

Avant-propos

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Christine Kiehl

Vice-présidente de RADAC

Collection COUP DE THÉÂTRE

**The Renewal of the Crime Play on the
Contemporary Anglophone Stage**

*Le Renouvellement du genre policier sur la
scène contemporaine anglophone*

Textes réunis par Susan Blattès et Aloysia Rousseau (RADAC)
n°32-2018 de la revue annuelle du RADAC

Ouverte aux chercheurs étrangers, l'association RADAC (Recherches sur les Arts Dramatiques Anglophones Contemporains), société savante affiliée à la SAES, réunit les chercheurs français spécialistes des théâtres anglophones contemporains (XX^e-XXI^e siècles). Son bureau est ainsi composé :

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Vice-présidente de RADAC

Introduction

The expression “crime play” immediately brings to mind the formulaic *whodunit* in which a number of potential criminals are gathered in a drawing room waiting for the cunning sleuth to solve the mystery and unmask the murderer. The overwhelming success of Agatha Christie’s *The Mousetrap* – which opened at the Theatre Royal in Nottingham in 1952 before being transferred to the Ambassadors and St Martin’s Theatre in London where it is still performed today, making it the world’s longest running play – shows the enduring popularity of this highly codified genre. But is this traditional form of detective drama – with its plot revolving solely around the question “who has done it?” and the play ending with that question necessarily being answered – the only kind of crime play that can be identified in contemporary Anglophone theatre? The answer is of course no, as the wide diversity of plays studied in this issue of *Coup de Théâtre* exemplifies.

Apart from Beatrix Hesse’s seminal book, *The English Crime Play in the Twentieth Century*, published in 2015, studies of the crime genre tend to leave the theatre out completely, focusing on crime novels, films and television series, as though crime plays did not even exist. The articles collected in this volume attempt to address this gap in theatre and performance studies by showing how a number of playwrights and theatre companies have departed from the rigid and obsolete form of the drawing-room thriller to offer new forms of crime plays that both celebrate and subvert the genre. From Tennessee Williams’s 1958 play, *Suddenly Last Summer*, to Word for Word’s 2016 adaptation of *All Aunt Hagar’s Children*, the plays tackled in this volume show how playwrights and theatre companies have set out to renew the genre, blurring obsolete dichotomies and more particularly erasing the distinction between high and low culture.

Since the popularity of crime fiction took it from the page to the stage and into cinema and TV, it is not surprising that different types of adaptation figure prominently in the renewal of the crime play. Beatrix Hesse, author of *The English Crime Play in the Twentieth Century*,

discusses the complex relationship a contemporary crime play may have with the earlier work(s) it is adapting. Her article “Recycling the Classics: *The Witness for the Prosecution* (2016)” compares the 2016 TV mini-series to Agatha Christie’s original short story “Witness for the prosecution” (1925) and stage play (1953), briefly evoking other TV versions and, of course, the famous Billy Wilder film from 1957. Adaptation in itself poses a threat to certain generic conventions since, after witnessing multiple versions of the same story, the element of surprise at the end can hardly be expected to function. This 2016 production goes further in breaching generic conventions by dispensing with the conventional poetic justice of the ending. Not only is the murderer found not guilty, but an innocent woman is hanged for the crime! Deprived of the conventional attributes of the classic crime drama, Hesse shows how new versions use other means to interest audiences. In the case of the 2016 adaptation of *The Witness for the Prosecution*, this involves a double strategy. On the one hand, it appeals to the audience’s enthusiasm for period drama (seen in the success of *Downton Abbey*, for example), and makes full use of 1920’s costumes and sets. On the other hand, it offers a more contemporary slant on social and class differences, while featuring scenes (a dead body and sex) which could not have been shown in earlier periods on the stage or screen. Deliberately distancing itself from earlier adaptations in some ways, at the same time as it acknowledges their impact in the case of the Billy Wilder film, this production nevertheless includes a number of theatrical sequences and thus maintains a link with the story’s previous incarnations.

Another example of how adaptation can function within the crime play genre can be seen in Graham Saunders’ article devoted to the Harold Pinter screenplay for Kenneth Branagh’s remake of *Sleuth*, the 1971 film which was itself based on Anthony Schaffer’s 1970 stage play. “‘His Last Bow’: Harold Pinter’s Genre Disobedience in *Sleuth* (2007)” thus proposes comparison with both the earlier film and original stage play to show how the crime genre is constantly being renewed. While a prolific adapter into film of other writers, principally novelists, *Sleuth* is unusual because it represents the only example of

Pinter adapting a play source, with the exception of his unproduced screenplay of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 2001. Saunders points out that "the visceral threat of the thriller – the pursuit and murder of victims for instance" is present in many of Pinter's plays as are scenes of cross-interrogation. Pinter's novelist in *Sleuth* is a writer of thrillers not detective novels. Saunders notes how the "radically uncertain" world of the thriller reinforces the sense of threat. This screenplay constitutes what Saunders calls "a destabilization of the rules of the genre", providing ironic intertextual doublings. It has therefore, along with other contemporary dramatists' responses towards crime and thriller genres, taken a turn towards postmodernism. Ultimately, both spectators and critics are positioned as detectives in the hunt to decode meanings for the puzzles they have been set.

There are other crime-play adaptations which are not based on films or plays but on works which started out as novels or short stories. Amélie Moisy analyses the 2016 Word for Word Company's adaptation for the stage of Edward P. Jones' 2006 short story "All Aunt Hagar's Children". This time, the adaptation seems designed not to undermine or subvert the perspective of the earlier text, but to reinforce elements of the *film noir* which were already present in the story. These features have been listed by the director of the production of *All Aunt Hagar's Children*. If the author of the story acknowledges his debt to this particular film genre, Moisy emphasises the way the stage production goes beyond the plot, character and setting typical of *film noir* to use specifically theatrical means to enhance the atmosphere of the genre. The use of lighting, costumes and certain types of music along with the movement and gesture of the actors all contribute to increasing the suspense. This is not, however, a simple reconstruction on stage of the aesthetics of *film noir*. Moisy demonstrates that the Word for Word company also manages to give a new perspective to hard-boiled fiction by giving space to female characters and domestic scenes.

Cécile Marshall also looks at an adaptation for the stage of a work of fiction. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was adapted in 2012 for the National Theatre by playwright Simon Ste-

phens from Mark Haddon's best-selling 2003 novel. She notes that the story explicitly presents itself as part of the British tradition of detective fiction by including in its title a quotation from one of Sherlock Holmes' stories. Marshall shows how the stage adaptation leads the audience into an "intertextual game of hide-and-seek". Simon Stephens's stage adaptation omits most of the explicit references to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, "thus ascribing an active interpretative role (that of the literary detective) to the audience". She also notes how the stage version allows the audience to experience directly both the protagonist's confusion and the limits of language as the stage "becomes submerged with stroboscopic lights and an accumulation of sounds and spoken words". The theatrical medium also enables the audience to experience different spaces and actions simultaneously. The entertainment promised by the detective genre is subverted and replaced by a postmodernist game of literary borrowings; the *whodunit* is solved halfway through the play, but Marshall argues that there is more to it than that and suggests that *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* turns postmodernist playfulness into a social act.

Julie Valero tackles another type of adaptation in "*Newyorkland* (2011) : la scène, espace de recyclage médiatique du genre policier". The Temporary Distortion Company creates work in which visual art, theatre, cinema and music overlap in what has been named "remediation". Valero focuses on *Newyorkland* which was inspired by the 1971 police thriller *The French Connection*. *Newyorkland* also includes echoes from TV police drama and real-life crime stories, further emphasising how the representation of crime, seen from many different angles, is omnipresent on both screens and stages.

Although scholars have already identified numerous subgenres within the *whodunit* genre, it would appear that playwrights continue to invent new ones, taking the *whodunit* in many different directions, thereby testifying to its vitality and adaptability. Four articles provide evidence of the crime play's constant evolution.

In "*Suddenly Last Summer* (1958) : Variations sur un *whodunit* médicalisé" Thierry Dubost shows how Tennessee Williams takes all the ingredients of the traditional *whodunit* only to create something

rather different in this 1958 play. There is a crime with an enigma attached to it, many clues and much suspense. The detective figure, although a doctor, not a policeman, approaches the case with the requisite intellectual rigour and uses all the available scientific techniques to get at the truth. There is even a truth serum which acts as a kind of lie detector in order to obtain a confession. However, this is a *whodunit* with a twist because the detective figure in this play does not serve only to find out what happened in the past (who committed the murder), his status as doctor potentially allows him to intervene in order to change the course of future events. In other words, this play shifts from a *whodunit* (focus on the criminal) to the *willhedoit* (focusing on the detective/doctor). In *Suddenly Last Summer*, the elucidation of the circumstances surrounding the death of Sebastian is not confirmed, contrary to what we might expect in a conventional crime play. Dubost demonstrates that Williams uses his detective/doctor not to provide a neat solution to the enigma, but to denounce social hypocrisy.

Caroline Schlenker's contribution also tackles an American playwright whose interest in popular culture in general might explain his use of the *whodunit* format. Her study, entitled "*Suicide in Bb* (1976): le policier revisité par Sam Shepard" focuses on Shepard's experimental play from 1976. This play also takes the basic ingredients of a crime play and combines them with elements which are normally not present in the genre to produce something completely different. Two detectives come to investigate what seems to be the murder of a musician. They are dressed as we might expect detectives to be dressed in a *film noir*. Very quickly however, the spectator realises that discovering who has committed the crime will not be a straightforward procedure. The play repeatedly requires the spectators to reconsider what has happened and what is happening. The crime scene serves as a space for improvisation and experimentation in terms of music, language and gesture. The murder is re-enacted several times with variations, roles are exchanged and the detectives seem more interested in playing at being detectives rather than solving a crime. Has a crime actually been committed? The introduction of "performance" and metatheatricity into a crime play suggests that subverting the rigid codes of

the conventional *whodunit* is a way for Shepard to put to the test the conventional form and structure of drama in general.

The articles in this volume are not only concerned with how the *whodunit* itself has evolved into different subgenres. Vicki Hoskins discusses the influence of one particular variety of crime writing, “true crime”, on a completely different genre, the musical, in “Death is the Wages of Sin: Murder and the True Crime Musical”. Instead of arguing that we are witnessing the birth of another subgenre within the *whodunit*, Hoskins suggests that the “true crime musical” constitutes a new addition to the musical genre, in other words crime writing is extending its influence to reach other theatrical genres. Although it may seem an unlikely combination, since both genres have their own codes and conventions, she demonstrates how this subgenre has emerged and provides two case-studies to prove her point. *Bonnie and Clyde* (2011) and *Thrill Me: The Leopold & Loeb Story* (2005) are both “true crime musicals” and Hoskins explains how each of them approached the task of reconciling the two sets of conventions and audience expectations. While *Bonnie and Clyde* made some concessions to the expectations of musical theatre audiences by encouraging them to feel sympathy for the protagonists (rather than their victims), this musical seems to have alienated audiences with its uncompromising display of violence. She notes how disturbing blood-stained bodies can be on stage. *Thrill Me: The Leopold & Loeb Story* on the other hand, kept the actual murder off-stage and used violence in a more stylized way. This musical fared better at the box-office. Hoskins also raises the question of the most effective way to market such shows. In the UK, *Thrill Me: The Leopold & Loeb Story* was marketed not as a “true crime musical” but as a “musical thriller”. This reinforces the idea present throughout this volume of the adaptability of the crime genre with audiences prepared to accept any number of variations of the “thriller”, contrary to audiences of the musical genre who may not yet be quite ready for such a change.

If marrying musical theatre and true crime can already be seen as something of a challenge, in the final article of this section, Cyrielle Garson, introduces a third element into the equation, “verbatim

theatre”, in “Playing the Truth Game “Verbatim”: from Tribunal Plays to Experimental Crime Plays on the Contemporary British Stage”. There may be obvious affinities between the crime play and verbatim theatre in terms of subject matter, but verbatim plays approach their material from a different angle. The first play studied by Garson, Tricycle Theatre’s tribunal piece *The Colour of Justice* (1999), has clear parallels with the “courtroom drama”, one of the subgenres of the crime play according to Beatrix Hesse. Garson comments on the inherent theatricality of the legal system which lends itself to a stage production. Furthermore both the courtroom drama and the verbatim play pursue a kind of documentary realism. However, in verbatim drama suspense is not really the main objective since the audience is usually aware of the outcome of these high-profile cases. It is in the second case-study, devoted to Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork’s verbatim work *London Road* (2011) that the musical dimension intervenes. Garson describes the problems of welding three types of play into an aesthetic whole: the musical, the crime play and the verbatim play. Yet, *London Road* proved to be very successful, despite some reservations appearing in the press about the project. Once again, faced with a hybrid theatrical form, conventional labels seem inadequate. If the label “thriller” seems the most apt, Garson insists on the fact that verbatim plays contribute to redefining what the crime play is in terms of its thematic, aesthetic and formal conventions. Furthermore she contends that works like *London Road* have “radically altered the landscape of British new writing more broadly”.

In the last section of this volume, Jean Berton, James Dalrymple, Déborah Prudhon and Jean du Verger focus on liminal works that are characterized by their generic heterogeneity. In between homage and subversion, the plays and serial drama studied by these authors both celebrate and reinvigorate the crime play – be it the British *whodunit* or American hardboiled fiction – playing with the rigid conventions of the genre.

In his article entitled “*Dark Road* (2013), tragédie écossaise du doute”, Jean Berton shows how Ian Rankin and Mark Thomson’s play belongs to no clear-cut category, being both a tragedy and a thrill-

ler as well as offering a commentary on Scottish society. As such, the spectator could be described as a detective whose hermeneutical quest consists in trying to identify the genre of the play, always, however, failing to do so. It is, as we are reminded by Berton, for the reader and audience member to decide how to interpret the play.

James Dalrymple also points out the “attentive detective work” expected from the viewer, a typical characteristic of the classic *who-dunit*, in his article devoted to the 1986 BBC television serial *The Singing Detective*. The multitalented author Dennis Potter does not, however, content himself with paying homage to the classic detective story. “The Singing Detective” also borrows from hardboiled fiction – as the main protagonist’s name, none other than Philip Marlow, exemplifies – and the Hollywood musical. Dalrymple shows how the serial drama deconstructs these lowbrow genres, blurring the boundary between high and low culture as is seen, for example, in the many references to psychoanalysis. In between theatre and cinema, the *who-dunit* and pulp fiction, *The Singing Detective* cannot be easily categorized and can be deemed both entertaining and thought-provoking.

The figure of the spectator-detective is once again the focus of Déborah Prudhon’s article yet he is in fact no longer only a spectator. As Prudhon demonstrates in her article devoted to Punchdrunk’s 2003 show *Sleep No More* – a fusion of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* and *Vertigo* – the company invests the notion of spectator-detective with a new meaning as the immersive spectator becomes a literal, rather than metaphorical investigator who meanders from room to room searching for clues. With its musical score and lighting effects borrowed from Hitchcock’s or David Lynch’s movies, *Sleep No More* adopts a typical *film noir* and neo-*noir* aesthetic yet also subverts the genre by replacing the stock character of the lonely hardboiled investigator with a community of detectives. As we are reminded by Prudhon, this community in fact outlasts the performance as fans keep looking – but seldom find – answers to *Sleep No More*’s many mysteries on the fan blogs devoted to the show.

There are no answers given either in Tom Stoppard’s 1972 play *Jumpers* whose aim rather seems to be to disorientate the audience,

as demonstrated by Jean du Verger in his close analysis of the play. Generic heterogeneity reaches a peak in this play which du Verger describes as a “house of mirrors” making the reader-spectator dizzy with its metaphysical and psychological references. As such, *Jumpers* both pays tribute to and subverts the crime play, constantly playing with the codes of the genre and inviting the reader-spectator to decipher the many intratextual and intertextual references. At the end of his article, du Verger analyses the main protagonist’s naked body as a textual metaphor. Dotty’s body is indeed offered to the audience’s gaze but the character’s psyche is still unreachable in the same way that Stoppard’s play is a typical *whodunit*... and much more than that, as are all the plays studied in this volume.

Susan Blattès and Aloysia Rousseau

Recycling the Classics: *The Witness for the Prosecution* (2016)

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1. Recycling the Classics

I have argued elsewhere (Hesse 2015) that the crime play has frequently enabled dramatists to experiment with innovative formats. However, at the present moment the quality of the crime play that most suitably lends itself to cultural diagnosis and critique is not its innovative potential but its retrospective attitude towards the canonized classics of the genre. This is remarkable insofar as it has generally been tacitly assumed that the effect of detective fiction rests largely on its central mystery and the final surprise revelation. The present abundance of rewritings of the classics, however, suggests the opposite: Golden Age detective fiction seems to be getting more attractive the more it is being repeated. A case in point is the new version of *Murder on the Orient Express* recently released by Kenneth Branagh. This is a remake not only of the 1974 film by Sidney Lumet but also of the feature-length episode of the recent “faithful” *Poirot* series that began in the 1980s and only recently terminated its run in 2013. This raises the question of how quickly a new version of a familiar classic can be inflicted on an audience and also what “surplus value” a viewer will get from yet another adaptation. One likely answer is that the film exploits the nostalgic value of Golden Age “cosy” crime fiction, but the equally recent and extremely successful TV series *Sherlock* suggests that it is not necessary for a rewrite to appeal to the sentiment of nostalgia. *Sherlock* consistently updates its material and the specific pleasure for the viewer is derived from seeing how this is accomplished; arguably, *Sherlock* is a programme more pleasant for viewers familiar with the original Conan Doyle stories than for novices. Interestingly,

this process of rewriting has also prompted fans of the series to indulge in further rewriting, as is in evidence in the abundance of fanfiction based on the series.

A similar effect is in evidence in the popular response to the stage version of Alfred Hitchcock's film *The 39 Steps*, which enjoyed an extensive run first on the fringe and later in the London West End. *The 39 Steps* was the pioneering example of a transfer from screen to stage, and a familiarity with the film version is an indispensable prerequisite to enjoying the show. I have discussed this play more fully elsewhere (Hesse 2009 and Hesse 2013); it may therefore suffice to point out that Patrick Barlow uses the techniques of Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theatre" and appeals to the audience's imaginative participation when he recreates the film in its entirety with the help of only four actors and minimal technology. The challenge of how this will be managed creates the main suspense in the production. In spite of recreating the film literally scene by scene, Barlow does succeed in closing on a surprising twist, when the villain is eventually shot by a "stage hand" coming through the closed curtains while all four performers are already on stage. Hence, the killing of the villain, though part of the original film, is still unexpected for the audience.

The main test case and example for my subsequent analysis will be the 2016 TV dramatization of Agatha Christie's "The Witness for the Prosecution" (hereafter: "W"). The new TV version attempts to go back beyond the Wilder film and the stage adaptation to the short story, claiming to restore original authorial intention in a manner that suggests a marked hostility to Christie as a playwright or to the stage crime play in general.

2. Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution*

Christie had adapted her 1925 short story for the stage herself in 1953 under the title of *Witness for the Prosecution*. (Hereafter: *W53*) The plot is already fairly well-known, yet a brief plot synopsis may be useful. Likeable but unstable Leonard Vole is accused of having murdered Emily French, a wealthy elderly lady of his acquaintance, who

left him all her money. His defence rests solely on the alibi his mysterious foreign wife Romaine can provide, but she seems to have an agenda of her own and appears at the trial as witness for the prosecution. A mysterious woman contacts Vole's solicitor (Mayherne in the short story, Mayhew in play, film and TV) and offers to sell him letters from Romaine Vole to her lover, which prove that she incriminated her husband out of spite. Thus, Romaine's evidence is broken down in court and Leonard leaves as a free man. It is not until later that the lawyer finds out that the mysterious "other woman" was Romaine Vole herself in disguise, who had figured out that the evidence of a loving wife in court carries very little weight and that she had to resort to other means to save her beloved husband from the gallows. In a second twist she informs him that Leonard was guilty after all.

In her stage adaptation, Christie turned this plot into a courtroom drama, a subgenre of the crime play rare in Britain, though popular in the US. British courtroom dramas were mainly written by members of the legal professions.¹ Christie herself had to read up on legal procedure and consult lawyers in order to get the technicalities right. Courtroom drama tends to revolve around the convention of the innocent suspect (another character, also present in the courtroom, turns out to be guilty instead) – hence the fact that Leonard is indeed guilty amounts to a violation of genre conventions. British courtroom dramas tend to be less interested in guilt and innocence than in questions of identity (as it also does in *W53*, where the question of who killed Emily French moves into the background as the reader/spectator tries to figure out the real intentions of Mrs Vole) and often end with a miscarriage of justice. *W53* reveals the inherent theatricality of the court trial: the generically built-in reversal of expectations manipulates the jury (= the audience) so effectively, that their judgment is impaired. Thus, the conclusion of the play amounts to an implicit criticism of the jury system.

While in the short story, written in the irresponsible 20s, the murderer goes scot-free, Christie introduced an ending of poetic justice in the stage version: Mrs Vole discovers that her husband is planning to leave her for another woman and kills him while still in the

courtroom.² The central plot device of disguise takes on a different significance on stage and screen, i.e., in mimetic genres, because while the reader has to take Christie's assurance that Romaine's disguise was largely impenetrable at face value, a viewer can judge for himself, whether he, too, would have been fooled.

W53 was a very successful play and had excellent reviews, *Plays and Players* praised Christie's ability to fill the theatre "without stars". The parts of the barrister Sir Wilfred Robarts (replacing the character of the solicitor Mayherne from the short story for the courtroom drama version) and of Mrs Vole were subsequently turned into star parts for Charles Laughton and Marlene Dietrich in Billy Wilder's screen version of 1957. Wilder largely adhered to the play, but added a heart condition for the barrister and scenes of comic banter between him and his nurse. He also added two significant flashbacks: Vole's first encounters with his wife and with Emily French. Vole first meets his later wife in Hamburg after the war. She is a singer in a nightclub and they engage in an immediate exchange of sex for consumer goods.³ The meeting with Emily French is more playful and flirtatious than described in the play version; moreover, it shows us the victim while still alive – it becomes impossible to treat her murder in an entirely light-hearted manner. Concerning the device of disguise, it has been argued that every viewer is likely to recognize that the "other woman" is also Mrs Vole, and that the point is precisely Sir Wilfred's wilful blindness – he only sees what he wants to see. Arguably, the surprise revelation had already become too widely known (although the film still ends with an appeal to the audience to keep the secret). However, there may be yet another reason for revealing the identity of the other woman beforehand. As Alfred Hitchcock has pointed out, in film it is preferable to inform the audience and create suspense than to keep them in the dark and create surprise. The surprise revelation at the end of detective fiction (of the whodunit variety) thus does not work well in film or on stage.⁴

The subsequent TV version of 1982 was closer to the play, dispensing with the two flashbacks, but retaining the scenes between Robarts and his nurse. Since the nurse scenes are very prominent, the

overall impression is that the film version has superseded the play in the popular imagination. As the identity of Mrs Vole and the “other woman” had presumably become even better known, the disguise is but minimal and it is comparatively easy to recognize Diana Rigg.

In 2016, Ben Affleck announced his intention to film *Witness* once again, presumably also starring. Agatha Christie Ltd. seem to be selling the rights quite freely at present, but even so, this does not explain why audiences would want to watch yet another remake, or be expected to do so.

3. *Witness for the Prosecution* (2016) – Principles of Adaptation

The DVD of the 2016 TV version (hereafter: *W16*) contains ample bonus material which discusses the basic principles of the new adaptation in a section entitled “From Page to Screen”. *W16* was a production that quickly followed the 2015 version of Christie’s novel *And Then There Were None*, which Hilary Strong of Agatha Christie Ltd. calls “the definitive version”, deliberately setting it off against Christie’s own stage version and various film versions based on it, including one directed by René Clair. In the case of *And Then There Were None*, it makes sense to draw on the earlier narrative version rather than the play because it is a novel and hence provides far more material than the stage version. This, however, does not apply to “W”, which is a very brief story indeed.

With respect to *W16*, Sarah Phelps defends the liberties she took in her very free adaptation of the text: “you pick up a detail and build a world around it”, a procedure she calls “next level adaptation”. As an example she mentions Mayhew’s “little dry-as-dust cough” (“W”: 1), which the screenplay develops into the after-effects of gas. In a further defence of a very free adaptation, Strong calls *W16* “inspired by Agatha Christie’s work”, using a metaphor of the “bones” (by Christie) and the “flesh” (by Phelps) and draws attention to the way Christie herself changed her narratives when adapting them for the stage.

As in *And Then There Were None*, Phelps decided to base her screenplay on the story rather than the play version, declaring “I didn’t

really want to adapt the play”. While this presumably means that she did know the stage version, she denies having seen the Billy Wilder film version, and recalls that Marlene Dietrich was starring in it before even mentioning Charles Laughton. These points made in the bonus material may be intended to prevent comparison between *W16* and a film that has after all become something of a modern classic. The bonus material also suggests that Christie, while admired as a novelist and short story writer, is considered something of an embarrassment as a dramatist. This is surprising since her writing has been praised not for the style of her descriptive passages but for her ability to write convincing dialogue. Julian Symons writes: “She was not a good writer, but she was supreme mistress in the construction of puzzles and had a skill in writing light, lively and readable dialogue that has been consistently underrated by critics” (Symons: 137). Symons’ appreciation of Christie’s skill in writing dialogue is obviously not shared by the production team of *W16*, since not a single line written by Christie herself survives in the final product. In a film or TV adaptation, of course, the original dialogue of the play will always be much more in evidence than the (perhaps equally embarrassing) style of the narrative texts. What this boils down to is that the production company would presumably prefer to keep nothing but the original plot intact and have the freedom to adapt or rewrite everything else (although criticism of Christie’s style in her narrative texts is never so much as voiced).

Apart from a general distaste towards the stage crime play that may be inferred from the bonus material, courtroom drama in particular seems considered to be an outdated format. The producer points out that they wanted to offer ‘more than the pure static courtroom of the play version’. Spatial confinement, which works well in the stage play, is now understood to be alien to the aesthetics of TV drama.

Again as in *And Then There Were None*, Phelps declares that this production is “subverting the expectations that people may have of Agatha Christie” in a further attempt to distance herself from the cosy, giving the examples of series like *Midsomer Murders*, but also the *Poirot* and *Marple* series. In a further variation of the surprise motif, she announces: “This isn’t what people will expect”. The “surprise” which

constitutes a generic convention of crime fiction is here transferred from the solution of the mystery to a breach of generic conventions.

4. Changes between the Short Story and the TV Version

One of the most conspicuous differences between *W53* and *W16* is a reorganisation of the action. While the play was mostly set in the courtroom, *W16* features a rather long pre-trial plot of almost 50 minutes as well as a long post-trial plot of about 30 minutes. The rather long expository action, however, is a characteristic that *W16* shares with the short story, which devotes 18 pages out of 24 to the phase before the trial. Like the Wilder film, *W16* extensively develops the defence lawyer's home life. While the short story merely tells us that Mayherne is married, the marriage of the Mayhews is depicted in detail in *W16*. Similarly, *W16* also develops the characters of Mrs [sic!] French and her housekeeper Janet, thus providing two fully fleshed-out character parts for two mature actresses.

The focus on these two characters is also related to the shift in the depiction of sexuality and gender relations from the 1950s to the 2010s. *W16* is much more sexually explicit than any of the earlier versions. While Mrs Vole in the play merely sarcastically remarks "What hypocrites you are in this country!" this charge may actually be levelled at the 20th-century versions themselves. Not even Billy Wilder, who had dealt with a similar topic in *Sunset Boulevard*, dared to state explicitly that Leonard Vole was Emily French's "kept man". Julian Jarrold, the director of *W16*, by contrast, mentions the "fizz and chemistry" between Vole and French. At the outset of the action, Emily French is shown picking up Leonard in a posh restaurant in which he is working as a waiter and bringing him to her flat where she proceeds to lecture him on the needs of a mature woman and offers him five pounds for sexual favours.

In the short story, the character of the housekeeper Janet is merely sketched in the following manner: "She was a faithful watchdog to her mistress, and she didn't like [Vole]. She was jealous and suspicious" ("W": 7). In *W16*, Janet is a closet lesbian, who loved her mistress "too

much” (as the dialogue later points out). Altogether, sexual motivations and relations are more strongly and conspicuously developed, for instance in a rather aggressive sex scene between the Mayhews, which, however, merely culminates in a fit of coughing.⁵ In both the short story and the 2016 TV version, the trial deteriorates into a battle of the sexes rather than a mere conflict between the Crown and the Defence. In the short story, Romaine comments in passing: “How stupid men are! Stupid – stupid – stupid” (“W”: 13), while Mayherne, in free indirect discourse, meditates “Women were the devil when they got their knife into you” (“W”: 15). This idea is even more strongly developed in *W16*, when Romaine, defeated in the courtroom, breaks out into a cry of: “You fucking men!” while Vole’s barrister Sir Charles Carter speaks of the “perfidy of women” in general, not Romaine in particular.

Although Christie is generally praised for her supreme plot construction, Phelps has identified two plot holes which she removes in her adaptation. Firstly, Christie does not bother to establish an alternative suspect in case Leonard is innocent, beyond “a burglar”⁶ and, briefly, some nephew of Miss French’s. The stage version does not introduce alternative suspects at all. Phelps, by contrast, establishes the housekeeper Janet as an alternative suspect and even develops this plot strand up to the point when Janet is finally executed by mistake. Secondly, Christie does not give any motivation for Romaine’s attempt to frame Leonard. In the short story, she merely responds to Mayherne’s question “Why are you so bitter against Leonard Vole?” “I shall not tell you. I will keep my secret...” (“W”: 14). Phelps explains that Leonard knew of Romaine’s previous marriage, which would prevent her projected marriage to her fictional lover Max.

Mayhew’s meeting with “the other woman” is also treated somewhat differently. In the TV version, Romaine chooses to introduce the character she is playing by name, calling herself “Christine Moffat”, which is the name of an actress in her company who used to be the star and constantly humiliated Romaine. This may serve the purpose of deceiving the audience yet more thoroughly, as has been suggested for the device of “the other woman” in general (Carlson: 122). When

Romaine, in heavy but very poor make-up, identifies herself as Christine Moffat who has since been the victim of a vicious attack (not with vitriol, as in the short story, but a mixture of boiling water and sugar), the audience may be taken in for an instant, but this is highly unlikely, since her made-up face is so very obviously made up, and besides, Romaine's diction is clearly recognizable, not with respect to its accent but in its rhythms. If Mayhew is taken in nevertheless, he obviously *wants* to believe what he is told, even more so than Laughton in the Wilder version.

One of the most notable differences between *W16* and the previous stage and screen adaptations is that, like the short story, it dispenses with poetic justice. Phelps accordingly calls the short story "deliciously nasty". In its abandonment of poetic justice, *W16* goes even further than the story by having an innocent suspect – Janet – executed.

5. Historical Period

As the bonus material reveals, this production takes great pride in its historical accuracy. Screenwriter Sarah Phelps for instance points out that Christie's thrillers are "very much about their time. More so because they're not trying to be about their time." The main action is explicitly set in "London 1923", that is, approximately at the time of the first publication of the short story. Jarrold expresses his approval with the choice of the short story as the source text rather than the play, because this gave him a 1920s' setting. The current popularity of 1920s' settings, as for instance in the TV serial *Downton Abbey*, is pointed out expressly in the section of the bonus material devoted to costume.⁷

The concern with the historical period already becomes obvious in the opening shot, which is set about five years before the main plot: Leonard Vole is shown running across a Belgian battlefield and in a shelter meets Romaine Heilger for the first time. This opening shot was very demanding and expensive, requiring the laying of 250 feet of track over the "battlefield", and hiring real amputees posing as mutilated corpses. The company took an obvious pride in this sequence

and devoted a separate subchapter in the bonus material to it. The director expressly stresses the “epic” quality of the opening shot, apparently trying to establish his version’s affinity with film rather than with drama. The second episode of the mini-series, after the necessary brief plot synopsis, reverts to the scene of the battlefield: Romaine and Leonard have now left their shelter and set out again into the outside world, hand in hand.

As in her previous adaptation of *And Then There Were None*, Phelps stresses the influence of the experience of war on each of the characters, particularly Leonard Vole. In an interview with Mayhew, Leonard delves into a lengthy monologue about the disappointment of the veterans returned from the war. And when he later encounters Mayhew once again and has to own up to having committed the murder, he merely comments: “Just one life after so many.” The relationship between the post-war period and the crime play is indeed significant. The crime play as a genre invariably reaches its peak about ten years after an armed conflict. Arguably, it is one of the social functions of the crime play, to help viewers come to terms with an experience of actual violence, which, however, has become transferred to a different realm.

In connection with the historical period, it is also worth noting that both Phelps and Jarrold repeatedly refer to *film noir* as their main stylistic inspiration, although the TV show is shot in colour, not black and white. The colour scheme of the production, however, is remarkable. As long as the action is set in London, it is photographed entirely in dirty browns, yellows and greens. Jarrold explains that he wanted to give “the foggy nightmarish world of London” a “quite tough claustrophobic look”. How pervasive this colour scheme is becomes particularly conspicuous in the final section of the show, when the scene is moved to France, to Le Touquet. This setting was chosen by the production team, since the short story does not specify where Mayherne and Romaine meet for the last time: “the place of their meeting is not relevant” (“W”: 24). While London is brown and yellow, France is portrayed as very bright and white in order to underline the characters’ escape from their past.

Another element closely associated with a *noir* or hard-boiled portrayal of crime is the representation of the dead body of the victim. The dead body had not been shown in the earlier versions, but it is displayed in great detail in the 2016 production and discussed in a separate subchapter of the bonus material. This is further evidence of the intention of the producers to distance themselves from the TV crime play of the “cosy” variety.

Another aspect of the concern with historical accuracy is the fact that the TV production highlights the aspects of class distinction and the contrast between rich and poor. The action proper begins with a cross-cutting from Leonard in his shabby flat to Emily French’s posh art déco apartment, creating a deliberate contrast between the world of the poor and the world of the rich. In the story, this contrast is not very pronounced. Vole moves in the same social circles as French – he meets her for the second time at a party at a mutual friend’s house. Miss French lives in Cricklewood, in very modest circumstances: “She lived poorly, almost humbly” (“W”: 3). The Voles live at Paddington and do not keep a servant but they have a charwoman and apparently the house to themselves. Likewise, John Mayhew of the TV version is presented as living in genteel poverty. Again, the short story does not suggest that Mayhew is poor: ‘as a solicitor, Mr Mayherne’s reputation stood very high’ (“W”: 1).

Apart from the purely economic difference, the TV production also stresses class distinctions, for instance in a scene of gratuitous police brutality when Leonard is arrested in his flat: he is asleep when the police break in and immediately club him down. Another scene presenting blatant class-consciousness occurs when Mayhew discusses the case with the counsel for the defence, Charles Carter, in the men’s room. Carter indulges in vulgar comments on the relationship between Emily French and a lower-class man and initially declines the brief until he hears of Emily’s wealth. For all of Carter’s pronounced hostility and vulgarity, the comment of KC Sir Charles in the short story is more effective: “If we can shake that Austrian woman’s testimony, we might do something” (“W” 15), as he cannot even bring himself to calling Romaine Heilger by her name.

6. *W16* as TV Drama between Film and Theatre

Apart from the epic opening shot, Jarrold frequently employs techniques that are more closely related to the aesthetics of cinema than to live theatre. One instance of this is his use of flashback. During the interview of the housekeeper Janet, for instance, several flashbacks occur: Janet telling Emily that Vole is already married, her discovery of the dead body on her return from church, Janet witnessing Leonard performing oral sex on Emily, Leonard leaving the house, now wearing a smart suit. Romaine's evidence likewise is illustrated by flashbacks. In a crime play, flashbacks are an interesting device, because a lot depends on the status the audience assigns to a flashback. Is it intended to merely illustrate the speech of one of the characters, or is it a "genuine" flashback in the sense that it is meant to show what really happened? This unclear status of the flashback has been used in crime films from Alfred Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (when the device was originally denounced as "unfair") to *The Usual Suspects*, and Christie herself made use of it in her crime play *Go Back for Murder*, a stage version of her novel *Five Little Pigs*.⁸

Another specifically cinematic technique is the cross-cutting between different plot strands. A particularly conspicuous case of cross-cutting occurs for instance between Romaine's revue, during which she spies Mayhew in the audience, clearly infatuated, and Mrs Mayhew lovingly dusting her son's room, with the camera, equally lovingly, resting on a collection of period toys. Later on, cross-cutting illustrates Mayhew's advancing career and Janet's mourning of her dead mistress – these two diverse processes are linked by the motif of printed letters that are painted on Mayhew's door and cleaned by Janet on Mrs French's gravestone. A similar technique of counterpoint is in evidence when the film cross-cuts between the scenes showing Janet on her way to the gallows and the Mayhews' preparation of their departure for a holiday at the seaside. The conspicuous use of flashback and cross-cutting demonstrate the TV crime play's attempt to break loose from the stage play that shaped it originally.⁹

In spite of its conspicuous hostility to the stage play, *W16* contains a pivotal scene that presents an apotheosis of live theatre: watch-

ing Romaine Vole perform a sentimental song on a Music Hall stage, Mayhew is immediately seduced by its emotional appeal. In the short story, by contrast, the theatre motif does not feature very prominently, maybe in order to safeguard the still fresh surprise of the ending. There are merely two references to Romaine's professional background in the theatre in order to prepare the final surprise reversal: "I was an actress in Vienna" ("W": 14) and "[y]et, Romaine Heilger was an actress" ("W": 23). The first quotation seems to suggest that Romaine is no longer an actress (and not merely that she is no longer in Vienna). A comparison between the three versions of Romaine's letter that is read out in court and makes the jury's sympathies shift in favour of Leonard is also instructive. The letter in the short story does not employ theatre imagery at all, while in the stage version, Christie included a reference to Romaine's desire to be "free from playing the part of a loving, grateful wife (W: 53, 85). *W16* by contrast includes two, much more explicit, references to theatre and roleplaying; Romaine refers to her "last theatrical role" and promises her fictional lover Max: "This will be my greatest performance."

Moreover, *W16* uses the theatre as a setting very pervasively and conspicuously, but its portrayal of the theatre as a professional environment is extremely critical. The first longer section set in the theatre shows Romaine backstage in a Music Hall. Instantly, her rivalry with Christine Moffat, the star of the show, is established. Christine ascends a crescent moon that forms the centrepiece of the stage set, without even acknowledging Romaine's presence. In the following scene, Romaine, standing at the stage door, attracts the attention of Christine's gentleman admirer and is warned off: "You're just the chorus, I'm the principal."¹⁰ The next time we see Romaine at the Music Hall, a dance routine of a seaside scene with the tune "At the sea, at the sea, at the beautiful sea" is being performed. This creates a foreshadowing of the final encounter between Mayhew and the Voles and at the same time an effect of metalepsis, since the play-within-the-play, the Music Hall routine, seems to have finally spilled over into and invaded the "real life" of the TV play's action. This is followed by another scene highlighting the competitive and merciless relationship between the

various fellow actors. A colleague shows Romaine the newspaper that reports Vole's arrest and merely comments: "Nothing like a scandal to pack the house." As an immediate result of her new notoriety, Romaine is immediately promoted to the Moon and has now herself become a "principal".

The scene with Romaine sitting in her half-moon, dressed in a glittering costume and heavily made up, becomes the central scene of the entire production. Romaine sings a love song entitled "Let me call you sweetheart", which reduces Mayhew in the audience to tears. This scene is repeated, or rather "quoted", several times in the course of the series. A glimpse of Romaine in her moon, to the tune of "Let me call you sweetheart", marks the end of Episode One. Towards the end of the second episode, a flashback to Romaine in the moon causes Mayhew to collapse. And in the final scene of the entire miniseries, Mayhew is shown walking into the sea, towards the moon that has become a symbol of his desire to be loved. "Let me call you sweetheart" is then played over the end-titles.

Since this scene is so central to the entire production, a closer description and examination is perhaps called-for. The sequence starts off realistically, with Mayhew settling into his seat as the clapping from the previous number dies down and the overture is being played. The curtain opens slowly, with the Moon still down, half hidden behind a group of nine chorus girls, the scene lit in a light pink. This scene is shot from behind over Mayhew's right shoulder, as in a conventional dialogue scene. As Romaine begins to sing, an establishing shot shows us the entire stage with a dance routine in progress in front of the rising Moon. What this scene does establish for us is that it is now Romaine who is seated in the Moon instead of Christine. There is a cut to a medium shot of Mayhew, who is straining his eyes in an effort to see more clearly – which, of course, he doesn't, or not until the very end. A medium shot of the dancers, now in a red light, is followed by an upward move of the camera to Romaine singing, where the camera rests for an instant before zooming in on Romaine's face. The light on stage has now turned to blue. A cut to a medium shot of Mayhew shows us that he is now smiling, presumably because he has identified Romaine,

but also because he is clearly enjoying the sentimental song she is singing. The lyrics of the song, repeated twice, run as follows: “Let me call you sweetheart; I’m in love with you. Let me hear you whisper that you love me, too. Keep the love light glowing in your eyes so true! Let me call you sweetheart; I’m in love with you.” As the scene progresses, the camera zooms in on Mayhew’s face on which the subsequent light changes are reflected, as are his response to the lyrics and his growing infatuation with Romaine. The film cuts to and fro between close-ups of Mayhew and Romaine, suggesting that there is hardly any distance between them any longer, in a manner in which traditional editing would usually prepare a kiss between the two main protagonists. As Romaine sings of “your eyes so true”, the camera shows us Mayhew’s face with the action on stage partly reflected in his glasses. In the final close up of Romaine, her head is thrown back and her mouth open, and her posture and expression are mirrored by Mayhew’s. A shot over Mayhew’s shoulder as the curtain closes awakens us to the realisation of the actual physical distance between stage and spectator and makes us recognize the illusion of intimacy that live theatre can produce, albeit rendered here by the means of cinema. As the house lights come on and we hear the other people in the audience (of whose presence we have meanwhile been largely oblivious) clap and chat, Mayhew, in close-up, begins to sob uncontrollably.

This key scene itself seems inspired by an iconic scene from Josef von Sternberg’s classic film *Der blaue Engel*. Marlene Dietrich as nightclub singer Lola-Lola is singing “Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuß auf Liebe eingestellt”, directly to Emil Jannings’ Professor Emmanuel Rat, who is seated in a box and watching her spellbound. In the course of the song, the virtuous schoolteacher is gradually becoming aware of his sexual attraction to her, a feeling he has not previously experienced and/or consistently denied.¹¹ The repetition of this scene in *W16* hence may be considered an express homage to Marlene Dietrich. In this context, it is worth mentioning that in *W16* Romaine wears a Dietrich hairstyle for most of the action.¹² The short story, incidentally, gives a very different description of Romaine’s outward appearance; the text expressly specifies “the dense blue-black of the hair” (“W”: 12). After

the scene described in detail above, Romaine discovers Mayhew, still crying, in the auditorium long after the show has ended. This characterization of the lawyer is clearly at odds with the character envisioned by Christie in the short story: “Mr Mayherne was practical, not emotional” (“W”: 1). This scene suggests that live theatre is an immensely powerful medium, which may explain why *W16* is so categorically trying to distance itself from it.

7. Conclusion

In the initial paragraph, I asked how a reworking of a familiar classic of crime fiction manages to create a “surplus value” for the viewer. In the case of *W16*, the adaptation does not follow the model of the successful TV series *Sherlock* by updating the material, but instead goes full tilt for the period piece, lovingly recreating a historical period that is currently popular in TV drama, as is also proved by the stunning success of *Downton Abbey*. In its obvious delight in lavish sets and costumes, *W16* also substantially differs from the minimalist style in evidence in that other successful current intermedial adaptation, Patrick Barlow’s stage production of Alfred Hitchcock’s film *The 39 Steps*. The element of surprise previously thought to be so central to detective fiction is no longer created on the level of plot design but in terms of a violation of genre conventions. While the final surprise twist – the identity of Mrs Vole and the “other Woman” – obviously no longer works and is therefore presented in a manner that makes it easy for the viewer to penetrate the disguise, *W16* goes against viewer expectations in dispensing with poetic justice, even to the point of having an innocent suspect, the housekeeper Janet, executed for a crime she did not commit. The fact that the character of a domestic is developed to such a notable extent itself also amounts to a violation of genre conventions. Similarly, the graphic violence and sexuality of *W16* were at odds with the audience’s expectations towards a “cosy” crime programme.

The second main question of this article was how *W16* as a TV play negotiates the different stylistic influences of stage drama and

film. The 1982 TV version had still acknowledged the close relationship between TV drama and live theatre by remaining largely faithful to the stage version. *W16*, by contrast, is trying to distance itself from the Billy Wilder film version to some extent – though with a kind of playful homage to the actress Marlene Dietrich – but much more substantially from Christie’s own stage adaptation. This is already in evidence in the deliberate move away from the genre of courtroom drama and, more generally, away from the spatial confinement that had been such an important element in the most successful type of stage crime play: the subgenre dubbed the “Murder House Mystery” by Charles LaBorde and exemplified by Christie’s own *The Mousetrap*. That the director prefers an “epic”, cinematic, approach to the intimacy of the confined stage set already gets obvious in the opening sequence which is, somewhat gratuitously, set in a WWI battlefield. This expensive scene is rerun several times in the course of the miniseries, as is another scene, which surprisingly seems to celebrate the power of live theatre. When Romaine is singing on stage to Mayhew, the emotional appeal becomes so strong that it doesn’t only reduce the onscreen spectator to tears, it even has the power to create metalepsis within the fictional universe by “spilling over” into first-level fictional reality. This suggests that one of the main causes for the hostility towards stage drama expressed by the entire production team of *W16* may be a considerable anxiety of influence.

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¹ For instance Edward Wooll, Jack Roffey or Henry Cecil.

² This may be explained by Christie’s changed attitude towards punishment and justice, but also by different genre conventions in drama and narrative; a similar move from the cruel twist of the short story to poetic justice in the stage version may be observed in *The Letter* by W S Maugham and *The Gioconda Smile* by Aldous Huxley.

³ Marlene Dietrich here repeated the part she had played in Wilder’s previous film on living conditions in postwar Germany, *A Foreign Affair*.

⁴ An example from Hitchcock’s own oeuvre is the film *Vertigo*, where in contrast to the source novel *D’entre les morts* the identity of Judy and “Madeleine” is revealed very early on, and the audience then have the far greater pleasure of waiting to see when James Stewart, too, will discover the truth.

⁵ The graphic sex scenes were frequently criticized as unpleasant and unnecessary by viewers on imdb.

⁶ This suggestion is not taken seriously for an instant, since it would constitute a breach of genre conventions, because the criminal must be a person of consequence and a character introduced to the reader.

⁷ Even in this section, there is a notable focus on historical accuracy, highlighting aspects of economics, class and gender.

⁸ As far as the flashback is concerned, it is worth noting that the 1982 TV version even dispensed with the few flashbacks Billy Wilder's film had introduced, while retaining the subplot revolving around Sir Wilfrid's heart disease and his obnoxious nurse. Hence we never learn how Vole first met his wife or Emily French – the focus is distracted from the dynamics of the Voles' marriage and little sympathy is elicited for the victim. This also means that the 1982 version is the closest to the stage play and does not attempt to distance itself from the medium of live theatre.

⁹ When the TV crime play first rose to prominence in the 1970s, it was still closely related to the stage crime play. A particularly good example of this is the work of Francis Durbridge.

¹⁰ The plot motif of the theatre as a scene of female rivalry is traditional in British cinematic treatments of life on the stage and occurs for instance in Alfred Hitchcock's whodunits *Murder!* and *Stage Fright*.

¹¹ Dietrich herself was to reprise this scene from *Der blaue Engel* several times in her later career, most notably in the above-mentioned *A Foreign Affair* and *Stage Fright*.

¹² It is only later in *Le Touquet* that she reverts to a Louise Brooks-style.

“His Last Bow”: Harold Pinter’s Genre Disobedience in *Sleuth* (2007)

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With the notable exception of Shakespeare, writing for the stage rarely enjoys the opportunity for reinterpretation more than once in film. Yet this has happened twice so far to Anthony Schaffer’s *Sleuth* (1970). Schaffer’s play is a witty homage to the so-called ‘golden age’ of the interwar detective novel; like the popularity of its borrowed form, *Sleuth* not only enjoyed successful West End and Broadway runs, but in 1972 was adapted by Schaffer into a film. Its second cinematic incarnation came in 2007 in a screenplay by Harold Pinter and directed by Kenneth Branagh. Despite not having seen or read the original play or its film adaptation, it is not difficult to see the appeal of *Sleuth* to Pinter as it contains a number of recurring signature preoccupations that appear in plays of his own such as *The Collection* (1961), *The Basement* (1967) and *Betrayal* (1978). In an interview, included on its DVD release, Pinter explained that for him *Sleuth* was about a power struggle.

The struggle in question takes place between Andrew Wyke, a wealthy crime novelist and a young man, Milo Tindall, for possession of the former’s wife. Wyke tricks his wife’s lover into staging a robbery that culminates in Milo believing he is about to die at the hands of Wyke, who for the benefit of any subsequent police investigation, plays the role of a householder disturbing a burglary. However, Milo turns the tables, returning some days later disguised as a police inspector investigating the disappearance of Milo Tindall. In the 2007 film the struggle between the two men is played out in a manner that audiences familiar with Pinter’s work for theatre would instantly recognize – an initial encounter conducted under a veneer of polite discourse concealing fierce animosity and rivalry. As in plays such as *The Collec-*

tion and *Betrayal*, where enmity is coupled with admiration, in Pinter's film version of *Sleuth*, Wyke's appreciation of his opponent grows after he in turn has been duped by Milo's disguise and performance as a police inspector.

In a long parallel career as a screenwriter for films such as *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966), *The Go-Between* (1971) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *Sleuth* was an unusual departure for Pinter in a number of ways: not only does it break from his established practice of adapting novels, but (with the exception of his unproduced screenplay of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 2000), it also marked the first and last time that would see Pinter adapting the work of a contemporary dramatist. More significantly, it broke with a reputation that Pinter had gained for fidelity to the original text (Sinyard 1986: ix), where in *Sleuth* a wholesale *reappropriation* rather than adaptation of a work takes place, something Pinter had not attempted in a screenplay since Robin Maugham's novella, *The Servant* in 1963.

As a consequence, Pinter's *Sleuth* retains only the barest plot outline of Schaffer's play. Little of the original dialogue is retained – and in its place emerge Pinter's signature tone and dramatic style. In an interview, Pinter was quite clear that he had deliberately set out to produce a version that would be quite different from the earlier film and play: "It's a total transformation. I must say I think I've made it my own" (*Sleuth*: 2008). Here, in what would be his last significant writing project before his death in December 2008, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that *Sleuth* stands as Harold Pinter's last original work.

The Harold Pinter archive at the British Library contains notes and drafts on *Sleuth* that clearly reveal an iconoclastic approach at work. This replacement of one style for another is evident in a handwritten first draft in one early exchange between Wyke and Milo:

Andrew

Do you act under the name of Tindle?

Milo

Tindle, yes.

Wyke
Why haven't I ever heard of you?
Milo
You will, before long.
Wyke
Really?
Milo
In spades
Wyke
That sounds threatening
Milo.

Does it?

Another exchange in the same draft, subsequently deleted in the final script also shows Pinter's voice as dominant:

A[ndrew] – You see. I planned all this from the word go. I've always longed to have an intimate chat with a hairdresser, particularly a hairdresser who is fucking my wife
M[i]lo – But I'm not a hairdresser
A – Yes you are (Pinter: 88880/2/103).

One of the other major differences that distinguishes Pinter's adaptation from Schaffer's play and subsequent film version is its attitude towards the 'golden age' of detective fiction. The phrase refers to the period between the First and Second World Wars and the enormous popularity of the 'whodunnit' or 'puzzle novel' by writers such as Margery Allingham, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. Here, murder is committed at weekend parties held in rambling country houses; in picture postcard rural villages or the closeted worlds of Oxbridge colleges, while those charged to solve the crime are amateur sleuths such as the aristocratic Lord Peter Wimsey, the elderly spinster Miss Marple, or the retired detective Hercule Poirot.

Sleuth is set in 1970, long after the golden age of the detective novel has passed, and although he dedicates the play to an array of fictional detectives including Philip Trent, Max Carrados and Gideon Fell, whom he describes as "omniscient eccentric gentlemen".¹ Schaf-

fer's main use for the classic detective novel is as a metaphor for England's inwardness, snobbery and undue reverence for the past. David I. Grossvogel has called Agatha's Christie's work "never more than nostalgia and illusion," (Grossvogel 1983: 254), while one of the main contentions in Colin Watson's study of the detective novel, *Snobbery with Violence*, published one year after *Sleuth* was staged, contends that the work of Christie and her contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s reflected exclusively upper middle-class attitudes, mostly predicated on a snobbery focused against foreigners, the working classes and Bloomsbury modernism. Wyke detests the contemporary crime novel "where the police race around in cars and call the suspects chummy" (Schaffer: 15), but near the end of the play Milo savagely dismisses Wyke's assertion that the classical detective novel is "the normal recreation of noble minds" (Schaffer: 14):

Take a look at yourself, Andrew, and ask yourself a few simple questions about your attachment to the English detective story...the only place you can inhabit is a dead world – a country house world where peers and colonels die in their studies; where butlers steal the port, and pert parlour maids cringe...It's a world of coldness and class hatred, and two dimensional characters who are not expected to communicate; it's a world where only the amateurs win, and where foreigners are automatically figures of fun...To put it shortly the detective story is the normal recreation of snob-bish, out-dated, life-hating, ignoble minds. (Schaffer: 90)

It is also for his mockery of Wyke's beloved fictional detective, St. John Lord Merridew, and the values that he represents rather than the affair with his wife that ultimately leads to Milo's shooting at the end of the play (Schaffer: 92).

Yet Wyke is also aware that he is writing against the prevailing mood of the time. By the 1960s the classical detective novel had been superceded by the *thriller*. For example, the year *Sleuth* was produced on stage saw the publication of Ted Lewis's *Jack's Return Home*,² George V. Higgins's, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and Colin Watson's *The Killer*. Yet, Wyke still observes, "You know even in these days I still set my own work among the gentry. And a great number of people enjoy it, in spite of the Welfare State" (Schaffer: 14). It is of course the creation

of the post-war Welfare State and the consensus by successive governments to uphold its founding principles that, according to Wyke, has led to Britain's moral and political decline. On several occasions in the play, Harold Wilson's government (which was still in power when *Sleuth* premiered in February 1970), is bitterly referred to in relation to the devaluation of sterling and the imposition of high taxation rates on the wealthy (Schaffer: 24). Despite this, Wyke's fictional creation St. John Lord Merridew survives and is still, according to his author, "Known to millions all over the civilized world". Quoting directly from one of his own novels, Wyke describes his amateur detective as "An ambulatory tun of port with the face of Father Christmas...A classical scholar with a taste for good pipes and bad puns, but with a nose for smelling out evil, superior to anything, in the force" (Schaffer: 27).

Yet, lurking beneath this comforting fictional world, Schaffer also associates the classical detective novel with other less attractive features. As mentioned, at the end of the play Milo confronts Wyke about the insularity and snobbery operating within classic detective fiction, and we are also made aware of another unwelcome feature: its xenophobia. Wyke, unsurprisingly, shares this prejudice. Curiously, one of the first questions he asks Milo concerns his antecedents and ethnic origin. We are told that Milo's mother "was born in Hereford, a farmer's daughter", but his father is an Italian, who fled to Britain in the 1930s from Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship. On learning this, Wyke immediately asks if Milo is Jewish, which he affirms that he is on his mother's side. Despite seeming to respond sympathetically, calling Mussolini's persecution of the Jews a "Dreadful business, dreadful" - and despite assuring Milo that 'We're all liberals here. I have no prejudice against Jews, or even half Jews. Why some of my best friends are half Jews' (Schaffer: 16), soon afterwards Wyke requests that were Milo to marry his wife any issue from the union should be baptized into the Church of England (Schaffer: 17). Later, when Milo argues that by killing him Wyke's soul will be damned, Wyke cuttingly replies, "I didn't think Jews believed in hell" (Schaffer: 47).

These anti-Semitic sentiments are not so surprising, given Wyke's reverence for detective novelists such as G.K Chesterton and Dorothy L. Sayers, where the Jew, (and foreigners in general), either seem to occupy the centre of international crime rings, or else are depicted as grasping parvenus, or louche sexual predators. Later in the play when Milo is pleading for his life, he asks Wyke the reason why he wants to kill him: "I'm amazed you have to ask. But since you do, it's perfectly simple. I hate you because you are a culling spick. A wop – a not one of me" (Schaffer: 49-50). In an influential essay on detective fiction, George Grella comments that, "The offense of foreign birth or blood seems too trifling to be murdered for, but Englishmen in general distrust the foreigner" (Grella: 98). His example, taken from the American John Dickson Carr's novel *Death Turns the Tables* (1941), features the detective Dr Gideon Fell, on whom Wyke bases his creation St. John Lord Merridew. In the novel, we learn of the murder of Anthony Morrell, an Italian businessman. Grella argues that the reason for his death has partly come about because he represents a "symbol of lower class virility" (Grella: 97). In Schaffer's play, Milo Tindall, who has moved up the social ladder via his minor public school and now runs a successful travel agency³ is the same embodiment of a classless sexual charisma that ultimately leads to his demise. It certainly lies at the root of Wyke's enmity towards his rival:

I hate your smarmy, good looking Latin face and your easy manner. I'll bet you're easy in a ski lodge, and easy on a yacht, and easy on a beach. I'll bet a pound to a penny, that you wear a gold charm round your neck, and that your chest is hairy and in summer matted with sun oil...I hate you because you're a seducer of women and a king among marsh-mallow snakes. (Schaffer: 49-50)

By contrast, expression of such outright xenophobia is rare in Pinter's work, although it occasionally manifests itself in early plays. For example, in his first play *The Room* (1957), Mr Hudd, on finding Riley, a blind black man with his wife, simply exclaims "Lice!" (Pinter 1990: 110) before striking him. In *The Caretaker*, racial otherness is an off-stage threat to the vagrant Davies, who rails at his fellow workers at the café: "Poles, Greeks, Blacks...all them aliens" (Pinter 1990: 17),

while later he expresses concern at the possibility of having to share a toilet in Aston's house "with them Blacks" (Pinter 1990: 27). In Pinter's film version of *Sleuth*, Wyke's antisemitism is absent, yet the dislike of Milo being predicated on racial grounds is retained:

A[ndrew] – Milo. What an interesting name. You're a foreigner I take it?

M[ilo] – My father is Italian.

A – Milo sounds Hungarian

M – Does it?

...

A – You're sure your father isn't Hungarian?

M – Well, he's kept it dead secret for years hasn't he?

A – And your mother?

M – English

A – So, you're kind of half breed? (Pinter 2003a).

Pinter then deliberately confuses things further by Wyke revealing his own Dutch antecedents, which Milo exploits to similar ends in order to gain power:

M – You speak Dutch yourself?

W – Not a word

M – Well, you're not much of Dutchman then are you? When it comes down to it I'm more of a Dutchman than you.

A – I'm more of a Dutchman than you are a Hungarian. That's certainly true.

M – ~~I'm not a Hungarian~~ (Pinter 2003b: 8880/2/103).

Characteristically, Pinter takes this preoccupation with ethnic origin to absurdly comic proportions, with Milo later telling Wyke that he is "Irish, Connemara. Spanish descent. By way of Uganda. My grandparents were slaves. My mother was a dark-eyed dusky beauty" (*Sleuth* 2008).

In her discussion of all three versions of *Sleuth*, Monika Pietrzak-Franger points out that in both the original play and the 1972 film, the battle between Wyke and Milo for dominance is determined by the former's "control over the medium of the detective novel" (Pietrzak-Franger: 184). Not surprisingly, it is Wyke who dominates at

first, but Milo quickly learns to become adept at subverting the literary rules by which Wyke plays. This he achieves by disguising himself as Inspector Doppler, and succeeds in confounding the cliché of police detectives' portrayal in novels as witless 'plodders' who are always destined to be traduced by their amateur (and frequently aristocratic) counterparts.

In Pinter's screenplay, little remains of this struggle for dominance being conducted through the rules of the detective novel. While the plan for Milo to steal the jewels is retained as well as his return in disguise as Inspector Black (in a change of name from the Inspector Doppler in Schaffer), the rules of combat between the two men are based more on differences in material status. Their opening exchange on meeting makes this clear:

He [Wyke] offers his hand. Milo takes it

Wyke

You got the train to Charlebury, did you?

Milo

I drove

Wyke

Oh, you drove?

Milo

That's my car

Andrew

What, the little one?

Milo

Not the big one

Andrew

No. The big one's mine. What do you think of it?

Milo

Very handsome (Pinter 2003b).

Here we are in familiar Pinter territory, and in other work, most notably *The Collection*, a similar confrontation and ensuing rivalry takes place between James and a younger man, Bill, whom the former also suspects of having an affair with his wife. As in *Sleuth*, competi-

tion takes the form of gameplaying, bluff and a slowly growing admiration by the cuckolded James for his rival.

As mentioned, Pinter does not altogether abandon the emphasis Schaffer places on the detective novel: rather, he changes the genre that Wyke as a novelist works in to that of the *thriller*. In his early career as an actor, Pinter performed in Patrick Hamilton's play *Rope* (1929), a thriller that he much admired, describing it in a letter to his friend and fellow actor Barry Foster as a work of genius. In his biography on Pinter, Michael Billington sees its two murderous protagonists, Brandon and Granillo, as prototypes of Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* (1958) (1996: 43), while Robert Gordon points out that throughout his career the conventions of the Hollywood thriller appeared just as frequently in Pinter's work as the often-cited indebtedness to Kafka's fiction (Gordon: 2). Marvin Carlson in his book *Death Traps: The Postmodern Comedy Thriller* observes, "At the center of almost every thriller of the 1970s and 1980s is found a husband, a wife, and a male or female lover" (Carlson 1997: 44). Despite belonging to the tradition of the country house detective novel, even *Sleuth* in its first incarnation as a play incorporates the adulterous triangle from film noir thrillers such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), that leads to murder,

Yet Pinter's relationship to the thriller draws above all from its *affect* and it is this factor that crucially differentiates it from the detective novel. In his overview of the thriller genre, David Glover identifies its chief difference from the detective novel being a "direct impact upon the nervous systems of... readers [and] the way in which it persistently seeks to raise the stakes of the narrative, heightening or exaggerating the experience of events by transforming them into rising cause of danger, violence or shock" (Glover: 136-8). What makes Pinter's contribution to drama significant is that he takes the visceral threat of the thriller – the pursuit and murder of victims for instance, and manages to capture the same mounting sense of tension, not through any overt violence, but through seemingly mundane incidents or exchanges of dialogue between his characters: examples include Goldberg and McCann persuading Stanley to sit down in *The Birthday Party* (Pinter

1990: 40-1), the entrapment and drowning of a wasp inside a marmalade jar over the breakfast table in *A Slight Ache* (1959) (Pinter 1990: 155-8), or the battle for dominance between Lenny and Ruth in *The Homecoming* (1965) over a glass of water (Pinter 1991: 41-3). In the same vein, Pinter's theatre also follows the widely accepted understanding of the way thrillers are constructed in comparison to the detective novel. Robert W. Winks outlines this difference, even though he disagrees with the definition itself: "mystery fiction 'explains reality', (if through a glass darkly)" whereas thriller fiction "does not 'explain' but rather 'reports actions'" (Winks 1980: 9). David Glover also observes that the two genres frequently bleed into one another, such as in Agatha Christie's early novels *The Secret Adversary* (1922) and *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929) (Glover:136).

In the 2007 film of *Sleuth*, Kenneth Branagh also spoke of how casting influenced the decision to make Wyke the author of thrillers instead of detective novels: "With Michael [Caine] he seemed [as Wyke] to be a character not probably writing country house murder mysteries, but would be writing more serial killer novels and Harold Pinter agreed with that, so we had great fun coming up with the book cover titles" (*Sleuth*: 2008). Branagh's reference to the novels comes from a scene in the film where the two men meet for the first time at Wyke's country house. Whereas in the 1972 film the walls are adorned with detective novel ephemera, including a framed photograph of Agatha Christie and a signpost for Baker Street, in Pinter's version Wyke draws Tindall's attention to his collection of novels residing beneath a framed publicity poster of the author, who is described as "The Master of Menace."⁴ The poster also includes a list of titles from his novels whose names reflect something of the macabre and sensationalist nature of the thriller genre. The titles also show an impish Pinter referencing incidents and phrases that have appeared in some of his own plays: *Rat in a Trap*, *Blackout*, *The Obelisk*, *Dead Fish*, *Loser's Kiss*, *Blind Man's Bluff*, *A Midnight Dip*, *Black Snow*, *Steak Tartare*, *Dead of Night*, *The Cat's Whiskers*, *Double Scotch* and the forthcoming, *The Smiling Man*.⁶

In early drafts of the script, Pinter considered opening the film with a scene from one of the screen adaptations of Wyke's thrillers. For

example, in notes entitled 'Possible Opening' Pinter provides a short scene in which Wyke is watching an adaptation of one his thrillers on television:

2. TV screen.

Man in empty nightclub. Dawn. Full ashtrays, empty bottles.

Man- Are you there?

5. TV

Man – I know you're there.

Voice – (loudspeaker) I'm here all right.

10. TV

Voice – what do you want?

Man- I've come to talk.

19. TV

Voice – walk onto the dancefloor and stand in the light (Pinter: ADD MS 88880/2/103)

In a later handwritten first draft, Wyke's presence as a viewer of his own work is made more explicit:

20. TV Screen

Man in empty nightclub. Ashtrays, empty bottles

Man? Riley?⁷ Are you there?

...

4. TV

Man: - I know you're here

Voice: I'm here all right

(Loudspeaker) I'm right here.

6. TV Andrew watching

Voice - What do you want?

Man – I've come to talk (Pinter: ADD MS 88880/2/103).

Significantly, this first draft identifies Wyke as a writer of detective novels, but this is crossed out and replaced with "crime novel" in the first typewritten draft. Yet, Pinter never quite fully abandons the close connections to the detective genre in Schaffer's play – rather he subverts them. This technique can also be found in early plays such as *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Birthday Party*, where formulaic elements

from the thriller (two hired killers awaiting their next assignment; two men from the criminal underworld coming to reclaim a fugitive from their organization), become destabilized. This destabilization has been given the attribution 'Pinteresque', and it is not difficult to see why a popular form like the detective novel with its tightly circumscribed rules might appeal. This has been given as one of the main reasons for the popularity of classical detective fiction, which George Grella believes comes from the assumption of "a benevolent or knowable universe... [and always provides a plausible and rational explanation of even the most perplexing chain of events]," (Grella: 101). In contrast, David Glover sees "The world of the thriller... [as] one that that is radically uncertain" (138). From his early association with the Theatre of Absurd onwards, the literary and dramatic genres that have proved most useful to Pinter have also been amongst the most stable and reassuring for its audiences: the form and structure of the thriller, despite its inherent sense of threat is at the same time a reassuringly familiar one. However, by a process of unravelling and reassemblage, Pinter is able to make what already holds the promise of a gradually heightened sense of threat both strange and discomfiting.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Sleuth*. A key line in Pinter's screenplay, and that subsequently became used in publicity for the film is Wyke's advice to Milo, "Obey the rules". Here, he is referring to the robbery that Milo carries out according to a strict set of instructions provided by Wyke: these follow a set pattern with which readers of crime and thriller fiction would be readily familiar. Pinter also obeys these rules, at least on the surface - retaining the robbery from Schaffer's play and keeping to Wyke's elaborate directives for staging the burglary. This also extends to Schaffer's own subversion of the rules governing the detective genre, which Pinter retains, when Milo disguises himself as a police inspector.

However, Pinter's subversions are also in evidence. A good example of this comes from the settings in Schaffer's play / film which both take place in Wyke's Norman Manor house, itself a familiar trapping of classic detective fiction. It is also a marker for Wyke's attitude towards England and Englishness based on demarcations of heritage, wealth,

class and race. In Pinter's screenplay, the façade of the grand country house is retained in the opening shots of the film and described in his original handwritten notes as "House Georgian; tall, silent, elegant" (Pinter, 88880/2/103). However, the interior is completely different. Instead of the minstrel's gallery and grandfather clock in Schaffer's play (Schaffer: 11), here the house is dominated by surveillance technology and contemporary paintings, sculptures and furniture by artists and designers including Gary Hume, Anthony Gormley and Ron Arad that reflect the tastes of Wyke's wife Maggie.

Much like the redesigned interior of Wyke's country home, Pinter's adaptation has excavated and removed much of the architecture that makes up the detective novel lore within Schaffer's play. Yet it is interesting to see that in early drafts of Pinter's script, elements from the genre still remain. A significant scene, later abandoned, prepares the audience for Milo's skills at disguise when he gives Wyke a video to watch. In it, Milo plays the part of St. John Lord Merridew. Despite it being a television adaptation of his own work, Wyke does not recognize that the actor playing Merridew is his rival:

Milo puts on video of Lord Merridew speech

A[ndrew] – Why are you showing me this? I've seen it.

M[i]lo – What's the actor's name?

A – How do I know? Jack Nicholson? Sean Connery? Marlon Brando? How would I know? I'm not interested in actors.

M – Is that a fact?

Fast forward to end of video. It is of Merridew removing moustache, wig etc. He is in his dressing room. He looks at the camera. Smiles. It is Milo.

A – Jesus Christ!

M – Good part

A – You bastard. You're everywhere

M – I cover the waterfront (Pinter 88880/2/103).⁸

While undoubtedly a good scene, it is not difficult to see why in the end Pinter rejected it: not only does it anticipate the revelation of Milo's disguise as Inspector Black, but it also contradicts the decision to make Wyke a writer of thrillers. By retaining the character of Merridew, the two genres of detective fiction and thriller would have

become entangled and confused. This bleeding of forms happens further on in another exchange, also subsequently deleted in the same handwritten first draft. Here, Wyke is talking to Milo disguised as Inspector Black:

A – I no longer have a wife. She died quite recently last night.

M – Oh dear. Suicide?

A – She was having an affair with a paranoid schizophrenic hairdresser. He killed her in a fit of raging jealousy.

M- Dear oh dear. Who was he jealous of?

A – Me.

M – How did he kill her?

A – Oh the classic. Strangled with a scarf. I think he got it from one of my books...

(Pinter, 88880/2/103).

Despite subsequently abandoning them, these allusions to the classic detective novel indicate Pinter's familiarity with the genre. Marvin Carlson observes that in 1955 "the mystery play, or thriller was one of the most common genres on the London stage" (Carlson 1993: 431), and in his study, *Pinter: The Player's Playwright*, David Thompson points out that, as a repertory actor during the 1950s, Pinter appeared in several Agatha Christie plays, both in adaptations of her novels and original works for the stage. Thompson argues that this engenders in Pinter an intimate knowledge of the detective genre that would later come to be sublimated into his own work. While Beatrix Hesse in her study of the detective stage play in the twentieth century only identifies Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* as fitting directly into this category (Hesse: 65), Thompson associates (not always entirely convincingly) a number of Pinter's other works as bearing an influence of the Agatha Christie plays he had appeared in as an actor with various repertory companies during the 1950s. Connections range from Gibbs's slaughter of the staff and inmates in *The Hothouse* (1958) being influenced by the stage adaptation of Christie's novel *Ten Little Niggers* (1939) to the use of blackouts that feature in many 1950s detective dramas that also occur in both *The Birthday Party* and *No Man's Land* (1975) (Thompson: 55-8).

More convincing are the connections Thompson draws between the interrogation of witnesses and the cross examination of suspects in Christie's play *Spider's Web* (1954), and Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker* (Thompson: 38).⁹ Allied to this is Christie's common device of using characters to give alternative accounts of identical incidents. Thompson observes that Pinter does this on several occasions in *Old Times* (1971) with Anna and Deeley's differing versions of seeing the film *Odd Man Out* (1947) at the cinema. Thompson points out that while contradictory narratives are usually resolved in traditional detective drama, often by the guilty party being discovered at the end, no such verification is ever forthcoming in Pinter's work (Thompson: 50-1). By the same token, in *The Birthday Party*, Thompson argues that the interrogation seems to be conducted without any intention of gaining either the facts or a confession from Stanley (1985: 50-1).

It is also true to say that several of Pinter's characters turn amateur detective. These include the aforementioned James in *The Collection*, who attempts to piece together the events that took place over the course of an evening at the Leeds hotel where his wife Stella and Bill were both staying, or *Night School* (1960) in which the ex-convict Walter attempts to discover the secret world that his fellow lodger Sally, apparently a teacher by day, inhabits each evening.

In conclusion, Pinter's *Sleuth* is neither an update or a remake of Schaffer's play / film, but a continuation of Marvin Carlson's principal argument in *Death Traps: The Postmodern Comedy Thriller* - namely, that since the early 1970s, British and American dramatists' responses towards crime and thriller genres have taken a turn towards postmodernism. According to Carlson, this has mainly concerned the manipulation of realism, of which he cites *Sleuth* as a key progenitor (Carlson 1997: 2). Specifically, he comments, "The playwright constantly seeks to surprise the audience about any and every aspect of the dramatic construction, and to this all-encompassing game, anything may be sacrificed, including most notably, the rules of the genre itself" (Carlson 1997: 15). Pinter's screenplay takes this disruption of realism together with the manipulation of detective drama / the thriller even further. With its contemporary look, such as the inclusion of works by artists

associated with the postmodernism of 1990s Britart,¹⁰ this version of *Sleuth* seems even more in thrall to its preoccupation with surfaces, while the casting of Michael Caine and Jude Law also interweaves several ironic intertextual cinematic doublings that not only reference the 1972 film of *Sleuth*, but also their own careers as film actors.¹¹

This article has also attempted to argue that, despite overt attempts to distance his version of *Sleuth* from the classic interwar detective novel, elsewhere traces have continued to haunt some of his work. Allied to this, both early critical and audience responses to his plays also encountered them in the same way as detective novels, with the critic / audience approaching the play on the alert for clues buried within the text or the performance that might solve the puzzles that the playwright had set for them. In an interview, Pinter described the process of writing as occupying a similar position, and it is worth noting how the language of the detective novel comes through: "I don't know what kind of characters my plays will have until they...well, until they *are*. I don't conceptualise in any way. Once I've got the clues, I follow them – that's my job, really, to follow the clues."¹² Here we find Pinter simultaneously both writer and detective, with the latter in close pursuit of the former in the hunt to decode meanings for the puzzles set for critics and audiences alike.

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¹ Anthony Schaffer, *Sleuth*, London: Marion Boyars, 1971, n.p. All subsequent references will incorporate page numbers from this source directly into the main body of the text.

² Lewis's novel was subsequently adapted into one of the most significant gangster thrillers in British cinema, *Get Carter* (1971). This also starred Michael Caine and was produced the year before his appearance in *Sleuth*.

³ In Schaffer's 1972 film adaptation Milo is a hairdresser. Characteristically, in Pinter's screenplay, an ambiguity remains about Milo's profession. Despite explaining that he is an actor who drives a taxi when not in acting work, Wyke continues to harbour the belief that Milo is a hairdresser.

⁴ The poster is also something of a Pinter in-joke. His early plays were famously described by the theatre critic Irving Wardle as 'comedies of menace', a term that is still used in Pinter criticism. The publisher, 'Baron Books' is also a reference to the stage name, David Baron, that Pinter took as an actor in the 1950s.

⁵ The children's game, played to sinister effect in *The Birthday Party*.

⁶ A reference perhaps to an incident in *The Caretaker* and Davies' discomfort at Aston's habit of silently watching and smiling when he thinks him asleep. Davies complains to Aston's brother Mick, 'he looks down at my bed, there's a smile on his face! What the hell's he smiling at?' (Pinter, 1988: 72).

⁷ It is interesting to note that in this last major work Pinter returns to the name of a character who featured in his first play *The Room*.

⁸ Pinter subsequently crossed out the following exchange that takes place after Milo has taken off his disguise:

A – That's my character. I created him. He's based on me. You can't play me!

M – Yes I can. (Pinter ADD MS 88880/2/103).

⁹ David T. Thompson, *Pinter: The Player's Playwright*, p.38. Others who have adopted this view of Pinter's incorporation of the detective play into *The Birthday Party* coming from his repertory days as an actor include Billington 1973: 173-6 and Elsom 1976:107.

¹⁰ In the film these works included Gary Hume's *Hounds of Hell* and Ron Arad's *Bad Tempered Chair*.

¹¹ For example, a complex triangularity exists with the casting of Jude Law as Tindall, who in 2004 starred in the remake of *Alfie*, taking over the eponymous role that Michael Caine originally played in 1966 film adaptation of Bill Naughton's novel

¹² Ian Smith, *Pinter in the Theatre*, London: Nick Hern, 2005, p.56.

Murder, mystery, suspense and doubt in Word for Word's *All Aunt Hagar's Children*

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Khary Moyer as the narrator, discovering bloody prints
(U.S. production)

Photo: Julie Schuchard – Word for Word

Edward P. Jones called his 2006 short story “All Aunt Hagar’s Children” a “sort of a detective story.”¹ This essay argues that its performance by the Word for Word Theatre Company simultaneously enlightens the interpretation of the short story and adds to the appreciation of the work as an aesthetic experience. In a first part, the plot of the short story will be briefly described and the Word for Word Company introduced. The point will be made that Jones’ short story is theatrical, but that the performance adds to the tale’s suspense. The second part will illustrate the ways in which the formal choices of the play, notably the intertextual cultural references to film noir, set off Jones’ meaning through the horizon of expectations that they establish. The director, Stephanie Hunt, said that “Emphasizing the film noir style helped focus the overall produc-

tion, since the story has so many rich themes” (Hunt).² The production in noir style presents the connecting themes in Jones’ story as elements in an overarching quest for meaning and what constitutes identity. The final part of this article will concern the sense of beauty and mystery that the performance imparts although it disambiguates the plot.³

The short-story “All Aunt Hagar’s Children” and the play *All Aunt Hagar’s Children*

In “All Aunt Hagar’s Children,” as in much of Jones’ work, analepses introduce apparently unrelated narrative threads, complicating the short story about a murder investigation. To sum up the plot, a black Korean War veteran, the unnamed narrator, has returned to Washington D.C. and works as a clerk in the office of a white Jewish lawyer, Sam Jaffe. The narrator’s mother, his aunt and their friend Miss Agatha, who fled to Washington as girls after they had knocked out a white man in self defense in Alabama, insist that the narrator investigate the murder of his childhood friend, Miss Agatha’s son Ike, as the police have been of no help in the two years since Ike’s murder. But the would-be sleuth is haunted by the death of a strange white woman and distracted by other private concerns: his imminent departure for Alaska to look for gold and avoiding an ex-girlfriend, Sheila Larkin, who he believes wants to throw acid in his face. The narrator goes to his mother’s for Sunday dinner and discusses the members of his family; he goes to the bar for drinks and information and comments on the patrons of the bar; he searches the apartment Ike shared with his wife Alona under Miss Agatha’s flat for clues; he questions Ike’s flirtatious neighbour and looks around the neighborhood. Meanwhile the puzzling last words of the dead white woman echo through his head, and remind him of the day he failed to save her as she came off a streetcar and collapsed, although he gave her mouth to mouth resuscitation. As he is repeating her last words out loud in the office, Dvera Jaffe, Sam’s wife, tells him that they are Yiddish words, and that the woman was a Jewish immigrant from Russia who had lost her mind. He learns, besides, that Ike was using drugs, and decides that Ike’s dealer, who has died of cancer, may be held responsible for his murder. However, after

an encounter with Sheila Larkin, he returns to Ike's flat and finds the real solution to the murder case—Miss Agatha's beloved daughter-in-law killed her son. Yet the narrator wonders why he was asked to investigate and what he should divulge. He finally decides against going to Alaska, lays his personal ghosts to rest and finds a measure of peace.

The Word for Word Company performed *All Aunt Hagar's Children* at ZSpace, their base in San Francisco, in November-December 2016, and in Angers, Nancy and Saint-Cloud in March 2017. Word for Word, which "believes in the power of the short story to provide solace, compassion and insight into our daily lives" (Saint-Cloud program), performs short stories by classic and contemporary writers without changing a word of the text, reading out descriptive passages as well as dialogue. Founded by JoAnne Winters and Susan Harloe in 1993, Word for Word has performed over seventy plays to date, first in libraries and schools, then in local theatres and at ZSpace, and the company takes shows on tour in California and France. In *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, directed by Stephanie Hunt, eight actors played approximately thirty characters. With the exception of the narrator, the same cast played in California and France.⁴

The dramatization was something of a discovery for Jones himself, as he told interviewer Belva Davis after seeing his story enacted on stage. Having found the performance "very moving, stunning," he wondered "if I was the guy who wrote all that stuff" (Davis).

Jones' short-story is masterfully wrought and theatrical. Laurent Lepaludier, in his article "Theatricality in the Short Story: Staging the World," states that short stories give the illusion of drama when the scenes evoked are "spectacular," i.e., possess visual and oral qualities, dramatic action and vivid conversation that allow the reader to imagine the scene easily (Lepaludier: 5). Jones writes dialogue that is life-like, and specifies accompanying gestures and actions, as in the bar scene: "'Yall remember Ike?' Blondelle nodded, and Mary drank some Coke. 'Miss Agatha wants me to find out who did it.'

They laughed. It went on for a good minute" (J: 110).⁵ Many scenes are spectacular, as when an old lady rouses the drunken young

man, the narrator, lying in the street at three in the morning (J: 122-123). Lepaludier mentions the versatility of the short story, and notes that intertextuality is a potential dramatic feature (Lepaludier: 4, 8). Jones' story uses a filmic intertext: "Soldier man's now a detective man. Like in the picture show" (J: 110); flashbacks, as in the cinema, make the reader "see" past events. The story's association with other works of mystery fiction, written or filmic, make it dramatic as both the mystery genre and drama depend on suspense. Moreover, Lepaludier insists that condensation is a major factor in drama and in the short story, as "in drama information is passed on essentially through the characters' discourses," and the short story's lack of space makes for compression (Lepaludier: 3, 8). What Jones' characters do not say is important. As the story is told from the young man's point of view, he does not explain what he is learning in his investigation, and a great deal is left for the reader to construe.

I would like to suggest that the Word for Word performance of *All Aunt Hagar's Children* charges the tale with energy, interprets meaning and adds to the suspense. As semiologists point out, the conventions of theatre are not realistic, but a code that the audience has come to know; the subcode that every word of Jones' text should be voiced is easily accepted by the spectator, as the full text provides valuable information, for example on breeding and character when Agatha removes her gloves, the narrator saying, "Flesh must meet flesh, my mother had taught her sons. Never shake hands with your gloves on" (J: 107). Moreover, as artistic director Susan Harloe told the audience after the performance in Saint-Cloud on March 28, 2017, voicing textual directions like "my mother said" with exasperation or "I got a chair for Miss Agatha" perfunctorily, reflecting ingrained manners, enabled the actors to add emotion and meaning to the text. Semiologists call the showing that distinguishes theatre from narrative "ostention" and Keir Elam, in *Semiotics of the Theatre and Drama*, remarks that "on stage [...] the physical characteristics of the signs and signals are not only ostended for their own sakes [...] but contribute directly to the production of meaning" (Elam: 41). Gestures and delivery (indicating emotion, intent, or character), costumes and sets, (denoting class or character), characters and objects on

stage function in a synecdochic fashion, giving spectators a more exact idea of the dramatic world (Elam: 29, 41). Patrice Pavis, in “The State of Current Theatre Research,” argues that the spectator does not have a compartmentalized vision of performance. Citing Merleau-Ponty’s “it is impossible [...] to decompose a perception,” he prefers to speak of “vectorisation” leading to a network of meaning rather than of signals and codes (Pavis: 10-12). The network of meaning produced on stage heightens the suspense of the short story. Sets like the narrator’s mother’s cozy “living room,” props like the orange and grape cool aid pitcher, convey respectability and a comfortable lifestyle, and the performance of the relations between family and friends comes across as tightly-knit, in tableaux out of a Norman Rockwell painting. The play insists on the all-American, patriotic fiber of the older women by having Miss Agatha delightedly echo the narrator’s mention of his soldier’s “uniform” (J: 104; H: 3). But it makes it clear that the narrator, though a product of their upbringing, is no longer of them. They smile at each other and are responsive, but he, haunted and preoccupied, well-mannered by rote, is grave throughout. This brings the quest motif to the fore: the audience feels that the mysteries that it is made aware of urgently need to be solved.

That the theatre ensures there are no interruptions channels the suspense, all the more so since, as Elam remarks, suspension is fundamental to drama where every act poses the question of purpose-success/purpose-failure (Elam: 124). Pavis speaks of the energy that the spectator perceives (Pavis: 19). In *All Aunt Hagar’s Children*, everything is related to the narrator’s purpose. In his encounter with Minnie Parsons, for example, he appears overpowered while this is not apparent in the short story. Thus the play’s unity and meaning are more readily perceived.

A crucial element in the making of meaning in the performance is the choice of film noir allusions. “The jazz music we used probably evoked some of the 50s era films, a noir tone of toughness. The costumes, especially the women’s hats and the man’s suit and hat, were important—affecting how the actors moved, evoking time period and a noir point of view” (Hunt). The young man, burly in his suit, is not quick in motion and is dumb before the women. This adds to the sus-

pense: How can he succeed? Will the spectator get to the bottom of the mysteries? The lighting adds to the noir mood and provides unity and meaning. In the bar scene behind the friendly Mary and Blondelle, the barwoman, poker-faced in the darkness, links the investigation to the ominous memories that are ostended in altered light, and prepares for a visitation of the ghost. Flashback signals include lighting and the recorded voice of the dead woman, or the opening up of the space stage left. There appears the abandoned Sheila Larkin (J: 103; H: 1), or Miriam Sobel, the “white woman [who] had died right in front of [the narrator’s] eyes,” reaching out at the first mention of her name, then turning upstage (J: 104; H: 2); there the black women are shown as “girlhood versions of themselves” in Choctaw, Alabama, and attack the white man trying to rape Agatha (H: 6). After hearing Myriam’s ghostly voice, the audience learns from the narrator that his name (which is never mentioned) is that of a dead slave, a name his great-grandfather had taken in memory of his friend murdered by a patroller (J:118; H:22). The noir vectorization leads to the expectation that these dark secrets and mysteries all connect to the action taking place stage right, and pose the question of the McGuffin, Hitchcock’s term for the desired object that serves to advance the plot of the story. The object of the young man’s quest, it is clear, is greater than just finding out the identity of Ike’s murderer.

Noir codes—with variations

Jones says movies “helped him to see everything,”⁶ and certainly meant that intertext to inform the reading of the story, but it is far more muted in the written text. Stephanie Hunt remembers: “I did not immediately perceive it as a noir story. I saw the story many ways. At first I saw it as a story about men and women....” (Hunt). Eventually, she saw the elements common to the short story and film noir:

1. The Reluctant Detective, who grows personally through the course of the story.
2. The femme fatale who is dangerous and seductive and eccentric (Minnie Parsons).
3. The Mynah Bird who gives him clues and yet may be a red herring (McGuffin?).

4. A haunting past (Choctaw, Alabama) and Miriam Sobel's death in his arms.
5. A first person narrator who is stylish, has many girlfriends (Sheila Larkin), drinks, and hangs out at a bar.
6. The story starts and ends in a law firm.
7. The familiar changes shape right before the protagonist's eyes.
8. The main character, while surrounded by people, is somewhat lonely. There are no friends in the story really, and no other men.
9. There are many secrets. (Hunt)

Intertextuality establishes a horizon of expectations (*Erwartungshorizon*) and, according to Elam, helps the theatregoer master the "rules of the game" (Elam: 92-94). The references to film noir help provide meaning in the worlds evoked by the flashbacks and the supposed present within the play, as expectations are met or countered.

The play shows how Jones used the form of detective fiction to explore the themes of identity and otherness. "All Aunt Hagar's Children" presents elements of what Michael Cohen calls the two "worldviews" of the detective story in his 2000 book *Murder Most Fair*, the whodunit (of Agatha Christie fame) and hardboiled fiction (of the Raymond Chandler type) on which film noir is based. In the whodunit, people are generally law-abiding, and a deductive supersleuth tracks down one criminal as if trying to find the solution to a riddle; in the hardboiled novel, a rough and tumble incorruptible P.I. confronts a corrupt society (Cohen: 27-28). "All Aunt Hagar's Children's" protagonist is more of a hardboiled detective, as he has the makings of a rugged character as an unconscious exploiter of women, given to drink and inarticulate in conversation, and the actor in the French production, who is physically imposing, completes the picture by hardly ever smiling. Unlike in hardboiled fiction, the people in the story are basically good: the narrator's employer is kind, sons respect their mothers, mothers provide Sunday dinners, family and friends provide support for each other; the costumes ostend their decency and the acting conveys their kindly warmth. However, the story refers to a society that is corrupt—at least, the police do not do anything to solve murders. The character of the white man in

Alabama comes onstage in scenes that are either violent or show him speaking nonsense, highlighting the theme of injustice. Finally, Alona's upbeat manner and the affection she shows for Miss Agatha reinforce the conclusion that nothing is what it seems, as in hardboiled fiction, where, according to John Cawelti, "Everything changes its meaning. [...] The supposed victim turns out to be a villain; the lover ends up as the murderess and the faithful friend as the rotten betrayer" (Qtd. in Cohen: 33). The narrator's voice over, a common device in film noir, created in the play by the actor's reading the full text, suggests a private recollection. It leads the spectators to expect intimate developments, where they will be apprised of the hero's personal experience, as well as of the particulars of a crime.

The production makes the pursuit of meaning a central motif, and shows how through his interaction with the female characters, the young man comes to see that things are not what they seem. Most literary commentators see a commonality of worldviews between noir films and hardboiled crime fiction. Mark Conard suggests that a mood, tone and sensibility link the literature and the films: a mood of alienation, a loss of the meaning of things that can be summed up as a "God is Dead" philosophy (Conard: 17, 19). Hunt recognizes that some episodes of *All Aunt Hagar's Children* might recall hardboiled crime novels, but says, "[H]ardboiled suggests to me a tough and hardened attitude toward violence. There were scenes of women knitting and gossiping, and serving pie and drinking cokes" (Hunt). The production makes family life comfortable and sets off the narrator's alienation to it. Yet the play both insists on the narrator's experience of loss of meaning and suggests meaning, bringing home Jones' significant departure from the noir and hardboiled genres by conveying the young man's final sense of integration.

The play reveals the narrator's quest for meaning to encompass the pursuit of justice for Ike and justice as concerns his relations to the other. In this regard, *All Aunt Hagar's Children* manifests a characteristic feature of the mystery genre. Noting the racist stereotypes and misogyny in much of detective fiction, Cohen concludes that "mystery fiction is very fond of cultural difference," and that although what

he terms exophobia cannot be attributed to the writers themselves, “prejudice in their characters helps to drive their books” (Cohen: 102-103). Jones’ narrator has phallogentric views, stated when he links his plan to go to Alaska to his search for pleasure with women: he wants to find “gold and cars and clothes and more women than I could shake a dick at” (J: 105). The performance plays on his view of the world and on the cultural conditioning resulting from Hollywood films. As Laura Mulvey has argued, “cinematic codes create a [male] gaze” objectifying women (Mulvey: 847). The first character to intervene besides the young man is Sheila Larkin, in provocative undress. Familiar with movie shots, the audience shares his view of her as an object, then realizes she is saying that she resents being treated like one:

Man: [...] This was two months since I’d told

Sheila L: Sheila Larkin

Man: as kindly as I could that she and I were finished.

Sheila L: “*So, you have your way with this woman and now you tellin her to just disappear?*” (J: 103; H: 1)



As in film noir, woman is subjected to the male gaze

Jia Taylor as Sheila Larkin

Photo: Julie Schuchard – Word for Word

The acting ostends the character's development: by using body and voice, actors can "vary the presentation of content according to the degree and kind of attention required" (Elam: 80). Pavis uses the term "energy" to describe this process.

[I]ntonations, gazes, restrained rather than manifest gestures are so many fleeting moments where meaning is suggested, but difficult to read and scarcely externalised. [...] [B]y his presence, movement, and phrasing, the actor or dancer releases an energy which directly reaches the spectator. Such a quality makes all the difference and contributes to the whole aesthetic experience as well as the development of meaning. [...] Here we must read the body [...] as that of a dancer... (Pavis: 19-20)

This energy makes the meaning of the short story more readily apparent and increases the suspense. The lead acts respectfully towards his "mother to beat all mothers" and her friends (J: 104), but shows distaste for females like his sister-in-law Joanne or the twin girls she is expecting. The actor stands at a distance from the solidarity of the older black women, and the loving relationship between the black mothers and daughters-in-law or Mary and Blondelle. Yet as his idea that a woman's world necessarily revolves around men is challenged, the spectator watches the actor carefully for changes in his attitude. On the day the narrator cannot avoid his old girlfriend Sheila Larkin, he expects that she will unleash her fury at being left, but, walking with her sister, she pays him no notice. The physical and moral impact on Jones' narrator, who finds himself "stumbling, struggling" (J: 129), is made visible as the actor's motion and delivery gradually alter; although the actor is defensive before the women's strength when he says "Forget all of them, I thought, forget Miss Agatha and Sheila and her billions of sisters and forget my mother and Joanne with her belly full of girls. Forget every bitch that ever lived. Forget em!" (J: 129), he makes change manifest when he sends away the male fantasy conductor offering him a drink onstage, and the emphasis with which he takes up the vocabulary of his mother and aunt for whom exile "was nothin but a little bitty old thing" after attempted rape (J: 125, 129), and shows that he is willing to give of himself in solving the crime, proves that he is not about to forget all of the women and leave for

Alaska. He again proves that he is a changed man on discovering the murderer; he shows shock but understanding, too, for Alona, Ike's widow, once "one of the smartest students Dunbar [High School] had ever known" (J: 114), who reacted to "all Ike's crimes against her" (J: 130)—she is not just a "bitch" as are the women in his rant.

The play makes it clear that women make the narrator change his mind about the difference between blacks and whites as well. He believes he is haunted by "that dead white woman" (J: 105) because "[she] was the first woman I had ever seen die. I never saw one woman die in Korea. Not one" (J: 112). But as the players recreate the scene the day the Miriam Sobel got off the streetcar and collapsed, the young man's mother's presence and interruptions while he tries to save the woman suggests that he is haunted, too, by his transgression against his cultural conditioning. The effectiveness of her warning to her sons never to kiss a white woman, which comes back as he is giving Miriam the kiss of life, is shown in the play by his difficulty keeping his hands off the white woman, his look toward his mother and subsequent switch to less controversial compressions.

Man (*Kneeling*): I tilted her head back and tried to give her breath [*Pencil indication: CPR breath*] the way the army had taught me [*Pencil indication: CPR breath*]. [*Pencil indication: remove hands*] My mother had always told my brother and me that if she ever caught us kissing a white woman she would cut off our lips.

Bertha: "You ever try coolin soup with no lips? Try it and see. It won't work. That soup will never cool and you'll starve to death." [*Pencil indication: look at her; then start compressions*]

Man: For a long time, I tried to help the woman, but I began to see that only the breath of God could help her. Would that white conductor show up and think that I was trying something untoward? Would he try to kill me for doing the right thing?

Bertha: *Try coolin that tomato soup yall love with no lips. Try it and see what it gets you boys.*

(J: 117; H: 20-21)

For J. P. Telotte, the flashback in film noir "points to problems of truth and objectivity and of our ability to know and understand

reality” (qtd. in Conard 13). Bertha’s physical intervention shows the narrator’s attitudes to be the result of cultural conditioning, a form of xenophobia necessary in the racist society symbolized by the (invisible) white conductor, of whom the young man acts wary. In the play, the black women in the crowd go beyond Jones’ description, kneeling and singing when the white woman dies, implying their solidarity with the white woman and that life and death take precedence over race. The narrator’s distrust of whites surfaces again in the scene where Dvera cries on hearing the young man repeat the dead woman’s words. The actor stands cornered, phrasing the remark “This was all I needed before Alaska: a white woman crying and no witnesses to my innocence” (J: 127). It is the more evident that a gulf has been bridged when Dvera tells the narrator that she is crying because she remembers her father. Without overacting, the actor voices Jones’ lines “Sometimes one moment sweeps aside everything you ever thought about a person” (J: 127), ostending the realization that the other is human too; and the performance exhibits the link between two white women, Dvera and Miriam Sobel, Dvera slipping on her scarf to become Myriam (J: 127, H: 34).

Other bridges are established and made manifest, for example when the narrator says of Dvera’s office, with its samovar and Sabbath calendar, “The doilies on the couch reminded me of my mother’s living room” (J: 132), or when he surmises that the rabbi’s wife is probably the real topic of Sobel’s story (J: 132), showing his new realization of the similarities between whites and blacks, Jews and Christians, and of the strong part that women play in every culture. The actor’s tone on reading Myriam’s admonition, “Listen, children, remember [...] what you’re learning here...” (J: 131) turns it into a metadiegetic comment on the significance of the play.

The ghost of Myriam Sobel, a white Jewish woman, accompanies the narrator on his quest for Ike’s killer; but she is not the only ghost. In the detective genre the supernatural, commentators say, ought to be explainable at least as one solution. Perhaps to keep up the noir tone, Stephanie Hunt “didn’t emphasize” Jones’ surrealist or magic realist tendency (“the blood on the fire escape being visible two years later,

and earlier the dream visitation of Miriam Sobel and her two children" - Hunt). But film noir characters are typically haunted by the past, and Sarah Trott argues that "War is the subliminal psychological crisis troubling the protagonists of [...] film noir" (Trott: xvi). As the veteran, alone in his room, remembers Miriam's death, it appears as a screen for the deaths he saw in battle: "In Korea I had got used to dead men everywhere..." (J: 112). Another ghostly reminder of war is Miss Minnie's legless husband, the veteran, "Just a nothing spiriting on down the street" (J: 121): he is not played by an actor but evoked out of thin air. Lisa Kroger and Melanie Anderson mention texts in which ghosts are "most likely brought about by a collective cultural guilt" (Kroger and Anderson: x). World War II is evoked by the legless veteran, the Korean War by the narrator, the Holocaust by Miriam Sobel, and today's inner city crime and violence by Ike. And the unexplainable supernatural agency that helps the narrator solve Ike's murder is made explicit in the actors' mimics and tone—in the narrator's wonder and his mother's satisfaction. The narrator is about to pin the crime on Ike's dealer, Fish Eyes, when he has a last look at the apartment. He realizes that the blood is still under the paint, and that there is a trail of "browned blood" leading up the fire escape to Miss Agatha's: "[W]hat power was in that blood for it to hang on for nearly two years?" he wonders (J: 130).

Man: ... Even after all the snow and sun and rain and time [it was] as if someone with bloody hands, just last night, had held on to [Miss Agatha's window] to steady himself before entering the apartment.

Bertha: Blood spilled with violence never goes away,

Man: I remembered my mother teaching Freddy and me,

Bertha: and you can see it if you have a mind to. (J: 130; H: 37)

As in the streetcar scene, Bertha speaks the law. Her presence introduces with instancy the question that all the ghosts in the text pose—the question of justice. For Bertha it is triumphant. And suspense is built up through vectorization of meaning; the spectator is told that however much unassignable injustice Ike, like Myriam's ghost and the legless veteran, may have been the victim of, one person spilled his blood, and is about to be identified.



Edris Cooper-Anifowoshe as Miss Agatha,
Kehinde Koyejo as Alona
Photo: Julie Schuchard – Word for Word

The play shows the narrator following the clues: Ike's blood leads the narrator up the fire escape to Ike's widow, Alona, whom Miss Aggie loves like a daughter. Cohen believes that "the monstrous thing about evil" is that "only the lack of restraint separates the murderer from the nonmurderer," "for of course many of the nonmurderers had a motive to kill but did not" (Cohen: 108). The energy between Alona and the narrator as he stares at her from the (imaginary) window emphasizes his fear at the possibility that, as a criminal other (Cohen: 108), Alona might kill him by pushing him down the stairs, as well as his relief at her (invisible) obstreperous little girl's "hi hi"s as she comes to the window and gives him her hand (J: 130; H: 37). The ac-

tor's note reads: "Alona's kid [...] first a hindrance, then savior" (H: 40 overleaf). The child returns the young man to what Slavoj Žižek calls the necessary benevolent, innocent other without which noir plays on the spectator's paranoia; he points out that the belief that one can depend on the community is fundamental to one's feeling of security (Žižek: 5.1).

Sympathy for motives renders the killer less other. "Of all Ike's crimes against her, what had been the final one?" (J: 130). The narrator is conscious of the evil in Alona's male antagonist. Yet even Ike cannot be perceived as "the Devil himself" (J: 115) for the narrator's mother has already insisted that "he was troubled" and put his addiction on par with the narrator's "drinkin and foolishness" (J: 124). Finally, the society in which Ike turned to drugs, and the veteran narrator to drink, is "the world the white people ha[ve] made for themselves," an idea reinforced in the play by the vignette of the surviving white man in Alabama (J: 131). Just as the women's "crime" in Choctaw was never found out, the narrator does not proclaim the truth and have the criminal locked up as in a whodunit, but, having perceived that the crime was committed by a person with whom he can sympathize, tells only his mother, who suggests that Miss Agatha already knows: "She knows what she knows. Maybe she needed someone like you in the world to know it, too" (J: 131). As in hardboiled fiction, where the putative victims are in on the crime, the investigator does not make public the information he has unearthed: "it needs no universal acceptance as in the classical mystery but only the detective's own conviction" (Cohen: 33).

In the play, the revelation of the identity of Ike's killer does not evoke justice triumphant but grievous news shared, suggesting the narrator's disillusionment. Dashed dreams are a common theme in film noir, and his decision not to go to Alaska could be seen as the bitter knowledge that there is no justice on Earth, if it were not for his amazement at the mysterious strength of the blood which pointed the way for him as an amateur detective, or his return to community with Alona's child: these do not indicate a "God is dead" philosophy. After conveying some of the alienation of film noir, the murder

mystery ends on the positive doubt constituting the narrator's respect and compassion for the other. The final scene in Dvera's office, shot through with her laughter, has a sense of closure as the young man can now absorb and reflect the lighter mood. The women players make the ending particularly touching, convincingly becoming a group of schoolgirls going down the street. As the actor speaks his final lines, his quietly appreciative response to the wonder of the one dancing child he is watching shows him to perceive the interconnectedness and uniqueness of things: "Her long plaits swung with her in an almost miraculous way. It was good to watch her, because I had never seen anything like that in Washington in my whole life. I followed her until she disappeared. It would have been good to know what was on her mind" (J: 132). In deciding against going to Alaska, the young man opts for the community of others that he has discovered in Washington D.C., with people who are not what he had thought.

Mystery performed

Linda Hutcheon, author of *A Theory of Adaptation*, does not consider adaptation as secondary to the adapted text. The process of creation, she says, involves a "(re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation" (Hutcheon: 9). In what Hutcheon calls the "transcoding" from one medium to another, and with the aesthetically satisfying impression that meaning emerges out of a mystery, the performance of *All Aunt Hagar's Children* reveals some of the beauty of the written text, and creates beauty, reinforcing a sense of mystery.

This is achieved firstly because the production conveys the density and richness of life that Jones' analepses suggest. Changing their costumes and deportment, the characters are transformed into others, sometimes on the spot—even into a bird. The live medium is dynamic, with Sam waving from Israel, for example, Sheila popping up, and mature ladies acting as little girls, giggling about "Miz Minnie's husband" (J: 121-122). Some effects, sets and gestures, and the final dancing, are striking. Moreover, Elam considers ostention in performance not just as "signal information" but as providing aesthetic pleasure, at

what can be regarded, for example, as a phonic event (Elam: 83). The actors' varied diction reflected the full register of the emotions and highlighted the author's choice of language.

What disambiguation there is does not rule out mystery. Artistic director Harloe came onstage in a question and answer period after the final Saint-Cloud performance to make the clues proving that Ike had brutalized Alona clear to the audience, and perhaps because it was comprised largely of high school students, to make historical time clear as well, so that all might see that the story which had been presented to them in the *noir* tradition contained various themes. Many are recapitulated in director Stephanie Hunt's recollection of her approach to the short story:

I did not immediately perceive it as a noir story. I saw the story many ways. At first I saw it as a story about men and women. [...] It's a coming-of-age story and he is looking for his place in the world, his destiny or purpose. For a while I saw it as an essentially American story, since immigrants, and migrations, rural and urban, north and south, even East and West (his dreams of Alaska) figure prominently. [...] Then I saw it as a neighborhood story, because it is part of Jones' entire collection of short stories about the Shaw District in Washington, D.C. [...] Eventually with the help of the dramaturg, Nadine Mozon, I saw it as a story about diasporas—the title including Hagar refers to this. The overlapping of the Jewish holocaust (Miriam Sobel's death on a D.C. street after surviving World War I [...]) which Jones has resonate with the slaughter and suffering of African-Americans during slavery and after in the Jim Crow South. So in essence, it is a crime story on a much bigger historical scale, since the story references these historical crimes to whole populations. [...] Jones' use of noir conventions seems to handle these large deep themes in a buoyant way. (Hunt)

That template of wider allusions guides the performance in which the main actor's place in the world and destiny are connected to the "real world," i.e., to historical events. The story came across as an integrated whole with universal implications making a case for respect of the other as the basis of justice, yet in its speed and compression, the

performance of *All Aunt Hagar's Children* highlights the mystery and beauty of the written work's layers of meaning.

Lastly, the play has an impact that can be described as mysterious. Giving life to Jones' words with a beauty and energy of its own, the performance opens up an alternative world, eliciting an immediate empathy from the audience for the characters. The narrator's story becomes the story of each one of us as we open ourselves to the other, sharing his feelings of discovery, growth and integration. Victor Turner has commented that theatre functions as a ritual; in its binding quality, and in the impression that it reveals a truth or *mysterium*, it recalls the Orphic mysteries. For Turner, theatre, which presents itself as false, gives access to the truth of Identity, necessarily linked to the world (Turner: 114-116). Word for Word's varied and beautiful recreation of Jones' work makes apparent both the mystery of the theatre and some of the mystery of existence.

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¹ Edward Jones, *Identity Theory interview*, January 2004, about "All Aunt Hagar's Children": "The story I am doing for the *New Yorker* is about the early 1950's and this guy comes back from the Korean War and it's sort of a detective story—there are a lot of things that are in it, actually. I have been thinking a lot about this guy, whether I can also do something and possibly write a novel about this guy. The problem I have is that I say certain things about him—he comes to certain conclusions in the story and I can't have him go back over the same territory again." (Birnbaum).

² The author wishes to thank Stephanie Hunt, director of *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, and Susan Harloe, artistic director of Word for Word, for their generous help in the writing of this paper. Unless otherwise specified, all direct quotes from Stephanie Hunt are taken from an e-mail addressed to Amélie Moisy on 15 November 2017, and are referenced as "Hunt."

³ This article provides views based on readings and a performance which another reader/theatre-goer might have received differently; I bear in mind Patrice Pavis' warning on the difficulty of dramatic analysis: "Evidently, it is the subject who analyses and evaluates, but to say that analysis is subjective is not only banal, it also presupposes the existence of an objectivity on which everyone might finally agree, and which would be the common, lasting reference, the object finally trapped in the flight of desire" (Pavis: 22).

⁴ Cast:

Sheila Balter*: Miriam Sobel, Dvera Jaffe

Velina Brown*: Miss Bertha, the Young Man's Mother

Edris Cooper-Anifowoshe: Miss Agatha, Harriet, Miss Hattie

Margo Hall*: Aunt Penny, Minnie Parsons, and others
Kehinde Koyejo*: Alona, Blondell Steadman and others
Khary L. Moye: The Young man (USA)
David Everett Moore*: The Young Man (France)
Joel Mullennix*: Alabama Man, Samuel Jaffe and others
Jia Taylor: Sheila Larkin, Mary Saunders and others

Production:

Stephanie Hunt: Director
Margo Hall*: Assistant Director
Susan Harloe: Artistic Director
Karen Runk*: Stage Manager
Jim Cave: Lighting Design
Drew Yerys: Sound Design
Renee Walker: Costume Design
Jacqueline Scott: Properties Design
Sean Riley: Set Design
Andrea Weber: Choreography

*member, Actors Equity Association (San Francisco and Saint-Cloud programs)

⁵ Throughout this article, references to Edward P. Jones' "All Aunt Hagar's Children" are indicated by the letter "J"; references to Stephanie Hunt's line breakdown for the play *All Aunt Hagar's Children* are indicated by the letter "H".

⁶ Regarding the influence of film and TV, Jones said "[W]hen I grew up, even when I didn't have a TV, I was fascinated by televisions that other people had. Then there were movies. Movies helped me to see everything because if you can't really see your characters doing things, if you can't hear them saying things, then chances are maybe the reader will not be able to experience that as well. They don't have to be doing anything spectacular. They can just sit there on the park bench." (Graham: 425).

Playing detective in Simon Stephens's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (National Theatre, 2012, staged by Marianne Elliott)

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*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*¹ was adapted from Mark Haddon's best-selling novel that explicitly claimed it belonged to the British tradition of detective fiction. Indeed, its title (chosen preferably to the original one, "Christopher's Book") is a quotation from one of Sherlock Holmes' stories, "The Adventure of Silver Blaze". Moreover, in Mark Haddon's novel, Christopher, the first-person narrator, fancies himself as a modern teenage version of his literary hero, Sherlock Holmes, whom he frequently quotes, and with whom he shares an acute sense of observation and a similar "power to detach his mind at will" (Haddon: 92) due to his being afflicted by Asperger's syndrome. In Simon Stephens's play, which follows the original novel closely, Christopher is asked to take his own part in a stage adaptation of his book performed at his school. Thus, the play's double status as adaptation and its strong literary intertext are playfully brought to the fore. While the main protagonist poses as an amateur detective and a writer of detective fiction, the detective genre is offered as a mirror of Christopher's "slightly alien consciousness",² both (detective fiction and people with Asperger's) being concerned with analytical details, logic and reasoning. To try and account for Christopher's intensely chaotic psyche, the stage is turned into a patchwork of signs (numbers, letters, sounds and stroboscopic lights) that are as many puzzles and mysteries which the hero has to interpret to make sense of the contemporary world.

The Curious Incident is a pastiche of a detective story in which the spectators themselves are invited to play detective. Not only do they have to identify the protagonists (the supporting actors subsequently

playing different roles), they are also presented with an intertextual game of hide-and-seek that is more subtle in the play than in the novel however, as Simon Stephens's stage adaptation omits most of the explicit references to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, thus ascribing an active interpretative role (that of the literary detective) to the audience. This playful manipulation of the genre even started before the opening of the play at the Gielgud Theatre, as the seats that bore a primary number had a special cover and a little pocket with a leaflet in explaining how to solve a mathematical puzzle using the letters of your name in order to win a prize, the prize being a happy face badge.³ What is more, it is thanks to his literary model, Sherlock Holmes, that the hero hopes to solve the mysteries of his own life. Because Christopher needs patterns to make sense of the world around him, the detective genre provides him with such a stable pattern: he can equate Mr. Shears with Sir Hugo Baskerville (both having an affair with a neighbour), Judy with Sir Charles Baskerville (both supposedly dying from a heart attack due to stress), and Sherlock Holmes with himself. Christopher, however, is unable to draw the right conclusions, and these intertextual reprises are there only for the audience's sense of gratification. Symbolically, the detective genre represents reassurance and the familiar: it is a system of codes and patterns that can be predicted, just like maths and numbers. However, Christopher seems to be more at ease with mathematics than detection. Although, like his literary hero, he gets his sense of observation and attention to details thanks to "a pathological and morbid process":⁴ smoking and injecting cocaine for Sherlock, being on the autistic spectrum for Christopher, he is a failed amateur detective, since the solving of the mystery is eventually not due to the powers of the (clueless) detective but the culprit's almost spontaneously admitting to his crime in a moment of guilt and empathy for his son. Christopher therefore emerges as a victim rather than a cunning Sherlock Holmes figure and the pastiche turns into a parody. This is emphasized by the two-part structure of the play which reproduces the reverse journey from Sherlock Holmes' in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. While in Conan Doyle's novel, Dr. Watson and Sherlock Holmes move from London to Devon to carry

out their investigations, in *The Curious Incident*, Christopher moves from his home in Swindon (Part 1) to London (Part 2) where he is finally reunited with his mother.

Although the play ends with a sense of poetic justice, thus confirming the moral nature of detective fiction, the codes of the traditional detective plot are gradually subverted: Christopher's book is left unfinished, thus robbing the audience of the obligatory climactic scene of revelation and thwarting the traditional teleology; instead, the culprit's confession is a moment of bathos in which the triviality of the motive is only increased by the burlesque nature of the case (a dog's murder that the police do not want to investigate as it is not considered a serious crime). Besides, the murderer's identity is reiterated by the would-be detective several times, mechanically, to various protagonists, each repetition emptying the words of their potential dramatic power. As for Christopher's book, which started as the account of his detection and was supposed to lead to the discovery of the truth, it becomes evidence of his guilt in his father's eyes (he carried on detecting despite his father's forbidding it). The detective consequently turns into a suspect and the search for truth, ironically, is seen as a new crime. Once confiscated by the father, the book becomes the new object of the detective's quest (momentarily leaving aside the quest for truth), and inadvertently leads to the discovery of yet another piece of writing, an envelope containing letters addressed to Christopher by his mother Judy whom he believed to be dead. The realisation that his mother is still alive and now living in London takes the main protagonist on a mock-epic adventure that obliges him to leave behind the familiar world of home, and venture into the unknown (i.e. his hometown of Swindon, its station, London and the tube).

In fact, the whole stage becomes a patchwork of signs (projected neon signs, mathematical signs, missives read and recited by various protagonists, pre-recorded voices, notices, flashing lights) that the hero has to try and interpret. In *The Curious Incident*, the stage represents Christopher's inner mind assaulted by stimuli he cannot process adequately. His predilection for order is visible in the stage set which looks like the inside of a black box with a grid system of dotted lines of

light on the floor and the walls.⁵ The space is very versatile, constantly adapting to the young hero's needs and following his erratic trains of thoughts: it is full of traps and cupboards in which the actor finds the needed props to suggest different places, such as the kitchen, the lounge, or the tube, a London street, etc. The other actors constantly remain on stage, moving forward into the limelight when needed to impersonate various protagonists as required by the hero's journey or his singular memories. Contrary to the traditional detective story situated in a world of stable social and moral norms (the Victorian society with its codes and conventions), *The Curious Incident* represents a mysterious world in which the protagonist is at a loss how to decipher, understand or interpret. The social world indeed contains signs to be interpreted: "You'll see the signs" (Stephens: 59), Christopher is told in the play, the problem being that he notices too many of them and is unable to prioritise them so as to be relevant in a given situation.

In fact, the detective genre poses as the hermeneutic key with which to access Christopher's alien consciousness. Like the traditional detective, Christopher relies on empiricism. He searches for patterns of logic and truth, a characteristic of people affected by Asperger's syndrome, but incidentally also of old-style detective fiction. However, contrary to Miss Marple or Hercule Poirot, Christopher does not have an instinct, an idea that would make up for the paucity of evidence and orientate his investigation. In fact, he has got no intuition at all but only trusts in logic, and this proves inadequate. In other words, empiricism no longer operates in today's world and Christopher's sense of logic is confronted with the absurdity of the modern world. He probably has more in common with the epic hero than with the traditional detective. In "Après l'âge d'or : le récit policier britannique contemporain entre nostalgie et hybridation", Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues that "le roman policier de l'âge d'or, comme tout roman, met en scène la nostalgie de la totalité sociale organique dont l'épopée était l'expression, et, comme tout roman, il met aussi en scène sa disparition définitive" (Lecercle: 400). Similarly, I would contend that *The Curious Incident* shows, if not nostalgia, at least a yearning for an organic social whole that would be Christopher's inner world where everything has a

logical cause and consequence, as in outer space and the cosmos, hence Christopher's dream of becoming an astronaut (a modern version of a Homeric epic hero). Nonetheless, Christopher is a problematic hero: he gives up writing his murder mystery novel before its denouement. What is more, his writing style is quite plain and repetitive, more like a police report than a novel. In conclusion, he is an unimaginative narrator, confronted with the impossibility of narrating. Indeed, Christopher is unable to talk about his mother or imagine what life would be like with her because he believes her to be dead and, as such, she no longer exists. Although he describes his mother's death as an objective fact, her death is surrounded with silence and mystery. The narrative that Ed, the father, has provided is elliptic: "I never meant for *it* to turn out like *this*" (Stephens: 47, my italics). He too has been unable to relate the truth; he is similarly afflicted by the impossibility of narrating his trauma (the break-up of his marriage). But the repressed narration will overwhelm the stage in the form of the mother's letters. Their narration is particularly complex and confusing as it is fragmented between several dramatic voices, different protagonists taking turns to recite the letters in the first person (Christopher, Siobhan the teacher and confidante, and Judy the mother and author of the letters). The effect on stage is of a destabilising proliferation of voices that represent the hero's sense of confusion. Soon, the stage becomes submerged with stroboscopic lights and an accumulation of sounds and spoken words until the protagonist has a fit. The use of language in *The Curious Incident* is mysterious, misleading, and puzzling. Whereas this very feature is discussed explicitly in the novel, in the stage production, it is the *mise en scène* that points to the limits of language and makes the audience experience a dizzying world of signs and letters.

The detective genre is therefore quite ambivalent in *The Curious Incident*. If, on the one hand, it is a fitting mirror of Christopher's search for patterns due to Asperger's syndrome, on the other hand, the epistemological quest that it stands for is called into question. Does language tell the truth? Ed's lie that led Christopher to believe his mother was dead further underlines the seeming inadequacy of words to represent reality and truth. As a consequence, Christopher rebels

against the literary and dramatic convention of suspension of disbelief: “I don’t like acting because it’s pretending that something is real when it is not really real at all so it is like a kind of lie” (Stephens: 50). Linda Hutcheon reminds us that, in the Saussurian model, “language is a social contract” that “has to be learned in some detail by users before it can be employed effectively” (Hutcheon: 183), a “social contract” that the hero is excluded from due to Asperger’s syndrome. The play thus tries to confront from within the commodification of language as mass culture with Christopher’s voice offering a disruptive perspective from which to reassess language and social codes. In *The Curious Incident*, using language and interpreting language is substituted for the detective game itself, an epistemological quest that is discussed explicitly in the novel: “it is fun not knowing what the words mean” (Haddon: 90), something the theatrical audience experience through the multi-sensory approach of the production.

Because the detective genre proves inadequate to account for Christopher’s perception, the play engages yet another semiotic system to fully represent his mental world. Although the play’s structure is minimalist in appearance (two parts with no scene division), there are in fact many different *vignettes* that follow each other, like so many cuts in a film. Film editing is indeed an important influence in the structure of the play and can be seen as a structural translation of one of the hero’s comments in the novel:

My memory is like a film. That is why I am really good at remembering things, like the conversations I have written down in this book, and what people were wearing, and what they smelled like, because my memory has a smelltrack which is like a soundtrack.

And when people ask me to remember something I can simply press **Rewind** and **Fast Forward** and **Pause** like on a video recorder, but more like a DVD because I don’t have to Rewind through everything in between to get to a memory of something a long time ago. And there are no buttons, either, because it is happening in my head. (Haddon: 96, bold type in the original)

The theatrical experience in the National Theatre production is created as synaesthetic, colliding multiple sensory stimuli (light,

sound, movement and rhythm, though not the smell that the narrator mentions in the novel!). The treatment of light in particular, ⁶ with stunning stroboscopic effects, reinforced by sound, creates a cinematic device that allows the audience to be immersed in Christopher's mental world. Such a cinematic dimension is also reinforced by the dramatic structure that comes close to cross-cutting editing (or parallel editing), normally used in film by cutting between two different scenes that are happening at the same time in different spaces. Here this device allows the representation of what happens in the plot and what goes on in Christopher's mind, therefore creating an impression of simultaneity. It also enables the play to tell one story (for example that contained in Judy's letters) and show another (the investigation into the mysterious murder of the dog). In the end, the play can be seen as one long series of crosscuts that disrupts linearity.

The play indeed rebels against the linearity of the detective genre, just as the novel tried to cheat linearity by using prime numbers as chapter numbers. There is a strong tension as a result between continuity and discontinuity in the play: scenes follow each other without any interruption but seem disconnected in subject and time. The audience is therefore immersed in Christopher's world, grappling, like him, to filter information and stimuli. This dramatic version of the stream of consciousness technique attempts to show an exhaustive picture of reality as perceived by people with Asperger's.

Thanks to the devices described above, the time frame is blown up. Whereas the novel is subjected to the linearity of the reading sequence, the stage allows for the conflation of different spaces and actions simultaneously. The present of the theatrical performance perfectly coincides with Christopher's vision in which only the present matters, while the past is "stupid", "not real" and "doesn't exist" (Stephens: 31). Theatre is the only medium capable of showing simultaneously, in the present, all the realities affecting Christopher. Although he expresses his distrust of drama, the theatrical medium is ironically the answer to his "endeavouring to frame some scheme into which all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted" (Haddon: 92), a quote Christopher borrows from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in the novel. This is

made possible by the multiple semiotic systems enlisted in the production that expand the novel's scope, although the novel's combination of narrative and cartoons can be interpreted as an attempt at escaping the limits of the narrative. The play reprises the book's narrative, spoken by its narrator or read / recited by different protagonists; the cartoons printed in the novel become performance art on stage with Christopher drawing directly on the stage or the backdrop; these are accompanied by acting, sometimes in a choreographed fashion, pre-recorded voices, music and sound effects, lighting effects and video projections. This results in a sensory overstimulation of the audience, at times verging on an impression of vertigo, and coinciding with Christopher's daily experience of the outside world so that what seems impossible in fiction because the traditional novel solely relies on language⁷ becomes possible in the theatre.

Although Christopher is a failed fictional detective, he might be an experimental writer, recognising the limitations of language and linear narrative which restrict his creativity. The play also contains a metageneric dimension as it comments on Christopher's book and its literary merits. Christopher indeed underlines the objective features of his book that is "very short", with no "proper ending" (Stephens: 25) and violates the conventions of the genre because the murder has not been solved. But ironically, Christopher, who cannot make sense of the outside world needs forms, codes, formats and patterns to help him understand it, hence his obsession with the detective genre, "the puzzle format of classic detective fiction, a highly coded genre which has been said by some to be disconnected from the real world" (Guignery: 433). In the play, this translates as frequent metageneric comments that break the dramatic illusion. Christopher does not buy realist drama and he will not allow the audience to forget the artificial nature of the stage adaptation. Incidentally, his curious mental state coincides with the postmodernist focus on aesthetic artifice and metatextuality.

The detective genre appears to be a mere pretext in *The Curious Incident*, since the whodunit is solved midway through the play at the end of Part 1. The entertainment promised by the genre is subverted and replaced by a postmodernist game of literary borrowings, pastiche

and parody in which role-playing is denounced as “a ridiculous game” (Stephens: 23), even when Stephens’s adaptation foregrounds the *mise en abyme* of play-acting in Part 2:

Siobhan: Christopher I want to ask you something. Mrs Gascoyne wondered if we would like to do a play this year. She asked me to ask everybody if we’d like to make some kind of performance for the school. Everybody could join in and play a part in it.

Mrs Gascoyne: I think it would be a good thing for everybody to join in and play a part in it.

Siobhan: I was wondering if you’d like to make a play out of your book.

Christopher: No.

Siobhan: I think it could be really good fun Christopher.

Mrs Gascoyne: I think it could be really good fun.

Christopher: No. It’s a book and it’s for me and not everybody just for me (Stephens: 50)

This dramatic artifice and the lack of verisimilitude are repeatedly denounced by Christopher who comments on the fact that the actor playing the policeman looks too old for his part. So even when the audience is ready to suspend disbelief, Christopher’s metadramatic remarks break the illusion. The comment sounds even more ironic when the policeman on the train asks: “Are you for real?” meaning figuratively “Are you serious?” (Stephens: 68) but also, literally, referring to his being a fictional character adapted for the stage in a play itself representing a *mise en abyme* of stage adaptation. Ironically, despite his distrust of drama, Christopher unwittingly accepts the role of stage director, insisting that the scene be played again to reproduce reality more faithfully: “It was Mother who gave me the milkshake not you” (Stephens: 82). In the end, the recurrent reminders of the dramatic artifice and the *mise en abyme* of performing participate in the celebration of the playfulness of language.

Still, it would be wrong to restrict the play to postmodern playfulness. There is more in *The Curious Incident* than mere attention to and manipulation of form; the play also proposes postmodernist playfulness as a social act. It holds a mirror to society and could paradoxically be seen as a social realistic play aiming to represent the treat-

ment of children with learning difficulties relegated to special schools; the struggle of parents faced with the blatant lack of academic ambition for their children; or the lack of social support resulting in broken marriages. Thus, *The Curious Incident* invalidates Roger Caillois's provocative statement in *Les Jeux et les hommes* according to which detective fiction is "nothing but abstraction and demonstration. It does not attempt to touch, to move, to exalt, or even to flatter the soul with a representation of its troubles, its sufferings, and its aspirations" (in Most and Stowe: 11). The reverse is true in *The Curious Incident*: the play touches, moves, and exalts. If Christopher's psyche is "nothing but abstraction and demonstration", at least the play manages to translate his world to the audience.

Parody is not just "trivial kitsch" says Linda Hutcheon (Hutcheon: 182), and the recurrent intertextual and metageneric references to the detective genre in *The Curious Incident*, instead of leading to the "political self-marginalisation" of the play, "work toward a public discourse" (Hutcheon: 191). Like Hutcheon's architect, the dramatist (Simon Stephens) and the director (Marianne Elliott) are "shaper[s] of public space" (Hutcheon: 180). Linda Hutcheon also stresses the link between the self-referentiality of parody and the social, historical and political context. She adds that "postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderline between art and the world" (Hutcheon: 180). My belief is that *The Curious Incident* parodies the detective genre not merely for the intellectual gratification of the audience, but indeed to work toward such a public discourse about today's world.

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¹ Referred to as *The Curious Incident* throughout this article.

² Mark Haddon, National Theatre, “*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – working on the spectrum”. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2bV75ITXJw>> (accessed 26/9/2017).

³ For a photo of such a seat, see <<https://bluecurtainsbris.wordpress.com/tag/gielgud-theatre/>> (accessed 8/1/2018).

⁴ *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, 2 vols, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1930, 89.

⁵ For a photo of the set, see <<https://bluecurtainsbris.wordpress.com/tag/gielgud-theatre/>> (accessed 8/1/2018).

⁶ The play's official trailer gives an idea of such a treatment of light: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O704ld5WQnk>> (accessed 26/9/2017).

⁷ "Siobhan said that when you are writing a book you have to include some descriptions of things. I said that I could take photographs and put them in the book. But she said the idea of a book was to describe things using words so that people could read them and make a picture in their own head" (Haddon: 85).

***Newyorkland* : la scène, espace de recyclage médiatique du genre policier**

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Dans une interview donnée à l'occasion de la création du spectacle *Newyorkland*¹, Kenneth Collins rapporte un souvenir d'enfance : celui du crépitemment continu de la fréquence radio de la police de New-York dans la maison de ses grands-parents, qui s'assuraient ainsi, à chaque instant de la journée, que rien de grave n'arrivait à leur fils, le père de K. Collins, officier de police. Ce souvenir sonore hante en continu le spectacle dont il sera question ici mais il témoigne aussi de l'existence d'un imaginaire commun, celui du film policier, à partir duquel Kenneth Collins, et son acolyte William Cusick, ont conçu le spectacle *Newyorkland* en 2011. Tous deux confessent qu'à l'origine de ce projet, il y avait un film : *The French Connection*, œuvre cinématographique marquante de 1971 qui introduisit une veine documentaire encore inédite dans le genre du film policier. C'est donc à un pas de côté qu'invite cette contribution puisque ce n'est pas tant à partir du roman que du film de genre que s'invente le geste scénique de *Temporary Distortion*, la troupe de théâtre expérimental fondée en 2002 par K. Collins à New-York.

Newyorkland est la troisième collaboration entre Kenneth Collins et William Cusick. Le premier assure la création du texte, de la mise en scène, de la scénographie et des lumières tandis que le second prend en charge la création vidéo. La signature conjointe sur chaque spectacle dit assez la place occupée par les images au sein de ces créations scéniques. Avec *Newyorkland*, Collins et Cusick reprennent en effet un format déjà expérimenté avec les deux précédents spectacles ; une scénographie en forme de cabine, pouvant tout à la fois rappeler le studio d'enregistrement ou la cabine radiophonique et une création scénique multimédiatique fondée sur une réalisation cinématographique origi-

nale et un univers sonore et musical riche et foisonnant, au sein duquel les voix, médiatisées le plus souvent, prennent place (musique et son : John Sully).

La scénographie de *Newyorkland* n'est pas sans rappeler certaines des productions phares de la troupe new-yorkaise historique de théâtre expérimental, le Wooster Group : cette structure en forme de cabine à triple entrée renvoie en effet à *Rumstick Road*, pour ne citer que celle-ci, pièce culte créée par Spalding Gray et Elizabeth LeCompte, en 1977. Les câbles à vue et les micros sur pied, devenus marque de fabrique du Wooster Group au fil des décennies, jonchent également les plateaux de Temporary Distortion, même s'ils semblent agencés de manière plus sophistiquée. Il n'est sans doute pas anecdotique de signaler que *Rumstick Road* avait été écrite comme une autofiction par S. Gray – dont l'œuvre entière se rattache à ce que l'on pourrait nommer un « théâtre autobiographique »² : il y abordait le suicide de sa mère à l'âge de 52 ans, et sa lutte contre la dépression, à partir de témoignages de son entourage et de rencontres avec ses différents thérapeutes. Nous verrons comment le travail sur le matériau biographique et documentaire caractérise également la dramaturgie de *Newyorkland*.

D'autres éléments relient encore la démarche de Kenneth Collins et de son collectif à celle d'Elizabeth LeCompte : les spectacles des deux compagnies sont reconnaissables aux jeux intermédiaux³ qu'ils proposent. Entre vidéo, télévision, cinéma et théâtre radiophonique, les deux troupes revendiquent un travail à la frontière du théâtre et d'autres arts et médias, susceptible de renouveler tant le jeu d'acteur que la narration scénique⁴. Et c'est sans doute sur ce dernier point que Temporary Distortion se distingue du Wooster Group et est plus marquée par son époque ; il élabore une dramaturgie inspirée d'autres genres, une dramaturgie qui emprunte aux codes et aux stéréotypes de formes littéraires, cinématographiques ou télévisuelles sans jamais rien ignorer de l'histoire récente du média théâtral. C'est bel et bien à ce jeu d'écarts et de renvois que nous voudrions nous intéresser ici, en formulant l'hypothèse suivante : en concevant *Newyorkland*, K. Collins et W. Cusick participent au renouvellement du genre policier sur la scène théâtrale mais ils contribuent encore à l'émergence d'un geste théâtral

caractéristique de l'esthétique contemporaine du XXI^{ème} siècle naissant, celui du recyclage médiatique⁵. C'est en effet en reprenant des formats déjà existants et en les agençant à d'autres matériaux que le groupe ré-écrit une narration très « concrète » comme l'avoue lui-même Kenneth Collins, qui date ce revirement dramaturgique du début de sa collaboration avec William Cusick, en 2008. Objet de travaux importants en Amérique du Nord à la fin des années 90, le recyclage culturel marquerait, selon Moser et Klucinskas (2004) un changement de paradigme esthétique, dû en grande partie à la mondialisation et à une circulation accrue des œuvres d'art. Propre à intégrer les cultures populaires, à se démarquer de la recherche d'une sacralisation de l'œuvre d'art, la notion paraît propice à l'étude d'un genre, le genre policier, dont la recherche de légitimité a toujours été un enjeu.

Nous analyserons en premier lieu comment le spectacle *Newyorkland* se situe dans un contexte généralisé de profonds bouleversements esthétiques – changement de paradigme pour Klucinskas et Moser, ère de la « postproduction » pour Nicolas Bourriaud (2003). Dans un second temps, nous repèrerons les éléments du dispositif scénique qui ressortissent précisément au genre policier ; nous verrons comment celui-ci repose sur l'articulation intermédiaire entre film et scène. Enfin, nous observerons la façon dont Cusick et Collins détournent la fiction policière pour en faire une enquête sociologique, s'inscrivant ainsi dans une tendance forte du théâtre contemporain, celle du « théâtre-document ».

Esthétiques contemporaines et « culture recyclante » (Moser et Klucinskas : 18) : le règne de l'hybridation ?

En introduction à leur ouvrage collectif *Esthétiques et recyclages culturels. Explorations de la culture contemporaine*, Jean Klucinskas et Walter Moser reviennent longuement sur le changement de paradigme esthétique qui s'opère à la fin du XX^{ème} siècle et nécessite selon eux de penser à nouveaux frais la philosophie esthétique. L'apport conjoint de la théorie des médias, dès les années 60, et des *Cultural Studies* dans les années 80 contribueront encore à la nécessité de ce renouvellement, en-

visagé comme un retour aux ambitions de Baumgarten et de sa théorie de perception : « L'art se voit replacé dans le contexte général des pratiques culturelles. Penser l'aïsthésis est une solution pour contourner l'impasse de la doctrine métaphysique de l'art. C'est décrire la nouvelle manière de faire l'expérience de la culture » (Klucinskas et Moser : 12). Et cette nouvelle manière de faire l'expérience du monde est fondamentalement marquée par les technologies médiatiques qui changent en cela les paramètres de notre « expérience esthétique », comme le rappellent les expérimentations de nombreux artistes des années 60, dont l'événement *9 Evenings* fut entre autre emblématique⁶ : « La philosophie de l'art a été élaborée à partir de l'expérience d'un sujet qui contemple une œuvre d'art, une expérience ponctuelle, fondée sur la cohérence de la structure de l'œuvre. Aujourd'hui la réception des représentations culturelles semble plus variée » (Klucinskas et Moser : 12).

Nicolas Bourriaud met, lui en avant la notion de « postproduction » :

Depuis les années quatre-vingt-dix, un nombre sans cesse croissant d'artistes interprète, reproduise [sic], ré-expose ou utilise les œuvres réalisées par d'autres, ou des produits culturels disponibles. Cet art de la postproduction correspond à la multiplication de l'offre culturelle, mais aussi, plus indirectement, à l'annexion par le monde de l'art de formes jusque-là ignorées ou méprisées. (Bourriaud : 5)⁷

Si l'on peut entendre le terme comme une façon de s'inscrire dans une tendance épistémologique forte – on pense évidemment ici au « postdramatique » de Lehmann, qui précède seulement de quelques années les travaux de Bourriaud – il renvoie aussi à une pratique concrète, rattachée à la production cinématographique et qui désigne l'« ensemble des opérations effectuées sur un film entre la fin du tournage et le tirage des copies de séries », comprenant notamment « le mixage, le montage, la conformation et l'étalonnage » (Pinel : 319).

Conséquence d'une porosité de plus en plus grande entre œuvres d'arts et produits culturels et d'une circulation de plus en plus fluide de ceux-ci, la post-production, selon Bourriaud, désigne ainsi l'action d'emprunter, pour utiliser différemment ou recycler ; les notions de

montage, de mixage et d'étalonnage étant fréquemment au cœur des actions pratiquées sur les matériaux d'emprunts. Si l'on en croit Josette Féral, qui reprend à son compte les travaux de Moser et Klucinskas pour les appliquer à des performances scéniques contemporaines, ces gestes ne sont pas nouveaux et caractérisaient déjà les avant-gardes des années 20 puis les travaux d'artistes des années 80 et 90 (Féral : 346). On pense également aux travaux de Jean-Pierre Sarrazac qui, lisant les écritures dramatiques des années 90, forge la très belle notion de « théâtre rhapsodique » (Sarrazac : 36) pour désigner ce geste de reprise et de couture d'éléments hétérogènes au sein d'un même *tissu*.

Mais l'époque n'est plus tout à fait au simple montage, à la couture rendue visible entre des éléments « repris » ou empruntés ; les modalités des transferts et de la circulation, tant des contenus que des formats, se sont tout à la fois multipliées et fluidifiées à tel point qu'il devient parfois difficile de repérer et d'identifier l'origine des emprunts et la qualité des migrations.

Tout en maintenant un certain degré d'opacité, les travaux de Collins et Cusick me semblent s'inscrire dans cette tendance à l'hybridation intermédiaire. Kenneth Collins qualifie à plusieurs reprises le spectacle de « piece », l'opposant strictement au terme « play » auquel le format de *Newyorkland* ne lui semble pas correspondre. S'il est largement en vigueur dans le champ du théâtre expérimental de langue anglaise, « piece » fait toutefois explicitement référence au vocabulaire musical, affirmant encore le caractère interartistique de leur démarche ; j'ai déjà relevé l'importance de la signature conjointe qui place la réalisation cinématographique au même niveau que celle de la scénographie, du texte, de la mise en scène et des lumières – autrement dit, la quasi-entière des éléments qui composent traditionnellement une représentation théâtrale – mais il faudrait encore ajouter que les spectacles de la compagnie se déclinent aussi en films, soit qu'il s'agisse, comme pour *Newyorkland*, de captations améliorées et disponibles à l'achat sur Internet, soit qu'il s'agisse d'une œuvre indépendante, comme c'est le cas pour un de leurs spectacles précédents, *Welcome to Nowhere*, qui s'inspirait du format du road movie⁸. Au-delà de cette hybridation première entre vidéo et jeu théâtral, il faut en-

core dire que la scénographie elle-même semble hésiter entre décor théâtral, cabine radiophonique, set musical ou décor de cinéma ; à cet égard, le travail de Temporary Distortion se démarque largement de la production théâtrale contemporaine qui a mis la notion de « dispositif » au cœur de ses recherches et expérimentations et a fait de la circulation et de l'ouverture de la scène des contraintes fortes de jeu et de réalisation. Collins et Cusick créent bel et bien des « boîtes » fermées (« boxes ») dont leurs personnages ne peuvent s'échapper et qui les contraignent à une certaine immobilité ; face public, statiques le plus souvent, ils déroulent leur texte comme ils le feraient face à une caméra ou dans un studio radiophonique. Les spectacles de Temporary Distortion s'apparentent ainsi à des « objets », c'est-à-dire renvoient à une certaine matérialité ; le décor y devient un interprète à part entière dans la mesure où il est aussi l'espace de projection de la réalisation vidéo et où il encadre – au sens propre comme au sens figuré – et soutient la parole des interprètes.

Ni tout à fait théâtre, ni tout à fait installation vidéo, *Newyorkland* est ainsi caractéristique de ce geste de « recyclage » culturel qu'analysent Klucinkas et Moser, en cela qu'il place sur un même plan texte, musique et images, pratiques culturelles et expérience artistique et s'inscrit ainsi dans la triade qui définit, selon eux, le nouveau paradigme esthétique : copiage, recyclage, sérialité (Klucinkas et Moser : 18). Dès le titre, les deux artistes revendiquent ce geste : *Newyorkland* renvoie, de manière ironique, tant à la littérature jeunesse qu'à l'industrie culturelle représentant les mondes merveilleux de l'enfance, *Neverland*, *Disneyland*... Enfance du metteur en scène lui-même comme on le rappelait en ouverture de cette contribution, mais aussi façon d'en découdre avec une imagerie héroïque et glorieuse, celle du justicier new-yorkais, et de révéler l'envers du décor ; la dureté, la violence d'un métier qui broie littéralement ceux qui l'embrassent.

Il nous faut à présent préciser en quoi la pratique scénique de Temporary Distortion se singularise, en analysant plus en détails d'une part le jeu avec ce genre populaire qu'est le « noir », d'autre part l'inscription de ce geste dans une histoire du théâtre au XX^{ème} siècle.

Du film policier...

Le travail de *Temporary Distortion* s'affirme avec force comme une réflexion sur la notion de genre. Si le spectacle étudié ici ressortit au film policier, les deux précédents pouvaient également se rattacher à des formes et/ou genres préexistants : *Welcome to Nowhere* jouait des normes et des motifs du *road movie* tandis que *Kamikaze* était le point de rencontre entre les histoires de fantômes japonaises et le western américain. A l'intersection d'un travail sur des formes et pratiques culturelles populaires et d'une dramaturgie relevant principalement de l'intertextualité (voire de l'interculturalité dans le cas de *Kamikaze*), les objets scéniques de *Temporary Distortion* jouent à être autre chose qu'eux-mêmes, en se fondant, tels des caméléons, dans les genres littéraires ou cinématographiques qui président au projet initial. Nous verrons ici comment *Newyorkland* est « caractérisé » et ce qui relève, au sein de la composition scénique, d'un jeu avec le genre policier.

Inspiré du film de William Friedkin, *The French Connection*, *Newyorkland* voudrait explorer ce massif des films noirs « classiques » des années 70, comme l'explique Collins lui-même. Les acteurs, exclusivement masculins, de cette production portent tous l'uniforme et évoluent dans une scénographie qui accumule les détails caractéristiques de l'univers professionnel décrit, comme autant d'indices laissés à l'appréciation du spectateur : bande jaune des scènes de crime, cible dessinée sur un des murs du décor, boîtes d'archives en carton des « affaires classées », etc. D'autres éléments comme le drapeau américain ou encore les pierres murales rouges, associés au titre même du spectacle, attestent du lieu de déploiement de la fiction. Les lumières, sombres le plus souvent, voire crépusculaires (dominante de couleurs noires, rouges et oranges) contribuent à la création de cette atmosphère particulière de sous-sol ou de longs hivers gris et lugubres. Des sources lumineuses ponctuelles complètent l'univers référentiel : des gyrophares s'allument à intervalles réguliers, complétant ainsi les néons rouges omniprésents, et de petites lumières rondes se changent soudain en donuts appétissants. L'univers sonore renforce encore cette accumulation : la machine à écrire résonne de sa frappe caractéristique, on entend au loin des sirènes, la radio est omniprésente et, à la fin du

spectacle, une musique irlandaise emplît l'espace plongé dans le noir pendant plusieurs minutes.

La réalisation cinématographique de W. Cusick s'inscrit sans surprise dans la lignée du travail scénique ; la colorimétrie alterne entre noir et blanc, sépia ou jaune rappelant l'univers visuel des films des années 70. Comme le titre le laisse entendre, la ville est omniprésente, « toile de fond à la fois poétique et fantastique », passage obligé du noir, qu'il s'agisse de livres ou de films (Lits : 81). Le spectacle s'ouvre ainsi sur une séquence de travelling sur les toits de New-York qui en annonce de nombreuses autres : marches nocturnes d'un flic dans la rue, balades automobiles au gré des rues new-yorkaises. A la caractérisation de cet univers générique s'ajouteront encore des scènes « types » : le commissariat est une ruche où chacun vaque à ses occupations entre sonneries de téléphone et plaintes des suspects ; les scènes de tension extrême face à des individus armés et menaçants se multiplient, le lien avec la population locale repose sur la menace et la négociation permanente... Au plateau, certaines actions scéniques participent encore à la reconstitution de l'univers policier : on retrouve les comédiens du film tantôt en action – au téléphone ou tapant un rapport à la machine à écrire – tantôt dans des postures d'introspection plus intimes ; leur mal-être vient alors faire écho à la violence des scènes filmées⁹.

Dans l'introduction à leur ouvrage, Klocinkas et Moser distinguent trois « scènes » où s'expriment la « problématique culturelle du recyclage » (Klocinkas et Moser : 19). Celle qui nous intéresse ici est celle où se jouent les procédés de « remédiation » mis en évidence aux débuts des années 2000 par Jay D. Bolter et Richard Grusin dans leur ouvrage *Remediation, Understanding New Media* – évident clin d'œil à Mac Luhan. Pour les deux auteurs, les procédés de remédiation sont des mécanismes qui consistent pour un « nouveau » média à s'emparer d'un média plus ancien : « we call the representation of one medium in another *remediation* » (Bolter et Grusin : 45) ; ils donnent plusieurs exemples de ces appropriations, des galeries virtuelles qui permettent, sur CD-ROM ou Internet, de télécharger des tableaux ou des photographies, aux jeux vidéos reprenant les codes du cinéma et nommés désormais « films interactifs » (Bolter et Grusin : 47). Depuis

quelques années, les études théâtrales se sont emparées des théories intermédiaires et des travaux de Bolter et Grusin, mettant en évidence des processus similaires chez des créateurs tels que Denis Marleau, Heiner Goebbels ou, bien évidemment, le Wooster Group¹⁰.

Il nous semble ici que les emprunts qu'opère *Temporary Distortion* sur le « film noir classique » des années 70 ressortit à ce type de procédés, plus encore qu'à une simple « intertextualité ». On a vu comment la réalisation vidéo joue avec les codes de ces films (colorimétrie, sujet abordé, scènes types, etc.) ; de la même façon l'usage de la voix médiatisée, le jeu théâtral mêlé à la bande-son du film ou encore la surface de projection fragmentaire qui déborde littéralement le décor, sont autant de mises en évidence de ce procédé de recyclage médiatique : la façon dont un média, ici le théâtre, s'empare d'un autre média, le cinéma et plus spécifiquement encore, le film policier des années 70.

... à l'enquête sociologique

Toutefois, si le genre policier est visuellement identifié par le spectateur dès les premières minutes, et affirmé tout au long du spectacle par le travail esthétique qui y est déployé, la narration n'est pas celle d'une enquête à proprement parler. Pas d'une enquête criminelle en tous cas, et c'est aussi en cela que le « recyclage » opère. K. Collins et W. Cusick invitent plutôt à une immersion dans un monde professionnel, à la représentation d'une enquête sociologique. Le jeu avec les codes du genre semble ainsi se faire avant tout à un niveau sensoriel – vision et audition – comme s'il s'agissait surtout d'emprunter au genre ses habits, de jouer avec le spectateur d'un imaginaire commun, celui d'une forme et d'un univers que tout le monde identifie, pour mieux raconter autre chose et s'approprier ce qui relève de cet imaginaire partagé. En cela, le geste scénique de *Temporary Distorsion* participe effectivement d'une ère de la « postproduction » :

Le préfixe « post » ne signale ici aucune négation ni aucun dépassement, mais désigne une zone d'activités, une attitude. [...] Il s'agit de s'emparer de tous les codes de la culture, de toutes les mises en forme de la vie quotidienne, de toutes les œuvres du patrimoine mondial, et de les faire

fonctionner. Apprendre à se servir des formes [...] c'est avant tout les *faire siennes* et les habiter. (Bourriaud : 10)

C'est à cette appropriation joueuse que semble ainsi inviter *Newyorkland* qui emprunte donc au *polar* un lexique, composé d'images type, de sons et d'actions pour le retourner en quelque sorte sur lui-même et construire un regard anthropologique qui serait celui du policier en service. Entre exactitude sociologique et détournement médiatique, *Newyorkland* s'inscrit dans une tradition dramatique forte du XX^{ème} siècle, celle du « théâtre-document ». Le spectacle se construit ainsi à mi-chemin entre réel et fiction, faisant usage de documents tels que témoignages et études sociologiques sur le milieu professionnel des officiers de police new-yorkais, accentuant l'aspect « psychologique » de leur matériau, comme l'explique Collins lui-même¹¹. Si témoignages et documents peuvent donc être qualifiés de « référentiels » en cela qu'ils ont « une existence à l'extérieur du théâtre et indépendamment de lui » (Piemme : 9), il faut évidemment noter qu'ils sont ici repris, ré-écrits, rejoués, bref « recyclés » au sein d'une fiction scénique relevant de cette « esthétique pouvant justement conjointre l'art et le document avec une certaine liberté, admettant le jeu des cé-sures et des greffes en tous genres » que Philippe Ivernel donne comme caractéristique de la tradition du théâtre documentaire (Ivernel : 19). Le réalisme des scènes filmées, la prégnance d'un univers sonore caractérisé (sirènes, fréquence radio, machine à écrire, cris, etc.) renforcent encore le mouvement de « reconstitution » qui préside à la réalisation de l'univers de *Newyorkland*. Mais si la scénographie s'apparente à une reconstitution, elle n'est évidemment que parcellaire, fragmentaire, se contentant de faire émerger des bouts de réel, des morceaux type, comme cet autel que l'un des policiers reconstitue peu à peu, accrochant des crucifix aux côtés des portraits de camarades tombés en service tandis qu'une voix off égrène des noms, ceux sans doute des policiers disparus. Et ce sont les témoignages personnels de policiers et proches de policiers qui viennent créer des moments de rupture, renforçant la portée dramaturgique du spectacle, et sa qualité de peinture sociologique d'un milieu. Les scènes de genre apparaissent dès lors comme une disruption dans l'univers verbal élaboré par ceux qui té-

moignent, comme si, d'un coup, le spectateur avait le pouvoir d'accéder à sa vie vécue, à son quotidien de violences et de peur. Le spectacle donne ainsi à voir et à entendre ce qui habituellement se cache, ne se dit pas – l'angoisse, la peur, le stress, les conséquences sur la vie de couple et de famille – loin de l'image construite par les médias – cinéma, mais aussi série télévisée qu'évoquent les personnages eux-mêmes : « the average policeman... [...] perhaps someone in his family is a cop or perhaps he's got the idea from watching tv » – médias, dont il emprunte pourtant le vocabulaire. C'est donc bel et bien vers l'intérieur que Collins et Cusick veulent diriger notre regard, vers l'intériorité de celui qui est au service des autres et passe ses journées à incarner une fonction, et ce par l'alternance de l'analyse sociologique et du recyclage médiatique. Une séquence témoigne particulièrement bien de ce jeu d'écarts : l'un des policiers que l'on suit rentre chez lui, vraisemblablement tard le soir, nous expliquant (entendre « face caméra ») ce qu'est réellement son métier, comment il devient impossible, une fois policier, de continuer à vivre normalement, à errer dans les rues en se laissant distraire par le bruit des voitures, celui des oiseaux, des arbres : « it takes non-stop focus », commente-t-il. Dès qu'il ouvre la porte de son appartement, sa compagne, furieuse, lui demande où il était passé et le somme de s'expliquer, tout en n'accordant aucun crédit à ses tentatives de justification : la caméra reste sur le pas de la porte, comme interdite, face au surgissement soudain de cette intimité douloureuse. Insuffisante à stopper le débordement de la jeune femme, elle va rester encore quelques instants après le départ du flic, chassé de chez lui, filmant les dommages collatéraux d'une vie de policier. Là encore, les effets d'une telle séquence sont doubles : si la dureté du vécu des personnages est propre à déclencher une certaine empathie chez le spectateur, on sourit aussi à la reconstitution de la scène conjugale, passage obligé du film policier.

Un jeu des écarts : de l'intermédiarité à la remédiation

L'intérêt théâtral de la démarche de Temporary Distortion réside dans le type même de recyclage médiatique qu'ils proposent. En effet, mis en situation de concurrence inédite par l'émergence d'un

nouveau média – le cinéma – au début du XX^{ème} siècle, le théâtre a dû renouveler ses pratiques pour continuer à exister. Il est intéressant de noter aujourd’hui le succès grandissant de mises en scène proposant rien de moins que l’illusion totale d’un jeu cinématographique ou télévisuel (comédiens enfermés derrière une vitre, sonorisés, jouant le plus « naturellement » possible) : on pense au *Nobody* de Cyril Teste ou encore au très beau *Ibsen Huis* de Simon Stone¹². Ces pièces ont pourtant cela d’ambigu qu’elles proposent d’effacer totalement la discontinuité entre jeu théâtral et jeu cinématographique, d’aplatir entièrement ce qui fait écart entre théâtre et cinéma ; on les regarde comme l’on verrait un film ou une très bonne série télévisée. L’hypermédia ancestral qu’est le théâtre (Kattenbelt : 2006) parvient alors à *remédier* le cinéma, à l’intégrer de manière pleine et entière à son format, sans qu’il soit possible d’apercevoir les coutures. L’incorporation est telle que même la vidéo peut disparaître : *Ibsen Huis* atteint un niveau de reproduction du média cinématographique assez vertigineux ; le décor est parfait, reproduisant les moindres détails d’une véritable maison de famille, le jeu des comédiens, sans aucune fausse note, et la narration emporte le spectateur dans un processus d’empathies et d’identifications qui lui arrache des larmes avant même la fin de cette morbide fresque familiale.

C’est évidemment à un jeu très différent que nous convient Cusick et Collins : la reconstitution parcellaire laisse apercevoir les coutures et la transition des scènes filmées aux scènes jouées nous permet de passer d’un média à l’autre en toute connaissance de cause. La proximité importante des acteurs, leur jeu face public, la mise en visibilité d’éléments du décor tels que les câbles, la sortie récurrente de l’espace de jeu à vue : tout cela contribue à marquer la présence du média théâtral. *Newyorkland* s’empare d’un genre cinématographique précis, celui du film policier, pour renouveler les pratiques scéniques actuelles, déplaçant ainsi le spectacle de « play » à « piece », c’est-à-dire du drame vers une forme plus ouverte qui emprunte tant au film qu’au théâtre radiophonique. Mais le théâtre ne disparaît jamais totalement. Au contraire, il s’affirme comme le lieu d’un renouvellement, d’un recyclage médiatique réussi, celui d’une forme hybride nourrie tant de

cultures populaires que de traditions littéraires et capable d'ouvrir avec le spectateur un espace de partage commun ; celui d'une mémoire collective à géométrie variable qui fait appel tant à la filmographie classique qu'à la série télévisée.

Il faut sans doute rappeler pour conclure à quel point l'ancrage dans la tendance documentaire ainsi que le recours au genre policier – celui-là même qui naît en même temps que la mise en scène moderne – nous semblent essentiels pour analyser et comprendre les jeux intermédiaux à l'œuvre dans *Newyorkland*.

Pour Bolter et Grusin, même si le spectre des pratiques de remédiation est large, allant de la plus visible à la plus transparente, l'ancien média remédié ne peut jamais tout à fait disparaître :

Finally the new medium can remediate by trying to absorb the older medium entirely, so that the discontinuities between the two are minimized. The very act of remediation, however, ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways. (Bolter et Grusin : 47)

William Cusick et Kenneth Collins assument entièrement la remédiation – le nom même de la compagnie n'annonce-t-il pas déjà un phénomène de déformation, même « temporaire » ? – et jouent à l'infini des écarts entre média(s) d'origine – le théâtre, la narration policière – et média d'emprunt – le cinéma, l'enquête sociologique. Un recyclage en règle qui dénote tout à la fois leur inscription dans les pratiques esthétiques de leur siècle mais aussi leur contribution au renouvellement de leur champ disciplinaire. Aujourd'hui, les deux créateurs ont radicalement migré d'un champ à un autre, proposant des installations sonores sous casque, s'inscrivant dans une longue durée (*Echo, Illusion*) et d'où le spectateur peut entrer et sortir, ou encore des performances *in situ* (*Counterpoise – duet for a funiculaire*). Reste à savoir si la migration est définitive, attestant alors que la remédiation ne serait que le stade transitoire d'une forme vers une autre, ou s'il s'agit pour eux d'interroger, encore et toujours, les marges frontalières du théâtre du XXI^{ème} siècle.

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¹ L'interview est disponible en extra à la captation du spectacle à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.ontheboards.tv/performance/theater/newyorkland#>
Toutes les mentions de paroles de William Cusick et Kenneth Collins qui suivent sont extraites de cette interview.

² On pourra, à cet égard, lire l'article de Marie Pecorari : « Spalding Gray, ou l'autoportrait en mouvement », in F. Fix et F. Toudoire-Surlapierre, *L'autofiguration dans le théâtre contemporain*, Dijon, EUD, 2011.

³ L'intermédialité se distingue tout à la fois de l'intertextualité et de l'interartialité (ou interartistique) en cela qu'elle enserme dans son étude tant les formes artistiques (textuelles, visuelles, sonores) que médiatiques et qu'elle prend en compte ce que J. E. Müller nomme l'environnement « pragmatique » de l'objet étudié (conditions de création, environnement socio-professionnel, contexte politico-économique, etc.). Voir par exemple les travaux de J. E. Müller (2006) ou J. M. Larrue (2015).

⁴ A propos des scénographies médiatiques du Wooster Group, on pourra se reporter à : O. Landrin, « La présence-absence de la médiation technologique dans les travaux du Big Art Group et du Wooster Group », in M.-C. Lesage (dir.), *Théâtre et interdisciplinarité, Registres* n°13, Printemps 2008, Paris, Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle ; ou M.-C. Lesage, « Théâtre et intermédialité : des œuvres scéniques protéiformes », in *Communications* 2008/2 (n° 83), p. 141-155. On peut également citer le travail de Katia Arfara qui propose une lecture inter-artistique du travail du Wooster Group dans son ouvrage *Théâtralités contemporaines, Entre les arts plastiques et les arts de la scène* (Peter Lang, 2011).

⁵ Josette Féral repère ce geste du recyclage comme caractéristique des pratiques scéniques du début du XXI^{ème} siècle dans son ouvrage *Théories et pratiques du théâtre* (Féral 2011 : 345).

⁶ Sur *9 Evenings*, série de soirées performatives organisées par un collectif d'artistes et d'ingénieurs à New-York en 1966, on se reportera à l'ample travail de documentation de Clarisse Bardiot : <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/f/page.php?NumPage=1840>

⁷ Evidemment on ne peut que songer, lisant Bourriaud, au théâtre « postdramatique » analysé par Hans-Thies Lehmann (Lehmann 2002). Sans entrer dans le cœur des débats autour de cet ouvrage, il semble qu'entendre « postdramatique » dans un sens qui serait plus proche de celui que Bourriaud confère à « postproduction », pourrait déplacer l'enjeu de ces débats.

⁸ On trouvera le film à l'adresse suivante : <http://nobudget.com/main/9/16/online-premiere-welcome-to-nowhere-bullet-hole-road?rq=welcome%20to%20nowhere>

⁹ Il faut rappeler ici l'hypothèse que fit Jean-Pierre Sarrazac dans un numéro de la revue *Genesis*, consacré à la génétique théâtrale, celle d'une concomitance non fortuite entre l'émergence du genre policier et la naissance de la mise en scène moderne ; rapprochant l'apparition du « paradigme indiciaire », défini par Ginzburg, de la pratique artistique qui fut celle d'André Antoine, il met en lumière une série d'analogies entre le genre policier et pratique de la mise en scène (notamment au niveau scénographique et dramaturgique). Le travail de reconstitution mis en œuvre par Temporary Distortion rejoint, en partie, ces conclusions.

¹⁰ On pourra consulter, entre autres : LARRUE, Jean-Marc (dir). *Théâtre et intermédialité*. Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses du Septentrion, 2016.

¹¹ Mais quoi d'étonnant à cette hybridation dramaturgique ? Le genre policier n'est-il pas aussi celui d'un certain « réalisme » ? un genre plébiscité par les lecteurs pour ce qu'il leur garantit d'« authenticité » ? « La séduction des lectures policières apparaît souvent liée tant à la manière réaliste dont ils parlent du monde, qu'à la nature des mondes dont ils parlent », commentent Annie Collovald et Erik Neveu dans leur belle étude consacrée aux lecteurs de romans policiers (Collovald et Neveu 2013 : 153).

¹² *Nobody* se présente comme une « performance filmique » (d'après des textes de F. Richter, mise en scène C. Teste, 2015). *Ibsen Huis*, présenté au festival d'Avignon 2017, est qualifié de « fresque épique » (d'après des textes d'H. Ibsen, mise en scène S. Stone, avec l'ensemble du Toneelgroep d'Amsterdam) : <https://tga.nl/en/productions/ibsen-huis/credits>

***Suddenly Last Summer* : variations sur un *whodunit* médicalisé**

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Lorsque *Suddenly Last Summer* (SLS) fut représentée pour la première fois *off Broadway*, en 1958, la réception critique fut globalement favorable, malgré une thématique et une esthétique potentiellement déroutantes pour les spectateurs les moins avertis. Cette œuvre de Tennessee Williams fait écho à nombre d'écrits antérieurs, mais ses enjeux furent très clairement résumés quelques mois plus tard, dans un article que l'auteur publia dans le *New York Times* (en mars 1959) à propos de *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Il y résumait un point central de *Suddenly Last Summer* : « We are all civilized people, which means that we are all savages at heart but observing a few amenities of civilized behavior » (Williams 1959 : 151). La tension entre l'essence sauvage de l'être et un encadrement social - carcan à la fois tangible et impalpable à l'intérieur duquel les individus sont confinés - se trouve au cœur de *Suddenly Last Summer*. En effet, cette pièce s'attache à la manière dont un personnage tente de lever le voile sur un événement brutal survenu au cours de l'été précédent, qui met à jour un télescopage entre le raffinement de Sebastian Venable et des forces brutales, emblématiques d'une animalité indomptable. « *Suddenly* » renvoie au meurtre d'un jeune homme, qui s'est produit en Amérique du Sud. Le récit qu'en fait sa cousine Catharine rompt avec les attendus comportementaux du monde « civilisé ». En effet, après avoir utilisé Catharine comme appât auprès de jeunes hommes avec lesquels il souhaitait avoir des relations intimes, Sébastien fut pris à partie par ces êtres affamés, qui le tuèrent et le dévorèrent partiellement. Soucieuse de rendre cette mort socialement acceptable, la mère de Sebastian s'attache les services d'un neurochirurgien spécialiste des lobotomies, susceptible d'opérer sa nièce. Elle souhaite en effet que d'une confrontation avec celle-ci jail-

lisse la lumière sur cet homicide, afin d'anéantir un témoignage hors normes que Mrs. Venable assimile à une profanation¹. Pour mettre en scène cette enquête, Tennessee Williams inscrit *Suddenly Last Summer* dans le cadre du *whodunit*, architecture théâtrale signifiante, mais qui ne relève pas de l'évidence dans la mesure où le rôle de l'enquêteur est tenu par un médecin et qu'il poursuit son investigation à l'aide d'outils qui sont ceux de sa profession et non ceux d'un détective traditionnel. En outre, si le crime peut expliquer un recours à une forme qui lui est liée, il convient de noter que l'herméneutique à l'œuvre pendant la représentation explicite imparfaitement la stratégie d'écriture de l'auteur. En transformant le spectateur en Dr. Watson mutique qui assiste à l'enquête d'un Sherlock Holmes médicalisé, le dramaturge gomme subrepticement certains enjeux, notamment ceux qui ont trait à son propre statut auctorial. Ce faisant, Williams propose une réécriture du *whodunit* qui mérite l'examen, afin d'établir comment la convergence d'une réflexion sur la nature humaine, le pouvoir médical et la vérité donnent une portée politique inattendue à cette œuvre.

Au vu de la définition du *whodunit* proposée par *The American Heritage Dictionary*, « A story dealing with a crime and its solution », *Suddenly Last Summer* entre dans ce cadre. En effet, le crime est avéré et la résolution finale apporte une solution à l'énigme initiale. Par-delà cette première caractérisation, quelques précisions formelles apportées par Eliot Singer permettent de restreindre le spectre définitionnel du *whodunit* :

It is absolutely essential to the whodunit that there be an apparent crime (usually a murder), that someone seek to solve that crime, and that the reader not learn of the solution until the final epiphany. (Singer: 166)

Si l'on s'en tient à cette dimension formelle plus restreinte, force est de constater que Williams inscrit *Suddenly Last Summer* dans les attendus du *whodunit*, en mettant en scène une personne qui cherche à résoudre une énigme criminelle, laquelle porte sur l'identité du ou des assassins. Par ailleurs, et ce point mérite que l'on s'y attache dans la mesure où il ne s'agit plus d'un roman mais d'une pièce de théâtre, le lecteur devient spectateur. Ce changement de genre redéfinit le code herméneutique à l'œuvre car, contrairement au roman, le théâtre ne

raconte pas la manière dont l'enquête se déroule, mais expose la progression de celle-ci. Enfin, le travail de l'enquêteur consiste effectivement à dévoiler une vérité masquée, tâche qu'il mène à son terme puisque, lors de la dernière scène, le spectateur dispose de toutes les informations sur le crime et les assassins.

S'il fallait préciser encore davantage la composante formelle du *whodunit*, Todorov permettrait de mettre en relief un trait particulier du genre, lorsqu'il écrit à son sujet qu'il « ne contient pas une mais deux histoires : l'histoire du crime et l'histoire de l'enquête. Dans leur forme la plus pure, ces deux histoires n'ont aucun point commun » (Todorov : 11). C'est manifestement le cas de *Suddenly Last Summer*, qui se décompose en deux parties, le récit du crime et la progression de l'enquête. En premier lieu, le médecin doit reconstituer la manière dont Sebastian a été tué, ce qu'il fait en écoutant les personnes rassemblées pour l'occasion. La seconde histoire, en revanche, n'en est pas une. En effet, contrairement aux attendus romanesques, elle n'est pas racontée aux spectateurs, mais se déroule sous leurs yeux. Le changement de genre - passage du roman au théâtre - aboutit à une opposition entre modes d'expression (récit/discours), lesquels participent néanmoins d'une structure formelle commune aux deux genres. Malgré cette variation notable, la pièce relève du *whodunit* dans la mesure où, par-delà les autres éléments formels et thématiques précités, elle s'inscrit dans la dualité constitutive du genre selon Todorov.

Lors de la scène d'ouverture, Mrs. Venable fait allusion à son fils, en valorisant son statut d'artiste² : « Mrs. Venable: I'm devoting all that's left of my life, Doctor, to the defence of a dead poet's reputation » (*SLS* : 103). Mrs. Venable donne une tonalité singulière à ses propos, car elle situe son engagement existentiel à l'intérieur d'un conflit³. Le spectateur comprend que le médecin va devenir une pièce maîtresse dans une stratégie guerrière, qui consiste à anéantir un discours injurieux⁴. Grâce à cette mise en situation, sur un plan dramaturgique, Williams introduit une forme de représentation inquisitoriale immédiatement intelligible pour le public. Le médecin, assimilé à un psychiatre – sans l'être véritablement, mais la lobotomie a compté parmi les remèdes de la maladie mentale, en particulier après la deuxième

guerre mondiale⁵ – ajoute une crédibilité policière de par sa seule présence, au sens où Michel Foucault écrit que « le psychiatre [...] est le descendant de l'inquisiteur » (Foucault : 75). Les codes théâtraux mis en avant inscrivent la pièce dans la tradition anglosaxonne du *whodunit* avec laquelle le public était familier. Cependant, par-delà cette typicité qui pourrait sembler culturellement réductrice, chacun – y compris les spectateurs qui découvrent le genre – comprend qu'il s'agit d'une enquête. Elle situe ostensiblement *Suddenly Last Summer* à l'intérieur d'une forme théâtrale que Colin Winslow définit en attirant l'attention sur le spectateur : « Whodunnit: Play in which the audience is encouraged to try to guess who has perpetrated a crime or series of crimes » (Winslow : 160) avec, pour cette œuvre de Williams, une particularité sur laquelle il convient de mettre l'accent, le caractère « médicalisé » du *whodunnit*.

Le crime est unique. Sebastian est décédé, mais selon sa mère un discours de folie occulte les circonstances de sa mort, laissant planer le doute sur l'identité de ses meurtriers. La mission du médecin consiste à résoudre un mystère, donc l'enquête s'attache à reconstituer le déroulement du meurtre, processus de découverte dont le spectateur devient le témoin. Dramaturgiquement, cette invitation auctoriale à la levée du mystère place *Suddenly Last Summer* sous le signe du jeu, marqué par une expectative spectatorielle constitutive du *whodunit*, qui confine *a priori* la pièce dans la catégorie des divertissements inoffensifs.

Par-delà cette annonce thématique, dès l'image d'ouverture, le public découvre avec surprise un décor visuel et sonore que Williams inscrit au cœur de son projet d'écriture⁶. Il le décrit précisément dans la didascalie d'ouverture :

It represents part of a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans on a late afternoon, between late summer and early fall. The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening; there are

harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature... (SLS : 101)

Visuellement, l'opposition entre une architecture marquée par l'ordre (Victorian Gothic style) et un jardin emblématique d'un monde sauvage rappelle la tension entre la blancheur d'une géométrie victorienne et un univers coloré, potentiellement dantesque. Au fil des actes, le spectateur découvre que cette jungle, où le cri tient lieu de verbe, propose à son regard un miroir du monde. Loin d'être contingent, le jardin tropical constitue la pierre d'angle de la mise en scène ; comme le *whodunit*, il invite au décryptage, mais à l'insu du public qui, dans la scène d'ouverture, ignore si le « *fantastic* » du décor relève d'une inspiration créatrice du metteur en scène, ou s'il traduit une volonté auctoriale⁷.

Sur le plan de la construction de l'œuvre, le trait frappant de la scène d'ouverture résulte de la mise en relief d'un double encadrement, physique et formel : celui d'une nature sauvage confinée à l'intérieur d'une vaste maison, et une expression théâtrale singulière - le *whodunit* - qui sert de cadre à l'histoire d'un meurtre dont la bestialité demeure implicite lors de la première prise de contact du public avec la scène.

Pour conforter sa stratégie d'annonce, Williams procède à un enchâssement au premier acte, via une enquête liminaire qui vise à dresser un profil de personnalité de la victime⁸. Cette approche initiale s'opère via une conversation entre le médecin et Mrs. Venable dont les allégations perdent rapidement en crédibilité, puisque son discours hagiographique la caractérise comme une mère déstabilisée par la mort de son fils. D'une manière assez surprenante au vu des enjeux, les échanges conduisent à une tentative de décryptage de la pensée de Sebastian, autour de son rapport au divin :

Doctor: Did he mean we must rise above God?

Mrs. Venable: He meant that God shows a savage face to people and shouts some fierce things at them, it's all we see or hear of Him. Isn't it all we ever really see and hear of Him, now? (SLS : 107)

Par-delà cette approche eschatologique, l'élément essentiel, indéchiffrable à ce stade, se situe dans l'adjectif « *savage* ». En effet, subrep-

ticement, l'enquête a déjà commencé ; les indices se multiplient, mais les informations initiales fournies se croisent à différents niveaux, d'où une confusion première, qui justifie les explicitations qui suivent. En outre, le décryptage des signes s'avère d'autant plus ardu que les codes interprétatifs ne sont pas fournis au spectateur, ce qui le place dans la situation de découverte semblable à celle du médecin. Ainsi, bien que l'adjectif « sauvage » entre en résonnance avec le décor, l'élucidation du lien s'opère graduellement. Le mot synthétise un regard sur le monde, tout en servant d'annonce à une scène fondatrice, qui annonce le destin tragique du jeune homme :

Mrs. Venable: They were diving down on the hatched sea-turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh. Sebastian guessed that possibly only a hundredth of one per cent of their number would escape to the sea. (*SLS* : 105)

Sur un plan symbolique, qui témoigne d'une précision syntaxique remarquable, la proximité de « eating their flesh. Sebastian » préfigure la scène de crime. En outre, Mrs. Venable met l'accent sur l'animalité, la dévoration, reliant cet épisode à son évocation préalable de la jungle reconstituée par Sébastien et aux plantes carnivores qui l'habitent⁹.

A l'inverse des pièces policières classiques où les personnages sont confinés malgré eux dans un espace clos et isolé, la maison où Mrs. Venable accueille ses invités ne constitue qu'un point d'arrêt transitoire, mais elle devient néanmoins une 'maison d'arrêt' dans la mesure où les personnages ont accepté de s'y rendre et que toute échappée s'avère impossible avant la résolution de l'énigme. Ce lieu de convergence rassemble les protagonistes pour faire jaillir la vérité. Face à l'impossibilité de reconstituer le crime, la validation ultime de son déroulement s'opère via une prise de parole qui suit un cheminement temporel particulier.

En tant que titre, « Suddenly Last Summer » invite le spectateur à poser un regard rétrospectif sur une action révolue, sachant que, dans une dualité chère à Williams, l'action scénique construit une herméneutique particulière dont la dernière scène constitue le point d'aboutissement symbolique. La pièce interroge le passé ; en cherchant à faire

la lumière sur le crime, elle nourrit une attente spectatorielle, un suspense inhérent au *whodunit* qui se construit autour d'une enquête. La tension entre un retour temporel et une élucidation potentielle se trouve à l'origine d'un jeu qui consiste à dérouler l'écheveau d'un récit dont les fils narratifs s'entremêlent. Sur ce plan, les propos de Mrs. Venable servent d'étalon ; elle assène une vérité sujette à caution, qui l'oppose à Catharine, ce qui octroie *de facto* une place centrale au détective, personnage clef de toute enquête.

En tant que figure d'autorité, le Dr. Cukrowicz dispose des attributs nécessaires pour exercer sa mission. Confortant les attendus de l'époque, Williams octroie ce rôle à un homme. Son statut médical, son discours rationnel et méthodique font de lui un représentant de l'ordre, du monde civilisé. Sa démarche intellectuelle renvoie aux activités botaniques de Sebastian « The Latin names of the plants were printed on tags » (*SLS* : 101), sachant que le médecin est censé classer des êtres – affabulateurs ou porteurs de vérité – afin de redonner une cohérence à un monde bouleversé. Par-delà les aspects spécifiques liés au contenu thématique de *Suddenly Last Summer*, dans le *whodunit*, son rôle consiste donc à mener l'enquête à son terme. Mrs. Venable espère retrouver la sérénité, tandis que dans la dernière scène le spectateur peut s'attendre à la mise à jour d'une vérité cachée, couplée avec le rétablissement de l'ordre.

Dès son arrivée sur scène, Catharine clame son innocence quant à l'invention supposée d'une fable qui ternirait l'image de son cousin, mais en vain¹⁰. En octroyant le rôle d'enquêteur à un médecin, Williams métamorphose le fonctionnement du *whodunit*. En effet, le croisement des récits contradictoires, avec un indice fatal au porteur de discours mensongers, n'a plus lieu d'opérer dans ce cadre médicalisé, sachant que la mise à jour de la vérité suit un cheminement classique, autour des interrogations permanentes du médecin. Paré des attributs de la science de l'époque, outre ses capacités de maïeuticien, le Dr. Cukrowicz se voit doté d'une omnipotence scientifique qui lui permet de mettre à jour la vérité. Incarnation divine médicalisée ou réincarnation du *Deus ex Machina*, le médecin dispose de l'arme absolue, Catharine en témoigne :

Catharine: but if they give me an injection—I won't have any choice but to tell exactly what happened in Cabeza de Lobo last summer. Don't you see? I won't have any choice but to tell the truth. It makes you tell the truth because it shuts something off that might make you able not to and everything comes out, decent not decent, you have no control, but always, always the truth! (*SLS* : 121)

Après que Catharine a explicité ce point technique, le spectateur attend le moment où elle se verra contrainte de parler, de dire la vérité dont les personnages sont en quête. Élément central de l'enquête, dans cette nouvelle formule inquisitoriale le médecin n'a guère besoin de compétences particulières pour parvenir au but, si ce n'est l'autorité nécessaire pour que Mrs. Venable n'étouffe pas une vérité qu'elle conteste¹¹. Au terme de préliminaires visant à camper la situation, tout en donnant à chacun la possibilité d'exprimer son point de vue, le Dr. Cukrowicz utilise le sérum de vérité : « (*The doctor gives her an injection.*) » (*SLS* : 133). Ce geste, dont Williams souligne visuellement la force symbolique, témoigne de la puissance de régulation que la société octroie au monde médical¹². Cet acte s'inscrit en écho de l'épisode traumatisant vécu par Catharine lorsqu'elle avait cédé aux charmes d'un homme marié, avant de subir l'ostracisme de la société bien-pensante, provoquée par sa rébellion consécutive à l'abandon post-coïtal de son partenaire. La jeune femme perd la maîtrise de son corps, et son affaiblissement mental conduit, comme elle l'avait prédit, à une expression désinhibée. Ironie scénique qui ne saurait être due au hasard, la présence d'une religieuse donne à son propos des allures de confession, sachant qu'après celle-ci, une divinité médicale statuera sur sa réintégration dans la communauté, et imposera éventuellement une peine (la lobotomie).

À l'inverse des détectives traditionnels des *whodunits*, le médecin peut donc faire l'économie d'une maïeutique retorse pour recueillir les aveux, puisque le sérum fait son office, libérant une parole de vérité. Par conséquent, le geste médical conduit à un véritable retournement ; scénographiquement, il marque l'étape ultime d'une attente : une présentation fiable du crime. Cependant, la métamorphose la plus signifiante concerne le genre théâtral, car jusqu'à cet instant, selon les

principes du *whodunit*, l'objectif premier était la mise à jour de la vérité. L'acte médical fait basculer la pièce dans une autre sphère, au moins symboliquement, car cette conclusion anticipée initie un nouveau suspense et inscrit *Suddenly Last Summer* dans une forme théâtrale que l'on pourrait baptiser '*willhedoit*'.

En agissant, le médecin perd sa neutralité supposée d'inquisiteur et devient un censeur potentiel, puisque ce premier acte médical instaure un questionnement relatif à l'étape suivante. En effet, la manne budgétaire que lui propose Mrs. Venable implique de pratiquer une lobotomie pour invalider le récit de Catharine¹³. Face à une mère soucieuse de protéger la mémoire de son fils coûte que coûte, le médecin est soumis à une tentation financière, dont le spectateur mesure toute l'importance éthique. Il se produit alors un basculement des enjeux, puisque le public ne cherche plus simplement à connaître le déroulement du crime, mais essaie d'entrevoir l'issue possible - intervention chirurgicale ou non - que le médecin donnera à son enquête¹⁴.

Conformément aux attentes, après un éclairage portant sur le contexte, à propos de questions majoritairement liées à la sexualité de son cousin, Catharine dépeint un tableau apocalyptique qui lève enfin le voile sur le mystère :

Catharine: he was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and this you won't believe, nobody *has* believed it, nobody *could* believe it, nobody, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don't *blame* them!—They had *devoured* parts of him. (SLS : 147)

Confrontée à l'image du cadavre de son cousin, ainsi qu'aux mutilations qu'il a subies, Catharine énonce sa propre vision de la scène. Elle évoque un acte cannibale, dont elle souligne le caractère insoutenable, via une emphase verbale qui correspond au ressenti de ses interlocuteurs, tout en expliquant l'impact de cette mort sur sa propre stabilité mentale. Bien que l'horreur criminelle soit subtilement annoncée dès la scène d'ouverture, la description de Catharine questionne le statut du récit dans *Suddenly Last Summer*. En effet, cet éclairage brutal sur le crime renvoie à de nombreux discours ainsi qu'à des éléments scéniques – le décor notamment – qui, en plaçant la dévoration au

centre de l'œuvre, nourrissent un questionnement relatif au cadre dans lequel s'inscrit sa confession.

Sur le plan du réalisme, la mise en relief d'une anthropophagie stupéfiante renvoie, en premier lieu, aux plantes carnivores évoquées dans la scène d'ouverture. Cependant, la description du cadavre de Sebastian fait également songer à une scène de genre, dans le domaine pictural, lorsque des artistes peignent une curée, ou donnent à voir les restes d'un cadavre partiellement dévoré. Dans ce cas, l'événement tragique, présenté dans sa cruauté insoutenable, peut inviter le spectateur à sortir du réalisme, en faveur d'une interprétation allégorique. Cependant, dans *Suddenly Last Summer*, le verdict du médecin valide prudemment le récit de Catharine. Cela conduit, dans l'immédiat de la scène finale et au vu du cadre formel retenu, à une lecture du crime qui repose sur un réalisme accepté comme tel :

(The doctor comes downstage. Catharine wanders out into the garden followed by the Sister.)

Doctor *(after a while, reflectively, into space)*: I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true... (SLS : 148)

Rompant avec les usages des enquêtes théâtrales, le personnage du Dr. Cukrowicz - figure d'autorité suprême puisqu'il dispose des armes de la science - propose une réponse qui déboute Mrs. Venable, tout en inscrivant le doute au cœur de son jugement final. Au terme du *whodunit*, l'enquêteur est censé proclamer la vérité, mais dans *Suddenly Last Summer* la phrase conclusive décline diversement - modalité, lexique, syntaxe - la rémanence d'une incertitude. Ainsi, le dramaturge déroge aux attentes et se joue du public, qui constate la défaite de Mrs. Venable, mais reste dans l'expectative quant au regard qu'il convient de porter sur le récit de Catharine. La jeune femme ne subira pas de lobotomie, mais malgré cette conclusion rassurante, le doute qu'instille le médecin questionne l'interprétation même de la scène macabre. L'incertitude induit une réflexion sur la représentation, le réalisme et ses limites. Cette méditation sur le théâtre, inscrite dans l'hésitation conclusive, suggère, parmi d'autres interprétations possibles, une lecture duelle, qui arrache partiellement la fable aux analyses littérales

auxquelles invite le *whodunit*, et qui incite, *in fine*, à une interprétation allégorique.

La fable serait donc construite autour d'une anthropophagie symbolique, révélatrice de ce que sont les êtres humains. Cette possibilité interprétative mérite l'attention, en gardant à l'esprit qu'au terme de ce *whodunit* revisité, le dramaturge met l'accent sur la convergence qui finit par s'imposer entre le médecin, qui met à jour une vérité, et l'artiste qui agit de même avec un public qui partage probablement certains préjugés avec Mrs. Venable. Par un retournement paradoxal, Williams se sert du *whodunit* pour refuser un théâtre de distraction ; évitant subtilement une opposition frontale avec le public, il subvertit le genre et emprunte des voies connexes afin de construire un discours politique. En effet, les enjeux du *whodunit* - la reconstitution verbale du crime ainsi que les éclaircissements espérés par le spectateur – importent sans doute moins, finalement, que la mise à jour de l'hypocrisie sociale d'un monde qui s'efforce de masquer toute forme de sexualité. Au féminin, en premier lieu, comme l'atteste l'ostracisme punitif dont Catharine fut victime, suite à sa dénonciation publique d'un homme adultère. Au masculin ensuite, dans un univers qui réfute une homosexualité patente et la relègue au rang de fiction. Malgré les efforts de Mrs. Venable, l'enquête aboutit à la déconstruction du mythe tissé autour de Sebastian, et la tentative d'étouffement du récit de Catharine matérialise la loi du silence qui prévaut dans la communauté. L'idéalisation outrancière de Sebastian, construite par une mère qui le savait l'objet de multiples désirs¹⁵, s'effondre à mesure que l'action progresse. La dénégarion maternelle devient la pierre d'angle de la critique sociale williamsienne, laquelle souligne la vulnérabilité des êtres face au pouvoir de l'argent et au poids des normes sociales. Plus fondamentalement et d'une manière surprenante au vu des lois du genre, le *whodunit*, qui est censé entraîner le spectateur dans une maïeutique complexe au terme de laquelle la vérité surgit, aboutit, dans *Suddenly Last Summer*, à un portrait social inattendu, presque dystopique. Le public est convié au spectacle d'un monde où le respect des bienséances prévaut sur celui des êtres et où, sous prétexte d'ordre, les médecins encourent le risque de se transformer en bourreaux au

service des forces de l'hypocrisie et du silence. La violence de la réécriture williamsienne du *whodunit* apparaît alors, et pas uniquement via l'évocation de la scène du crime, mais plutôt par sa puissance d'interpellation individuelle. En effet, lorsque le rideau tombe, le sérum de vérité théâtral démontre son impact, privant chacun de ses prétentions à l'innocence. Déniaisé, frustré dans son plaisir de témoin distancié, le spectateur se trouve soudainement face à lui-même, complice d'une lobotomie sociétale dont il ne peut s'exonérer.

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¹ « Mrs. Venable: I’ve waited months to face her because I couldn’t get to St. Mary’s to face her—I’ve had her brought here to my house. I won’t collapse! She’ll collapse! I mean her lies will collapse—not my truth—not the truth. » (SLS : 103)

² Cette première définition concernant son statut d’artiste constitue la première brèche dans la crédibilité de son discours :

Doctor: He wrote one poem a year?

Mrs. Venable: One for each summer that we traveled together. The other nine months of the year were really only a preparation. (SLS : 104)

³ Sachant que les spectateurs découvrent rapidement que le récit maternel est lacunaire : « Mrs Venable: I haven’t heard the girl’s story except indirectly in a watered-down version, being too ill to go to hear it directly, but I’ve gathered enough to know that it’s a hideous attack on my son’s moral character which, being dead, he can’t defend himself from. » (SLS : 110)

⁴ Le reste de la pièce peut conduire à mettre en doute cette approche, comme en témoigne la perspective développée par Janice Siegel : « Now that he is dead, Violet is more determined than ever to preserve the fiction of Sebastian as ‘de-

voted son, poet-priest, and visionary saint'—to validate her view of him—because this fiction has come to define her own existence. » (Siegel : 542)

⁵ « Although approximately 60,000 lobotomies were performed between 1936 and 1956 in the US, some of them in makeshift operating rooms outside of the hospital, lobotomies are now only performed under very select conditions and circumstances » (Caruso : 6). See also: « Freeman [...] brought the technique to America where over 20,000 lobotomies were performed by 1951. Meanwhile, Freeman initially with, and subsequently without, Watts brought the technique to America where over 20,000 lobotomies were performed by 1951. » (Lapidus : 1)

⁶ Sur le plan de l'usage des sons, dans une dimension structurante, voir : « (*She gazes up again: we hear the wild, ravenous, harsh cries of the birds. The sound comes in rhythmic waves like a savage chant*) » (SLS : 105)

⁷ Cette ambiguïté fondatrice invite à prendre quelque distance quant aux certitudes formelles énoncées par certains critiques : « The play is easily identified as an example of Gothic melodrama. Its very setting—an exotic, tropical garden within a Victorian Gothic mansion (9), looking like a 'well-groomed jungle' (11)—establishes the familiar Gothic dialectics of overrefinement and wildness, fastidious artifice and dangerous nature that are common to the genre. » (Gros : 229)

⁸ « Williams presents an even more explicit version of character-as-text in *Suddenly Last Summer*: the never seen Sebastian Venable, a writer himself, exists only as a function of other people's narratives. » (Robinson : 269).

⁹ « Mrs. Venable: The Venus flytrap ?

Doctor: An insectivorous plant?

Mrs. Venable: Yes, it feeds on insects. » (SLS : 101)

¹⁰ Sa mère et son frère partagent les doutes nourris par les autres personnages : « Catharine : I can't change the truth, I'm not God! I'm not even sure that He could, I don't think God can change truth! How can I change the story of what happened to her son in Cabeza de Lobo? » (SLS : 128)

¹¹ « The characters in these three plays are given explicit awareness that they are trying to *speak*, to engage in *talk* or a *talk*, even at times to *tell a story*. Far more important, on every occasion that two characters interact, as the one attempts to speak, the other strives to shut the opponent up. » (Van Laan : 244)

¹² Williams savait que le public percevrait potentiellement cette action comme un coup de force, écho de la lobotomie envisagée, laquelle suscitait un antagonisme grandissant : « An initially small but growing body of criticism began appearing in the professional medical publications, including articles in the respected *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *American Journal of Psychiatry* which expressed concern over the potentially underestimated risks of the procedure. Within the realm of public opinion, the increasing prevalence of the procedure meant a significant portion of the American public came in contact

with postlobotomized individuals, increasing the awareness of the potential negative effects and consequences of the procedure. » (Robison : 669)

¹³ «Doctor: You're such an innocent person that it doesn't occur to you, it obviously hasn't even occurred to you that anybody less innocent than you are could possibly interpret this offer of a subsidy as—well, as a sort of a *bribe*? » (SLS : 114)

¹⁴ In an attempt to discredit Catharine's "hideous" story of Sebastian's character and death, Mrs. Venable has her declared insane and means to have "cut out" of Catharine's brain her debasing memories of Sebastian through the neurosurgery of lobotomy: a once medically sanctioned and ostensibly civilized form of Sebastian's cannibalization. Thus, even as Mrs. Venable and Catharine narrate their antithetical memory-stories of Sebastian's life and death, they act as the major antagonists in his story's dramatic reenactment. As dramatically realized, then, the play is structured not in the sequential pattern of a story told, then reenacted, but by the *simultaneous* revelations of the fate of Sebastian and the fate of Catharine—thereby heightening the suspense of each revelation and creating emotional tension by withholding the full understanding of their analogical significance until the play's very end. (Thompson : 98)

¹⁵ "Mrs. Venable: My son was chaste. Not c-h-a-s-e-d! Oh, he was chased in that way of spelling it, too, we had to be very fleet footed I can tell you, with his looks and his charm, to keep ahead of pursuers, every kind of pursuer! (SLS : 110)

Suicide in Bb : le policier revisité par Sam Shepard

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Il est indéniable que Shepard a eu un immense impact sur le théâtre contemporain : nombre d'articles et de livres ont été écrits à son sujet et le sont toujours, et ses pièces ont été produites des centaines de fois aux États-Unis et, dans une moindre mesure, à l'étranger. Les textes de Shepard sont aussi souvent utilisés comme support pour la formation des comédiens aux États-Unis. Cependant, il faut reconnaître également que par rapport à d'autres auteurs américains majeurs, les études sur Shepard ne sont pas en quantité comparable aux études sur O'Neill ou Williams. De même, bien que les pièces soient souvent mises en scène aux États-Unis, on peine à trouver des productions à l'étranger et notamment en France : toutes les pièces ne sont d'ailleurs pas traduites. Alors qu'est-ce qui fait que Shepard se démarque d'autres auteurs ? Shepard propose sa vision de ce petit plus qui rend un artiste unique dans sa pratique, dans une lettre qu'il adresse à son beau-père Johnny Dark :

I remember an interview I saw on film once of Charlie Parker and they asked him what he thought set him apart from all other tenor sax men. His reply was stunningly simple- 'The octave, man. Just the octave' (Shepard to Dark : Box 1, Folder 8)¹

Ce qui fait que Shepard écrit comme il écrit, ce qui fait qu'il trouve une véritable résonnance chez son public et dans le monde du spectacle dans son ensemble, revient un peu à ce secret de création que remarque Wayne Lawson à propos de la sortie de *Fool for Love* à New York :

To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln on General Grant: If Sam Shepard drinks, we should find out what and dispense a case of it to every writer in America. Whatever the secret of creation is, this cowboy-aristocrat carries it to his bones. Suigeneris, a screenwriter, poet, composer and actor as well as a playwright, Shepard makes everyone else look pale, and at forty he has hit

the stride, in a run of finished masterpieces that combine the formality of the sonnet and the ferocity of the rodeo.² (Lawson : 119)

Ce mystère est difficilement dicible pour les critiques, qui s'attardent à trouver les origines de l'écriture dans sa biographie (le « cowboy aristocrate », l'écrivain de cinéma, le poète, le compositeur, le comédien). Les critiques se concentrent souvent sur le texte et principalement sur les sonorités des répliques. Les analyses critiques universitaires des textes de Shepard peinent à identifier la particularité de son écriture qui lui valut et lui vaut toujours une popularité sans faille outre Atlantique.

Mais d'après la plupart des critiques, le sujet des pièces reste élu­sif. Michael Smith, qui découvre Shepard en 1963, remarque à ce sujet :

Il est toujours difficile de dire quel est, au juste, le sujet des pièces de Sam- mais elles sont immanquablement vivantes. (Lefevre : 6)³

Le metteur en scène Jacques Levy, qui a dirigé une production de *La Turista*⁴, remarque également que Shepard ne cherche pas à communiquer un sens à son public : « Sam est plus intéressé à faire quelque chose au public qu'à lui dire quelque chose » (Lefevre : 6)⁵.

Loin de vouloir élucider son œuvre, Shepard, si l'on en croit Bonnie Marranca, souhaite disparaître dans celle-ci. Il ne souhaite laisser aux critiques et aux spectateurs qu'une trace de ses intentions :

In the relationship of artist and audience the private I devises strategies to evade the public eye. Like the jazz saxophonist Niles who commits suicide in *Bb*- the 'key' to the mysterious overture- Shepard wants to disappear into the text, and to leave behind for the critic/detective only his outline. Behind this emotional gesture is the radical ideal of the authorless work and the denial of the Author as myth. (Marranca : 13)

Comme chaque lecteur ou spectateur de l'œuvre de Shepard est un détective en quête de sens, rien de plus normal que Shepard s'essaye au genre policier avec *Suicide in Bb* (1976) au début de sa résidence au *Magic Theatre* de San Francisco. Contrairement aux autres pièces écrites cette même année, *Suicide in Bb: A Mysterious Overture* ne fut pas jouée au *Magic*. *Suicide* fut jouée le 15 octobre 1976 au *Yale Reper-*

tory Theatre à New Haven, puis reprise trois ans plus tard à l'*Impossible Ragtime Theatre* de New York. Cette pièce se situe pour Shepard dans un temps d'expérimentation du texte sur scène, de réflexion sur le lien entre texte et réalisation scénique et de création par le biais d'ateliers d'improvisation. Shepard y travaillera la musique jazz dans la performance en collaboration étroite avec le musicien Max Roach et le metteur en scène Robert Woodruff. Il y proposera sa vision très personnelle du genre policier, genre qui fut en premier lieu imaginé, si l'on en croit Yves Reuter (Reuter : 2017), aux États-Unis avec Edgar Allan Poe et qui prit bien des formes depuis ces débuts. Shepard emprunte au genre son goût pour le mystère, le secret, l'être et le paraître, le jeu entre auteur et spectateur, les bas-fonds de la société américaine, pour le parodier en y ajoutant son goût pour la performance physique, verbale et sonore.

Dans *Suicide in Bb*, deux détectives cherchent à comprendre les circonstances de la mort de Niles. Spectateurs et personnages n'arrivent à donner ni queue ni tête à l'énigme, qui semble s'obscurcir au fur et à mesure que personnages et musiciens tentent de la résoudre à l'aide d'improvisations verbales, gestuelles ou musicales sur scène. Ce caractère insaisissable de l'énigme se retrouve donc dans la forme même de la pièce *Suicide*, comme le formule Robert Woodruff:

[T]he plays are almost assaultive, without being hostile, and they're full of holes and contradictions that you just can't fill in... When an audience leaves one of Sam's plays they're probably really confused. They've just had several hundred images thrown at them- flash, flash, flash! – and they can't synthesize it all. (Bottoms : 3)

L'expérience de l'action de cette pièce se déroule sur le mode d'impressions successives, sans possibilité d'intellectualisation ou d'analyse. La tendance naturelle qu'ont les spectateurs à synthétiser leur réception, à expliquer le sens des actions, se trouve donc déroutée. Tout cela est intentionnel selon Bonnie Marranca :

The plays mitigate against the ideal of conceiving work as a totality, on a unified scale, offering instead only a sampling of feelings and events that have to be experienced in segments. (Marranca : 23)

A travers ces segments disparates et improvisés par les acteurs et musiciens, *Suicide* propose une forme nouvelle pour le genre policier sur la scène américaine.

Dès le début de la pièce *Suicide in Bb* la scène présente un univers théâtral qui mêle deux genres : le policier et le *musical*. Un piano prend la place centrale, et un homme entre, visage caché, qui apparaît au spectateur comme une image de film noir, pour se cacher dos au public derrière son piano. La lumière s'estompe après ce premier indice, puis on entend un coup de pistolet énigmatique qui retentit dans le noir. Très vite cependant, cette image cliché du policier ou du film noir est parodiée : accompagnés d'instruments qui rythment leur action sur scène, les personnages jouent et rejouent la scène du crime, s'interrogent sur l'identité des protagonistes et brouillent les pistes. La musique vient livrer un spectacle décalé qui se superpose aux éléments de narration du policier sur scène : le crime, les détectives, les témoins, et les indices.

En effet, dans *Suicide in Bb* (SB), la présence spectrale de la musique du groupe de Niles plane énigmatiquement sur scène. Pendant leur enquête, les détectives sont sans cesse accompagnés de musique. Les répliques et accompagnements musicaux se répondent, se superposent et parfois se complètent comme dans un ensemble de jazz. Les répliques annoncent parfois la musique : « Let's start over », ou bien la musique accompagne les mouvements : « [...] *the two detectives, enter from right accompanied by music* » (SB : 193). Parfois, la musique accompagne les répliques : « *PIANO player begins to play, accompanying LOUIS as he speaks* » (SB : 196). La musique prend part à l'action sous plusieurs formes. Dans les mises en scène de Shepard que nous avons visionnées, les instruments remplacent souvent les corps sur scène (le moment le plus éloquent reste sans doute quand la basse couchée sur le sol représentait le corps de Niles dans la mise en scène de Robert Woodruff de *Suicide in Bb*⁶) et ne produisent d'ailleurs pas toujours de son. Bien que très explicitement dirigés dans leurs gestes et leur jeu par les didascalies, les musiciens sont invités parfois à prendre quelques libertés quant aux moments de leurs interventions dans l'action de la pièce : « at random intervals » (SB : 205). Ces sections de « free jazz »

laissent libre cours à l'improvisation le soir du spectacle. Avec cette musique qui structure action et répliques, la pièce *Suicide* se joue du genre policier : le policier devient un jeu à la fois musical et gestuel, qui invente ses propres règles et déroute le spectateur.

Dans cet univers théâtral mêlant le genre policier au *musical*, les personnages ont eux aussi une spécificité. Dans *Suicide*, comme dans d'autres récits du genre policier, les personnages ne semblent se définir que par les rôles qu'ils occupent. Comme le remarque Reuter (Reuter : 54), dans le roman policier, « Il s'agit plus d'un système de *rôles*, de pions au service d'une machinerie narrative et herméneutique ».

Pour compliquer la fonction de ses personnages, ils ne sont pas ce qu'ils semblent être. Ils ne sont donc pas fiables en tant que relais de la narration. Ce sont des imposteurs :

You check the face, the hands, the eyes, the turns in the mouth. You look for any sign that might give him away to you as an imposter. A man in disguise. (*SB* : 220)

Au-delà de cette fonction conventionnelle du personnage du policier, imposteurs et « rôles » du canon, *Suicide in Bb* s'inscrit également dans une nouvelle phase d'expérimentation de Shepard autour du personnage. Dans sa « note aux acteurs » (« Note for Actors ») d'une pièce écrite la même année, *Angel City* (1976), Shepard propose à ses comédiens la définition suivante des rôles de la pièce :

The term "character" should be thought of in a different way when working on this play. Instead of the idea of a "whole character" with logical motives behind his behavior which the actor submerges himself into, he should consider instead a fractured whole with bits and pieces of characters flying off a central theme. In other words, more in terms of collage construction or jazz improvisation. [The actor is] mixing many underlying elements and connecting them through his intuition and senses to make a kind of music or painting in space. (*Angel City* : 62)

Dans une pièce policière traditionnelle, ce sont les personnages qui peuvent nous expliquer ce qui se passe, ce qui s'est passé, à travers les interrogatoires et les hypothèses formulées sur scène- ils occupent une fonction formelle qui n'est pas constante ni stable au long de la

pièce. Les personnages n'ont pas qu'un rôle de relais de narration: ils s'identifient également à travers les actions qu'ils performant sur scène. Pour arriver à comprendre les personnages de *Suicide*, il faudra donc tenter de reconstruire les éléments qui les caractérisent.

Pablo et Louis sont des détectives : preuve en est, dès le début de la pièce, ils sont en costume de détectives, long imperméable pour Pablo et chapeau de détective pour Louis, et vont chercher leur attaché-case. De même, dès leur entrée sur scène, les deux détectives « jouent » un duo : par la gestuelle inscrite dans les didascalies, ils performant les rôles du mort et du meurtrier : « LOUIS *is playing dead and being dragged across the floor by his heels by PABLO* » (SB : 193). Plus loin, Louis joue même le moment de la mort de Niles, le mort qui fait l'objet de leur enquête : « He pretends to be shot by a silent bullet and tries to fall into the shape of the outline » (SB : 194). Mais Pablo et Louis ne s'arrêtent pas à cette première mise en jeu de la scène du crime : ils rejouent à nombreuses reprises la scène de la mort de Niles à travers des mimiques absurdes et décalées qu'ils ne semblent pas vraiment maîtriser. Louis sera Niles et Pablo l'hypothétique meurtrier. Pendant que Louis élabore une hypothèse quant aux raisons du crime de Niles, Pablo a un poignard dans la main et avance comme s'il allait tuer Louis. Suite à cette action qu'il interrompt de justesse, il déclare : « PABLO : I can't do it. LOUIS : You're not supposed to do it. If you did it, I'd be dead » (SB : 200). Louis rappelle donc par cette réplique au conditionnel qu'ils ne sont pas les véritables protagonistes du crime : il ne s'agit que d'un jeu, donc il ne peut pas vraiment mourir. Louis joue une nouvelle fois « le mort » alors qu'il se défend contre lui-même, comme pour rejouer le suicide possible de Niles (SB : 203, 204).

Pablo interrompt cette séquence de gestes qui suggèrent à chaque fois la mort de Niles avec cette phrase : « We're through with simulating events now. Now we've got some real evidence » (SB : 204). Cependant, on retrouve Louis plus loin qui reprend son envie de suicide :

LAUREEN: (*as she bows the bass, to PABLO*) Your partner is reaching for the knife. (...) What's he killing himself for anyway? An audience? There isn't any audience. Tell him there isn't any audience. Tell him that. » (SB : 206)

Selon Laureen, comme Niles, Louis aurait donc envie de mettre fin à ses jours à cause d'un public qui ne lui serait pas favorable. Cependant, Louis tente de rétablir sa véritable identité quand il rétorque à Petrone : « PETRONE: (*to himself*) We need another martyr with a hole in the head. LOUIS: I'M NO MARTYR ! I'M A DETECTIVE » (SB : 229).

Plus loin dans la pièce, la situation se retourne bel et bien. Les détectives seront bien à leur tour les victimes: Paulette tirera avec un pistolet sur Pablo qui s'effondrera sur le tracé du corps. Louis recevra une flèche dans le dos. Comme Niles, ils ne semblent jamais mourir. Cette confusion sur les rôles du mort et des détectives culmine au moment même de l'arrestation :

PABLO and LOUIS arrive simultaneously on either side of NILES and snap handcuffs on both of his wrists. The other half of each pair of handcuffs is locked onto their own wrists so that all three are locked to each other. (SB : 229)

Attachés les uns aux autres, les trois personnages semblent donc être coupables, victimes et détectives à égalité au dénouement de la pièce. A travers leurs performances sur scène, leurs rôles semblent difficiles à dissocier.

Le genre policier s'articule entre l'être et le paraître. Cependant, les personnages ne sont pas d'accord entre eux sur le caractère secret de l'enquête, si bien que Pablo sort de ses gonds :

PABLO: Oh, yeah? Not confidential, huh? Who the hell called up in the middle of the goddam night, worried sick, and wanted to know if these papers were under lock and key? The governor! [...] Not confidential my ass. They're Super-Confidential! They're so confidential they're even classified [...] (SB : 198)

Pourtant, dans *Suicide*, peu de choses sur scène sont ce qu'elles semblent être. Petrone entre sur scène avec un saxophone alto, souffle dedans et à la place du bruit de l'instrument, on entend le cri d'une femme : « It should be delivered like a musical note but definitely be a scream » (SB : 200). Plus tard, le même instrument produit les bruits de l'impact des doigts sur les touches : « No sound comes from the sax

except the rhythmic tapping of the keys » (*SB* : 202). Les personnages des musiciens sont eux aussi des imposteurs sur scène. Pablo accuse plus loin :

PABLO: You claim to be one of Niles' musicians. I haven't heard a sound come out of your horn yet.

PETRONE: You haven't?

PABLO: No, I haven't.

PETRONE: Well, it takes a while to attune your ears to the frequency we're playing in. [...] It's also an attempt for visual music. (*SB* : 204)

Dans cette pièce, même le mort semble jouer un autre rôle. D'abord, où est le cadavre ? Si on en croit Lord Paner Leroy : « Un (...) policier sans cadavre, cela n'existe pas [...] » (Paner Leroy : 28). Mais Niles est-il vraiment mort ? La pièce nous laisse songeurs. Le mort est présent dès que la lumière se répand sur scène à travers la trace de peinture blanche d'un corps sur le sol (*SB* : 193). Cependant, avant que les deux détectives ne formulent leurs hypothèses, Louis sème déjà le doute, et cela dès le début de la pièce : « LOUIS: (*lies back in the position of the outline*) The guy's dead, right ? » (*SB* : 194).

Plus tard, pour brouiller encore plus les pistes, le personnage de Niles apparaît sur scène sur une note humoristique qui n'est pas sans dérouter encore les spectateurs. Niles constate d'ailleurs en rentrant sur scène : « NILES (*shining flash light on outline on floor*): Why do they still have the outline of my body on the floor? Maybe they're not convinced » (*SB* : 209). Niles ne croit pas que les détectives soient convaincus de sa mort, et à l'évidence, avec sa présence sur scène, les spectateurs ont toutes les raisons d'en douter.

Paulette et Niles questionnent tous deux la mort de Niles :

PAULETTE: [...] You've shot yourself in the head and it's all over.

NILES: IT'S NOT! IT'S NOT OVER!! (*SB* : 212)

Sans arriver à se mettre d'accord sur les événements passés, ils doutent de tout. Niles est-il mort ? Niles a-t-il été tué ? Ont-ils tué Niles ? Ont-ils tué quelqu'un d'autre, et qui ? :

NILES: [...] WHOSE FACE DID WE BLOW OFF?

PAULETTE: Somebody else's.

NILES: WHO WAS IT? [...] Was it somebody important we killed?

PAULETTE: Who knows. (*SB* : 222)

Niles a le dernier mot dans cette pièce : « Someone was killed here for sure » (*SB* : 229). Mais qui ? Nous ne le saurons jamais.

Chez Shepard, pour résoudre une énigme, le raisonnement donne place à des improvisations sous forme de performances. Comme nous l'avons mentionné plus haut, l'improvisation était une méthode que Shepard utilisait beaucoup en création à cette époque. Pour résoudre le crime, les détectives vont se livrer à des improvisations absurdes.

Afin de résoudre l'énigme de la mort de Niles, les détectives Pablo et Louis partent sur des pistes musicales, verbales, vocales, gestuelles qu'ils empruntent et qu'ils expérimentent, seuls ou avec les quelques personnages qui les rejoignent sur scène, pour tenter de saisir l'insaisissable histoire du musicien de jazz. Pendant que Louis s'amuse à éteindre puis allumer en boucle la lumière de la lampe de bureau, les deux détectives tentent de formuler leur première hypothèse. Ils élaborent cette théorie au détour d'un dialogue rythmé par la lumière qu'actionne Louis sur scène:

LOUIS: Nobody bought the music?

PABLO: That's right.

LOUIS: So he blew his brains out.

PABLO: That's a little oversimplified.

LOUIS: So he got depressed.

PABLO: We don't know that for sure. (...) I don't know! And stop switching that light on and off! (*SB* : 195)

La scène s'allume puis s'éteint par intermittence, à l'image de la succession effrénée de répliques courtes qui constituent leur dialogue.

Plus tard, après quelques échanges, Louis tente de formuler seul une deuxième hypothèse de résolution du crime. Pour cela, il va se lancer dans une longue analyse psychologique de la victime. Ce procédé est contesté dans le genre policier, car il retarde l'action :

Il ne doit pas y avoir, dans le roman policier, de longues descriptions, d'analyses psychologiques subtiles ou du souci de créer une atmosphère [...] De tels passages retardent l'action et dispersent l'attention, détournant le lecteur du but principal qui consiste à poser un problème, à l'analyser et à lui trouver une solution satisfaisante [...] » (Reuter : 25)

Et pourtant, pour comprendre la psychologie de Niles, Louis se lance dans un monologue, au piano, dans lequel il retrace l'histoire du personnage tel qu'il l'imagine : « LOUIS: (*piano behind*) Boy hears sound. He hears sound before he has a name[...] » (SB : 196-197). Dans ce monologue, il décrit Niles comme un musicien passionné : Niles ne vit que pour la musique. Comme la musique est sa vie, les incompréhensions et le rejet du public de sa musique signifie son départ ou même sa mort. Cependant, à la surprise de tous, Louis conclut son hypothèse en déclarant : « He's fooled them all[.] He's just laying low » (SB : 197). Son acolyte ne le croit pas, mais ce doute s'empare des personnages comme des spectateurs : est-ce possible que dans cette enquête pour meurtre le mort ne soit pas vraiment mort ?

Comme en miroir à l'hypothèse de Louis, Pablo va lui aussi se lancer dans une longue explication quant au destin tragique de Niles, comme dans un polar ethnologique qui cherche la raison du meurtre dans le milieu musical qui est le sien :

(PIANO PLAYER breaks in here, strong forceful bass line. PETRONE keeps playing silently. LOUIS struggles desperately with the knife hand, moving all over the stage; PABLO keeps talking.)

PABLO: A victim of circumstances beyond his control [...] (SB : 203)

En plus d'un piano pour accompagner ces propos, Louis va se livrer à une performance corporelle sur scène. Il va « jouer » le suicide de Niles en se débattant contre un couteau qui semblerait vouloir le poignarder. L'hypothèse formulée par les détectives dans cette pièce, semble décalée, voire contradictoire, par rapport à l'*action* des personnages sur scène : ce paradoxe provoque chez le spectateur une tension entre le visible et l'audible. A travers la gestuelle, Louis tente une autre manière de comprendre l'action de Niles. Le personnage de Laureen expliquera cette méthode plus tard : « You pick up the gesture from

him and start repeating it back to him [...] But you are still not clear what it means » (*SB* : 221). Sur scène, l'absurdité de cette action rend le discours de Pablo encore plus décalé et livre un double discours. L'hypothèse sérieuse formulée par Pablo est parodiée simultanément sur scène à travers la gestuelle de Louis. L'effet de cette double narration est comique, mais ne semble pas aboutir au résultat attendu : la résolution de l'énigme de la mort de Niles. Petrone suggère alors de changer leur méthode d'investigation qui semble stérile. Pour cela, elle propose une méthode absurde :

PETRONE: (to PABLO) You know how Raymond Chandler worked? He always started out knowing who the killer was first and then spent the rest of the time covering it up. He always worked backwards. That's how you guys should do it. (*SB* : 212)

Chaque méthode de résolution est ainsi parodiée et semble ne pas aboutir. Si bien que Pablo, incapable de résoudre l'énigme, se retrouve lui-même victime du crime :

PABLO: (staggering) [...] WE ACTED BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY! WE USED EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE ENEMY! WE TRIED TO REASON! WE TRIED TO CONNIVE! BUT NOTHING WORKED! IN THE END WE WERE DEFEATED BY GHOSTS! AN UNSEEN ENEMY! IN THE END WE WERE NOT CERTAIN! WE COULD MAKE NEITHER HEAD NOR TAIL OF THE PREDICAMENT! WHETHER OR NOT WE WERE DESTROYED FROM WITHIN OR WITHOUT! [...] (*SB* : 222)

Pour conclure, plus que la mort de Niles, c'est bien la forme que prend l'enquête, cette "visual music", ces improvisations à la fois gestuelles et musicales qui dérangent : « LOUIS: All this free-form stuff is disturbing to my deeper depths » (*SB* : 213). Dans *Suicide*, l'énigme repose autant sur la forme de la pièce que sur l'intrigue : le policier est mis en abyme par le mystère. Shepard tente, à travers le caractère expérimental de *Suicide in Bb*, de prendre à revers les attentes de ses lecteurs et spectateurs à travers les collages et hybridations des formes d'expression. Comme le texte semble appartenir au genre policier, le lecteur ou le spectateur s'attend à une histoire, des narrations sous

forme de dialogue, et une structure en deux temps qui remonte de l'enquête au crime. Par la confrontation implicite ou explicite de la musique et du texte théâtral, le lecteur/auditeur est détourné, par la double nature du texte entre sons et mots, d'une interprétation finale et aboutie. La coprésence du texte, des performances corporelles et de la musique ouvre des possibilités d'interprétation nouvelles pour le spectateur/auditeur. Elle propose aussi de vivre l'enquête dans le moment de la performance physique, vocale et musicale des détectives : c'est-à-dire dans un présent et une présence où crime, enquête et victime coexistent sur scène.

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³ Cité par Paul Lefebvre dans son article « *True West* de Sam Shepard », *Les Cahiers de la NCT, Nouvelle Série*, n°11, hiver 1994, p.6, Wittliff Collections, Collection 054, Box 3, Folder 8.

⁴ Mise en scène à l'*American Place Theater*, NY: March 4 - April 1, 1967, avec Sam Waterston and Joyce Aaron.

⁵ Cité par Paul Lefebvre dans son article « *True West* de Sam Shepard », *Les Cahiers de la NCT, Nouvelle Série*, n°11, hiver 1994, p. 6, Wittliff Collections, Collection 054, Box 3, Folder 8.

⁶ Un enregistrement vidéo de cette mise en scène est disponible au *New York Public Library for the Performing Arts*.

Death is the Wages of Sin: Murder and the True Crime Musical

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According to the *Associated Content*, “true crime is the fastest growing genre since the turn of the century,” with television series, films, and books amassing large fan followings (Gregoriou: 10). Audiences are obsessed with true crime content; recent hits such as Netflix’s *Making a Murderer* (2015), American Crime Story’s *The People v. O.J.* (2016), and the popular podcast, *Serial* (2014) have all pointed to the genre’s rise in popularity over the past few years. In fact, a recent *Bustle* article even named 2016 the “year of true crime” (Sorren). True crime remains a popular genre for books, television, and film; yet, it seems that theatre has been slow to utilize true crime in its storytelling. Although staged violence is nothing new, Broadway musicals’ multi-million dollar budgets and correspondingly expensive ticket prices often force producers to “play it safe” by creating content that will appeal to the widest audience base. As arguably the most commercial and market-driven theatrical venture, Broadway musicals are frequently family friendly and uplifting. As John Bush Jones states in *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, audiences have historically wanted musicals that are “feel-good . . . shows with a conventional narrative storyline and some hummable tunes” (Jones: 268). True crime’s intent, however, is not to allow readers and spectators to “feel good” about themselves; often, the goal is to convey motive so that the consumer of the genre can understand the reasons behind a criminal’s behavior. These genres seem to be at odds, but there are musicals whose narratives and staging echo those found within true crime stories.

Fans of Broadway musicals have certain expectations that they hope productions will fulfill, and spectators can leave the theatre feeling disappointed when those expectations go unfulfilled. This conflict

can be understood through Hans Robert Jauss's theory of "horizon of expectations," which is understood to be the set of expectations a person holds based on the established rules, conventions, and traditions of a particular type of work. The further the work deviates from these expectations, the more likely the consumer will feel alienated or disappointed (Griswold: 87). On the question of expectations, theatre historian Marvin Carlson states, "Generic expectations and relationships to other works (intertextuality) are clearly as relevant to theater reception as to reading, and juxtaposition of fiction and reality is perhaps even more relevant, given the particularly central role played by mimesis and iconicity in the theater" (12). When fans of Broadway musicals see shows that do not fulfill their expectations of what a Broadway musical should be, they feel frustrated. One way to combat this kind of audience response is by shifting the horizon of expectations through the creation of subgenres that follow slightly deviated conventions. Musical theatre scholar Larry Stempel suggests subgenres construct "the rules of the game, so to speak—by which creators create, performers perform, and audiences come to know what to expect" (4). Subgenres alter the way producers and consumers think about media. Although *American Idiot* (2009), *All Shook Up* (2004), and *Company* (1970) are all musicals, it can be helpful to understand them under more targeted genre names, such as "rock musical," "jukebox musical," and "concept musical," respectively. Additional musical theatre subgenres include "megamusical" and "revue musical;" yet, musicals that tackle violence that is rooted in true crime stories do not fall under a unified subgenre. As developments in musical theatre shift the genre's focus towards darker material, it seems prudent to consider additional subgenres that reveal connections among musicals that do not neatly fit into existing categories. By analyzing how musical writers engage with violence and criminal motive, this study seeks to categorize a new subgenre of musical theatre called the *true crime musical*.

The concept of combining true crime and musical theatre is not new; the elements that are constitutive of these genres already exist on theatrical stages, although no producer or critic has labeled them in this manner. Just as the "jukebox musical" and the "rock musical" have

become popular subgenres of musical theatre, so too might the true crime musical become as instantly recognizable. In the same manner that other subgenres of musical theatre legitimize the works that fall under those categories, this essay attests that carving out a subgenre for true crime performance works is a step towards diversifying the types of musicals offered on commercial stages. Composers and lyricists may become emboldened to write new content inspired by the existence of the subgenre, and producers may consider marketing their productions to fans of true crime. Fans of true crime and musical theatre share an interest in the “escapist nature” that both genres provide; by combining them, this subgenre could appeal to a wide array of spectators (Everett: 100, Battaglio).

True crime and musical theatre share one additional crucial element: their demographic. Both count women among their most loyal consumers. Investigation Discovery, a cable channel that plays true crime media non-stop, is the most watched channel for the “women 25-to-54 age group,” according to Nielsen ratings, and female consumers make up 70% of the fans for the true crime podcast, *Sword and Scale* (Battaglio, Weller). The Broadway League reported that over the past 2016-2017 season, 66% of its audience were women, with the average theatergoer being 41.7 years old (Broadway League). Producers have thus far ignored this crossover demographic. If these two genres are combined, might they offer a new type of media that would be popular among a key demographic?

The true crime musical shares many of the same features that make its literary counterpart popular. Some of these include: encouraging readers to sympathize with criminal protagonists, presenting violence with detailed grotesquerie or through psychological literary effects, and fictionalizing motive.¹ The true crime musical also borrows from musical theatre, frequently utilizing common conventions, such as placing its lead characters in a romantic relationship. This essay interrogates the use of true crime literary and filmic devices in musicals in an effort to reveal the true crime subgenre already operating on musical stages. This essay begins with an examination of the “crime porn” exhibited by Frank Wildhorn, Don Black, and Ivan Menchell’s

Broadway box office failure *Bonnie and Clyde* (2011; hereafter referred to with Wildhorn as primary creative author). A dramatization of the famous romantic duo that robbed banks and killed when necessary during the Great Depression between the years of 1932 and 1934, *Bonnie and Clyde* embraces conventional true crime grotesquerie, such as bloodied bodies and autopsy imagery, while also subverting the common musical theatre narrative of the personal dream. Secondly, this essay looks to Stephen Dolginoff's off-Broadway hit *Thrill Me: The Leopold & Loeb Story* (2005), which dramatizes the famous 1924 kidnap-murder of Bobby Franks. The musical is an intimate and psychological look into an abusive relationship that creates tension through the absence of visual body horror. While these two productions are not an exhaustive list of the entire subgenre, they offer two potential ends of a possible spectrum, in which *Bonnie and Clyde*'s spectacle is a counterpoint to *Thrill Me*'s minimalism.

Frank Wildhorn's *Bonnie & Clyde* has one of the bloodiest opening sequences of any Broadway musical. The musical opens with the sound of a car engine sputtering and revving as lights come up on a projection of a moving road. After a few moments, the drive is disrupted by the sound of gunfire and breaking glass, and the projection ends. From upstage, the audience sees a newly revealed bullet-ridden and shattered life-size car. Within the car are the blood-splattered bodies of Bonnie and Clyde.² The visuals are grotesque, as blood stains the vehicle's upholstery and the rear windshield is covered in blood. This tableau of death, featuring the infamous "Death Car," provides the context with which the audience views the rest of the musical.³ Not only does the barrage of light, sound, and violent imagery provide a sensory overload for spectators, but also as a relatively long two-minute sequence, the scene effectively sets the tone for the rest of the musical.⁴ This sequence borrows the popular true crime narrative convention of framing the story with its conclusion, in this case, the deaths of its protagonists. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, the title characters are gunned down in the opening minutes, and by the show's end, they drive off to what the audience knows will be their deaths. By framing the musical in this manner, Wildhorn ostensibly links his musical to the true crime

genre, and through this same savage imagery, he distances it from other musicals whose violence steers clear from realistic effects.

Although violence features heavily in true crime, one of the most important aspects of the genre is to present the criminal protagonist as sympathetic; if the reader cannot sympathize or understand the protagonist's actions, they will be less engaged in the narrative.⁵ One way true crime connects readers to its protagonists is to present them first as "innocent" children, seemingly before they turned to crime and murder. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, during the opening Death Car sequence, young versions of Bonnie and Clyde enter the stage singing about their dreams. For Bonnie, it is to become a movie star just like Clara Bow, while Clyde wants the life of an outlaw just like Billy the Kid. These songs fulfill audience expectations of musical theatre by using the common "I Want" song type. Common "I Want" songs in musical theatre include "The Wizard and I" in *Wicked* (2003), "You and Me (But Mostly Me)" from *Book of Mormon* (2011), and "Gimme Gimme" from *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2000). These songs inform the audience of what the character wants, whether it is fame, fortune, or romance, for example.⁶ By incorporating the "I Want" song early in the musical, Wildhorn places *Bonnie and Clyde* firmly within the popular conventions of Broadway musicals. Strikingly, however, the child versions of Bonnie and Clyde sing while the corpses of their future selves remain just upstage of them—perhaps literally "upstaging" them. The sequence is a combination of true crime and musical theatre narrative tactics.

True crime also incites sympathy for its characters by revealing their motives to be the direct result of traumatic experiences. Prior to meeting Bonnie, Clyde is incarcerated for petty theft. During his imprisonment, the guards beat him frequently—the bruises, cuts, and blood visible on his face—and a fellow inmate repeatedly rapes him. Although the rapes occur offstage, they are a significant reason for why Clyde initially turns to violence. Although Clyde first considers inciting a prison guard to kill him, preferring death to his prison life, he eventually decides to end his torment by killing his rapist. In "Raise a Little Hell," he says, "He'll see me but it's the last time . . . No way

out I gotta do this . . . Never killed but now I have to” (Menchell: 64). Clyde then takes a pipe from a hidden floorboard. Turning upstage, Clyde hits a wooden beam repeatedly as a projection of a newspaper headline reads “Eastham Inmate Beaten To Death. No suspect” (Menchell: 64). The musical de-escalates the murder by turning it into self-defense and by staging it symbolically rather than realistically. The symbolic staging of Clyde’s murder of his fellow inmate stands in stark contrast to his own bloodied body the audience saw at the beginning of the show. By staging the violence perpetuated against Clyde as more realistic than the violence he commits against others, the musical makes it appear that Clyde’s violence is more benign. This serves to justify Clyde’s first murder.

Although Bonnie and Clyde are responsible for several deaths, the musical rarely acknowledges them. When they kill people—typically police officers—the victims do not remain onstage after they are shot. In Director Jeff Calhoun’s original staging, victims were shot, and a blackout or scenic shift quickly followed, thereby reducing any potential impact the victims’ bodies may have had on audience perception. In the Death Car sequence, Bonnie’s and Clyde’s bodies remained onstage for two minutes, but these other incidental deaths happen so quickly that audiences are encouraged to move on. This serves to make the violence perpetuated against the lead characters worse than the violence they commit against others. The posse members that eventually follow through with killing them, for example, speak at length about how they plan to do so, showing little remorse or respect for their lives. Lines such as, “I want to walk down Main Street with Clyde Barrow’s head on a stick” and “Just get me within three hundred yards of him and I’ll put a bullet through his neck” are contrasted with the fact that Bonnie and Clyde do not speak of their kills (Menchell: 109). In the scene where the posse is planning to murder Bonnie and Clyde, one sympathetic member, Ted, exclaims, “Since when did we get into the business of murderin’ people?” (Menchell: 109). The text frames Bonnie’s and Clyde’s deaths as murders; in doing so, the audience sympathizes with them and not the posse that eventually kills them.

The Death Car sequence also represents a theatrical version of “crime porn,” which refers to “visual body horror,” such as images of autopsies, gruesome deaths, and blood splatters (Murley: 5). Although the appearance of “crime porn” is not necessary in true crime media, it is common. When victims are the subject of “crime porn,” such as murder or autopsy images, it can lead to sympathy for the victim and vilification of the murderer. When criminals are the subject of “crime porn,” such as in post-execution images, audiences often feel that all has worked out for the best. As Murley states, a criminal’s death instigates a “good old-fashioned reordering of the chaos wrought by crime” (3). In the original Broadway production design, the “crime porn” of the Death Car was accompanied by gruesome projections, such as a video detailing the real aftermath of Bonnie’s and Clyde’s deaths. The video shows one of the posse members walking to the now-decimated car and opening the passenger door to reveal a deceased Bonnie falling limply out of the car. On the driver’s side is Clyde, whose face is marred by the gunshot he took to the head. The video continues as the posse members celebrate Bonnie’s and Clyde’s deaths. Additional photographs of the real Bonnie and Clyde lying dead on a coroner’s slab are projected at certain points within the show. In traditional true crime form, these post-death and autopsy images are supposed to elicit feelings of closure, but that does not align with how audiences are meant to react to similar deaths in musical theatre.

Although “crime porn” is popular in true crime, this convention functions differently onstage. Corpses, for example, “display the loss of a living person,” and when death occurs onstage, leaving bodies behind, it “stresses the audience’s own proximity to death” (Perdigao: 1-3). This is different from reading about death, seeing static images, or watching it represented on film. Living actors who perform as corpses increase the relative “realness” of the violence through their very real bodies. Violence “that is made to ‘look’ real and artless draws attention to the body in the space,” and can “[hint] at the possibility of ‘real’ danger, ‘real’ pain and harm” (Fitzpatrick: 61-62). The blood that soaks the onstage “bodies” also creates a horrific picture that functions differently onstage, as “A realistic use of blood in the theatre can

sometimes be all the more disturbing than in film or television precisely because of the nature of live performance, [and] the physical presence of actors” (Woodworth: 18). The moments in which *Bonnie and Clyde* relies on “crime porn” to convey narrative instigate conflicts between the horizon of expectations for the musical theatre and true crime genres; this can create audience unease. However, audience expectations would shift were the production marketed as a *true crime* musical. Audiences would come to expect the use of violence, blood effects, and disturbing content because producers would label the musical “true crime,” which would alter the expectations under which audiences would view the show. While *Bonnie and Clyde* relied on gruesome “crime porn” to convey its narrative, *Thrill Me* stages violence stylistically rather than realistically in order to present a horrific psychological narrative of love, obsession, and murder.

Stephen Dolginoff, who wrote the music, lyrics, and book for *Thrill Me: The Leopold & Loeb Story*, is a fan of true crime literature, but he is the first to say that his musical is less about a murder than it is about a relationship gone wrong.⁷ The musical, whose tag line is “Relationships can be murder,” dramatizes the 1924 murder of fourteen-year old Bobby Franks through the perverse and controlling relationship of his killers, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb.⁸ Dolginoff wrote the musical as an indictment of love that borders on obsession, and through the dominant/submissive dynamic of his two characters, Dolginoff fictionalizes not only their relationship, but also, the motive for the murder. Frequently, in true crime literature, authors will hypothesize possible motives for their stories when they are officially inconclusive (Murley: 131). Often, however, these motives can veer more towards fiction than fact, as the true crime author invents a far more entertaining motive than what likely occurred. In the historical Leopold and Loeb case, the police unearthed a large amount of evidence against the two then-nineteen year olds. Once they were caught, Leopold and Loeb confessed that they killed Bobby Franks because of their obsession with the Nietzschean ideal of “Superman.” They had thought committing the perfect crime would be a fun experiment. From their statements, the murder became the “Crime of the

Century,” and newspapers dubbed the boys the famous “thrill killers” (Theodore: 148). Dolginoff titles his show “Thrill Me” not only as a reference to this historical nickname, but also to comment on the possibility that Leopold and Loeb were romantically involved. For *Thrill Me*, this relationship serves as the (fictional) motive for the murder.

Originally produced as part of the Fourth Annual Midtown International Theatre Festival at the Abingdon Theatre Arts Complex in New York City, *Thrill Me* had its official premiere on July 16, 2003. The subsequent Off-Broadway production was produced by The York Theatre Company and opened on May 26, 2005. There have been over 100 productions as of this writing, both in regional American theatres as well as international performance spaces. A Korean-language version has been running in Seoul, Korea continuously since 2007; and likewise, a Japanese translation in Tokyo since 2011. There was also a Greek translation produced in Athens and a German production in Datteln, Germany. The musical also came to the West End for a brief production at the Charing Cross Theatre in 2011. *Thrill Me* productions in Austria, Belgium, Brazil, and Switzerland are forthcoming.⁹ Unlike *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Thrill Me* has been a financial success and has amassed a wide fan base because the show did not shy away from the true crime nature of its narrative.

The musical opens on a fifty-four year old Nathan Leopold, who is meeting with the Parole Board of the Joliet Prison. This is Nathan’s fifth time before the Board; they have denied him parole previously because of a perceived lack of remorse for the murder he committed when he was nineteen. The musical jumps between 1924 and the parole hearing in 1958. Dolginoff presents Leopold initially as weak and easily controlled by the man he loves—Richard Loeb. Later, Leopold reveals that he purposely left behind the evidence that would eventually implicate them in the murder because he thought they would be able to spend their life imprisonment together.

In the musical, Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold’s relationship is a complicated dance of possession and control. From the very first moment Dolginoff introduces Richard Loeb, the stage directions establish him as predatory: “*From behind, darkly handsome Richard Loeb,*

nineteen, enters, slowly approaching like a predator stalking his prey, and purposefully startles him" (Dolginoff 2006: 13). Leopold, attempting to show ownership over Loeb, then puts his hand on his shoulder, but Loeb "pushes" it off (Dolginoff 2006: 14). Dolginoff writes in the stage directions that Leopold is "*like a slave to his master*" (Dolginoff 2006: 16). The relationship is abusive, with Leopold explaining that, prior to the murder, Loeb had "cut off all . . . contact" because he likes to make him "feel like dirt" (Dolginoff 2006: 15). Loeb constantly threatens to cut off his affections if Leopold will not participate in his illicit plans. When Leopold tells him he does not want to set fire to a warehouse, for example, Loeb responds, "Hey, if you don't want to be with me... (*He starts to move away.*)" and when Leopold finally agrees, Loeb rewards him with a "*hard kiss on the lips*" (Dolginoff 2006: 16). Scholars, such as Scott McMillin, Raymond Knapp, and John Bush Jones have all pointed to the musical's reliance on creating romantic narratives between its lead characters, and though the relationship is abusive, Dolginoff places his musical within this romantic convention.

Even though the musical focuses on the controlling, toxic nature of Leopold and Loeb's relationship, the murder is still a vital aspect of the show. By placing the murder offstage and utilizing an invisible victim, *Thrill Me* presents an excellent example of a true crime musical that prioritizes psychological terror over visual "crime porn." In fact, the victim's presence is felt through his absence. In "Roadster," Loeb has a "conversation" with the invisible Bobby:

Would you like to see my roadster?
 Would you like to look inside?
 It's a shiny, Packard roadster.
 Would you like to take a ride? (Dolginoff 2006: 35)

Dolginoff even provides a moment where Loeb responds to the (unseen) Bobby's dialogue:

I know—never talk to strangers!
 That's what mothers always warn.
 But I think we could be buddies.
 Sure, I'll let you honk the horn (Dolginoff 2006: 36)

A *Time Out* review of the London production, stated, “The song that hits hardest is ‘Roadster’ – a disarmingly charming number, used to lure a young boy to his death” (*Time Out* London). Despite his literal absence, Bobby’s presence is felt in the show. He is alive and “present” in “Roadster,” and the audience is able to imagine him alive; later, the audience imagines his murder. Leopold and Loeb describe various murder methods before they finalize their plan:

We could chloroform a rag
And make him breathe the vapors
Then use it as a gag
To choke him.
And once his face is green
We’ll throw him in a bag
Flee the murder scene
Then read about it in the papers (Dolginoff 2006: 31)

Thrill Me’s use of graphic language is what aligns the musical with the true crime genre, which frequently favors descriptive violent language. True crime books, for example, go beyond telling the reader a murder occurred. Instead, they utilize language to create violent images in the reader’s mind. The opening chapters of the popular true crime book, *Helter Skelter*, describe in detail the bodies left behind in the aftermath of the Tate/LaBianca murders:

She was young, blond, very pregnant. She lay on her left side, directly in front of the couch, her legs tucked up toward her stomach in a fetal position. She wore a flowered bra and matching bikini panties, but the pattern was almost indistinguishable because of the blood, which looked as if it had been smeared over her entire body. A white nylon rope was looped around her neck twice, one end extending over a rafter in the ceiling, the other leading across the floor to still another body . . . (Bugliosi 30).

Although *Thrill Me* lacks a visual representation of Bobby’s murder, the language Dolginoff uses crafts a picture of the murder—in much the same way as literary true crime does.

Although the victim’s body is unseen, the murder weapons are visible. These include the rope they tie around Bobby’s neck to initially

threaten him, the crowbar that Loeb uses to knock him unconscious, and the bottle of acid they use to disfigure him after death. These items act as a synecdoche and are representative of the unseen murder. Stage properties, or “props,” act as a “highly visual code” in which the prop item carries with it the weight, severity, and meaning of the real (non-stage) item; this is especially true for stage props that are recognizable as weapons (Hamill: 41). Props often have more visual power onstage than they do in life and can “heighten the spectators’ awareness” (Overman-Tsai: 87). Essentially, when audiences see a weapon onstage, they pay attention. Throughout the musical, Dolginoff lures the audience into a false sense that they will never see the victim onstage, but his tangible, if not literally *real*, blood appears when the protagonists are seen carrying bloodied rags after the murder. Although there is no explicitly staged violence in the musical, *Thrill Me* utilizes suggestive and textual “crime porn” to great effect. Both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Thrill Me*, then, exhibit two distinct versions of “crime porn,” one visual and grotesque, the other linguistic and psychological. Taken together, these two musicals demonstrate the ways in which “crime porn” might function within a true crime musical subgenre.

Thrill Me and *Bonnie and Clyde* are two versions of a true crime musical. Many other recent musicals also fit within this category, including three musicals about Lizzie Borden, but thus far, musicals that incorporate true crime storytelling have had little success on commercial stages (2007; 2014; 2017).¹⁰ *Thrill Me*’s global success demonstrates that these types of musicals can have cult followings, but they need to be marketed appropriately. *Thrill Me*’s original production used the tagline “Relationships can be murder,” and the show’s summary detailed that the musical was about the 1924 murder of Bobby Franks. A recent U.K. production marketed *Thrill Me* as a “captivating musical thriller,” and the official website for the show foregrounds the musical as a show about “Thrill Killers.”¹¹ In contrast, producers for *Bonnie and Clyde* focused on the show’s love plot, the musical’s summary highlighting the protagonists as “America’s most notorious *lovers*” in a “*sexy and compelling adventure*” (emphasis mine).¹² Both musicals contain a romance plot and violent elements, but *Bonnie and*

Clyde focused on the romance, while *Thrill Me* blended the two (i.e. “Relationships can be murder”). *Bonnie and Clyde*’s marketing did little to prepare potential audiences for seeing explicitly staged crime porn. Even if people knew some of the duo’s history, they were likely not expecting the severity with which the production staged violence. To some extent, then, marketing is responsible for shifting the horizon of expectations for audiences. If producers and critics accept the true crime musical as a legitimate subgenre of musical theatre, then marketing will follow. There are musical theatre fans that adore “rock musicals” and “jukebox musicals,” specifically attending those performances with expectations of what those subgenres will deliver. Perhaps, labeling musicals as “true crime” will have a similar effect, and fans of the literary or filmic versions will explore what true crime and live theatre have to offer. At minimum, the subgenre provides a new avenue for marketing these works to an audience that might appreciate them.

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¹ See Jean Murley's *The Rise of True Crime*.

² In the Original Broadway Cast, the characters were played by Jeremy Jordan (Clyde) and Laura Osnes (Bonnie).

³ The “Death Car” became a tourist attraction following Bonnie’s and Clyde’s deaths. The car was displayed at state fairs for much of the next decade. See Jeff Guin’s *Go Down Together: The True, Untold Story of Bonnie and Clyde* for more information about the Death Car as tourist attraction.

⁴ I timed the filmed production that is housed at the New York Public Library’s Theatre on Film and Tape archive. Although it is possible that this length may vary from production to production, with the computerization of Broadway shows, these details typically become consistent.

⁵ See Jean Murley’s Introduction to *The Rise of True Crime*.

⁶ See Stacy Wolf’s *Changed for Good* for more examples of how this song type functions in different musicals.

⁷ Email interview with Stephen Dolginoff, February 18, 2013.

⁸ In the musical, Bobby is twelve, but the real Bobby Franks was murdered at fourteen years old.

⁹ Email interview with Stephen Dolginoff, February 18, 2013.

¹⁰ See *Spindle City: The Lizzie Borden Musical* by Katrina Wood; *Lizzie* by Tim Maner and Steven Cheslik-DeMeyer; and *Lizzie Borden* by Christopher McGovern.

¹¹ See thrillme-uk.com.

¹² See MTT’s description of *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Playing the Truth Game “Verbatim”: from Tribunal Plays to Experimental Crime Plays on the Contemporary British Stage

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“[T]he theatrical and narrative structure of a verbatim play needs no less cunning than a thriller.” (Hytner 2017)

“At the time I was writing crime novels and reading crime novels and I felt safer with a plot to pull me through. I’m always looking for the plot and the story. How am I going to tell the story in a way that you want to know more? I put on stage my own journey to discovery.” (Slovo 2016)

Crime and its relentless investigation have been ubiquitous to the repertoire of British verbatim theatre, especially since its renaissance in the mid-1990s.¹ Quite clearly, there are some obvious ways in which a crime play and a verbatim play are related. Both a crime play and verbatim theatre can in effect be dealing with real-life crimes and therefore use some actual words spoken by real people. A quick survey of the latter also reveals that, whatever its shape or form, verbatim theatre engages with the criminal underbelly of British society, sometimes poignantly giving voices to them, as in Robin Soans’ *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), Tanika Gupta’s *Gladiator Games* (2005) on the events surrounding the death in custody of Zahid Mubarek, Davey Anderson’s “massaged-verbatim” piece *Blackout* (2008) on the true stories of a young offender from Glasgow, Simon Armitage’s poetic *Black Roses: The Killing of Sophie Lancaster* (2012), DV8 Physical Theatre’s *John* (2014), Brave Badger’s “headphone-verbatim” piece *The*

Listening Room (2017), Mojisola Adebayo's *The Interrogation of Sandra Bland* as part of the Black Lives Matter movement (2017), as well as in our two case studies: the Tricycle Theatre's tribunal piece *The Colour of Justice* (1999) and Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork's verbatim musical *London Road* (2011).²

Quite expectedly, the mock-verbatim play *Taking Care of Baby*, famously penned in 2007 by Dennis Kelly, revolves around a crime, that of young mother Donna McAuliffe who is convicted of the murder of her two infant children.³ Interestingly, James Fritz's mock verbatim piece *Lines* (2011) is "a documentary play about another documentary play that never actually happened" (*L* 2), that is to say that none of the interviews and characters are real. However, more surprisingly, at the heart of the play is the tragedy of a real event, and of a man who died and the play closely follows the structure of a crime play.⁴ It would be wrong, however, to systematically equate a verbatim piece about crime with the category of the "crime play" (and, conversely, a crime play using some verbatim material with verbatim theatre). Indeed, a verbatim play about crime could simply look like the staging of Tony Parker's *Life after Life: Interviews with Twelve Murderers* (1990), capturing the individuality of different voices with a stunning immediacy and vividness and, yet, having the format of a series of interviews back to back.⁵ It follows that Beatrix Hesse's definition of the genre in her recent monograph on the subject as "a play revolving around crime and its detection" (Hesse: 1) and whereby "[t]he crime must be [...] central" (Hesse: 1) may not be sufficient to analyse the whole spectrum of plays hovering between the poles of both the crime play and verbatim theatre. It will thus be necessary in this article to offer a more specific interrogation of the complex relations between the genre of the crime play and recent verbatim performances on the British stage. More specifically, this article explores how criminal cases have been represented in verbatim theatre, that is to say the verbatim treatment of crime narratives. To this end, this study will endeavour to suggest that some contemporary verbatim performances have contributed to the long tradition of crime plays on the British stage and provide a close reading of two case studies. In other words, a question to

be asked here is whether verbatim theatre can be said to have injected a new ebullience and contemporary edge into the genre of the crime play. This study also hopes to establish that the strategies typically associated with the crime play are increasingly inscribed within the features of verbatim theatre. Similarly, by drawing from real life, crime plays may incorporate some verbatim strategies themselves.

As Marvin Lachman has stated, the crime play has tended to be “neglected” (Lachman: 1) from academic scrutiny. Likewise, and in spite of the compulsive appeal of an actual crime, verbatim theatre has not often been discussed in relation to the crime play genre, even if one of the most prominent verbatim theatre-makers, Gillian Slovo (*Guantanamo, The Riots* and *Another World*), has also gained a notable reputation as a crime novelist, and that some conventional features of the crime play, such as the kind of music that tends to punctuate certain scenes in those plays, may find their way into a verbatim performance.⁶ Instead, scholars and commentators alike have preferred to focus their attention on the political potential of verbatim theatre, on its ethical issues or on the correlation between true crime and the crime play, without having any recourse to verbatim theatre criticism. “Verbatim crime plays”, I contend, crucially alter the reading of both verbatim theatre and the crime play, and, as such, they deserve our full attention. In other words, there are many variables and less obvious relations to take into consideration, which the following pages will attempt to illuminate.

First, there are two main ways in which verbatim theatre and the crime play may be said to intersect: the tribunal play (and we shall look at the Tricycle Theatre’s *The Colour of Justice* (1999) for elucidation), and the more experimental side of the verbatim spectrum of practice (through Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork’s *London Road* (2011)). Second, the audience typically understands from the start of a verbatim performance that the words were originally uttered by real people, which arguably changes everything in terms of reception. Third and more problematic perhaps, any murderer/criminal in verbatim drama is known to the audience before the play even starts, which makes verbatim theatre particularly difficult to be envisaged in relation to

the crime play, or rather to its most consensual definition. Clearly, the effectiveness of the crime play tends to heavily rely on surprise with many unexpected turns, which is harder to achieve when the case is already known to the public. In other words, here, the audience's work is no longer to put the various threads of the story/documentary fragments together like a jigsaw. Fourth, as such, the focus of the "verbatim crime play" is more often than not on the judicial process that follows the crime, rather than on the crime as it happens. Their aim is consequently different, as verbatim works are often attempting to give a voice to people otherwise neglected or marginalised, from convicted murderers to young offenders, with the discernible intent to challenge prejudices and shed light on some hidden aspects of society. Fifth, to further complicate matters and due to their particular origins, verbatim plays tend to be formally more experimental than mainstream crime plays. This makes a remarkable dramaturgical difference. For instance, verbatim theatre sets different kinds of clues throughout a given piece that I call "verbatim markers", which are simply there to remind the audience that they are watching a verbatim performance. Such elements like the playing of the original interviews in *London Road* or the reminders of the origin of the statements throughout *The Colour of Justice* do not really contribute structurally to the play, they do not bring about an unexpected twist in the crime plot or any extra tension. Sixth, their exposition is therefore very different and the verbatim identity of these crime plays often requires a self-reflexive gesture before the crime scene is even set. Seventh, "dramatic" language is another key difference. Indeed, Kate Dorney in her study *The Changing Language of Modern English Drama* considers that contemporary verbatim theatre marks the passage into a new realm whereby "[l]ife-like-ese and speech have finally melded" (Dorney: 225). Linguistically speaking, the presence of a unique "idiolect", that is to say one's "own distinct and individual version of language" (Coulthard: 431) is generally what defines a non-verbatim playwright. Even if, theoretically, the writer of a crime play can choose any word at any time, s/he eventually tends to make typical choices of preferred words.⁷ Taken together, these variations suggest that the way these verbatim and real-life crime

plays appeal in comparison to their non-verbatim counterparts is rather different.

Having made an argument for the complex relations between the genre of the crime play and recent verbatim performances on the British stage, let us now turn to one of its most prominent manifestations: the tribunal play that Beatrix Hesse has described as “a special case among the [crime] plays surveyed” (Hesse: 91) in her monograph *The English Crime Play in the Twentieth Century*.⁸ As the tribunal play is already considered as a crime play in the critical literature (and presents less challenges at the formal level), the following pages will consequently devote more space to the highly problematic case of Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork’s *London Road*.

The Tribunal Play

The Colour of Justice (1999) was the fourth in the Tricycle Theatre’s pioneering series of tribunal plays and distilled over 11,000 pages of material (69 days of public hearings) into a two-hour performance, including an interval. This crime play – categorised as “melodrama” by Beatrix Hesse – is entirely based on the Macpherson Inquiry that was a watershed moment for race relations in the UK and purported to expose the failure of the original Metropolitan Police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence by a gang of white youths. The production then transferred to the Theatre Royal Stratford East and the West End before appearing at the National Theatre and eventually becoming a screenplay broadcast on BBC2. The video recording of the performance was also used in Hendon amongst the Leicestershire police for both training and racial awareness purposes.

The term “tribunal play” is to be understood as a single-sourced, two-hour (or more) verbatim play scrupulously based on the transcripts from a high-profile legal case that can be “trials, tribunals [or] public inquiries” (Paget: 223).⁹ Typically, therefore, a tribunal play offers a painstaking reconstruction of portions of a legal case for a theatre audience. Its subjects vary greatly depending on the source used by its creators, but it tends to concern itself with miscarriages of justice and

larger flaws within the operations of British institutions, which strikingly differ from the concerns of a conventional crime play. Crucially, the premise behind these UK productions is that inquiries constitute a matter of public interest that are denied an appropriate coverage by being inaccessible, poorly reported in the traditional journalistic media outlets and by not being broadcast on television. Hence, theatre compensates for and serves as a corrective, providing the British public with “a readily accessible overview” (Woolf: 7).

More importantly, perhaps, both the crime play and verbatim theatre acknowledge the inherent theatricality of the legal system. Indeed, trials are intense dramatic spectacles and compelling events that lend themselves readily to theatrical reconstructions, their particular structure offering an ideal template for these crime plays. In a 1971 journal article, distinguished California attorney Richard Harbinger unapologetically describes trials as theatre: “[a]s a dramatic thing, it had dramatic attributes, such as dramatic form, dramatic substance and, most significantly, dramatic effect. When one observes an adversary trial, he sees a play” (Harbinger: 122). In other words, theatre and fiction are spectres hovering over these real judicial and human activities, sometimes even compellingly colliding with them: “there are recorded instances of a criminal being cast in the role of Christ in a mystery play, so as to exploit his actual torture and death as part of the spectacle” (Favorini: xiv). Similarly in *The Colour of Justice*, if much less harrowing, one of the lawyers of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, a full judicial inquiry headed by Sir William Macpherson, five years after the murder of a black teenager in South East London – an area notorious for racist attacks and stabbings – makes the following comment after hearing the evidence of William Mellish, formerly detective superintendent:

MANSFIELD: Can I just ask, the officer we are calling XX. This is becoming like a Pinter play with surreal references. (*TCOJ* 400)

At one point in the Shipman Inquiry – investigating the actions (including those of the statutory bodies, authorities and responsible individuals) that led to Dr Harold Shipman’s deeply shocking series of murders at Market Street, Hyde, near Manchester, England – Dame

Janet Smith alerts us to the fact that “[t]he way that Shipman could kill and walk away unsuspected would be dismissed as fanciful if described in a work of fiction” (Woolf 2014). But how does the tribunal play qualify as a crime play?

Before going any further and looking at *The Colour of Justice* in more detail, it must be asserted that the tribunal play is not necessarily exempt from fiction altogether. Indeed, some tribunal plays have departed from the aforementioned conventions. In other words, theoretically at least, a tribunal play could be indistinguishable from a conventional crime play belonging to the category of the courtroom drama. More importantly and although it is theoretically convenient to include tribunal plays in the crime play genre, since they are perceived as belonging to the subcategory of the courtroom drama, I would like to propose that the verbatim nature of these plays complexifies any attempt at theorisation.

One of the key tenets that unite both the crime play and tribunal theatre is the pursuit of documentary realism. In the case of a tribunal play, this is even more prominent: the designer Bunny Christie accurately recreated on stage Hannibal House at Elephant and Castle and the stage set recreated everything down to the tiniest detail (e.g. the computers, the ring binders, lawyers whispering to each other, etc.). Furthermore, sometimes realism meets reality as it were, involving far less strain on the imagination as when Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, the Chairman to the inquiry announces that “we will break off now for twenty minutes” (*TCOJ* 366), which is made to coincide with a 20-minute interval for the audience at the Tricycle Theatre. In other words, the idea of realism in these performances arises from an aesthetic project that takes it upon itself to realise the utopian impulse towards the real, essentially through the repudiation of anything that can be construed as theatrical (e.g. the house lights are never turned off). As such, these plays also differ from the typical courtroom drama, as they are attached to “irrelevant details” and the text is very often peppered with many unremarkable *sur le vif* moments: “can we have on the screen PCA 45 at page 72” (*TCOJ* 322). Finally, *The Colour of Justice* is not a conventional courtroom play as it does not end with a

verdict. Instead, it ends with the closing statement of Macpherson, demanding “a minute of silence to remember Stephen Lawrence” (*TCOJ* 415). Evidence of the success of this strategy may be found in the fact that “the whole audience at the Tricycle st[ood] up” (Butler 1999).

As we have just seen, even the most conventional verbatim form – the tribunal play – has a significant impact on the genre of the crime play in that it both extends and challenges some of its conventions. It remains to see what effects a more experimental form of verbatim theatre could have on the received definitions of the crime play.

Experimentation

The musical *London Road* is a crime play that focuses on the lives of the Ipswich inhabitants on the eponymous road in 2006-2007, at a time when fear in the whole community was at its height, following a brutal series of murders committed on young prostitutes working in the area by a man who was to be known as the “Suffolk Strangler” and which made national headlines. Instead of focusing on the victims or the family of the victims like the media coverage did at the time, Blythe turned her attention to the community going through (in a relatively short space of time) a state of rising panic on the way to a sort of post-traumatic regeneration, that is to say a community healing itself. As one of the characters says in the play, Blythe was “about the only person that **has** – actually come down [t]here [London Road and Ipswich], and **asked** the residents how they feel” (*LR* 9).¹⁰ Throughout the process, Blythe also interviewed police officers, the surviving sex workers in the area and, perhaps in what one would call a self-referential manner, members of the media working on the case. Put another way, the play is not a record of the startling event itself but, instead, lays emphasis on the panic response of the London Road community to that event. In particular, the piece narrates how the community strove to blot it out so that ordinary life could resume.

It was first performed (with a cast of 11 and a six-piece band) on 14 April 2011 at the Cottesloe auditorium of the National Theatre, London, in a production directed by Rufus Norris and designed by

Katrina Lindsay that played to packed houses. As is common in verbatim theatre, the production also raised £25,000 for the Iceni Project in Ipswich (a drug rehabilitation organisation- through audience collections after each performance. Following its success, including the reception of the Critics' Circle prize for Best Musical and Show of the Year from *Time Out London* as well as critical rave reviews, it was then revived the following year for the much bigger space at the National Theatre, the Olivier, on 28 July 2012. In addition, an extract from *London Road* was revived for a special performance on the occasion of the National Theatre's 50th anniversary in November 2013. Due to its success, *London Road* has also been revived throughout England in amateur and student productions such as one by Sedos in summer 2016 at the Bridewell Theatre in London and by the Bristol Old Vic School in June 2014. It also received a North American premiere that was produced at the Bluma Appel Theatre in Toronto. More recently, *London Road* was adapted for the big screen and the script was again written by Blythe, with added material that had not been used in the theatre show. This was the first time the National Theatre was premiering a film and also the first time a verbatim production was adapted for the cinema.

In this section, it is proposed that the internationally celebrated *London Road* is a theatre production in which many features of the crime play and verbatim material are co-dependent. It is also experimental since, if one applies Jauss' concept of "horizon of expectations", that is to say "the familiarity of previous aesthetic experiences" (Jauss: 25) with which we always see new works, it would seem that none of these past experiences – be they crime plays, musicals or verbatim drama – could have possibly helped in framing and understanding *London Road* from an aesthetic standpoint. Faced with a completely new type of crime play, verbatim performance and musical, critics have tended to use a rich variety of expressions to encompass the phenomenon of the "musical verbatim crime play". Critic Peter Bradshaw called it an "addictive forensic thriller set to music" (Bradshaw 2015), Barry Hertz a "revolutionary musical mystery" (Hertz 2016), whilst Justin Chang settled for "an arresting true-crime musical" (Chang 2016). To carry

out research on *London Road* is immediately to encounter a milestone in British verbatim theatre history, a “groundbreaking” (Spencer: 408) production that lifted verbatim theatre to a whole new level, making a claim for attention that was to rival both the genre of the musical and that of the crime play. For the purposes of this section, it may therefore be desirable in the first instance to clear away the eulogistic chorus, and to focus instead on what makes it a significant contribution to the genre of the crime play.¹¹

First of all, one would surely argue that the term “musical verbatim crime play” signals a paradox of sorts. Indeed, the crime play and verbatim theatre’s relative integrity and seriousness seem very far removed from the joyous lightness and buoyancy of most musical theatre that is all glamour, entertainment and charm.¹² Clearly, both the crime play and verbatim theatre are interested in recreating a certain level of reality, whereas by contrast, the musical requires exuberance as well as a higher and enchanting level of energy. In other words, they reflect quite different attitudes towards life, and for our purposes, this generally pertains to opposing aesthetic considerations. That is to say: the expected realism associated with the crime play on the one hand and the verbatim language, on the other, cannot be more opposed to the sheer artificiality of songs and musicals.¹³ Even if the traditional crime play relies on very strict conventions, which may on the surface appear to have something in common with the set pieces of musical theatre, they differ at a fundamental level. Additionally, from a technical standpoint, it would seem virtually impossible to reconcile the formal structure of music with the verbatim meanderings and inarticulacy of everyday conversational language (or its dramatic recreation in the context of a crime play). Further, the sequential placement of different oral verbatim material does not necessarily match the sequential placement of musical sections that can include repetitions (sometimes with alterations).

In the context of a crime play based on a true story, as is the case for *London Road*, another difficulty arises from the fact that such a production deals with an unsettling subject (here the 2006 Ipswich serial murders) and very sensitive material that seems, from the outset,

not to lend itself well to such a treatment, becoming an insurmountable ethical and political challenge.¹⁴ In fact, before *London Road* even opened, the media tried to stir up controversy. *The Daily Mail*, for instance, titled one of its articles “Theatre Show about the Suffolk Strangler’s Killing Spree to Be Staged” (Daily Mail Reporter 2011) and implied that this could potentially be a traumatising experience for the people affected by the tragedy: “some of the families might be offended”. Similarly, *The Eastern Daily Press* called its article on the subject “Former Norwich Pub Landlord’s Prostitute Murders to Be Turned into a Musical” (Staff Reporter 2011), with all the alarming implications that such a title could trigger in the general public. As for the BBC – perhaps as a result of the aforementioned *Daily Mail* article – they revealed that “Suffolk Murders Play Angered Tania Nicol’s Mother” (BBC 2011) and reported that Ipswich MP Ben Gummer had claimed that “[i]t [was] a pretty sick-making feeling to make a musical, or musical documentary, out of something which [he] th[ought] most people in Ipswich would like to be left alone” (BBC 2011).¹⁵

Now, one question that automatically springs to mind has to do with the function given to the songs in the verbatim crime play. Do they serve as a narrative device or do they clash jarringly with the unsung spoken words, brimming with the pleasures and celebratory tones of the spectacle? One thing is certain: the “musical verbatim crime play”, if we may call it so, departs from conventional understandings of the genre of the crime play, as well as both verbatim and musical theatre. Consequently, it appears almost counterproductive to attempt to define a strand of performance largely in its infancy. Suffice it to say that, over the course of this article, a musical verbatim crime play is to be understood as a verbatim crime play that prominently displays its musical and sung material and, in so doing, inevitably disturbs the conventions of both the mainstream crime play and verbatim theatre. Conversely, a musical verbatim crime play is to be understood as a break from mainstream musical theatre, since both the music and the songs are created through a verbatim methodology of some sort. Last but not least, the musical verbatim crime play, contrary to a given “verbatim crime play” with songs and music, such as

Robin Soans' *Life after Scandal* (2007), often blurs the lines between verbatim speech and songs.

As will already be evident, perhaps the best way to define a musical verbatim crime play such as *London Road* is by seeing it as an aesthetic compromise between these three strands. In the case of *London Road*, due to its subject matter and the close and constant scrutiny of the press, it is very possible that the balance tilted more in favour of verbatim theatre and the crime play. A good example of this is the absence of the particular and typical moment when a character is about to break into song. Another lies in the fact that the singing voice of the performers sounds more “spoken” than is usually the case. In other words, a different musical verbatim crime play based on less controversial material might have different aesthetic priorities, perhaps tending towards an all-dancing and all-singing spectacle. In effect, the main priority here seems to have been to avoid distracting the audience from listening to the verbatim material. As such, the methodology adopted by composer Adam Cork was to attempt to transfer Blythe's strict headphone-verbatim methodology to the medium of songs and music. Technically, this means that Cork transposed every spoken sentence and half sentence as if they were a tune. Put another way, he focused on the rise and fall of conversational speech in the musical line and was forensically faithful to the rhythm and pitch of the real people, to their “voiceprints”.¹⁶ Very skilfully, he moulded the structure of the songs around the verbatim testimonies to the minor details of pauses in everyday language.¹⁷ For example, in the second song in the show entitled “Everyone is Very Very Nervous”, the Radio Techie sings the following:

*I mean the best person to talk to is the bloke
by the gen – by the erm lamp-post over there. (LR 11)*

On one level, *London Road* can easily be described in terms of crime drama. The exposition comprises the usual clues early on that the story is shrouded in mystery, revolving around several still-to-be-solved murders. Although unmentioned in Hesse's seminal study of the genre, *London Road* would seem to enter the category of the thriller – one of the four modes she identifies in her theoretical work – as

it is clearly a crime, or rather a series of crimes, that triggers off the action. It starts with a murder that disrupts a whole community, which is then followed by the discovery of several bodies. It also has the familiar “whodunit formula” embodied by the catchy song “It Could Be Him” posing the typical “who done it” question and increasing suspense:

STARBUCKS GIRL 1. *You automatically think it could be him.
/ That's the scary thing, you know he could be amongst us
walking around with us every day and we, we don't know./
Like anyone. It could be anyone in here/ for all we know (LR 19)*

London Road also harbours one of the “stabilizing features” of the crime play genre identified by Beatrix Hesse in her aforementioned work, that is to say the kind of society depicted that is here clearly “a ‘well-ordered’ society characterized by fear of social mobility, of foreigners, and of disease and the diseased” (Hesse: 172). Likewise, the tension increases throughout in response to the continuous threat and there is a real closure: the criminal has been punished, something good has happened in the community and the girls have been kept off the street and drugs. At times, music also enables the verbatim material to follow the structure of a crime play more closely, as it possesses the capacity to add dramatic intensity, emphasising the state of mind of a character and/or facilitating empathy more broadly. What seems to have been particularly decisive for the creative team is to attempt to maintain the dramatic cohesion of the crime play at all costs. For instance, one of the most unsettling scenes in the piece in which the character of Julie (the originator of the “London Road in Bloom” competition) confesses the following:

Ya know, I feel sorry for the families but not for them [the murdered prostitutes]. [...] they're betta off ten foot under. (*Beat.*) That's a horrible thing to say isn't it? (LR 65)

is placed at a strategic and dramatic moment.¹⁸

As we have seen, on another level, most of those who have written on *London Road* to date have also stressed its strangeness as well as its puzzling engagement with the genres of the thriller, verbatim and musical theatre. Visually and unlike the conventional strategies

of both verbatim theatre and the crime play, we can see a smoke/haze effect throughout that makes the general atmosphere slightly unreal, as does the sound of the orchestra, the hanging flower baskets being flown to the ceiling, the lighting and the repetitions of the verbatim words. As expected from a musical as well, sound can also become a disruptive element, despite the fact that Blythe strove to fit the verbatim and musical material into the more conventional dramatic frame of the crime play. As Patrice Pavis has expressed in *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre*, “sound in the theatre appears to be not just a sonorized accompaniment to the text, but rather an action, a performance that involves the entire production” (Pavis: 231). Even though Blythe writes that “Adam [Cork] was able to set these words to music by following the cadence and rhythms of the original speech patterns so accurately that their verisimilitude was not diminished” (Blythe: 6), I would suggest that this argument is particularly difficult to sustain when the audience witnesses, for instance, the character of Ron say “*Good evening. (Beat.) Welcome*” (LR 5) no less than twenty-two times and slide into song. If it is true that Blythe reduced Cork’s musical interventions to a minimum, ultimately, he had to versify spoken language at times, leading Blythe to modify the forensic accuracy with which she normally works. Inevitably, going from unversified, spontaneous speech to songs heightens and formalises it. As opposed to what one would encounter in both the crime play and verbatim drama, here we encounter three kinds of language: the spoken, which remains unmarked, the sung, presented in italics, and the emphatic/stressed presented in bold. In other words, the script radically departs from that of a crime play and resembles a musical score:

FEMALE REPORTER (*and the two other reporters*). *Well this is the **third time** that **Steve Wright** has appeared in Court but it’s the **first time** that he’s formally entered a plea he arrived here at Ipswich Crown Court. (LR 42)*

Within the sung, the chorus – the main body of a song – clearly stands out as it constitutes the most distinctive departure from both aesthetic conventions of the crime play and verbatim theatre. For in-

stance, the song “Everyone is Very Very Nervous” in Act I, Section Two, which is interspersed by a singing Santa on a plinth interpreting Edward Pola and George Wyle’s *It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*, ends up being performed by the full cast as follows:

ALL. *Obviously you gotta lotta people goin’ out f’th’ weekend
Th’ gonna be a bit worried
So erm we’re handing out personal alarms to erm* (LR 15)

At the end of the song, everything accelerates, the music overtakes the words, a police siren joins in, and the word “very” is repeated with a cacophonous medley of sounds that completely upsets the remnants of realism. In other words, in several musical instances, the verbatim material has been stretched beyond itself, to the point where its original meaning has been lost and new meaning cannot yet be created.

Even the diegetic function of the songs contributing to the incorporation of *London Road* into the genre of the crime play by essentially increasing the sense of flow is disrupted:

RON. *I got up and all I could see was police cars* (Beat.)
Goin’ up the road. Course – ya know – I – (LR 26)

These exact words initially said by Ron are then sung by “various” (LR 27) in vocal harmonies and then distorted through a kind of echo-singing technique, creating the sense of a whole community being brought together by these tragic episodes. Furthermore, one of the key effects of setting verbatim language to music and taking it beyond its customary social significance is that it makes the audience look at the unsung material in a different way. Indeed, unlike the conventional crime play, all of a sudden the spoken material sounds more sung, one notices the symphonic structures of spoken language like never before. Also, typical of the musical genre is the presence of self-introduction “songs” such as the following:

JASON. *Me. I’m uh, uh – I’m a freelance photographer* (Beat.)
But I’m –working for – some a the nationals, today. (Beat.) (LR 30)

Another key feature of the musical verbatim crime play is its disruption of the conventional rules of characterisation. Indeed, as Lib Taylor has argued, the performance processes of *London Road* (i.e. the distortion of the verbatim material through voice and music) introduce “deferrals of the realist matching of voice to real person” (Taylor: 376). The staging was also highly stylised. A particular moment in the performance stays in memory, the one in which the real television news reporter Simon Newton is shown on a monitor. This filmed TV newsreel footage is then juxtaposed with the musical recreation by actor Michael Shaeffer live on camera. This particular report is then sung by all the actors on stage. Even more disrupting to the conventions of the crime play, perhaps, is the use of blue and white police incident tape creating a web on stage in some of the scenes. It completely disrupts the conventions of realism when it appears around the residents’ sofas, an artistic decision that neither the conventional verbatim theatre-maker nor the crime play dramatist would have happily considered. This metamorphosis of the London Road sitting rooms – where the majority of the scenes take place – is a visual metaphor for what the residents experienced in the midst of those tragic events. On stage, we see the residents trying to get on with their lives whilst being constantly reminded of the incidents. The actors standing in for the London Road residents are literally caught in these incidents, physically trying to circumvent the police tape.

Arguably, the definition of the crime play is always provisional and it would seem that *London Road* extends our understanding of the genre still further. Despite its arising from the rather grim context of the Ipswich murders and aftermath, it can be perceived as a seismic shock – a groundbreaking moment in British theatre story – that radically challenged an audience’s habit of attending crime plays, musical and verbatim theatre.

Conclusion

In many ways, the mixture of strategies belonging to both the crime play and verbatim theatre can be seen as a kind of new aesthetic that gives more artistic licence to each strand in terms of distortion

and imaginative leaps. Indeed, for the crime play genre, the inclusion of verbatim material enshrines it with the promising “effect of the real” (seen at its clearest in *The Colour of Justice*), as well as unforeseen possibilities such as the ones we observed in *London Road*. This also betrays a new attitude towards verbatim theatre, since its material is now perceived as clay for the theatre-maker to experiment with, rather than a mere “constrained theatre” (Angel-Perez 2009), that is to say a theatre solely governed by artificial rules and principles.

In considering the various ways in which the state of new writing is perpetually shifting, further attention could equally be given to the growing impact of verbatim theatre on playwriting methods, forms and dramatic language.¹⁹ In other words, it is my contention that verbatim theatre may also be currently contributing to a more profound redirection of the thematic, aesthetic and formal conventions of the crime play, bringing new kinds of theatrical experience such as Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork’s *London Road* on the British stage. In fact, my main argument in this article is not just that verbatim theatre has flourished in all sorts of ways over the past two decades – including when it seemingly takes the shape of the crime play –, but that it has radically altered the landscape of British new writing more broadly.

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¹ Depending on one's definition of verbatim theatre, it is possible to trace one of the first British verbatim crime plays as dating back from the early-modern period: *The Late Murder in Whitechapel, or Keep the Widow Waking* written by Thomas Dekker, John Ford, William Rowley and John Webster (on the basis of the verbatim accounts of two real crimes) and staged in 1624 at the Red Bull playhouse in Clerkenwell.

² "Massaged-verbatim" is used here to encompass those plays that mix verbatim theatre and fiction. Headphone-verbatim is a strand of verbatim theatre whereby the actors wear headphones or earphones throughout the performance and repeat a beat behind as much as they can hear (not only the verbatim words but how they were said in the original interviews).

³ A mock-verbatim play designates a theatre work that is not based on the exact words of real people but adopts a specific language and strategies that make the audience think it is verbatim.

⁴ Ian Tomlinson was an English newspaper vendor who collapsed and died in the city of London on his way home from work during the 2009 G-20 summit protests.

⁵ This book of revealing interviews with nine men and three women who have been given sentences of life imprisonment for murder was not initially meant for the stage. However, in many ways, it is similar to a verbatim play or a collection of riveting short crime plays, each of them containing a killing with unexpected twists at times. Fascinatingly, the aforementioned book was turned into a verbatim play by Paul Jepson and performed as part of the National Theatre's 'Transformations' season in 2002.

⁶ A good example of this is the National Theatre of Scotland's site-specific piece *Enquirer* (2012) that utilised music that could remind one of the soundtrack to a thriller.

⁷ It is in fact a far more complex issue that goes beyond the scope of this article since the selection of verbatim material itself, as a form of artistic expression by one author that reproduces actual speech, can also betray him or her. In other words, the way s/he puts together the verbatim words on a page, the choice of certain conventions and techniques and, particularly, the limitation of his or her artistic expression to those very few qualities are always revealing. On a given page, the so-called "voice" of the author may not be as evident in the context of verbatim theatre. Nonetheless, one would certainly not confuse a verbatim play by Alecky Blythe with one by David Hare or Chris Goode.

⁸ Hesse does not necessarily consider the whole genre of the tribunal play as characteristic of the "new" English crime play. However, she includes Richard Norton-Taylor's *The Colour of Justice* (1999) – one of the most celebrated tribu-

nal plays in the UK – among her case studies probing the manifold directions of the genre.

⁹ William Twinning defines public inquiries as “normally set up by Ministers to investigate and pronounce on matters giving rise to serious public concern, such as major disasters, allegations of corruption or of serious impropriety of public life or of police malfeasance. The main objective is to restore public confidence by a formal, independent, and open investigation of the facts, and to make recommendations to prevent a recurrence of the matters causing public concern” (Twinning: 34).

¹⁰ To some extent, *London Road* also enabled the residents to counter some of the media representations that sensationalistically depicted this particular area in Ipswich as a “red-light district”.

¹¹ *London Road* received five star reviews from *Time Out*, *The Independent*, *The Financial Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Sunday Express*, *The Mail on Sunday*, *Metro* and *The Guardian* and its first run at the National Theatre was extended to accommodate the high demand for tickets.

¹² We are very much aware that these are generalisations and the spectrum of the musical genre cannot be equated to these clichés. However, more often than not, musicals are understood as “a light-hearted story on a contemporary theme performed as music theatre, and using solo songs, duets, trios, choruses and straight dialogue to convey the dramatic dialogue” (Nzewi: 181).

¹³ This is also an important point for Beatrix Hesse, which she perceives as the “[s]tabilizing features” (Hesse: 172) of the genre, which she associates with the “adherence to the doctrine of stage naturalism” (Hesse: 172), that is to say “the preference for the single living-room set, and the use of a linear, chronological plot” (Hesse: 172).

¹⁴ The residents still live on this road, the parents of the victims are still grieving and for many people at the time, the project, however respectful it may be, appeared to come too soon after the events.

¹⁵ As a result, Alecky Blythe wrote to all families of the victims to explain in more detail what the show was about and what it was not about, thematically as well as aesthetically, so as to allay some of their fears. She also explained that their daughters and themselves were not going to be represented in the performance.

¹⁶ This is a kind of vocal footprint. Admittedly, when we speak, we hit particular pitches that we tend to return to when we repeat rhythm in our speech. Here, in this particular context, this corresponds to the verbatim detail of the voice in a musical sense.

¹⁷ As Cork has explained, the “fairly solid musical structures” he created to contain the “anarchic” verbatim material were mostly “built out of key elements of

the transcribed voice, translated into harmonic progressions, or rhythms in the accompaniment" (*LR ix-x*). On other occasions, Cork used a slightly different process whereby he composed "a 'container' unconnected with the musical surface of the words, but inspired by their literal content, or the tone in which they are spoken, or the mood of the situation in which they were uttered, or that of the situation which they describe" (*LR x*).

¹⁸ Until that part in Act II, Julie had been introduced to the audience as a sympathetic character and this revelation towards the end of the piece was clearly intended to produce a momentary and unexpected emotional shock.

¹⁹ In his *Rewriting the Nation*, Aleks Sierz uses the term to specifically designate "the category of text-based theatre, where an individual playwright is at the centre of the theatre-making process" (Sierz: 50). He then continues to explain that "[n]ew writing is thus distinguished from other forms of theatre, such as physical theatre (where the emphasis is on the visual), devised theatre (where a group collaborates on a text), adaptations of books or films (where the story and dialogue depend on the source) and verbatim theatre (where the words of real people are used)" (Sierz: 50). Arguably, the conventional crime play does not entirely fit within the category of new writing since it can encompass adaptations and even verbatim theatre, as I hoped to have shown in this article.

***Dark Road*, tragédie écossaise du doute**

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*Dark Road*¹ est une pièce policière que Ian Rankin et Mark Thomson ont écrite pour combler un manque dans le théâtre écossais dont on peut dire qu'il a pris son essor avec la Renaissance écossaise au lendemain de la Première Guerre mondiale : la « Scottish National Theatre Society », fondée en 1922 pour créer le « Scottish National Theatre », formalisa la charte du théâtre écossais. Au fil des générations, les troupes de professionnels et d'amateurs firent évoluer les diverses formes du théâtre écossais en accompagnement des événements politiques de la nation. Après la dévolution de pouvoirs de Westminster à Holyrood en 1999, il devenait impératif, vu l'importance que prenait le roman policier, d'établir le genre du théâtre policier écossais². Rankin et Thomson ont veillé à produire un texte dramatique qui respecte l'ambition de créer une œuvre et l'objectif des fondateurs du théâtre national : « To produce Scottish national drama through the production [...] of plays of Scottish life and character » (Findlay : 221). Le drame est un huis clos écossais : vingt-cinq ans après l'arrestation d'Alfred Chalmers pour meurtres en série, Isobel McArthur, devenue directrice de la police d'Édimbourg, se prépare à prendre sa retraite. Elle est hantée par le doute de la culpabilité de Chalmers et veut publier une étude sur son cas. Le meurtrier, fin manipulateur, tente de se faire disculper. Alexandra, 22 ans, se rebelle contre sa mère Isobel qui refuse de révéler l'identité du géniteur ; pour son diplôme de fin de licence, elle travaille à la réalisation d'un documentaire sur Chalmers.

Le titre, *Dark Road*, est tiré d'une réplique de Frank adressée à sa filleule Alexandra, fille de 21 ans de l'héroïne, Isobel : « ALEXANDRA — Not good to check the past for truth and lies? FRANK — That's a dark road. Your mum loves you. She's only ever done what she thinks was best for you.³ That's all you need to know » (92). L'expression

« dark road » est polysémique : au sens propre, c'est une rue sombre propice au meurtre ; au sens métaphorique, la recherche de la vérité conduit toujours au drame ; au sens dramatique, l'ironie dirige vers le tragique puisqu'Isobel recherche inutilement une vérité dont elle a perdu la certitude : ainsi, l'aveuglement de l'héroïne est la cause de sa perte puisque, d'une part, le doute qui l'assaille ravive le désir de vengeance de l'antagoniste, alors que, d'autre part, elle refuse à sa fille la vérité de sa quête légitime. La mort d'Isobel sera la hantise d'Alexandra : elle survit sans la possibilité de connaître l'identité de son géniteur mais avec la certitude que son obstination a causé la mort de sa mère.

Comme pour justifier la tragédie de Rankin et Thomson, dans son étude sur le roman policier écossais Lenn Wanner précise : « Typically, detective fiction tells the story of one man's quest for truth, if not justice » (Wanner : 9). Isobel et sa fille Alexandra cherchent, chacune dans son existence, la vérité et la justice. C'est pour cela que Frank, à propos d'Alexandra qui veut être la Spielberg du documentaire (12), déclare : « In the DNA: search for the truth » (12). Le concept de vérité (truth) est appliqué à la tragédie *Dark Road* : la réalité d'une culpabilité. Mais la vérité de la culpabilité de meurtres en série d'Alfred, qui est principale dans ce drame, n'est pas plus génératrice de conflit dramatique que la vérité secondaire parce que personnelle, à savoir celle qui concerne l'identité du géniteur d'Alexandra.

La conscience de l'illusion, ou perception erronée due à une apparence trompeuse, devient ici discours métathéâtral : l'illusion du spectateur le dispute à l'illusion des personnages car le doute de la protagoniste est le produit d'une illusion potentiellement fatale. En effet, le pouvoir de l'institution de la police, à l'image de la société écossaise, génère-t-il sa corruption laissant impuissante sa directrice du moment, ou bien l'antagoniste est-il le seul sujet corrompteur dans cette confrontation ? Le spectateur doit-il voir là une métaphore de la lutte entre la nation écossaise et le pouvoir central de Westminster, puissances supérieures à l'individu dont l'héroïsme est dérisoire ?

Ce texte n'ayant pas fait l'objet d'étude critique approfondie jusque-là, s'il faut le considérer comme une œuvre fondatrice, il appa-

raît nécessaire, dans une approche « texte – contexte »⁴ d'aborder trois points dans ce texte dramatique destiné en priorité à la scène écossaise : cette tragédie du doute est une pièce archétypale ; l'illusion joue avec le fantastique et la fable du renard est un moyen original ; la scotticité de *Dark Road* est une caractéristique majeure de cette tragédie écossaise du doute.

Une tragédie du doute, pièce archétypale

Selon le *Littré*, le doute est « l'incertitude où l'on est sur la réalité d'un fait, [sur] la vérité d'une assertion » (*Littré* : 1829). Pour souligner l'effet délétère du doute, Racine associe le doute, le malaise et la mort : « Dans le doute mortel dont je suis agité, » (*Phèdre* I, 1, 3-4) : bien que les contextes soient très différents, ce vers d'Hippolyte pourrait être attribué à Isobel : « It unnerves me why I am so uncomfortable with his conviction twenty-five years on » (16).

Dark Road, communément qualifié de thriller, est une tragédie⁵ dont la structure rassemble les fondamentaux de sa forme générique tels que les résume P. Pavis : hamartia (l'héroïne sollicite son antagoniste), hubris (elle rejette les appels à la raison de ses amis), pathos (elle meurt par la main de la fille de l'antagoniste et abandonne sa fille à sa culpabilité) et catharsis (Pavis : 388). À l'instar d'*Othello*, dont le héros éponyme est victime des machinations d'Iago, Isobel, l'héroïne, affronte les manipulations d'Alfred, arrêté par l'équipe de détectives dont elle faisait partie quelque vingt-cinq ans plus tôt. Le tandem Iso-bel — Alfred personnifie la lutte du bien et du mal, typique des moralités médiévales, dans une variation originale de la jalousie qui est le doute sur la justice de ses actes passés : a-t-elle trahi le droit écossais ?

L'unité de lieu est respectée : Édimbourg, capitale de l'Écosse, est investie de valeurs symboliques possibles, dont celle du siège politique de la nation. L'unité de temps — en 1988 (40) — doit s'identifier comme, à la fois, le temps du drame, soit quelques jours, et celui de l'exposition du doute et de sa résolution. Le temps de l'héroïne est plus complexe puisqu'il s'agit de son bilan de trente années dans la police avant celui la retraite : c'est le temps de l'entre-deux, celui de

la vie professionnelle de la policière et celui de la vie familiale simplifiée à la relation de l'héroïne avec sa fille de vingt-et-un ans submergée par le sentiment d'amour-haine puisqu'elle ne connaît pas son père : « ALEXANDRA: Who is my father? — ISOBEL: Don't ask that! » (118).

La protagoniste, Isobel McArthur, est la directrice de la police d'Edimbourg en fin de carrière : « I've done my thirty and am able to get my pension [...] » (11) ; sa fonction la place très proche du pouvoir, mais si elle n'a pas d'origine noble, son collègue Frank la qualifie de « Queen of Police in Edinburgh! » (12), humour écossais sarcastique. Son adjutant principal, Frank Bowman, ami et ancien amant, est commissaire divisionnaire. Il déconseille fortement à Isobel de revenir sur l'arrestation de l'antagoniste : « It's a bad, bad thought. You put that thought out your head » (15). Elle a un adjutant secondaire dans le personnage de Fergus McLintock, surnommé Black Fergus, ancien directeur de la police dont Isobel est le successeur : « Was that Black Fergus just here? [...] Man's a legend » (20). La protagoniste a une faille fatale: le doute.

L'antagoniste est Alfred Chalmers, Edimbourgeois grand manipulateur, à l'image du maître de la représentation de la torture mentale Alfred Hitchcock : « *Alfred Chalmers enters with Judith. He's in his sixties, grey, but the face has great definition* » (66). Frank dit de Chalmers : « He's a virus — he's already out. You name him and he's out and he's in me and you and in Fergus » (52). Alfred est caractérisé par la vanité : « Listen, just because this is your projection doesn't mean I'm not cleverer than you are » (141) ; et il finit par avouer ses meurtres en série (134, etc.) après que la scène du meurtre de Sarah a été rejouée sur scène : « I've made a terrible mistake. [...] She doesn't fit into the sky » (145). Il exécutait des jeunes femmes dépravées et sans emploi qui avaient avorté ; il s'était inventé un univers céleste, « Constellation of the Vain Queen » (173), où il croyait expédier ses victimes. L'aveu de culpabilité d'Alfred Chalmers — « I know I killed [Sarah]. I killed them all, of course I did that, but you didn't catch me » (171) — n'est pas dénué d'une manifestation d'orgueil (hubris) : il joue la désinvolture de celui qui croit avoir gagné la partie.

L'antagoniste principal est secondé par sa petite-fille, Judith, qui fait office d'agent extérieur caché sous les traits d'une infirmière de l'hôpital psychiatrique où Alfred est interné. C'est elle qui, armée d'un pistolet, blesse Isobel puis la tue contre l'ordre de son grand-père.

Entre protagoniste et antagoniste se place, comme un enjeu, Alexandra, la fille unique d'Isobel. Elle tient le rôle d'un lien secondaire entre la police et l'assassin. En s'adressant à Alfred Chalmers, « And I'm a flaky student making a documentary. If we get this right, it could open everything right up. I won't let you down. You're not going to dump me, are you? » (96), elle expose un lien trouble puisqu'il rapproche dangereusement l'apprentie documentariste et la fille en quête de son père.

La relation mère – fille pourrait être positive quand Isobel dit : « I want to retire and go on supporting Alexandra, I thought I might write a book » (14) et sa fille déclare : « I'm always safe. My mother's chief of police! » (34). Mais cette relation devient un double jeu de trahison qui mène à la tragédie. La déclaration finale d'Alexandra, « I love her » (178), est une révélation tardive qui transforme le doute en certitude et vise à donner une note de pathos durable à la pièce au moment où le rideau tombe. La quête secondaire conduite par Alexandra est un nœud de l'intrigue : sa recherche sur la vérité de l'identité de son géniteur se heurte au refus obstiné de sa mère, ce qui crée un drame égal à celui auquel l'héroïne est confrontée. En effet, en rébellion contre sa mère, elle contacte Chalmers, pour réaliser le documentaire. Manipulée par l'assassin, « I'm not interested in not being trusted. You say you want me to trust you, but you're not sure about giving me your address? », elle commet une faute grave, « ALEXANDRA: It's 121 Polwarth Gardens EH11 1LQ. (*Beat. A little panicked*) Hello, are you still there, Alfred? » (97), car elle vient de trahir sa mère en donnant son adresse, et s'en aperçoit trop tard. Sans le savoir, elle déclenche l'enchaînement de faits qui causent la mort de sa mère. Le rôle d'Alexandra, comparable à celui de Judas, est celui d'un agent de tension dramatique.

Le dernier personnage présent sur scène est virtuel ; il appartient au niveau fantastique puisqu'il s'agit du fantôme de Sarah McElhen-

ney, la quatrième victime de Chalmers. Isobel dans un monologue s'adresse à elle : « You weren't really unemployed, were you, Sarah. You were a student [...] » (129). C'est un personnage dont la fonctionnalité est de créer le trouble par la fusion du passé et du présent. Sarah est un double potentiel d'Alexandra car elles ont le même âge, elles sont étudiantes, elles vivent dans le même logement. Le rôle de Sarah, qui relève du fantastique par la réanimation d'une morte, est de créer le trouble dans l'esprit du spectateur.

La faille de l'héroïne est l'obsession du doute qui la pousse à vouloir écrire un livre sur le cas de la condamnation d'Alfred Chalmers : « [...] I am so uncomfortable with his conviction [...] » (16). En fait, la condamnation était juste et Chalmers fait des aveux complets en fin de récit. L'héroïne révèle son projet au prisonnier qui est prompt à exploiter ce qui lui paraît être sa faiblesse :

ISOBEL — You're here because I'm interested in the truth. Are you interested in the truth?

CHALMERS — Depends on whose it is. [...]

CHALMERS — What's on the tip of your tongue, Isobel? Something desperate to get out but you won't let it. [...]

ISOBEL — Does it matter, if it's about truth?

CHALMERS — Whose truth? You can't invent the truth.

ISOBEL — I don't want to invent the truth.

CHALMERS — But you sound like you've lost yours. (70-71)

La faiblesse d'Isobel est dans son honnêteté, voire son humanité, mise en relief par le jeu de mot sur « conviction », c'est-à-dire la condamnation et la conviction mensongère de Chalmers.

Le jeu d'affrontement entre Eros et Thanatos est une composante nécessaire du récit policier moderne et il n'était pas absent du théâtre élisabéthain, comme dans *Le roi Lear* ou les tragédies domestiques. Contrairement à l'amour, la sexualité, et *a fortiori* l'hypersexualité, est un masque, une forme d'auto-illusion menant à la trahison, élément du tragique. Si la liaison entre Isobel et le père de sa fille demeure un sujet tabou, celle qu'elle a eue avec Frank a renforcé leurs liens d'amitié et de soutien. Mais Alexandra semble souffrir d'addiction au sexe

qui provoque le rire : « Women now enjoy sex; it's not like when you were young » (124) ; et la protestation d'Alexandra, « Well, I'm trying to have sex » (145) devient un cas de contrepoint burlesque. Cependant, la sexualité exacerbée d'Alexandra sert avant tout à promouvoir l'intrigue secondaire qui est la compétition entre une jeune femme qui sort de l'adolescence et sa mère : non seulement Alexandra recherche son père, elle est en quête de sa vérité (« Are you my fucking father, Frank? » (125), mais encore elle est malgré elle le double de Sarah, le cadavre découvert sous le plancher⁶. Elle se sent trahie par le silence de sa mère qui va causer la perte de l'héroïne. Isobel a compris le piège de Chalmers qu'a contribué à créer sa fille : Isobel met en garde Alexandra (« Stay way from him, Alexandra. ») qui n'obéit pas (« Oh please, my darling daughter. Oh please, Alexandra. »), mais elle lui pardonne (« I'm really sorry and I love you. ») (147) et lui dit adieu. L'ironie de la dernière scène est que sa mort sera le résultat de la trahison de Judith qui tue Isobel contre l'ordre de son grand-père, alors que le plan était de la laisser vivre avec le souvenir de la mort de sa fille, Alexandra.

L'analyse des éléments de la composition de *Dark Road* montre que ce thriller est une pièce tragique avec de multiples références : l'intertextualité enrichit le texte tenu par une tension dramatique jusqu'à la fin, la mort de l'héroïne. L'ironie tragique, où la victime annonce sa mort, est exprimée de façon détournée : « FRANK : It'll be OK. Nothing bad is going to happen. — ALEXANDRA : You make it sound like something might » (92). La tension dramatique est de ce fait amplifiée en milieu de pièce.

La pièce policière présente deux crises, le doute d'Isobel et l'incertitude de filiation d'Alexandra, qui fusionnent pour en concentrer l'effet de catharsis sur le spectateur. Ainsi, tous les critères de la tragédie classique énoncés confèrent à *Dark Road* la qualité d'archétype de pièce policière écossaise.

Le jeu de l'illusion et du fantastique⁷

La certitude, antonyme du doute, est l'aboutissement de la recherche de la vérité menée concomitamment par Isobel et Alexandra.

Or la vérité pour les personnages n'est que la réalité d'une illusion : en effet, selon Michel Corvin, « Tout théâtre est théâtre d'illusions dans la mesure où il cherche à susciter un effet de réel tel que le spectateur prenne la fiction pour la mise en scène d'un monde possible et les personnages pour des reproductions humainement acceptables » (Corvin : 822). Ainsi, vérité et illusion forment un oxymore dramatique, car la dimension fantastique est intrinsèque à l'art du théâtre. La mimesis est une illusion : qu'un haut gradé de la police veuille faire le bilan de sa carrière avant de prendre sa retraite et produire une étude sur le cas d'un tueur en série est vraisemblable. Mais qu'elle doute du bien-fondé de l'inculpation de Chalmers vingt-cinq ans plus tard relève de la fable : le spectateur le sait bien car il fait la part de la réalité et de l'illusion pour trouver du plaisir dans la « dialectique de l'illusion et de la réalité » (Corvin : 823). D'ailleurs, Alfred Chalmers, dont le patronyme est homophone de « charmer(s) », a le talent d'un illusionniste : Alexandra le trouve séduisant et il sait influencer son interlocutrice.

Le dramaturge abolit l'écart temporel en faisant réécouter l'enregistrement des interrogatoires : ainsi le passé *est* le présent : « She finally takes a cassette recorder out of her bag [...] » (29). C'est un moyen de faire entrer le récit dans le fantastique ainsi que le souligne le discours de l'héroïne : « Lorraine. Rebecca. Lisa. Sarah. Dear God. There you are. Still there. Still gone » (29). Suivent quatre pages où chaque réplique est précédée de l'indication scénique « *voice from cassette* ». L'action du personnage est vraisemblable jusqu'à ce que le fantastique fasse une intrusion inattendue : l'Alfred de 1988 s'adresse à l'Isobel de 2013, « (*Shouting from cassette at live Isobel*) » (41). Faire se rejoindre des lignes de temps parallèles crée un effet de cauchemar qui exprime le doute. C'est pour cela que le dramaturge fait imprimer verticalement un texte en triple parallèle :

ISOBEL	CHALMERS	FRANK
I am trying to	Let me go!	Shut up, you
make sense of	Let me go!	Woman killer
this and I am	You got the	you scum.
facing up to the	wrong man you	

possibility... fucking idiots.
Let me go! (46)

Les multiples récriminations véhémentes de Chalmers véhiculent la force de l'illusion :

You sent me down on an illusion. You worked it up between you, loved-up group of liars. [...]

Even now you give me indigestion on a meal I ate twenty-five years ago.
[...]

A good cop doesn't create fictions, only facts. [...]

I've told you truths. Now excuse me whilst I enjoy the illusion of freedom
in my past. (142 – 143)

Lorsque Chalmers avoue ses meurtres, il brise la bulle du doute qu'il n'a jamais cessé de créer.

En dissipant l'illusion mensongère, Chalmers, et plus encore sa petite-fille Judith, exposent leur délire, à l'instar de Lear, car la folie est un état d'illusion. La justification de Judith confère à son discours un degré d'illusion : « That we squander the life that's given us. That we abuse it. Make it empty. And then there's nothing. He needed us to wake up, to look up » (169). Et Chalmers qui nie avec persistance ne doute jamais parce qu'il est dément, ce que révèle sa cruauté : « I'm not going to kill you, Isobel, not your body. I'm going to make you look at my final pattern and forever see your dead daughter and know that you did it » (174). Enfin, la réplique d'Isobel, « She's a psycho bitch, Frank, she's shot me in the leg » (176), compare la fausse réalité des personnages policiers à la fausse folie des assassins. Rankin joue sur l'infinité de registres d'illusion, du non-sens à la poésie, en prêtant ce discours à Chalmers : « All those useless girls, unemployed, killing their babies after playing the slut, walking the earth with no purpose. So I gave them a purpose. I made them little stars. In the constellation of the Vain Queen » (173).

L'absence renforce la dialectique de la vérité et de l'illusion : c'est le rôle de l'indice de vérité, disparu des archives. Il s'agit du fragment de tissu qui avait été prélevé sur la veste de l'accusé : soit elle appartient

à l'habit de la victime, soit elle provient du déguisement de Wolfman porté par Isobel, ce soir de Halloween 1988, et posé par inadvertance sur la veste de l'accusé⁸. Par ailleurs, le mutisme d'Isobel sur l'identité du géniteur d'Alexandra est un non-dit, synonyme d'absence d'indice de vérité. Paradoxalement, l'absence est un élément essentiel dans la construction du drame parce que c'est la cause du défi d'Alexandra de tourner un documentaire sur Chalmers : le refus de vérité de la mère génère la trahison de la fille.

La vérité, en revanche, peut jaillir de l'illusion comme l'a montré Shakespeare dans une mise en abyme du meurtre du père de Hamlet. Rankin en suggère une parodie, en faisant rejouer la scène du meurtre de Sarah :

There's a sound off, like a door opening and closing.

CHALMERS — Her. Sarah. She's come home.

ISOBEL — No.

Sarah McElhenney enters the room. Sees Chalmers, who lunges at her. It is a terrible murder, messy and violent.

CHALMERS — Why are you making me do this?

ISOBEL — I'm not making you do it. Stop!

CHALMERS — It's already done!

SARAH — Jesus Christ, why did you let him do this?

ISOBEL — We tried to catch him! I'm sorry! (143-144)

Après cette reconstitution fantasmée, Chalmers se trahit et avoue son crime. Mais la présence d'Alexandra donne lieu à une scène surréaliste qui prolonge l'illusion de la mise en abyme. La scène se conclut par un monologue d'Isobel qui tente de récapituler les faits pour accéder à la vérité : « Facts. Facts, Isobel, facts. Four murders. Three unemployed women [...] » (148). Mais Isobel, au début de cette cinquième scène était entrée ivre, et son raisonnement ne peut aboutir dans cet état éthylique entre réalité et illusion : « I'm trying Sarah. I'm getting nearer. Stay with me. Oh dear God, I'm trying to see. I'm open to everything » (148). Entre faits et illusions, Isobel, qui croit entendre le rôle de Sarah agonisante, vit en même temps dans le présent et dans le passé.

Le Songe d'une nuit d'été de Shakespeare présente une pièce dans la pièce où le drame fantastique jouée par des artisans impliquant un animal sauvage allie l'humour au dévoiement. Il en est de même dans *Dark Road* où la symbolique du renard est un élément de scotticité : la pièce *Dark Road* est-elle un conte d'Halloween ? En effet, le récit est doublé d'une fable, car on perçoit l'intrusion du loup sous la forme d'un masque d'Halloween porté par Isobel (157) et surtout du renard : le masque est porté par Judith (45-fin) et c'est elle qui a déposé la vraie tête d'un renard qu'elle a décapité. Le grand guignolesque s'ajoute au fantastique, thriller oblige.

Le comportement de Judith/renard n'est pas toujours cohérent, comme le montre cet extrait de la scène 5, acte 2 :

Foxhead appears in room.

ALEXANDRA – Aren't you going to make a constellation with [Sarah's body]?

CHALMERS – She's only one. You can't make a constellation with only one star.

ALEXANDRA – That's true, Mum. Even I know that.

CHALMERS – You need two.

ISOBEL – I'm really sorry and I love you.

Foxhead runs up to Alexandra and places a knife at her throat, stays there panting for a while.

CHALMERS – This has nothing to do with me.

Chalmers exits, dragging Sarah's body off. As soon as he has gone, Foxhead suddenly disengages and runs off. (147)

Cette scène entre réalité et illusion traduit une hallucination, une forme de mise en abyme du folklore : ce combat entre le loup et le renard doit-il être pris comme une fable au sens littéraire⁹, une parabole au sens moral ou philosophique¹⁰, ou est-ce la fable au sens théâtral, la lutte du bien et du mal dont nul ne sort indemne ? Quoi qu'il en soit, elle invite à une approche herméneutique.

Les fabulistes utilisent le renard pour exprimer la ruse, la roublardise, c'est-à-dire l'illusion. En écossais le nom courant est « tod » qui signifie aussi la mort implicitement liée à Chalmers. Si Judith porte le masque du renard, le fourbe est Alfred : « *Suddenly a person in a fox-*

head mask attacks Isobel [...] Chalmers appears or enters in the shadows, half seen » (140). Les deux composent un personnage de fable alors qu'Isobel tente de récapituler : « Piece it together, Isobel! » La porte du fantastique est ouverte.

La « légende » du renard s'installe plus avant lorsque Isobel interroge son ami : « Frank, I keep getting a picture of, I don't know why, a fox's head. Does that mean anything to you? » (107). Fantasma ou souvenir, la vérité jaillira de la fable :

ISOBEL — And I keep seeing this... It's like a man in a fox's head, all bloody and terrible.

FRANK — This is something you imagined, yeah?

ISOBEL — You used to say my imagination and logic were friends when for most people they are enemies. (154)

De même, de la poésie peut naître la sagesse. Robert Burns détourne l'image traditionnelle du personnage du renard dans « On Glenriddell's Fox Breaking His Chain »¹¹ pour illustrer le thème de la liberté énoncé dans le premier vers : « Thou, Liberty, thou art my theme ; ». Le nom de Glenriddell, que Burns a emprunté au village de Glenrisdell de Kintyre, résonne comme « la vallée de l'énigme » (« riddell » étant homophone de « riddle »). Mais la libération du renard que Glenriddell a enchaîné se fait par le savoir. Isobel veut savoir ; le spectateur aussi : sommes-nous tous des renards enchaînés ?

L'identité du narrateur du poème de Burns est affaire de débat : de l'érudit à la nation écossaise. Dans l'éventualité d'une superposition du poème sur la pièce, le narrateur serait Isobel McArthur ou Alfred Chalmers, voire les deux : Isobel veut se libérer du doute, Alfred de la prison. Le loup Isobel a mis en prison (« enslave », v. 20) Alfred le renard. Mais l'interprétation peut s'inverser : dans sa prison, Alfred s'est informé (« Suck'd in a mighty stock of knowledge, » v. 59) et il peut tirer profit de son savoir pour déstabiliser Isobel.

La morale de la fable de Burns — « Since we to scoundrels owe our freedom. » (v. 66) signifiant que les Écossais doivent beaucoup aux Covenantaires, malgré tout — est différente de celle qu'offrent Rankin et Thomson : le spectateur peut admirer l'art de la manipulation de

Chalmers et se demander si le renard est sage ou fourbe. De surcroît, l'auteur de romans policiers doit beaucoup à l'entremise de Satan qui conduit les hommes à s'entretuer et Rankin détourne aussi l'allusion sur « riddle » en faisant dire à Alexandra : « What treacheries riddle history with that motif » (118). Les dramaturges aussi tirent bénéfice de fables traditionnelles et de ballades pour créer leurs propres contes : « How fortune wrought us good from evil; » (v. 63). Dans *Dark Road*, le loup et le renard s'entredétruisent par effet d'ironie du sort, car chacun a été trahi par celle qui lui était le plus proche.

L'art dramatique et la finalité de la pièce policière favorisent l'ironie :

FERGUS — It was a Wolfman [...] The night we arrested him. It was Halloween, remember. The station had a party. And we all had masks on. [...]

ISOBEL — Who put the fucking mask on Chalmers' jacket?

FERGUS — You put the mask on the mannequin. The mannequin had Chalmers' jacket on it. [...] And you were the Wolfman. (157-158)

La lutte archétypale du loup et du renard se termine ici par la vengeance contrariée du renard et la mort inopinée du loup. La fin offre une catharsis digne des textes dits « tartan noir » ; les noirs desseins ne sont contrebalancés que par du comique noir, comme on le ressent lorsque Judith raconte comment elle a tué un renard et l'a conservé dans son frigo pour en prélever la tête (169).

***Dark Road*, une pièce écossaise polyréférentielle**

Dans l'introduction de la pièce, Ian Rankin précise : « Mark and I had started out wanting to put a contemporary cop drama on stage, one set in the Edinburgh of the here and now [...] »¹² (ix). C'est une invitation à évaluer le degré de scotticité de la pièce.

L'étude onomastique des textes littéraires écossais est toujours riche d'enseignements : Fergus McLintock, l'ancien directeur de la police qui a fait condamner Chalmers, a pris sa retraite mais il rend visite à ses ex-collègues : le patronyme McLintock est complexe car il renvoie au héros éponyme du western éponyme (1963) inspiré de *La Mégère*

apprivoisée ; et l'étymologie celtique (Mac Gille Fhionntag) renvoie à Fingal (Fine Gall, le territoire des étrangers) en Irlande. Un policier, du nom de Drew (diminutif du saint patron de l'Écosse, Andrew), dit de lui qu'il est une légende (20) : faut-il relier 'McLintock' à 'Fine (ou 'Fianna') Gael', signifiant 'la tribu des Gaëls', à Isobel, qui lui a succédé sur le même poste, a reçu le patronyme de McArthur en référence probable à la colline qui domine Édimbourg, *Arthur's Seat*, qui renvoie à un écho de la légende du roi Arthur. Avec le commissaire divisionnaire Frank Bowman, personnage franc comme un archer (gallois) du roi, on ne peut que soupçonner les auteurs de chercher à suggérer l'association de l'héroïne à une mythologie englobant l'Écosse.

Chalmers est-il le champion de l'existentialisme niant la toute-puissance de la religion presbytérienne ? Alfred Chalmers ne vit que dans l'instant mais il sait reprocher à Isobel les vingt-cinq dernières années passées en prison. Après qu'il a clairement avoué les quatre meurtres, s'il prétend vouloir donner un sens à ses actes c'est pour mieux justifier le cinquième, celui d'Alexandra qu'il retient prisonnière : « Tonight I can finish my project. I can make a pattern » (174). La justification délirante qu'il donne pour les quatre premiers meurtres est celle que donnerait un soi-disant élu d'une chapelle fondamentaliste qui se croit chargé de la mission d'exterminer des jeunes femmes perdues : « All those useless girls, unemployed, killing their babies after playing the slut, walking the earth with no purpose. So I gave them a purpose. I made them little stars. In the constellation of the Vain Queen » (173).

Le personnage d'Alfred Chalmers a reçu ce patronyme en hommage à Thomas Chalmers (1780 – 1847), homme de science et prédicateur évangéliste qui a publié des sermons (1817) sur la relation entre les découvertes en astronomie et la Révélation selon les chrétiens. Le rapport entre Alfred Chalmers et Thomas Chalmers est établi dans la réplique d'Isobel : « The constellation of Cassiopeia : the Vain Queen » (37). La religion de Chalmers, en l'occurrence le Calvinisme, est-elle un rêve, une illusion ? Si le prénom de Judith, la petite-fille d'Alfred et son bras armé, est une référence biblique, Isobel est-elle un avatar d'Holopherne ? Mais ironie oblige, en tuant Isobel, Judith pulvérise

le plan de son grand-père. De surcroît, son dernier acte, est agrémenté d'un aveu de nihilisme : « I've nowhere to run to. There's nothing » (177).

Enfin, en exploitant le travail de fin d'année d'Alexandra, Chalmers, le manipulateur démoniaque démasqué, devient un avatar du Gil-Martin des *Confessions d'un pécheur justifié* de James Hogg (1824). Faut-il y voir une parodie du premier détective (féminin, comme Isobel)¹³ de la littérature écossaise ? Chalmers sous les traits du Robert Wringhim des *Confessions* serait l'élus qui se croit indestructible, l'élus qui se pense supérieur en intelligence — « Just because this is your projection doesn't mean I'm still not cleverer than you are » (141). — et finit piteusement.

La faille de la protagoniste met Isobel en position de vulnérabilité face à l'assassin qui a le pouvoir de répondre aux questions ou de repartir en cellule :

CHALMERS — Tell me if you have a doubt. About me. [...]

ISOBEL — There's lots of doubts around the case, we—

CHALMERS — Do you have a doubt or not? [...]

ISOBEL — I gave evidence at the trial. They were facts, it's not about—

CHALMERS — Is it there? Is there any doubt? Is there? Going, going, g—

ISOBEL — Yes.

CHALMERS — Thank you, Isobel. (*To JUDITH*) My room now please. My room now. (75-76)

Ce dialogue met le récit en tension. Il accentue le rôle du doute dans le drame : Isobel, est hantée par le doute causé par un souvenir flou du bien fondé de l'arrestation d'un tueur en série, Chalmers, vingt-cinq ans plus tôt. Alexandra reformule le questionnement d'Isobel : « Well, if he's not, then who's the monster? » (81). Frank ne cesse de mettre Isobel en garde contre le danger de ce doute envahissant : « And you'd trust Chalmers with something so precious as the truth? » (87). Et plus tard il relie son discours au thème de la pièce énoncé dans le titre :

Isobel, the mistake can easily be made where the fear of your future slips doubts into what's been, about how you got to now. You need to concen-

trate on what's next for you. The past is an immovable object; it's dark and heavy, and the longer you look into the darkness, the more your eyes seem to see things that aren't there. (106)

Cette peur du futur qui instille le doute chez Isobel condense celle des Écossais pris dans le processus d'indépendance de leur nation.

Le doute est associé à la culpabilité : dans une tirade qui devient un morceau de bravoure, Chalmers parvient à déstabiliser Isobel : « I know about guilt, Isobel. I've always felt guilty [...] guilty that I was me. That I was who I was [...] » (134). Et il prend l'ascendant sur elle : « You don't have the answer because you've not done the thinking, so you need to go now and think » (136). L'action de cette pièce policière est moins celle de la recherche de la vérité qu'une lutte entre les personnages sur le doute.

La foi est l'antonyme du doute selon John Knox (1513-1572) dans sa conversion de la nation aux principes du calvinisme :

Ye shall believe God, that plainly speaketh in His Word; [...] The Word of God is plain in itself. If there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, which is never contrarious to Himself, explaineth the same more clearly in other places; so that there can remain no doubt, but unto such as obstinately will remain ignorant.¹⁴

Pour les presbytériens, le doute est une attitude à bannir résolument de l'Écosse. Dans cette tragédie du doute, l'obsession de la vérité chez l'héroïne traduit la hantise knoxienne de la corruption : Isobel doute, à tort, de la vérité de la culpabilité de Chalmers tandis que ce tueur en série est habité de la hantise des femmes corrompues — celles qui forniquent et commettent des infanticides par commodité. L'ombre déformée de John Knox — qui soupçonnait Marie Stuart de fornication et d'assassinat sur son mari Darnley¹⁵ — plane sur Chalmers. Mais on peut entrevoir dans cette tragédie la dramatisation de l'anxiété de la société écossaise post-dévolutionnaire.

La déclaration d'Isobel sur les faits — « We only got him on the fourth [victim] [...] we didn't prove the first three » (17) — indique que la preuve de la culpabilité de Chalmers quant au meurtre des trois premières victimes n'a pas été suffisamment établie. La certitude et la

conviction du détective n'étant pas des preuves, l'accusé aurait dû bénéficier du verdict de culpabilité non prouvée¹⁶ inscrit dans le droit écossais¹⁷. Quant à la culpabilité pour le quatrième meurtre, la preuve basée sur l'indice de la fibre textile est faible :

FRANK – That fibre might not have come from the Wolfman mask. It might have been Sarah's coat. [...]

ISOBEL – The only real evidence was a lie.

FRANK – Was *maybe* a lie. (159)

Frank clôt la discussion sur le doute, mais le processus de la mort purificatrice de l'héroïne est enclenché : « Whatever crisis is storming your sense of right and wrong, you need to get over it fast, or have you forgotten how much of a monster he is? You can't *change* that. You can't reinvent that » (160). Le thème du doute est un élément majeur de la scotticité de cette tragédie.

Autour d'Alexandra se tissent la notion de double dans le tandem Sarah/Alexandra et celle de l'illusion, le mensonge ou le non-dit. Chalmers les associe de manière explicite : « [...] they lived in the same house, their lives framed by the same walls, looked out the same windows and saw the same things ; they took the same bus, they went to the same university » (174). Le double tragique devient-il trio ? En effet, Judith est une jeune femme sans avenir qui finira sa vie en prison et Alexandra devra vivre avec la mort de sa mère dont elle est grandement responsable. Sarah est morte : son esprit va-t-il hanter sa maison ? De plus, la rivalité crée un double. Alexandra et Isobel partagent le même sujet d'étude, Alfred Chalmers, avec des finalités divergentes : Isobel veut écrire un livre pour trouver la preuve de la culpabilité justifiant l'arrestation de Chalmers à laquelle elle a participé sous le commandement de Fergus ; et Alexandra veut réaliser un documentaire qui sera son examen de fin d'étude. Cependant, ses motivations profondes seront l'objet de discussions.

La parodie est une forme de double : le rapport létal du Dr Jekyll et de Mr Hyde se retrouve dans celui qui unit Isobel et Alfred, car chacun a besoin de l'autre pour exister. Conformément au modèle¹⁸, Iso-

bel-Jekyll est tuée par la petite-fille de son opposant, et Chalmers-Hyde conclut la pièce en disant : « It's dark » (178).

La culture écossaise, qui transparaît nettement dans les références littéraires et religieuses, apparaît en toile de fond de cette lutte entre l'honnêteté d'Isobel et la fourberie d'Alfred. L'épigraphie inscrite sur la première de couverture, « He forced us to think like him... like a serial killer », suggère au lecteur, qui s'apprête à acheter le livre, qu'un double discours est vraisemblable. Qui porte le masque de l'exemplaire Isobel ? Qui porte le masque du cruel menteur Alfred ? Chaque lecteur-spectateur est libre de son interprétation sociale, historique, politique... Mais l'antagonisme séculaire entre l'Angleterre et l'Écosse n'est jamais totalement absent de l'expression théâtrale en Écosse.

Le théâtre moderne est né de la dramatisation des textes et des offices religieux tout au long du Moyen Âge : pendant des générations, en Écosse, le vendredi saint on a célébré des offices appelés *Tenebrae* pendant lesquels l'assemblée se trouvait plongée dans la pénombre. L'objectif était de faire ressentir le frisson de la trahison, de l'abandon, de l'angoisse, de la mort. À l'instar de la passion de Jésus, Isobel vit ces heures douloureuses de doute et de trahison parce qu'elle doit affronter le grand négateur, sous les traits de Chalmers.

Rankin et Thomson font dire à Alexandra à propos de son projet de documentaire : « so we create something where truth lives behind the eyes of facts » (164), mais la création n'est-elle pas de la fiction ? Est-ce à dire que la vérité est dans la fable du renard où deux personnages antagonistes distillent et amplifient le doute ? Pareil schéma est ouvert à l'interprétation : se pourrait-il que ces antagonistes représentent une nation, par exemple qu'Isobel serait la championne de l'Écosse qui doute de son indépendance ?

Dark Road est un texte de théâtre dramatique (Pavis : 102) qui ouvre une voie dans un genre nouveau en Écosse à un âge où la nation traverse une période exceptionnelle, ou de crise politique, ou de doute sur l'avenir. Rankin nourrit le texte de références à Shakespeare mais aussi le sature de scotticité jusqu'à brasser la mythologie celtique avec

les luttes politiques pour livrer une tragédie archétype. *Dark Road* est un métissage de tragédie classique et de « tartan noir » où l'humour noir et le réalisme se mélangent à la fable pour produire un modèle à suivre et à contester.

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¹ Ian Rankin and Mark Thomson, *Dark Road*. Toutes les citations de l'œuvre seront simplement suivies du numéro de page.

² Ian Brown ne mentionne pas de pièce policière dans son *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, 2011.

³ Cette phrase anodine en apparence qui rapproche trois temps ('present perfect', 'present', 'preterit') est une indication de la dimension fantastique du récit. Voir plus loin.

⁴ M'inspirant de l'essai de Peter Barry, *Literature in contexts*, je concentre mon étude sur des points ciblés.

⁵ « *Dark Road* is less a whodunit than a did-he-really-do-it? ». Mark Fisher. 29 septembre 2013. <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/sep/29/dark-road-review>> (consulté le 27 octobre 2017).

⁶ Isobel, jeune fonctionnaire de police au moment de l'arrestation de Chalmers, a racheté pour une bouchée de pain la maison où a eu lieu le dernier meurtre, celui de Sarah.

⁷ Le fantastique est un élément typique du théâtre écossais, comme dans *The Strange Undoing of Prudentia Hart* (2011) de David Greig.

⁸ La dénonciation des méfaits de l'alcool même dans les commissariats de police est un thème récurrent dans le genre « tartan noir » ; c'est un indice de corruption.

⁹ Avec, en guise de morale, le dernier vers de « Glenriddell's Fox Breaking his Chain » : « we to scoundrels owe our freedom ».

¹⁰ Dans *Scottish Folktales and Legends*, la légende « The Fox and the Wolf » autour de l'affaire du tonnelet de beurre, expose la fourberie du renard et la vengeance fatale du loup par l'entremise du cheval. Dans une forme parodique, *Dark Road* pourrait s'intituler « Isobel, Alfred et les jeunes filles dévergondées. »

¹¹ « On Glenriddell's Fox Breaking His Chain » (1791). <<http://www.robertburns.org/works/325.shtml>> (consulté le 18 octobre 2017).

¹² *Dark Road* est une pièce écrite en anglais standard d'Écosse (SSE) et le texte est entièrement accessible à un lecteur / auditeur anglais : les personnages appartiennent à la bourgeoisie et se doivent de s'exprimer dans la langue dite de prestige, et non pas en écossais vernaculaire, en l'occurrence le dialecte d'Édimbourg. Ce point linguistique peut s'interpréter comme un moyen de rehausser le degré de tragédie noble et moderne.

¹³ Arabella Colvert enquête et découvre que Robert Wringhim est le meurtrier de George, son frère ; elle ne pouvait pas savoir que Gil-Martin avait pris les traits de Robert pour ce crime.

¹⁴ Knox, John. *History of the Reformation in Scotland*. Edited by William Croft Dickinson, New York, Philosophical Library, 1950. Accessible à : <<http://www.reformation.org/john-knox-interview.html>> (non paginé, consulté le 3 septembre 2017).

¹⁵ Alison Weir, *Mary Queen of Scots and the Murder of Lord Darnley*, Londres, Pimlico, 2003.

¹⁶ Voir thème et références dans mon article : « L'archétypalisation du verdict de culpabilité non prouvée : le cas de Madeleine Smith. », dans *Chroniques judiciaires et fictionnalisation du procès*, Paris, Mare & Martin, 2017, p 97-112.

¹⁷ Voir l'introduction de *Not Proven* de J.G. Wilson, p. 7-14.

¹⁸ « As I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end » est la dernière phrase du récit de Stevenson.

(Re)writing, Role Play and Revelation in Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*

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The Singing Detective is a six-part, 1986 BBC television serial written by the dramatist Dennis Potter. It tells the story of Philip Marlow (Michael Gambon), a failed writer of pulp detective stories confined to a hospital bed suffering from an acute form of psoriasis. Tormented by feverish hallucinations, he attempts to reconstruct mentally the plot of one of his novels, "The Singing Detective," only to find the story become entangled and conflated with traumatic childhood memories, notably his mother's extramarital affair and eventual suicide. Philip's memories are refracted through the purportedly low-brow and antithetical popular genres of his 1940s childhood: the *film noir* and the musical. The former sees the hero playing the role of a hardboiled sleuth – indeed, his name references Philip Marlowe of Raymond Chandler's crime novels. The latter is manifest in Philip's hallucinations, as characters spontaneously break into choreographed song and dance routines.

The question we will ask is: to what extent is *The Singing Detective* a radical rewriting of the detective genre? While the serial seems to parody and deconstruct the tropes of the genre, does it ultimately reject or affirm them? In particular, we will see how Potter alludes to the *whodunit's* synergy with psychoanalysis, weaving a parallel identified by Freud himself into the series' narrative. As sessions with the hospital psychiatrist enable Philip to unravel the mysteries of his childhood traumas, restaged as a crime in his novel and nightmares, we might ask who the real detective of the story is, the hero or his therapist? It is, after all, the latter who brings about a full recognition and revelation of Philip's trauma, the primal scene of his mother's infidelity and death.

And if this is the case, does the serial not finally uphold the core values of the *whodunit*, that patient enquiry will result in revelation?

Drama and the television play

Before examining how *The Singing Detective* sought to engage with the tropes of the detective story, it is important to understand how its formal experiments also challenged the television conventions of the day. Although Dennis Potter was also a novelist, screenwriter and playwright, he enjoyed an almost unparalleled status as an *auteur* of British television drama in the 60s and 70s. Following John Osborne's era-defining play *Look Back in Anger* in 1956, a more democratic, class-conscious theatre had emerged in Britain. This dominant "aesthetic and cultural mix which is associated with [...] gritty Northern working-class realism" (Caughie: 95) also characterized much British television drama. Although his work is not explicitly, or *radically*, political, Dennis Potter, like many of his generation of TV writers, were from "Oxford and Cambridge: scholarship boys [...] who had been uprooted from their class and educated alongside the elite," and who often "took as their theme the dislocations of class mobility" (Caughie: 85). A beneficiary of the grammar school system, Dennis Potter would often return to the rural Gloucestershire of his childhood in the 1930s and 40s as a subject matter for his work. Despite this, Potter largely eschewed the kitchen sink aesthetic, framing his thematic preoccupations with non-naturalistic devices.

The popular format for writers of TV drama in the 60s to the early 70s was the *television play*, notably the BBC's *The Wednesday Play* (1964–70) and *Play for Today* (1970–84) and ITV's *Armchair Theatre* (1956–74). Stand-alone dramas often focused on contemporary social issues, these were literally plays inasmuch as one scene could be filmed for up to twenty minutes on a single set, the focal point being the acting and psychological realism. Unlike in cinema and due to the BBC's "theatrical tradition," it was the television writer rather than the director that was "seen as the primary author" (Porter 1984: 10). This characteristic of British television drama from the 60s to early 80s "placed

its writers in a favoured position” (Millington: 120), and *auteurs* such as Dennis Potter gained fame and enormous creative freedom. They also enjoyed a relationship with viewers unimaginable today, with the BBC and ITV long enjoying a broadcasting duopoly. As John Caughie explains, the government-commissioned Pilkington Report of 1962 also gave those working in the medium license “to ‘push the boat out’ and take audiences where they had not been before,” which “served to enshrine in television drama notions associated with [...] an art which is provocative and moves us on, but which is *nevertheless* situated within a popular medium for a mass audience” (Caughie: 128). Thus, an avowedly avant-garde serial such as *The Singing Detective* boasted “an audience of about eight million people in Britain for its first episode (around one in seven of the total population), and six million people were still watching the last episode six weeks later” (Caughie: 20).

The Singing Detective is also significant as in many ways it heralds the end of the television play. During the 80s a “flurry of new recording and editing technology” saw the multi-camera studio production largely abandoned in favour of a single-camera operation, the result of which being that television writers “were able to think in terms of cinema” (Rose: xv-xvi). The serialization of British drama also enabled producers to build audiences around a story arc in a way that was impossible with the stand-alone play. Broadcast in 1986, *The Singing Detective* also came in the final years of the BBC-ITV duopoly, already threatened by the arrival of Channel 4 in 1982, as the competition was opened to ever-greater numbers of broadcasters.

Reading, writing, metafiction and metatheatre

The Singing Detective’s challenge to naturalism lies foremost in the constant play of temporal levels and shifts between fantasy, memory and reality, making it initially disorientating. The story that emerges from Marlow’s past, and its connection to both his novel and the present, thus requires attentive detective work from the viewer. His nightmares and novelistic fantasies centre around a convoluted plot involving espionage, Russian prostitutes and Nazi scientists. Marlow plays

the role of a hardboiled sleuth as naked female bodies are fished out of the Thames, each time bearing a new face: that of Philip's mother, his wife, or characters from his novel. Scenes return repeatedly to the train compartment Philip shared with his mother *en route* to London after the breakdown of his parents' marriage; to his beloved treetops in the Forest of Dean; or to the Underground platform where his mother's pleas for him to "come back" are subsumed by the menacing cacophony of an incoming train. In the third episode, we hear Philip – the boy, not the adult – murmur in voice-over: "Round and bloody round. The same bits all the time. [...] Summat's bloody wrong!" (episode 3, 15 min. 40 sec.).¹ The confusion is exacerbated by similarly-named characters who appear at different temporal levels of the narrative and by the use of the same actor to play several roles. Gradually, however, "a new internal logic dictates the way that the obsessive images come and go" (Hunningher: 236–37), namely the unravelling of Marlow's neurosis.

Also vital to the *The Singing Detective's* discourse is the theme of reading and writing, a trope perhaps more commonly associated with postmodernist literature and particularly metafictional novels which "draw attention to the process of the construction of the *fictive* 'world' through *writing*" (Waugh: 102, italics in original). As a patient in a neighbouring hospital bed coincidentally reads the eponymous novel, Marlow himself seems to be rewriting it, vocalizing internally what could be a film treatment, punctuation marks and stage directions included. Meanwhile the hospital psychiatrist Dr Gibbon conducts his own detective work on his patient's *case* by reading and interpreting the titular novel for *clues* to Marlow's condition. Besides metafiction, the serial's focus on (re)writing also betrays the influence of theatre and cinema, notably the French *nouvelle vague*:

The directors of the French new wave were especially fond of [...] scriptural metaphor, scarcely surprising given that many of them began as writer-critics who saw writing articles as expressive *écriture*. Indeed, the New Wave itself formed part of a continuum of experimentation which included the *nouveau roman*, absurdist theater and other experiments in music and the arts. The writing metaphor, in any case, facilitated a displacement of inter-

est from realism to textuality, from the situation of the characters depicted to the act of writing itself. (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis: 109)

While we will return to *The Singing Detective*'s debt to experimental theatre and cinema, the focus on narration recalls a particular characteristic of the detective story remarked upon by critics of metafictional rewritings of the genre. This is that the fictional sleuth's investigation "mirrors" that of the reader who must "piece together the disparate signs that might eventually solve the mystery" (Nealon: 117). The serial explicitly and self-reflexively recognizes this paradigm. As one of the "mysterious men" that pursue the eponymous detective in Marlow's imagination puts it: "it's a clue. Everything – all things mean something. All things *point*" (episode 6, 43 min. 18 sec.). This echoes what many critics have identified as a further particularity of the detective story: "Everything that is described or merely mentioned is significant because it has the status of a potential clue. [...] nothing in a detective story is insignificant because at worst it will mislead" (Porter 1981: 43). In *The Singing Detective*, Marlow goes as far as denouncing this trope, exclaiming at one point: "All solutions, and no clues. [...] That's the bloody Novel – He said, she said, descriptions of the sky – I'd rather it was the other way around. All clues. No solutions. That's the way things are" (episode 4, 23 min. 04 sec.). With this statement Marlow recalls similar arguments made by hardboiled author Raymond Chandler, who eviscerated the golden age detective novel of Agatha Christie in his polemic essay "The Simple Art of Murder": "The murder novel has also a depressing way of [...] solving its own problems and answering its own questions. There is nothing left to discuss" (Chandler: 92).

No-one could say that *The Singing Detective* leaves nothing left to discuss but there is still a feeling that the viewer finally has all the elements he/she needs to make sense of the mystery. Indeed, we are told as much in another self-reflexive statement, this time from the hospital registrar in a failed attempt to win Marlow's confidence: "It must be hellishly ticklish to work out a plot in a detective story, I should think. I suppose you have to scatter clues all over the place" (episode 1, 55 min. 08 sec.). This is true of the serial as a whole, each allu-

sion and lip-synched song adding further clues to the source of Marlow's anguish. As Hunningher observes: "the Registrar is right. Potter does scatter clues all over the place. There are clues about sex, family, treachery, guilt, illness, creativity, death, and they point to [...] the fundamental psychological significance of Marlow as a whole character" (Hunningher: 238).

A further particularity of the classic detective story is the stark separation of story and narrative. According to Tzvetan Todorov, the detective story expresses this "duality" in terms of the original crime and the investigation, the first of which is "absent" but must be recovered by the detective, whose temporal and spatial reconstructions are narrative in nature (Todorov: 57–58)². *The Singing Detective* plays with this notion of the absent story of the crime in various ways. Firstly, the primacy of plot in the genre is alluded to by Philip: "The worst thing about a detective story is the plot. The best thing too. No, what am I talking about? It's the *only* thing" (episode 4, 21 min. 48 sec.). One such plot sees Marlow imagine that his wife, Nicola, is scheming to steal the screenplay of his eponymous story and sell it to a Hollywood studio. This narrative thread is a classic trope of postmodernist rewritings of the genre, sometimes referred to as "metaphysical detective stories" (Merivale and Sweeney: 8), which often subvert the absent story of the crime through the theme of missing texts. Many take inspiration from Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter", in which the prototype fictional detective Auguste Dupin is tasked with recovering stolen royal correspondence, the sensitive contents of which the reader never learns. The reference is made overt in the serial when Nicola's co-conspirator alludes to "his bloody script that we've purloined!" (episode 4, 38 min. 36 sec.).

The recovery of the hidden story through the organizing work of narrative is also foregrounded in the series through the theme of authorship. When his wife asks him to consider returning to writing work, he replies: "I *have* been working [...]. I've been turning [the novel] into something else" (episode 4, 17 min. 08 sec.). Marlow's struggle for authorial control is also allegorized by his detective fantasies. After all, fictional sleuths traditionally claim mastery over the past

by finally revealing the *what*, *where*, *when* and *why* of the mystery. It is also a familiar trope of some metafictional novels that revolve around “characters who manipulate others explicitly as though they were playwrights or theatrical directors,” a process which leads to “obsessive and uncontrolled practices of self-fictionalization” (Waugh: 118–19). This is certainly the case for Philip in the serial, as he juggles a series of narratives and finds himself at times with a godlike, or indeed devilish power over his characters. After Nicola’s questions about his screenplay arouse his suspicions, Marlow begins to whisper to himself the lines of a dialogue, in which each punctuation mark is vocalized: “No luck full stop No good full stop Talk about difficult exclamation mark I had to give it up because he was getting very suspicious full stop” (episode 4, 25 min. 46 sec.). When Nicola is then shown meeting Mark Finney, her apparent lover and co-conspirator, she repeats the dialogue, and the scene is revealed as a fantasy authored directly by Marlow from his bed.

Mark Finney later seems to become conscious of his fictional status, an awareness that is manifested as a feeling of entrapment. That this is expressed as paranoia at being *observed* is no coincidence, given the detective premise: “I tell you, it gives me the creeps. I mean, I half expect [Marlow] to be out there somewhere, looking at me. [...] He seems to know too much. He’s got hold of too many details” (episode 4, 34 min. 32 sec.). A similar realization dawns on the two absurd “mysterious men” stalking the hero in Marlow’s mental reconstruction of his novel. They gradually realize they are superfluous to the plot, complaining finally that their “roles are unclear,” and that they can’t return home because “that’s off the page” (episode 6, 1 hr. 03 min.). Here we can not only trace literary devices such as metafiction but also the influence absurdist theatre from the likes of Tom Stoppard. As Patricia Waugh argued:

The characters in Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* (1957) know the script to be a machine, an alternative to destiny, as do Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* [...]. The device is an obvious theatrical strategy because of the *prima facie* existence of the script in drama. In fiction, characters normally know of their condition through knowledge of their relationship

to an author. [Dennis] Potter's novel *Hide and Seek* (1973), for example, begins with its oversexed 'hero', Daniel, trying to explain how his life has been imposed upon by a morally sick author who has imprisoned him in 'This Dirty Book'. (Waugh 1984: 7)

Ironically Waugh does not mention that Potter was first and foremost a *dramatist* and only wrote four novels. The fact that *Hide and Seek* contains a number of ideas that are more fully developed in *The Singing Detective* reinforces the view that Potter was best suited to television drama and that his attacks on naturalism were, as Waugh identifies, *theatrical* strategies. As Steve Vineberg argues, Potter's work "lives on that edge between realism and anti-realism, theatrical illusion and blatant theatricality" (Vineberg: 29).

The detective story, art and popular culture

Despite the allusions to experimental theatre, cinema and literature, the serial's engagement with more popular forms, from the detective story itself to the Hollywood musical, is vital to its discourse. *The Singing Detective* cannot, however, be said to revel in the ubiquity of popular culture. Gibbon senses that Marlow wants to transcend genre fiction to do something *serious*: "You didn't set out to mimic that sort of stuff, now did you?" (episode 2, 20 min. 20 sec.). While the hero reacts with typical hostility to this suggestion, he concurs discreetly elsewhere, citing the lyrics to the Cole Porter song *Anything Goes*: "Good writers who once knew far better words now use only four-letter words" (episode 5, 44 min. 50 sec.). Similarly, Marlow is hurt by the aspersions cast upon his work by his therapist: "It's not a *novel* is it, properly speaking? Not what Lawrence would call the one bright book of Life" (episode 2, 13 min. 40 sec.). Tellingly, Potter and D. H. Lawrence share similar backgrounds, with the representation of coal-mining fathers among the autobiographical touches that imbue *Sons and Lovers* and the television series.

Marlow's struggle to transcend genre is indicative of a wider discourse about rising above the influence of what Fredric Jameson identifies as the "whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch"

(Jameson: 2–3). Jameson saw it as a facet of late capitalism that post-modernist cultural productions would “no longer simply ‘quote’” the lowbrow, “but incorporate [it] into their very substance” (Jameson: 3). In *The Singing Detective* the play of genre isn’t as frivolous as it might seem. Marlow’s ambivalence towards popular culture is also tied to questions about class and social mobility. In his detective guise Marlow pays tribute to his father’s working men’s club performances by moonlighting as a singer, a fact sneered at by his client and adversary Mark Binney: “Tastes differ. You’re more at home in dance halls, I dare say” (episode 3, 24 min. 40 sec.). Meanwhile the hero’s manner of speaking is an absurd British pastiche of his hardboiled heroes, referred to in Potter’s script as “Chandleresquerie” (Potter 1993: 15), and by the eponymous sleuth as “unhelpful, paperback-soiled, little side-of-the-mouth, mid-Atlantic quips” (episode 3, 22 min. 30 sec.). Full of clichés and allusions, a typical Marlow utterance would be: “OK. So what’s the story? Who’s the dame? [...] Where’s the body? There’s always a body, too” (episode 2, 11 min. 5 sec.). The tropes to which Marlow refers are those enshrined in S. S. Van Dine’s infamous “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” from 1928, which stipulated that: “There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better” (Van Dine, 219). The unashamedly lowbrow manner of speaking, however, points not towards the formal detective story of the English school but American literary traditions from which the hardboiled detective novel derives. As Dennis Porter explains, the literary “fashioning an American vernacular [...] was consciously ideological,” as authors from Mark Twain to Dashiell Hammett responded to the “need to make the language of a class-conscious monarchy suitable for the use of democratic people living under a republic” (Porter 1981: 133).

In speaking in this way, Philip also avenges himself against his mother’s family in London who mocked his regional dialect when he was forced to relocate there with his mother. “I byunt going to talk at all!” Philip seethes, “I be going to kip my mouth shut!” (episode 4, 4 min. 30 sec.). Potter himself experienced a similar sense of displacement when forced to lodge in the capital temporarily in 1945 while

waiting for a council house in the Forest of Dean, and where he “was mercilessly teased because of his accent” at a local school (Kynaston: 63). We sense in Philip’s struggle to find a voice an affinity with his hardboiled heroes who reject standard English. As Marlow’s bewildered nemesis Mark Binney complains: “Isn’t it possible for you to talk properly, in ordinary, decent English?” (episode 3, 23 min. 10 sec.).

The location of the detective genre between high and low culture is also evoked when the hero complains that the name Philip Marlow was a curse for him: “You’d think my mother would have had more sense than to call me Philip, wouldn’t you! [...] What else could I have done except write detective stories? She should have called me Christopher” (episode 1, 30 min. 20 sec.). The allusions to Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe and Christopher Marlowe are significant. As John Caughie argues: “It is no accident that Marlow takes his name both from a fictional detective and from one of the cruellest of Elizabethan tragedians” (Caughie: 175). Chandler was himself at the forefronts of debates about the artistic merit, or lack thereof, of detective fiction. Having himself denounced the “golden age” detective novel of Agatha Christie, Chandler received unlikely praise from a self-confessed “addict” of the genre, poet W. H. Auden: “Mr. Chandler is interested in writing, not detective stories, but serious studies of a criminal milieu, [...] and his powerful but extremely depressing books should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art.” (Auden: 408)

The Singing Detective’s musings on the boundaries between high and low culture also extend beyond allusions to *film noir* to the Hollywood musical. As Steven Vineberg observes, “musical comedy, with its manufactured optimism and its aura of romance, is *noir’s* perfect opposite” (Vineberg: 30). Yet the juxtaposition isn’t as paradoxical as it might seem, both are popular genres of Philip’s 1940s childhood, and could be said to underline tensions in his psychological makeup. The heroes of hardboiled fiction are unsentimental loners who scorn women and never speak of tender feelings, while Hollywood musicals champion spontaneity and emotional expressiveness. This opposition goes to the heart of Marlow’s torment: how can he let go of the past

and embrace the present, stop seeking blame and revenge and renew himself creatively?

Marlow hallucinates characters breaking spontaneously into song and dance routines, lip-synching to popular songs of the era. In this we can trace the influence of Brecht, whose “alienation effect” – a technique that “piles on songs, music hall patter, narration, direct address to the audience, and strips of expressionistic drama” – aims to keep an audience “on the prickly edge of surrender to the narcotizing lull of fiction, continually aware of the tricks and mechanisms of theatre” (Vineberg: 29). In Potter’s case the trope had already become familiar to his audiences, having used it extensively in his serial *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), which fuses a tale of suburban sexual frustration with a *Bonnie and Clyde*-type crime caper. As Graham Fuller argues, the two dramas, alongside 1993’s *Lipstick on Your Collar*, form a “trilogy about the mediating effects of popular culture in, respectively, Thirties, Forties and Fifties England” (Fuller: 80). Where Potter’s characters struggle to express themselves, popular song intercedes but also somehow cheapens the sentiment, highlighting “the growing influence of mass culture in general on the lives and minds of its characters” (Creeber: 503).

Initially, and certainly to the uninitiated, the use of music might be said to be alienating in a Brechtian way. It is, after all, “the very familiarity of television which enables it [...] to act as an agency for defamiliarization” (Fiske and Hartley: 19), particularly at a time when naturalistic modes were so dominant. The fact that Philip cannot hear his father’s real singing voice in his memories of the working men’s club, only popular recordings of the songs, highlights both the temporal gap between past and present and the unreliability of memory. While “the obvious disjunction between the actor’s voice and the singing voice of the original recording (heightened by male characters often miming to female vocals and vice versa) foregrounds the artificiality of these musical intrusions” (Creeber 1996: 503), the bittersweet quality to the songs could not be said to undermine the representation in quite the way that it does in, say, the films of Jean-Luc Godard. In *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), for example, the abrupt musical sequences are as

jarringly discontinuous as the director's famous jump cuts, suggesting a possible influence of the *nouvelle vague* on Potter's aesthetic. However, Godard arguably had more in common with Brecht's epic theatre which condemned "the illustrative, culinary function of music," by using melodies and lyrics which "were designed mutually to discredit rather than complement each other" (Stam: 213–14). Like Potter's contemporary John McGrath, whose 7:84 theatre group productions in the 70s mixed "pop and pub culture, music-hall and Brechtian techniques," the serial's use of song is arguably too seductive and therefore "not Brechtian in its reliance on an emotional identification" (Thomson: 158 & 163). Tellingly, McGrath and Potter worked together for the BBC on the first series of the literary review show Bookstand in the early 60s.

Yet the musical sequences also raise issues about class and social mobility. During a memory of his father singing at the club, the adult Philip appears among the crowd in his hospital pyjamas, unable to applaud due to the psoriasis that has caused his hands to clench up. "I can't clap my hands – I *can't do it* – ! Not even for my dear old Dad" (episode 2, 56 min. 48 sec.), he laments, before the menacing figure of a miner leans over Philip again to accuse him of not wanting to applaud: "You byunt interested in clapping thee fayther, now be ya? Thou's never did give the poor bugger credit when him was alive! Got too big for thee boots, disn't?" (episode 2, 57 min. 10 sec.). It is implied that Philip later became embarrassed by his working-class origins and his father's singing, but that – the latter now dead – it is too late for him to rectify the mistake.

Guilt, sin and psychoanalysis

Themes of guilt and (original) sin abound throughout *The Singing Detective*. Marlow's revelatory therapy sessions with Gibbon underline a synergy between the detective genre and psychoanalysis that has been highlighted by a number of critics. Dennis Porter, for example, argued that "the psychoanalytic case history is a mystery story"

which raises “a problem whose solution is furnished at the end” (Porter 1981: 243). Freud himself made this analogy in 1906:

In both [the criminal and the hysteric] we are concerned with a secret, with something hidden. [...] In the case of the criminal it is a secret which he knows and hides from you, whereas in the case of the hysteric it is a secret which he himself does not know either [...]. The task of the therapist [...] is the same as that of the examining magistrate. We have to uncover the hidden psychical material; and in order to do this we have invented a number of detective devices ... (Freud 1906: 108)

Potter seems to have been deeply aware of these parallels, depicting in Marlow a man whose detective fantasies indicate a displacement of childhood trauma. Thanks to Dr Gibbon’s stewardship, Marlow acknowledges his regret for having run away from his mother in London following a confrontation about her affair, a scene that gathers resonance as it is replayed in fragments throughout the serial. It is implied that this event led to her suicide by drowning in the Thames. That a prostitute suffers a similar fate in Marlow’s novel is a coincidence seized upon by his therapist: “I’m just a little surprised that [...] you would so exactly replicate such a traumatic event in your own life in the pages of a [book]” (episode 6, 7 min. 24 sec.). Elsewhere his mother’s death is also restaged as the murder of a German spy, played by the same actress, whom his detective alter-ego fails to save. As Freud remarked of the compulsion to repeat: “the patient does not *remember* anything at all of what he has forgotten and repressed, but rather *acts it out*” (Freud 1914: 394). The link between role play and trauma is most stark in the scenes exploring Marlow’s childhood. In one scene, the camera locates the young Philip in the tree canopy from where he witnesses his mother’s infidelity. Addressing the viewer directly (one of many such asides designed to undermine the fourth wall conventions of drama): “When I grow up, I be going to be – a detective. [...] I’ll find out things! [...] I’ll find out *who did it!*” (episode 2, 54 min. 25 sec.).

While Philip’s detective role-playing can be seen a defensive cloak into which he seeks escape from his trauma, Gibbon implies the same might be true of his illness: “Chronic illness is an extremely good shelter. Have you ever seen it in those terms?” (episode 3, 19 min. 30 sec.).

At times Marlow's skin condition indeed seems to suggest a carapace into which he retreats from the probing medical staff. Yet at others, his hypersensitive skin could be said to betray his trauma with a porosity that recalls Didier Anzieu's notion of "moi-peau":

La peau [...] c'est l'interface qui marque la limite avec le dehors et maintient celui-ci à l'extérieur, c'est la barrière qui protège de la pénétration par les avidités et les agressions en provenance des autres, êtres ou objets. La peau enfin [...] est un lieu et un moyen primaire de communication avec autrui, d'établissement des relations significantes ; elle est, de plus, une surface d'inscription des traces laissées par ceux-ci. (Anzieu: 61-62)

Just as Marlow's skin could be said to the surface upon which his trauma is written, an "interface" between his subconscious and the exterior world, a similar porosity compromises his detective fantasies. That is to say, Marlow's traumatic memories and the physical pain of his present predicament make frequent incursions into, and distortions of the hardboiled narrative.

In the final episode Marlow confesses to another childhood incident which figures large in his memories. It is revealed that he shifted the blame onto a fellow pupil for having secretly defecated on his primary school teacher's desk, a crime for which the latter was severely beaten. Worse still, this schoolmate suffered from learning difficulties and began to believe he committed the offense after all. The gradual unravelling of *The Singing Detective's* mysteries, anchored by Marlow's sessions with Dr Gibbon, suggests that the serial's rewriting of the detective story is not as radical as it first appears. As critic Dennis Porter suggests: "the best detective stories are constructed [...] in the knowledge of the paradox that the circuitous and even painful path in fiction [...] is also the path of pleasure" (Porter 1981: 41). Here the critic appears to be drawing on Freud, who observed "the postponement of gratification [...] and the temporary toleration of unpleasure on the long and circuitous road to pleasure" (Freud 1920: 135).

Gibbon attempts to convince Marlow that childhood is by nature mysterious, and that we should accept that this is part of the human condition: "Irreducibly beyond elucidation. [...] Impossible to

unravel I mean. [...] There are *always* things which puzzle us as children [...]. They are mysteries. They remain so. Even to a writer of detective stories!" (episode 3, 16 min. 30 sec.). Yet in many ways *The Singing Detective* contradicts this common-sense thinking. It is difficult *not* to conclude that the hero has finally achieved a form of catharsis; there is finally a sense that Marlow's childhood has been *unraveled*, with a denouement that unifies a number of loose plot strands.

The Freudian theory that *The Singing Detective* most closely evokes is that of the primal scene. Philip does not comprehend at first what he is observing in the woods between his mother and her lover Raymond Binney, pleading in voice-over: "Wos him a-doing? Was him doing to our Mam? Mum! Mum! Shall I go and fetch Dad? Mum ..." (episode 3, 47 min. 58 sec.). This recalls Freud's case study *History of an Infantile Neurosis*, also known as "The Wolfman" on account of the patient's fairy-tale inflected dreams. The man in question is led to remember an incident in early childhood where he awoke in his cot to witness his parents copulating in the same room, a "primal scene" he misconstrues as "an act of violence" (Freud 1918: 230). In a paper entitled "Detective Stories and the Primal Scene", Geraldine Pederson-Krag argues that:

The reader addicted to mystery stories tries actively to relive and master traumatic infantile experiences he once had to endure passively. Becoming the detective, he gratifies his infantile curiosity with impunity, redressing completely the helpless inadequacy and anxious guilt unconsciously remembered from childhood. (Pederson-Krag: 16)

Just as Philip dreams of becoming a detective so that he can unravel the mysteries of his mother's infidelity, Pederson-Krag argues that children become de facto detectives investigating the mysteries of parental sex, whether it be through ambiguous clues or actually witnessed scenes of lovemaking. For Philip, the ambiguity of the scene in the woods is reinforced by his mother's torment; shortly after having sex she guiltily breaks down in tears. Also distressing to the boy is the animal behaviour of her lover, who compares her breasts to apples and teasingly threatens to bite them: "I could bit tha', my babby. Sweet as an apple" (episode 3, 47 min. 38 sec.). One of several biblical referenc-

es in the series, the scene clearly evokes the fall from paradise and the motif of the forbidden fruit. The event also represents the ruin of Philip's childhood innocence and the Garden of Eden that is for him the forest, his hideout in the canopy akin to the tree of knowledge. When he is obliged to accompany his mother to London, he laments his expulsion from paradise, comparing the capital bitterly to his beloved Gloucestershire: "Chunt like whum though, be it! [...] There yunt no place like the Forest: Where cost thou go up here? Where be the trees? And the oaks? The elms?" (episode 4, 4 min. 58 sec.). The parallel between the detective story and the expulsion from paradise echoes W. H. Auden's reading of the Golden Age detective story, which depicts "an innocent society in a state of grace [...] and where murder, therefore, is the unheard-of act which precipitates a crisis" (Auden: 407–08). For Auden, the detective's naming and shaming of the culprit is suggestive of the scapegoat that takes on the sins of others so that society can return to harmony.

The serial's abundance of Oedipal motifs – both the Greek tragedy and the complex as defined by Freud – is again suggestive of Potter's deconstructive engagement with the detective genre. As critic Dennis Porter explains, while the Bible teaches us that "the curiosity to know is a sexual curiosity," Oedipus confirms "the Bible's authority in the matter" inasmuch as it proposes "a connection between sex and detection, between the activities of the riddle solver and those of the incestuous son" (Porter 1981: 240). In a memory of Philip's train ride to London with his mother, in which she attracts the eye of soldiers in the carriage, this connection is made explicit. When she starts to cry and one of the soldiers tries to comfort her, Philip intervenes furiously: "Doosn't thous touch her! Kip thee hands off our Mum! [...] I shall tell our Dad! Him ool kill you! [...] And the man in the woods!" (episode 3, 50 min. 02 sec.). The threats of violence hit an unintended comic note, however, as Philip's mention of "the man in the woods" has the soldiers sniggering at the boy's indiscretion.

As we have seen, *The Singing Detective's* renewal of the detective story is staged as a story about rewriting and role play. The hero must separate fact from fiction by abandoning his guise of the hardboiled

sleuth to confront the true mysteries of his childhood, reimagined as crimes in his novel and nightmares. In its discourse on the boundaries between high and low culture, the serial also succeeds in examining the sometimes painful dislocations of class and social mobility while questioning the mediating effects of popular culture on the individual. Rather than revel in the ubiquity of Jameson's "schlock and kitsch", however, the serial charts its hero's attempts to transcend the detective story while showing how the detective story can be revitalised and transcend popular culture. Despite its play of styles and deconstructive approach to the genre, *The Singing Detective* ultimately provides solutions to its mysteries. Marlow's confrontation with the truth engenders an improvement in his skin condition and a reconciliation with his wife. Therefore, rather than negating or subverting the process of revelation implied by the detective narrative and the psychoanalytical sessions with Dr Gibbon, the serial ends by affirming them.

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¹ In order to transcribe the regional dialect in scenes representing Marlow's childhood in the Forest of Dean we consulted the script for *The Singing Detective*, published by Faber and Faber in 1986.

² Translated and summarized from the original French: "A la base du roman à énigme nous trouvons une dualité [...]. Ce roman ne contient pas une mais deux histoires : l'histoire du crime et l'histoire de l'enquête. [...] la première, celle du crime, est en fait l'histoire d'une absence : sa caractéristique la plus juste est qu'elle ne peut être immédiatement présent dans le livre."

***Sleep No More* de Punchdrunk : Immersion dans l'univers du film noir**

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Le théâtre dit « immersif » apparaît comme une tendance florissante dans le paysage théâtral contemporain britannique. Les productions¹ auxquelles ce terme s'applique partagent l'intention de placer le spectateur – ou « immersant »² – au cœur du dispositif (Machon 2013: 22), en abolissant la distinction entre scène et salle pour les fondre en un espace unique.

La compagnie anglaise Punchdrunk, fondée en 2000 par Felix Barrett, est l'une des pionnières de ce type de théâtre et ses productions comptent parmi les plus emblématiques du genre. Situées au croisement du théâtre, de la performance, de la danse et de l'installation, elles déconstruisent la pièce de théâtre traditionnelle pour créer un *monde* théâtral que le spectateur – masqué – peut habiter et explorer le temps d'une soirée. Il est invité à déambuler à sa guise dans de très vastes environnements s'étendant sur plusieurs milliers de mètres carrés et aux décors particulièrement travaillés, où il trace un itinéraire personnel et découvre les différentes scènes au gré de ses pérégrinations :

This is a unique theatrical experience where the lines between space, performer and spectator are constantly shifting. Audiences are invited to rediscover the childlike excitement and anticipation of exploring the unknown and experience a real sense of adventure. Free to encounter the installed environment in an individual imaginative journey, the choice of what to watch and where to go is theirs alone. (site internet de Punchdrunk)

Le visiteur du site peut également y lire le message suivant : « These things are mysteries not to be explained but you will understand when you get there alone » (site internet de Punchdrunk).

Le choix du terme de « mystères » pour décrire les productions de la compagnie est particulièrement intéressant. Tout d'abord, il renvoie à ce qui est difficile voire impossible à expliquer ou comprendre. De fait, le caractère éminemment physique, personnel et intime de l'expérience gêne nécessairement toute tentative d'explication ou de compréhension pour une personne qui n'en aurait pas fait l'expérience par elle-même. Par conséquent, l'analyse d'un tel théâtre se heurte à des obstacles d'ordre méthodologique. L'absence de script et de trace « officielle » sur lesquels fonder sa recherche ainsi que la singularisation des parcours spectatoriels invite le chercheur à modifier son approche et à recourir à des outils critiques visant à rendre compte de l'expérience individuelle. L'étude proposée s'appuie ainsi en partie sur des témoignages d'expériences des spectacles de Punchdrunk – la nôtre et celles d'autres spectateurs³.

Synonyme d'*énigme*, de *secret* – que la compagnie cultive tout particulièrement – le terme de « mystères » nous invite également à opérer un rapprochement avec le genre policier qui se structure autour du motif de l'enquête. Le terme évoque d'ailleurs, en anglais, les *murder mystery plays*⁴. Comme le souligne Rose Biggin dans son ouvrage consacré au travail de la compagnie : « [...] many of Punchdrunk's productions do sit firmly, aesthetically and atmospherically, in the trappings of tragedy and its sub-genres of mystery, horror and crime » (5). Le spectateur, à l'instar d'un détective, est ainsi invité à venir percer les mystères de l'univers de Punchdrunk.

Cet article s'intéresse au renouvellement du genre policier à travers l'étude de *Sleep No More*, le grand succès de la compagnie. Suite à la production originale de Londres en 2003, le spectacle a été transféré à Boston en 2009 puis à New York en 2011 où il se joue encore à ce jour à guichets fermés, tandis qu'une nouvelle production a été créée à Shanghai en novembre 2016.

À l'instar des autres créations de Punchdrunk⁵, *Sleep No More* se fonde sur des sources textuelles et filmiques préexistantes. En effet, la performance se présente comme une fusion de la fable de *Macbeth* avec l'univers du film noir. Pour le dire avec les mots de Felix Barrett, « *Sleep No More* is *Macbeth* told as a Hitchcock thriller » (Barrett, 2013, np). La

performance est une adaptation libre de la pièce de Shakespeare, dans laquelle viennent se mêler des éléments tirés de plusieurs films du réalisateur britannique, notamment *Rebecca* (1940) et *Vertigo* (1958).

Dans la production new-yorkaise, l'intrigue se déroule dans l'hôtel McKittrick – une référence à l'hôtel du même nom de *Vertigo* – fondé, comme l'indique le programme, en 1939 et resté figé dans les années quarante. Cette toile de fond temporelle ainsi que les deux films d'Hitchcock qui imprègnent l'univers fictionnel de *Sleep No More* contribuent à plonger les spectateurs au cœur de la période classique du film noir qui s'étend, comme le rappellent Alain Silver et James Ursini dans leur ouvrage *Film Noir*, de 1941 à 1958.

Cette analyse de *Sleep No More* explore et interroge les divers dispositifs – scéniques, esthétiques, dramatiques et spectatoriels – qui contribuent à recréer l'univers du film noir. L'article s'intéresse aux caractéristiques de ce genre travaillées par la production, notamment à travers l'étude de la figure du détective et de celle du spectateur en immersion qui passe d'un investigateur de l'espace sémiotique fictionnel – dans les pièces « traditionnelles » où une séparation entre la scène et la salle est clairement marquée – à celui d'un espace physique réel.

Esthétique cinématographique : immersion dans l'univers du film noir

Le travail de Punchdrunk est profondément influencé par le cinéma. Leur production *The Drowned Man*, jouée à Londres en 2013-2014 dans un ancien centre de tri postal désaffecté plaçait d'ailleurs le septième art en son cœur. Basée sur la pièce de Büchner, *Woyzeck* (1837), ainsi que sur le roman de Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (1939), l'histoire se déroulait dans des studios hollywoodiens, dans le monde fictionnel de Temple Pictures. Rose Biggin dresse la description suivante de l'espace de performance qui occupait cinq étages⁶ : « [The series of spaces] included film sets, private studio rooms, a costume department and a grand dressing room on the Hollywood side ; and a real world side including a caravan park, town centre and doctor's surgery » (Biggin: 79).

Dans *Sleep No More*, l'influence du cinéma se retrouve dans les nombreuses références aux films d'Hitchcock qui apparaissent à travers certains lieux, personnages et scènes. En entrant dans l'hôtel McKittrick – référence à *Vertigo*, comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné – les immersants traversent un labyrinthe plongé dans le noir avant de déboucher sur le *Manderley Bar*, espace de transition entre le monde réel et le monde fictionnel⁷. Le nom du bar est une référence à la propriété de Maximilian De Winter dans *Rebecca*, le film d'Hitchcock lui-même adapté du roman de Daphné du Maurier. Par ailleurs, l'hôte des lieux, qui accueille et discute avec les « invités » avant qu'ils n'accèdent à l'espace de performance, porte le nom de *Maximilian Martell*.

D'autres références à *Rebecca* ponctuent la trame narrative de *Sleep No More*, même si seule une poignée de spectateurs y ont accès. En effet, deux scènes du film sont reprises lors de *one-on-ones*, particularité et trait distinctif des productions de Punchdrunk où un acteur entraîne un spectateur à l'intérieur d'une pièce, ferme la porte à clef derrière eux, ôte le masque de l'immersant et joue une scène pour cette seule personne. Ainsi, lors d'un *one-on-one* avec le personnage d'Agnes Naismith qui incarne également la seconde Mrs De Winter de *Rebecca*, celle-ci susurre à l'oreille du « spectateur » les premiers mots du monologue de la narratrice qui ouvre le roman et qui sont prononcés par une voix off dans la scène d'ouverture du film d'Hitchcock : « We can never go back to Manderley again. But sometimes, in my dreams, I do go back to those strange days » (Hitchcock, 1940). Un autre *one-on-one* avec la vieille femme de chambre Catherine Campbell, figure de Mrs Danvers⁸ de *Rebecca* – elle porte par ailleurs la même tenue que l'actrice du film d'Hitchcock – rejoue la scène du film où celle-ci montre à la jeune Mrs De Winter la chambre de la défunte et lui fait voir – et toucher – sa chemise de nuit.

La femme de chambre s'arrête devant une porte de la mezzanine, se retourne vers moi, me murmure à l'oreille : « I know you've always wanted to see this room. Wait here a moment ». Elle entre à l'intérieur de la pièce, referme la porte sur elle, me laissant seule à l'extérieur. Quelques instants plus tard, la porte s'ouvre, elle me prend la main et me tire à l'intérieur. Elle enlève mon masque, me regarde droit dans les yeux

: « My dear, you look tired, why don't you sit down ? » Elle m'indique une chaise placée à côté du lit. Je m'assieds, elle s'allonge sur le lit, sa tête tout près de la mienne. Elle éteint la lumière, allume un ventilateur. « Listen to the sea ». Après quelques instants, elle se lève, se saisit d'une chemise de nuit qu'elle me montre. « Have you ever seen something so delicate? Look, you can see my hand through it ». (Notes personnelles)

Sleep No More est une performance dont l'inspiration cinématographique se fait ainsi profondément ressentir. Les échos aux films d'Hitchcock – *Rebecca*, *Vertigo* mais aussi *Psycho* (Dailey) – sont légion. Mais au-delà des références filmiques, c'est l'esthétique de la compagnie que le cinéma – et en particulier le courant *noir* – influence. Josephine Machon, auteur de plusieurs ouvrages sur le théâtre immersif et le travail de Punchdrunk en particulier, voit dans l'espace scénique des productions dont les décors sont travaillés dans les moindres détails dans une perspective très réaliste, une influence cinématographique :

The forensic attention to detail in scenic design [...] seeks to replicate the intimacy of cinematic experiences. Punchdrunk's associate designers, Livi Vaughan and Bea Minns, work with Barrett to ensure that the long-shot experience of the spatial scene setting fuses with the sharply focused close-ups of the detail in space. (Machon 2017: 227)

On pourrait objecter que cette attention au détail n'est pas propre au cinéma – on pense notamment à l'esthétique du jeu vidéo à laquelle Punchdrunk emprunte également – et qu'elle n'est pas non plus représentative de tous ses courants. Ce qui intéresse Josephine Machon ici est l'alternance plans d'ensemble / gros plans permise par l'immersion. Contrairement au cinéma cependant, les immersants ne sont pas limités par les mouvements de la caméra ; ils décident quels endroits explorer et où porter leur regard. En ce sens, le masque – sur lequel nous reviendrons – joue le rôle de caméra :

The mask is the most crucial part in a way. [...] It allows you to probe further than you would do. The mask allows you to function as a voyeur, as a camera because you're more aware of where you're looking, what you choose to see and your peripheral vision is slightly affected. (Barrett et Machon 2007, np)

Outre ce travail de l'espace scénique, Josephine Machon établit un parallèle entre les spectacles de Punchdrunk et l'esthétique cinématographique à travers le recours à une bande-son :

[A]s with cinema, [music] is vital to the atmosphere, the overarching narrative and the penetration of character psychologies. [...] Soundtracks are plundered from film references as audio citations and reset signals, functioning as a cue for performers to return fluidly to the beginning of the loop. [...] As with a film soundtrack, these songs lay out through specific scenes, provide the tempo and emotional resonance for choreography, tap into nostalgia. (Machon 2017: 227)

La musique joue en effet un rôle central dans les productions de Punchdrunk, tant d'un point de vue pratique – elle sert de repère au grand nombre de performers dont les mouvements sont millimétrés – que de l'atmosphère. Dans un entretien qui figure dans le *Souvenir Program* de *Sleep No More*, le directeur artistique de la compagnie revient sur l'idée à l'origine du spectacle :

As with most of our work, *Sleep No More* started with the score. I found an old recording of a film noir soundtrack that felt wonderfully emotive; I loved its frisson of anger and I could see an epic theatrical world within it. (Souvenir Program : 21)

Si la musique préside à la création du « monde théâtral » de *Sleep No More*, elle participe pleinement de l'atmosphère de film noir de la production, d'autant plus qu'elle travaille les musiques de Bernard Herrmann, compositeur de la bande originale de nombreux films d'Hitchock. *Sleep No More* compte de multiples références musicales, parmi lesquelles le prélude du film *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) qui accompagne l'entrée des spectateurs dans l'hôtel à travers le labyrinthe, « Carlotta's Portrait » de *Vertigo* lors de l'une des premières scènes entre Macbeth et Lady Macbeth, ou encore « The Window » et « The Package » de *Psycho* lorsque Lady Macbeth attend seule dans sa chambre après le départ de Macbeth, parti commettre le meurtre de Duncan⁹. Il est intéressant de noter que la scène du banquet est accompagnée d'un medley d'extraits de la bande originale signée Angelo Badalamenti de *Mulholland Drive* (« Diner » et « Mr. Roque/Betty's Theme »¹⁰). *Sleep*

No More n'emprunte donc pas seulement au film noir classique mais, avec le film de Lynch, au néo-noir. La production de Punchdrunk se réapproprie ainsi les diverses catégories du genre, fusionnant différentes influences et temporalités – celle de la pièce de Shakespeare, des films noirs d'Hitchcock et des films néo-noirs plus contemporains.

Mais la musique n'est que l'un des nombreux éléments qui contribuent à inscrire *Sleep No More* dans l'univers du film noir (néo-noir). En effet, dans le processus de création, Felix Barrett dit avoir été attiré par le genre dans son ensemble :

I was incredibly drawn to the noir environment. It's all about shades of light, in both a figurative and a literal sense, and both of these elements are important to our work. It was an easy leap from film noir to *Macbeth*, as Shakespeare's play has all the classic noir motifs: passion, a femme fatale, and a paranoid, power-obsessed man who'll do anything to get what he desires. (Barrett, Souvenir Program : 21)

Felix Barrett établit ici un lien direct entre le film noir et la pièce de Shakespeare, qu'il lit au prisme des codes et archétypes de ce courant cinématographique – Lady Macbeth en femme fatale et Macbeth en homme assoiffé de pouvoir. Si cette justification peut paraître simplificatrice et la comparaison ne pas aller de soi, il n'en demeure pas moins que l'intrigue de Macbeth se voit transposée par Punchdrunk dans l'univers du film noir, et les éléments macabres de la pièce mis en relief.

Les éléments soulignés par le directeur artistique de Punchdrunk sont autant de caractéristiques du genre qu'Alain Silver et James Ursini relèvent dans leur ouvrage *Film Noir*, à commencer par l'éclairage en clairs-obscur :

La plupart des films noirs de la période classique baignent dans des atmosphères sombres et contrastées, à la manière de Rembrandt ou du Caravage. Les ombres et la lumière s'opposent non seulement dans les extérieurs de nuit mais également dans les intérieurs faiblement éclairés, protégés de la lumière du jour par des rideaux ou des stores vénitiens. (Silver et Ursini : 16)

Cette description s'applique parfaitement à *Sleep No More* – ainsi qu'aux autres productions de Punchdrunk – dont l'espace de perfor-

mance est à peine éclairé. Les lieux intérieurs et extérieurs représentés sont tous plongés dans la pénombre – une obscurité physique qui répond à la noirceur symbolique des personnages et de leurs actions – rendant d’autant plus prégnants les jeux avec la lumière. Pour illustrer ce recours à un éclairage inspiré du film noir, nous pouvons évoquer les stores vénitiens de l’agence de détective – espace sur lequel nous reviendrons plus en détail – par lesquels filtre de la lumière, ou encore cette scène dans laquelle une actrice est éclairée en plongée par une lumière intense au milieu de la forêt où règne l’obscurité ; elle écrit frénétiquement à la craie sur un tableau noir (« Why all honest men must die ? ») avant de s’évanouir et de s’écrouler au sol. Cet exemple rend compte des « atmosphères sombres et contrastées » typiques des films noirs qui caractérisent l’univers de *Sleep No More*.

Outre l’esthétique inspirée du genre *noir* – la musique et l’éclairage – la performance en reprend également les thèmes classiques, parmi lesquels Alain Silver et James Ursini identifient « le cauchemar fataliste » :

Le monde du Noir pivote autour d’un axe central : la causalité. Ses événements sont liés comme les maillons d’une chaîne que rien ne peut briser et mènent inexorablement à une conclusion fortement prévisible. (Silver et Ursini : 15)

Si la causalité et l’enchaînement des événements sont propres à toute dramaturgie, ils trouvent une résonance particulière dans *Macbeth*, pièce dans laquelle « ce qui est fait ne peut être défait » (« What’s done cannot be undone » V.1). Ce thème du « cauchemar fataliste » se retrouve également dans une particularité du dispositif dramatique de *Punchdrunk*.

En effet, chacune de leurs performances se structure autour d’une « boucle » (*loop*) d’une durée d’une heure environ qui se répète trois fois au cours de la soirée. Les personnages – et par extension les immersants – sont ainsi prisonniers d’un enchaînement causal qui tourne littéralement en boucle et ne peut être brisé¹¹. Cet enfermement dans une fatalité qu’Alain Silver et James Ursini associent au film noir – a priori plus linéaire, sauf dans certains films néo-noirs – se voit transposé physiquement dans *Sleep No More*. Cela a également pour effet

de changer notre perception de ce qui se joue dans *Macbeth* : l'accent est mis sur une lecture fataliste de la pièce, donnant d'autant plus de poids à la prophétie des sorcières – une scène particulièrement frappante dans la production de Punchdrunk, qui prend la forme d'une *rave party* et contraste nettement avec l'esthétique d'ensemble.

Dans cet univers sombre et fataliste évoluent des personnages archétypaux du film noir, et notamment celui de la femme fatale évoqué plus haut. Comme le rappelle Yvonne Tasker dans *A Companion to Film Noir* : « the figure of strong, desiring women whose ambitions or actions produce turmoil and even death for male characters is a feature of several high-profile examples of film noir » (Tasker : 361). De nombreux personnages féminins de *Sleep No More* correspondent à cet archétype du genre. Elles en adoptent l'attitude et les attributs visuels – de longues chevelures, du maquillage, des bijoux et de longues robes de soirée sensuelles¹². Elles sont séductrices, à la fois envers les autres personnages mais également avec les immersants, brouillant par là même la ligne de partage entre fiction et réalité.

La figure du détective

Si les femmes fatales peuplent l'univers du film noir comme celui de *Sleep No More*, la figure centrale du genre demeure le détective privé :

Si tout le monde s'accorde à considérer *Le Faucon maltais* comme le point de départ de la période classique [du film noir], cela signifie que le privé est depuis le départ la figure emblématique du genre. Qu'on l'appelle privé, limier ou fouineur, le prototype du héros du film noir est issu des polars *hard-boiled*, de la littérature à deux sous qui remplissait les pages de magazines bon marché comme *Dime Detective* ou *Black Mask* au début des années 20. (Silver et Ursini : 147)

Le détective, archétype du film noir, est incarné dans *Sleep No More* par le personnage de Malcolm :

In our world, Malcolm, Duncan's son, is a detective. Over the course of his narrative he's sensing the portents and omens that are floating around. He's

obsessed with birds. This is where the Shakespearean story line gets infected by the noir. (Barrett cité dans Piepenburg, np)

Malcolm incarne la figure de l'augure chargé d'interpréter les auspices – le programme le présente comme « reader of auspices » (Souvenir Program : 16) – qui pointent l'assassinat de son père mais qu'il ne déchiffre pas à temps. Comme tous les personnages de *Sleep No More*, Malcolm a un espace qui lui est associé. Il s'agit d'une agence de détective qui paraît tout droit sortie d'un film noir des années quarante, la *Mac Crínáin and Reid Private Detective Agency* :

A bright light shines through the blinds of this gumshoe-style office, where old metal fans and hundreds of envelopes line the walls. The fans are arranged to look as if they are all looking down at Malcolm's desk. Cabinets are loaded with files and shredded papers. In the back is a darkroom filled with images of birds. (Piepenburg, np)



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Au cours de sa boucle narrative, Malcolm accomplit les tâches qui incombent au détective. Outre sa mission de déchiffrer les signes, il reçoit à l'agence Agnes Naismith, venue pour obtenir des informations sur sa sœur disparue et, dans une toute petite pièce comportant une chaise et une lampe suspendue à une longue corde dans laquelle

seule une poignée d'immersants sont admis, il mène un interrogatoire silencieux et chorégraphié avec Macduff. Ici se rejoue une scène typique des films noirs et policiers que *Sleep No More* se réapproprie à travers la forme chorégraphiée qui vient remplacer l'échange verbal. La proximité physique des immersants et des performers dans une salle exiguë renforce cette inscription concrète dans un espace réel.

L'immersant mène l'enquête

Si Malcolm est l'incarnation du détective de film noir dans l'univers de *Sleep No More*, il peut être considéré, à travers son échec mentionné plus haut, comme un contre-modèle. Serait-ce donc aux spectateurs de prendre le relais ? C'est en tout cas ce à quoi semble inviter la production. Tandis que Malcolm tente de résoudre une énigme à l'intérieur de la diégèse, l'immersant cherche à faire sens de ce qu'il observe. Plongé dans ce monde de fiction clos, il se construit comme une figure d'enquêteur engagé dans sa propre quête herméneutique. Il peut être associé, selon les termes d'Alain Silver et James Ursini, à l'archétype de « celui qui recherche la vérité » : « Celui qui recherche la vérité peut endosser n'importe quel costume, son objectif principal étant de se frayer un chemin dans le dédale complexe de l'univers du Noir en quête d'une réponse critique [...] » (16).

Les productions de Punchdrunk, dont l'espace est un véritable « dédale » pour l'immersant, sont conçues comme un *puzzle*, une énigme que le public tente de résoudre :

[T]hat sense of an audience not knowing/understanding, seeing this puzzle in front of them, cracking it, and that sense of achievement of solving the theatrical riddle is probably what I'm most excited about. (Barrett dans Jakob-Hoff, np)

Face à cette « énigme théâtrale », l'immersant adopte une attitude de détective et part à la recherche d'indices – objets, lettres et autres documents contenant des informations sur les différents personnages de l'univers fictionnel – qui, mis en relation les uns avec les autres, lui permettront de reconstituer le fil narratif. Les spectateurs sont invités à fouiller l'espace dans ses moindres recoins¹³ ; libre à eux d'inspecter

les étagères, d'ouvrir les tiroirs des meubles, de soulever le couvercle de boîtes à bijoux, de regarder sous les lits, etc. Comme le déclare Felix Barrett : « In our world, every single drawer, cupboard, wardrobe that can be opened, should be opened because you'll find something inside » (cité dans Piepenburg, 2011a, np).

J'arrive dans un endroit que je n'ai pas encore exploré. Lady Macduff entre dans une petite chambre d'enfant, pose la valise sur le lit, l'ouvre, en sort des habits d'enfants qu'elle regarde avec tendresse, les plie sur son ventre de femme enceinte et les range dans une commode. Elle quitte la pièce, les autres spectateurs la suivent ; je reste seule à l'intérieur, contourne le lit, inspecte le contenu de la valise, ouvre les tiroirs de la commode (des habits d'enfant, une petite paire de chaussures en cuir). (Notes personnelles)

L'espace sémiotique des pièces de théâtre traditionnelles devient ainsi un espace physique à explorer pour le spectateur de théâtre immersif qui se fait investigateur. En ce sens, *Sleep No More* rompt fondamentalement avec l'expérience de cinéma et se réapproprie le film noir à travers l'immersion ; le spectateur a comme l'impression d'être passé de l'autre côté de l'écran : « I am not watching and translating a bodily reference on screen but engaging all senses without screen mediation, in direct contact with surface, flesh, scent via sole of foot, fingertip, nostril and so on » (Machon 2018: 228). Le rapport des immersants à *Macbeth* se voit modifié dans le même mouvement. Ils se réapproprient physiquement ce monument du théâtre anglais.

Laura Levin souligne le lien qui existe entre la figure du « spectateur-détective » et le dispositif immersif :

The spectator-detective is a common feature of environmental work – from traditional forms like murder mystery theatre to performances in found spaces like abandoned buildings. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks make this connection in *Theatre/Archaeology*, where they liken the sites of site-specific performance to crime scenes and artists to detectives: “the detective investigator adopts an aesthetic of immersion, an improvising and ambulatory strategy of no single viewpoint, an oblique approach to isolate significant traces in the inconsequential and absent details.” (Levin : 86)

En se déplaçant dans l'espace et en ayant la possibilité d'assister à une même scène plusieurs fois au cours de la soirée grâce au dispositif des boucles narratives, l'immersant de *Sleep No More* peut ainsi adopter une stratégie d'enquêteur et varier ses points de vue.

De plus, chaque pièce que les spectateurs-détectives parcourent et inspectent contient des « secrets » – la compagnie parle aussi d'*abstraction* – que seuls les plus observateurs d'entre eux sont capables de déceler. Ces secrets se cachent notamment dans les détails du décor. Felix Barrett donne l'exemple du magasin de taxidermie de *Sleep No More* :

Seemingly at first glance all is normal; you've got the usual dioramas that you would see in any place like this. But then at closer inspection you notice almost slight abominations [...]. With every single space in the show where there is a layer of detail that we're trying to scratch away at, you can dismiss it, you can as an audience member think that you've got the handle on the space but then actually when you scratch the surface and you start to interrogate it you start to realise that there is something else, there is a darkness, there is a subtext. (Barrett in Piepenburg, 2011b, np)

On peut également penser à la chambre des enfants Macduff dans laquelle se trouve un miroir. À première vue, ce dernier semble refléter la pièce. Mais en regardant de plus près, on s'aperçoit qu'il donne en réalité à voir la chambre une fois le meurtre des enfants commis : des livres jonchent le sol, le lit est défait et une mare de sang se trouve en son centre.

Punchdrunk cherche ainsi à produire chez l'immersant l'excitation éprouvée lors de la découverte d'une pièce du puzzle narratif qu'il est le seul – ou presque – à avoir décelé.

Le spectateur a ainsi conscience – ou tout du moins, l'intuition – que l'espace performatif recèle des secrets et cela est renforcé par le fait que tous les espaces ne sont pas accessibles à tous et à tout moment. L'immersant peut trouver une pièce dont la porte est fermée tout en étant conscient que quelque chose s'y passe – il peut apercevoir un personnage à travers une fenêtre ou entendre du bruit à travers cette porte. Afin de percer le mystère de l'environnement dans lequel il se

trouve, le spectateur-détective doit mener son travail d'enquêteur de manière active – mémoriser la disposition des lieux pour y revenir plus tard, attendre patiemment qu'un personnage lui en ouvre l'accès, etc.

Myrto Koumarianos et Cassandra Silver racontent leur expérience lorsqu'elles ont trouvé l'accès à la hutte dans la forêt bloqué alors qu'un personnage se trouvait à l'intérieur :

The idea that there was something inside to which we were denied access both incited and disappointed us. There was a sense that some unattainable wholeness, some answer to a mystery was lying just beyond our grasp. If we were bold enough in our performance we might gain access to something that others could not know, and thus, we could presumably piece together some further truth of the fiction. (Koumarianos et Silver : 170)

À travers l'examen attentif de l'environnement dans lequel il est plongé, l'immersant peut ainsi être considéré comme un enquêteur – un lecteur de signes qui essaie de découvrir la cohérence du récit en reliant les divers éléments. Mais la comparaison avec la figure du détective ne s'arrête pas là, comme le remarque Laura Levin : « [T]he DIY aspects of the show position *spectators as detectives*. Like gumshoes, we follow characters from scene to scene piecing together the story » (Levin : 85).

Suivant les personnages à travers l'espace, le « spectateur » imite le détective en filature – les performers agissant comme s'ils n'étaient pas conscients d'être suivis – et, lorsqu'il se met à courir après un acteur pour ne pas perdre sa trace, il adopte l'attitude du détective engagé dans une course-poursuite. À titre d'exemple, lors de ma première visite à l'hôtel McKittrick, j'ai assisté au début du spectacle à une scène entre Lady Macbeth et Macbeth. Lorsque ce dernier a fini par quitter la pièce – suivi par quelques spectateurs – j'ai décidé de rester. Au bout d'un certain temps, il est revenu couvert de sang. Lors de la seconde boucle, j'ai donc décidé de le suivre pour rassembler les pièces du puzzle et assister au meurtre de Duncan, me glissant ainsi dans la peau d'une enquêtrice qui suivrait un suspect.

Dans sa « traque » des performers d'une scène et d'une pièce à une autre, le spectateur-détective peut ainsi rappeler John Ferguson

(dit Scottie), le personnage central du film *Vertigo*, ancien détective embauché par un ami pour suivre la femme de celui-ci, Madeleine. Dans une scène sans dialogue où prime la pulsion scopique – à l’instar de *Sleep No More* – accompagnée par la musique de Bernard Herrmann reprise dans la production de Punchdrunk, Scottie prend Madeleine en filature et la suit de site en site à travers San Francisco – chez le fleuriste, dans un cimetière, au musée, à l’hôtel McKittrick et dans la baie de San Francisco (Levin : 86).

Comme le protagoniste du film d’Hitchcock, l’immersant des productions de Punchdrunk se retrouve dans la position du voyeur¹⁴, un rôle facilité par le port du masque qui assure l’anonymat.



Revêtir le masque permet au spectateur de faire tomber ses inhibitions, d’oser explorer librement l’espace et de suivre les personnages qui l’habitent. Lesley Ferris, dans le récit de son expérience personnelle de *Sleep No More*, souligne le lien qui existe entre le port du masque et le sentiment d’endosser le rôle de détective :

Wearing a mask during the performance made me feel that I was experiencing the story and action alongside the characters, yet I felt invisible – as if my identity as an audience member had melted away. This gave me a sense of freedom in exploring the McKittrick and following the characters on

their journey. *It was as if I was an anonymous detective in the play*, wandering through the thrilling and twisted world of *Sleep No More*, on my own journey to discover the story and solve its mystery. (Ferris, np, mes italiques)

Une communauté de détectives

Cependant, nous pouvons nous demander si ce « mystère » peut véritablement être résolu. En effet, il est physiquement impossible de suivre tous les acteurs et donc toutes les « pistes » en une soirée. À la fin de cette expérience nécessairement parcellaire et lacunaire, l'immersant-détective se retrouve avec de nombreuses questions et peu de réponses, à l'instar du spectateur des films de David Lynch.

Nous pouvons même nous demander s'il existe véritablement un *sens* à percer. La compagnie entretient cette idée (trompeuse ?) d'une énigme à résoudre – le « guide » vendu à la fin de la représentation de *Sleep No More* par exemple va dans ce sens – qui pousse les spectateurs à revenir (certains retournent à l'hôtel McKittrick plus d'une cinquantaine de fois). S'ils continuent à mener l'enquête, c'est que les spectateurs découvrent de nouveaux éléments – pièces, scènes, détails, *one-on-ones*, références intertextuelles – perçus (à tort ?) comme autant de pistes de sens qui leur permettraient de se rapprocher d'une vérité de la fiction.

L'absence de résolution amène ainsi les immersants à poursuivre l'enquête au-delà de la représentation, quitte à en perdre le sommeil (« *Sleep No More* »). L'individualité et la singularité de chaque expérience ainsi que l'existence des *one-on-ones* invitent également un travail de détection collectif. En effet, une façon pour les immersants-détectives de faire sens de ce qu'ils ont vécu est de mettre en commun les divers indices récoltés individuellement dans l'après de la représentation afin de rassembler les pièces du puzzle narratif. C'est ainsi que fleurissent de nombreuses pages internet et forums de discussion qui y sont dédiés¹⁵ – sources d'information par ailleurs très précieuses pour ceux qui travaillent sur un tel théâtre¹⁶. Les internautes y poursuivent divers fils d'enquête : ils partagent leurs expériences personnelles, tentent de cartographier l'espace de performance, de reconsti-

tuer les parcours de chaque performer, et échangent sur les emprunts à d'autres œuvres qu'ils ont pu observer.

La quête individuelle physique se transforme ainsi en une enquête collective virtuelle.

Sleep No More participe ainsi au renouvellement du genre policier sur la scène anglaise contemporaine. Les références à divers films d'Alfred Hitchcock dont la production est truffée, l'ambiance sonore qui travaille l'univers musical de Bernard Herrmann, le faible éclairage de l'espace de performance ainsi que la présence des figures de la femme fatale et du détective privé inscrivent *Sleep No More* dans une esthétique de film noir. Mais au-delà de ce que l'on peut considérer comme un hommage au genre – noir et également néo-noir avec les influences des films de David Lynch dans lesquels les interprétations « individuelles, non linéaires et illogiques » sont célébrées (Machon 2018 : 223) – Punchdrunk en propose un véritable renouvellement à travers la mise en place d'un dispositif immersif.

Ce dernier permet aux immersants de se glisser dans la peau de détectives à la recherche d'indices et à la poursuite des personnages dans une quête de sens narratif, devenant par là même partie intégrante du monde de fiction, à la fois « acteurs » et « directeurs » de leur propre film noir :

Punchdrunk explores the space between the theatrical and cinematic. [...] Exploring the space individually, the audience is given the opportunity to both act in and direct their own film; to revisit, to edit and to indulge themselves as voyeurs. Like a Hitchcock film, the audience is plunged into the world of the unknown and left to piece the puzzle together. (Barrett et Machon 2009, np)

Si l'exploration se fait de manière « individuelle » – les groupes sont d'ailleurs séparés au moment de leur entrée dans l'espace de performance – l'assemblage des pièces du puzzle s'effectue « ensemble », de manière collective. Nous pouvons ainsi voir se dessiner une nouvelle figure du détective aux antipodes du « *hard-boiled detective* », non plus solitaire mais membre d'une communauté.

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¹ Les productions de Punchdrunk rompent tellement avec les codes des pièces traditionnelles que nous choisissons de ne pas employer ce terme pour les qualifier. Nous préférons parler d'*expériences* de théâtre, de *productions*, de *spectacles* ou encore de *performances*.

² Terme inventé par Char Davies, artiste canadienne contemporaine, et repris par d'autres critiques pour l'appliquer au spectateur du théâtre immersif, comme Catherine Bouko et Steven Bernas (Bouko et Bernas 2012 : 8).

³ Ces témoignages ont été recueillis à travers des entretiens menés personnellement ou sont tirés de publications – notamment la thèse de Daniel Schulze – ou de blogs et pages internet sur lesquels les « fans » de Punchdrunk font part de leurs expériences respectives.

⁴ Les « mystères » font également référence aux rites religieux secrets des sociétés antiques, entre autres grecques et romaines, auxquels seuls les initiés avaient accès. Punchdrunk emprunte plusieurs éléments à ces « mystères » – notamment la culture du secret qui entoure leurs productions – et leur dernière création, *Ka-*

beiroi, jouée à Londres de septembre à novembre 2017, se donnait précisément comme une initiation pour deux personnes au culte à mystères éponyme.

⁵ *Romeo and Juliet* pour *The Firebird Ball* (2005), *The Duchess of Malfi* de John Webster pour la production du même nom (2010) ou encore *Woyzeck* de Buchner pour *The Drowned Man* (2013).

⁶ Un tour virtuel d'une partie de l'espace de performance est accessible en ligne à l'adresse suivante : <http://tour.templestudioslondon.com/>

⁷ Les invités passent un certain temps dans ce lieu où ils peuvent boire des verres et discuter entre eux avant qu'on ne les entraîne dans une pièce adjacente par petits groupes pour leur distribuer les masques et les mener – en empruntant un ascenseur – dans l'espace de performance.

⁸ Dans la production précédente, ce personnage s'appelait Mrs Danvers et Agnes Naismith, the Second Mrs De Winter, rendant la référence à *Rebecca* évidente.

⁹ Pour une liste exhaustive des musiques de la performance associées aux différentes scènes, on renverra le lecteur au post « All There Is : The Music of the McKittrick Hotel » accessible au lien suivant : <http://paisleysweets.tumblr.com/post/41572547344/all-there-is-the-music-of-the-mckittrick-hotel>

¹⁰ Cette observation est tirée du post mentionné ci-dessus.

¹¹ La pendaison de Macbeth lors du final de *Sleep No More* vient paradoxalement rompre ce temps cyclique, ce que Rose Biggin observe également au sujet du final d'une production antérieure, *The Duchess of Malfi* (2010) :

A further way in which this ending lacked internal narrative coherence was in regard to the way the format of the show had been constructed and arranged before the finale took place. Looping individual characters' journeys during the show suggested, to me, that time itself in this world was fractured and cyclical [...] the idea of cyclical, ever-repeating time was negated by an ending event explicitly showing the death of a main character. (Biggin: 151-152)

¹² Pour l'iconographie de la femme fatale dans le film noir, on renverra le lecteur au chapitre « Women in Film Noir » de Janey Place dans l'ouvrage d'Ann Kaplan du même nom (54).

De plus, un trombinoscope de la distribution de la pièce à New York est consultable en ligne à l'adresse suivante : <https://mckittrickhotel.com/sleep-no-more/>

¹³ Avant de laisser les immersants sortir de l'ascenseur, le maître d'hôtel leur glisse que la chance sourit aux audacieux (« fortune favours the bold ») et par la suite, les néophytes imitent rapidement les « initiés » dans leur fouille de l'espace.

¹⁴ Plusieurs articles ont été écrits à ce sujet, notamment celui de Spyros Papaioannou, « Immersion, smooth spaces and critical voyeurism in the work of Punchdrunk. »

¹⁵ On peut d'ailleurs se demander qui les anime. Se pourrait-il que ce soit la compagnie qui continue à y alimenter le mystère ?

¹⁶ On peut noter le blog très complet et détaillé « Back to Manderley » sur la plateforme Tumblr : <http://paisleysweets.tumblr.com/>

***Jumpers* (1972) de Tom Stoppard ou l'autopsie du genre policier**

Jean DU VERGER
(ENSMM Besançon)

“The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic”

G.K. Chesterton, “The Blue Cross” in *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911)

Introduction

Après avoir exploré l'aspect métadramatique du genre policier dans *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968) puis cherché à montrer comment un détective parvient à élucider un mystère en confrontant les témoignages contradictoires des différents protagonistes dans *After Margritte* (1971) – illustrant ainsi les propos du personnage de Sir Rowland adressés à l'inspecteur Lord dans la pièce d'Agatha Christie *The Spider's Web* (1954) : « You must know better than I do, Inspector, how very rarely two people's account of the same thing agrees » (*TSW* : 88) –, le dramaturge anglais Tom Stoppard propose avec *Jumpers* (1972) une pièce qui, tout en se jouant des codes de la « crime play » (Hesse : 1), propose une véritable encyclopédie du genre.

Jumpers s'ouvre *in medias res* pendant une soirée célébrant la victoire électorale des *Radical Liberals* – un parti composé de technocrates à tendance fortement anti-démocratique – en Angleterre. Les premières scènes oscillent entre le farfelu et l'absurde : une chanteuse sur le retour qui ne parvient plus à chanter, une femme qui se balance sur un trapèze accroché à un lustre en faisant un strip-tease, une troupe de philosophes-gymnastes, les « jumpers » du titre de la pièce, effectuant un numéro d'acrobatie au cours duquel l'un d'eux – le professeur Duncan McFee – est assassiné. On est plongé au cœur

d'une sorte de soirée de music-hall où s'entremêlent enquête policière, considérations métaphysiques sur la question du relativisme moral et de l'existence de Dieu, dissection psychologique d'une relation amoureuse sur le déclin. Véritable palimpseste philosophique et théâtral, *Jumpers* ressemble à un labyrinthe ou un palais des glaces dans lequel références philosophiques, citations et parodies ne cessent de se refléter au point de se diffracter en une multiplicité de sens et d'interprétations possibles, laissant le spectateur-lecteur quelque peu désorienté.

La présente étude se propose d'explorer la manière dont le dramaturge détourne dans la pièce les codes de la littérature policière avant d'aborder l'utilisation qu'il fait de l'une des principales caractéristiques du genre qui lui permet d'ouvrir les portes de l'espace privé du couple George et Dotty Moore. En effet, le roman policier se propose également de dissiper, selon la belle formule de Boileau-Narcejac, les « clairs-obscur » du cœur et peut ainsi donner à voir le hors-champ du couple. Enfin, en abordant la question de la désintégration du couple, le dramaturge anglais s'inspire d'une tendance qui n'a cessé de se développer depuis la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur la scène britannique à savoir le meurtre comme conséquence des tensions au sein du couple (Hesse : 57) et tout particulièrement le motif du triangle amoureux, en l'occurrence ici Archie Bouncer, Dotty et George Moore.

Par ailleurs, le texte dramatique de Stoppard s'offre également comme une sorte d'enquête pour le lecteur-spectateur dans la mesure où le texte est parsemé d'indices littéraires, artistiques et philosophiques qui participent à la subtile efficacité dramaturgique et dépend de la sagacité du lecteur-spectateur. Il appartient en effet à ce dernier de découvrir et interpréter les indices disséminés dans le texte afin de profiter pleinement de la complexité du texte stoppardien.

Détournement(s) d'un genre

Jumpers se présente comme une mosaïque de fragments philosophiques qui interrogent le spectateur-lecteur sur la question ontologique de l'existence de Dieu¹, ainsi que sur les concepts du Bien et du Mal, et Stoppard donne à cette réflexion la forme d'une enquête

policière. En effet, la pièce repose sur les conventions de la littérature policière, conventions que le dramaturge anglais s'amuse à parodier et à détourner. Cette manière d'utiliser le cadre d'une enquête policière permet d'emprunter aux différentes variantes du genre pour créer par collages une encyclopédie du genre, dont le détournement et la parodie permettent d'augmenter l'efficacité dramatique de la pièce. Outre les références au genre policier, Stoppard n'hésite pas à renvoyer le spectateur-lecteur à des pièces de son propre corpus telles que *Another Moon Called Earth* (1967) ou bien *The Real Inspector Hound*.

Dans leur ouvrage *Le Roman policier* (1964), Boileau et Narcejac définissent ce genre littéraire comme une enquête, « mais une enquête qui a pour but d'élucider un certain mystère, un mystère en apparence incompréhensible et accablant pour la raison » (Boileau et Narcejac : 8). La trame narrative de la pièce de Stoppard vient s'insérer dans le cadre de ce que l'on appelle un « *whodunit* ». Le *whodunit* est un sous-genre narratif complexe du roman policier, qui repose sur la technique du puzzle. Le genre fit florès à l'époque de l'âge d'or du roman policier, des années 1920 aux années 1940. Le terme fut inventé par D. Jordan dans la revue *American News of Books*. Il fait référence à une forme d'écriture inventée par Edgar Allan Poe, dans sa nouvelle *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841). Le *whodunit* repose sur un certain nombre de conventions : un crime vient d'être commis ; un détective excentrique mène l'enquête ; divers suspects et indices contribuent à l'élucidation du crime qui a été commis. Cette fragmentation de la trame narrative est l'une des raisons pour lesquelles le genre est comparé à un puzzle.

Tom Stoppard avait déjà parodié le genre dans sa pièce *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), dans laquelle deux critiques dramatiques se retrouvent inextricablement happés par le monde fictif de la pièce à laquelle ils assistent et qui est une parodie de la célèbre pièce d'Agatha Christie, *The Mousetrap* (1952). La parodie, comme impulsion première, demeure au fil du temps un élément essentiel du roman policier. En effet, le cliché est constitutif du genre et sa répétition ainsi que les poncifs du roman-problème (la figure du coupable-patient, l'enquêteur, les témoins...) introduisent une distance parodique. C'est

d'ailleurs cette dimension parodique qui produit un effet de mise en abyme dans *The Real Inspector Hound*.

Revenons maintenant à *Jumpers*. La pièce comporte tous les éléments du *whodunit*. Le professeur Duncan McFee est assassiné (« *Professor McFee was killed by a bullet fired from the outer darkness* »). Habituellement, selon les conventions traditionnelles du *whodunit*, le meurtre n'a pas lieu sur scène mais hors-scène, une fois que les personnages principaux, qui sont aussi les suspects potentiels, ont été présentés. Or dans *Jumpers*, Stoppard détourne les conventions du genre en faisant assassiner McFee sur scène. En outre, Archie, l'un des principaux suspects, n'a pas encore fait son apparition sur scène. Nous avons bien évidemment d'autres suspects possibles : Doty et la secrétaire. En effet, lorsque le meurtre est commis, Doty est cachée à la vue des spectateurs-lecteurs : « *When the pyramid is complete it hides Doty from view* » (J : 16). Ces derniers ne peuvent donc pas voir ce qu'elle fait. Comme l'indiquent clairement les didascalies, cette situation est voulue par le dramaturge :

And from her position in the near-dark outside the JUMPERS' light, it should be possible to believe that Doty is responsible for what happens next – which is: A gun shot. ONE JUMPER is blown out of the pyramid. (J : 16)

Ceci nous renvoie à la situation du personnage de Penelope dans la pièce *Another Moon Called Earth*, que le dramaturge écrivit pour la télévision en 1967. Penelope est soupçonnée d'avoir poussé sa *nannie*, Pinkerton², par la fenêtre au cours d'un défilé fêtant le retour d'un astronaute³. Toutefois, Penelope apparaît comme la seule coupable possible, alors que ce n'est pas le cas de Doty :

CROUCH: The incident. There's been a bit of an incident. (*He sags into a chair.*) Woman, middle-aged to elderly, five foot one, grey hair in a bun, blue dress, starched apron, fell in the street. Dead. (AMCE : 61)

[...]

BONE: Well, it must have been your window – it's the only one overlooking... You can't hide! (AMCE : 64)

Le personnage d'Archie dans *Jumpers*, est lui-même un suspect potentiel. En effet, lorsqu'il décrit le déroulement des événements, il

fait calmement remarquer à l'inspecteur Bones, en charge de l'enquête, qu'il avait également un motif pour tuer McFee :

ARCHIE: Professor McFee was killed by a bullet fired from the outer darkness. We all saw him shot, but none of us saw who shot him. With the possible exception of McFee's fellow gymnasts, anybody could have had a reason for doing so, including, incidentally, myself. (*J* : 53-54)

On remarque que cet extrait fonctionne comme une sorte de *flash-back*, technique propre au *whydunit*. Contrairement au *whodunit* qui suit un déroulement chronologique linéaire, le *whydunit* repose sur l'exploration des raisons psychologiques qui ont motivées le crime ce qui lui permet une plus grande liberté avec la chronologie des événements.

Nous avons également affaire à un détective pour le moins excentrique, l'inspecteur Bones, qui affirme : « Show business is my main interest, closely followed by crime detection » (*J* : 37) et qui rappelle d'autres détectives du corpus stoppardien. Nous pensons à l'inspecteur Hound dans la pièce déjà citée ainsi qu'au Detective Inspector Foot dans *After Magritte* (1970).

Au fur et à mesure que l'action se déroule, le lecteur-spectateur découvre un certain nombre d'indices qui sont censés l'aider à élucider le meurtre de McFee. Ainsi Archie s'exclame : « shocking tragedy. I am entirely to blame », ou bien : « And then again, perhaps it was Dorothy. Or someone. (*Smiles.*) » (*J* : 53). On voit bien ici comment le dramaturge procède pour se jouer du public. Il met en application l'une des principales règles du genre, à savoir le principe de désorientation qui repose sur la mise en place d'apparences trompeuses. L'inspecteur Bones met justement George en garde : « Do not be misled by appearances » (*J* : 35).

La dichotomie apparence/réalité permet à l'auteur de créer une comédie de la confusion (*cross-purposes*), faisant ainsi écho à la stratégie de l'auteur d'un *whodunit* dont le but principal est de tromper, d'égarer son lecteur. Toutefois, Stoppard subvertit la structure formelle du genre en privant le lecteur-spectateur de dénouement, lui laissant le rôle de deviner qui est réellement l'assassin. Cette absence de conclusion dont parle Beatrix Hesse (Hesse : 169) se trouve clairement exprimé dans la coda de

l'édition de 1986 et permet au dramaturge, dans une scène onirique, de brouiller encore un peu plus les pistes. En revanche, si l'on considère la coda dans les éditions de 1972 et de 1976, le lecteur-spectateur attentif peut légitimement penser qu'Archie est le coupable :

ARCHIE: *Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest!*

(From each side of the stage, as though catapulted (from trampolines off stage) a YELLOW JUMPER leaps into the middle of the stage, both JUMPERS landing together in front of CLEGTHORPE, with the first bar of the introduction to 'Sentimental Journey'.

[...]

GEORGE *watches, moves hesitantly.*

This is what happens now, and it ought not to take as long to happen as it does to describe it: The JUMPERS and the music together keep the beat: The pattern of men changes and in six separate movements CLEGTHORPE is moved upstage until he is standing on CROUCH's desk as part of a pyramid of JUMPERS.)

[...]

*(A gunshot. It stops the music, and knocks CLEGTHORPE out of the pyramid, which disintegrates. [...])*⁴ (J 1972 : 86-87)

La coda des versions de 1972 et 1976 constitue ici une sorte de répétition du meurtre originel de McFee. Ce dernier qui était, à l'image de Clegthorpe, l'archevêque de Canterbury, un membre éminent de cette « squirarchy » (Hesse : 135) fut éliminé pour ne pas avoir respecté la loi non-écrite de la société désormais dirigée par les « Radical Liberals » d'Archibald Bouncer. En contrevenant ainsi aux règles, McFee et Clegthorpe se mettent en marge du groupe des Jumpers. Ils deviennent gênants puisqu'ils sont devenus des « blocking character[s] » (Hesse : 139) que le ou les assassins se doivent d'éliminer afin de parvenir à leurs fins.

Le détective : une figure clownesque

Les personnages stéréotypés de détectives sont, dans les pièces de Stoppard, une bonne illustration de la manière dont l'auteur ré-utilise et recycle ses propres écrits dans ses textes. Si l'on examine brièvement

le personnage de l'inspecteur Foot dans *After Magritte* (1970), pièce que l'on peut envisager comme l'un des hypo-textes de *Jumpers*, on observe certaines caractéristiques communes aux deux inspecteurs. Foot est dépeint comme un personnage condescendant, comme l'indiquent les didascalies « (*FOOT ignores her [mother]. He stands looking down smugly at HARRIS*) » (*AM* : 60). Tout comme Foot, Bones ne fait que très peu attention aux réponses qui lui sont faites :

FOOT: It is my duty to tell you that I am not satisfied with your reply.

THELMA: What was the question?

FOOT: That is hardly the point. (*AM* : 62)

GEORGE: Yes... (*Lightening.*) Yes, I'm something of a logician myself.

BONES: Really? Sawing ladies in half, that sort of thing?

GEORGE: Logician. (*J* : 35)

Et non « magician », terme que semble avoir entendu Bones, qui peut se lire comme une remarque ironique de l'auteur sur la pensée des philosophes-positivistes qui sont en quelque sorte des prestidigitateurs de la pensée, qui interrompent ou découpent les phrases et le raisonnement philosophique au gré de leur fantaisie. L'effet comique du *double sound pun* est ici évident. Autre exemple de l'incapacité de Bones à écouter, il s'avère incapable d'appeler George par son prénom et le nomme tour à tour « Charlie », « Jack », « Ferdinand », « Sidney » ou « Clarence ». (*J* : 35, 36, 37 et 42)

Tous ces éléments produisent un effet comique qui fait écho à la dimension clownesque du personnage du détective dans le *whodunit*. Audrey Laski propose à cet égard une approche théorique originale de la question en faisant ce parallèle entre le personnage du détective et du clown : « Every Clown template I have been able to recognize has at least one representative among series detectives » (Laski : 95). Elle propose une typologie des différentes caractéristiques des « mythic Clowns » (Laski : 94) en les comparant avec celles de certains détectives.

Le personnage de Bones est un collage des différents types de clowns, illustrant ainsi le propos de Laski selon qui les clowns passent rapidement d'une catégorie à l'autre (Laski : 94), ce qui contribue à

créer cette impression d'instabilité et de changement permanent que le spectateur-lecteur perçoit. Dès qu'il apparaît sur scène, Bones est décrit de manière un peu surprenante pour un détective qui enquête sur un meurtre : « *He carries a bunch of flowers* » (J : 34). On pense aux numéros de clowns qui arrivent en piste en portant un énorme bouquet de fleurs ou une grosse fleur à la boutonnière. Cette entrée en scène est caractéristique de la manière dont le dramaturge introduit ses personnages de détectives. Ainsi, l'inspecteur Hound apparaît sur scène vêtu de fort étrange manière « (*Enter INSPECTOR HOUND. On his feet are his swamp boots. These are two inflatable – inflated – pontoons with flat bottoms about two feet across. He carries a foghorn.*) » (TRIH : 26), soit à peu près les godillots des clowns qui accentuent leur démarche maladroite et en perpétuel contre-rythme. Quant à l'inspecteur Foot, son entrée en scène est des plus incongrues : « *FOOT charges into the room* » (AM : 58). Là encore, on visualise l'Auguste qui se précipite sur la piste de son pas pachydermique.

De plus, la manière dont Bones se présente auprès de George atteste du ton burlesque de la pièce :

BONES: Ah! – Bones!

GEORGE: What?

BONES: As in rags – and.

GEORGE: Rags and bones???

BONES: Yes – No. Bones' the name, as in dem bones... (*Pause*)... dem dry bones. (J : 34)

De l'expression proverbiale « rags and bones », on passe au fragment du Gospel *Dry Bones*, télescopage propre au processus d'écriture de Tom Stoppard. Le personnage de Bones semble, à travers ce court dialogue, être assemblé pièce par pièce sur scène. L'effet comique est accentué par la remarque suivante de Bones: « *Show business is my main interest, closely followed by crime detection* » (J : 37).

Le comique est redoublé par les gestes de Bones qui dénotent les caractéristiques comportementales du détective : « (*He produces a notebook.*) » (J : 38) ; « (*His pencil poised, his eyes wide.*) » ; « (*Bones scratches his head*) » (J : 39). Un geste classique de l'enquêteur qui tra-

duit soit sa perplexité, soit sa réflexion. On retrouve cette gestuelle dans la pièce d'Agatha Christie, *The Spider's Web*, dans laquelle l'inspecteur Lord est décrit de la manière suivante : "*The INSPECTOR puts a hand to the back of his head [...]*", (TSW : 95). Comme nous l'avons remarqué précédemment, Bones est une incarnation de plusieurs types de clowns-détectives tels qu'ils sont décrits dans la taxonomie d'Audrey Laski.

L'un des traits clownesques mis en lumière par Audrey Laski concerne le fait que les détectives ne cessent de poser des questions (Laski : 94). Ce questionnement incessant est justement une caractéristique de Bones comme par exemple « What is it you do? » (J : 34) ou « Who was at the party? » (J : 38). À l'instar du philosophe, le détective ne cesse de questionner les témoins afin de trouver une solution au meurtre de McFee. Par ailleurs, ses questions sont en réalité une manière pour lui de vérifier ce qu'il dit ou entend : « Really? How do you mean? » (J : 38) ; « You know what I mean? » (J : 49).

L'une des caractéristiques mentionnée dans la typologie de Laski est celle du nigaud, dont la fonction dramatique principale est de se tromper avec le lecteur-spectateur (Laski : 97) Comme l'illustre la remarque suivante de George :

GEORGE: Well, it's awfully nice of you to come round...

BONES: Not at all. If I'm going to arrest her, I can hardly do it by Interflora. (J : 49)

Bones semble ici avoir déjà conclu quant à la culpabilité de Dotty et ceci avant même d'avoir réellement commencé son enquête. Cette micro-scène peut être lue comme une diversion, un piège qui doit détourner l'attention du spectateur-lecteur. La confrontation entre Bones et Archie nous éclaire quant à un autre aspect de la figure du clown, celui du petit homme, qui fut remarquablement incarné par Charlie Chaplin au cinéma. Ce dernier est décrit par Laski comme un personnage à la fois amusant et pathétique, aux airs de perdant qui triomphe parfois (Laski : 96). Cet aspect du personnage de Bones fut d'ailleurs souligné lors de la représentation de la pièce donnée par la troupe The Washington Shakespearean Company en 2004 par l'imperméable fri-

pé qu'il portait. Dotty le décrit comme « a plain clothes detective » (*J* : 64). Lorsqu'il s'entretient avec Archie, ce dernier lui donne sa carte de visite afin non seulement de l'impressionner, mais aussi de lui faire sentir son pouvoir :

BONES: (*Reading off card.*) 'Sir Archibald Jumper, MD, DPhil, DLH? LD? DPM? DPT (Gym)'.... What's all that?⁵ (*J* : 52)

Cette micro-scène souligne l'hyperactivité d'Archie. Cette hyperactivité constitue l'un des traits caractéristiques du coupable dans le roman-problème. Par ailleurs, le personnage d'Archie semble symboliser, de par les multiples fonctions qu'il occupe, le microcosme de la haute-société britannique. On pense ici à la scène de *The Spider's Web* au cours de laquelle l'inspecteur Lord feuillette le *Who's Who* : « INSPECTOR (*reading*) « "Delahaye, Sir Rowland Edward Mark, K.C.B., M.V.O. [...]" » (*TSW* : 81).

La réaction de Bones montre son ignorance des codes sociaux et rend par conséquent le geste d'Archie quelque peu ridicule. Cependant, au fond, la réaction de Bones n'a que peu d'effet sur Archie dont le mépris est tel qu'il pense pouvoir corrompre sans difficulté la police :

ARCHIE: I dare say your ambitions do not stop with the Police Force, even. (*J* : 52)

On voit bien ici la manière dont Stoppard intègre une dimension sociale à sa pièce. En effet, après-guerre, le genre a, notamment sous l'impulsion d'Agatha Christie, abordé la question des changements qui étaient à l'œuvre au cœur même de la société britannique. Nous pensons notamment à la remarque de Mrs Boyle dans *The Mousetrap* : « [...] the lower classes seem to have no idea of their responsibilities » (*TM* : 306).

Par ailleurs, Bones, « a plain clothes detective », est dépeint comme un personnage se situant à la périphérie du monde du spectacle dans lequel évolue Dotty mais aussi de l'univers philosophique et politique qui est celui de George et Archie. Comme il le fait d'ailleurs remarquer lui-même, « [i]t's not a world I move in very much » (*J* : 36). Ce sentiment d'exclusion constitue l'une des caractéristiques du petit homme. Comme le souligne Audrey Laski, cette dernière figure

de clown se place en dehors des limites de la société et semble incapable de comprendre les raisons de son bannissement (Laski : 96).

Une pièce en clair-obscur⁶

Nous allons maintenant nous attarder sur ce que nous pourrions appeler « la scène de l'inspecteur Bones »⁷ afin de mettre en lumière quelques-uns des éléments qui caractérisent l'écriture dramatique de Stoppard. L'une des techniques préférées du dramaturge est le *cross-talk* – une sorte de joute oratoire qui repose sur un phénomène d'interférences – qu'il utilise dès l'entrée en scène du personnage de Bones. Bien que ce dernier soit là pour enquêter sur le meurtre de l'infortuné McFee, George pense que sa présence est due à la plainte qu'il a déposée au sujet du bruit de la fête qui a eu lieu la veille au soir.

GEORGE: Inspector! – I think I can help you in your inquiries. I'm your man. I am the mystery telephone caller.

BONES: (*Pause.*) You laid information against your wife, sir?

GEORGE: Yes. Well, it was really against myself more than my wife [...]

BONES: Your phone call was about noise?

GEORGE: Yes.

BONES: You didn't mention – an acrobat? (*J* : 37)

[...]

BONES: (*with irony.*) In these cases, we do like to have a look at the scene of crime.

GEORGE: Oh, really? What for?

BONES: It's traditional... (*J* : 39)

Les remarques de Bones relèvent du pastiche, l'utilisation des stichomythies permet à l'auteur de créer ainsi une comédie fondée sur l'incompréhension en raison d'une communication brouillée en permanence par des interférences extérieures ou bien en raison de l'inattention des personnages, du fait de la multiplication des sources qui réclament notre attention au quotidien comme la radio, la télévision ou le téléphone. Le téléphone, comme tout accessoire théâtral, possède une signification qui lui est propre, et constitue également l'un des motifs récurrents de la « crime play ». Si sa sonnerie contribue à créer,

comme dans *The Real Inspector Hound*, une véritable tension dramatique, il symbolise dans *Jumpers* une communication manipulée, voire faussée puisque d'une part George ment sur son identité et, d'autre part il évite de communiquer directement avec son épouse Dotty alors qu'elle se trouve dans le même appartement, soulignant ainsi l'incommunicabilité au sein de leur couple.

Examinons maintenant cette pièce sous l'angle des mouvements d'ombre et de lumière qui permet à l'auteur de jouer non seulement avec ses personnages mais aussi avec le lecteur-spectateur. L'éclairage joue en effet un rôle central dans la « crime play » dans la mesure où l'obscurité crée une atmosphère mystérieuse et permet de dissimuler l'identité du coupable. Si l'ombre et les ténèbres inspirent une inquiétude, voire la peur, c'est bien parce qu'elles dissimulent ce qui nous est inconnu, elles représentent l'espace dans lequel se déploient nos cauchemars. Les jeux de lumières, que décrivent les didascalies, ont une grande influence sur la création de cette atmosphère, savant mélange d'angoisse et de peur. Les premières indications que donne le dramaturge découpent l'espace théâtral en trois lieux distincts, « *three playing areas* » (J : 7) : le bureau de George, la chambre de sa femme, Dotty, et le hall. Mais l'indication la plus importante concerne l'éclairage : « *It is an essential requirement of the play that the bedroom can be blacked out completely while the action continues elsewhere* » (J : 7). Ces indications viennent souligner le cadre à la fois urbain et bourgeois de l'action qui va permettre au dramaturge d'offrir un accès à l'espace privé du couple. Comme l'a observé Anna Pasolini, l'une des principales caractéristiques du roman policier classique est de donner à voir les secrets de la vie privée bourgeoise (Pasolini : 152). Outre la tension dramatique qu'induit la séparation entre l'espace occupé par George et celui occupé par Dotty (Crump : 366), c'est l'oscillation entre ombre et lumière qui doit ici attirer notre attention. L'importance de ce jeu est mise en évidence lors de l'assassinat du professeur Duncan McFee. Le personnage de Dotty se retrouve ainsi caché (« *in the near-dark outside the JUMPERS' light* », J : 7), de telle sorte que le spectateur puisse la croire coupable (« *it should be possible to believe that Dotty is responsible for what happens next – which is: A gun-shot* », J : 7)) lorsqu'elle réap-

paraît en pleine lumière à travers le trou formé dans la pyramide par la chute du corps de McFee. À ce propos, on pourrait voir la pyramide comme une mise en scène de l'écriture du dramaturge. En effet, le texte dramatique de Stoppard repose sur le collage de fragments épars qui, une fois réunis dans la phrase, créent un effet de surprise lié à la présence d'un élément incongru qui attire l'attention du spectateur-lecteur, tout comme la figure de Dotty à travers la pyramide humaine ne peut passer inaperçue. Le dramaturge commence, dès le début de la pièce, à jouer avec les spectateurs qui n'ont pas accès aux didascalies (Kreps : 190). Le spectateur est donc amené à croire en la culpabilité de Dotty – du moins jusqu'à l'acte II, quand Archie admet, face à l'inspecteur Bones, avoir eu quelques griefs envers McFee qui font de lui un coupable potentiel (J : 53-54).

Archie rejette ainsi Dotty dans l'ombre en s'interposant entre elle et Bones (et le public), diffractant la lumière du soupçon sur lui-même. Par ailleurs, les didascalies du début corroborent cette hypothèse : « *Archie (Unseen)* », « *Archie's voice* » et « *Archie (Voice only)* » (J : 9, 10 et 13).

Mais si Stoppard joue avec les spectateurs, il joue également à la manière de Pirandello avec ses personnages. Tout au long du premier acte, le dramaturge met ainsi en place une sorte de chassé-croisé permanent entre George et le cadavre de McFee. Le cadavre devient alors un accessoire théâtral. Ce « busy body » (Hesse : 55) dont parle Beatrix Hesse, qui fait écho à celui du personnage d'Oliver Costello dans *The Spider's Web*, disparaît ainsi aux yeux des protagonistes et l'aspect répugnant du cadavre fait progressivement place à un objet de comédie macabre.

Après le meurtre de McFee, Dotty, paniquée, fait appel à Archie qui lui dit : « Just keep him out of sight till morning » (J : 13). S'ensuit alors ce chassé-croisé visuel entre George et le cadavre accroché derrière la porte de la chambre de Dotty. Chaque fois que George entre dans la chambre, le cadavre est visible pour le public mais lui ne le voit pas : « (*George leaves, shutting the door and thus revealing the corpse to the audience. He re-enters, and the corpse is obscured again*) » (J : 22). Mais, outre la dimension comique, ce gag visuel constitue, comme le

remarque fort justement Barbara Kreps, une illustration, en termes de représentation théâtrale, sur la manière dont le jeu du langage permet de cacher une vérité dont l'existence est présente à l'esprit des spectateurs (Kreps : 197). Le comique de la situation lié à la dissimulation du corps de McFee dure tout au long du premier acte et notamment pendant la visite de l'inspecteur Bones, lorsque ce dernier, vers la fin du premier acte, revient de manière impromptue par la cuisine : « *(Enters from the kitchen)* » (J : 41). Son retour inopiné oblige Dotty à mettre George à la porte de sa chambre : « *(Dotty pushes George out of the bedroom and closes the door. The bedroom blacks out. George turns to meet Bones who has appeared and is coming upstage [...])* » (J : 41).

La chambre se retrouve plongée dans la pénombre, disparaissant ainsi à la vue des spectateurs. Elle sera éclairée à nouveau quelques minutes plus tard par une lumière diaphane : « *(The bedroom light is romantic : pink curtains have been drawn across the French window, and there is a rosy hue to the lighting)* » (J : 42). La lumière et la musique de Beethoven (*Fidelio*) confèrent un aspect figé, onirique, à la scène qui contraste avec la chute brutale et inattendue du cadavre : « *(From behind the closed curtains, the stiff dead JUMPER falls into the room like a too-hastily-leaned plank. Quick fade to blackout, in bedroom only)* » (J : 43). Le bruit provoqué par la chute du cadavre coïncide avec le bruit du magnétophone de George, ce qui a pour effet de laisser George dans l'ignorance de la situation qui se déroule dans la pièce à côté de son bureau. Le dispositif visuel élaboré par le dramaturge est combiné à l'utilisation de la musique ou du bruit et contribue à l'aveuglement de George, incapable de voir ce qui se déroule sous ses yeux.

À la fin de l'acte I, la musique dissimule aussi l'arrivée d'Archie et de ses Jumpers venus se débarrasser du cadavre⁸ :

(SEVEN JUMPERS in yellow tracksuits enter smoothly [...]) In the bedroom, DOTTY is surprised but pleased by the entry of ARCHIE and the JUMPERS. They have come to remove the body.) (J : 46)

Une sorte de danse macabre et comique réunit Dotty et les gymnastes : « *the effect is a little simple improvised choreography between the Jumpers and Dotty* » (J : 47). Archie s'apprête, en prestidigitateur qu'il

est, à faire disparaître le corps dans un sac-poubelle, et l'on ne peut s'empêcher de penser à ce que George disait lorsqu'il résumait la philosophie des radicaux-libéraux : « No problem is insoluble given a big enough plastic bag » (J : 31).

Une fois de plus, la mise en scène donne forme au message véhiculé par la pièce, à savoir que le langage vient dissimuler la vérité. Les strates du langage viennent, en effet, se superposer les unes aux autres et finissent par rendre la réalité opaque en l'occurrence ici la question du meurtre et de la manière dont les gymnastes disposent du cadavre de McFee. Cette réalité est clairement mise en abyme par la structure récursive de cette scène. Comme le note Pierre Hadot, « [c]'est le langage lui-même qui nous donne l'illusion d'être un système de signes intermédiaires entre notre pensée et les objets » (Hadot : 90) :

([...] the FOUR JUMPERS throw the body into the bag: bag closes, bedroom door closes, JUMPERS moving smoothly, front door closes, and on the last beat of the song, only ARCHIE and DOTTY are left on stage.) Blackout (J : 47).

La vérité ne peut donc apparaître nue sous peine d'aveugler l'homme et, *a fortiori*, le lecteur-spectateur.

Le corps du délit

Examinons maintenant la manière dont les indications scéniques contribuent aux modalités d'inscription des corps dans l'espace théâtral. Nous nous intéresserons ici seulement aux représentations théâtrales des corps de Dotty et de la secrétaire. Nous nous appuierons donc sur les didascalies mais aussi sur les comptes rendus publiés dans la presse concernant la mise en scène de 1972 et ceux plus récents portant sur la mise en scène de 2004 par David Leveaux à Broadway.

La pièce s'ouvre sur une scène surréaliste au cours de laquelle la secrétaire effectue un strip-tease tout en se balançant sur un trapèze :

Like a pendulum between darkness and darkness, the SECRETARY swings into the spotlight, and out. She is on a swing, making an arc from wing to wing, in sight for a second, out of sight for a second, in sight for a second out

*of sight for a second... back and forth. The swing itself hangs from chandelier.
[...] Each time she reappears she has taken off some clothing. (J : 9)*

La nudité au théâtre constitue un événement captant toute l'attention du spectateur. Dans le *strip-tease* (pratique à la lisière du théâtre), le dévoilement du corps est codifié et le vêtement joue le rôle principal. Dans la mise en scène de Leveaux, l'actrice qui incarne l'effeuilleuse : « swings across the stage seven times » (McKinley). À chacune de ses apparitions éphémères, elle dévoile une partie de son anatomie soulignant la connotation sexuelle de la scène (« a topless woman on a swing » McKinley) mais, en focalisant l'attention du spectateur (tout en la détournant), le dramaturge souligne également l'importance du corps et tout particulièrement celui de la femme. La scène met en lumière la frustration qu'engendre la pièce puisque au moment où la secrétaire doit se montrer nue, elle disparaît brutalement dans la pénombre : « *The SECRETARY is nearing nakedness, obscured* » (J : 10).

L'autre personnage dont la nudité attire notre attention est Dotty. Sa nudité va permettre à Stoppard d'exprimer de manière théâtrale un certain nombre des thèmes centraux de la pièce. Bien que la nudité de Dotty puisse, en surface, représenter l'intimité de la relation entre elle et George, elle est avant tout un moyen de mettre en lumière le dysfonctionnement du couple mais également de souligner le contraste entre l'esprit (George) et le corps (Dotty). Lorsque George fait irruption dans la chambre de Dotty à la recherche de son lièvre Thumper, il ne fait absolument pas attention au corps nu de Dotty sur le lit. La nudité révèle les secrets d'un corps désiré. Or, pour George, ce corps est trop visible, au point qu'il en est invisible. Cette « hyperobtrusive situation », pour reprendre l'expression du chevalier Dupin, le célèbre détective d'Edgar Allan Poe, dans *La Lettre volée* (1844) (Poe : 195), nous renvoie à l'une des caractéristiques récurrentes du genre, qui consiste à placer la solution du mystère à la vue de tous. Cela traduit l'absence de désir de George pour sa femme, et le corps de Dotty semble, sous l'effet de l'anamorphose de la didascalie, se métamorphoser en cadavre :

The body of the JUMPER is nowhere in sight. However, DOTTY's nude body is sprawled face down, and apparently lifeless on the bed. George takes in the room at a glance, ignores DOTTY [...] (J : 21)

L'attitude de George a dû, lors de la création de la pièce en février 1972 à l'Old Vic, surprendre plus d'un spectateur si l'on veut bien se souvenir que l'actrice qui créa le rôle de Dotty n'était autre que Diana Rigg. L'incompréhension du spectateur face à la réaction de George est accentuée par la supplique de Dotty : « Stay with me! » (J : 22) Elle s'est relevée entre temps (« DOTTY has sat up on the bed », J : 22). Elle l'invite même, à la plus grande surprise de George, à quelque jeu érotique : « Play with me... » Mais ce dernier reste prisonnier de ses pensées métaphysiques. Après une brève dispute au cours de laquelle elle dévoile son désarroi, Dotty couvre son corps « (*She lies down on the bed and pulls the cover over her.*) » (J : 23). En recouvrant ainsi sa nudité elle revient au *statu quo ante*, celui d'une « bored housewife » (J : 29).

Tout comme Dotty ne sait pas quoi faire du cadavre de McFee, George lui ne sait pas quoi faire avec le corps de Dotty :

(He strokes her hair. He doesn't really know what to do. So he plays with her hair for what seems a long time, lifting up her hair, running it through his fingers, looking at it, separating strands of hair. His mind grapples with hair, and then drifts, and stops). (J : 32)

Une fois George reparti dans son bureau, Dotty décide de déplacer le corps de McFee : « *During the next scene in the study, the light remains in the bedroom. DOTTY, during the scene, lifts the corpse off its hook and sits it in an upstage chair* » (J : 32) ; celui-ci devient alors visible pour les spectateurs. Lorsque George revient soudainement dans la chambre à la recherche, cette fois-ci, de sa tortue Pat, on assiste à une scène qui nous paraît extrêmement intéressante :

(He heads back towards the bedroom where DOTTY has just dumped the JUMPER into the chair. The chair is upstage facing the audience. DOTTY is standing up against the chair with her back to the audience [...] GEORGE is going to cross the bedroom behind DOTTY's back. The JUMPER's yellow trousers are ill concealed by DOTTY's body.

GEORGE enters.

As GEORGE opens the door, DOTTY calmly lets her robe slip down her back until it hangs like a drape below her buttocks, her arms, still in the sleeves, held out to the sides; thus concealing the JUMPER from view. Thus, she is naked from thighs up, back view. GEORGE glances casually at her as he crosses the room.) (J : 33)

Le corps à moitié nu de Dotty vivante vient donc dissimuler le corps habillé du cadavre. C'est le dévoilement de son propre corps qui détourne volontairement l'attention de George du cadavre. En se dénudant elle se rend à nouveau visible à George, qui cette fois-ci la remarque, mais pour faire écran à un autre corps, celui du pauvre McFee...

Jumpers ou l'autopsie du corps féminin

Toutefois, ce que le corps cache est encore plus porteur de sens que ce qu'il dévoile. Le corps, s'il confère à l'être humain son apparence, est avant tout une surface qui doit être examinée, comme le montre la scène du "dermatographe" au début de l'acte II. Cette scène illustre parfaitement la remarque de Bertrand Russell sur le fait que la pensée d'autrui se reflète dans son corps : « What goes on in the minds of others is known to us through our perception of their bodies, that is, through the sense-data in us which one associated with their bodies » (Russell : 27). Le corps constitue en effet l'un des éléments essentiels de la « crime play » ou du roman policier. Le corps, que ce soit celui de la victime ou du coupable, est non seulement l'objet de tous les regards, et tout particulièrement ceux du policier ou du détective, mais également le lieu de toutes les interprétations. Comme le note à raison Ronald R. Thomas, le corps doit être déchiffré et pour cela l'enquêteur doit aller au-delà des simples apparences, d'où l'intérêt qu'il y a à explorer l'intérieur du cadavre de la victime afin de déterminer les causes de sa mort. L'étude de Thomas montre bien comment les conventions du genre ont mis l'accent sur la médicalisation du discours criminel qui confère au détective le statut de maître diagnosticien (« master diagnostician ») (Thomas : 3)⁹ capable de lire au-delà des apparences souvent trompeuses. Il lui ap-

partient de combler les blancs d'une histoire fragmentée (Thomas : 4). Thomas souligne ainsi comment le personnage du détective apparaît comme un expert capable de déchiffrer le corps humain avec la précision d'une machine (Thomas : 5), afin de rendre visible ce qui, jusqu'alors, était du domaine de l'invisible. On voit donc bien ici comment la fiction policière s'intéresse, non seulement aux aspects physiques du corps, mais aussi à la complexité de l'esprit humain. Thomas souligne comment la science s'est peu à peu appropriée l'ensemble de l'enquête policière en utilisant un certain nombre de machines ou de sciences nouvelles telles que le détecteur de mensonge, la photographie ou l'anthropométrie. Le but de ces machines et de ces techniques est de permettre au corps d'écrire et de parler en son nom propre (Thomas : 17).

Le personnage de George observe la scène étrange, qui se déroule dans la chambre de Dotty, dont les interprétations sont multiples :

(He opens the bedroom door. In the bedroom, no one is in view. The drapes – or screens – are round the bed. An ambiguous machine—the dermatograph—is set up so that it peers with its lens through the drapes. Some camera-lights are in position around the bed, shining down over the drapes into the bed. The TV set is connected by a lead to the dermatograph.) (J : 51).

Après avoir refermé la porte, George retourne dans son bureau puis c'est au tour de l'inspecteur Bones de pénétrer dans la chambre de Dotty. Après les présentations d'usage, Bones s'enquiert auprès d'Archie au sujet des propriétés de cette étrange machine :

ARCHIE: [...] As you can see I have been taking a dermatographical reading.

BONES (*Indicating the dermatograph*): This? What does it do?

ARCHIE: It reads the skin, electronically; hence dermatograph. All kinds of disturbances under the skin show up on the surface, if we can learn to read it, and we are learning.

BONES: Disturbances? Mental disturbances?

ARCHIE: Among other things. (J : 53)

Ainsi donc le « dermatographe » permet de regarder à l'intérieur du corps, de rendre transparent ce qui est opaque, afin de déceler

d'éventuels symptômes de dysfonctionnements mentaux ou physiologiques. Toutefois, la machine n'est pas maîtrisée : « if we can learn how to read it, and we are learning » (*J* : 53), soulignant ainsi les limites de la science à comprendre l'humain et la folie, tout comme la philosophie ne peut tout expliquer. La nudité de Dotty est synonyme d'opacité et de mystère, elle dissimule plus qu'elle ne révèle. La texture même du corps de Dotty est, à l'instar de la pièce, une énigme qu'il nous faut déchiffrer comme le soulignera George : « Dorothy—don't hide—it's not a charade » (*J* : 69). Le dermatographe qui doit permettre l'accès à la connaissance de l'esprit de Dotty ne semble pas à même de déchiffrer la complexité de l'âme humaine. Pas plus, d'ailleurs, que la psychiatrie dont le représentant, Archie, avoue les limites à George, au cours d'une conversation où abondent les sous-entendus sexuels. Le corps de Dotty devient alors le lieu où viennent s'inscrire les désirs libidineux d'Archie, désirs auxquels renvoie de manière oblique son titre de « Vice-Chancellor » :

ARCHIE: I naturally try to get her to open up, but one can't assume she tells me everything, or even that it's the truth.

GEORGE: [...] All she says is, she's all right in bed.

ARCHIE: Yes, well there's something in that.

GEORGE: What exactly do you do in there?

ARCHIE: Therapy takes many forms. [...]

GEORGE: You examine her?

ARCHIE: Oh yes, I like to keep my hand in. (*J* : 60-61)

Archie fragmente mais ironiquement, à la manière d'un blasonneur de la Renaissance, le corps de Dotty, un corps qui n'est en réalité pour lui qu'une machine. Tous ces fragments qui tissent la structure de surface du corps ne font en réalité que l'opacifier davantage. Cette parcellisation du corps fait écho à la fragmentation de son esprit qui se reflète au travers de ses chansons :

ARCHIE: [...] you think that when I'm examining Dorothy I see her eyes as cornflowers, her lips as rubies, her skin as soft and warm as velvet – you think that when I run my hands over her back I am carried away by the delicate contours that flow like a sea-shore from shoulder to heel – oh yes, you think my mind turns to ripe pears as soon as I press –

[...]

But for us medical men, the human body is just an imperfect machine [...]. (J: 61)

Mais en réalité la texture du corps de Dotty est bien plus complexe qu'il n'y paraît, ce qu'elle exprime d'ailleurs elle-même de manière métaphorique dans cet échange avec George :

GEORGE: Are you a proverb?

DOTTY: No, I'm a book.

GEORGE: *The Naked and the Dead*. (J: 21)

Le terme « book » illustre clairement la complexité du personnage de Dotty, qui est loin d'être une forme brève, un apophtegme, même sybillin. Elle est au contraire l'expression d'une forme littéraire complexe. L'utilisation du titre du roman de Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), renvoie aussi à la complexité du personnage de Dotty et à sa situation désespérée. La pièce souligne tout particulièrement sa solitude, qui constitue par ailleurs l'un des thèmes récurrents du roman de Mailer. Contrairement aux personnages féminins dépeints dans *The Naked and the Dead*, Dotty n'est pas, pour Stoppard, un simple objet sexuel mais bien un personnage dense et complexe.

La nudité de Dotty révèle ainsi une transparence qui est hantée par l'opacité et l'habile mise en scène du corps. Une mise en scène qui participe d'une stratégie de l'éblouissement censé aveugler le spectateur, en le laissant s'interroger sur ce qui se tapit dans l'ombre. Sa nudité s'apparente donc à un véritable costume qui vient voiler son identité profonde, ce qui lui permet d'exister. Les entrelacs et la superposition de ses tissus (le regard d'autrui...) contribuent à opacifier la complexité de son personnage. Son corps vient s'intégrer dans la syntaxe même de l'espace théâtral, dont elle constitue en quelque sorte l'élément central, comme l'écrivit le critique dramatique du *New York Times*, Jesse McKinley, au sujet de la mise en scène de David Laveaux à Broadway en 2004 : « a bedroom that assembles itself around a completely naked woman » (McKinley), à l'image de ces collages cubistes qui insèrent un élément de la réalité dans une œuvre fictionnelle.

Conclusion

La surface apparemment comique de la pièce dissimule et révèle à la fois une réelle profondeur philosophique et ontologique. Cette oscillation permanente entre ombre et lumière repose sur les didascalies et le texte-palimpseste de la pièce, dont la richesse et la complexité laissent parfois le lecteur-spectateur dans une situation inconfortable dans la mesure où la multiplicité des perspectives contribue à l'égarer dans un véritable labyrinthe. Son désarroi est à l'image de celui exprimé par George : « How the hell does one know what to believe? » (*J* : 62).

L'écriture de Stoppard exhibe ici son savoir-faire afin de le donner à voir au lecteur-spectateur attentif. Par ailleurs, le chassé-croisé verbal entre les personnages ainsi que les didascalies se retrouvent être l'écho d'un savant et subtil chassé-croisé intratextuel et intertextuel dans l'œuvre même du dramaturge. Stoppard propose dans *Jumpers* une véritable encyclopédie de la « crime play » dont il s'ingénie à détourner les codes. Les détournements et subversions des codes du genre invitent le lecteur-spectateur à opérer par commutations ou permutations qui installent ainsi une équivoque permanente et permettent de ne jamais figer, fixer réellement le sens d'un texte qui s'ouvre à de multiples interprétations, tout comme le corps de Dotty, soumis non seulement aux regards d'Archie, de George et du « dermatographe », mais également à ceux des spectateurs. Malgré sa nudité, ce corps résiste aux interprétations psychanalytiques et psychiatriques d'Archie et de sa machine. En conservant son mystère, le corps de Dotty permet à Stoppard d'illustrer la difficulté, voire l'impossibilité qu'il y a à vouloir déchiffrer les motivations de l'âme. L'enquête philosophico-policière est incapable d'apporter une solution au mystère qui parcourt la pièce. L'« horlogerie policière » (Catsiapis : 30) de celle-ci repose elle-même sur une écriture dramaturgique de haute précision dont les différents rouages (allusions, citations, collages ou didascalies) maintiennent en éveil la curiosité du lecteur-spectateur. Elle induit en effet chez ce dernier des réflexes comparables à ceux d'un détective qui cherche à déceler les indices du mystère, indices qui, mis bout à bout, doivent lui permettre de résoudre son enquête.

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¹ Comme l'a fort bien observé, et non sans humour, Beatrix Hesse : « The play's protagonist, George Moore, is continually interrupted in his attempts to write a lecture on the great "Whodunit" question: "Who created the universe?" », (Hesse : 66).

² On appréciera ici au passage l'utilisation comique de l'onomastique stoppardienne, avec cette allusion à l'écossais Allan Pinkerton, célèbre pour avoir fondé en 1850 aux États-Unis la Pinkerton Detective Agency.

³ On notera ici le parallèle entre les conditions dans lesquelles s'effectue le retour sur terre de l'astronaute dans *Jumpers* et dans *Another Moon Called Earth*. Si dans *Another Moon* l'astronaute est accueilli en héros, dans *Jumpers* en revanche il revient sur Terre après avoir sacrifié l'astronaute qui l'accompagnait. Le vaisseau n'ayant plus suffisamment d'énergie pour ramener les deux astronautes sur Terre il n'hésite pas à abandonner son coéquipier sur la Lune. Un abandon qui ressemble fort à un assassinat.

⁴ Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers*, Londres, Faber & Faber, 1972, p. 86-87. Les deux éditions mentionnées proposent une version légèrement différente de la coda. Les versions de 1972 et 1976 confèrent une circularité à la pièce puisque celle-ci s'achève comme elle a débuté avec l'assassinat de l'un des gymnastes. En revanche, dans la version de 1986 ce passage a été supprimé. Par conséquent, la conclusion ne donne aucun indice tangible quant à la culpabilité possible d'Archie, laissant ainsi un goût d'inachevé à l'enquête.

⁵ Ce passage fait écho au passage d'*Ulysses* dans lequel Bloom lit son nom dans le botin mondain (« court directory ») : « Bloom, Leopold P., M.P., P.C., K.P., LL.D. (honoris causa), Bloomville, Dudrum ». Bloom s'interroge, à travers ses fonctions civiques et honorifiques, sur son propre statut au sein de la société (« among the country families and the landed gentry »), (Joyce : 588).

⁶ Boileau-Narcejac remarquent avec pertinence que « c'est bien entre brume et soleil que le roman policier s'est développé et c'est bien la lutte entre la nuit et le jour qui le caractérise, c'est-à-dire le clair-obscur », (Boileau-Narcejac : 61).

⁷ Cette scène se déroule de la page 34 à la page 47 de *Jumpers*.

⁸ Voir également la didascalie : « *the song dominates the whole scene. Nothing can be heard [...]* », (J : 46).

⁹ On pense également à la nouvelle d'Edgar Allan Poe *The Man of the Crowd* (1840), notamment lorsque le narrateur remarque : « The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces [...] it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years », (Poe : 428).

