

Sabbatical Leave Report

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Spring Semester 2003**

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide a chronicle of my one-semester study sabbatical that began in January and concluded in May 2003. Section one contains my initial sabbatical proposal to take classes in the department of Theater Arts and Dance at California State University, Los Angeles. Section two and three document my actual work during the sabbatical including a course-by-course description of work completed during the 2003 Winter and Spring quarters. Section four draws several conclusions and describes the derived benefits/value to both the college and myself. The report ends with an appendix that contains representative work (i.e. papers, projects) from the completed courses.

My only dissatisfaction with my study sabbatical at CSU Los Angeles was, perhaps, that it went by too quickly. Twenty weeks and nineteen quarter units later, I feel so lucky to have been able to immerse myself in academia as a student. I would like to thank the Salary and Leaves Committee for approving this sabbatical. I hope this document provides satisfactory evidence that the time I spent away from Mt. San Antonio College was useful, rewarding and worthwhile.

SECTION ONE: SABBATICAL PROPOSAL

**Proposed Study Sabbatical
Submitted December 3, 2001**

Overview

I propose to continue my course of study in the area of Theater Arts and Dance at California State University, Los Angeles. I have been enrolled as a graduate student in this program since fall of 1997. Because of my college commitments, I have only been able to take one course a quarter. If accepted, this study sabbatical would allow me to enroll full-time for two successive quarters.

This study sabbatical would begin in January 2003 and end in May of the same year. Since CSU Los Angeles operates under the quarter system, I would enroll in both the winter quarter (which begins in January) and the spring quarter (which begins in April). Each quarter is 10 weeks in length and, thus, two quarters would correspond roughly to our 18 week semester. I would enroll in 10 units during winter quarter and 8 units during spring quarter. Upon completion, I will have completed 18 quarter units, which translates to 12 semester units.

Course of study:

(Note: the 400-level courses listed below are necessary requirements of the MA degree in Theater Arts and Dance at CSU Los Angeles).

I. Winter Quarter 2003:**TA 511-- Seminar: Special Studies in Theater History (4 Graduate Units)**

Graduate seminar studying a significant era or movement in theatre history. Specific subject area to be determined by instructor.

TA 595 – Graduate Performance (3 Graduate Units)

Demonstration of graduate level proficiency in a major performance situation; research or analytical written project directly related to performance.

TA 431 – Introduction to Stage Scenery (3 Undergraduate Units)

Theory, practice of scenery design; physical stage, script, director demands; working drawings, models, sketches; perspective rendering. Additional hours required.

II. Spring Quarter 2003:**TA 476 – Play Writing (4 Undergraduate Units)**

Workshop in planning, preparing, and writing manuscripts for stage; emphasis on handling dramatic materials, play structure, characterization, and appropriate dialogue.

TA 471 – Theatre of the Avant-Garde (4 Undergraduate Units)

Translation studies in development of avant-garde in French-, German-, and English-speaking theatres. Emphasis on experimental drama as producible, living theatre.

Anticipated Value and Benefit of the Proposed Sabbatical Activity

Value to applicant

This study sabbatical would have significant value to me. As I approach the middle of my eleventh year of teaching, this pause from instruction will renew my teaching energies. As a part-time student for the past four years, I know the fun, as well as relief, of being a student after a day full of teaching. I truly love, almost as much as teaching, the ability to sit in a classroom and learn. The opportunity to immerse myself in learning as a full-time student again is a dream of mine that will allow me to return to the classroom, once the sabbatical is complete, with vigor and eagerness, not to mention an empathetic understanding of what it means to be a student. Also, the sabbatical would certainly refresh my pedagogical strategies. Specifically, this course of study will provide important insight into the most current and significant theories in the academy. My studies in theatre have already introduced me to concepts in performance studies, Brechtian performance, poststructuralism, postmodernism, colonialism/postcolonialism, deconstruction, cultural studies and countless other important topics within higher education. Although advanced, this scholarship always makes its way to my students through introductory instruction. These are ideas and theories that they will inevitably encounter as they enter university education and I feel it is important that I am well versed in this scholarship.

Additionally, the study of effective performance techniques will undeniably advance my speaking and teaching skills. An advanced investigation into the dynamic relationship between performers and their audiences will help me to

better comprehend and engage my audience—our students—and to envision new and innovative strategies to approach my performance in the classroom.

Value to department

The study sabbatical would also benefit our department. The department of Communication is a hybrid department consisting of Speech, Radio and Television, Journalism and Theater. The completion of theater coursework will allow me to move closer to my goal of teaching both speech and theater classes at Mt. SAC, thus providing another full-time professor for Mt. SAC students who choose to study theater. Furthermore, a study sabbatical will give me the opportunity to observe other professors in action, to evaluate and engage their teaching strategies and to share these methods of instruction with the members of our department.

Value to college

Finally, the study sabbatical would directly benefit the college. With the consent of our full-time theater professors, my education in theater will prepare me to direct on-campus plays and aid in the direction and growth of our theater department. Also, the study of performance will enhance my abilities to represent our college. Already, I have served as an emcee for functions ranging from now-defunct Friends of the College event to the Hot Blues and Cool Jazz Festival. Along with Liesel Reinhart, I narrated the Measure R video and each year I perform in the Faculty Association's "Puttin' on the Hits" fundraiser. The study and practice of acting and writing will directly enhance my abilities to create scripts for college communications and to perform as a college spokesperson.

SECTION TWO: WINTER 2003 COURSES

COURSE: Theater Arts 511-- Seminar: Special Studies in Theater History

AREA OF EMPHASIS: The Theatrical Construction of American Identity in the Nineteenth Century

PROFESSOR: Dr. Judith Hamera

OVERVIEW:

Perhaps the most rigorous course of my sabbatical, this seminar focused on performativity in the 1800's including an investigation into minstrel shows, the rise of female actresses like Sarah Bernhardt, Chicago's Hull House Settlement, the theatrical representations of Indians and the story of P.T. Barnum to argue that the American self is caught in an endless oscillation between cohesive public rituals designed to create an authentic American identity, and the fragmentation that is revealed as these "authentic rituals" are exposed as the cobbled together construction of projection, fantasy, and representation of America's others.

READING:

Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism by Susan A. Glenn

Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity by Shannon Jackson

Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class by Eric Lott

Playing Indian by Phillip Loria

Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum by Neil Harris

ASSIGNMENTS:

In addition to completing the reading, an annotated bibliography, and a number of smaller papers, I researched and wrote a twenty five page seminar paper about the abduction of Charley Ross in 1893 and the popular Broadway melodrama based on the crime (Appendix 2a).

COURSE: Theater Arts 431 – Introduction to Stage Scenery**PROFESSOR: Chris Acebo****OVERVIEW:**

This course addressed the theory and practice of scenery design. Fundamental to our instruction was the consideration of the physical stage as a canvas for scenic design. We discussed and worked through the problems and advantages of proscenium, thrust, and environmentally immersed stages. Taking a hands-on, creative approach to the course, Professor Acebo also required that we draw every class period. We were also lucky enough to visit the Mark Taper Forum to tour the set he created for Lisa Loomer's "Living Out."

READING:

Selected articles from *Theatre Journal*, *The Drama Review* and *American Theatre Journal*.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Professor Acebo required working drawings, models, sketches, and perspective renderings for an imagined production of *Macbeth*. The final project consisted of both architectural plans and a scale model set for an imagined production of the Greek tragedy *Electra*, by Sophocles. That model is available for perusal upon request.

COURSE: Theater Arts 475—Dramaturgy*

PROFESSOR: Dr. Susan Mason

OVERVIEW:

This course investigated the theory and practice of process, production and institutional dramaturgy. Specifically, we looked at the tasks of research, adaptation, and script selection that are integral to the successful mounting of a dramatic work.

READING:

Selected articles from *Text and Performance Quarterly* and *The Drama Review*.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Projects included researching and writing programs and posters for specific shows. Also, each student also served as the official dramaturge for one play from CSULA's theatrical season. I worked with department chair Dr. Stephen Rothman on his production of Ron House's *El Grande De Coca Cola*. As part of my role, I helped create a study guide for visiting classes as well as a protocol and production history (Appendices 2b, 2c).

*This course was an approved substitution for TA 595.

SECTION THREE: SPRING 2003 COURSES

COURSE: Theater Arts 476 – Play Writing**PROFESSOR: Dr Chris Herr****OVERVIEW:**

This course provided practical instruction in theatrical creative writing. In a workshop setting, students took part in planning, preparing, and writing manuscripts for stage. Special emphasis was given to handling dramatic materials, play structure, characterization, and appropriate dialogue.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Each week students were required to complete in-class as well as out-of-class writing assignments. Sample assignments included sustained conflict exercise, overheard conversation exercise, and character biography exercises. Students were also required to complete an entire one-act play during the quarter. I wrote a play entitled *White* that was selected as one of the outstanding student generated scripts and will be performed this coming spring as part of the John Lion New Works Festival at the State Playhouse on the campus of CSULA (Appendix 3a).

COURSE: Theatre Arts 511-- Seminar: Special Studies in Theater History

AREA OF EMPHASIS: Popular Theater: The History of Clowns Including the Work of Bertolt Brecht and the San Francisco Mime Troupe*

NOTE: As part of the Masters of Arts program, CSULA requires that all graduate students take at least two courses in theater history. Since each class focuses on a different time period, these courses are completely distinct from one another.

PROFESSOR: Dr. Susan Mason

OVERVIEW:

This course focused on the history of clowning, beginning with Italy's *commedia dell'arte* in the 18th century, moving on to the clown's of the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, and finishing in contemporary society with discussions of protest clowning groups such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

READING:

Festive Revolutions: The Politics of Popular Theater and the San Francisco Mime Troupe by Claudia Orenstein

Durov's Pig: Clowns, Politics and Theatre by Joel Schecter

ASSIGNMENTS:

In addition to completing the reading, students were required to submit reading notes for each chapter in the reading. Also, I created and performed a one-

person protest piece and wrote two research papers for the course (appendices 3b, 3c).

*This course was an approved substitution for TA 471.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

In my sabbatical proposal I listed seven anticipated benefits to be derived from this sabbatical. They included:

1. *A renewal of my teaching energies.*
2. *A better understanding of students and student life.*
3. *A revitalization of pedagogical strategies*
4. *An advancement of speaking and performance skills.*
5. *A significant movement toward completion of an MA degree in theater.*
6. *Information and ideas to share with our theater department.*
7. *Improved abilities to represent our school in performance situations.*

With the completion of my coursework at CSULA and the start of Fall semester at Mt. SAC, I have already realized many of these goals.

1. *A renewal of my teaching energies:*

My time away from teaching has rejuvenated and re-energized my commitment to the academic process. In addition to the spring semester, I also refrained from teaching this past summer. I spent much of that time thinking of new ways to improve my speech classes. I have devised new assignments, created new tests, constructed more interesting syllabi and planned more creative class activities. This sabbatical has allowed me to “catch my breath,” so to speak, and I feel lucky to have so much more energy to share with our students.

2. A better understanding of students and student life:

I also have a greater appreciation of both the hurdles and luxuries of being a student. I forgot, I think, how difficult and rigorous homework and research assignments can be. Yet, challenging work often translates to a greater satisfaction once it is completed. This sabbatical has reminded me to keep my standards high in the classroom, to assign difficult and challenging work, but also to be as helpful and empathetic as I can be when students encounter problems.

3. A revitalization of pedagogical strategies:

I have also been given many examples, both good and bad, of pedagogical strategies demonstrated by professors at CSU Los Angeles. Many of the best strategies have already made their way into my class. For example, the class activity "Performing the Syllabus," which I first came into contact with at CSULA, is an excellent performative ice breaker that engages students from the first day of class. On the other hand, I was unlucky enough to have one professor who played videotapes for the majority of our class time. I was reminded that audio visual aids should be used sparingly by a teacher and that nothing replaces dynamic, live communication.

I am also grateful for the chance to catch up on the latest trends within academia. If you peruse the bibliographies of the research papers contained in the appendix to this document, you will discover a critical engagement with a number of advanced concepts, ideas and theories. Although this work is often

too advanced for my students, I have begun to bring versions of it into my class. For example, I learned about the idea of “performativity” in Judith Hamera’s 511 history course and have now started teaching the concept in my Speech 1A class.

4. An advancement of speaking and performance skills.

As one might expect, after this intense study of performance, I am a better performer in and outside the classroom. For example, my work in Susan Mason’s 511 history of clowning course introduced me to several improvisation strategies that have directly improved my lecture and discussion skills.

5. A significant movement toward completion of an MA degree in theater.

Clearly, this sabbatical has moved me substantially closer to my goal of teaching both speech and theater classes at Mt. SAC. I have now completed all the necessary coursework and simply need to pass the comprehensive examination to earn my MA degree in theater.

6. Information and Ideas to Share with our Theater Department:

Working closely with the teachers and students at CSU Los Angeles, I have come across a number of ideas that might be beneficial to our department. For example, CSULA has started basing their season play selection, in part, on the curricula of other classes outside the department. Working closely with the English department, a director might choose a Shakespearean play to

correspond to the coursework of an English literature course, for example. Also, in my dramaturgy class, we worked on creating study guides for visiting classes. These study guides are a terrific way of encouraging critical thinking on the part of student spectators.

7. Improved abilities to represent our school in performance situations.

This study of performance will also help me to better represent the college. Not only have I practiced and honed my performance skills, but I have also enhanced my writing and design skills. Thanks to my playwriting class, I was able to put newly enhanced creative writing skills to use in the recent Hot Blues and Cool Jazz Concert. At the event, Liesel Reinhart and I wrote and performed a short play about Galileo to help promote the new capital campaign for the planetarium.

APPENDIX

2a.

Ken Klawitter
TA 511: Winter 2003
Final Paper

**Defiling Innocence:
Two Performances of the Abduction of Charley Ross**

In the past week, only one event has been able to displace the impending U.S. invasion of Iraq as the top story in newspapers and news shows: the rescue of Elizabeth Smart. As details were made available to the press, we learned the horrifying news that this Salt Lake City teenager was snatched from her bedroom at night by a drifter, a banished Mormon who was driven by a revelation to gather seven young wives into a polygamist family. *The Washington Post* called it “a crime that had captivated the country because of its chilling circumstances” (A3). With its mix of religion, sex, crime and teenage vulnerability, the story of Elizabeth Smart became the latest in a long line of American narratives that have played into a cultural fascination assembled at the intersection of notions of innocence and corruption, purity and vileness. Before Elizabeth, there were the stories of JonBenet Ramsey, Danielle Van Dam and before these the classic cases of Bobby Franks and the Lindbergh baby. While distinct, all of these cases are remarkably similar in the scope and type of attention they elicit. And each, when held up against their specific social contexts, can tell us a great deal about our larger understandings of children, families, and social roles. This paper details the fascination with one, perhaps first, case of child abduction in America: the kidnapping of Charley Ross.

Charley, along with his brother Walter, was taken from his Germantown, Pennsylvania home on July 1, 1874. Although Walter was recovered that same day, Charley remained missing. Soon, Charley's middle class family received notice from the abductors that Charley would be returned in exchange for a \$20,000 ransom. By most accounts, Charley's abduction is the first known case of ransom kidnapping in the United States (Fass, Sullivan, Smith, Zierold).

The chronicle of "Little Charley Ross" was recounted most recently in Paula Fass's 1997 book, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America*. This paper relies heavily on Fass's detailed account of late nineteenth century American life as well as its factual reconstruction of the case. While Fass's work has been integral to this paper, I am interested in the ways in which Charley's story became the basis for other stories and how, in particular, it emerged performatively. In this paper I shall examine two performative projections of the Ross abduction: a long-running New York melodrama, *Pique*, by Augustin Daley as well as Christian Ross's memoir, *The Father's Story of Charley Ross, the Kidnapped Child: Containing a Full and Complete Account of the Abduction of Charles Brewster Ross from the Home of His Parents in Germantown, with the Pursuit of the Abductors and Their Tragic Death; The Various Incidents Connected with the Search for the Lost Boy; the Discovery of other Lost Children, Etc. Etc. With Facsimiles of the Letters from the Abductors*. Specifically, I am arguing that the abduction of Charley Ross provided Americans with a vicarious thrill that was capitalized on in Daley's melodrama. The play sensationalized the events of Ross's abduction and, in so doing, commented

upon Victorian American family life and the changing understanding of gender roles, instantiating the late nineteenth century crisis in masculinity. In response to negative rumors and innuendos manifest in the play and newspaper articles, Christian Ross attempted to reestablish his authority over the story through a public performance of paternal masculinity. The story of Charley Ross, which Christian tried to repossess, ultimately evaded paternal control and became resolutely entrenched in American culture. Its reverberations can be heard in contemporary narratives of abduction and kidnapping which contain the residue of Victorian America's fascination with the abuse of the innocent child—a fascination which often comes at the expense of children themselves.

The story of Charley Ross captivated late nineteenth century Victorian Americans who were both shocked and titillated by the new crime of ransom kidnapping. Immediately following the abduction, stories appeared in newspapers ranging from the *New York Times* to the *San Francisco Chronicle* and soon Charley's name became a household word from coast to coast (Fass 47). But Charley's name was not uttered only in domestic settings. Christian Ross wrote in his memoir that strangers continually stopped him on the street and "talked over the outrage, denominating it the worst offense ever committed in our country" (74). Two years after the crime, Charles Krauth, a Presbyterian minister who penned the forward to Christian Ross's memoir, speculated on the scope of public consciousness of Charley's story:

[Although the world is] full of stories of stolen children... the saddest of these touching stories, among the most deeply veiled in mysteries, is the story and mystery of Charles Brewster Ross. The story is already familiar in various degrees of fullness and accuracy to millions of sympathetic hearts. (Ross 9-10)

Sympathy may have been one emotion felt by millions of Americans, but there is also reason to believe that pleasure and titillation were others. Because so little was known after Charley was taken, the newspaper stories that appeared were often shrouded in mystery and conjecture which potentially added to their intrigue (Fass 34). This intrigue was further fueled by Christian's shocking decision not to pay the kidnapers, even though the \$20,000 ransom money was a sum well within his reach. As a result, salacious rumors and innuendos about Christian and his wife Sarah began to surface in newspapers (*New York Times* 1874, Ross 223). These various theories hinted that Christian might somehow benefit from reward or ransom money. Elsewhere, gossip suggested that Charley was the product of an extra-marital affair by Mrs. Ross and that the kidnapping was an elaborate scheme to hide an illegitimate offspring. The expressions of shock and indignation that presumably accompanied these rumors of impropriety no doubt glossed a gleeful pleasure that came from following the twists and turns in the Ross case. The sheer entertainment value of the Ross abduction was recognized by showman P.T. Barnum who offered a \$10,000 reward for the recovery of Charley. In return, Barnum asked for the right to exhibit the boy to inquisitive spectators (Harris 281). Of course, there is also Daley's *Pique*, discussed extensively later in this paper, which speaks directly to the entertainment value attached to the public drama of Charley Ross. As Fass contends, such facts "suggest the degree to which the Ross case was being enveloped in popular explanations as it increasingly stimulated the public's imagination" (30).

There were numerous antecedents as well as contemporaneous factors which may help explain this public fascination with Charley's story. To begin, we must reflect on the theme of abduction in North America from the 1600's through the 1800's—a theme that frequently centered on Indians taking white captives. Beginning in the mid 1600's, Indian captivity narratives were quite popular. As Richard VanDerBeets suggests in the introduction to *Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836*, these stories were a crucial ingredient in the American consciousness until just following the Civil War, when the genre fell out of favor (5). Interestingly, the Ross story took root at roughly the same moment that Indian captivity narratives were receding. Charley's kidnapping story may be understood as a kind of surrogate saga, occupying much of the same psychological space as the once-popular Indian captivity narrative. Consider the following captivity account, written in 1676 by Rachel Plummer:

[The Indian] caught hold of the child by the throat; and with his whole strength, and like an enraged lion actuated by its devouring nature, held on like the hungry vulture, until my child was to all appearance entirely dead...As soon as they found it had recovered a little, they again tore it from my embrace.
(VanDerBeets 340-341)

The cultural dregs of this "savage Indian tale" and others like it can be found in accounts of Charley's abduction, resurfacing most notably in Christian Ross's memoir. In his description of the abductors, Ross alluded to the tales of Indian torture when he compared the drawn out ransom negotiations to a brutal persecution:

Savages, before dispatching their enemies frequently torture them by tearing the flesh piecemeal from the quivering limbs of their victims; but these men remorselessly...increased by every stroke of pen the torture they had inflicted.
(70)

Indian captivity narratives seem to have laid part of the ground work for understanding ransom kidnapping and Charley's story was modified to fit this cultural prefiguration.

Charley, of course, was not abducted by Indians and so newspapers had to look elsewhere to find an alien other. Working on suspicion and assertion, A *New York Times* article from 1874 wrote that "the kidnappers of Philadelphia belong to a class which our increase of wealth during the last quarter of a century is bringing to us from abroad" (4). This article, which turned out to be blatantly false, used waves of European immigrants as surrogates for tribes of Indian savages and helped white American families visualize a threatening new enemy who, in addition to jobs and property, might also try to usurp their offspring. Not surprisingly, these early rumors of immigrant child snatchers in the Ross case led to unwarranted police searches of gypsy caravans and Italian households (Fass 27).

Another theme in Indian captivity narratives was the question of identity. Indian capture was dreadful, writes researcher John Demos, not only because Indians might torture or kill their captives, but because they might somehow produce a drastic change in the captive's identity. To put it bluntly, the captive might become one of the savages (24). This fear of difference and belief in the fragility of identity surfaces in the Ross abduction, as well. Christian Ross fretted continually over the stability of his son's identity when he asked,

With whom is he? Are they kind to him? Do his childish eyes which knew nothing but home and kindness see sights revolting? Does he hear brutal language? Are the scenes about him so strange that his memory of us gradually fails, and his recollections of love, home and friends will all be swept away?...Stolen by thieves, will he be taught to be a thief? (Ross 420-421)

Passages such as these, which demonstrate the profound fear of losing identity and being reshaped into something uncivilized, clearly tap into some of the same fascinations associated with Indian captivity narratives and help to partly explain why the Ross story resonated with late nineteenth century Americans.

Ironically, even though Christian Ross feared the loss of his son's identity, he was, to a degree, responsible for stripping it from him. In the title to his memoir, Christian refers to his son as "the lost boy." Soon this term took on mythic dimensions and became transposable with Charley's full name (Fass 23). Not only did the nickname blanket Charley's story in mystery and further highlight the tragedy, but the moniker also played up the idea of "lost children" which was, as Fass notes, a potent theme in Victorian culture as evidenced by the popularity of novels such as *Oliver Twist* with its gang of orphans or *Peter Pan* with its tribe of lost boys (52). Moreover, Christian's erasure of his son's specificity emblematically fused this lost boy with all the real-life lost children of late nineteenth century America. And there were many. Many disappeared from their homes as the outcome of procedures by child-saving agencies like the Children's Aid Society. While this agency, and others like it, may have housed and taken care of orphans, they also separated scores of children from their parents and their established homes. According to some estimates, over 90,000 children were removed from their homes and taken to territories and states in the West between the years 1853-1893 (Langsam 25). These agencies, specifically the Children's Aid Society, were often criticized for "stealing children" and trying

to redefine and reidentify mostly immigrant, mostly impoverished young people (Langsam 45-46).

According to a number of theorists, the potentiality for redefining children in this way might be understood, historically, as stemming from the newness of “the child” in the late nineteenth century. As an invention, theorists have argued that children have traditionally been the “repositories of adults’ desires (or a text, to be ‘written’ and ‘rewritten’ to use a newer language)” (Jackson 61). Put another way, “The child is functional, a malleable part of our discourse rather than a fixed stage; ‘the child’ is a product of ways of perceiving, not something that is there” (Kincaid 1998 19). The constructed child is propped up by a number of assertions which define him or her as distinctly different from adults. One way of establishing this difference is to insist on the innocence of children. The innocent, malleable child lacks knowledge and thus becomes ripe for exploitation, as evidenced by the strategies of redefinition and reidentification engendered by child-saving agencies of the late nineteenth century. While it is one thing to take and “rewrite” an immigrant child from a poor family, Charley’s story demonstrated that such tactics could also be used on children from respectable, business-class families. But Charley’s abduction added something else new to this formulation: a price tag. While the Ross abduction tapped into existing insecurities and uncertainties about the innocent identity of childhood, the \$20,000 ransom demand added a ghastly new terror into the mix. Despite their innocence, or maybe because of it, a child’s worth could now be counted in numbers.

Of course, taking children from their home and attaching a price to their bodies was not an entirely new phenomenon for nineteenth century Americans. Lest we forget, slave children were routinely torn from their families and purchased. Charley was abducted in 1874. A little less than a decade had passed since the conclusion of the Civil War and the horrors of slavery were no doubt still fresh in the minds of most. In his memoir, Christian wrote that parents should “shudder at the bare possibility of one of their offspring being snatched from them by miscreants for vile traffic” (111). His use of the words “vile traffic,” as Fass notes, was all his Victorian audience needed to bring this gothic horror to a crescendo, summoning the awfulness and the dread of the slave trade (260).

There were clearly a number of compelling narrative threads in Charley’s story: the pure white child suddenly exposed to the commercialization of slavery; the inexperienced child stolen from his respectable business-class family; the civilized child whose identity was now vulnerable to the savagery of his strange abductors. Each of these threads (and probably more) were being woven together to create a tapestry of melodramatic exploitation—an exploitation that hinged crucially on the idea of innocence, on the idea that children were blank slates who could be molded and used in any number of ways. Is it any wonder, then, that this horrible, appalling and thrilling new crime received a melodramatic treatment in the theater?

Augustin Daly’s *Pique* was first produced on December 14, 1875 at Daly’s own Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York. Favorably reviewed by most critics, the play was one of Daly’s most successful (Sturtevant 239). *Pique*

opened in December and concluded with its two-hundred-thirty-seventh performance on July 29th, 1876 (Sturtevant 240). The first two acts of this five act play are comparable to many romantic melodramas, featuring an intricate love story full of twists and turns as young lovers search for romance and happiness in a turbulent world. The final three acts of the play, however, are markedly different. They feature not just a kidnapping, but a ransom demand for the return of the kidnapped child. Daley never mentioned Charley Ross by name, but he was known to lift existing stories and incorporate them into his plays. Also, the editor of an anthology of his plays, Catherine Sturtevant, came right out and said what Daley implied, that *Pique* is a dramatization of the Ross case (239). Daley's play does not simply regurgitate the facts of the Ross case, however. In keeping with the aura of thrill and intrigue surrounding the case, *Pique* sensationalizes the Ross abduction and, in the process, comments on Victorian family life, gender roles and society at large. Fittingly, just as the constructed child of the late nineteenth century was a blank slate that could be rewritten, the play rewrites the story of one child, Charley Ross, and deploys it in the service of a number of ideas.

Most significantly, the play works as an emblematic site that instantiates the crisis of masculinity in late nineteenth century America. In the early nineteenth century, the idea of manhood was bolstered by many factors including, but not limited to, growing employment opportunities, geographic expansion and assaults on native populations and effete European bankers (Rogin 162). As the century reached its midpoint, however, "the walls of the male establishment

began to crack” (Dubbert 307). *Pique* dramatizes one of the perceived threats to masculinity during this time period: the increasing autonomy and power of women.

At times, the play appears to champion this development. The main character in Daley’s play is Mabel Renfrew, a woman who seems to challenge the patriarchal structures of nineteenth century America. Mabel is confident, witty and, because she purportedly has a substantial family inheritance to support her, financially independent. When a gaggle of male suitors vie for her affections at a party, she tells them all to leave. “I dismiss everyone,” she says and in so doing upends the traditional power structures of gender (Daley 255). For a while, Mabel comes into focus as the “single, highly educated, economically autonomous woman” that became known as the New Woman of late nineteenth century America (Kimmel 142). With a plucky protagonist not afraid to put men in their place, *Pique* seems all set to chart a new course of possibility for women.

Mabel’s self-assuredness is further enhanced when contrasted to the impotence and uncertainty of Mathew Standish, the male protagonist of *Pique*. Standish possesses absolutely no agency. He frets about on stage, desperately seeking the affection of Mabel. Although Mabel and Mathew do wind up marrying, the union is conceived of as hasty decision that Mabel makes out of spite to get back at another man who has deceived her. When Mathew moves her from the lively city to the boring country, Mabel can endure her relationship no longer and confesses to her husband that she never loved him. Mathew then

curses, bids farewell and is not heard from *for two entire acts*. Before long, Mabel is single, planning a way to move back to the city, and, from the looks of things, much better off than she was before. In its removal of a weak male protagonist and its endorsement of the self-sufficiency of its female lead, *Pique*, through its dramatic structure, makes a compelling case for the viability of the New Woman. Apparently, this depiction of feminine self-sufficiency and male impotence rankled one writer from the *Chicago Tribune* so much that he or she (probably he) argued against a touring company of the show from coming to town and wrote, "There is no excuse for the resurrection of this irritating mass of mawkish sentiment and emasculated sensationalism" (cited in Sturtevant 240).

Emasculated sensationalism aside, *Pique* is hardly a proto-feminist piece of theater. That a strongly misogynist current runs through its narrative may not come as much of a shock to readers familiar with nineteenth century melodrama. What is interesting about *Pique's* shift in rhetoric, however, is how it deploys the image of the innocent child as its axis point. Mabel, in fact, goes through a taming process where she increasingly learns how to be a proper woman by understanding what it means to be a good mother.

The seeds of Mabel's rebellious streak are still alive at the end of the second act when she plots with two drifters to steal her child and take him to the city where she will then meet up with little Arthur. Precisely how this audacious scheme is supposed to occur and how Mabel will be able to live as a single mother without anyone discovering her secret is never quite explained in the script. Never mind, soon Mabel goes through a reversal and decides to abandon

her plan. Interestingly, this change occurs at the very moment audience members first see little Arthur on stage. Brought on stage by the character of Aunt Dorothy, the child is sleeping and wrapped in blankets. Once Dorothy has exited, Mabel gazes at her child and specifically announces her change of heart:

Yes, he is my guardian angel! From what sin, what despair, does he not keep me! Oh, thou! Who has given him to me so helpless and yet so strong to save, make me worthy of this precious gift. These tiny hands about my neck shall draw me to a better life; this innocent head resting upon my bosom shall cast out my hate and pride. And I will watch over thee, my baby—lest in my hour of guilt, my punishment should come through thee. Oh dreadful thought! ...I have changed my mind. (Daley 298)

The innocent child in need of a mother's care becomes the agent that will change Mabel and turn her into the good mother she was meant to be.

Pique reinforces the feminine as maternal by offering up a binarism that pits Mabel's maternalism against her criminality. She only has two choices: be a good mother or be an outlaw. By endorsing this constraining duality, the play makes a case that women who do not understand that mothering is their highest priority are, to some extent, criminal. That this sudden change occurs in the presence of the image of innocence is no coincidence. As Mabel herself states, the pure child devoid of knowledge becomes a role model of sorts, a standard against which Mabel might learn to become a better person. "The innocent head" that, in the quintessential pose of motherhood, rests on "her bosom" will bring her to a "better life" and "cast out" her faults.

Alas, despite Mabel's decision not to go through with her ruse, the wheels have already been set in motion and the kidnappers decide to steal little Arthur anyway so that they might hold him for ransom. For

Pique to have a happy ending someone must save the day and here we meet Mabel's second role model, Raitch, an Irish servant. Raitch is everything that Mabel is not. While Raitch is unsure of herself and a bit skittish, she does know that care giving is a proper attribute for women. In fact, when we first meet Raitch, she impatiently waits for the arrival of Mabel to her new country home. She excitedly asks Aunt Dorothy, "I'm to wait on her my own self, ain't I?" (Daley 265). Later, when she first meets Mabel, Raitch can hardly contain herself. "If you please, mum, I'm to be your maid," she exclaims, "Miss Dority said so, and I want to be" (Daley 271). The stage directions read that Raitch is so excited at the prospect of being a domestic servant to Mabel that she starts crying. Through her tears, Raitch exclaims that she cannot wait to take Mabel into the barn and show her how cows are milked and how one finds hens' eggs. In her alignment with hysterical outbursts, animals and a desire to serve, Raitch emerges as a regressive picture of femininity steeped in an innate maternalism that is quite the opposite of the New Woman.

Of course, there is the danger of reading too closely into Raitch's character and overextending the assertion that she is the play's model of proper and natural femininity. That said, Raitch might simply be a comic device and nothing more were it not for one startling turn in the plot of *Pique*. When little Arthur is finally rescued, it is neither the emasculated father nor even the redeemed mother who champions the play. Rather, Raitch comes to the rescue and surfaces as the play's hero. Her

surprising heroics offer a disturbing endorsement of the value of innocent, childlike behavior for women. *Pique* ultimately argues that women might be better women by following the lead of Raitch and forgoing intellectual endeavors and simply following their maternal instincts. In a world where children can be snatched or stolen, *Pique* makes the case that the primary responsibility of women is to protect their vulnerable offspring. Once again, the innocence of childhood is deployed, this time as a foil to an ill-conceived, criminal and unnatural New Womanhood. As the play ends, Mabel holds her child and announces that “happiness begins tonight for me—and that will endure while heart can beat, or life can last.” To her husband, who has somehow weaseled his way back into the narrative, she gleefully rejoices, “Tomorrow you will take us home” (Daley 330).

From our vantage point, the story contained in *Pique* is, among other things, an interesting historical example of the melodrama working within a certain contextual framework. For the Ross family, however, the possibility of reading newspaper reviews of the play next to stories containing rumors and innuendo that criminalized Christian and Sarah was probably bizarre and disturbing. Not surprisingly, Christian made available another version of the Ross story for public consumption. In 1876, a year after *Pique* opened on Broadway and two years after his son was abducted, Christian Ross published his memoir. That Ross wanted his work to be the authoritative report of the abduction is evidenced by the portion of his title that reads ...*a Full and Complete Account*. Accordingly, his memoir is now accepted as the most definitive telling

of the story (Fass 24). But Christian Ross's memoir does more than set the record straight about any parental misdeeds regarding the crime. Much like the Broadway melodrama that was inspired by the abduction, Ross's account, along with his public search for his son, can be understood as a kind of performance--one of paternal masculinity during a time period when understandings of paternity were in a state of flux.

Recent scholarship about fatherhood in nineteenth century America seems to contradict the traditional image of the aloof Victorian patriarch unconcerned with the obligations of fathering. As Stephen M. Frank argues in *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth Century American North*,

We are told that the nineteenth century was the age of the mother, a time when the controlling patriarch yielded his place as a cultural ideal to the affectionate matriarch... [But] the nineteenth century was less the age of the mother than it was an era of the parent. For as surely as nineteenth-century Americans believed in the power of "mother's love," they believed in the need for a "father's care. (174)

This concept of paternal care emerges in interesting ways in the Ross memoir. Initially, the Ross memoir conveys its story through an authoritative voice that operates to the exclusion of other voices—most notably that of Charley's mother. Sarah Ross, Christian's wife, is effectively silenced in this public performance of the Ross family tragedy. Not only does the memoir state that Sarah was not told about the crime until several days after the abduction, but it also confirms that she was excluded from all negotiations with the kidnappers (Fass 25). Moreover, she is never allowed to speak in Christian's narrative. Rather, she emerges as a mysterious, emotional creature in passages where Christian

transmits “the anguish of [his] wife” who was so overcome that she could not summon the tears which might have provided “an outlet for grief, but with her the fountain was dry” (25). Against this backdrop of feminine grief, Christian details his grueling attempts to recover his son. In emphasizing his deeds against Sarah’s inability to do anything—not even produce the expected womanly tears—Christian Ross’s memoir enacts a masculinity grounded in agency and performs a paternalism in full view of the public eye. While Sarah may have nurtured and cared for Charley at home, once the boy entered the public sphere, Charley apparently became subject to the complete care and authorship of his father.

Part of that paternal care included a stubborn resistance to the demands of his son’s kidnappers. Ross’s negotiations with kidnappers lasted five months during which time he was sent twenty-three ransom notes. His memoir continually seeks to justify his decision not to pay the kidnappers. He wrote that because he fully appreciated

the danger which might result to society should the brigands prove successful in their infamous experiment, the case was placed in the hands of police authorities of the city...with the understanding that I would never consent to compound the crime, preferring to wait and suffer in the hope of securing the criminals with the child. The terrible anguish caused by this long suspense, to which the knowledge of the child’s death would be a relief, it is impossible to describe. (18)

In this act and the rhetoric that surrounded it, Ross’s decision became a public act that sent a message to not just future kidnappers but to all men instructing them how to act the part of the proper father. In fact, a *New York Times* article asked, “How few men would have the firmness—say rather the stoicism—to resist the pleadings of their own hearts, enforced by the cry of a frantic mother

bereaved of her child" (4). Here, Christian's decision not to capitulate, understood as an admirable masculine trait, surfaces in opposition to a fragile and frantic feminine emotionalism. Ultimately, however, even this brave father was not entirely immune to the emotionalism associated with femininity. Christian experienced a complete emotional breakdown described in the following passage:

The incessant strain upon mind and body for the past three months—the alternation of hope and fear—the anxious pursuit—the weary labor by day, and the sleepless nights—were surely a heavy burden to carry, without the heartless slanders and calumnies which were coined and circulated about Mrs. Ross and myself....For several weeks I had felt my strength yielding to the excessive tax upon my system, and for days was kept up only by force of will, strung to the greatest tension by longing for our lost darling. When the break came it was sudden and overwhelming; both body and mind succumbed at the same time. (223)

In his description of this event, Christian attempted to portray himself as man overcome not by emotion, but by public opinion and a "weary labor." By placing the cause for his collapse on outside events, his masculinity was further spared any association with an innate weakness or emotionalism.

Moreover, Christian took great pains to present the idea of self-sacrifice—a performance which also bolstered his paternal masculinity. Christian wrote that the search for his son was a massive financial undertaking that included \$20,000 spent on detectives and \$8000 on printing for the 700,000 circulars that were distributed from coast to coast. Also, he wrote that the search meant he had to leave behind a promising career and business life (92). In his documentation of sacrifice, one can sense the general discomfort felt by men in late nineteenth century America who were continually encouraged to merge the drive toward

competitive accomplishment with a passionate devotion to domesticity (Frank 156). The intersection of family life and career—brought into sharp relief in the Ross case--required a delicate balancing of roles that might ultimately result in a renewed appreciation for ones children. As Ross wrote,

Children never seemed half so precious as now. A new cause of anxiety and a new apprehension was carried by men to their daily business. A new reason for thankfulness was found that the kidnapper had not invaded the family circle during their absence. (90)

Christian's public performance of paternalism became a sharp reminder of the difficulty of paternity in the late nineteenth century. In the "thankfulness" that fathers might now understand, however, the Ross abduction possibly helped to foster a renewed appreciation of children as well as the importance of fatherhood as a masculine role.

Ross's public performance of fatherhood was so compelling that, by the end of his search, he had enlisted legions of Americans to help him. When he died in 1897, five hundred thousand people were reportedly engaged in the search for Charley (Fass 55). Perhaps they were responding to Christian's direct appeal to "every parent who loves his child... [to] join in and renew the search" (319). They might have also been motivated by the more spectacular moments in Ross's memoir. With its combination of heartbreak, intrigue and sensation, *The Father's Story*...was a smash hit with readers and a runaway bestseller (Fass 56). Not only did the memoir promise the whole story, but it also included copies of each of the handwritten ransom notes from the abductors. These ransom notes were generally followed by remarkable descriptions in which Christian painted the kidnappers as

men [with] no bowels of mercy; in them the eclipse of goodness was complete; their depravity black as Egyptian night, and total. Dragging their innocent prey from his own sweet home into their polluted den, they contrived to guard themselves at every point, and traffic on parental anguish" (419).

Here, as before, we see the Victorian themes of sensation in the public exploitation of children. The innocent child, now equated with prey, drug against his will into a polluted den is a description worthy of the most sensational melodrama. Ross's memoir may have helped forge a new understanding of the importance of the paternal role but it did so partly by exploiting childhood innocence while making the most of parental fears and anguish. The *New York Times* registered this new fear when it asked, "Must it, then, be accepted that any of us are liable to have our children stolen from the public streets and in open day?"

Only after Christian passed away did his wife Sarah take up the search for her lost son. Not much information is available about Sarah's search for Charley. She published no memoirs and her story remains a mysterious footnote in most of the research I uncovered. However one thing is for certain, Sarah was no more successful in finding Charley than her husband. Charley was never found. And despite Christian's efforts to define and contain it, Charley's story took on a life of its own, becoming resolutely entrenched in American culture. Not only would subsequent kidnapers use Charley's name when making their demands, but judges and police authorities would routinely reference Charley in future cases. Over half a century after he disappeared, Charley was still a ripe subject for newspapers. Edward H. Smith wrote in 1927, "Any kind of an item

suggesting the discovery of Charlie [sic] Ross is always good copy and will be telegraphed about the country from end to end, and printed at greater or lesser length" (Smith, xv). The haunting story of this lost boy established a disturbing precedent of sorts in which stories of missing or lost children would become accepted and expected features of American culture. JonBenet. Danielle. Elizabeth. The children who occupy the space that Charley once occupied are thoroughly recognizable by their first names. And the stories that accompany these names are rife with images and words that still have the potential to horrify and titillate.

As this analysis has suggested, these stories of missing children are often not simply about the children themselves. In the projections and dramatizations that these invents inspire, child abductions offer glimpses into the various ways we see ourselves, our problems, our families and our social roles. Ironically, one thing abduction stories rarely, if ever, provide is a satisfactory discussion of the real dangers that children face. The statistics, while never the whole story, bear reiteration. While over 1 million children suffer physical abuse, only 200-300 kidnappings occur each year (Finkler 805). Compared to problems with our environment, the threat of increased militarization as well as the ongoing struggles against poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy, our obsessive focus on kidnapping can be understood as the real threat to children since it often replaces our attention to these more pressing matters. As James Kincaid asks,

Why do we devote so much energy, concern and money, so much organizational skill, so many competing centers and foundations, so much legislative know-how, so much fear and repetitive talk to the most insignificant problem facing our children: the risk of being kidnapped by a stranger? (Kincaid 1998 180)

One answer might be that on some level, child abductions are entertaining. This is certainly the case with dramatizations like *Pique* that are explicitly offered as entertainment. As performance scholars, we might also begin to account for this morbid fascination by asking ourselves why kidnappings seem so intricately linked to the compulsion to dramatize. I would offer that, in their dramatic forms, child abductions are both less-than-real and more-than-real and that this potentiality for both exaggeration and containment makes the story ripe for spectatorial consumption. As Augustin Daley's *Pique* demonstrates, a theatricalized version of a tragic event can make that event less-than-real and, in effect, contains the tragic consequences. And so, in Daley's play, the horrors of child abduction are assuaged through a happy ending which restores the child to his proper home. Even in dramatizations that do not contain this tidy resolution, however, the understanding or the belief that what one is seeing is "not real" potentially takes the edge off a scary, uncertain crime, helping viewers mitigate their own apprehensions. Simultaneously, performances of child abductions are more-than-real. That is, sensationalized and horrific enactments of child snatching amplify the crime and thus make it thrilling and exciting. As we have seen, thrill and excitement are often produced in these stories through an intersection of purity and corruption, virtuousness and villainy-- combinations which

exploit the very innocence we have insisted on in our construction of the child. Taken together, the less-than-real and more-than-real dimensions of dramatized child abductions turn the crime into a rollercoaster which allows spectators to vicariously experience the buzz of fear with the assurance all is make believe. But when such vicarious thrill rides work to displace genuine concern for the actual lives of children, performances of the phenomenon of child abduction are disturbing exercises in abuse.

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2b.



History,
Comedy,
Surrogacy:

A study
Guide for

*EL
GRANDE
DE
COCA
COLA*

Ron House, John-Neville-
Andrews, Alan Shearman,
Diz White and Sally Willis

LESSON # 1: History

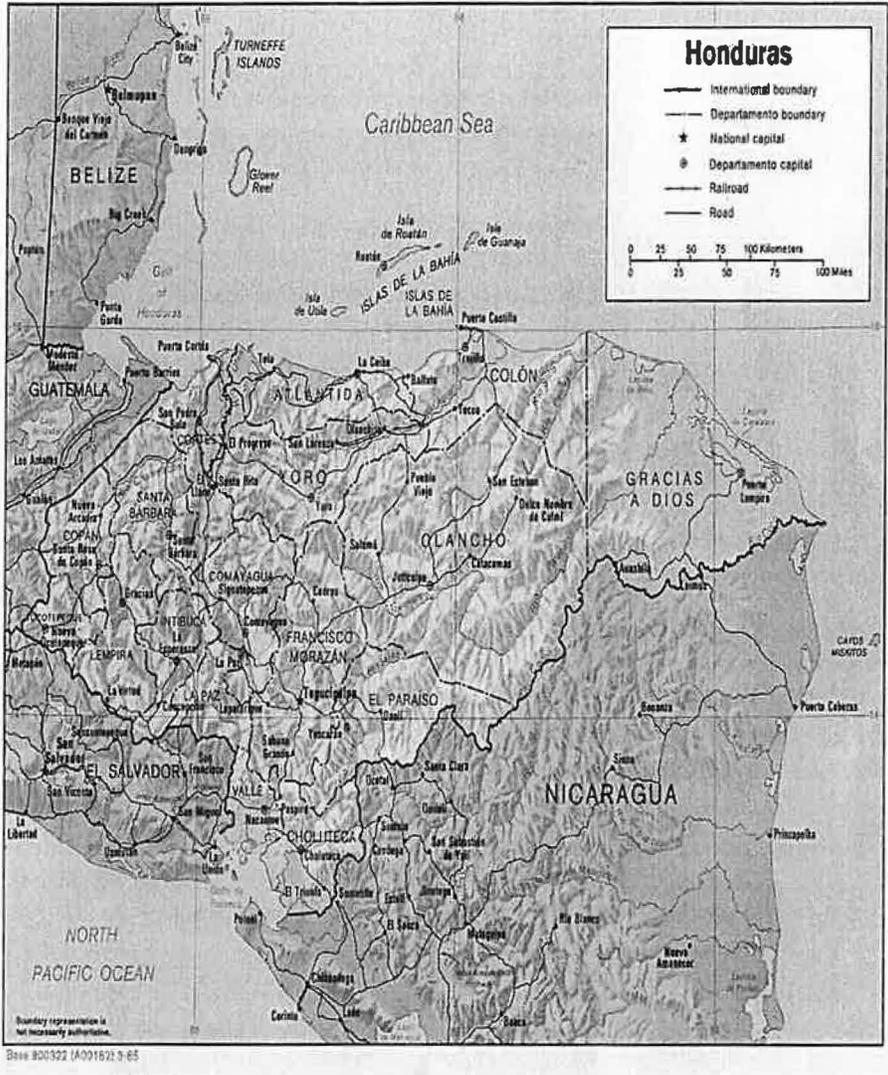
El Grande De Coca Cola takes place in Honduras in 1973. Some information on Honduran history may help you to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the script. This timeline is by no means exhaustive, but provides an overview of key moments in the nation's development.

- For centuries, Mayan culture flourishes in the land we now call Honduras.
- In 1502, Columbus lands at mainland Honduras. Soon, Spain colonizes and the native population is decimated by conquest and disease.
- In 1821, Honduras gains independence from Spain.
- In the late 19th and early 20th century, its agriculturally based economy is dominated by US companies that establish vast banana plantations along the north coast.
- During the late 60's and early 70's, the timeframe for this play, Honduras endures two military coups by Gen. Lopez Arellano and battles El Salvador in a war that kills and displaces thousands.
- Today, the democratically elected government of Honduras presides over a country in which over one quarter of the population cannot read or write and most live in poverty conditions. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Do playwrights have a responsibility to represent the social, historical and political dimensions of their subject?

In what ways might comedy and performance help us negotiate the devastating conditions of war and poverty?



Lesson # 2: Comedy

Comedy exists in different forms. In fact, scholars have identified several different levels of humor, sometimes referred to as the ladder of comedy. These levels include:

Obscene Comedy generally relies on inflammatory words or images in order to shock audiences into laughter. One form of obscenity is scatological humor, commonly referred to as "potty humor."

Romantic Comedy involves idealized romantic love and the humorous displays of emotion often associated with it.

Black Comedy induces laughter as a kind of defense mechanism when a situation, dispassionately considered, would be simply horrifying

Farcical Comedy depends upon ridiculous situations, exaggerated character types and horseplay for its comic effects.

Satirical Comedy ridicules human folly and associated political, social or moral problems.

ACTIVITY:

As a group,
try to identify
moments
within *El
Grande De
Coca Cola*
which
represent
these
different
levels on the
ladder of
comedy.

Lesson # 3: Surrogacy

Surrogacy can be thought of as the substitution of one person for another. In theater, surrogacy is one of the main operational tools of actors. That is, they often pretend to be someone else. In *El Grande De Coca Cola*, surrogacy plays a crucial role. Not only do the characters in the show pretend to be other people, but the actors who are playing the characters may be of different ethnicities than those they are representing.

Consider the following scenarios of surrogacy. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, write your responses to this question:

When is it ok to act as a surrogate? Is there a point when surrogacy can become detrimental and/or demeaning? Likewise, are there moments when it can be liberating?

Gender Impersonation as in Drag Queens or Kings



Blackface Minstrelsy, a popular form of Entertainment in 19th and early 20th Century America



**Dressing up as Indians for events
such as Halloween**



2c. Dramaturgical Protocol



Some (Possibly) Helpful Information
Compiled by Ken Klawitter
TA 475: Dramaturgy
Winter 2003

Your leading man and playwright...

RON HOUSE

Ron House is the creator of *EL GRANDE DE COCA-COLA*, which won a New York Drama Critics Circle Award and was named one of *TIME* Magazine's Ten Best Plays of the Year; *BULLSHOT CRUMMOND*, with the play version taped by Showtime as a cable television special and also made into a film by Handmade Films (George Harrison, producer); and *FOOTLIGHT FRENZY*, which was taped by Showtime, and after a long run in San Francisco, played in Scandinavia (translated into Danish and Swedish). With Alan Shearman, he co-authored *THE SCANDALOUS ADVENTURES OF SIR TOBY TROLLOPE*, which premiered at the San Diego Repertory Company before moving on to Capitol Rep in Albany, N.Y., Pennsylvania Stage Company, Sundance, Seattle and Portland. Ron was most recently seen playing the role of "Max Prince" in Neil Simon's *LAUGHTER ON THE 23rd FLOOR* at the Laguna Playhouse.

Some of Ron's work in films has included: *Bullshot Crummond*, *Airplane II Escape From New York*, *Modern Problems*, and *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*.

Television credits include: *The Roseanne Show*, *Hooperman*, *L.A. Law*, *Knox Landing*, *Dark Justice*, *The Cheech Show*, *Low Moan Spectacular*, *El Grande De Coca Cola*, (HBO) *Bullshot Crummond*, (Showtime), *All My Children*, and *Wizards and Warriors*.



Your director...

STEPHEN ROTHMAN

CSU Los Angeles Press Release -- February 28, 2003

Cal State L.A. Chair is Elected to National Theatre Conference

Stephen Rothman, chair of the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance at California State University, Los Angeles, has been elected to membership in the National Theatre Conference. Founded in 1925, NTC has a limited membership of 120 persons who are artistic directors and other theater professionals from across the country, as well as university theater faculty, particularly department chairs, many of whom work actively in the field. The organization initiates and support projects of value and significance with a view to strengthening and broadening the influence of American theater. NTC members meet annually to exchange views on and to promote the profession of theater.

Rothman received his B.S. and M.F.A. from Florida State University. Before joining the Cal State L.A. faculty in spring, 2001, he was associate professor of theater at Pennsylvania State University and producing director of Pennsylvania Centre Stage, the professional theater arm of Penn State (1998-2001).

Based in Los Angeles from 1979 to 1998, Rothman is best known by southern California theatergoers as founder and producing artistic director of the revitalized Pasadena Playhouse. He coordinated the then multi-million dollar restoration of the three-theater complex and directed numerous productions in each space. In California, he also served as artistic director of the Sacramento Theatre Company, and produced West Coast premieres that included *Hometown Heroes*, *California Schemin'* and *Orphans*, presented in American Sign Language at Deaf/West Theatre. His March 1997 Sacramento production of *Love Letters*, starring then-Governor Pete Wilson and his wife Gayle, made L.A. Times front-page news. Rothman has been producing director of the Paramount Arts Centre, and associate executive director of the Asolo State Theatre. He was theater management consultant for the El Portal Theatre in Los Angeles for many years.

In addition to directing over 100 shows at more than 50 different theaters around the country, Rothman has directed television productions, including two seasons on *The New WKRP* in Cincinnati. He has taught master classes and held adjunct professorships at USC, CSU Davis, Illinois State University, and Florida State University, and held a three-time appointment as the Iben Lecturer at Bradley University in Illinois. In 2000, Rothman received a Carbonell Award as Best Director for his work on David Rambo's play, *God's Man in Texas*. The play won the most honors for a non-musical, including best play, supporting actor, lighting and set design, and has since become one of the most popular new plays in the regional theater circuit. The Carbonell Awards are given by the South Florida Critic's Association and the Theatre League of South Florida. In 1997, Rothman received the Los Angeles Dramalogue award for his direction of *Orphans*.

The Palm Beach Post has hailed Rothman a director who "understands the balancing act of tones and characters," and the Los Angeles Times called his most recent directorial work at Cal State L.A. (*Burning Patience*) "captivating." Rothman is preparing to direct Cal State L.A.'s production of **El Grande de Coca Cola** in May.

Another Playwright...

JOHN NEVILLE-ANDREWS

John Neville-Andrews, Associate Professor of Theatre (acting and directing) and Head of Performance, has over 30 years of professional experience in acting, directing and producing with a wide range of institutions, theatres and programs. He has taught at Pennsylvania State University, Maryland University, Yale University, Catholic University, and California Institute of the Arts, and has conducted master classes at other universities and institutions.

As the former Artistic Producer of The Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C., he garnered attention and critical acclaim for his productions of Shakespeare and the classics. He came to this country as co-author, actor and director of the enigmatic comedy **El Grande de Coca-Cola** (which won a Drama Desk Award for Best Musical in 1972) and *Bullshot Crummond*. Other credits as an actor and director include numerous Off-Broadway plays such as *The Homecoming* and *Clarence*, Broadway plays such as *The Elephant Man*, and work in prominent regional theatres including the Arena Stage, Long Wharf Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and Yale Repertory Theatre. Awards include the Helen Hayes Award (*The Miser*, 1986, as Outstanding Resident Production), the Smithsonian Institute's Certificate of Excellence (*Playaround Shakespeare*, 1987) and a 1983 American Theatre Association Award for Contribution to Theatre as an Author, Actor and Director. He directed national tours in the U.S. and Germany with the musical *Crazy for You*, has directed at the Utah Shakespeare Festival (*Misalliance* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*), Theatre-by-the-Sea, Rhode Island (*Private Lives*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*), Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival (*The Winter's Tale*), and the Meadows Award tribute to Stephen Sondheim (aired on the A&E cable channel),

Most recently he has accepted the position of Artistic Producer for the U-M's Festival of New Works, a showcase for new plays, musicals and screenplays. Neville-Andrews is also Artistic Director of the Michigan Shakespeare Festival, for which he has directed *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*. The Festival is closely associated with and supported by the University of Michigan and the Department of Theatre and Drama. Each year, the Festival utilizes the skills and talent of students, faculty and staff as actors, directors, designers and technical artisans.



Some famous guys who've been in *El Grande*...

RON SILVER



Silver trained for the stage at the Herbert Berghof Studio. He also studied with Uta Hagen and at the Actors Studio with Lee Strasberg. His first big break came as a cast member of **El Grande De Coca-Cola** in 1973; after that he moved to California and got a part on the TV sitcom "Rhoda. From then on Silver remained steadily employed in TV and theater; his screen career was renewed in the early '80s, and by the late '80s he was landing lead roles in major productions.

JEFF GOLDBLUM



A native of Pittsburgh, PA, where he was born October 22, 1952, Goldblum moved to New York at the age of 17 to pursue an acting career. He got his start at Sanford Meisner's distinguished Neighborhood Playhouse, and in the '70s began performing in a wide variety of on and off-Broadway productions. When he was 22, Goldblum made his film debut with a small role as a rapist in Michael Winner's brutal revenge drama Death Wish (1974). His performance in **El Grande de Coca Cola** brought him to the attention of Robert Altman gave him a small part in California Split (1974) and a slightly larger role in Nashville (1975). Afterwards, Goldblum was steadily employed in film and worked for some of Hollywood's biggest directors including David Cronenberg and Steven Spielberg.

Reviews of Prior Productions

Theater: d.c. space
Washington D.C
 1981

The Washington Post

February 24, 1981, Tuesday, Final Edition

HEADLINE: Pidgin & Plugs: The Strange Flavor of 'Coca-Cola' At d.c. space

BYLINE: By James Lardner

BODY:

Despite the Latin Lavor of the title, "El Grande de Coca-Cola" is unmistakably British. It hails from the kick-you-in-the-teeth school of British humor that has supplied us, at its best, with "Fawlty Towers" and the assorted "Monty Pythons," while strongly influencing our own "Saturday Night" show and spinoffs.

The emcee of this show, which opened last weekend at d.c. space, is Pepe Hernandez, the patriarch of an improbable Latin show-biz family of five that has inherited its wardrobe from a pre-Castro Havana nightclub, and speaks a language ("and now, uno acto mas dangerouso," "uno acto fabuloso y different ," etc.) best described as pidgin Spanish.

Pepe himself, agreeably acted by Brian Corrigan, entertains us with incompetent, Latinized impersonations of Cary Grant, James Stewart and Charles Laughton (in "The Humpety-Back of Notre Dame"). Then his kin take turns singing, dancing, and presenting such dubious "actos" as "Blind Joe Jackson," a blues singer who has trouble finding the strings on his guitar. (In similar vein, there is a blindfold mystic who promises to identify objects suggested by the audience, and manages only to identify a rubber boot -- by fondling it.) And at regular intervals, the Hernandezes take time out to plug Coca-Cola, their sponsor.

One of the many strange things about this strange show is how many of its acts have nothing to do with the Latin motif. After intermission, for example, the Hernandez family comes on as a French theater troupe performing a play about Toulouse-lautrec. Then comes perhaps the strangest, but most successful, act of all -- a pantomime wedding ceremony in which all the participants look happy and harmonious, followed by a "slow-motion replay" in which the same scene abounds with violence and bitterness.

The director, John Neville-Andrews, was part of the original team that wrote and performed this show and generated a large and loyal following for it in New York and elsewhere. Nothing about the version playing nightly except Mondays through March 15 at d.c. space even begins to explain that earlier success.

**Theater: Village Gate
New York City
1986**

The New York Times

January 23, 1986, Thursday, Late City Final Edition

HEADLINE: STAGE: AT VILLAGE GATE, 'EL GRANDE DE COCA-COLA'

BYLINE: By MEL GUSSOW

BODY:

"EL GRANDE DE COCA-COLA" has returned to New York with a partly new version of the popular 1973 musical revue, a classic of fractured Spanish and splintered tomfoolery. A knowledge of the language -or of any language - is not necessary for one to enjoy the show. It is muy ridiculo y histerico, somewhat in the manner of Monty Python, and a great deal of the fun is physical comedy. The musical revue opened last night at the Village Gate.

Fortunately, three of the originators of the show (all are authors, directors and actors), Ron House, Alan Shearman and Diz White, have come back for the revival. The fourth, John Neville-Andrews, as the artistic director of the Folger Theater in Washington, is presumably preoccupied with more serious matters.

Mr. House plays the character of Senor Don Pepe Hernandez, "el compere extraordinario," who is the impresario of a third-rate vaudeville show, featuring his relatives. The production is intentionally the opposite of elegant, definitively tacky from the costumes to the scenery to Mr. House's wig, which, to his feigned amazement, flies in several directions.

The antic acts include a tango parody, levitation, a blind blues singer who cannot find the string side of his guitar and assorted buffoonery that occasionally involves the audience. Miss White and Olga Merediz wear bananas on their heads and sing and dance in the style of Carmen Miranda. With or without fruit, the two are, as promised, "chicas frivolas." The three clownish men, Mr. House, Mr. Shearman and Rodger Bumpass (often dressed like a headwaiter), push their co-stars further into frivolity.

Mr. House imitates famous Hispanic figures of life and fiction, including Jaime Cagney, Largo Juan Silber (con papagayo) and "Richard Tres de William Shakespeare," who, in this version, cries, "Un burro! Espana para un burro!" Mr. Sherman reprises his clown routine as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. In this hilarious one-man sketch, the artist is too short to place his canvas on his easel. He tries gymnastics, settles for pratfalls.

Other brief attempts at geographic diversification are less amusing, especially a spoof of young people in Germany, but the revue is rapid and leaves no time for reflection. Above all, "El Grande de Coca-Cola" is un espectáculo espontaneo y diabolico.

**Theater: Wildside Cabaret
Tampa Florida
1990**

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

April 6, 1990, Friday, City Edition

HEADLINE: "COLA' ANYONE? Spanish spoken here, but it's all in good fun

BYLINE: RUSSELL STAMETS

Se habla Espanol?

No matter if the answer is yes or no, odds are that you'll be able to understand the new Playmakers production of *El Grande de Coca Cola*. The play's not in English, but don't let that panic you.

"It's difficult to tell people that, without them misunderstanding what they're going to see," said director Jim Rayfield. "It's in Spanish, but it's written for people who don't speak Spanish. This is not a play the Spanish Lyric Theater would want to do."

When you look at the plot of *El Grande de Coca Cola*, the language is probably the least unusual aspect of this comical romp.

"The basic premise, which is presented in a program note, is that this family's putting on a cabaret act in a town in Honduras," said Rayfield. "The leader of the family promises to bring a parade of stars in the world to the cabaret, and he gets his uncle, the local Coca Cola bottler, to put up the money."

The real stars don't materialize, and the family members perform themselves. They do acrobatics, they do a little play (in French), mind reading and other lounge entertainment.

"Imagine a show with a lot of different acts, and then imagine everything going horribly wrong," said Rayfield. "The family can't really perform all these things very well. You learn to love them, though, because they're so sincere."

The small core of actors is called on to do a great variety of things. Not only did they have to master lines in languages most of them didn't know, they had to play the drums and do acrobatics, too.

"It's very, very difficult to describe to people," said Rayfield. "But everyone will be able to understand the Spanish. It's really more like English than Spanish. The humor is very broad, and that makes it understandable."

How good is your Spanish, really?

La Opinion 10/27/1992
Una obra traviesamente llamativa
Author Madrid, Joe

La pieza **El Grande de Coca Cola** ya se ha escenificado antes, pero la versión que brinda la compañía Low Moan Spectacular es tan extraordinaria que vale la pena verla nuevamente.

La historia ya se ha contado antes. Pero hay ocasiones en que el talento de la compañía de teatro es tan extraordinario que vale la pena relatarla nuevamente.

La presentación de "El Grande de Coca Cola" que nos brinda la compañía Low Moan Spectacular tiene un reparto de comediantes payasos que hace reír a todos. "El Grande de Coca Cola" se presenta en el teatro Odyssey

La obra está supuestamente basada en las experiencias vividas por el escritor y primer actor Ron House mientras trabajaba en una obra en España. "El Grande de Coca Cola" nos relata la historia de las improvisaciones de último momento hechas por un aspirante a imitador de Don Francisco.

El set de la obra es un club nocturno ordinario. Don Pepe Hernández le ha prometido al pequeño pueblo un Desfile de estrellas internacionales, pero el desfile no aparece. El decide usar a su familia como sustituto; y ahora... ¡Es la noche de estreno!

El resultado es un terrible desfile de mal gusto integrado por artistas de cabaret sin talento alguno. Rodger Bumpass se destaca en su interpretación como el músico, casi consumado, quien se niega a acompañar el acto de magia realizado por el mago de entusiasmo exagerado, quien con seguridad pondría su vida en peligro.

Tras varios cambios rápidos de vestuario Bumpass se presenta nuevamente. Con brazos abiertos, lentes oscuros y un sombrero, él interpreta al "Ciego Joe Jackson," un pobre cantante de los "blues." El discreto estilo bufonesco de Bumpass complementa y ayuda a preparar la escena para el comiquísimo e imperturbable anfitrión Don Pepe Hernández, interpretado por Ron House.

Mientras que los novatos actores frenéticamente destruyen toda convención teatral, el sereno pero a veces temperamental Don Hernández retoca los errores del acto con un acento español muy fuerte. Graciosamente la mayoría del público, integrado en gran parte por personas de raza blanca, parece entender cada palabra que Don Hernández recita. El adapta su lenguaje al inglés agregándole "ees" y "oos" aquí y allá para hacer el idioma más aceptable a los oídos del público. A pesar de la obvia cadencia vacilante de sus palabras, uno no puede más que asombrarse de lo fácil de entender que Don Hernández hace su recitación. El efecto es verdaderamente admirable, pues la obra es relatada casi en su totalidad ¡en español!

Diz White, la otra cofundadora de Low Moan Spectacular, protagoniza a Consuelo Hernández, la hijastra de Don Fernández. Frecuentemente vemos a Consuelo discutiendo con su hermana María, a quien Robyn Rice interpreta maravillosamente. White protagoniza a la traviesamente llamativa Miss Coca Cola con gran soltura; su ritmo y precisión son perfectos.

Rubén Garfias completa este talentoso reparto en su papel de Ramón, el ni tan magnífico llamado "El Magnífico." Garfias también protagoniza otros personajes varios.

Mientras que la locura que inspira la pieza surte el efecto esperado, la obra se puede clasificar entre la farsa y la parodia. Y como parodia, aquellos que sean muy sensibles culturalmente necesitarán de un buen sentido del humor.

Duncan Mahoney, director técnico de la obra, logra transportar a la audiencia a otro mundo usando el equipo esencial de escenificación. Lynne Peryons lo complementa enormemente con su diseño de iluminación. También debe reconocerse la labor de Denise Blasor, consultora de escenificación y vestuario.

Esta producción es la primera escala en el recorrido internacional de "El Grande" que también se presentará en más de quince países, entre ellos Brasil, México, Chile, Australia, Sudáfrica, Gran Bretaña, Bélgica y Holanda.

"El Grande de Coca Cola" se presentará hasta el 22 de noviembre de miércoles a viernes a las 8 p.m. y los sábados y domingos a las 7:30 p.m. y el 8 y 22 de noviembre a las 3 p.m.

Some pictures from a Kenyon College production in 2001



Are Stereotypes Funny or Offensive?

One view...

The Shah of Arab Humor; the Sheik of Middle East Jokes; the King of Arab American Comedy ...

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... just off the FBI's 10 Most Wanted List ... on leave from a stint at Camp X-Ray in Cuba ... the man you hope isn't on your vacation flight ...

Ray Hanania

Why Humor? Using comedy to shatter not reinforce stereotypes

By Ray Hanania

The tragedy of September 11th has created an unusual environment where individual rights are abrogated and abused, and where stereotyping has replaced good investigative techniques to fight crime.

Terrorism does not have an ethnic face? Why must we insist on putting an ethnic face on this crime?

These are all serious issues. Bigotry. Stereotyping. Racism. Discrimination. Terrorism striking at the heart of America. The threat of more terrorism. And in the Middle East, the hopes of peace have been shattered by the worst violence in decades. What looked like the promise of peace has now turned into a guarantee of escalating tensions, more violence and regional destabilization.

All of these factors have come together to create one of the most unstable environments in our times. And one ethnic group is the target of this growing animosity. Arab Americans.

As an Arab American, I have always felt that I could somehow make a difference. Ever since college, I have tried to work toward peace in the Middle East. I believe the most effective effort is in communications. It has been the one element that has been absent from the Arab community, and its absence has contributed to misunderstanding, and escalating animosity.

The Middle East conflict is the focal point of a storm of violence taking place throughout the world today and in America. Although Osama Bin Laden's vicious terror strike against the World Trade Center's Twin Towers is not related to the Middle East conflict, his origin as a fanatic from Saudi Arabia has made this impossible to ignore.

In the past 25 years, I have spoken out publicly against violence and for peace. I have debated pro-Israeli leaders like Israel's former Foreign Minister Abba Eban (Kup's Show, nationally, in 1976) not to make points but to counter their domination of the American viewpoint. You can't have peace until both sides are understood. And the Arab American side has never been properly understood. I have blamed that on our poorly trained spokesmen who have failed to understand the fundamentals of basic communications. Their inability to communicate has contributed to the American misunderstanding, has strengthened the pro-Israel argument and has weakened the Arab position.

But after 25 years of writing columns, perspectives and commentaries that have appeared in hundreds of newspapers around the country and dozens in the Middle East, and having participated in hundreds of public appearances across this country from Harvard to Northwestern, I have come to realize that the situation is so bad that even a logical argument cannot break through the years of accumulated anti-Arab hatred and misunderstanding that a strong pro-Israel lobby and a poorly equipped Arab lobby have created.

Till this day, Arab American organizations and spokespeople fail to understand the most basic techniques of professional communications. The people who take these roles are often trained in

history, politics or law, but have no formal training in public relations or media strategy, both very important professions that require years of training. The only common denominator they have is that they finally recognize the importance of the media is impacting the events in the Middle East. It's not enough to want to be a spokesman. It's not enough to know the issues. You must be trained. And most of the Arab American spokespeople today are untrained neophytes with a good understanding of the facts, who have no real training in public relations or communications. They sound good to the choir (Arab American audiences who cheer their positive evolution) but they are having very little impact on Americans and the Western public.

Why Comedy?

Comedy is the most effective means of communicating, especially in a political environment. The truth is, most people don't want to be bothered with politics that they do not feel directly impacts on them, or that contradicts the basic premises and understandings they already have. I see the Arab spokesmen moving their mouths and forming words, but all the Americans hear is "blah, blah, blah."

How do you change that?

By changing the fundamental premises that Americans have of the Arab people. You cannot force Americans to just accept our version of history or justice. We Arabs know that we have truth on our side, but in the world of Americans and the West, perception is reality. Truth is not as important as the manner in which you present it, and the audience you are speaking to.

Americans also love comedy. They appreciate comedy. While they will not let even the most polished Arab spokesman into their mindset, they will allow comedy to enter.

Comedy can make a difference. This is the serious side to comedy. It is effective satire, the sharpest of communications knives that can cut through injustice and promote fairness. Laughter breaks down hatreds and stereotypes, although many people incorrectly believe that comedy propagates stereotypes.

The fact is that most Americans have stereotypes about Arabs. And the stereotypes that comedy lampoons are stereotypes that they already have. I believe that if I, as an Arab, can show Americans that I can make fun of the stereotypes they have of my life as an Arab, maybe I can show them that the stereotypes must not be that serious. Maybe, the stereotypes are wrong. Laugh at them. Discard them.

The easiest way to reinforce a stereotype in the mind of a person who has a stereotype of me, as an Arab, is to treat the stereotype like it is a serious issue. The easiest way to undermine it, is to show the person who has it, that the stereotype is not as serious as they think. In fact, it is a joke. In my comedy act, I lampoon and ridicule many serious subjects such as the custom of wearing a Berqa (the full heavy cloth covering many Arab women are forced to wear from youth); Honor Killings, the practice that exists in the Middle East and also in other cultures and countries of murdering a female relative, sibling or child who has committed or is suspected of committing an act of adultery that has shamed the family.

These are all serious issues. I do not support them. They are more than stereotypes. They are wrong practices. Lampooning them is an effective way to undermine them and to help Americans, who make judgments about how they view Arabs because of these practices, recognize that many Arabs oppose these unfair traditions.

I have written in a serious way criticizing the Berqa and Honor Killings. Yet, I feel that serious dissertation on them is not enough. We have to insert them into the mainstream American consciousness and comedy is that vehicle.

There is a serious and responsible side to comedy and I hope that as I develop my stand-up comedy career, I can help undermine those stereotypes that need and must be changed.

Another View...

Cartoon Seeped in Ethnic Stereotypes Say Critics

By Tom Lee

A new Web cartoon has drawn fire from Asian Americans who say it reinforces negative stereotypes about people of Asian descent. *Mr. Wong* airing on Icebox.com, a popular Web site featuring unconventional animated shorts, follows the adventures of a slant-eyed, bucktoothed houseboy, Mr. Wong, and his domineering WASP socialite employer, Miss Pam. The show is the brainchild of South Park writers, Pam Brady and Kyle McCulloch, who also provides the voice of Mr. Wong. They are marketing the cartoon as a "touching and heart-warming story of a girl and her 85-year-old Chinese houseboy. Love and loss abound."



Mr. Wong and Ms. Pam in conversation. Image courtesy of Icebox.com

The title character is a composite of all the Asian stereotypes, say opponents of the show. Mr. Wong speaks in a highly exaggerated Chinese accent, mispronouncing his l's as r's, and is the subject of ridicule because of his speech. The site even informs the watchers that the show is "rroading" when it loads the cartoon for viewing.

But a spokesperson for Icebox.com maintains that the cartoon is all in good fun and does not intend to demean any particular race. "We acknowledge that some of our programming is controversial, but that it is well within the bounds of current satire-based, comedic programming such as *Saturday Night Live*, *Howard Stern* and *South Park*," said Lisa B. Spiritus, director of public relations for Icebox, Inc. "Some programming on Icebox is edgy in its humor and paints caricatures of individuals as part of its satirical content; however, it is up to our viewers to decide whether this is the type of content they want to watch."

Some leaders in the Asian American community, however, aren't convinced that the cartoon was created in the spirit of good fun.

"Exaggerated accent, slight stature, and submissive personality are all typical of an anti-Asian mindset," said George Ong, national president of the Organization of Chinese Americans. "The fact that Icebox treats racism as comedy is both offensive and baffling. *Mr. Wong* is nothing more than a modern-day *Amos 'n Andy*—lacking any trace of either sensitivity or humor."

"The portrayal of this Asian Pacific American character is stereotypical in every way," Ong said. "He speaks with an unrealistic accent and has no pride, allowing his boss to step all over him. The character of Mr. Wong is a conglomeration of stereotypes—not really a character at all."

Other opponents argue the cartoon has a negative impact on the public's views of Asian Americans. Victor Hwang, an attorney for the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco fears it may lead to anti-Asian sentiments or even violence. "It may seem innocuous and not too serious but that could lead up to serious crime," he said. "Challenging stereotypes is an important part of fighting hate crimes in general."

"I know it's satire. They could do a satire of the Jewish Holocaust but that doesn't make it right," said Hwang. "They have to be sensitive to the minority communities."

It seems all this controversy may have worked in Icebox.com's favor. A slew of people have logged on to the site just to see what the controversy is about. A look at the *Mr. Wong* message board shows that the majority of the audience loves the show and sees it as politically incorrect humor, not as something racist as activists have charged.

Many fans of the show argue that all stereotypes get equal play in the cartoon, as evidenced by the unfavorable portrayal of the rich and conniving blueblood, Miss Pam.

Activists, however, insist two wrongs don't make a right. Whites are constantly in the media's eye, Ong said, while Asian Americans have very little representation, so any representation at all reflects largely on all people's perceptions. "Miss Pam is clearly not a representation of all white Americans; Mr. Wong, however, is the embodiment of every popular stereotype of people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent," he said. "These attempts by Icebox to pass off sweeping generalizations as entertainment are deplorable."

While protesters of the show hope Icebox.com will be responsive to the Asian American community and pull the show off its schedule, the Web site has already committed to airing *Mr. Wong* throughout its 13-episode season with a possibility for renewal if there is a high enough viewership.

Just So You Know...



A Brief History of Honduras

Honduras is a largely mountainous, sparsely-populated country at the hub of Central America. Until the Mayans moved to the Yucatan, Copán in Honduras was the center of the Mayan empire. Columbus landed here on his fourth voyage, in 1502, and named the region Honduras ("in the depths"), perhaps impressed by ridge after rolling ridge of pine-covered mountains. During the 300 years of Spanish rule, Honduras produced some silver, but was mostly ignored by the empire. Even agriculture, the economic base of the rest of Central America, was slow to develop. Honduras gained its independence in 1821 and, after forming part of the Central American Confederation, became a nation in 1838.

In the last half of the 19th century, U.S. companies established northern Honduras as an important site for banana production. Since then, U.S. corporate interests, especially United Fruit Co. have had much power in Honduras. So much power, in fact, that U.S. Marines were sent in 1911-12 to protect U.S. investments in bananas.

Throughout almost the entire 20th century, Honduras has been dominated by military dictatorships, and when the military has not actually held the presidency, it has held the power behind the throne.

As fighting in neighboring El Salvador and Nicaragua intensified in the early 1980s, the military in Honduras tightened its hold on power even further. A small local guerrilla movement was quickly defeated, but surveillance and repression of grassroots organizations was continuous. In exchange for large amounts of U.S. aid, Honduras cooperated fully with U.S. policy and permitted the Nicaraguan "contras" to maintain permanent bases along the border.

The U.S. held almost continuous joint maneuvers with the Honduran army meant to intimidate the Sandinista government. In addition, some Salvadoran army units were trained in Honduras by U.S. military advisors. Since the peace regional process took effect in the late 1980s, democracy in Honduras has been strengthened; civilians have more real power and the army shows more restraint. Though the per capita income of Honduras is one of the lowest in Latin America, since 1990 it has also improved slightly.

Some Quotations You Might Find Interesting...

"So, a Jew, a Mexican and a black guy walk into a bar..."

Un/popular joke set-up

"The fact is that most Americans have stereotypes about Arabs. I believe that if I, as an Arab, can show Americans that I can make fun of the stereotypes they have of my life as an Arab, maybe I can show them that the stereotypes must not be that serious. Maybe, the stereotypes are wrong. Laugh at them. Discard them."

Ray Hanania, comedian

"Despite their billing as images or reality, these Negroes of fiction are counterfeits. They are projected aspects of an internal symbolic process through which, like a primitive tribesman dancing himself into the group frenzy necessary for battle, the white American prepares himself emotionally to perform a social role."

Ralph Ellison, on minstrelsy

"Language is a virus from outer space."

Laurie Anderson

"Featuring games, sketch comedy, celebrity guests and musical performances, the Spanish-language variety show *Sabado Gigante* is watched by over 100 million viewers in 42 different countries. With a lifespan of over 40 years, the show is also the longest-running program in the history of television."

Guinness Book of World Records

"The discovery that one has it in one's power to make someone else comic opens the way to an undreamt-of yield of comic pleasure and is the origin of a highly developed technique."

Sigmund Freud

3a.

WHITE

By Ken Klawitter

**(Based on the words and ideas of Steve Seagle, Liesel Reinhart,
Shannon Jackson, Richard Dyer, Peggy McIntosh, Martin Mull, Noel Ignatiev,
The paint section at Home Depot, and the New Abolitionists)**

**June 3, 2003
Draft 4**

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Characters

Angel
Josette
Robbie
Sam

All four characters are college students. For each production of *White*, however, the actors should substitute their own names for the names given in this script. The gender and ethnicity are not important except, perhaps, for Angel—who should probably appear to be what some people consider “white.” Each performer plays a multitude of roles. I have suggested in the script which actor should perform each part. But directors should feel free to change these casting decisions if he/she feels it would better suit the production.

Time

The present.

Place

A classroom, Africa, etc.

PROLOGUE

(Lights come up on a classroom. Everyone listens intently as Professor speaks to class)

PROFESSOR/ROBBIE

So by now it should be perfectly clear to each of you why Lacan felt that the unconscious mind is much like language itself.

ANGEL

(Turns to audience. Upbeat and energetic.)

It was my first quarter in graduate school.

PROFESSOR

Lytard, on the hand, sees the unconscious as visual, as figural, like shapes that one draws or paints. Is this clear? Is this clear?

(Everyone nods)

Good.

ANGEL

I was so fuckin' lost. In between incomprehensible references to--

PROFESSOR

--the phallogocentrism embedded within Western thought--

ANGEL

--and--

PROFESSOR

--the hegemonic misrepresentation of postcolonial "femaleness"--

ANGEL

--I heard this--

PROFESSOR

--both are propped up by the distinctively American construction known as...whiteness.

ANGEL

Did he just say what I think he said? Did he just say "whiteness?"

REST OF CLASS

(Breaks from scene and turns to Angel)

Uh-huh.

ANGEL

Excuse me, professor, did you just say “whiteness?”

PROFESSOR

Uh-huh.

ANGEL

(To audience)

I was stunned. I thought my multicultural quotient was pretty high. I mean, I knew all about Chicano History, I got an “A” in my Native American Literature class, I celebrated Black History Month, and I ate my lunch at Panda Express. But whiteness? OH MY GOD. He was talking about me!

(To classmates)

Can you believe this guy? What a load of--

JOSETTE

--but Angel, when you auditioned, didn't you realize... this was a play about whiteness.

ANGEL

Really?

SAM

It's called “White.” Do the math.

ANGEL

But I thought it was called “White” because it...was our ode...to the...snowflake? No? Oh, come on guys, it'd be so cute. We could sing Christmas carols and make snow angels and nobody would get offended. We could still do that show, couldn't we?

(They look at her disapprovingly. She starts singing and making snow angel movements.)

“I'm dreaming of a white Christ—“

(She pauses. Everyone looks at her.)

Shit. (A beat). This better not be some creepy “white pride” thing! 'Cause I don't want to spend the next 30 minutes on stage in front of all these people talking about rednecks and wonder bread!

PROFESSOR

Rednecks and wonder bread are the essentialist building blocks of the Caucasian subject position that---

ANGEL

All right! All right! All right! I'll play along. But I'm warning you—this better be good. And I still want some snowflakes in here somewhere!

A MUTANT BABY

SAM

(To audience)

Psst. Hey? Got a moment for an Islamic myth? Yeah. Nobody ever does. According to Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, it all happened in Africa, six thousand years ago.

(Cast goes back on stage and helps create the mood for this scene through movement, background noises, etc.)

Everyone's skin is dark. Dark as night. The tribe's mad scientist, Yacub, mixes his notions, mixes his potions and finalizes his latest experiment with a chant.

(Does the chant from Lion King)

ROBBIE

Uh...dude...that's the song from Lion King?

SAM

Everybody's a critic.

(Does the chant again—holds up a baby wrapped in a blanket. A baby cries.)

The night is pierced with the cry of an infant. Torches find the way to Yacub's hut. There, villagers find a squealing, mutant, albino child.

(Blanket is pulled away to reveal a plastic baby doll. Everyone screams.)

SAM

As Yacub celebrates his successful tampering with the line of his people, he has no idea that this mutant white gene's child will gain power one day and is destined to rule for thousands of years. Ah ha ha ha ha ha !!!

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

TEACHER/JOSETTE

(Cheesy, over the top, speaking to audience)

Ok students, settle down, settle down. As you know, this is multicultural awareness month here at Columbus High. And today we are going to take part in our very own "Celebration of Diversity." And so I've asked each of you to bring in an authentic cultural artifact that tells us a little bit about where your family comes from. Now, before we start I want everyone to remember that even though we all come from different backgrounds, we are not just white, not black, not red or yellow or brown—we are all human. At the same time, if we want to "Ear-racism,"

we have got to figure out why each of us is a special flower in the bouquet of humanity. Who would like to share their authentic cultural artifact first?

ANGEL

(Raising her hand eagerly)

Ooh. Ooh. Ooh. Ooh. Me. Me. Me.

TEACHER

Angel, why don't you start us off.

ANGEL

(Very good-two-shoes).

Ok. Well, I am proud to be 1/84th Navajo Indian... and so I've brought in a Kachina Doll that I got for Christmas last year.

TEACHER

Oooh. How wonderful.

ANGEL

I know.

(Takes out her notes and reads very quickly)

"Centuries ago, tribal elders began carving these dolls as teaching tools for the children. The elders came forth from the "Kiva" or ceremonial room where they communicated with the spirits. What the spirits taught the elders was then illustrated to others through the spirit carvings. Kachina Dolls, like the human Kachina Dancer, are visual representations of the invisible spirits that assist each of us in the rigors of life." Thank you.

TEACHER

Angel, that was just...that was just so...diverse. Thank you. Thank you. All right, who's next? Sam?

SAM

Well my family comes from the West African town of Badagry.

TEACHER

Really? How wonderful!

SAM

Yeah. Beginning in the 1500's African men and women were transported through Badagry to America as part of the cultural genocide known as transatlantic slavery.

TEACHER

Oooh, how exciting!

SAM

And I have brought an example of the actual chains slave traders used to bind my ancestors.

TEACHER

Oh, that is so militant, thank you Sam. Why don't you pass those chains around so everybody can touch them and understand just how terrible slavery was. Ok, who's next? Robbie?

ROBBIE

(Who has been sleeping)

Huh? What?

TEACHER

Did you bring in an authentic cultural artifact that sheds some light on your ancestors?

ROBBIE

Uh...I don't have any ancestors.

TEACHER

Well, of course you do. Where does your family come from?

ROBBIE

Wisconsin.

TEACHER

Before that, silly.

ROBBIE

Well, we used to live in Illinois. But my dad said too many Mexicans were moving in.

TEACHER

(Flustered)

Oh. I see. Uh. Hmm.

ROBBIE

Oh, and once, for my birthday, I got this "Born in the USA" shotgun. Does that count?

(Pulls out gun)

SAM

White boy with a gun! Everybody duck!
(Everyone screams and hides).

TEACHER

(From under her desk, shaking)

Ok...so...who'd like to go next?

BACK IN THE DAY

ROBBIE

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the show where contestants learn about the history of whiteness as they test their wits against the legacy of domination, suppression and hegemony. It's the Wheel of Whiteness! Here's your hostess – Vanna White!!

(Everyone except Angel gets set up for Wheel of Fortune— humming theme song, getting into place, etc.)

ANGEL

(Trying to get them to break from the game show bit.)

Uh...guys? Hello? Uh...over here? This...uh...Wheel of Whiteness...it's not working for me.

SAM

But, Angel, you get to be Pat Sajak.

ANGEL

The whole ...game show shtick?...it's tired.

ROBBIE

Ok, forget the game show. New construct--same important content area-- The history of whiteness.

JOSETTE

We need an interesting way to get it across to the spectators.

ROBBIE

I got it! Have you ever played RISK?

ALL

The game of WORLD DOMINATION!?

ROBBIE

That's the one.

JOSETTE

I'm a one-woman steamroller across Europe and Asia.

ANGEL

A board game. Now that's white.

ROBBIE

OK. Let's play. Josette, you're Russia. That's Red.
(Hands Josette a red card)

JOSETTE

Uh...I'm usually black.

ROBBIE

(Switches to black. Hands out appropriate cards to other actors)

Okay, black. Now Angel— France — Yellow. And Sam, you're English. Pink.

SAM

I will not be pink!

ROBBIE

Deal with it. Ok. So. You're all fighting against each other...
(Rest of cast just stands there)

I said...you are all fighting with each other!
(They start to fight)

Good. Now, these European wars are long and bloody and just plain messy—there's the 100 Years War that breaks out in the 1300's and lasts...

REST OF CAST

A hundred years?

ROBBIE

Actually...no... more like two hundred and fifty. And who can forget the Napoleonic Wars at the start of the nineteenth century? It's like a big game of European Twister. The French stick their feet into Russia. Britain tries to block France. France gets an arm into Britain. And then Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria and Sweden pile on top of little Napoleon and crush him.

SAM

(Gets crushed like Napoleon.)
These wars are fun!

ROBBIE

But then, at some point, the Europeans realize that they don't need to assault each other all the time.

JOSETTE

(Looking out and pointing at audience members menacingly.)
Hey...why don't we all... go after them?

ROBBIE

Right. You start attacking nations in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

JOSETTE

Come on! Let's go get 'em!

ROBBIE

But wait, before you do that, Josette, you need some sort of term...a name to distinguish yourself from these new peoples.

JOSETTE

How about ... the murdering, conquering slave traders versus the enslaved?

ANGEL

Why don't we just call them all savages and give them one color?

SAM

Hey, I think pink is savage. They can have pink.

ROBBIE

There are too many of them to just be one color.

JOSETTE

Well, what if we all shared a color and gave them, say, the yellow – for China – the black – Africa – and red and brown for the Americas?

ANGEL

But what color do we take?

ROBBIE

(Offers up his pink card)

ALL

(In unison)

Not pink!

ANGEL

(A slow realization, thinking to herself)

White. We could all be white.

ROBBIE

Is it starting to make sense, Angel?

ANGEL

Wait a minute.

ROBBIE

What?

ANGEL

There is no white in RISK.

(Rest of cast groans)

ROBBIE

Stay with the metaphor. This is important.

ANGEL

No – I can't – There is no white in RISK. It's not real to me now. The game is over.

JOSETTE

I have Asia. I think Black wins.

ROBBIE

Allright, forget the creative performance metaphors. I'm just gonna talk. You guys... do... something ...to make this interesting.

(To audience)

It's time to talk about scientific racism.

(Rest of cast huddles together and eventually starts a dance piece.)

In order to justify conquest and slavery, scientific racism emerged – an attempt to construct a biological account of racial differences. It divided the Earth's people in to just a few groups. By the 19th century, race scientists—

(Notices dancing)

—what are you all doing?

SAM

It's an abstract dance piece.

ROBBIE

About scientific racism?

SAM

You gotta problem with that?

ROBBIE

(He thinks about it and then joins in the dancing).
Race scientists settled on the term "Caucasian" as a way of merging European populations into a single race – mainly to distinguish them from who they were not.

JOSETTE

In 1781– a French immigrant, Hector St Jean, wrote an essay entitled "What is an American?" In which he said

HECTOR ST. JEAN/ANGEL

It's a new RACE of people made from English, Dutch, French, Scotch, Swedish--

ROBBIE

--get the picture? It was important, especially in America, because many immigrants who left Europe were on the low end of the class structure there, but found that here, they had superiority as members of a new... white race.

REST OF CAST

(In unison)

We're WHITE!

SAM

I told you. I am not pink!!

AND NOW A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

JOSETTE

Are you tired of constantly being pulled over by the traffic police, even though you've committed no offense?

SAM

Fed up with walking into those Beverly Hills department stores and being looked at as if you're Wynona Ryder?

ANGEL

Frustrated that no one would take you seriously as a presidential candidate?

ROBBIE

Then what you need is...Melanin-Away! The all-natural, 100% synthetic, fat-free, sugar-free, caffeine-free, food substitute that rids your skin of all that pesky melanin.

JOSETTE

Many scientists believe that humans evolved melanin to absorb and disperse dangerous ultraviolet light. For some people, an evolutionary oversight kept them from producing satisfactory amounts of melanin. But now that we have a hole in the ozone layer bigger than FUCK, no one's safe from skin cancer. So say goodbye to Melanin and say hello to fair skin with...Melanin Away.

SAM

I've taken Melanin-Away for only three weeks now and I've already noticed a change. Pretty soon I'll be whiter than Regis Philbin's ass!

ANGEL

So how much would you pay for the chance to have white skin?

ROBBIE

Don't answer that question. Because with your new white skin you'll also get ...

JOSETTE

The pleasure of turning on the TV and seeing a whole bunch of people who look like you.

SAM

The freedom to do something great without being called "a credit to your race."

ROBBIE

The license to remain completely ignorant of the languages and customs of people of color who make up the majority of the Earth's people.

SAM

Now how much would you pay? But wait, there's more!

ANGEL

The privilege of finding band aids that match your skin color.

JOSETTE

The satisfaction of knowing that you can walk into just about any hair salon and there will be someone there who can cut your HAIR!

ROBBIE

The benefit of NEVER being asked to speak for all the people who look like you!

SAM

NOW how much would you pay? But wait, for a limited time being we're also throwing in...

ANGEL

A better chance of being approved for low-interest mortgage loans!

JOSETTE

Exclusive membership in the least likely group to be imprisoned and executed by our own government!

ROBBIE

The privilege of doing a performance piece about race without anyone thinking that you're just being self-serving!!!

SAM

All this, and more, can be yours for 16 easy payments of \$39.99!!!

ANGEL

Melanin-Away should not be taken if have eczema, a pre-existing heart condition or a brother named Tito. Before taking any medications, always consult a doctor or at least someone who plays one on the internet. Melanin-Away is available at... White Aid.

GOOD-N-PLENTY

JOSETTE

Ladies and gentleman, please puts your hand together for...GOOD-N-PLENTY!

GOOD-N-PLENTY/SAM

(Performed to *Without Me* by Eminem. Sam comes out in baggy jeans, hooded sweatshirt and ski cap. Somehow, blackface should slowly be applied as he performs).

Guess who's black

Black again

Plenty's black

Tell a friend

Guess who's black, guess who's black, guess who's black, guess who's black...

I've created a minstrel, cause everybody wants to see minstrels some more
 they want a blonde whose lyrics are sicker
 Well if you want a minstrel, then this is what I'll give ya
 Might call you a fag or a bitch but don't call me a wigger
 Hey, my rhymes will jumpstart your heart quicker
 Then the shock that you got when I won the Oscar
 For 8 Mile, only had one shot, I mean two, I mean four.

I waited so long, it's time to debate.
 Am I black? On the edge? Or just a fake?
 My life's been hard so I just my kill ya
 Does this back story sound familiar?

Now the NAACP might have a beef with me
 won't let me be me, so let me see
 They try to say I'm a minstrel on MTV
 But I'd be so boring if I's just me

So black on my face and red on my lips
 Put more red on my lips and gimme the chips
 And get ready, cause this shit's about to get heavy
 I've just taken over hip hop, AND WON 3 GRAMMYS!

(Music stops abruptly, Good-n-Plenty stands up, pulls out a piece of paper from his back pocket and reads the following words with no emotion)

"I am the worst thing ...since Elvis Presley
 To do black music ...so selfishly
 And use it to get myself wealthy"

From the horse's mouth, as they say.

(Music back on, back in character)

Now this looks like the time for me
 So everybody just look at me
 Do you think I need a little ethnicity?
 Would I be too boring if I's jus me?

I said this MUST BE the time for me
 I mean I won all those ... grammy's
 By stealin' a brutha's ethnicity
 And passin' it off like it's jus me

(Quick transition to ...in full black face)

Come listen all you galls and boys
 I'se jist from Tuckyhoe,
 I'm goin to sing a little song
 My name's Jim Crow
 Weel about and turn about
 And do jis so
 Ebry time I weel about
 And jump Jim Crow!

(Stops, pauses, wipes some blackface off his forehead, looks at it, looks at audience, then walks off).

WITNESS

ROBBIE

(Alone on stage, he speaks to audience)

A couple of years ago, there was an exhibit at the Roth-Horowitz gallery in New York City entitled *Witness*. This exhibit contained 120 souvenir photographs that were collected over the past two decades by an antique dealer from Georgia named James Allen. We're going to show you some images from the exhibit in a moment. But before we do that, I want to warn you...these pictures are really difficult to look at.

This is Lora Nelson, an African American woman from Okeene, Oklahoma, who was hung in 1911 along with her 14 year-old son, LW. You see, the photographs that Allen collected were of the thousands of public lynchings that occurred in America from 1883-1960. These pictures were made into flyers and postcards and they were traded ...like baseball cards.

I wasn't there, but I did read articles in the NY Times that described the exhibit. The way you're seeing the pictures is not exactly the way they were displayed in the gallery. The small 3x5" cards were not enlarged, but were framed and assembled side by side, row upon row on a single white wall. Like these—three photographs of Frank Embree dated July 22, 1899.

The gallery was apparently very small and so spectators were standing almost shoulder-to-shoulder. From what I read, I guess you could hear people breathing ...and crying.

But it wasn't just the black bodies displayed in the photos that were so disturbing. It was pictures like this one. Do you see them? In the corner? The "white" spectators standing next to the lynched "black" bodies? Like they're standing next to the Grand Canyon or in front of the Empire State Building? What was going in their minds that they could look at this event

as a moment to be commemorated? What were they protecting? Were the stakes that high?

When you get your picture taken, they call it posing. In the end, that's really all that race is about, isn't it? A pose? Whiteness.... when you really stop and think about it... has absolutely nothing to do with the color of your skin.

(Angel walks out)

Hey Angel.

ANGEL

Hey Robbie—what are you doing out here all alone?

ROBBIE

Oh, just bustin' out a monologue. How are you doing?

ANGEL

I don't know—I just...I feel bad.

ROBBIE

Why?

ANGEL

Look, I know, our history is full of horrible stuff. Slavery, lynching, it's mind-boggling that that racist crap could ever happen. And still happens. But I feel like everybody's looking at me, you know. The fingers are pointed right at me.

ROBBIE

No one's blaming you. No one is pointing fingers.

ANGEL

But I'm white, you know? Isn't that what this show is all about? How horrible white people have been?

ROBBIE

Not really.

ANGEL

Funny, because that's how it seems to me.

ROBBIE

Stay right there. (Calling offstage) Hey Roy—come on out here for a second.

ROY/JOSETTE

Hello.

ROBBIE

Angel, I'd like you to meet Roy. Roy G. Biv.

ANGEL

That's just Josette in a bad costume.

ROBBIE

Suspend the disbelief for a millisecond, ok? Now, think back to 2nd grade. You remember Roy G. Biv. don't you?

ANGEL

Was he that creep who peed in my WHAM lunch box?

ROBBIE

Roy, tell Angel who you are.

ROY

I am Roy G. Biv. I am all the colors in the spectrum. Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Indigo Violet. Roy G. Biv. That's my name. Color theory is my game.

ROBBIE

And you remember what you're teacher told you about color theory don't you?

ANGEL

My second grade teacher was this sweet elderly woman named Mrs. Glassley. I loved her.

ROBBIE

Well, have we got a surprise for you. Mrs. Glassley, come on out!

SAM/MRS. GLASSLEY

Hello Angel.

ANGEL

Mrs. Glassley—oh my gosh—you look so...so butch.

MRS. GLASSLEY

What's wrong sweetie pie?

ANGEL

Well...geez...where do I start? See... we're doing this show about... whiteness...

MRS. GLASSLEY

Mmm-hmm...

ANGEL

And... so...well... (gets quicker and quicker) we performed this Islamic myth about this guy named Yacub and plagiarized a Lion King melody (she does chant quickly) and then we pretended we were grade schoolers with a teacher almost as nice as you. And we also talked about history and learned there never really was any white race or culture. And we talked about privilege and then we did a little bit about Eminem I mean GoodnPlenty and wow you have big hands and then Robbie spoke about a photography exhibit he saw and for me it all started in grad school where I first learned about whiteness and you know all I ever really wanted to talk about was snowflakes anyway and so what's the deal with the color... white... anyway?

MRS. GLASSLEY

Sugar plum, do you remember Roy G. Biv?

ANGEL

No, but...he's standing right next to you.

MRS. GLASSLEY

There is no "W" in Roy G. Biv, chickpea.

ANGEL

Pardon the expression, but... no duh.

MRS. GLASSLEY

If there is no "W" in Roy G. Biv, honeybun, then white is not a color.

ANGEL

Of course it is. I just painted my bathroom--

MRS. GLASSLEY

White is the total reflection of every color and is therefore not a color at all. And like the fiction of the color white, so it is with race—a construct that is only real because social institutions and practices make it real, poohbutt.

ANGEL

But I have a couple questions. Are you saying Whiteness isn't real? And did you just call me poohbutt?

MRS. GLASSLEY

Oh, now, SugarHo. I didn't say whiteness wasn't real. But it is a choice—a choice that those who think of themselves as “white” must make—because to choose otherwise is costly. But... when you really stop and think about it... not to choose otherwise, that is the real cost. Don't waste all your time feeling bad. Instead, try this. Stop. Being. White.

(A beat. Finally, glancing at his watch.)

Heavens, we're running long. It's time to stop being Mrs. Glassley and bring this play to a close.

THE BIG FINISH

JOSETTE

Is everybody ready for the big finish? Alright, let's do it.

(Each cast member holds up a stack of white cardboard snowflakes and announces them, one by one, as distinct colors. These snowflakes should eventually be thrown into the audience. Background music would be nice. The colors might be read overlapping, in unison, etc. Be creative!)

ROBBIE

Ivory

JOSETTE

Powder

SAM

Light beige

ANGEL

Glacier

ANGEL

Angel Food
Vanilla Frost
Satin Shimmer
Banana Cream
Soft Mist
Sea Cloud
Bisque
Chiffon
Rain Shimmer

SAM

Pearl
Chantilly
Meringue
Snow Ballet
Dove Wing
Honey Wind
Natural Echo
Winterscape
Soap Suds

JOSETTE

Snowman
Pale Olive
Popcorn
Flour
Honeysuckle
Peach blossom
Spackle
Wave Break
Creamy Grey

ROBBIE

Azalea
Frost
Gypsy Moth
Calla lily
Hen's Egg
Sandy Pink
Orchid
Iceberg
Silver Plum

Fuzzy Sheep	Pallid Tan	Light Mushroom	Arctic Circle
Macaroon	Ecru	Caulk	Linen
Lace	Whippoorwill	Milky Tan	Bone
Waft	Edelweiss	Parchment	Swiss Coffee
Chalk	Bridal Blush	Candlelight	Cotton
Oyster	Wispy ash	Birch Bark	New Snow
Snowflake	Sea Shell	Rice	Spider Web

JOSETTE

James Baldwin once wrote,

SAM

“The world is white no longer; it will never be white again.”

ROBBIE

You know...in the end...it's just a shade, a hue, a tint...

ANGEL

And, when you really stop and think about it, does it even have one...particular... name?

(Blackout)

WHITE

"Whiteness" has become a catchphrase recently as writers and scholars turn an eye to the latest province of identity politics. A current deluge of articles, books, seminars, websites and classes have begun to ask what, exactly, makes pink, peach, or olive colored people "white"? This play was written to demonstrate that the forces that make one "white" are some of the same forces--both real and arbitrary--that make beige, brown or olive colored people "black." *White* questions the very idea of whiteness in order to reframe the problem of racism by focusing squarely on the forces that create dominance and supremacy.

Many might ask why we can't just get above the idea of race. While that is a noble goal, perhaps the freedom to think or not think about race is a privilege that comes with white skin. In fact, scholars often describe the inevitable silence of whiteness, its transparency, its status as the unexamined norm against which all difference is measured. *White* examines the unexamined

I hope in some small way the ideas conveyed in *White* will help dispel some of the mystery of whiteness. In the end, I want the play to help us better understand what it means to be "white" in America. And, perhaps more importantly, what it means not to be "white."

3b.

Ken Klawitter
TA 511-- Spring 2003
Midterm Paper

**Clowning as Political Performance:
The Campaigns of Screaming Lord Sutch**

David Edward Sutch, head of Britain's Monster Raving Loony Party, died in the summer of 1999 after forty unsuccessful runs for British Parliament (Arnold). Although never elected, Sutch initiated significant and lasting changes in British public policy (Blizzard). I argue that Sutch's lasting impression as well as his ability to generate change stem from his performance of the political clown.

Clowning functions as political commentary in a number of ways. Three fundamental tactics figure prominently in this analysis. To begin, clowning maintains a parasitic relationship with power. Even though clowns may question or attack power structures, they often depend on these very structures. Without the presence of power or authority, the clown loses a choice target to mock (Orenstein 3, Schechter 10). Second, clowning often enacts an alternative vision of society. Clowns may "suspend and mock everyday law and order" and present an unconventional picture of the world (Schechter 1). In so doing, clowns embody the traditional meaning of the word *demonstration*, which has less to do with protesting existing structures or institutions and more to do with demonstrating a new portrait of the world (Misslin). Finally, clowns often make use of strategic extremism, my own formulation. Political experts frequently deem extremism an ineffective political strategy and champion moderation instead. With their facade of folly and silliness, however, clowns can present extreme, sometimes

outlandish, views that might be political suicide for another figure. Strategic extremism potentially shifts the ideological spectrum and, as a result, makes the clown's less preposterous ideas seem sensible in comparison.

Each of these ideas surfaced in interesting ways in the political campaigns of David Sutch. First, Sutch maintained a parasitic relationship with English power structures. He mocked royalty by altering his title to "Screaming Lord Sutch" even though he has no royal blood. Moreover, during one campaign, he even tried to change his name to "Mrs. Thatcher" (Jones). Sutch both ridiculed and relied on British politics to maintain his status as a clown. Sutch's election platforms also presented an alternative vision of England that contradicted normal assumptions. For example, he argued that dogs should consume phosphorescent food so pedestrians could steer clear of dog excrement at night. He also thought that sheep should be painted tartan to improve the scenery and to speed up production of kilts. Even his long-standing political slogan contradicted normal assumptions: "Vote for insanity, you know it makes sense" (Thompson). Sutch reinforced this performance through costume. He often appeared at political events with his trademark top hat, tiger skin suits and multi-colored wigs (Davison). With a veneer of silliness, Sutch not only found a platform to express outlandish views that envisioned a new, innovative Britain, but he was also able to articulate less extreme ideas that appeared quite rational in contrast. Those ideas included a reform of the House of Lords, an overhaul in English Schools and significant changes in the British voting process (Blizzard). Through clowning, Sutch put himself in a position where he could make fun of society and, at the same time, present meaningful suggestions for improvement.

Two critical conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, strategic extremism can be an effective political strategy. Lord Sutch inspired meaningful dialogue in British politics and some of his original ideas eventually became part of public policy. These

changes included lowering the voting age to 18, eliminating mandatory high school exit exams, and keeping pubs open all day (Blizzard). That Sutch was able to initiate these changes in public policy supports the notion that less preposterous ideas, in the midst of extreme views, may appear reasonable and thus stand a chance of acceptance.

Second, clowning has its limits. Despite his success in fostering societal change, Sutch never won an election. British voters did elect Alan Hope, however, co-founder of the Monster Raving Loony Party. Hope campaigned under the idea of Sensible Loonyism—a more moderate offshoot of Monster Raving Loonyism (*Washington Post*). Perhaps clowning effectively gains attention and might create some influence; but if a political clown wants to be taken seriously as a political leader, he or she must eventually take off the clown mask.

But for Lord Sutch, the clown mask may have been more than a means of gaining attention. The mask may have also been a way to hide from a world he did not understand. Privately, Lord Sutch was drowning in a pool of depression. When he learned he would be financially unable to run for Parliament for the 41st time, he gave up and hung himself in his London home (Arnold). To commemorate their deceased leader, members of the Monster Raving Loony Party joined together not for a moment of silence, but for a two minute scream.

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3c.

Ken Klawitter
TA 511
Final Paper

Shannon Jackson and the Performance/s of Whiteness

"The question of where to begin is an interesting one..."

These words unleash Shannon Jackson's play, *White Noises*. Asked to contribute to an ensemble installation/performance about memory, Jackson penned a narrative monologue that recounts her experience as an undergraduate attending the Black Theater Network's annual conference. Jackson was there to present a paper about the works of Adrienne Kennedy. The conference was held in a Detroit hotel that was also playing host to a lingerie convention largely composed of white women, a group with whom Jackson was repeatedly linked during her visit. Adding to the misunderstanding, Black Theater Network members who had not read the essay assumed that "Shannon Jackson" was black. *White Noises* juxtaposes the events in Detroit with remembrances from Jackson's childhood and articulates a compelling protest against white privilege—a protest reinforced through Jackson's inventive performance strategies. These themes and strategies served as inspiration for the piece I presented in class.

Professor of Rhetoric and of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as author of numerous works

including the recently published book *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity*, Shannon Jackson has distinguished herself as one of academia's most talented writers and scholars. Perhaps less well known are her skills in performance and creative writing. In 1997 and 1998, Jackson performed *White Noises* at various venues throughout the country. Jackson writes in the introduction to her show that the script emerged as a response to moments when she has been positioned as a white woman and has tried to confront as well as evade the implications of that address (49). She contends that the ability for white critics and performers to simultaneously confront and avoid their own racial positioning is a privilege not as easily attainable for people of color. Because whiteness is often invisible, the ability to escape a racialized positioning is one of the many privileges available to those with white skin. As Richard Dyer writes, "white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" (44). Like a wind that helps an athlete run faster, white privilege is a propelling force that often goes unnoticed by those who benefit from it. Jackson writes that the act of recalling white privilege is like "trying to recall an experience that you slept through" (51). Rather than trying to solve this counterintuitive predicament, Jackson articulates its impossibility, writing that "when you go to tell a story-- about something that happened to you, I mean-- you realize that while you were experiencing it you didn't know you were in a story" (55). She also disrupts the chronology of her narrative by juxtaposing memories from her childhood with recent memories of the conference. By introducing disorder and chaos into the very act of remembrance, she dramatizes

the uncertainty and fallibility of memory and helps to explain why memories of white privilege often go unregistered.

In addition to narrative disorder, Jackson also uses the strategy of multiple characters to reinforce the show's rhetorical agenda. While the show is often told from her own perspective, she also morphs into a number of different personalities including her college professor, a casting director, a Westin Hotel spokesperson, and Kathryn Ervin, president of the Black Theater Network. This use of multiple characters not only allows Jackson to explore a diverse range of emotions and personalities but also works as a Brechtian distancing strategy. Rather than becoming immersed in one actor's portrayal of a single character, spectators witness Jackson "trying on" a number of different characters. In so doing, Jackson comments on the act of acting itself. Moreover, this strategy reinforces a central thesis of the show: the performative dimension of race. Jackson's portrayal of both African Americans and men potentially denaturalizes the strict identity categories of "white" and "female" and reveals these categories, in a Butlerian sense, as resulting from the reiteration of certain racial or gender norms (Butler 95).

Jackson also writes in her introduction that currents attempts at theorizing whiteness often work to obscure white racism (50). Time and again, critics meticulously expose the lack of knowledge of other white people or locate all the bad white people in history—from plantation owners to anthropologists--and dwell on the racism of these villains to deflect attention or to expunge their own culpability in a system of racial hierarchy. Jackson labels this "the saving of

whiteface” and wonders if white face-saving tactics might sometimes substitute for the undoing of racism:

I remember speaking to several white critics who were "working on whiteness" while trying to avoid all the "land mines" surrounding that issue. Avoiding land mines has an obvious appeal. However, I suspect that at times one must be willing to step on one, be willing to look bad, and then be willing to come to terms with the explosion. Moreover, the impulse to look good often keeps white privilege intact. By censoring, modulating, and responding correctly, latent racisms remain all the more robust for being all the more protected. (55)

Jackson takes enormous risks and steps on a number of landmines in her show. In one of the more disturbing moments, she discloses the fact that as a child she often wondered about the cleanliness of dark skin. While some spectators were offended at the line, she writes, many considered this moment to be essential, a necessary move to both establish and confront the idea of latent racism (60).

White Noises served as the inspiration for the work I presented in class and many of the preceding ideas surfaced in different ways in my performance. Whereas Jackson demonstrated the insidiousness of white privilege by documenting the difficulties of memory, I chose to address the issue much more directly. Using the format of the commercial, I attempted to sell a product called “Melanin-Away” that would produce fair skin. The benefits or privileges of white skin were then detailed as selling points for the product. I was concerned about my own position of privilege and so, in this scene, I indicated that my ability to do this performance and be received favorably was, to some degree, a white skin privilege. Thus, the last selling point indicated that with fair skin, “you can do a performance piece about race without anyone thinking you’re just being self-serving.”

I also used Jackson's technique of multiple characters as a Brechtian distancing strategy. In addition to the commercial spokesperson, I played a bespectacled professor, a young kid, and various versions of myself. In order to heighten the meta-theatricality of the piece, I also addressed the audience and, during one scene, reflexively called attention to the idea of performance and theater. In the section detailing the history of whiteness, several classmates and I mused over the efficacy of various performance metaphors—from board games to game shows to abstract dance pieces—to help explain the complex information.

Finally, I attempted to step on a landmine or two in the show. In the opening scene, I confessed to wanting to be black because it was “cool and slick” and I offered up my own black face performance by adopting a black accent and gait. Other sections that concerned me before the show included the presentation of European imperialism as a fun game of “Risk” and the moment where I revealed pictures of lynched African American men. I worried and still worry that showing the pictures operated as one of the white face-saving strategies described by Jackson. By dwelling of the horrors of lynching, I ran the risk of redirecting awareness or erasing the impact of current, more insidious forms of racism that still occur. I hope that spectators were also left thinking about the current structures and practices that perpetuate white supremacy.

I will end this paper by admitting, as Jackson admits in her introduction, that writing in response to one's own performance feels odd. Writing about performance is almost as complex and impossible as writing about white