



Backpages 27.1

To cite this article: (2017) Backpages 27.1, Contemporary Theatre Review, 27:1, 134-148, DOI: [10.1080/10486801.2017.1274147](https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2017.1274147)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2017.1274147>



Published online: 12 Apr 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Backpages 27.1

Backpages is an opportunity for the academy to engage with theatre and performance practice with immediacy and insight and for theatre workers and performance artists to engage critically and reflectively on their work and the work of their peers.

The Editing of Emma Rice
Crisis Management in the Theatre of Shon Dale-Jones
Europe: A Tragedy of Love and Ideology
Archiving Gestures of Disobedience
Remembering Annie Castledine
Mighty Annie



The Editing of Emma Rice

Tom Cornford

Tom Cornford is a Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London and a director and dramaturg. He is currently completing his first monograph, Theatre Studios: Practices, Philosophies and Politics of Ensemble Theatre Making. This article was written on 8 November 2016.

London theatre has been shocked in the last fortnight by the announcement from Shakespeare's Globe that its new artistic director, Emma Rice (who began her tenure in April and has just completed her first season), will be leaving her post in April 2018. The controversy has even made national news, featuring on both Radio 4's *Today* programme and BBC2's *Newsnight*. This is testament to the strength of feeling

elicited by the Globe's announcement, and the polarized views that have characterized its discussion and connected it to national events such as the Brexit vote. Like Brexit, it has generated a great deal of satirical anger, with blogs and tweets attacking and lampooning the Globe, of which the parody account @RealGlobe2018 is representative: 'Know it's been a while but any1 remember best way to do blackface? Asking for a friend... #MakeShakespeareGreatAgain #Globe2018 #EmmaRice'.¹ As Alistair Smith, editor of *The Stage* newspaper tweeted, '[s]uspect anger at Emma Rice news amplified by fact it feeds into wider UK narrative of reactionary forces prevailing over progressive ones'.²

In its statement to the press, the Globe highlighted Rice's experiments with using lighting and amplified sound as the source of irreconcilable differences between the director and the theatre's board, by whom she was appointed in 2015.³ This announcement followed a series of negative responses in the press and online, which dismissed her artistic programme as fundamentally inappropriate to the Globe. Some spoke up for Rice, most notably *Guardian* critic Lyn Gardner, but the mood music could be heard by all, and there was a strong sense that some of it was being conducted

¹ @RealGlobe2018, *Twitter*, 1.18pm 25 October 2016.

² @smithalstair, *Twitter*, 4.36pm 25 October 2016.

³ Shakespeare's Globe, 'Statement Regarding the Globe's Future Artistic Direction', *Shakespeare's Globe*, 2016 <<http://blog.shakespearesglobe.com/post/152286922818/statement-regarding-the-globes-future-artistic>> [accessed 9 November 2016].

from within the Globe and its wider circle.⁴ In what follows, I'll offer a brief survey of responses to these events, make a case for what I think is really at stake in Rice's dismissal, and conclude by asking what this sorry episode tells us about the position of artistic leaders more widely.

Responses to the Globe's statement have been substantially factional. It has been all but impossible to find a theatre professional willing to speak in favour of it, and many have come out in public to condemn it. The exception to this rule has been Mark Rylance, who has claimed, in an interview with *Time Out*, that the cause of Rice's departure was the fact that her approach was placing limits on the Globe's ability to use its spaces in a range of ways (I'll return to this).⁵ Likewise, scholars working on contemporary theatre have been apparently unanimous in their disdain for the Globe's actions and its justification for them. Theatre critics, on the other hand, have divided, as they often do, along roughly political lines. Those favouring experimental practice (who we would have called left-wing and might identify this year as Remainers) have been united in their support for Rice (though I suspect that many of them may view much of her work as somewhat anodyne and commercial) and the cultural conservatives have, if not welcomed the news, then accepted it without significant comment. Shakespearean scholars have divided along similar lines. Most notably, Richard Wilson, Sir Peter Hall Professor of Shakespeare Studies at Kingston University, was reported in *The Stage* asserting the Globe's 'responsibility to the worldwide scholarly community' to create productions reflecting 'Elizabethan conditions according to current research'.⁶

This echoes the argument made by the Globe's public statement, which asserts that 'shared light' is fundamental to the theatrical particularity of its performance spaces. The case for shared light as a cause for Rice's departure, however, is unconvincing because she has not, in fact, done away with it.

⁴ Lyn Gardner, 'Emma Rice is Right to Experiment at the Globe – Art Should Reinvent, Not Replicate', *Guardian*, 28 September 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2016/sep/28/emma-rice-shakespeares-globe-theatre-modern-audiences>> [accessed on 9 November 2016].

⁵ Andrzej Lukowski, "'It's very tragic": Mark Rylance Speaks Out About Emma Rice's Shock Departure from the Globe', *Time Out London*, 3 November 2016 <<http://www.timeout.com/london/blog/its-very-tragic-mark-rylance-speaks-out-about-emma-rices-shock-departure-from-the-globe-110316>> [accessed 9 November 2016].

⁶ Matthew Hemley, 'Shakespeare Academic Defends Globe Board's Decision to Remove Emma Rice', *The Stage*, 27 October 2016 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/shakespeare-academic-defends-globe-boards-decision-to-remove-emma-rice/>> [accessed 9 November 2016].

We have become habituated to a distinction between stage and auditorium defined by lighting because of darkened auditoria, not lit stages. Until the introduction of electric (as opposed to candle, oil, or gas) light, auditoria remained partly illuminated alongside onstage lighting, as does today's Globe. Rice has not extinguished auditorium lighting and nor could she (with the exception of a few days at the end of the Globe's summer season, when the sun goes down before the show does).

But haven't Rice's additions to the theatre's auditorium represented an unprecedented break from the artistic policy ascribed to the theatre by *The Stage* ('to represent Elizabethan conditions')? In short, no. 'Original Practices' productions (developed under Mark Rylance's tenure as artistic director) explored limited aspects of these conditions (the construction of clothing and use of make-up, for example), but they were conceived, designed, rehearsed, and directed entirely in line with mainstream contemporary practices. Rylance's claim that the policy pursued by Rice of installing lighting and sound equipment 'prevents everybody else from doing any other kind' of production is not convincing.⁷ As I have shown elsewhere, there was only one production of a play by Shakespeare in the first four years of Dominic Dromgoole's tenure at the Globe that did not feature a rebuilt stage, and there was no public response from the Globe's Board to his policy of altering its building.⁸ Even the Globe's founder Sam Wanamaker did not have a purist attitude to the theatre he created. Paul Prescott's admirable analysis of his engagement with Shakespeare warns against any such simplistic idea: '[m]uch in his life was adventitious and unpredictable; the founding of the Globe was no exception'.⁹

That said, Wanamaker clearly also saw the Globe as a significant intervention into the staging of Shakespeare. And, even if we reject a trans-historical essentialist understanding of it, the reconstructed theatre retains its capacity to challenge theatre makers and audiences to reconsider their relationship with Shakespeare. We may, for example, see the Globe as a place constructed by highly skilled craftspeople that stands at a human scale against the glass and steel assertions of capital by which it is surrounded. It offers

⁷ Lukowski, 'Rylance speaks out'.

⁸ Tom Cornford, 'Reconstructing Theatre: The Globe under Dominic Dromgoole', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 26.4 (2010), 319–28.

⁹ Paul Prescott, 'Sam Wanamaker' in *Great Shakespearians Volume 15: Poel, Granville Barker, Guthrie, Wanamaker*, ed. by Cary M. Mazer (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 151–210 (p. 153).

the opportunity to see and hear plays out in the air, with hundreds of other people, for a few pounds. This vision of Shakespeare's place in our culture lay behind Rice's only Shakespearean work before her appointment at the Globe: Kneehigh's *Cymbeline* (2006). Michael Billington complained that this production showcased 'Kneehigh's cleverness' as opposed to 'Shakespeare's genius' and Dominic Cavendish bemoaned that 'the text has been decapitated, leaving only the bare body of the story walking about madly'.¹⁰ The subtext of these criticisms is so clear that it almost obscures the text. 'Clever' is what men call girls. It's an adjective that withholds as it praises. 'Genius' does no such thing. It is the noun that keeps on giving. But it is reserved for the Great Dead Men. And I challenge you to saturate a sentence in as toxic a mixture of castration anxiety, fear of death, and class hatred as Cavendish has managed in his image of the decapitated text staggering about.

Emma Rice has asserted, both in public statements and implicitly in her actions, that the Globe should be a genuinely popular theatre and has challenged the gendered, and race and class-based ideas that continue to dominate representations of Shakespeare. Valery Wayne wrote of Kneehigh's *Cymbeline*, that it 'conveyed not the letter of the text but its spirit'.¹¹ We might think of Rice's work at the Globe this year in the same way. Her disinterest in the literally historical has been balanced by an emerging commitment to creating a new public theatre. In this project, she has tried to counteract some of the multiple inequalities of contemporary Britain that the wider theatre is still struggling to resist. Some, like critic Kate Maltby, have argued that this project tilts at a straw man, and that Rice is not nearly as radical as she purports to be.¹² There may be some truth in that, but it obscures the important fact of the small but significant changes that Rice's tenure has achieved.

Before Rice, for example, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) performers had overwhelmingly appeared in leading roles (defined as title characters and/or a play's largest parts) in touring or educational productions and in the (smaller) indoor Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. Where BAME performers had appeared in main productions, they were usually cast in roles that have been long associated with non-white performers (including Romeo,

Othello, Caliban, Ophelia, Horatio, Tybalt), and they were cast by white directors. In the last Globe season, however, a new pattern emerged. There were two BAME leading roles on the main stage (a notably more diverse season than previously) and Iqbal Khan was brought in to direct *Macbeth*, with Ray Fearon in the title role and a notably multicultural cast.¹³ Furthermore, re-gendering roles to increase opportunities for women was a clear policy.¹⁴

The Globe has also seen a more inclusive *style* of production. In Matthew Dunster's *Imogen*, for example, we heard not the Edwardian formality that still dominates Shakespearean speech, but a sound closer to contemporary London. In short, Rice has set out to address the Shakespeare industry's systemic bias towards those with power and privilege. In so doing, she has begun to make what might have become a compelling case for the Globe's prominent place in London today and Shakespeare's in our culture, by using the production of his plays to question our relationship with our collective pasts and presents. But the Globe's decision has put paid to that. It has confirmed that the theatre is fundamentally committed to (which is to say branded by) aesthetic and political conservatism. Those are the stakes of these recent events.

And so we come finally to the fact that the Globe's Board has taken issue with Rice's use of the building in a way it never did with her predecessors and has chosen not to stand by the decision to appoint her that it made only a matter of months ago. The significance of her gender in these events must not be dismissed. Both of Rice's male predecessors experimented with ways of altering the Globe to work as a contemporary theatre and both endured periods of critical disapproval. Neither was removed as a result. Rice's treatment is another instance of the commonly observable phenomenon of women in high profile positions being subjected to a form of censure that men rarely receive. Rice's professed inexperience of Shakespeare, for example, was rounded upon in a way that similar statements by Dominic Dromgoole (who had also directed only one play by Shakespeare prior to running the Globe) never were. But the imminent conclusion of Rice's tenure also suggests that the artistic leaders of our biggest and most prominent theatres are being seen, by some, like the managers

¹⁰ Duška Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 57-58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹² Kate Maltby, 'Emma Rice was Never as Radical as She Thought She Was', *The Spectator*, 26 October 2016 <<http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/10/emma-ric-never-radical-thought/>> [accessed 9 November 2016].

¹³ Many thanks to Jami Rogers, researcher on the University of Warwick's British Black and Asian Shakespeare Project for supplying this information.

¹⁴ We should note, however, that Helena was re-gendered in the other direction to become Helenus in Rice's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and that there was no re-gendering of a leading role in the season.

of football clubs. They are options to be gambled with and ultimately disposable.¹⁵

This is even more concerning because none of what Rice has done has been unpredictable. She has continued at the Globe the kind of work that she developed with Kneehigh. She has created an inclusive form of broadly mainstream theatre with a contemporary edge, focused on clarity of narrative and exuberant theatricality. If the Board considered that inappropriate for the Globe, why did they appoint her? Once they had decided to appoint her, why did they not feel it incumbent upon them to stick by her? Rice has long been considered a talented director, though she has had relatively limited experience of leading an institution. She has entered a major role in the London theatre with gusto and a serious purpose, and she has delivered a financially successful first season. And she has (to put it factually) not been supported.

This is more widely concerning because of the way the Globe is funded. Unusually, it is not in receipt of core funding from Arts Council England, and is therefore more than usually dependent upon ticket receipts, and philanthropic and other donations. We have heard from the Globe that Rice's first season has 'achieved exceptionally strong box office returns'.¹⁶ But what about donations and sponsorship? Since Rice's departure, one philanthropic organization, the Joyce Carr Doughty Charitable Trust, has announced that it is considering demanding the return of the funding it has given to the theatre 'to support performing arts bodies that engage new audiences', a project that it sees as contingent upon Rice's position.¹⁷ It is not hard to imagine, given this statement, that the attitudes of other funders with other objectives were instrumental in the events that led to the announcement of Rice's departure. And this is important because, in a future of what ministers are fond of calling 'mixed economies' of funding, theatre makers are going to be more accountable to what may well be unaccountable groups and therefore vulnerable to half-hidden agendas and private interests. Editing (as Shakespeareans well know) ends up telling us most about the editor.

¹⁵ There are echoes here, too, of the National Theatre's recent, chaotic handling of Tessa Ross's brief period as joint Chief Executive with Rufus Norris.

¹⁶ Shakespeare's Globe, 'Statement Regarding Globe's Future Artistic Direction'.

¹⁷ Matthew Hemley, 'Emma Rice Decision Prompts Charity to Shelve Future Globe Funding', *The Stage* (2016) <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/emma-rice-charity-shelve-funding-globe/>> [accessed on 9 November 2016].

Crisis Management in the Theatre of Shon Dale-Jones

Maddy Costa

Maddy Costa writes about theatre and music, blogs at Deliq, edits the blog New Theatre in Your Neighbourhood in association with Fuel, and co-curates Something Other with Mary Paterson. She is resident critic with Chris Goode & Company.

When I first met Shon Dale-Jones, in 2007, I thought his name was Hugh.¹⁸ I had seen Hugh Hughes's debut show, *Floating*, the year before, and been beguiled into lasting affection: by the mischievous imagination of the work, its rough theatricality and gently comic storytelling; and by Hugh's sincere personality, his wonder and habit of truthfulness, particularly in expressing the feelings that others might hide. Somehow I missed the memo that Hugh was an alter-ego, the creation of an already experienced theatre-maker who had been running his own company, Hoipolloi, with his wife, Stefanie Mueller, for over a decade, and was experimenting with a new character who would shape his work for years to come.

In that 2007 interview, Dale-Jones quoted a maxim of the film-maker Luis Buñuel: 'fantasy and reality are equally personal and equally felt, and therefore their confusion is a matter of relative importance'.¹⁹ It still inspires him, and characterises his most recent work, *The Duke*: another mischievous tale, but this time played in his own voice, as autobiography. There are three strands to its narrative: in one, his elderly mother accidentally breaks a china figurine of the Duke of Wellington, bought by his father as an alternative life-insurance policy; in another, Dale-Jones is confounded by news and images of families, children, dying as they attempt a makeshift transit from the war in Syria to the safety of Europe. And in the third, he is working on a film script in which the island of Anglesey drifts away from the Welsh mainland into the Irish sea: an image familiar to fans of *Floating*, because Hugh Hughes told the exact same story.

Re-reading that 2007 interview, I was struck by something else Dale-Jones had told me: before he

¹⁸ See Hugh Hughes's personal website at <<http://www.hughhughes.me/>> [accessed 20 November 2016].

¹⁹ Maddy Costa, 'Beware the Alien Bakers', *Guardian*, 23 August 2007, <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2007/aug/23/edinburghfestival2007.edinburghfestival2>> [accessed 31 October 2016].

created Hugh, and *Floating*, he had tried to write the Anglesey adrift fantasy as a film, but realised it would never get funded, and it was only as theatre that it would reach people. I find great joy in the way he has twice used this story (originally published as an April Fool in his local newspaper when he was a child) to take positive action: first to avoid becoming 'one of those sad people who walk around for 10 years with a script in their hand'; and now to respond in a meaningful way to the refugee crisis. Throughout *The Duke*, Dale-Jones raises a number of questions about human responsibility, whether to close relations or faraway strangers, and about the value of art, and gradually creates the conditions by which his audience might attempt a unifying answer, inviting them to give a charity donation to Save the Children's Child Refugee Crisis Appeal, not at some vague point in the future, but into a bucket that he holds at the exit. By mid-October 2016, he had already collected over £20,000 this way.

MADDY COSTA: When there's so much in the world telling us we don't have the power to make change, it's important to recognise the small power, and do the things you can do.

SHON DALE-JONES: Absolutely. That was one of the biggest things my grandmother gave me. She was a profound influence on me, and she would say on a daily basis: don't think what you do is not enough. Just do what you can, don't be overwhelmed by how enormous the scale of things is, and try and join in with other people. Now I'm doing it I think, yeah, that's all you can do. And it gives you a lot of energy actually, it propels you forward.

MC: There's a way of seeing the film-script storyline in *The Duke* as the other path your life could have taken, if you hadn't chosen the active path of turning *Floating* into a play. So the underlying message is to not sit back but to act.

SD-J: It's funny: three years ago, in June 2013, I finished a project in Anglesey with National Theatre Wales and decided to take a few months off. Stef [Stefanie Mueller] and I had been running Hoipolloi for 20 years, our daughter had gone to university, and it was a little moment we gave ourselves, to talk about what we wanted to do, in our lives and in our working lives, from now on. But at the same time I had this opportunity to write a TV script, which I'd wanted to do for a long time: lots of people had told me that Hugh Hughes could be a really good TV character. So I set off on that journey, I wrote four half-hours, and it was really great, really creative. When I handed in my last piece of work [in 2015], I knew I had to wait before I got any conclusive answer to whether or not it would

get made, so rather than just sit and wait, I thought I may as well start writing a play. And having not been in the theatre space for almost three years, I really really wanted it to do something, to contribute something back. If I'm going to write another show, I thought, it has to be worthwhile.

I was really troubled by the Syrian crisis, and how the refugee crisis had escalated: that felt like the most immediate and urgent thing to write about. But also my mother is getting older, that was a very deep personal concern. I thought if I pushed the two things together, the personal concern and the big world concern, it might work as a way of connecting the two emotionally.

What's interesting is that with the TV script, I have no say whether that gets made or not. Of course I could make my own half-hour short film, but the distribution networks work in a very different way. But what happens in theatre is really brilliant, because you can own that space, you can own the material. When Stef and I set up Hoipolloi we made the shows we wanted to make, and then we went and knocked on people's doors and said: 'Will you programme this show?' We took the power into our own hands, and I don't think we ever really shifted from that position.

The TV contract might happen, but what's happened over the past year feels very meaningful: I feel very, very full, sometimes full to bursting, because I'm with the material in many ways, and I've worked with Save the Children, so the emotional journey is really quite big. When I was writing the TV sitcom I really enjoyed it, but it was nowhere near as profound as this. When you put those two things together, that tells me quite a lot.

MC: The theatres where you're performing *The Duke* are giving you their spaces for free. So along with everything else, the show is creating its own microcosm economic system.

SD-J: Yeah, that's really exciting, and it's a by-product in a way: we know we're trying to achieve one aim, but then a whole lot of other things happen. I'd really like to explore how different economic models can work around making theatre, presenting theatre, how audiences purchase that theatre, where that money goes and how that money is received. I've been on both sides of the funding system: I've had no funding, I've had very good funding, now I'm in between a bit, I have to apply for small grants to keep me going, which is fine, that's my choice. But it's true, I'm trying to break it all down in case there might be another way round. The economy of what I'm making at the moment is really the cheapest version – I mean, I've got a suitcase that I travel round with, I get on a

train, I turn up, I plug in. It's the cheapest theatre model you can imagine.

MC: But it's also a model that responds to the environment crisis.

SD-J: Absolutely, that's built in there as well.

MC: How is that question, 'Is it worthwhile?', affecting how you think about what happens next?

SD-J: Starting on this journey feels like a beginning of something new, like another chapter that's only just started. So the next show I'm making is called *Me and Robin Hood* and it's about poverty. I want to talk about the division between rich and poor: this country's been really up against it, most of us probably think that was a major contributor to the Brexit vote. I want to talk about what we think poverty is and what we think wealth is and why it's become so divided and so unequal and so unjust and so unfair – all the obvious stuff. And then I have my own story: the town I was brought up in, in the late-1970s, early 80s, Anglesey Llangefni, was in the top 5% for the worst affected areas. So I lived in a town where people were poor, and I know that, and I know that I was given a leg up, I know that I ended up going to university and I now live in Cambridge, and when I go back to the town of Llangefni, that journey isn't just from one town to another, it's a journey from wealth and affluence and aspiration and opportunity to a complete opposite place, and that really disturbs me. And you look around and go, this isn't only my story, this is what we're up against. So that feels worthwhile. It feels very worthwhile.

MC: Are you expecting to have the same space-for-free arrangement with the new work as you've had with *The Duke*?

SD-J: It'd be incredible if we could but I really don't know. My hope is I will do *The Duke* for the next two years and continue with that model for that show; whether we can create a similar model for *Robin Hood* we need to investigate. I probably will start pushing it. And most people are brilliant when you start asking. 'I will give this, why don't you give that, and then the audience gives this, and we're all in, aren't we?' It's quite difficult for people to say no.

But also, what's great about *The Duke* is that it's non-funded, so you can absolutely do what you want with that show. It's hard for people like the Arts Council, for example, to pay for a show to be made that will then make money for a charity because a theatre company is already a charity. But you have to find a way of bursting through that, or it's not helping anybody. There are enough people I know to keep the conversation going, to think about it not just as a performance on stage. I've always said the show is just a vehicle for all the other stuff: we want to use it to add our voice to political

campaigning, or to lobby the government; we want to connect up the charity work, the political work, the artist's work, and the audiences. If we can keep those connecting up then I think we might be on to something, because we can only [create change] together. As we know now the Labour movement is in disarray, and there is no opposition really to the government; there are a lot of people like you and I who would be aligned around various issues but the worry is that we're not a collective force.

It's a big paradigm shift that we need to go through, and we're being forced into it, whether we want to or not. Right-wing ideology is becoming so prevalent and so powerful and so cynical that it's forcing the people who aren't in agreement into a position of going: OK, well, we'll fight a bit then. We are well-equipped, we are well-networked, and we are clever people and we are generous people, and together we could stand up against this tide, but we need to identify each other.

MC: There's something else here for me about power: you have to recognise your own power sufficiently to act, but in the moment of taking power letting go of it so it becomes collective.

SD-J: Absolutely. The giving model is a really powerful one, because people worry that if they give, they're losing, but actually when you give you gain. And this is how the formula works. People think as an individual you'll lose power if you share it, but you won't: you grow in power. I've been really inspired by that.



Europe: A Tragedy of Love and Ideology

Andrew Haydon

Andrew Haydon is a freelance theatre critic based in Manchester. His account of British theatre in the 2000s is published in Decades – Modern British Playwriting: 2000-2009, ed. by Dan Rebellato (London: Methuen Drama, 2013). This piece was written for his blog, Postcards From the Gods, and posted on 26 June 2016. This printed version stands as a record of that initial impulse.²⁰

'Summer. A river. Europe. These are the basic ingredients...'

Martin Crimp, *Attempts on Her Life*, 1997

²⁰ See Andrew Haydon, 'Europe: A Tragedy of Love and Ideology', *Postcards From the Gods* 26 June 2016 <<http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk/2016/06/europe-tragedy-of-love-and-ideology.html>>

‘The Greek government failed to resist the austerity measures demanded by the Troika with devastating consequences for millions of Greek citizens, a majority of whom voted against those measures in the referendum of July 5, 2015.’

Lindsay Goss & Nicholas Ridout, *quite the best news news in some considerable time*, 2016²¹

‘This is not a friendly takeover. It is an irreversible turning point and a break in the recent history of the theatre. This change represents historical levelling and razing of identity. The artistic processing of social conflict is displaced in favour of a globally extended consensus culture with uniform presentation and sales patterns.’

Volksbühne, 2016²²

‘Love, for me, is an extremely violent act. Love is not “I love you all”. Love means I pick out something, and it’s – again – this structure of imbalance. Even if this something is just a small detail... a fragile individual person... I say “I love you more than anything else”. In this quite formal sense, love is evil’.

Slavoj Žižek, 2005²³

In their performance *quite the best news in some considerable time* Lindsay Goss and Nicholas Ridout say that they want to avoid ‘left melancholy’. The piece takes its title from a comment on the victory of the Left-wing, anti-austerity, anti-neoliberal EU party, Syriza, in Greece in January, 2015. The left melancholy they want to avoid derives from the fact that, despite having been elected, and despite the Greek people having voted to reject austerity in a subsequent referendum, the European Union imposed the measures regardless.

At the Volksbühne, 180 artists have signed an open letter to ‘die Parteien im Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin, Staatsministerin für Kultur und Medien, Frau Prof. Monika Grütters’ denouncing “platitudes like ‘the language of the stage will be polyglot’.”²⁴ In the banality of this promulgation we fear the sell out of our own artistic standards and the likely weakening of our potent drama theatre operation” (“Gemeinplätze wie “die Bühnensprache wird polyglotter werden.” In der Banalität der Verkündung fürchten wir den

Ausverkauf der für uns geltenden künstlerischen Maßstäbe und die zu erwartende Schwächung unseres potenten Schauspieltheaterbetriebs”).

In a referendum in Britain, 52% of 72% percent of the enfranchised population (44,722,000 – in 2015) voted for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. (17,410,742 to leave vs 16,141,241 to remain, in a country with an estimated overall population of 64,596,800 (2014)).

* * *

The victory in Britain has been framed as, and is largely understood as, a victory of the nationalist right, despite it also being a clear victory for the communist left. In fact, the particular reasons behind each Remain vote, Leave vote, and abstention are as unknown as each voter’s secret love, darkest secret, or favourite pop song.

Young people who voted, voted overwhelmingly to Remain. But a vast proportion of young people didn’t vote. A vast number of those who live in social housing, or housing association property voted to Leave, but a vast proportion of them didn’t vote either. The percentage of Labour voters voting to remain was 63% and Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the party has been widely criticised. The percentage of SNP voters voting to remain was 64% and Nicola Sturgeon’s leadership of the party has been widely acclaimed.

On the streets of England, several dozen racist incidents have been held up as evidence of a far right emboldened by the winning leave vote. In Westminster, even the very fact of Britain actually leaving the EU at all seems far from assured as Article 50 remains uninvoked. After the referendum, as before, nobody really seems to know what is going on, or why.

* * *

In the anger of some thwarted Remainites over the weekend it could be argued that we saw many of the things that some of the Leave side were rejecting: their demonisation as racists, the condescension toward their ability to hold a view at all, the characterisation of their views as uninformed or incorrect. Ready-formed reactions as full of the prejudice as those which left Remainites claim of Leave. That the majority of Remain voters live in Britain’s affluent cities, and the majority of Leave voters live outside them, lent an ugly sheen of monied, metropolitan condescension to the well-meaning, good-hearted pleas for calm, inclusion, and love. By the violent

²¹ For further discussion of *quite the best news* see: Andrew Haydon, ‘quite the best news in some considerable time (rinse and repeat version) – Arts 2, QMU, L’, *Postcards From the Gods*, 14 June 2016 <<http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk/2016/06/quite-best-news-in-some-considerable.html>>

²² ‘Offener Brief’, *Volksbuehne*, 20 June 2016 <https://www.volksbuehne-berlin.de/deutsch/offener_brief/> [accessed 1 December 2016].

²³ ‘Zizek! – Full Transcript’, *BeanHu’s Blog* 7 December 2009 <<https://beanhu.wordpress.com/2009/12/07/zizek/>> [accessed 1 December 2016].

²⁴ ‘Offener Brief’, *Volksbuehne*.

actions of some victorious Leave voters, this view sees itself as having been vindicated.

If the Leave vote does cause a recession, how much worse it will actually make things for the majority of Leave voters? Could it be framed as the most effective, quiet, democratic revolution ever seen; two fingers stuck up at everyone who has profited from the ongoing marginalisation and immiseration of those revolting. ‘How much worse can it get?’ their votes perhaps demand. ‘What have we got to lose? Nothing. What have you lot got to lose? Lots. So there you go pal, fuck you.’

And, while Leave rejoice in their apparent racist nihilism – having in fact delivered a massive trauma to a symbol of neoliberal capital – the powers in Westminster may even be poised to prove everything that Leave’s most paranoid theorists suspected all along; that they have no voice at all, that Leave’s victory in the referendum will ultimately demonstrate nothing more than a neoliberal elite’s power to override their wishes.

* * *

[Thomas] Martin [one of lead signatories of the Volksbühne letter] denied criticism that his protest mirrored the same anti-globalisation fears that have elsewhere surfaced in the Pegida protest movement and the rise of Germany’s anti-immigration party Alternative für Deutschland. “We are not afraid of the new. In fact, we were one of the first theatres in Germany to put debates around globalisation on the stage.” Earlier this year, the theatre hosted the launch of former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis’s new pan-European leftwing movement DiEM25.²⁵

The Slovenian intellectual Rok Vevar says of Brexit:

The thing is that the EU refuses to share responsibility for this devastating historical mistake called Brexit. We all have to ‘leave’ in order to establish an EU that won’t be run on the neo-liberal agenda. I find it totally inappropriate (but totally expected) that other EU members along with a EU commission refuse to take any responsibility for Brexit. All the governments of EU member states including the commission should resign after Brexit. It proves that there is something fundamentally wrong with

²⁵ Philip Oltermann, ‘Open Letter Turns Spotlight on Berlin Volksbühne Theatre’s Offstage Drama’, *Guardian*, 23 June 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/23/open-letter-turns-spotlight-on-berlin-volksbuhne-theatres-offstage-drama>> [accessed 1 December 2016].

the present EU structure. What happened in Britain is a symptom more than anything else. I think that Junker really helped to convince those undecided in UK to vote Leave. It was more or less only a matter of time – it could happen also elsewhere, although you, living in GB, are convinced that could happen only in GB. The political left has to come up with its own new concept of a political state and union. Once that happens, things are not irreversible anymore. The amount of fascism in the EU is connected with a lack of imagination on the European political left. Let us not be depressed.²⁶

British economist Paul Mason argues:

In the progressive half of British politics we need a plan to put our stamp on the Brexit result – and fast. We must prevent the Conservative right using the Brexit negotiations to reshape Britain into a rule-free space for corporations; we need to take control of the process whereby the rights of the citizen are redefined against those of a newly sovereign state. Above all we need to provide certainty and solidarity to the millions of EU migrants who feel like the Brits threw them under a bus this week. In short, we can and must fight to place social justice and democracy at the heart of the Brexit negotiations.²⁷

The Spanish socialist MEP Miguel Urbán Crespo said: ‘[w]hen parliaments become theatres, we have to turn theatres into parliaments’.²⁸

* * *

In ‘Theatre is the Antidote to Poisonous Politics’ the British theatre critic Matt Trueman writes:

Theatre can counteract [the “stream-based, individualistic culture [in which] we are living

²⁶ From an unpublished interview with the author, 25 June 2016.
²⁷ Paul Mason, ‘Britain is not a Rainy, Fascist Island – Here’s My Plan for ProgrExit’, *Guardian*, 25 June 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/25/britain-rainy-fascist-island-progrexit-brexit>> [accessed 1 December 2016].

²⁸ Miguel Urbán Crespo qtd. in Philip Oltermann, ‘Yanis Varoufakis launches pan-European Leftwing Movement DiEM25’, *Guardian*, 10 February 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/10/yanis-varoufakis-launches-pan-european-leftwing-movement-diem25>> [accessed 1 December 2016].

increasingly atomized, slightly disconnected lives. We are spending time staring at our phones rather than looking at people's faces – that in itself is actually leading to a lack of empathy and neuroscientists are telling us that it's limiting our ability to be empathetic" – Mark Ball]. It is a human art-form that requires us, as an audience, to try and understand others. It is nothing less than an empathy machine.²⁹

Trueman could arguably be suggesting that Leave voters need theatre to understand their mistake, and that there is no suggestion that Remain voters need to try to understand the logic of the Leave voter. It is both simplistic and inaccurate to paint Remain voters solely as comfortably-off, city-dwelling multiculturalists. Just as it is a mistake to paint Leave as solely the preserve of an uneducated, disenfranchised, racist poor. A victory for Remain would have endorsed not only open borders (within Europe), but also the punitive destruction of the Greek economy and mainland Europe's largely hostile, racist attitude toward Middle-Eastern and North African refugees. The victory for Leave need not be understood as xenophobic and right-wing, but as a progressive blow against the interests of neoliberal capital.

Globally-minded left Remain voters could take solace, for example, from framing the Leave vote as a rejection of the razor-wire fences erected across Europe's southern borders in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Croatia against the refugees fleeing the slaughter in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, and as an act of solidarity with the Greek people.

* * *

To return to the Žižek quote at the top of the piece, the 'Tragedy of Love and Ideology' – borrowed from the title of the second in Martin Crimp's *17 Scenarios For Theatre, Attempts on Her Life* – and the question of empathy, what seems to be missing from all Brexit analysis so far is the frank admission that everyone is acting out of love. In Brexit, we see the problematic truth of Žižek's apparently playful, deliberately provocative formulation: 'love is evil'.

²⁹ Matt Trueman, 'Theatre is the Antidote to Poisonous Politics', *WhatsonStage*, 20 June 2016 <http://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/matt-trueman-our-divided-times-need-theatre_41051.html> [accessed 1 December 2016].

Let us, for the time being, tune out the idea of 'hatred,' and let's instead focus on people's 'best motivations.' People have voted in the interests of their families, of their communities, and of their country. All inspired by love. They only want what's best for their children. Etc. They only want to see their country have the right to determine its own future. Etc. These are not inherently motives with which we disagree. Who doesn't want the best for their child? Who doesn't believe in the right of a country to self-determination?

People have also voted as sensibly or as optimistically as they dared. The EU, as it stands, is unloved. For the left, it betrays all but the 1% with its financialization of a continent. For the right, it betrays the principle of absolute self-determination, either per country, or per individual. People voted emotionally, with emotional pragmatism. National love or international love. Belief in capital or belief in a possible Socialist future. People voted with all the facts or with none. People voted accurately for their interests, or inaccurately. There arguably wasn't even a result good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

* * *

We have not walked anywhere in anyone else's shoes.

We voted five minutes walk from our houses in streets that we'd never even seen before.

We don't know people who live on the housing estates, or we don't know people who live in the posh flats.

We don't know anyone from another country, or we don't know anyone who doesn't know lots of people from other countries.

We still aren't listening to anyone else.

We think they still aren't listening to us.

We know we are right.

We have not yet reached the fifth stage of grief.

* * *

We realised something about the question we wanted to answer.

'What is the role of the intellectual in the revolutionary struggle?'

We realised that this question suggests, if you ask it the wrong way, a kind of left melancholy.

By which we mean, the intellectual's conviction that there is nothing to be done.

That in effect, the intellectual has no role in the revolutionary struggle, and can stop worrying about the whole thing altogether.

This is also a way of avoiding sincerity and of being cool.

We think it is the wrong way.

In place of left melancholy we wanted pleasure and joy.

Goss & Ridout, *quite the best news in some considerable time (rinse and repeat version)* (2016)

We thought that Freud was probably right about laughter.

We had no moral compass, or if we did have one it had been badly damaged in the frequent electrical storms.

We lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth.

We saw Arthur Scargill's blue movie cameo.

We sent death threats by fax machine and kept a list on a computer of people we were going to kill.

We were class-traitors, cry-for-help shoplifters, we were murderers of sleep.

We loved each other too much.

We held each other's hands.

Forced Entertainment, *Speak Bitterness* (1994)



Archiving Gestures of Disobedience

Farah Saleh

Farah Saleh is a Palestinian dancer and choreographer active in Palestine, Europe, and the US. She has studied linguistic and cultural mediation in Italy and in parallel continued her studies in contemporary dance. She has been dancing and choreographing with Sareyyet Ramallah Dance Company since 2010, for which she recently created Ordinary Madness (2013) and Hana and I (2014). She is currently touring with her latest pieces Free Advice (2015), La Mème (2016), and Cells of Illegal Education (2016).

In reenacting we turn back, and in this return we find [...] a will to keep inventing.³⁰

Andre Lepecki

My last three creations (2014-2016) – *Free Advice*, *A Fidayee Son in Moscow*, and *Cells of Illegal Education* – are the outcome of my latest research into the role of artists in society and their possible contribution to social and political change. This exploration emerged after I witnessed and reflected on the role of the new Arab and international revolts of the last years, which have brought new forms of artistic engagement into the public sphere. I felt the only way to justify for myself being an artist in the middle of all the injustice and the massive protests was to create work that would bring the artist physically back to the streets and then bring the common concerns and experiences of the bodies in revolt to the art space. This would allow me to navigate the tension between art and activism, and develop alternative knowledge using the body as archive.

In my *Free Advice* solo, I first walked the streets of Ramallah, Vienna, Budapest, and Providence with a 'Free Advice' sign in order to invite dialogue with passersby on art and society. Then I transformed this experience of public intervention into an interactive dance solo to continue the dialogue in the performative space. In *A Fidayee Son in Moscow* installation, I attempted to archive gestures of Palestinian children – one of whom is my brother – at a communist international boarding school in the Soviet Union (during the 1980s), using an interactive video and setting to reflect on the present and future of the children of the Palestinian Left. In *Cells of Illegal Education (C.I.E)* interactive video dance installation I attempted to reconstruct the movements of Palestinian students during the First Intifada when education was banned by an Israeli military rule, to reflect on today's acts of civil disobedience in Palestine.

In this short article, I am going to take my latest creation, *C.I.E*, as an example to explain how I see my contribution as an artist to change through exploring and problematizing *embodied* social and political memories. I will show how archiving a whole array of gestures and movements present in an alternative narrative – left out of mainstream Palestinian narratives of revolt – can come along through reenacting, analyzing and commenting on the gestures of its actors and the context they were performed in. My artistic practice attempts to collect fragments of a gestural collective identity, and reconstruct a genre and new archive that the dominant Palestinian nationalist and non-Palestinian narratives have ignored or obscured.

C.I.E tackles the closure of schools and universities by military rule for long periods during the First

³⁰ Andre Lepecki, 'The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances', *Dance Research Journal*, 42.2 (2010), 22-48 (p. 46).

Intifada, one of the many collective punishment methods used by the Israeli occupation regime in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during that period, with the longest closure of 51 consecutive months. To resist the punitive measure, a few months after the closure was imposed students, teachers, and activists from the Intifada popular committees started organizing the so-called 'Popular Education' in alternative spaces, such as homes, cafes, open spaces, and dorms. School students were taught part of their curricula and university students focused on continuing their university requirements, while all were introduced to new revolutionary concepts inexistent in the formal education system.

Seeing this act of civil disobedience as a threat to security, the Israeli military forces labeled the disobeyers as "Cells of Illegal Education" and started punishing them, often with imprisonment or the destruction of their houses and other spaces they used for popular education.

For three months before going into the dance studio with the dancers to start the creation process, I did extensive research looking for texts, photos, and videos from the First Intifada. In addition, I carried out interviews with scholars, former activists, and students and let my imagination take me to what the gestures of the First Intifada look like and how they can be archived with our contemporary bodies using an interactive video installation as a tool. I also asked the dancers to bring archive material to the studio, stories, photos, and songs they could gather from family and friends on popular education. During the three intensive weeks in the studio we intertwined archive material, oral testimonies, and imagination to reenact, transform, and deform the gestures of a group of Birzeit University students during their university closure.

I chose to work with three pictures and one painting from that historical period, study the gestures of the students in each one and imagine, while having the information I researched in mind, what was before and after the moments and actions captured by the pictures and the painting. The four constitutive sections of *C.I.E* were filmed and edited not as a consecutive narrative, and in the montage before each one a short text would describe the situation as if narrated by the students. The first section is called 'In the Shadow of the Intifada' and portrays students attempting to secretly study in someone's kitchen. The second and third sections are entitled 'The Forbidden Area' and 'A Historical Moment', in which students manage to violate the Israeli military order, break into their closed university labs, and organize an architecture

class (see Image 1). In the fourth section – 'We Organized a Mock Lecture' – students stage a mock lecture in front of the university's closed entrance in order to take a picture to be utilized to print postcards and mobilize the international community against Israel's collective punishment.

While identifying gestures and working on reconstructing them with the dancers, I kept Jacques Derrida's key parameters of what constitutes an archive in mind: a technique of repetition, a certain exteriority and a place of consignment.³¹ For that reason in the choreography I chose to use pedestrian movements similar to those that would exist in the four situations of the images; added a certain repetition of the gestures to make the choreography accessible to the viewers; and used the body as a place of consignment of the archive.

After the video was shot at the university old and new premises, archive material was also used in the editing, such as photos and music. Later it took me a few more weeks to conceive the final shape of the installation, which I intended to be interactive, so that the audience would try the movements of the students, revive their gestures when experiencing the installation, recall their narrative while back at home, and possibly reconnect to similar acts of the present.

Interactivity as a tool for re-experiencing the past is crucial in my project, since during the last ten years at least a strong feeling of nostalgia for the First Intifada's civil disobedience acts has been sensed in Palestine and among international activists and calls for reactivating the political spirit of this historical moment of revolt have been repeatedly launched.³² This was a reaction to the failure of the Oslo peace agreements signed with Israel in 1994, the disastrous outcomes of the Second Intifada (2000-05) on the Palestinian struggle, and the ongoing status quo of continuous Israeli occupation and internal Palestinian political division since 2006. *C.I.E* constitutes an artistic exploration of this nostalgia through a story of popular education.

In the installation, I attempt to archive the gestures of these students before this picture was taken, during the moment of stillness, and after the picture was captured. However, in my artistic practice, I do not aim at merely reenacting gestures. I also aim at deforming them to unearth the missing parts in the official narrative. For example, the dance video includes six men and women dancers, profoundly

³¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), 9-63.

³² Ala Alazzeh, 'Seeking Popular Participation: Nostalgia for the First Intifada in the West Bank', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 25.3 (2015), 251-61.



Image 1 On the left Architecture students at Birzeit University in 1991 posing after they broke into their university to take a lecture in the Architecture Department lab. On the right the reenactment and deformation of the picture in the video of *C.I.E.* © Farah Saleh.

changing the original picture, and emphasizing the absence of women in it. In this way, my archiving practice reflects on the absence of women's important role during the First Intifada in the dominant narrative and reaffirms their actual presence in all civil disobedience acts during that period. *C.I.E.* re-embodies absent women within a new archival form.

C.I.E. is also an interrogation of how the spirit of the First Intifada is transmitted and interpreted in the present. While listening to people recalling the First Intifada and popular education in the interviews I carried out, articles and books I read, I sensed a lot of romanticism – ‘We were completely organized not like today, we had functional popular committees for each sector, education, health, prisoners etc. All worked perfectly,’ J.H., a former activist of the popular education, told me – which I felt the urge to tackle in the video itself and through my archiving practice. For instance, the first scene of the video, which takes place in a kitchen, questions if the students meeting in random spaces, such as someone's kitchen, really studied during their illegal encounters or if what really mattered at the time was the act of civil disobedience itself: the gesture of reclaiming the right to study.

The picture below, which I reenacted in *C.I.E.*, gives another example of the importance the

students and teachers gave to the disobedience gesture itself more than the educational content of it (see Image 2). It is a propaganda postcard created by Birzeit University students in 1990 while taking a mock class in the open air right in front of the closed university entrance. The postcard was used to mobilize students and call

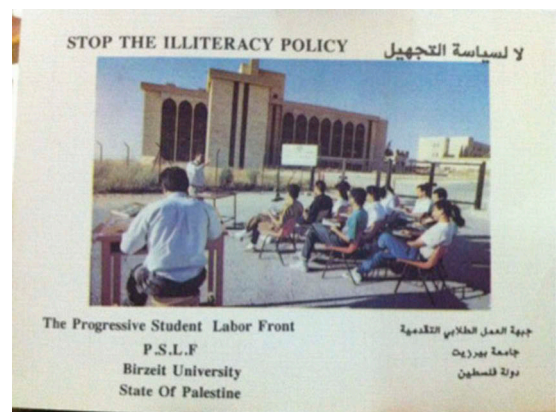


Image 2 ‘Stop the Illiteracy Policy’ Propaganda Postcard, Birzeit 1990.



Image 3 Khaled Hourani, a Palestinian visual artist, portrays the intergenerational conflict in his painting *From the First Intifada* (1987), which was a point of inspiration for one of the video sections.

for international support. In *C.I.E* I transformed and deformed the postcard by taking out the teacher – the pedagogic figure – and emphasized the instrumentality of the act of taking the picture for propaganda purposes.

The gestural archive of *C.I.E* seeks to portray most of the social and political context of the story; therefore it also tackles the intergenerational disobedience in the First Intifada. The Palestinian youth were not only rebelling against the occupation, but also the older generation, not following anymore when to come back home, what to do while outside and took part in civil disobedience acts. The generation of the First Intifada felt that the previous generation's norms of social conservatism and political submission had not succeeded in liberating the Palestinian people.

Archiving these stories of illegal education with our own bodies is ultimately an act of self-historicization and re-appropriation of the history of a certain socio-political generation, often missing or recounted partially in the dominant narrative. The driving force of this archive of gestures is not nostalgia, but the necessity to reflect on the present and future of civil disobedience acts, while finding the continuity with similar collective past experiences. That is why the installation interacts with the audience, tries to make them live the civil disobedience experience in their own bodies and pushes them to reproduce the gestures and states of being of the students.

C.I.E is an invitation to bring the past experience in the present: instructions are provided to the audience

on a piece of paper hung on the door. The first asks them to enter the room one after the other and to leave 20 seconds between each person. This is how the students during the First Intifada used to enter a space so that the Israeli military wouldn't notice that a group of people was going to meet and study somewhere. The second instruction is to lower their head and watch for any danger before arriving at the kitchen table installed in the room, while I put some obstacles between the door and the table to make the audience feel the students' constant state of alertness. The third is to have a fruit from the plate on the table while watching the video for 12 minutes looping, to make the audience live the familiar and enjoyable situation people were describing in their recounts about popular education. The fourth is to leave from the back door, again one by one, to keep all suspicions away and maintain the organized secretive work until the end.



Remembering Annie Castledine (1939-2016)

Annabel Arden

Annabel Arden is a British actress, theatre and opera director, and one of the founders of Théâtre de Complicité.

‘WALK WITHOUT FEAR!!’ she would roar across the room. Annie appeared fearless: she knew that in order for the work to live in the moment, fear had to be banished from the stage.

And ‘POSSESS THE SPACE!!’ was another key command.

These were touchstones... particularly for women. In the nineteen seventies and eighties there were redoubtable women theatre makers, but perhaps they were less visible. There were no women running major London theatres. There were pioneers in a different landscape – all ground breaking workers who laid the foundations for the world we inhabit today.

Her intellect and her courage were especially exhilarating for women in the theatre: she cared not a jot for anything prosaic or mundane – someone else could take care of it – hers was the vision and she was not going to please everybody, be a good girl, she was going to pursue her truth; and often there were hideous collisions and consequences, but Annie kept on no matter what.

She was a great intellect, a great champion of women writers and a political director, but these passions were not what really drove her. What drove her were the classics. She lived and breathed the rigour of the classics and with implacable will she strove to bring the invisible into being, to make thought and emotion tangible through the movement and voices of actors in the space.

Clarity, beauty, music, the music of language. She was determined that these classical values should be the prerogative of all, of the underprivileged, the marginalised, that all people’s stories should possess the most exquisite aesthetic values. And that their own voices should find new forms through the exposure to such values. The classics existed hand in hand with new experimental work – Annie loved contradictions, ‘wrestling with polar opposites’, she was in her element in the crucible, ‘the white heat of creation’.

Apollo and Dionysos – she was anarchic, promiscuous, incorrigible, playfully, violently Dionysiac – she was also prophetic, calm, adamant, healing, musically Apollonian.

I believe she really loved APOLLO.

I can still hear her voice crying out his name in supplication. Or in delighted thanks for some miraculous intervention in the face of disaster.

We called her jokingly the oracle but she really was prophetic, she had the ability to predict events (‘You see I was right about that, wasn’t I? Wasn’t I?’)

And, like the classical oracles, she made the terrible descent to the dark places many times in seminal works which dared to explore the extremes of human existence *And All the Children Cried* by Judith Jones and

Beatrix Campbell (2002), *Goliath* by Bryony Lavery (1997), *From the Mississippi Delta* by Endesha Ida Mae Holland (1997) and so many many more. The descent into the dark also involved the return into the light, and she managed to make these searing texts shine. This transformation from darkness into light was related to the quality of stillness, and, towards the end of her life, stillness became a habitual state; indeed, in her last years, stillness became a study whose essence she sought to share with others.

The day after her death, I had to go to work at Glyndebourne so I went via Eastbourne to sit in her room one last time, with Sarah and Katherine. I was grateful for those moments. So, stunned and empty, I arrived at the stage door where the stage door keeper (who I had previously to my shame considered SUBURBAN) looked sharply at me and said, ‘Are you all right?’ ‘Well no,’ I said ‘I have just lost a very dear friend’. ‘Ah’ she said, ‘You know that poem by Rilke which ends with the line “You must change your life?”’

An electric charge shot through me. There was a discernible presence. ‘I’ll print it out for you now’ said the stage door keeper.

The poem is called *Torso of an Archaic Apollo* and as I read it, I heard Annie.



Mighty Annie

Gerlind Reinshagen

Gerlind Reinshagen is a playwright, novelist, and poet. This tribute to Annie Castledine, written in 1988, and never before published, is printed with the author’s permission, and translated by Glenys Schindler.

She was an untroubled child when she invented the story. At night her sleep took her into the story and when she awoke in the morning she was still in the story. She left the house and found the story out there in the streets: all the heroes from the story were gathered – the friends, lovers, brothers, dancers, devils, fools, acrobats. ‘Good morning,’ said Annie and played with them, and they in turn played with her. Neither lover, dancer nor devil ever forgot their part. This continued all through her childhood. Even in the capital, where she studied, she had forgotten none of this. She moved lightly and freely in her stories and carried on telling them to herself in the evenings.

But at home in South Yorkshire, the air from the coalmines always present, tiredness descends sooner

than elsewhere. In the evening the heroes left behind sat around their coal fires, ate baked-beans on toast and warmed their tired feet. They took off the stories one by one and threw them away like clothes.

Annie returns home and nothing is as it was. Life in the small town appears to her to have come to a standstill: stars, all gone cold, are moving across the sky at night, planes are following their destined path.

No matter how much she asks round and recalls the past, juggling words like balls thrown high into the air – nobody wants to catch them, nobody wants to remember. Hardly anyone still knows the games of the past.

‘That’s life,’ say the people. ‘Has she not grown up and studied, isn’t it time she learned this? Take our advice and come to your senses. Put the old stories behind you.’

But Annie replies: ‘This advice is wrong! What kind of life is that down in the pit, without stories round the clock, with beans on toast but no stories, a life in which there is no play?’

At university Annie has learned that common sense alone achieves nothing, nor do mere words. So she rolls up her sleeves and dresses the tired people once again in their own stories, and begins to heave them from play into real life, that is to say on to the stage.

Of course, that is not as easy as it used to be. One has to summon great strength, superhuman strength. On bad evenings Annie sits with her head sunk, the fire smoking, the ground beneath her feet swaying. She thinks this world of her making is beginning to sink, she is afraid it could fall apart.

‘There you are, we told you so,’ say the people. ‘Haven’t the creative movers and shakers always been men up to now? It’s common knowledge that this is no place for women. She’ll break down,’ the people prophesy.

But Annie answers: ‘Your prophecy is wrong.’ For hard work has made her stronger. She has gained muscles almost like a man. Only her voice has remained unchanged, quiet and so gentle that one could listen to her forever.

Soon her first play is ready for the stage, then the second, the third and countless more; not only in her home county, in Leeds and York, but also in Devon, in Exeter. Soon she is in command of an army of players, lighting technicians, carpenters, metalworkers, painters of illusions; and so a man’s work is never too much for her.

Sometimes, however, the army shows its discontent and tries to rebel, starts to go for her. Then Annie gives a smile that is as gentle as her voice, carefully lifts her arm and flexes her muscles. The army grows silent again.

‘Just wait and see how long she can hold out! Her lover has gone! She won’t find another,’ the people think.

But Annie replies: ‘You think wrong’. Long ago she found a replacement, she has found more lovers than the plain housewives back there in the provinces: she creates them herself on the island’s stages, at each place many others. And with each she has a story to tell which is more colourful, more fantastic, burning, beautiful and secret than all the stories of married life back home.

Soon, however, this is no longer enough for her. Annie has the strength to reach out further. She reaches across the Channel, the Atlantic even, and gets her grasp on foreign stories, those telling of other countries, other wars, lovers unknown; she comes to our divided country and reaches out for my stories, too. She asks around, observes and listens; she drinks the tenth cup of coffee and smokes the thirtieth cigarette; she lies wide-awake at night and doesn’t spare herself. She says: ‘I have dared it. My mother didn’t, nor did my sister. I have managed it’.

But the people are still shaking their heads: ‘How can she manage without sleep? Won’t she become ill and put her life at risk?’

So, finally, Annie says: ‘This question is right!’ And, quietly in her gentle voice, she adds: ‘Rather than be recognized as healthy or ill, strong or weak, as woman, man or child, I want you to see me as a HUMAN BEING!’

So the people fall silent and ask no more questions. They sit still in the theatre and are amazed.



Backpages is edited by Caridad Svich. The Backpages editorial team is Maddy Costa, Andrew Haydon, Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway, Carl Lavery, Catherine Love, Ian Rowlands, Duška Radosavljević, and Aleks Sierz.