Tony Kushner: Legacy and Reading

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This candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to others.

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Abstract

This thesis shows that questions of 'legacy' occupy a pivotal position in the work of US playwright and screenwriter Tony Kushner. It is the first study to consider this in detail. Using a methodology of close reading, I show that Kushner's handling of legacy in his plays and screenplays has five distinctive facets. He uses queer, affective reading to establish reparative alternatives to oppressive legacies. He presents legacy as both reliant on and constituted by dispossession. He shows it to be characterised by both endurance and loss. He indicates that in the US it is bound to the law and the institution of slavery. Finally, he scrutinizes the collaborative nets and dyads that reveal its connective force. Through chapters that demonstrate each of these aspects to Kushner's treatment of legacy, I show that his oeuvre raises essential questions about the subject: How are legacies transmitted? How can they be interpreted through theatre and film? And can legacy be read?

'Legacy' remains underdeveloped as a critical term. Though frequently employed in literary, theatrical, and political texts, it has received little attention outside of the work of Jacques Derrida. Yet, though largely silent on legacy, poststructuralist and queer theory traditions offer tools for reading that develop my approach to Kushner's work. I draw from Derrida on legacy, but also Alain Badiou on theatre, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on affective reading and performativity, and Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou on dispossession. Kushner, I argue, reads legacy with a combination of hope and fierce scepticism. Pressing audience and readers alike to actively engage with his theatre and screenwriting, he shows legacy to be readable, reliant on human interconnectedness, and characterized by intricate internal tensions between substance and negativity, endurance and disposability, loss and perseverance.

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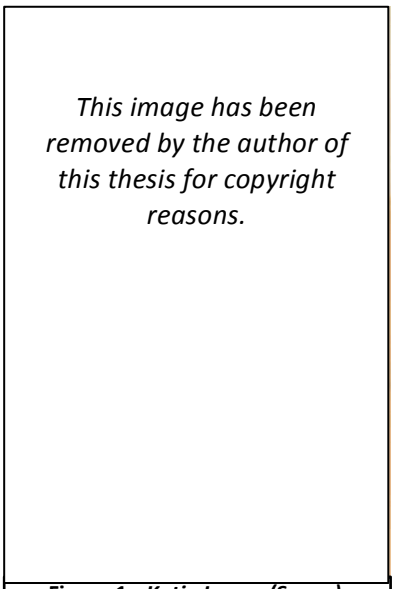

Figure 1 - *Katie Leung (Sooze)*. Hampstead Theatre production of *iHo*, 2016. Photo: Manuel Harlan

The word legacy appears rarely in Tony Kushner's body of work. Occurring in several essays and interviews, it arises only once in a play or screenplay, and when it does it is not spoken, but written. This single instance comes during *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures,* or *iHo* (2009), when Sooze Moon Marcantonio carries onto stage a book entitled *Legacy of Ashes: A History of the CIA* (2007). Although scripted, this detail might easily pass without notice. [1] In the Hampstead Theatre's production (2016), Sooze (Katie Leung, Figure 1) often covers the book's title with her hands, and although she leaves it cover-up and spine-out on a table for some time, it is neither mentioned nor physically referred to. When Sooze/Leung departs later in the scene she takes it with her. Yet, this is a significant moment for my research. It brings all three components of my title together: in a play by Tony Kushner, the audience is literally given the chance to read 'legacy'.

Kushner's treatment of legacy is the focus of my thesis. Though he uses the word frugally, it is a central concern in his plays, screenplays, and librettos. Mine is the first study to investigate this key component of his work – scholars such as Aaron Thomas and Bert Stern make reference to legacy in Kushner's theatre, but do not develop this.[2] Kushner's attention to legacy is rooted in a concern with human interconnectedness, and resistance to injustice. Close reading his plays and screenplays, both on the page and in performance, I argue that he pushes audience

[1] Personal correspondence: Amelia Cherry, 'Email to Carla Douglas (RE: Questions Regarding Kushner's IHo)', 29 March 2017.

[2] Aaron C Thomas, 'Engaging an Icon: Caroline, or Change and the Politics of Representation', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 4.2 (2010), 199–210 <https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.4.2.199_1>; Bert Stern, 'The Therapy of Desire', in *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays*, ed. by James Fisher (Jefferson & London: McFarland, 2006), pp. 201–14.

and characters alike to critically read and interpret legacies. Claiming that 'existence' is 'legible', he shows reading to be metaphorically and literally integral to the formation, transmission, and reception of legacies.[3] It also offers the means to respond to the aftereffects of discrimination and violence. For Kushner, reading self-consciously and with empathetic imagination allows for a reparative model of legacy to operate. Reparative legacies are responsive to local contingencies, and to heterogeneous ways of passing things between generations. They are hopeful, and good at driving change.

Studying this also redresses the underdevelopment of 'legacy' as a critical term. Kushner situates himself against the future-oriented and often obscuring understanding of legacy common to contemporary and historical usage of the term. In doing so he opens a wider discussion about what legacy is, and how it works. He identifies several often-overlooked characteristics of legacy, which he uses to the advantage of his project. For example, he shows legacy to be reliant on human interconnectedness. Using this to challenge the boundaries between self and other, he scrutinizes legacies that fall outside of patriarchal, heteronormative, or elitist norms. Kushner also shows legacy to be characterised by the unceasing and destabilizing interplay between substance and negativity, endurance and disposability, loss and perseverance. He mobilizes this instability to critique legacies that perpetuate suffering, and offers reparative alternatives.

A further contribution of this thesis is my work on the unexpectedly significant links between reparative legacy and theatre. Theatre's impermanent aspects make it an unconventional medium for the study of legacy, which can be narrowly understood as seeking continuance. Theatre's longevity resides in its capacity to adapt and be taken up and performed in different times, places, and styles, and this both influences and facilitates Kushner's treatment of legacy. Reparative legacies in particular thrive in contexts where change and endings are embraced, rather than

[3] Catherine Steindler and Tony Kushner, 'Interviews: Tony Kushner, The Art of Theater No. 16', *Paris Review*, Summer 2012 <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6153/the-art-of-theater-no-16-tony-kushner> [accessed 17 January 2014].

elided. Kushner's recent forays into film have, I show, been less successful in offering resistance to legacies of oppression, partly because the medium is more fixed.

I support this argument through close analysis of a substantial selection of works from Kushner's oeuvre, stretching from his earliest published play, *A Bright Room Called Day* (1987), to his most recent publications, the screenplay for *Lincoln* (2012) and a 'Revised and Complete' version of *Angels in America* (2013). Though I am cognizant of periodization and changes in Kushner's style and thought, I treat his texts as having a web-like, rather than linear, connection, shaped by his frequent returns to and revisions of texts like *Angels, Homebody/Kabul* (2001), and *iHo* (2009).[4] I thus address these texts thematically, rather than chronologically.

In my first chapter, I show that Kushner's libretto *Caroline, or Change* (2003) uses affective reading to establish reparative alternatives to oppressive legacies; this reading of legacy answers to Eve Sedgwick's understanding of the reparative. I develop this in Chapter Two, through a contrapuntal reading of *The Illusion* (1989) and *Homebody/Kabul* (2001). I argue that for Kushner, legacies are both constituted by and reliant upon dispossession. Working from Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, I take dispossession to refer to both violent loss, and movement beyond the boundaries of the self. Reparative legacies emerge from the empathetic acknowledgement of both aspects of dispossession. My third chapter treats survival in *Angels in America* (1991/1992). I claim that in response to the crises of AIDS and Reaganism, Kushner embraces a model of legacy heavily influenced by Charles Darwin in its insistence on openness to all, and the coexistence of change, progress and destruction. I use this to argue that for Kushner, the tension between endurance and loss is an inescapable characteristic of legacy. Chapter Four analyses *Lincoln* (2012), a film directed by Steven Spielberg, for which Kushner wrote the screenplay. Kushner ties Lincoln's legacy to his interventions in the law around US slavery. However, under pressure from Spielberg and the motion picture format, he elides

[4] The date given for each of Kushner's texts is that of its first major performance or screening. In most cases, published versions have followed at a later date. In the case of some of these plays multiple published versions exist, some with major revisions. I offer details of the dating of each of my core texts in a note at the outset of the chapter in which I analyse them.

the damaging aftereffects of Lincoln's actions. This is contrary to the impulse of Kushner's theatre. My final chapter investigates collaboration in 'Reverse Transcription' (1996), *A Bright Room Called Day* (1987), and *Widows* (1991). The latter was written with Ariel Dorfman. Collaboration forges net-like structures along which legacies might pass, superseding the boundaries between self and other, and revealing legacy's connective force. Kushner uses this to disrupt generational ordering and resist oppression. Together, these chapters show him to read legacy with a combination of hope and fierce scepticism, continuously pressing his audience to do the same.

On Legacy

Kushner's sceptical, imaginatively empathetic treatment of 'legacy' is made possible by the many different ways in which the word can be understood and used. A robust and flexible term, 'legacy' spans both the concrete and abstract worlds. It might refer to material things – objects and money – handed down by one's predecessors, or to less tangible things such as injunctions, metaphors, or ideologies. While rare, it can also be used as a verb: 'to legacy' refers to the act or action of handing something down. This sense inflects legacy's extended use, where it denotes 'a long-lasting effect of an event or process'.[5] It is closely linked to inheritance, which means to take or receive from a predecessor, or to come into legal possession of something. Where inheritance shifts the emphasis towards the heir, legacies concern all parties.[6]

Kushner's most recent play, *iHo* captures his understanding of the varied, connective, and potentially harmful qualities of legacy. *iHo* focuses on the

[5] 'Legacy, n. and Adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/107006> [accessed 10 September 2016]. Legacy's definitional complexity is also highlighted by the changes made to its *OED* definition between 2014 and 2016. The earlier version defined it partly as '*anything* passed down from an ancestor or predecessor'. It is now defined in far more specific, less generationally bound terms as '[a] sum of money, or a specified article, given to another by will'.

[6] 'Inherit, V.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/95948> [accessed 10 September 2016].

intergenerational dynamics of the Marcantonio family.[7] In the 2016 Hampstead Theatre production, Sooze's father-in-law Gus Marcantonio (David Calder) summons his three adult children to his Brooklyn home, which is filled with legacies under threat. Gus not only intends to sell the home itself, but hides within it documents relating to the family's history, which he refuses to pass on to his children. A former trade union organizer, and fierce proponent of the Left, Gus is also suffering what he believes to be dementia, and thinks his political legacy has been rejected and lost. He plans to commit suicide as an act of protest, and asks his daughter Empty (Tamsin Greig) to help him do this. It slowly becomes clear that through his suicide, he wants to leave a legacy to her. Empty is a labour lawyer, and Gus sees her as his failed political heir. Her brother V at one point argues that she has been given the 'real inheritance', the 'road map to the worker's paradise'.[8] It is revealed that Gus knows helping him to commit suicide will destroy Empty, and that he wants this to be his legacy to her. He wants her to be unmade, so that she can understand the destructive power of total revolution. Gus's legacy is thus purposefully destructive, and Empty eventually rejects it so that she may survive.

Kushner's introduction of Weiner's *A Legacy of Ashes* into *iHo* asks the audience to think about legacy and – if familiar with the book – to consider its negativity. Weiner's study claims that the CIA's reputation as decisive, brilliant, and in control is belied by a long history of 'startlingly consistent' failure and destruction, which constitutes its legacy.[9] One of the revelations of the play is that Gus's greatest political achievement – the Guaranteed Income – was a sham that benefited only those already high up in his Union. His legacy is like that of the CIA: its horror, which literally spells death for some, is hidden beneath a veneer of success. His wish to pass a political legacy to Empty is both driven and corrupted by this history, which is also partially hidden from her. Here, without having any of his characters say the

[7] *iHo* is unpublished, and hence has not been extensively studied in this thesis. It was first staged in 2009, but was significantly revised for the 2016 Michael Boyd production at the Hampstead Theatre in London. My analysis refers to this production. (Michael Boyd, *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures, or IHo* (Hampstead Theatre, London, 2016).)
[8] All quotations from *iHo* are transcriptions from the Hampstead Theatre's 2016 production. (Boyd.)
[9] Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

word ‘legacy’, Kushner is able to comment on the importance of treating it with careful scepticism.

Kushner’s imaginatively doubtful approach to legacy differentiates him from both contemporaries and historical figures, who present legacy as largely one-directional, even teleological. Using the word ‘legacy’ more frequently than Kushner, they obscure its links to violence and skewed power relations in favour of sentimentality. ‘Legacy’ is particularly prominent in certain genres of writing. Sarah MacKenzie’s study of seventeenth century practices of inheritance, for example, identifies the ‘parental legacy’ as a sub-genre of the advice text.[10] The novels of the nineteenth-century are, similarly, deeply involved with legacies. Examples, though, stretch well beyond this. Through analysis of a selection of historically discontinuous texts, I show the use of ‘legacy’ to be varied but also characterised by striking similarities across periods, geographical locations, and media. Together George Washington’s Farewell Address (1796), Charles Dickens’ short story ‘Mrs. Lirriper’s Legacy’ (1864), Weiner’s *Legacy of Ashes*, and the press coverage of 2016’s ‘Shakespeare 400’ celebrations tend towards obscuration. They elide the negativity of legacies in favour of sentimental valorisation of those transmitting them. In contrast, in the rare instances that Kushner uses the term, he explicitly interrogates the long lasting aftereffects of legacy’s negativity, and critiques any attempt to mask this.

Early printed versions of Washington’s Farewell Address offer a niche but telling historical instance of the word ‘legacy’. Although Washington does not explicitly speak of ‘legacy’ in the address, printers such John Russell and William Butler framed it with a double instance of the word. Its title page runs as follows:

> The legacy of the father of his country.
>
> Address of George Washington, president of the United States, to his fellow citizens, on declining being considered a candidate for their future suffrages.

[10] Sarah McKenzie, ‘Death, Inheritance and the Family : A Study of Literary Responses to Inheritance in Seventeenth-Century England’ (unpublished Ph.D., University of Warwick, 2003) <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/44291/> [accessed 28 June 2017].

'It is a Legacy worthy such a Father'. *Shakespeare*[11]

Washington's publishers assure the Address will be read as a legacy by calling it one, and emphasising his place as 'father' to the country, whose citizens are presumably also his heirs. In their foreword, the publishers highlight Washington's 'desire' that the address be 'preserved from the ruin of time', taking this wish for continuance to constitute a legacy. The pamphlet visually mirrors and reasserts this claim with a quotation from Shakespeare. It is ironic that this quotation – intended to highlight authenticity – is spurious. It is neither part of Shakespeare's Collected Works, nor his prominent Apocrypha, which have been collected by Tucker Brooke and others.[12] In this example a legacy is attributed to a 'father', but not bequeathed by him. It takes the form of an object (the printed address), but is also intangible (words and ideology). Finally, it props itself up with misattributed words, which open the legacy to doubt, and link it to fiction.

Almost seventy years later Charles Dickens plays with the fictional qualities of legacy in his gently satirical short story 'Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy' (1864). While the title of the piece might suggest that Mrs Lirriper passes down the legacy in question, she is actually the heir. Legacy here takes on the typical nineteenth-century sense of a monetary inheritance: Mrs Lirriper is left the money and worldly goods of Mr Edson, the runaway father of her adopted grandson Jemmy. Jemmy does not know that Edson is his father, but he playfully supplements Mrs Lirriper's inheritance by 'leaving' her a collection of stories about the lodgings that she runs. He states: 'As Gran is in the Legacy way just now, I shall make these stories a part of Gran's Legacy.

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[11] George Washington, *The Legacy of the Father of His Country. Address of George Washington, President of the United States, to His Fellow Citizens, on Declining Being Considered a Candidate for Their Future Suffrages.* (Printed at Boston: John Russell, 1796), Eighteenth Century Collection Online <http://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online> [accessed 10 December 2016]; William Butler re-printed this document in Northampton (Massachusetts) in 1797.

[12] 'Collected Editions of Shakespeare' <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~adm6/en3025/listcoll.html> [accessed 10 December 2016]; *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*, ed. by C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908) <https://archive.org/stream/shakespeareapoc00broouoft#page/n3/mode/2up> [accessed 10 December 2016]; 'Shakespeare in Europe - Works of Uncertain Authorship - Apocrypha' <https://shine.unibas.ch/works7apo.html> [accessed 10 December 2016].

I'll leave 'em to her'.[13] One of the stories in this collection is of his own design: an innocent re-telling of Edson's tale. While mostly incorrect, it brings Mrs Lirriper to sentimental tears. Dickens, here, conceptualizes legacy as both monetary and textual. It also relies upon secrecy, and takes odd leaps between generations, passing up to the grandmother, rather than down from her.

Weiner's *Legacy of Ashes* uses 'legacy' in a different way to the Washington and Dickens examples, each of which deals with the legacy of a person or family. Weiner draws his title from an individual's statement: Dwight Eisenhower's frustrated proclamation at the end of his presidency that the CIA was so dysfunctional that 'he would "leave a legacy of ashes" to his successor'.[14] However *Legacy of Ashes* refers primarily to the long-lasting aftereffects of a series of events and actions. Its subject is less the CIA's covert action than the destruction that its failures leave behind.

In these examples, 'legacy' describes varied things. Legacies can be physical objects, words, injunctions, and metaphors. They can involve both willed transmissions between individuals, and sweeping aftereffects, which may be unwilled. They might be historical, fictional, or both. There are, however, similarities between these instances. In two of the examples, the legacies belong to US presidents, suggesting a close association with authority. Men – even in the case of Mrs Lirriper – hand down all the legacies referred to in these titles, showing that patriarchy can be inscribed through legacy. Some sort of secret, absence or negativity is also present in each example. This might be the absence of a person who has died or will eventually die, a lack of knowledge, or simply vagueness and ambiguity, as in the misattributed Shakespeare quotation in the Washington example.

In each of these instances, sentimentality – often in the form of exaggerated, positive emotion – elides or obscures negativity. In the title page for the Farwell Address, for example, there is an over-abundance of ardour for Washington's words,

[13] Charles Dickens, 'Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy: A Christmas Number of All the Year Round', *All the Year Round*, 1864, 753–600 (p. 582).
[14] Weiner, p. 167.

which masks any faults he may have had, along with the uncertain attribution of its quotations. In Dickens, Mrs Lirriper responds to Jemmy's legacy to her, and especially to his telling of his (unknown) father's tale, with an almost paralysed, self-indulgent tenderness, which elides her continued decision to conceal his biological father's story.[15] Even Weiner ends his book by referring to the few 'halcyon days' of the CIA, and by imagining what the CIA would look like were it to 'rise from the ashes', stating that the US must 'depend' on this happening to survive the war on terror.[16]

In these cases, the potency of the word 'legacy' relies on a mixture of vagueness and sentimentality, which mutually feed each other. This is evident elsewhere, including in more coherent bodies of work, such as in the group of texts surrounding 2016's 'Shakespeare 400' celebrations. The four-hundredth anniversary of his death was marked by a plethora of articles about Shakespeare, many of which discussed his legacy. The 'Shakespeare400' website carried the blurb: 'A life's work. A 400-year legacy. A year of celebrations'.[17] Articles about the anniversary show a common tendency to appeal to legacy as a means of heightening appreciation of Shakespeare without critiquing him. The gov.uk Op Ed of then-Prime Minister David Cameron is indicative of this.[18] Cameron offers a number of specific reflections on what Shakespeare gifted to modern audiences – including writers, theatre practitioners, school children – but does not ask difficult questions about how his work's ubiquity is also the consequence of imperialism. He writes:

> Shakespeare's legacy is without parallel: his works translated into over 100 languages and studied by half the world's schoolchildren. As one of his

[15] Dickens, p. 600.
[16] Weiner, p. 514.
[17] 'Shakespeare400' <http://www.shakespeare400.org/> [accessed 29 September 2016].
[18] David Cameron, 'Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Shakespeare in 2016', *Gov.Uk*, 2016 <https://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/celebrating-the-life-and-legacy-of-shakespeare-in-2016--2> [accessed 28 September 2016]; For further examples, see also: Peter Yeung and others, 'What's in a Number? William Shakespeare's Legacy Analysed', *The Guardian*, 22 April 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/ng-interactive/2016/apr/22/william-shakespeares-legacy-analysed> [accessed 28 September 2016]; Jess Denham, 'William Shakespeare 400th Anniversary', *The Independent*, 22 April 2017 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/william-shakespeare-400th-anniversary-60-everyday-words-and-phrases-you-never-knew-came-from-the-a6975111.html> [accessed 29 April 2018].

> contemporaries, Ben Jonson, said: 'Shakespeare is not of an age, but for all time'. He lives today in our language, our culture and society – and through his enduring influence on education. [19]

The quotation from Jonson serves a similar purpose to the Shakespeare 'quotation' in the Washington publication, reinforcing the importance of Shakespeare's legacy, and establishing for him a sort of temporal exception: even in his own time, he was understood to be for all the ages. Cameron adds to this a sense of global reach, and influence. Unsurprisingly, he fails to address the relationship between the teaching of Shakespeare throughout the British Empire, and the legacies of colonialism and racism. The ease with which the word 'legacy' can be used to such ends is one of my motivations for undertaking this study. In the examples used here there is a description of legacy, but no one asks explicitly what 'legacy' means, how it is being interpreted, or what sort of temporal shape it takes. Kushner's limited uses of the word show an awareness of and resistance to what, especially in Cameron's piece, leads to a cycle of confusion and obscuration.

Kushner tends to withhold the word 'legacy' for two uses: to describe that which has been passed down by those who are dead or dying; and to engage with the long-lasting aftereffects of damaging political and social forces and practices. In both cases, he is far more critical than Cameron, Dickens, or Weiner. For example, when he writes about the legacy of AIDS activist and singer Michael Callen in the aptly titled 'Michael Callen's Legacy', Kushner uses 'legacy' in the first sense described here, and turns sentimentality towards analysis.[20] Callen, a founding member of the People With AIDS Self-Empowerment Movement, released a record called *Legacy* in the 1980s, before his death from an AIDS-related illness. After he died, Kushner wrote a tribute to Callen that went into the album's liner notes:

> He was one of the omnipresent, one of the titans, he seemed during the feverish days of the first risings of the PWA [people with AIDS] population and its supporters to be everywhere, on television, in the media, expressing an

[19] Cameron.
[20] Tony Kushner, 'Michael Callen's Legacy', *Michael Callen* <http://michaelcallen.com/who-was-michael-callen/michael-callens-legacy/> [accessed 22 June 2016].

> anger that sounded familiar but always slightly unlike the anger in fashion, as exemplified by ACT UP.[21]

'[O]mnipresent', 'titan': the piece uses hyperbole to express admiration and affection. It leans towards the sentimental. Yet, as Kushner describes Callen's dissenting anger and contributions to music and the struggle of PWAs, he remains focused on specifics. He comments, for example, on the 'astonishing' fact of holding in one's hands an album which was in essence 'produced in collaboration with, or at the very least accompanied by the plague', as the 'lungs producing this soaring music were at the time of much of the recording thoroughly ravaged by KS lesions'. For Kushner, Callen's record – his self-proclaimed *Legacy* – passes on his music and activism, but also carries the traces of his illness. The album is thus also the legacy of HIV/AIDS. Kushner's work hinges on insights such as this, which open out the difficulties and instabilities of legacy.

Kushner's second sense of the word 'legacy' is polemical, and interrogates the disabling aftereffects of injustice and inequality. He does this by foregrounding legacy's negativity. As I have already noted, negativity is implicitly present in each of the examples of legacy offered at the outset of this chapter. Negativity is a rich word, and I use it to refer to absence, and negation, but also to scepticism, and refusal. I further intend it to have inflections of Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman's understanding of negativity as referring to 'the psychic and social incoherencies and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity'.[22] This troubling, as they point out, isn't always 'negative', because it can make room for change. In the three examples analysed below, Kushner is interested in the interplay between negativity (as a form of absence) and substance: places where something insubstantial is made to seem tangible in order to propagate a particular legacy, or where real aftereffects are made to disappear by those in power. By exposing these tensions, Kushner is able to counteract the obfuscation of legacies' damage, and to encourage critical responses to them.

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[21] Kushner, 'Michael Callen's Legacy'.

[22] Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. vii–viii.

The earliest published instance of Kushner's use of the word 'legacy' appears in Tom Szentgyorgyi's profile essay, 'Look Back – and Forward – in Anger' (1990).[23] The profile discusses *A Bright Room Called Day*, a play written in part to offer an explicit comparison between Ronald Reagan and Adolf Hitler. It is with reference to Reagan that Szentgyorgi quotes Kushner on legacy. Kushner states:

> I feel that *one of the legacies of the Reagan era* is to drive a very powerful wedge between the American people and their political reality […]. There's a kind of amnesia that the country [the US] has always been guilty of but that has now become a national political style. I think the Reagan administration was a major beachhead for that style.[24]

In Kushner's view the political era for which Reagan was the figurehead had multiple lasting aftereffects, at least some of which he understands to be legacies. The legacy to which he refers here is the entrenchment of a national political style, imagined as a powerful wedge of amnesiac thinking that stymies effective challenges against the Right. This metaphorical wedge is substantial enough to be driven between Americans and their political reality. In doing so, however, it creates an absence or negativity that prevents them from remembering and learning from the past, and (paradoxically perhaps, in light of Berlant and Edelman's definition) reinforces a fixed national political style. Here, legacy is characterised by the interaction of substance and negativity, and is a perpetuator of division and inflexibility.

My second example extends Kushner's critique of the Right. It is taken from 'A Socialism of the Skin (Liberation, Honey!)' (1994), an essay in which he asks: 'is there a relationship between homosexual liberation and socialism?'[25] Here, Kushner proclaims the importance of a politics that confronts and goes beyond the problematics of desire and repression. In doing so, he responds to proponents of gay conservatism, such as Andrew Sullivan and Bruce Bawer, who promote a politics of

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[23] Tom Szentgyorgyi, 'Look Back - and Forward - in Anger', in *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, ed. by Robert Vorlicky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 11–17.
[24] Szentgyorgyi, p. 15. My italics.
[25] Tony Kushner, 'A Socialism of the Skin (Liberation Honey!)', in *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1995), pp. 19–32 (p. 19).

assimilation and limited government intervention in gay rights and social change. Kushner rejects this argument by pointing to the legacies with which it is associated. According to him, one of the key features of this conservatism is that the vast majority of social transformation is left to the individual:

> [it] will have to be taken care of by some cultural osmotic process of quiet individualised persuasion, which will take many many many years. It's the no-government approach to social change. You can hear it argued now against school desegregation, or any attempt to guarantee equal education; you can hear it argued against welfare or job programs. *It's the legacy of trickle-down*, according to which society should change slowly, organically, spontaneously, without interference, an approach that requires […] a great, appalling luxury of time […], after the passage of which many many more miserable lives will have been spent or dispensed with. I am always suspicious of the glacier-paced patience of the Right.[26]

The legacy of trickle-down is the consequence of the fantasies of the political Right. Kushner re-appropriates the notion of economic trickle-down, where the poorest gradually benefit from the increasing wealth of the richest. He applies this to social change, where those who are discriminated against gradually benefit from the increasing tolerance of the privileged. Trickle-down, as Kushner implies, is notoriously ineffectual: a promised, substantive change that unfolds so slowly (if it unfolds at all) that it cannot mitigate suffering. In short, trickle-down is negativity disguised as substance. For this reason, the legacy of trickle down is suffering: the 'many more miserable lives' that are not lived, but 'spent or dispensed with', as if they amount to no more than economic units. Through treating legacy in this way, Kushner foregrounds the inadequacy of trickle-down politics, and critiques the 'appalling luxury of time' that its proponents are willing to wait for social change.

The association of legacies with suffering, and with large sweeps of time, is again the focus in my final example, which comes from 'Wrestling with Zion: An Introduction' (2003), co-authored with Alisa Solomon. The anthology that it introduces is a collection of essays, gathered but not written by Kushner and Solomon. It consists of

[26] Kushner, 'Socialism of the Skin', p. 29. [My italics].

progressive Jewish-American responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict during the second intifada. Kushner and Solomon write:

> No single explanation of the meaning of the Mideast conflict, *no single reading* of its etiology or its current trends and tendencies, is sufficient to explain the central position it occupies in the world's attention, its iconic and geopolitical significance. The tragic dimensions and persistence of this struggle are fed by many sources: the strategic value of the terrain; clashing theologies and nationalist aspirations; imperialism past and present; the *genocidal legacies* of colonialism and Holocaust, racism and anti-Semitism; formations of postcolonial power imbalances, unequal development, petrochemical exploitation. And, to borrow from Walter Benjamin, driving on both sides there is the hope for a better future for grandchildren and perhaps even more potent, the memory of murdered ancestors.[27]

The 'genocidal legacies of colonialism and Holocaust, racism and anti-Semitism' are on a scale that supersedes Kushner's prior uses. They refer to centuries of regional and global violence. Kushner and Solomon offer these legacies as one of several 'reading[s]' of the aetiology of Mideast conflict, although they are also a consequence of it. No single reading is sufficient to explain the situation, but supplementing all of them is hope and violence, which passes through the intergenerational space between murdered ancestors and future grandchildren: implicitly a space of legacy. Here, Kushner once again characterises legacy through the interplay of substance and negativity. The absence created by murder, destruction, and violence, is linked to substantive, physical things – weapons, population movement, money – and leaves behind physical evidence in the form of dead bodies and survivors. Identifying this unceasing back-and-forth, in which the legacies of conflict beget more conflict, not only helps to explain why clashes continue, but to open a space where this can be rigorously interrogated.

In speaking to this negativity, and insisting that the legacies of colonialism, Holocaust, racism, anti-Semitism, Reaganism, and trickle-down should be actively read and interpreted, Kushner addresses an obscure definition of legacy. As John

[27] 'Wrestling with Zion: An Introduction', in *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. by Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon (New York: Grove Press, 2003), pp. 1–9 (p. 1). [My italics].

Mowitt argues, 'legacy' has two 'etymologically marked fronts'.[28] It finds its roots in the Anglo-Latin *lēgantia*, formed on *lēgāre*.[29] *Lēgāre* can mean to bequeath or leave as a legacy. It also means to appoint as deputy or delegate. If the former paradigm of legacy is linked to the will and testament, the latter, as Mowitt argues, can be associated with empire, and 'the assignment or responsibility given, specifically in the era of imperial Rome, to the *legatus* or provincial delegate of the emperor, in effect of the sovereign'.[30] This second front of legacy inflects the first. The concerns with historical processes and authorities visible in Kushner's deployment of 'legacy' modulate his reflections on the personal paradigm of the will and testament in plays such as *iHo*, *The Illusion*, and *Homebody/Kabul*. The two fronts also have a number of etymological confluences: Mowitt points to their coming together in 'the Latin *lex* or law where legacy is indexed to the right to assign or bequeath'.[31] This is a focus in *Lincoln*. Most important to my argument is their convergence in *lēgo* (of which *lēgāre* is the infinitive), where legacy meets active reading. *Lēgo* means to pick out or choose, to select or appoint (just as the sovereign's delegate is selected to send a message, and the inheritor can be selected to receive a legacy). It also means to read, not only in one's head, but also aloud.[32] Legacy's etymological links to *lēgo* emphasise the difficult processes through which legacy is transmitted to and received by its inheritors, who may have to read, interpret, or make critical choices about it. This process is metaphorically similar to the rehearsal of a play, in which actors read aloud and make such choices. The process of sending and reception is where the two fronts of legacy – that of the will and testament, and that of empire – collide.[33]

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[28] John Mowitt, 'Offering Theory', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 33.3–4 (2006), 269–82 (p. 272).
[29] T. F. Hoad, 'Legacy', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford University Press, 1996) <www.oxfordreference.com> [accessed 23 May 2014].
[30] Mowitt, p. 272.
[31] Mowitt, p. 272.
[32] D. P. Simpson, 'Lēgo', *Cassell's Latin Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 1959), pp. 340–41 (pp. 340–41) <https://www.dawsonera.com/readonline/9780826430212/startPage/20> [accessed 23 May 2014].
[33] See Mowitt for further analysis of these 'fronts' (Mowitt, p. 272).

The legacies that Kushner critiques are problematic partly because they resist the active interpretation of those who inherit from them. On the American Right, the dividing wedge of Reaganism exists but pretends not to, while the trickle-down effect doesn't exist but pretends to. In both cases, the legacy is hidden from interpretation. The genocidal legacies fuelling the Mideast conflict, meanwhile, are only one aspect of a vastly complex conflict; they do not and cannot tell us everything about it. In all cases, Kushner draws out the darker valences of legacies that operate on a large scale. To re-purpose Weiner's term, each is in its own way a 'legacy of ashes'. It is notable that both Weiner's text and *iHo* also play with the dynamic between substance and negativity. Although different in scale, both the CIA's ability to protect the US from espionage and Gus's Guaranteed Income only look substantive: their veneer of success hides a real legacy of failure.

Kushner's interpretation of legacy is characterised by scepticism towards obfuscation, and an insistence that legacy is read critically. As I will show in my chapter on *Caroline* (Chapter One), he understands reading to have a close kinship with consideration, interpretation, and discernment, and to be applicable to page, performance, and existence itself. Kushner's reading of legacy emphasizes the interplay of substance and negativity. One might also speak about this as a dynamic of intertwined plenitude and loss, or as I outline in later chapters, endurance and disposability. A key purpose of this study is to use Kushner's texts, and his distinctive emphasis on reading that which is transmitted between generations, to redress the underdevelopment of 'legacy' as a critical term. This reciprocally offers insight into Kushner's oeuvre. In essence, I offer a reading of legacy through and with Kushner. The questions that I pose are intended to work legacy's conceptual terrain, and Kushner's texts: How are legacies transmitted? How can legacy be interpreted? And can it be read?

Methodology

I use a methodology of close reading; this is one of the significances of 'reading' in my title. This methodology is drawn from an understanding of the mutually productive relationship between word, theory, and human experience in Kushner's

writing. Kushner is well versed in theory, which is closely woven into his texts. His plays and films produce systems of ideas and physical performances that respond to and explain these theories. A seminal example of this is the humorously named character Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov, who appears in both *Angels in America*, Part Two: *Perestroika* (1992), and in *Slavs!* (1995). The 'Oldest Living Bolshevik', he gives an almost-identical speech in both plays.[34] In this, he offers a valorisation of Theory and Truth with a capital 'T': theory that is singular, bloody, and monumental, and gives us 'True Praxis, True Theory married to Actual Life'.[35] Speaking at the Kremlin in 1986, he despairs of the loss of such theories, claiming:

This quotation has been redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

[36]

In Prelapsarianov's understanding, Theory has given him and his contemporaries the ability to visualize on an omniscient scale. Together their 'all-knowing glance' and ability to hear 'the tick of the infinite' in their blood gives them spatial, temporal, and physical access to a prospect unimaginable to those without Theory.[37] Because those that follow him do not have Theory, Prelapsarianov cannot pass on his vision.

This scene recalls the transformation of theory in the latter half of the twentieth century. Where Prelapsarianov weeps for this, Kushner sees it as a positive thing. Speaking of the need for theories that are 'less totalizing' he comments:

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[34] Kushner's revised 2013 edition of *Perestroika* eliminates small differences, bringing the text almost perfectly in line with that of *Slavs!* It is unclear whether both plays show the same event, or just the same speech presented twice.

[35] Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Revised and Complete Edition)* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2013), p. 138; Tony Kushner, 'Slavs!', in *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1995), pp. 81–188 (p. 108).

[36] Kushner, *Angels in America (Revised and Complete)*, p. 138; Kushner, 'Slavs!', p. 108. The square brackets indicate additional text in *Slavs!*

[37] 'Sidereal, Adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/179318> [accessed 25 October 2016].

> We can't really trust a total theory anymore. I could certainly never trust a theory that said, 'This theory explains everything'. I don't believe it in Marx, Freud, or Stephen J. Gould. Hence the glories of postmodernism – that all theories now have to also reveal their own lies and their own slippages. […] At the same time, we have to recognize that human beings are as much creatures of the idea as they are of materiality and that we need ideas. […] We live in – we are made out of – words. Wallace Stevens is very important. I think that we are both created by and create history […]. That kind of Möbius strip is important to me.[38]

While Kushner sees all theories as having limitations and slippages, he also sees them as integral, even constitutive of human life and history. Echoing Wallace Stevens' evocation 'Life consists | Of propositions about life',[39] Kushner argues that people 'live in' and are 'made out of' words, which he loosely links to ideas, and in turn to theory. Words, theory, people, and history take on the quality of a Möbius strip, an impossible-seeming twisting surface, which has only one side and one boundary. Inextricably connected, they create each other in an endless loop.

Kushner's understanding of the mutually productive relationship between word, theory, and human experience has encouraged my close reading approach, which allows texts to be theories in their own right. This is a practice used by Elizabeth Freeman. She argues that by reading texts slowly and carefully, one can treat them as 'theories of their own, interventions upon both critical theory and historiography'.[40] My understanding of close reading is further inflected by Jane Gallop. She argues that in literary studies close reading is the practice of paying attention to what is actually happening on a page, rather than allowing some idea 'behind the text' to drive the analysis.[41] She describes it as 'a technique to make us learn, to make us see what we don't already know, rather than transforming the

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[38] Craig Kinzer and others, 'The Theatre and the Barricades', in *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, ed. by Robert Vorlicky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 214.

[39] Wallace Stevens, 'Men Made Out of Words', in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, Literature Online (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954), p. 355 <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:po:Z300218890:3> [accessed 1 January 1998].

[40] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. xvii.

[41] Jane Gallop, 'The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters', *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 2000, 7–17 (p. 7).

new into the old'.[42] There is an ethical dimension to treating texts of all kinds in this way, for '[u]ltimately, close reading is not just a way of reading but a way of listening'.[43] Close reading may seem an odd methodology for a study that works not only with plays and screenplays, but with theatre and film. As I will show though, it can facilitate rich engagement not only with the written or spoken word, but with the body, stage, and screen. Jay Prosser's reflections on close reading an image might be extended to these mediums: at base, it requires 'attending carefully' to something and spending more time with it than one might usually do in the course of encountering it.[44]

Throughout the thesis I maintain a commitment to gradually 'unfold' texts, allowing their multiple iterations as written texts, performances, and video or sound recordings, to intervene in the analysis that can be constructed around them. Each text generates its own theory of the relationship between legacy and practices of reading and performance. This is not to say that I work to the exclusion of other texts and theories. I work with queer, literary, political, and biological theories, either because Kushner himself alludes or answers to them, or because they challenge or clarify his treatment of legacy.

In working with these texts, and with Kushner's, I have adapted Lauren Berlant's process of close reading. Similar to Freeman's, she glosses her method as 'reading with'. Berlant states: 'I do not read things; I read with things'.[45] 'Things' here can be people, objects, texts, and theorists. 'With' might mean being literally accompanied by them, using them instrumentally, or being used by them. To 'read with' one needs to 'cultivate a quality of attention to the disturbance of their alien epistemology', which for Berlant opens one to a feeling of non-sovereignty.[46] She further describes reading with as a method in terms of an elliptical thought process, that:

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[42] Gallop, p. 11.
[43] Gallop, p. 12.
[44] Jay Prosser, 'Introduction', in *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*, ed. by Jay Prosser and others (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2012), pp. 7–14 (p. 10).
[45] Berlant and Edelman, p. 125.
[46] Berlant and Edelman, p. 125.

> both tracks concepts and allows for unfinishedness, inducing itself to become misshapen in the hope that by the time you return to the point of departure, so many things will have come into contact that the contours of the concept and the forms associated with its movement will have changed.[47]

Reading with is important to the study of legacies, because these are always in some way relational, involving more than one person, and often multiple persons and things. I do not only read with Kushner, his texts, their performances, intertexts, and theories: I read with legacies too.

Like legacy, reading with always involves an intertwining of substance and negativity. The elliptical shape of Berlant's reading calls to mind a grammatical ellipsis. The latter is 'a figure of return that isn't symmetrical', signifying both loss (the '…' of an elision) and plenitude (the '…' of an ending heavy with meaning, going beyond words). This elliptical way of thinking allows encounters with concepts to become 'a scene of unlearning and engendering'.[48] Such encounters ensure that reading is more about listening, conversation, and uncertainty, than about proclaiming closure or imposing meaning.

Like Berlant, I am cautious to note that actively 'reading with', moving beyond our defences, is not always successful. As she writes:

> The wish, of course, is that reading with, like being with, is a natural process that unfolds. Over time, the bad defenses will peel away. Over time, you will lose your terrible attachments to likeness and alterity. Over time, the right things will end up on the floor while the rest is taken in. There is a reason we call that wish *fantasy*.[49]

The disruptions of 'reading with' are not limited to one component of the reading encounter. They are reciprocal, and guarantee neither a gradual unfurling of meaning, nor any unfolding at all. This lack of guarantee is a necessary component of

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[47] Lauren Berlant, 'Lauren Berlant Discusses "Reading with" and Her Recent Work', *Artforum.Com*, 2014 <http://artforum.com/words/id=45109> [accessed 10 February 2015].
[48] Berlant, 'Lauren Berlant Discusses "Reading with" and Her Recent Work'.
[49] Berlant.

my reading of legacy. My methodology is, in essence, a process of taking time with texts and performances in which I seek to do two things: to notice and think through that which is already there, on the page, stage, or screen; and to read these things in ways, and with things that unsettle them, thereby opening out both new and old ways of thinking about legacy. This all occurs against the slippery terrain outlined above, where obscuration can be both an inherent feature of a legacy, and a purposeful manipulation of its contours to suit those treating it. In this context, the conscious acknowledgement that clarity and the peeling away of defences do not always happen naturally, or at all, is an important and practical acknowledgement of limitations.

Theory

As my methodology attests, both Kushner and this thesis have clear intellectual genealogies. This is not to suggest that its logic is the result of inevitable progression. As Michel Foucault argues, access to an account of one's descent should not imply the ability to trace an ultimate origin in an ancestor or group of ancestors. Foucault's genealogy 'rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies'.[50] To quote Gary Gutting, it shows origins to be 'complex, mundane, inglorious […] – in no way part of any grand scheme of progressive history'.[51]

This thesis has a sprawling genealogy, both loosely and tightly interwoven. It more closely resembles a web than a line, and its various critical and theoretical underpinnings are linked in multiple ways. The body of literary theory on legacy is small. Much of it stems from poststructuralism, where the interrogation of philosophical predecessors, authorial authority, and origins, leads readily towards a concern with legacies. It is rare to find contributions that focus in a sustained manner on legacy as a conceptual term. For example, the article by John Mowitt to

[50] Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 76–99 (pp. 77–78).
[51] Gary Gutting, 'Michel Foucault', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2014, 2014 <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/foucault/> [accessed 13 September 2016].

which I refer above appears in 'The Legacies of Theory', a special edition of *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, arising from a conference of the same name. Massimo Verdicchio writes that at this conference:

> [t]he debate varied from discussions of what constitutes a legacy or legacies of theory to what defines theory and whether theory is still possible and if so 'what theory?', to more practical applications of theory, which is one way that the legacy or legacies of theory take form.[52]

This description shows staging a study of legacy to be complex: these papers look at the legacies of theory, not the theory of legacies. Legacy is often the secondary term here, and is instrumental to studying theory, rather than the other way around. This is not to say that such studies do not elucidate or raise questions about legacy, but that they often do so in a tangential way.

Kushner's interrogation of theories focused on legacy is limited, and perhaps best epitomised by his self-ascribed 'anxious' relationship with Harold Bloom, whose *Anxiety of Influence* offers a model of legacy that Kushner works against.[53] Influence and legacy are not the same thing, but are closely related. 'Influence' involves the ascendancy or authority of one thing, person or group over others, and is not necessarily intentional. In the arts, it is often conflated with legacy when an author's authority affects or even impinges on those who respond to their work. Looking at the Western canon, Bloom claims that the strong, post-Enlightenment poet is actively engaged in misreading their predecessor's work. Anxious about their own belatedness, Bloom's poet (who is almost always male) undertakes 'misprision', the misreading and 'the re-writing of the father' with the aim of surpassing them.[54] The strongest poets seek to supersede their fathers, and to appear self-begotten, as if

[52] Massimo Verdicchio, 'Legacies of Theory: Introduction', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 33.3–4 (2011), 227–32 (p. 227).
[53] Kushner's response to this text is analysed in greater detail in Chapter Five. See: Tony Kushner, 'With A Little Help From My Friends', in *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness: Essays, A Play, Two Poems and A Prayer* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1995), pp. 33–40 (p. 38).
[54] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 19.

they were being 'imitated by their ancestors'.[55] Although Bloom uses the term 'legacy' only twice in *The Anxiety of Influence*, the move to become self-begotten is also the move to break legacy's forward-oriented cycle, as the successor metaphorically switches places with the predecessor.

Kushner's approach to legacy shares certain features with Bloom's: the insistence that our predecessors should be actively read and misread, and doubtfulness towards the one-directional power structures resulting from teleological approaches to history. Yet his self-proclaimed 'anxiety' about working with Bloom does not drive him to appear self-begotten.[56] Breaking from Bloom's analysis, he does not wish to flip the power structures that he critiques, or to obscure what has gone on in the past so that he can take on the appearance of originality. Kushner's understanding of legacy is more egalitarian than this. Connective, and heterogeneous, it has more in common with the work of Jacques Derrida.

Derrida's key observation that legacies involve a critical choice has helped to develop my understanding of Kushner's approach to legacy. In light of my reflections on legacy's etymological links to *lēgo*, and hence to selection and choice, this may seem a connection easily made. However, Derrida's analysis of legacy's critical choice is seminal in its focus on how death, inheritance and legacy allow us to 'learn [how] to live', and about how we might inherit justice.[57] In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida envisages Marx's legacy as a spectral return. He starts with the suggestion that this legacy is heterogeneous: there is more than one spirit of Marx, and hence there are multiple spectres and legacies.[58] He develops this with reference to the theatre, using Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a springboard for his discussion. Derrida conceives of legacies as sharing the spectral properties of the ghost of Hamlet's father: coming

[55] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 141.
[56] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 38.
[57] For further reading of Derrida and legacy see Peggy Kamuf, *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010); J. Hillis Miller, 'Sovereignty Death Literature Unconditionality Democracy University', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 33.3–4 (2011), 233–45; Mowitt; Nicholas Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).)
[58] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), p. 14.

from a never-fully-accessible past, they disrupt the present, are heterogeneous, and disjointed. He writes:

> Let us consider … the radical and necessary *heterogeneity* of an inheritance, the difference without opposition that has to mark it, a 'disparate' and a quasi-juxtaposition without dialectic […] An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*. 'One must' means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. *If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it* [my italics]. We would be affected by it as by a cause – natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret—which says 'read me, will you ever be able to do so?' [59]

Playing with the differing valences of inheritance and legacy, Derrida juxtaposes what it means to inherit from a legacy with being affected by natural or genetic causal forces. Here, legacies are characterised by the need to make a critical choice, and must be 'read'.[60] Yet in a move that takes us back to Kushner's struggles with obscuring legacies of ashes, even as legacies demand interpretation, they simultaneously defy it, because they can never be univocal or given.

This is an aspect of what Derrida understands to be legacy's radical and necessary heterogeneity. Like the spectre, a legacy always speaks in several different voices. This conception of legacy is similar to Kushner's in that it highlights the ethical necessity of acknowledging those legacies that unfold in different, disjointed temporalities. These include those experienced by people on the wrong side of trickle-down, in the long-time of suffering identified in Kushner's 'A Socialism of the Skin'. It includes also those on the other side of Reagan's amnesiac wedge, and those on different sides of the Mideast conflict. Although, according to Derrida, the 'presumed unity' of an inheritance consists in the injunction to choose, this choosing is qualified by the need to 'filter, sift, criticize, … sort out several different

[59] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 18.
[60] Derrida is here working with a narrow sense of legacy, which raises questions about how to look at legacies that might be constituted by a *lack* of choice (including legacies of slavery). I consider this further in Chapter One.

possibles'.[61] One must maintain together many different choices, even as one is asked to choose between them, something that can only happen in a time that lacks conjuncture.

Opening *Spectres*, Derrida states that when he speaks of ghosts, inheritance and generations, he is also speaking of 'certain others who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us'.[62] He does this 'in the name of *justice*', which does not refer to the law, but to 'the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present'.[63] 'Legacy' carries with it resonances of our finite existence, and of our continuation in the guise of our progeny or followers. It tacitly acknowledges those who are not there, whether they are dead or not yet born. In resisting a version of legacy or inheritance that is 'right' or stretches unrelentingly into the future, Derrida is gesturing towards a justice open to the distant, departed other.

Responding to Derrida's work, and his death, Peggy Kamuf encapsulates this perfectly. She notes that whether one acknowledges it or not, when one writes or speaks in the wake of another,

> [a] responsibility […] is always and everywhere engaged, for – this is the specter Derrida conjured up so as to learn to teach how to live – there is literally no other place but in the wake of others from which to write, speak, and sign.[64]

There is a strong resonance between this and Kushner's focus on legacies of ashes. In concentrating on the negativity of legacy, its absences, complications, and fraught relationship with substance, Kushner reminds us to read legacies. He asks us to look beyond the sentimentalized transmissions between generations that we may associate with Shakespeare (including the 'fake' Shakespeare of Washington's publishers), or with the comforting Mrs Lirriper. Kushner's approach to legacy is rooted in the awareness that we are always writing, speaking, signing, performing in

[61] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 18.
[62] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. xviii.
[63] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. xviii.
[64] Kamuf, p. 13.

the wake of others; unlike Bloom he does not wish to conceal this. If we are to live ethically legacy must be acknowledged, engaged with, touched, performed, and read repeatedly and with openness to alterity and resistance to abuse.

Scholarly Frame

The notion of the critical choice that places us in relation to the other is pivotal to my conceptualisation of legacy. It hovers in the background of my thought, even as I encounter legacies that may defy this schema. This is not, however, a thesis about Kushner and Derrida on legacy. The network or genealogy of thinkers that I draw on starts with Derrida, but steered by my engagement with Kushner's texts, it spins in several directions. Each chapter of this thesis has its own theoretical pivot point, driven by the text itself: reparative reading in *Caroline, or Change*; dispossession in *The Illusion* and *Homebody/Kabul*; progress and survival in *Angels in America*; memorialization, slavery and the law in *Lincoln*; and collaboration in 'Reverse Transcription', *A Bright Room Called Day,* and *Widows.* Each of my chapters lays out its own theoretical framework. They are influenced by some of the major progenitors of twentieth-century Western thought, especially Freud and Darwin. I would also highlight two interconnected bodies of thought that, like Derrida's poststructuralism, inflect the work of this thesis.

The most substantial of these is queer theory. This includes especially Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler on reparation, affect, and recognisability. I also work with their differing treatments of performativity, which in turn respond to J. L. Austin.[65] Butler's recent and less explicitly 'queer' dialogue with Athena Athanasiou on dispossession is also essential to my work.[66] In Chapters One and Two I read with Lee Edelman and Elizabeth Freeman, whose analyses of queer time help me to think

[65] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1999); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993); J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, Second Edition (Cambridge, Mas.: Harvard University Press, 1962).
[66] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

through the temporal shifts of Kushner's theatre, and of legacy itself.[67] Kushner is somewhat marginal to the field of queer theory, and notably absent from the work of major theorists such as Butler and Edelman. This is partly because many of the texts that have followed *Angels in America* do not explore LGBTQ+ life and culture with similar depth. It is also a consequence of the critique of Leo Bersani, who in 1996 wrote of *Angels in America*:

> The enormous success of this muddled and pretentious play is a sign, if we need still another one, of how ready and anxious America is to see and hear about gays – provided we reassure America how familiar, how morally sincere, and, particularly in the case of Kushner's work, how innocuously full of significance we can be.[68]

It is not within the scope of my thesis to fully address Kushner's place in this field. However, I am able to consider some of the ways his work and queer theory interact, particularly when queerness is understood to refer to both sexuality and – following Sedgwick – all forms of non-monolithic signification.[69] Queer legacies might take the form of non-heteronormative, non-reproductive lines of transmission. They may, however, also be legacies that resist normative time, or embrace unexpected possibility without recourse to sexuality. In studying this I follow the impulses of Kushner's texts, which appeal to many different kinds of queerness to help resist oppression and open a space for legacies that encourage change.

The second network of thinkers that I draw on is concerned with reading. While I take my emphasis on reading directly from Kushner, I am interested in the ways that others have understood reading. These are often the same people mentioned above: Eve Sedgwick, on paranoid reading for example. I also work with poststructuralist thinkers including Roland Barthes and Derrida, whose radical re-

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[67] Lee Edelman, 'Hamlet's Wounded Name', in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Madhavi Menon, Series Q (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 97–105; Freeman.

[68] Leo Bersani, *HOMOS* (Cambridge, Mas.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 70.

[69] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer and Now', in *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–22 (pp. 8–9).

appraisal of writing and reading informs my approach. Edward Said's writings on authority and beginnings have also been influential here.

I join these theoretical frames with the diverse responses to Kushner, coming from numerous scholars. Book-length studies of Kushner are rare. Of these, James Fisher's *The Theatre of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope* has the most critical merit.[70] The majority of scholarly work on Kushner takes the form of essays and anthologies such as Fisher's *Tony Kushner: New Essay on the Art and Politics of his Plays*.[71] Of Kushner's texts, *Angels* has received by far the greatest treatment, with two anthologies dedicated to it, and numerous journal articles considering everything from Kushner's presentation of HIV/AIDS and queer identity, to the work of individual productions.[72] *Lincoln* has also seen a strong scholarly response, which I outline in Chapter Four. The other texts in this study – chronologically ordered *A Bright Room Called Day*, *The Illusion*, *Widows*, 'Reverse Transcription', *Homebody/Kabul*, and *Caroline, or Change* – have received fewer scholarly responses. None of the existent literature on Kushner considers his treatment of legacy in a substantial way, though some critics make brief reference to it. [73]

In addition to these scholarly texts, I draw on high quality reviews, magazine and newspaper articles. In some cases – as in Kate Masur's *New York Times* Op. Ed on *Lincoln* – these have been pivotal to establishing the field of discussion around a play or screenplay.[74] I also draw extensively on the rich array of interviews with Kushner. Finally, operating in the background of this study is the work of the other

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[70] See James Fisher, *The Theatre of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope* (New York & London: Routledge, 2001); James Fisher, *Understanding Tony Kushner* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2008); Hussein Al-Badri, *Tony Kushner's Postmodern Theatre: A Study of Political Discourse* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

[71] *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays*, ed. by James Fisher (Jefferson & London: McFarland, 2006).

[72] *Essays on Kushner's Angels*, ed. by Per Brask (Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing, 1995); *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. by Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[73] See Thomas; Stern; Catherine Barnes Stevenson, '"Seek for Something New": Mothers, Change, and Creativity in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, *Homebody/Kabul*, and *Caroline, or Change*', *Modern Drama*, 48.4 (2005), 758–76 <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2006.0038>.

[74] Kate Masur, 'In Spielberg's "Lincoln," Passive Black Characters', *The New York Times*, 12 November 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/opinion/in-spielbergs-lincoln-passive-black-characters.html> [accessed 20 January 2016].

playwrights that have influenced Kushner, and of scholars responding to these connections. To reiterate, influence and legacy are closely related, but not identical. Influence is about the flowing in of authority; it does not have to be intentional, or involve a critical choice. Legacies are things that are either intentionally passed down or intentionally claimed, though they might also be the unintentional aftereffects of events or processes. Texts can be influential because they are passed down between generations, and they can have aftereffects that might be read as legacies. Kushner names Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Anton Chekhov, Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, and Hendrik Ibsen as influences from 'classic drama'. He calls Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller important to his work.[75] His extensive list of contemporary influences includes Caryl Churchill and Suzan-Lori Parks among many others.[76] While it is not the purpose of this study to analyse how these thinkers have influenced Kushner, the substantive scholarship already done on this facet of his work informs my analysis.[77]

Legacy, the Novel, and Theatre

One of my claims in this thesis is that theatre is an important medium for the study of legacy, both in Kushner's work and more broadly. Though in Chapter Four I look at Kushner's writing for film, most of my thesis deals with this theatre. Because theatrical performance is singular, and cannot be handed down in the way of a play-text or book, it has a difficult relationship with legacy. At first glance, genres like the

[75] These influences are mentioned in numerous places, but see especially Kim Meyers and Tony Kushner, 'Not on Broadway', in *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, ed. by Robert Vorlicky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 231–44 (p. 237); Elana Estrin and Tony Kushner, 'Q and A: Playwright Tony Kushner Speaks about Influence of Tennessee Williams', *Cultural Compass: Harry Ransom Center*, 2011 <http://blog.hrc.utexas.edu/2011/05/19/q-and-a-playwright-tony-kushner-speaks-about-influence-of-tennessee-williams/> [accessed 10 May 2016].

[76] Meyers and Kushner.

[77] For example, see the following essays from *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays*, ed. by James Fisher (Jefferson & London: McFarland, 2006): James Fisher, '"The Angels of Frutification": Tennessee Williams, Tony Kushner, and Images of Homosexuality on the American Stage' (pp. 5–27), Robert Vorlicky, 'Blood Relations: Adrienne Kennedy and Tony Kushner' (pp. 41–55), and Stefka Mihaylova, 'Reading Corneille with Brecht: *The Comedy of Illusion* and the Illusions of Citizenship' (pp.135–48); see also Janelle Reinelt, 'Notes on *Angels in America* as American Epic Theatre' and Art Borreca, '"Dramaturging" the Dialectic: Brecht, Benjamin, and Declan Donellan's Production of *Angels in America*', in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. by Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 234–44 and pp. 245–60.

nineteenth-century Realist novel, which is thematically and formally engaged with legacy, may seem to be more fruitful sites for its study. Yet, comparison of Edward Said's analysis of authority in the novel with Alain Badiou's work on the theatre shows this to be incorrect. Theatre's relationality, and impermanent aspects make it an ideal medium through which to transmit, represent, and study legacies.

In my study, engagement with plays in performance has been limited. Kushner's texts are only infrequently performed in the United Kingdom, and in lieu of live performances I have at times had to rely on archives, video recordings, and reviews. In my analysis of these, I work with the knowledge that they are reproductions that cannot fully replicate the theatrical experience. In the case of 'Reverse Transcription' such resources were unavailable, and my imagining of the text is all I have had to work with. I draw my approach to the relationship between these plays and their performance from Kushner himself, who writes:

> When I teach playwriting I say: 'you are writing for the page and for the stage.' A play script is a text for reading in two ways. It is a score for a kinetic event, so the interpreter of the score will have some sense of what you mean him or her to do with it […]. But it is also a literary artefact and I always want to give the reader the best sense of what it's going to feel like on stage. You're aware when you're watching Shakespeare that you're missing immense amounts and you think (if you're loving it) 'Oh my God! I've got to get home and read this.' When you're reading it intelligently and well, you'll think 'God, there's so much life in this! I would love to see it on stage.' So either way there's a sense of incompleteness which I think replicates an essential thing about the theatrical experience: ghosts – being haunted by something that's not there, or that was there and has disappeared…[78]

Throughout my thesis, page and stage reciprocally haunt each other in differing ways, and to different degrees. Sometimes, this is because I have not seen a play, and am working from stage directions, reviewer's descriptions, and photographs to

[78] Will Mortimer and Tony Kushner, 'The Will Mortimer Interview: The Hampstead Theatre Literary Manager Talks to the Writer Tony Kushner', in *IHo: Programme* (London: Hampstead Theatre, 2016).

imagine mise en scène, sound, and performance. I follow Kushner in resisting the imposition of a hierarchy between text and performance.[79]

Theatre offers rich terrain for legacy in several ways. The idea that disappearance is the 'essential' feature of theatre, and that page and stage haunt each other, suggests the interplay of substance and negativity on which Kushner's treatment of legacy hinges. Like legacy productions are also relational. Playwrights, directors, actors, designers, lighting and sound technicians, producers, and audiences, all come together in the theatre's space, which also carries traces of past events. This offers numerous opportunities for passing on or down, and for bequethal. However, unlike written plays, performances are passing, and cannot transmit legacies that seek to endure unchanged. As Alain Badiou argues, theatre's longevity – indeed, its 'eternity' – lies in the fact that different people can perform it in different times and spaces. He writes: 'theatre is measured in terms of eternity, not by staying on but by disappearing'.[80] In Peggy Phelan's resonant words 'Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation or representation of representations: once it does it becomes something else. […] Performance's being […] becomes itself through disappearance.'[81] Though Phelan is talking about all kinds of performance, in both her writing and Badiou's the essence of the theatrical event is that it is passing, and exists only in the now, and then in memory. A play has the capacity to be repeatedly staged, but this will always be with difference, and it will always end.

In light of this, it is useful to contrast the way legacy operates in the theatre, with another medium. As a feature of both its context and its form the nineteenth century Realist novel is the genre of legacy *par excellence*. As Sophie Gilmartin shows, nineteenth century thought was preoccupied with ancestry, and with the

[79] For debates regarding the relationship between text and performance, see Duška Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making : Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). See especially Chapter 1.
[80] Alain Badiou, 'Rhapsody for the Theatre: A Short Philosophical Treatise', *Theatre Survey*, 49.2 (2008), 187–238 (p. 224) <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557408000124>.
[81] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 148.

question of whether we are 'merely "mimickers," determined by our past', or able to 'act with free will and self-determination, free of the past'.[82] Along with what Jennie A. Kassanoff describes as the Realist genre's signature concern of 'parental prerogative', this makes for fertile ground for the study of legacy.[83] Such concerns can be seen in Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1874), where legacies drive the plot. In the latter, questions of self-determination emerge through the differing legacies of both Rev Edward Casaubon and Peter Featherstone. For example, Casaubon stipulates that his wife Dorothea will be disinherited should she marry his cousin Will Ladislaw. This very injunction begins to transform Dorothea's feelings towards Will, and they marry.[84] Here legacy drives the plot but not in a simple way, for only the disruption of the will of the bequeather allows for resolution. The same might be said of *Great Expectations*, where the revelation that Magwich is Pip's benefactor, and the subsequent loss of his legacy, sees Pip reformed.

The nineteenth century novel is not alone in considering such questions. Gilmartin argues Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895), and Tennyson's poem *In Memoriam* (1849) have similar concerns. However, the formal context of the novel – the particular coming together of author, narrator and protagonist around the question of beginnings – gives it compelling links to legacy. In *Beginnings: Method and Intention* Edward Said examines the Realist or classical novel's ability to add to reality, or 'fill gaps in an incomplete world'.[85] To his view, the Realist novel gives people the 'authority' to begin and invent, but also restrains this inventiveness through 'molestation'. This is our consciousness of the novel's duplicity when compared with reality.[86] He theorises the relationship between real life and the 'life of the novel' as a line of succession, in which the novel inherits from life, and

[82] Sophie Gilmartin, 'Transition and Tradition: The Preoccupation with Ancestry in Victorian Writing', in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. by J. B. Bullen (London & New York: Longman, 1997), p. 19.
[83] Jennie A. Kassanoff, 'Henry James, Women and Realism (Review)', *The Henry James Review*, 31.3 (2010), 297–300 (p. 297). Kassanoff, it should be noted, is not suggesting that 'parental prerogative' is an unchallenged feature of Realist fiction. In fact, she points to Henry James's tendency to reconcile Realist concerns with their opposites: in this case, with 'non-familial or queer affiliations' (297).
[84] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), pp. 298–99.
[85] Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention & Method* (London: Granta Books, 1985), p. 82.
[86] Said, pp. 83–84.

comments that '[t]his line and this sense of heritage, [… stand] at the absolute centre of the classical novel; and yet how interestingly secondary, how intentionally flawed and derived a line it is.'[87]

Thus, the classical novel does not just represent processes of inheritance within the narrative. Nor are novels only physical objects handed down to readers who come after the author. In Said's formulation, the Realist novel succeeds and inherits from life. This would suggest that it, and its characters, are life's heirs, receiving its legacies. Novels do this, though, only in a very derived way. The author is engaged in a complex and inescapable process of filiation with text and character, but in this secondary world he or she cannot arrive at the same end-point as people in the 'real' world do: they cannot die in order to pass on. Said writes:

> In a sense, the novel's attitude as a formal institution towards its *dramatis personae* is that of a chiding father who has endowed his children with a patrimony and an abode he himself cannot really ever relinquish. In being the author – and notice how this applies equally to the writer/author, the novel-father/author and the character/author – one engages oneself in a whole process of filiation not easily escaped.[88]

In short, the novel's author cannot vacate the text, but remains behind, ensuring the continuity of its course, haunting it.[89] He or she doesn't leave their legacy to be occupied by the heir's will alone. Their lingering presence continuously calls attention to the fact that they are trying (and partially failing) to pass life on to their characters. This lies at the heart of legacy's prevalence within the nineteenth-century novel, and is one of the roots of its propensity to represent legacy as molested, and subject to hiddenness and secrets.

The nineteenth-century novel's concern with legacy and struggles with inheriting 'from life' raises questions about legacy in the theatre. Performances are also

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[87] Said, p. 93.
[88] Said, p. 93.
[89] Said's discussion of the novel as a 'form of secondary communications, with its mimetic authority derived genealogically from an "original" reality' is aware of the problems related to the relationship between authorial authority and textuality (188). This is the subject of further chapters in *Beginnings.*

'molested' by the audience's awareness that all is but an illusion. In Kushner's *The Illusion*, the subject of extensive analysis in Chapter Two, the molested relationship between art and life is represented as having direct consequences for a legacy. A greedy father, Pridamant, goes in search of his lost son, and hires the magician Alcandre to help find him. Alcandre conjures visions of the son's life for him. In a series of curiously mismatched vignettes we see the son (whose true name is never given) fall in love, marry, commit infidelity, and be killed. As Pridamant reaches the peak of his remorse and despair over this death, Alcandre makes a revelation: the son is still alive. He is an actor, and what Pridamant has witnessed are merely scenes from plays in which his son has performed. Pridamant reacts to this by revoking his newly-discovered parental approval of his son. Sorely disappointed that he is an actor, he states:

> The theatre – all that effort devoted to building a make-believe world out of angel hair and fancy talk, no more substantial than a soap bubble. You are moved at the sight of a foul murder – then the murderer and the murdered are holding hands, taking bows together. A black-magic reconciliation.[90]

So for Pridamant, theatre is a form of black magic, without any substance. Like a soap bubble it distorts what one sees through its lens, even as it is ready to burst or collapse at any moment. The filiation that it establishes is faked, and so too is the filiation that he now has with his re-discovered son.

However, Alcandre is quick to point out that the world itself is no different to theatre: '[w]hat in this world is not evanescent? What in this world is real and not seeming?' he asks (81-82). He argues '[t]he art of illusion is the art of love, and the art of love is the blood-red heart of the world. At times I think there's nothing else' (82). Here, Alcandre proposes more than the filiation of theatre and the art of love: they are one and the same thing. Theatre (like love) becomes the heart of the world, pumping life-blood throughout the rest of the body, which is dependent on it and on

[90] Tony Kushner and Pierre Corneille, *The Illusion* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1994), p. 81. Further references in this chapter are in-text.

which it is dependent. In other words, for Alcandre theatre and life are integrally interconnected, and reflect on each other.

If theatre shares the novel's molested filiation with life, it also diverges from it in significant ways, both because of the impermanent qualities of performance, and because of its collaborative structures. Theatre's is not (as the nineteenth-century novel often is) the product of an author whose work is handed down to readers one book or digest at a time, to be experienced individually or read aloud with intimate circles. The paths of filiation for a performance are more intricate, involving not only the writer, but also the director and actor among others. Alain Badiou's 'Rhapsody for the Theatre' relates this to the secondariness and fragility of the theatrical form. Badiou emphasises that theatre is, first and foremost, an event, and that 'a theatrical spectacle begins and ends. […] The fact that immediately the spectacle is played a second time changes nothing in this regard. It is two times One, with no access whatsoever to any permanence.'[91] This lack of permanence – which is also manifested in the inability of other media, such as journalism, to reconstitute theatre – is its very eternity: 'The eternal essence of a spectacle lies in its having-taken-place'.[92] Writing of Racine's *Bérénice* (1670), Badiou explains that:

> because it is open and incomplete, because it will be played through the ages and by human beings who are indifferent to the whole context of this text, human beings who have changed gods, whose city no longer has the same form, and whose loves no longer have the same law, this [theatrical] text […] must bespeak a generic humanity, capable of passing from actor to actor, from body to body, from State to State, all the while preserving its fundamental meaning.[93]

Theatre – at least, Badiou's idealized, utopian vision of it – is eternal because it is riddled with lacunae, both subtle and explicit. Its text can never itself be 'whole'. Badiou writes 'Every representation *resurrects* the text and brings it to completion'.[94] The text itself must hold 'a certain intrinsic imperfection […], a

[91] Badiou, p. 192.
[92] Badiou, p. 224.
[93] Badiou, p. 227.
[94] Badiou, p. 212.

porosity, a plasticity'. It must be able to be something more; alone it is 'too simple to articulate the whole of a world'.[95]

Badiou's playwright is, like the author of Said's novel, associated with secondariness, and tantalising distance from radical beginning. Yet for Badiou, the playwright has far less purchase over his or her work than the novel's author. He compares the two:

> Grappling with incompleteness, martyred by the not-all, jealous of the novel, the theatre author often wants to complete things. Anxious of being suspended from the aleatory character of an event, he jumps ahead of the game in despair. Whence the stage directions, which became almost endless in the nineteenth century […] In actual fact, this meant an invasion of theatre by the novel, under the law of an author who would much rather make a whole out of his theatrical proposition.
>
> The theatrical real does away with all that, it expels the novel, and it chastises the stage directions. […]
>
> Should we go so far as to make the following atrocious statement: that the death of the genius frees up the incompleteness of his plays? Yes, the theatre is cruel, […] because it cannot belong to any one person alone.[96]

This is the key difference between the novel and fragile, event-driven theatre, which is secondary, even as it gives us access to the tantalizing 'theatrical real'. I doubt that theatre can ever, as Badiou suggests here, be fully vacated by the 'genius' of its author. However, embedded in its very form is the certainty that it cannot ever belong to one person alone. Its networks of filiation spiral out beyond the playwright and the text, and change each time the play is performed. Because legacies are dependant on the connections between people, this relational quality makes theatre a generative medium through which to represent and study legacies, particularly those that are not normative.

Kushner's theatre is what Badiou describes as 'Theatre' with a capital 'T'. It 'pronounce[s] itself about itself and about the world' and makes the audience 'the interpreter of the interpretation'.[97] Badiou follows Vitez in arguing that the function of theatre 'consists in orienting us in time, in telling us where we are in history.

[95] Badiou, p. 212.
[96] Badiou, p. 213.
[97] Badiou, pp. 198–99.

Theatre as a machine for answering the question "where?", a localizing machine, a machine for a topological relation to time'.[98] At the specific moments in which plays unfold on stage, their legacies, like history, are given a space, are signalled to the audience, and even imparted to them. In 'this strange public space, where fiction is consumed as a repeatable event', these processes are destabilised and unfettered from some of the constrictions that they encounter within the novelistic form.[99] Kushner's Theatre (with a capital 'T') is, I show, a difficult but fruitful site for the work of understanding legacy. Even when I work primarily with the written page, the haunting possibilities of the stage continue to work the terrain of legacy, bringing it into contact with difference in a way that answers to Berlant's process of reading with.

[98] Badiou, p. 229.
[99] Badiou, p. 187.

Chapter One

Reading Legacy in *Caroline, or Change*

This chapter is concerned with the interpenetration of reading and legacy within *Caroline, or Change* (2003), a musical for which Kushner wrote the libretto and collaborator Jeanine Tesori the score.[1] One of Kushner's mid-career texts, it explicates the key premise of this thesis: that legacies are read and interpreted both by those who transmit them, and those who inherit from them. I argue that in *Caroline, or Change*, Kushner and Tesori are interested in paradigms of reading legacy that seek to expose what is hidden. Processes of affective reading are used to uncover and disrupt the damaging historical legacies of American slavery, among other forms of structural inequality. They attempt to open a space in which change can happen and different legacies can be established. To do so, they develop an approach to legacy that answers to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's understanding of the reparative. The audience is drawn into this process, and is invited to critically practice reparative reading.

In *Caroline* legacies are readable in a figurative sense. This is reading as consideration, interpretation and discernment; that which Kushner describes as making 'existence legible'.[2] Characters in this play adopt particular strategies and positions to figuratively read their legacies. I am concerned with their encounters with symptomatic reading, which seeks to uncover what is beneath the surface, and to penetrate the depths of that which is read. Working primarily with Jacques Derrida, Kushner, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, I study both the propulsive energy and the dangers that can stem from this kind of reading.

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[1] A note on dates: *Caroline* premiered in 2003, and appeared on Broadway in 2004, the same year as it was published. See Tony Kushner, *Caroline, or Change* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004). All further references to the libretto in this chapter are in-text.

[2] Steindler and Kushner; 'Read, V.', OED Online (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/158851> [accessed 1 May 2017].

In *Caroline,* Kushner and Tesori develop strategies for exposing hidden legacies of inequality, and encouraging change. I use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on paranoid and reparative reading to understand how characters' readings of legacy hinge on their accesses to, resistance to, and acceptance of change, which in the text refers to both difference over time and money.[3] Paranoid reading is symptomatic, and leads to damaging repetitions. I argue that the eponymous Caroline's way of reading legacies is paranoid, but so are the temporal structures within which she labours. In contrast, reparative reading offers a 'range of affect, to respond to local contingencies, and to allow for ruptures of hope' as a move beyond the symptomatic.[4] This sort of reading is practiced by Caroline's daughter Emmie. Through Emmie, Kushner and Tesori encourage audience and characters alike to read legacies queerly: with openness to the non-monolithic, and to unexpected possibility. Reading with Sedgwick, I argue that Caroline and Emmie's different responses to legacy open out an unstable mesh of unforeseen possibility. Here, the readable nature of legacy not only points to its hidden depths, but also exposes its reparative potential.

***Caroline*, an Outline**

Like most of Kushner's plays, *Caroline* is a poor subject for summary. In this study, this is exacerbated by the multiple iterations that I analyse: the libretto by Kushner (2004), the *Original Broadway Cast Recording* (2004), a video recording of the 2006 National Theatre production directed by George C. Wolfe, and a live performance at the Chichester Festival Theatre (2017) directed by Michael Longhurst.[5] It is Kushner's most substantial engagement with the musical genre, and in it he and Tesori use the musical form to seriously engage with a variety of political issues.[6] Semi-autobiographical*, Caroline* is set in the small, Southern town of Lake Charles,

[3] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, pp. 123–51.
[4] Emily Apter and Elaine Freedgood, 'Afterword', *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), 139–46 (p. 145) <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.139>.
[5] *Caroline, or Change: Original Broadway Cast Recording*, 2 vols (Burbank: Hollywood Records, Inc., 2004); George C. Wolfe, *Caroline, or Change* (National Theatre, London, 2006), National Theatre Archive; Michael Longhurst, *Caroline, or Change* (Chichester Festival Theatre, Chichester, 2017).
[6] Kushner and Tesori have also collaborated on a one-act opera about Eugene O'Neill entitled *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* (2011) (Tony Kushner, 'A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck, Draft 03 04/14/11', 2011, Courtesy of The Glimmerglass Festival.)

Louisiana, where Kushner grew up. He notes that its writing was informed by a concern with 'race relations, the civil rights movement, and African Americans and Southern Jews in the early 1960s, a time of protean change sweeping the country'.[7] He is specifically interested in looking at these things from the perspective of a small Southern town, where change unfolded 'in a more subterranean fashion, and at a different pace, than elsewhere in America' (xi). Throughout the musical, moments pivotal to progressive narratives of history, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights movement, and the Vietnam war, share the stage with local shifts in the Lake Charles community, and vie with domestic changes, such as divorce, the death of a parent, or changes to routines. The form of the musical seeks to capture this interplay between the domestic and the epic. As James Fisher asserts, it blends folk elements from African American and Jewish American life 'with aspects of Broadway kitchen-sink realism and its seeming antithesis, surreal fantasy'.[8] Tesori's music interweaves elements from the Blues, jazz, Motown, gospel, Christmas and Chanukah tunes, and Stephen Sondheim musicals, among other sources. This hybridized score, together with the play's combination of different genres, are used to tease out the intricacies of historical experience.

The play unfolds the interwoven lives of two families, the Thibodeauxs, who are African American and Christian, and the Gellmans, who are white and Jewish. The families are connected by Caroline Thibodeaux, who works as a maid for the Gellmans, earning only thirty dollars a week. Caroline is 39 years old, a divorcee, and the mother of four. Desperately trying to stay afloat both financially and emotionally, she feels trapped in her job, and by her context, which is explicitly informed by global histories of racial, class, and gender discrimination. Though her daughter Emmie is engaged with the Civil Rights movement, Caroline sees a change in circumstance as being impossible for herself. Spending much of her time in the Gellman's boiling basement, where she interacts with the magical,

[7] Tony Kushner, 'Introduction', in *Caroline, or Change* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004), pp. xi–xv (p. xi). All further references to this Introduction are in-text.
[8] Fisher, *Understanding Tony Kushner*, p. 84.

anthropomorphised figures of the Washing Machine, Radio (a trio of singers), and the Dryer, she is extremely unhappy.

The plot hinges on the relationship between Caroline and the Gellman's young son Noah. In the wake of his mother's death Noah is strongly attached to the 'implacable, indestructible' Caroline (46). He hates his new stepmother Rose Stopnick Gellman. Rose has moved from New York to join Noah and his distant father Stewart. Battling with her new context, she dislikes Caroline's brusqueness and relationship with Noah, but also wants to befriend her. Her guilt about their socio-economic inequality often fails to elicit empathy. Caroline, meanwhile, dislikes her job and rejects the prospect of being friends with either her employer Rose, or with Noah.

This comes to a head in the subject of Noah's pocket money. He frequently leaves this in his pockets; Caroline finds it while doing the laundry and returns it to Noah. Believing this to be disrespectful to the financially struggling Caroline, Rose instructs her to keep any loose change that she finds. She frames this as punishment for the boy and as a 'raise' for Caroline (50). Noah, Rose says, 'needs to learn consequences'; the latter word resonates throughout the play (50). In the Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT) production, Rose (Lauren Ward) and Noah (Charlie Gallacher) argue about this during a split scene. They stand on opposite sides of the upper level of the stage, which has just split in half to allow character of the anthropomorphised Bus (Ako Mitchell) to enter, bearing news of John F. Kennedy's assassination to Caroline (Sharon D. Clarke), who is 'outside' at the bus stop. This newly opened rift is symbolic of the rupture within their family.

When she is told of Rose's plan, Caroline is insulted and refuses to take 'pennies from a baby' (49). Under great financial pressure, she eventually relents and takes the change. At first, all is well: the first part of the play ends by associating Caroline's access to 'free' change with the state of being 'Free as the air!' (66). The situation is altered in the play's second part. First, the money knocks Caroline 'off her routine', and reminds her of past sorrows (69). Then Mr Stopnick, Rose's Leftist, pro-

revolutionary father, gives Noah twenty dollars for Chanukah. As he does so, he warns Noah that money follows 'certain laws', asking him to:

> [t]hink of someone who is poor:
> and know, you stole this gold from them.
> Especially here in the Devil's South!
> You rip your gold from a starving man's mouth! (94)

Noah's acceptance of the money transmits to him a legacy of exploitation that is linked to a Southern history of racial discrimination.

Predictably, Noah leaves his twenty dollars in his pocket. Despite a prior resolution to stop taking change, the twenty dollars will make a significant difference to her family, and Caroline decides to take it. When Noah discovers this he is enraged, and falls immediately into the racialized, genocidal discourse that Mr Stopnick has warned him of, shouting:

> President Johnson has built a bomb
> special made to kill all Negroes!
> […]
> I hope he drops his bomb on you! (104)

Pushed beyond her last boundaries, Caroline responds furiously, telling Noah that 'Hell's where Jews go when they die' and giving him the money, before leaving the Gellman's house altogether (104). The problems of pocket change thus come to reveal the discrimination and oppression at the heart of a racist, socioeconomically disparate society, where change comes too slowly.

In the aftermath of their confrontation, Caroline leaves work for several days. She is overwhelmed by the sense that she 'can't afford' to be 'Caroline', either financially or emotionally (118). Despite its apparent inevitability, Caroline feels her only recourse is to deny change by figuratively ironing her heart flat (118). To her, the incident with Noah is indicative of the fact that 'changin's a danger' for her: it brings too much pain to the surface (115-6). She decides to plunge herself into a breathless space where no change can touch her (124).

Here, the title's ambiguous conjunction, the 'or' of *Caroline, or Change*, is clarified. 'Or' can be used to distinguish between things, to mark an opposition, or to introduce a synonym, and hence to formulate an analogy. On a level, Caroline must choose between herself 'or' change (whether pocket change or social change). However, she and change are also analogous: when she jettisons a certain kind of change, Caroline must jettison herself, flattening her desires, isolating herself. It is left to Emmie, the bearer of Caroline's legacy and 'strong blood', to spark hope in a triumphant future where it is envisaged that black women will no longer have to iron their hearts flat (124-26). Emmie, who is able to read legacies differently to Caroline, becomes her mother's legacy, the 'consequence unforeseen' that emerges from the hidden landscape in which Caroline labours.

Theorizing Legacy, Reading Legacy

In my Introduction, I highlight Derrida's association of legacy with critical choice and with reading. Reasoning that a legacy is characterised by an injunction to choose what one will inherit, Derrida writes that when receiving a legacy '*one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret'.[9] He argues that when working with Marx, for example, the inheritor must participate in the always-unstable, even dangerous process of reading their legacy, because there is nothing 'given, natural, transparent, [or] univocal' about inheriting. In his model active choice and critical reading are a necessary part of the transmission of legacies.

When brought into dialogue with *Caroline,* Derrida's claims that legacies always involve a critical choice must be modified by the context of US slavery. In this musical, the legacies of slavery and other mechanisms used to define and control African Americans throughout US history are foregrounded. 'Choice' is a fraught word here: one cannot choose, for example, not to be born into slavery, or to ignore the afterlife of centuries of discrimination. As Kevin Gannon argues in the documentary *13th*, which looks at racial discrimination in the US, 'We are the

[9] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 18.

products of the history that our ancestors chose. If we're white. If we're black then we are products of the history that our ancestors most likely did not choose'.[10]

It would be equally damaging, however, to deny the agency of those who have been dispossessed.[11] When African-American writer and scholar Sadiya Hartman writes of what it meant for her to claim an African-American identity after travelling through Ghana to trace the slave routes along which her ancestors may have travelled, she states:

> If after a year in Ghana I could still call myself an African American, it was because my Africa had its source in the commons created by fugitives and rebels […] The *legacy that I chose to claim* was articulated in the ongoing struggle to escape, stand down, and defeat slavery in all of its myriad forms. It was the fugitive's legacy.[12]

Here, Hartman 'chose[s] to claim […] the fugitive's legacy'. This legacy is as much the product of her attempts to recover a lost history – fraught with the gaps and fissures of centuries of trauma – as it is that of her predecessors actively passing it down to her. In claiming she also produces and theorizes this legacy, choosing to draw together certain narratives connected beneath the word 'slavery' but not necessarily causally linked to each other.

Hartman's process of choosing and claiming a legacy is resonant with Derrida's description of reading in general. In an argument inflected by his contemporary Roland Barthes, he writes that when one reads, '[o]ne must … in a single gesture, but doubled, read and write'.[13] As one follows the 'given thread' laid down by the author, one embroiders the text, supplementing it. This doubled gesture requires processes of reception, interpretation, and production; processes that are also necessary for the transmission of legacies to occur. Reading, a literal requirement for

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[10] Ava DuVernay, *13th* (Netflix, 2016) <www.netflix.com> [accessed 1 June 2017].

[11] See Chapter Two for a discussion of the relationship between dispossession and legacy.

[12] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), p. 234. My italics.

[13] Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 64; for Barthes on this subject see especially 'From Work to Text' and 'Death of the Author' in *Image - Music - Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

many legacies, also offers a metaphor for the way we pick up and supplement a thread left to us by our ancestors.

The idea of reading legacies is not new. As shown in my Introduction, legacy's etymological roots in the Latin *lēgo* link it to both bequeathal and reading aloud.[14] The most obvious intersection between these two meanings is the reading of a will. For example, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (c. 1599), Marc Anthony uses the reading of Caesar's will to manipulate a crowd of plebeians to decry Caesar's assassins. Professing that he does not 'mean to read' the will, he encourages the crowd to interpret it in his stead. He guides them to see themselves as Caesar's heirs, and to bequeath their memories of the Emperor 'as a rich legacy' to their 'issue'.[15] This wins them to his side, though he will later deny them this inheritance. Reading, both literal and metaphorical, is indispensible to the action of the play and the transmission of Caesar's legacy.

For Kushner reading – and the movement of reception, interpretation, and production illustrated by Derrida – is also a vital function of theatre. In an interview with Catherine Steindler he explains, '[w]atching theater, you learn that existence is legible but that you have to have a critical mind if you're going to read it.'[16] He continues:

> The point is to pierce the veil of illusion and see underneath to the skeleton, to the infrastructure, to the plumbing, and see how this stuff is actually made and how the magic effect is produced. You can't live as anything other than history's fool if you don't make an effort to do that. I mean, you will always wind up being history's fool—it's not like you're going to get out of it—but the only hope we have is for people not to be literal readers, not to be fundamentalist readers, and to understand that, from the Holy Scriptures on, the whole point is to interpret and to understand. I think theater forces you to do that. [17]

[14] Simpson, p. 13.
[15] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and others, Second Edition (New York & London: W. W. Norton Company, 2009), pp. 1001–65 (pp. 1001–65), III.2.131-134.
[16] Steindler and Kushner.
[17] Steindler and Kushner.

For Kushner, this means that one must interpret and understand, embroidering or piercing the theatrical text, rather than reading it in a literal or fundamentalist manner. As he states in another interview, '[t]he world is never simply one thing'; it 'produces meaning and the meanings are always internally contradictory and dialectical and paradoxical.'[18] For Kushner, understanding this is essential to both epistemological breakthroughs, and to the admittedly unrealisable hope that we won't become history's fools, but will see its patterns and respond appropriately.[19]

In both Derrida and Kushner's statements, there is a link to the epistemic process of 'symptomatic' reading. As Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus note, symptomatic reading takes 'meaning to be hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter'.[20] This is implicit in Derrida's idea that reading around a secret is a fundamental characteristic of legacy. Kushner's statement is also an example of this paradigm of interpretation, because he describes reading as a process of 'piercing', and seeing 'underneath to the skeleton'.

Symptomatic modes of reading are widely used and useful, but they can also cause problems. As Best and Marcus argue, symptomatic reading can dismiss surfaces as superfluous. It sees analysis of that which is latent and repressed as necessary to achieve a 'clear' understanding of a text. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick addresses further problems in *Touching Feeling*. Although she does not use the term 'symptomatic', she problematizes epistemic practices rooted in 'a topos of depth or hiddenness,

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[18] Andrew Khan and Tony Kushner, 'The World Is Never Simply One Thing: An Interview with Tony Kushner', *Yale Literary Magazine*, Spring 2013 <http://yalelitmag.com/the-world-is-never-simply-one-thing-an-interview-with-tony-kushner/> [accessed 1 April 2014].

[19] The influence of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre is evident in this approach to history and reading. As Kushner writes elsewhere, 'Brecht insistently strove for a theatre conscious of its ideology, or rather theatre that struggles to become conscious, and makes theatre of that struggle. He insisted that ideological analysis, political and historical thinking were salutary for theatre practice, but much more importantly, […] this labor of critical thinking Brecht identifies as not only salutary but in an important sense the true subject of all theatrical art'. (Kushner, 'Introduction', in Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children/ Mutter Courage Und Ihre Kinder*, ed. by Charlotte Ryland, trans. by Tony Kushner (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p. xxi; see also Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht On Theatre : The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1964).)

[20] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), 1–21 (p. 1) <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1>.

typically followed by a drama of exposure'.[21] One of the problems with such an approach to knowledge, Sedgwick suggests, is that it results in a powerful focus on what is '*beneath*' and '*beyond*'. These terms turn with relative ease 'from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos', which can confine and even restrict critical thought.[22]

Of course, despite its discourse of hiddenness, Derrida's description of legacy is largely an attempt to resist the narratives of which Sedgwick warns. By showing legacy to be read but never 'given' and always 'secret', he problematizes the notion of a cleanly delineated process of transmission between generations, neatly connected to a secure origin and end. There is similar ambiguity in Kushner's statement. In his theatre the skeleton that is exposed is not just drawn to the surface; it has been there all along. This is echoed in plays such as *Angels in America* (1991/1992), where there are clear instructions allowing the audience to literally see 'how the magic effect is produced', as the mechanics of performance and special effects are laid bare on stage.[23] Thus, both Derrida's discussion of reading and legacy, and Kushner's reflections on reading and existence, actively engage with a topos of hiddenness and exposure. They don't necessarily privilege the depths over the surface, and require critical engagement with the process of reading. These ambiguities point to some of the ways symptomatic reading interacts with other modes of reading. Though highly dominant in Western thought – implicit, for example, in psychoanalysis and Marxism – it is but a way of reading.

Caroline, or Change shows that there are many different ways of reading. Characters frequently read the same situations differently. For example, early in the play Noah is given three different readings of the reasons for his mother's death. His grandparents say she died because she smoked, and 'wouldn't listen' when told it would harm her. As he moves away from them, entering Caroline's basement, she teaches him another way of reading his situation:

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[21] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 8.
[22] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 8.
[23] Steindler and Kushner.

> God sometimes eat people, like a wolf.
> He make this whole world as a test.
> Cancer was your momma's test,
> and her death is your test, you been tested too. (21)

Yet, as Noah exits the basement, Stuart sings: 'There is no God, Noah,| We don't believe in God […] and your mother is dead' (22). Caroline's harsh but compassionate explanation is thus almost immediately contradicted.

While encyclopaedias, comic books, and other written materials have a place in *Caroline*, literal reading is less a focus here than in plays such as *iHo* (2009) or *Homebody/Kabul* (2001), where some characters read voraciously. In fact, as Caroline declares during the play's climax, while for others reading can be a catalyst for change, for her it is just another mark of oppression:

> And some folks goes to school at nights,
> And some folks march for civil rights.
> I don't.
> I ain't got the heart.
> I can't hardly read. (117)

While Caroline struggles to read in a literal sense, she actively follows, interprets and reads her context, her situation, her oppression, and the legacies to which these are linked.

Throughout *Caroline*, Kushner both draws on and resists symptomatic tropes to push his characters and audience to read in varied ways. One of these ways of reading can be described as 'queer', though only in a broad sense. Although the musical genre has strong historical links to gay culture, *Caroline* is not explicitly about gay characters in the way of *Angels* or *iHo*.[24] Rather, its way of reading mobilizes the

[24] I use 'queer' as a term that is not identical with 'gay'. 'Gay' is more likely to be an (often contested) 'objective, empirical categor[y]', while 'queer' is rooted in 'performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation' (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer and Now', in *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–22 (p. 9)). For examination of the musical's links to LGBT history and identity see: D. A. Miller, *Place For Us [Essay on the Broadway Musical]* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1998); John M Clum, *Something for the Boys* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001); Stacy Ellen Wolf, *A*

heterogeneous qualities of queerness, which Sedgwick defines as 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically'.[25] When I refer to queerness in *Caroline*, it is with this non-monolithic signification in mind. Queer reading encapsulates this openness to the unexpected beyond the realm of sexuality or gender. As Madhavi Menon suggests, Sedgwick's description:

> necessitates an openness not only to sexual and gendered possibilities, but also to chronological, national, racial, philosophical, and animal choices; to texts and ideas that address questions of sameness across times, the non-coincidence of the same with itself, and the vexed relation between sameness and difference.[26]

In the rest of the chapter, I argue that in *Caroline*, Kushner presses for the non-monolithic re-examination and open dissemination of history and legacies through active, critical, and queer reading. This offers the possibility of establishing or uncovering legacies that answer to Eve Sedgwick's description of the reparative.

Paranoia, Reparation

I draw my understanding of the term 'reparative' from Sedgwick's work on paranoid and reparative reading. Her discussion of this helps me to understand two features of *Caroline*. The first is its presentation of affective reading. The second is its critique of the relationship between legacy and change, where both scepticism towards change and embrace of it are necessary to establish legacies that resist oppression. Sedgwick's work on paranoid and reparative reading is concerned with the ways that we 'do' knowledge: the ways we pursue it, expose it, receive it, and read it.[27] She is interested in the means through which the 'productive critical habits' associated with paranoia and suspicion in the Western academy can also replicate the very

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Problem like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

[25] Sedgwick, 'Queer and Now', p. 8.

[26] *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Madhavi. Menon (Duke University Press, 2011), p. 6 <https://www.dawsonera.com:443/abstract/9780822393337>.

[27] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, pp. 5 & 124.

structures and effects that they are intended to guard against, becoming intractable to change, and clouding critical thought.

Sedgwick is interested in both the cognitive aspects of reading, and in its affective dimensions and motivations. Her work on how affect shapes the ways we selectively scan and amplify what we read is important to my conceptualization of legacy for a number of reasons. Broadly speaking, it helps me to understand how legacies are sentimentalized. In my Introduction, I comment on the difficulties that arise from the sentimental valorisation of legacies, especially when this obscures their complexity. Acknowledging the affective motivation of reading a legacy opens a productive space, which recognises but also exceeds the sentimental, leaving room for other kinds of affect. In the case of *Caroline,* Sedgwick's work on paranoid and reparative reading also elucidates the temporal structures of the differing affective positions adopted by Caroline and Emmie, and their corresponding ways of reading legacies.

Sedgwick's understanding of the paranoid/schizoid position is adapted from Melanie Klein and Silvan Tompkins, both theorists of object relations. Her analysis shows that paranoid reading can become monopolistic and intractable to change, forging temporal structures dependant on repetition. In Klein, the paranoid/ schizoid position emerges in the infant, and is defined by a number of 'violent' things.[28] These include the inability of the self to tolerate ambivalence, and the splitting of both the self and its objects into magically good or bad part-objects. Such objects populate human mental life; they are '*things* … with physical properties, including people and hacked-off bits of people'.[29] The infant is greedy for the good part-objects, and rejects the bad. For Sedgwick, the adult is capable of similar object splitting through Nietzschean *ressentiment*: a projective identification, which expels bad parts of the self into a person, who is taken as an object. This results in a

[28] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes', in *The Weather in Proust*, ed. by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 123–43 (pp. 131–32); Melanie Klein, 'Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms', *The Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research*, 5.2 (1996), 160–79.
[29] Sedgwick, 'The Difference Affect Makes', p. 126.

'terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into the world around one'.[30]

This defensiveness and alertness give paranoid reading repetitive temporal qualities. The paranoid position is, according to Sedgwick, a 'strong theory of negative affect'. Following Tompkins, she emphasizes that it is a 'theory' used not only by critics or analysts, but by all people, who in trying to deal with affect also theorize it. Paranoid theory is strong because it accounts for a wide spectrum of phenomena, providing strategies for anticipating negative experiences. Placing its faith in knowledge as a form of exposure – a symptomatic revelation – it encourages narrative structures that attempt to curtail bad surprises by making them always already known. These narrative structures are also reflexive and mimetic, in the sense that they focus on symmetrical epistemologies.[31] Paranoia, in other words, understands everything to repeat and imitate what it already knows and anticipates.

Sedgwick links these characteristics to an inability to deal with change. For example, despite its reliance on expectation, 'failure to anticipate change is […] entirely in the nature of the paranoid process, whose sphere of influence […] only expands as each unanticipated disaster seems to demonstrate more conclusively that, guess what, *you can never be paranoid enough*.'[32] Because the paranoid position relies on always already knowing the future, it makes itself intractable to change, and cannot foresee it. When unexpected changes then occur, the paranoid position is further strengthened by the assumption that even more paranoia is needed (because good and bad remain separated) rather than seeking other (possibly reparative) ways to theorize the change.

Caroline, or Change offers at least one explicit example of paranoid reading shaping a legacy: Mr Stopnick's twenty dollars. His gift to Noah is both traditional (money is a common Chanukah present), and part of an attempt to make the boy aware of the

[30] Sedgwick, 'The Difference Affect Makes', p. 135.
[31] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, pp. 133–38.
[32] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 142.

skewed power relations that he is inheriting. His explanation that money 'follows certain laws' and is always 'stole[n]' from someone who is poor is paranoid because he assumes that these structures will always remain the same (94). By making Noah aware of the 'meaning' of the money, he hopes to teach the boy to anticipate this bad surprise, and to avoid it. However, he fails to foresee that in trying to teach Noah this lesson by giving him a large sum of money, he has provided the means for Noah to repeat the very relations of which Mr. Stopnick is critical, further reinforcing his position.

This moment is indicative of the paranoid position's interweaving with a repetitive generational narrative. Sedgwick writes:

> The dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality, […] in which yesterday can't be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so, takes its shape from a generational narrative that's characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness: it happened to my father's father, it is happening to me, it will happen to my son, and it will happen to my son's son.[33]

Paranoid temporality thus takes its character from a generational narrative in which legacy seems to be constituted by the repetition of experience. In his speech accompanying Noah's Chanukah gift (94), Mr Stopnick implicitly endorses such paranoid generational narratives, even as he strives to point out their problems.

Sedgwick offers the reparative position as an alternative to this symptomatic form of reading. It does not eclipse the paranoid position, but shares the stage with it.[34] Access to the reparative position is often fleeting, but it is from this position that 'challenges to a normalizing universality can develop'.[35] Her understanding of the reparative is rooted in a reading of Klein's 'depressive' position, which she adapts to her own needs. Sedgwick describes the reparative as:

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[33] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 147.
[34] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 130.
[35] Sedgwick, 'The Difference Affect Makes', p. 136.

> the position from which it is possible […] to use one's own resources to assemble or 'repair' the murderous part-objects into something like a whole – though […] *not necessarily like any preexisting whole.* Once assembled to one's own specifications, the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn. Among Klein's names for the reparative process is love.[36]

To put it differently, where the infant cannot integrate the part-objects of their fragmented perceptions, the depressive adult can use their own resources to repair them into something new. Reparative strategies understand that good and bad tend to be inseparable on every level.[37] Pleasure-seeking and ameliorative, this process of reassembly provides more durable, nourishing and satisfying objects with which to identify.[38] As Lauren Berlant notes, within the context of Sedgwick's oeuvre 'reparative criticism aims to sustain the unfinished and perhaps unthought thoughts about desire that are otherwise defeated by the roar of conventionality or heteronormative culture'.[39] Reparative reading, then, is open to change, and exceeds the monopolistic nature of paranoid reading.

Significantly, Sedgwick does not suggest that the paranoid position is without valence, or that the depressive position is completely good. Depressive pressures can lead to 'a paralyzing apprehension of the inexorable laws of unintended consequences'.[40] This suggests that the depressive position, like the paranoid, cannot always manage change. Sedgwick notes that, for herself at any rate:

> activist politics takes place […] at [the] difficult nexus between the paranoid/schizoid and the depressive position. […] The propulsive energy of activist justification, of being or feeling joined with others in an urgent cause, tends to be structured very much in a paranoid/schizoid fashion: driven by attributed motives, fearful contempt of opponents, collective fantasies of powerlessness and/or omnipotence, scapegoating, purism and schism. Paranoid/schizoid, in short, even as the motives that underlie political

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[36] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 128.
[37] Sedgwick, 'The Difference Affect Makes', pp. 136–37.
[38] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 144.
[39] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 123 <https://www.dawsonera.com/readonline/9780822394716> [accessed 11 May 2014].
[40] Sedgwick, 'The Difference Affect Makes', p. 136.

> commitment may have much more to do with the complex, mature ethical dimension of the depressive position.[41]

Caroline, or Change operates at this 'difficult' nexus of propulsive paranoid energy and mature reparative energy. These come together in the first and last parts of the play. Here, Kushner and Tesori expose the damaging repetitions wrought by the long-lasting legacies of structural oppression, particularly where these are hidden (either kept literally out of sight, or so normative as to practically have disappeared). They contrast these with the possibilities of new legacies, characterised by queerness, and openness to the unexpected. The shifting, often-conflicted process of reading and producing legacies offer the possibility of weakening, and even overwhelming, damaging generational and teleological narratives.

Caroline and Paranoid Reading

The paranoid position is so relevant to *Caroline* because of the musical's intensive focus on change, and especially because of Caroline's paranoid refusal of it. The title's pun refers to both systems of monetary exchange (represented by pocket change) and progressive narratives of history (social change). Kushner and Tesori use paranoid reading's propulsive energy to anticipate and expose social injustice, focusing especially on the legacies of capitalist monetary systems, and their pressures on the use of Caroline's time. However, their musical also emphasizes the damaging, ineffectual dimensions of this way of reading.

Throughout Kushner's oeuvre, change in the non-monetary sense is presented as being double-sided. In *Angels in America*, when Harper asks the dioramic Mormon Mother, '[h]ow do people change?' she responds:

> Well it has something to do with God so it's not very nice.

This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. (Continued onto next page.)

[41] Sedgwick, 'The Difference Affect Makes', p. 137.

This image of change is visceral, violent, and inescapable. Yet elsewhere Kushner has offered a more constructive understanding of change, saying that 'to believe that people aren't changeable is to miss the whole point of everything, of sea-changing Shakespeare and of life and everything'.[43] He thus understands change to cause suffering, but also to be a meaningful part of both human life and theatre, as represented by Shakespeare.

Caroline, or Change treats both of these dimensions of change. Caroline has a similar perspective to the Mormon Mother: her paranoid expectation is that change will make her circumstances worse, and she consequently refuses to accept it. In contrast, the musical presents several characters that appreciate its importance. For example, Caroline's friend Dotty, who is also a maid, embraces change. Early in the play she tells Caroline about the vanishing of the town's hundred-year-old statue of a confederate soldier, insisting 'things change everywhere, even here' (32). Although the statue's disappearance signifies the tearing down of the legacies of enslavement and Jim Crow, it unsettles Caroline, who only feels that it will bring trouble.

The anthropomorphised Moon is, like Dotty, a proponent of change. When she rises for the first time in the play, just after Dotty's story about the statue, she brings with her a 'Moon change'. Her light transforms Caroline's white uniform so that it becomes 'spotless', an alteration literally realized through stage lighting, and accompanied by soaring, operatic song, indicative of the Moon's freedom. As this transformation suggests, the Moon is a symbol of transmutation; she is also constantly changing, as she moves between phases. Her refrain, repeated many times in the musical, is 'Change come fast and change come slow| but change come, Caroline Thibodeaux' (32). In contrast to Dotty and the Moon, Caroline's refrain is

[42] Kushner, *Angels in America (Revised and Complete)*, p. 200.
[43] Kushner, 'Introduction' in Tony Kushner, *Death & Taxes: Hydriotaphia & Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2000), p. xvi.

that ‘Nothing ever changes [or happens]| underground in Louisiana’ (11, 34). While she works in the Gellman’s basement, change remains something impossible.

On one hand, Caroline’s refusal of change is a realistic assessment of the perpetuation of exploitation. She is caught in a cycle that she cannot safely escape without potentially exposing herself and her children to extreme physical hardship and depravation. On the other hand, her feelings towards change also mean that when alternatives (albeit tenuous ones) are offered to her, Caroline refuses them. Her resistance to even hearing about change is largely the consequence of the legacies that underpin her labour. This is made clear in ‘Washer/ Dryer’, the first scene of the musical. It is a meditation on the enduring legacies of the prescribed forward-movement of capitalist time and labour. It shows this model of time to be – somewhat paradoxically – damagingly repetitious, subject to paranoid temporality’s ‘dogged, defensive narrative stiffness’ and insistence on sameness. This is particularly evident when it operates in relation to Caroline’s working body, and when it is read by Caroline.

Within its first three minutes, ‘Washer/Dryer’ positions Caroline within a Southern geographic and historical context, which forms the backdrop for her paranoid reading, and for the play’s political action. Caroline opens the play with resonant humming. As the lights come up, she can be seen in a windowless room, surrounded by laundry, a washer, dryer, and radio. As she goes about her labour, sorting laundry, her Bluesy hum rises, subtly evoking a history of music sung by African Americans in situations of coerced work (from slavery to prison camps). Breaking suddenly into song, her first words are:

> Nothing ever happens under ground
> in Louisiana
> cause they ain’t no under ground
> in Louisiana
> There is only
> Under water. (11)

Moments later, the anthropomorphised Washing Machine appears, and tells us that it is 1963. These details place Caroline within a Southern context during the height of the Civil Rights movement. In the CFT production, this was emphasised by a number of added details: as the audience filed into the theatre, they encountered a statue front and centre of the otherwise empty thrust stage. Bearing a Confederate flag, its plaque read 'The South's Defender'. As the lights went down to signal the start of the play the auditorium filled with the sound of crashing water, and dark figures pulled down the statue and carried it offstage. This toppling – which the audience later learns was partially accomplished by Caroline's daughter Emmie – is a symbol of changing times, and is referred to several times over the course of the play.[44]

Kushner uses *Caroline*'s Civil Rights-era context as an opportunity to comment on the continuing socioeconomic inequalities arising from America's history of racial discrimination. In the introduction to the libretto he writes that '[t]he failure of [the United States] to address racism and poverty, domestically and globally, has been a terrible failure, its cost incalculable, and the worst consequences have not yet arrived' (xv). Kushner's reference to further consequences was prescient, as illustrated by 2005's Hurricane Katrina, which occurred after *Caroline'*s debut. During this crisis a humanitarian disaster was created by government failure of initiative, combined with socioeconomic disparities, rooted in historical and present-day discrimination.[45] Seventy-thousand people, the majority of whom were black, elderly, or poor, were not evacuated ahead of the storm, and subjected to horrific conditions (most notably in Louisiana Superdome).[46] The situation was so extreme that Marcus and Best use Katrina as an example of why scholarly symptomatic

[44] For a brief commentary on the relevance of *Caroline* to the national removal of Confederate statues prompted by white nationalist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia (August 2017), see Brad Rhines, '"Change" Can't Come Soon Enough', *American Theatre*, 2017 <http://www.americantheatre.org/2017/08/18/change-cant-come-soon-enough/> [accessed 21 August 2017].

[45] Tom Davis, 'Chairman's Opening Statement', *Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina (Hurricane Katrina: Preparedness and Response by the State of Louisiana)*, 2005 <http://www.katrina.house.gov/hearings/12_14_05/ witness_list_121405.htm>.

[46] See also Jesse Jackson's response to Hurricane Katrina rescue efforts: 'Video: Sept. 2, 2005: Jesse Jackson Calls Rescue "Racist"', *ABC News* <http://abcnews.go.com/Archives/video/sept-2005-jesse-jackson-calls-rescue-racist-11496440> [accessed 29 May 2014].

reading is not needed in the twenty-first century. They argue that the '[t]he assumption that domination can only do its work when veiled' is 'superfluous in an era when […] the real-time coverage of Hurricane Katrina showed in ways that required little explication the state's abandonment of its African American citizens.'[47] These details are always present, operating in the background of the musical, and conjured every time Caroline refers to Louisiana being under water (as literally occurred during Katrina's storm surge). While it would be anachronistic to say that they inform Caroline's paranoid readings directly, they resonate with both Caroline's paranoia and Kushner's critique of it. Caroline's opening words and sounds speak of and to this still-unfolding history, which reverberates throughout the play both musically and dramatically, and allows for no complacent expectation that the end to Caroline's problems are close at hand.

Caroline's position is further established through her relationships and conversations with the three anthropomorphised characters that join her in her labour. The Washing Machine is cheerful and new. The Radio is a trio of singers, who channel the Ronnettes and Supremes. The Dryer is devilish, and Caroline suffers in his baking heat. As the National and CFT productions attest, these characters can be staged in multiple ways. The Lyttelton Theatre at the National is large, and set designer Ricardo Hernandez used this space to make the basement big and tall. The anthropomorphised performers initially stood on a balcony, each placed directly above the physical machine that they represented.[48] They sang down to Caroline (Tonya Pinkins) from their lit alcoves, dressed in era-appropriate costumes. Fly Davis's smaller set in the Minerva Theatre at CFT, meanwhile, saw the appliances appear on the same level as Caroline throughout. The lower level of the set was Caroline's domain, and was backed by a high balcony and stairs symbolic of the Gellman's space. To maximise movement, the centre of the thrust stage consisted of a circle, surrounded by a concentric ring. Both rotated independently. Throughout most of the first scene Caroline/Clarke stood in the central circle. Meanwhile, the

[47] Best and Marcus, p. 2.
[48] In this production Melinda Parris played the Washing Machine, Ramona Keller, Joy Malcolm, and Nataylia Roni the Radio, and Clive Rowe the Dryer.

anthropomorphised performers, outfitted in futuristic, synthetic materials, danced, stalked, walked, and sang using the moving, outer circle.[49] For example, the Washing Machine/Bryan wore a dress made of plastic bubbles, and wheeled about an actual washing machine on coasters, her moves carefully choreographed. This alters the dynamics of their relationships: in the CFT production, the appliances are on Caroline's level, and can get close to her, offering physical comfort or threat. In the National, they sing down to her, their force emotional.

In the CFT production the characters' synthetic costumes signify that they are the embodied manifestations of technology, representing different aspects of modern history and the capitalist system within which Caroline labours. They are also likely the emanations of Caroline's psyche, visible only to her. While they acknowledge the other characters who share their space – in both productions Emmie dances in sync with the singing Radio at one point – they are never addressed directly, or physically touched by anyone but Caroline. In light of my use of Sedgwick and Klein it is tempting to read them as externalized 'part objects', especially because the Washing Machine and Dryer are things onto which Caroline has projected 'good' and 'bad'. However, this is an over-simplification of the role of these differing, embodied characters, who comfort, advise, tempt, and threaten Caroline, and have agency beyond her.

The Washing Machine is the first anthropomorphised character to speak, her opening lines following directly after Caroline's:

> Consequences unforeseen.
> Consequences unforeseen.
> Put your faith and clothes in me,
> a brand-new Nineteen-Sixty-Three
> seven cycle wash machine. (11)

The Washing Machine is clearly caught up in the cult of her own newness. As she takes over from Caroline, the music changes; drums and base pick up, and Caroline's

[49] At CFT the Washing Machine was played by Me'sha Bryan, the Radio by Gloria Onitiri, Jennifer Saayeng, and Keisha Amponsa Banson, and the Dryer by Ako Mitchell.

Blues chords are incorporated into a more elaborate tune. Confident in her abilities as a 'brand-new […] seven cycle' model, the Washing Machine comically asks Caroline to 'put your faith and clothes in me'. She is an embodiment of technological progress, and represents the penetration of change into Caroline's basement. This modifies Caroline's opening claim that 'nothing ever happen underground| in Louisiana' (11).

However, The Washing Machine's claims of newness are overshadowed by the twice-repeated phrase '[c]onsequences unforeseen'. In the Broadway Cast Recording these lines are sung by Capathia Jenkins with drawn-out relish. They are ambiguous, having no clear subject or tense, and mark the Washing Machine's complex relationship with paranoia. Her words may be an anticipation of the future (the musical's trajectory later suggests they are), but if this is the case, rather than attempting to pin that future down, she joyfully acknowledges that not all consequences will be predicted, or even predictable. Against Caroline's paranoia, the Washing Machine might be read as a healthy depressive, who acknowledges unforeseen and unintended consequences without being paralysed by apprehension. However, she is also a symbol of repeated processes, of progress that 'agitates' 'round and round' (13), in a cycle whose purpose is to always achieve the same result (clean clothes). Her technology helps Caroline but also implicitly contributes to her cycles of suffering.

The Washing Machine's giddy forebodings are juxtaposed with the temporal narratives represented by the Radio and Dryer. Like the Washing Machine, they are symbols of what might be called the 'proper' movement of progress, brought into the domestic sphere. In *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman argues that constructions of time as seamless, unified and forward moving are 'implanted' in the body in such a way that 'institutional forces come to seem somatic facts'. [50] They are part of 'chrononormativity', or the temporal regulation that binds us to 'socially meaningful embodiment'. This form of regulation is like the paranoid genealogies of which

[50] Freeman, pp. xxii, 3–5.

Sedgwick speaks, because both require dogged repetition. Freeman argues that subjectivity emerges through mastery of certain forms of time. 'Properly' temporalized bodies are linked by state and representational apparatuses to narratives of movement and change, in which teleological schemes of events – including descent and legacy – are strategies for living. However, this normative time is also a regime of mastery, which uses time 'to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity', and converts asymmetrical power relations into ordinary bodily tempos.[51]

Time, as a form of mastery felt in the body, is of particular importance in 'Washer/ Dryer', where each of the appliances imposes time upon Caroline. For example, the Radio, whose Supremes and Ronettes-like persona sweeps the audience back to the early 1960s, works to keep Caroline compliant and in her place by repeatedly reminding her of the time. Conventionally a tool of mass communication, tracking the time and announcing history as it is made, in this scene the Radio communicates no local or national news to Caroline. Instead, its songs are about Caroline's personal situation, pointing out her deficiencies and desperation, and announcing when '[t]ime's come' to turn on the Dryer (15). It not only ensures that Caroline's work is done according to schedule, but continuously relates the passing of time to things that worry, upset, or make her feel overwhelmed. Where the Washing Machine suggests one need not be afraid of change, the Radio pushes Caroline into paranoia's dogged temporal schemes. The two represent different ways of reading the same context.

The Dryer is the last of the three objects to appear. Old and rusted, he is directly juxtaposed with the Washing Machine. He too represents domestic technology, but he is the cause of repeated returns to 'hell'. The Dryer makes the basement extremely hot; he describes himself as transforming it into a 'purgatory', causing Caroline physical suffering, which the Radio implies is a punishment for her sins (16-17). This fall into hell is a routine part of Caroline's day. The Dryer repeatedly sings

[51] Freeman, p. 3.

that 'Time has come' to 'turn [him] on' and later to 'suffer heat!' (17). The Radio, overlapping the Dryer, also repeats that 'Time's come!' (16). In the National production, Clive Rowe's Dryer is urbanely dressed in a black suit. He is raised on a balcony separate to the Washing Machine and Radio. Caroline repeatedly and anxiously glances up at him as she loads the laundry into the dryer. In the CFT production Ako Mitchell plays the Dryer as sexually threatening, frequently entering Caroline's personal space while she uncomfortably and angrily tries to ignore him. In this performance especially, the Dryer represents not only the suffering of Caroline's work, but the force of patriarchy, which combines with those of capital, technology, and the media to oppress her.

This is epitomized by the sadistic tone of his music, which in this scene also evokes slave labour. Suffering heat is a regulated, mandatory aspect of the labour imposed upon Caroline by capital's demands on her time and body. The Dryer's song, initially sung with a soulful, Mo-town sound, slows considerably towards the end, until just after he states 'time has come to suffer heat!' Here, his words stop, replaced by the resonant rise and fall of his voice, a mournful sound that is backed by steady drumbeats, which at first seem almost to keep the time. The extreme heat suffered by Caroline is reminiscent of slave narratives, including that of Harriet Jacobs, whose days hidden in a tiny garret above a shed owned by her aunt and uncle were characterized by intense heat.[52] In line with the repetitions of paranoid temporality, this moment may even suggest that when she puts the Dryer on Caroline is cast back to an enslaved condition. As he says to Caroline before she turns him on, '[y]ou know this story' (17). The basement is 'the Pit of [her] abasement', where she repeatedly casts herself into exploitative, uncomfortable labour (16-17).

The Dryer and Radio thus represent the repetitive, predictable nature of Caroline's experience. It is clear that she has good reason for feeling that nothing changes in the basement. As the differing embodiments of timely, domestic technologies, the Washing Machine, Radio, and Dryer also represent terrible historical legacies, which

[52] Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*, ed. by Lydia Maria Child (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861) <http://archive.org/details/incidentsinlifeo1861jaco> [accessed 2 May 2014].

arouse paranoid feeling in Caroline. 'Washer/Dryer' is an uncanny performance of what Freeman calls a '*dialectics* of feeling'. As she notes, 'we feel through and with representational, technological and social forms whose histories are uneven and overlapping'.[53] Here, those representational and technological forms magically come to life, their bodies and voices literally overlapping as they sing in duets, trios and quartets. For Caroline, the overlapping voices of these contrasting technologies of change, progress and history combine to produce an overwhelming sense of despair. Following the Dryer's final, mournful notes, and backed by the slow, steady beat of the drum which is part of his leitmotif, Caroline finally explains her situation, beginning with the repeated line: 'I got four kids' (17). Here, all of the tensions nascent in the first part of the scene erupt, as she shows that she tolerates these repeated abuses of dignity in order to support her children.

Backed by the deep notes of the Dryer, which are mournful, sinister, and sometimes almost conciliatory, she sings: 'It Nineteen-Sixty-Three and I| wish every afternoon I die' (17). Caroline feels her 'meek' labour as a form of physical and symbolic abuse. In the National production, as Caroline/Pinkins sings that it is like 'getting hit| and turning cheek' (18), the Dryer/Rowe hit the wall beside him with his cane, crying out as if he was beating her. She accepts this plight for the sake of her children, and for the thirty dollars a week on which they get by. If she allows herself to change – or even want to change – she feels she will jeopardize this. The scene's final lines, which Caroline sings alone and without the backing of any of the machines, are a slightly varied repetition of its opening lines – where nothing ever happens under ground in Louisiana, because it's 'always' underwater. Although time outside of the basement is manifestly moving, Caroline's daily routine returns her repeatedly to a hellish state in which she cannot allow herself to change, and must actively guard against its possibility.

'Washer/Dryer' is thus a reflection on and representation of a domestic moment, infiltrated by the symbols of 'progressive' history, but also caught in a continuous

[53] Freeman, p. 127.

loop. In a changing world, Caroline's body is not 'properly' temporalized. Her experiences, both physical and affective, reveal that the narratives of progress attached to capitalist politics and represented by the technologies of the basement, are not viable strategies for living. Her paranoid refusal of change (even as she secretly longs for it), her expectation that any alteration will mean yet more bad surprises, and her repeated experience of suffering heat, show that capitalist temporal rhythms do not move her forward, but take her back to the same place again and again. Caroline's paranoia thus both responds to and highlights social injustice. This disrupts narratives that might attempt to elide or hide the legacies of Southern discrimination and socioeconomic disparity. At the same time, this scene highlights the damage done to Caroline by her (enforced) paranoid temporal narrative, in which nothing changes, and each instant must imitate one that has passed. As the play continues, Kushner's text will further disrupt these narratives, representing legacy as overlapping, uneven and never settled, characterised by 'consequences unforeseen' (11).

'The Consequence Unforeseen': Caroline and Reparative Reading

While in the first parts of *Caroline* the paranoid position is prominent, this is not the only way that it shows us how to read legacies. It eventually makes room for an alternative model of reading, in which 'consequences unforeseen' bring reparative resources and new generational narratives. These do not erase the paranoid position – the propulsive energy that exposes bad surprises remains – but acknowledge that that which is unanticipated can also be good, and that not all things that are hidden are negative. The reparative readings offered in the latter part of the play offer alternative, queer approaches to its narratives regarding legacy and change. As Sedgwick notes, it is a 'feature of queer possibility – only a contingent feature, but a real one, and one that in turn strengthens the force of contingency itself – that our generational relations don't always proceed in […] lockstep'.[54] It is not always the case that children must relive the experiences of their progenitors.

[54] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 147.

Key to the play's reparative reading is the relationship between Caroline's work and her children. As Aaron Thomas argues, Caroline's explicit concern with her children is one of the ways that the play destabilizes the legacy of the 'mammy' figure, whose motherhood of the white child conventionally takes precedence over her own.[55] Caroline's work is, in several instances, presented as having a detrimental effect on her ability to impart a legacy that is of value to Larry, Emmie, Jackie, and Joe. In the play's eleventh scene, she is confronted by Dotty after she misses a week of work in the aftermath of her fight with Noah. Dotty does not know that this has happened, but she has seen Caroline argue with Emmie at the Chanukah Party. During this fight, Emmie, having been scolded by her mother for speaking back when Mr Stopnick criticizes African American non-violence, argues that Caroline's actions perpetuate a legacy of servitude and degradation. She sarcastically cries: 'Mamma teach me what you know| How to keep my head tucked low' (92). Dotty knows differently – she criticizes Emmie for her conceit, saying 'Think bein a maid what she prefer?' (93). Yet, in her address to Caroline, Dotty perpetuates Emmie's discourse, singing:

> Caroline, Emmie is young, she don't know about you,
> About what you'd do if you'd a mind to.
> Change yourself, Caroline,
> Learn something new!
> Show her your fire, show her your grit,
> Show her your new face. (114)

When Caroline asks how she should do this, Dotty tells her to quit her job. Caroline cannot do this, saying: 'It too late' (114). For Dotty, who is attending college and has a boyfriend with a car, Caroline's life of domestic repetitions prevents her from showing a 'new face'. Without this, her legacy to her daughter is of no worth within society's progressive narrative. Dotty caps off her argument to Caroline by saying: 'This ain't time for prayin. You got to think', explicitly linking the discourse of change to the secular logic of progressive modernity (115). It is at this point that Caroline casts Dotty out of her life.

[55] Thomas.

After her confrontation with Dotty, Caroline is left alone on stage in a state of despair. 'Lot's Wife', the musical number that follows, is the second emotional climax of the performance. Still caught 'Sixteen feet below sea level', spot-lit and singing only to the audience and to God, Caroline reflects on the terrible effect that money has had on her: 'That money reach in and spin me about,| my hate rise up, rip my insides out' (116). She laments speaking her 'hate' to Noah, and decries the fact that 'pocket change' has 'changed' her (116). She is desperate to go back to the way she was before. In the Broadway Cast Recording (where Caroline is also played by Tonya Pinkins) her emotional turmoil is implicit in the way that her words are rapidly spoken more than sung, and are out of synch with the ominous music that plays. She begs God to 'Drag me back to that basement again' (116). It is with these thoughts in mind that she begins, again, to sing with the music, in a number that marks her self-perceived place amidst mounting societal change. Remarking that 'hope's fine – |till it turn to mud', she sings:

> And some folks goes to school at nights,
> some folks march for civil rights.
> I don't.
> I ain't got the heart,
> I can't hardly read.
> Some folks do all kinds of things and
> black folks someday live like kings
> and someday sunshine shine all day!
> Oh sure it true
> it be that way
> but not for me –
> this also true:
> ya'll can't do what I can do
> ya'll strong but you ain't strong like me[.] (117)

Pointing to her almost-inability to read, Caroline puts Dotty's already-achieved goal (going to night school) alongside more utopian dreams of wealth for all and constant sunshine. Caroline elsewhere states that she would rather night 'stay| nighttime forever' (47), suggesting that she is also out of sync with even the dreams of others. Still, she does not deny the possibility of these things when she notes that it is 'also true' that none of the people achieving or dreaming these things can do what she can. Her strength is manifest in her ability to slam the iron – symbol of her labour –

down on her heart, her throat, her sex, until there's no air left in her. In the National production Pinkins harshly slams down on the air again and again with both hands, showing the effort that this takes. She must treat her heart, voice and desire as objects to be split from an authentic Caroline. This is how she will 'rearrange herself', how she'll 'change!' (118).

Here, Caroline acknowledges the cost at which she returns to what she was before, keeping at bay the changes wrought by Noah's pocket change, which has briefly given her an easier life. To return, she must in effect murder herself, and she asks God to do just this, softly crying: 'Murder me God down in that basement,| murder my dreams so I stop wantin' (118). She wishes, like Lot's wife turning back toward the destroyed city of Sodom, to be turned 'to salt| a pillar of salt |a broken stone' (118). Only then will she be 'set free' from the 'evil' that she has done, and the 'sorrow' that would 'make evil' of her.

Freedom, for Caroline, is not an expected release from the cycles of labour, nor is it an abundance of money, or and integration into the march of progress. It is a space of suppression; one in which there is no breath, and where change and desire can no longer touch her. From here, she can anticipate all change while experiencing none. Nevertheless, as the Washing Machine and Moon sing, 'secret little tragedies' can also coexist with 'costly quiet victories' (123). It is suggested that Caroline will repair her relationship with Noah. In another nighttime conversation across the miles between their homes, Caroline acknowledges the unspeakable sorrow within them both, allowing Noah to share in her secret tragedies, and perhaps helping him to 'learn how to lose things' (124).

However, the play does not leave the audience in this (almost) breathless space. In the Epilogue, entitled 'Emmie's Dream', it makes its most significant commentary about descent and legacy, rupturing paranoid temporality's stiff, defensive reading of legacy. While the audience may believe that they have already seen the unforeseen consequences of discrimination, economic disparity and generational lockstep unfold, there is another, reparative 'consequence unforeseen'. This

consequence is Emmie, whose arrival on stage is announced by the Moon, waking the world to 'prepare| for the consequence unforeseen' (125). As the Moon sings this, Caroline is still on stage. Emmie appears in her nightgown, and '*Caroline looks at her, then goes inside, giving her daughter the stage*' (125). Catherine Barnes Stevenson reads this as the symbolic act of turning the world over to Emmie. [56]

Throughout the play, the most important local news that we hear about Lake Charles is that the town's statue honouring a Confederate soldier (and therefore, symbolic of the Confederate will to keep African Americans enslaved) has disappeared, and later that its decapitated body has been found. In the Epilogue, Emmie explains that she was involved in tearing the statue down. In an imagined conversation the evil statue asks who she is, and she replies:

> [']Emmie Thibodeaux!
>
> 'I'm the daughter of a maid,
> in her uniform, crisp and clean!
> Nothing can ever make me afraid!
> You can't hold on, you Nightmare Men,
> Your time is past now on your way
> […]
> For change come fast and change come slow, but
> Everything changes!
> And you got to go!' (126)

Emmie is actively aiding in creating a new world. In these last three lines, she appropriates the Moon and Dotty's motif that 'change comes'. In doing so, she breaks the pattern of both the refrain and the past. The Moon's lines 'Change come fast and change come slow,| but change come, Caroline Thibodaux' are altered, the second line replaced with 'everything changes'. Rather than trying to insist that her mother change, Emmie insists on the long-awaited change necessary for social justice. The power of her words is emphasised by the music, which builds in a vibrant roll, close to the sound of thunder sheets, as she casts the statue out. In the CFT production during this scene Emmie (played by Abiona Omonua) leaps onto the

[56] Stevenson, p. 773.

washing machine (the appliance), which has been left centre stage, without its anthropomorphised emanation. She occupies, in a literal sense, the space of Caroline's work and of the Washing Machine, and uses it to make herself tall.

Her crescendo is, however, suddenly interrupted by the sound of her brothers shushing her, telling her not to wake their mother. They sing:

> Mama sleepin, she work all day.
> Don't wake Mama, let her sleep,
> let her dream till the morning come.
> She been workin hard… (126)

Although we never physically see Caroline return to the basement, the boys' shushing sound still associates her with it. As Drew Daniel notes, sound always vibrates through '(social) space', and the potential to productively misrecognize it is always there.[57] Here the boys' sound is reminiscent of the hissing of steam and machinery. It acts as a visceral reminder of the basement in which Caroline continues to work, and suggests that they may also experience it as a legacy. However, for now, Caroline's children give her space to dream, and be nourished and healed by sleep. Although the Moon has just declared that morning has arrived, Caroline is given time for rest.

As she sleeps, Emmie closes the play by re-appropriating her mother's vision of the water-logged Louisiana landscape. Taking the hands of her brothers, she sings:

> I'm the daughter of a maid.
> She stands alone where the harsh winds blow:
> Salting the earth so nothing grow
> too close; but still her strong blood flow…
> Under ground through hidden veins,
> down from storm clouds when it rains,
> down the plains, down the high plateau,
> down to Gulf of Mexico.
> Down to Larry and Emmie and Jackie and Joe.

[57] Drew Daniel, 'Scambling Harry and Sampling Hal', in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by Madhavi Menon, Series Q (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 121–29 (p. 128).

The children of Caroline Thibodeaux. (127)

Stevenson calls this 'a paean to the heroic legacy of her mother'.[58] Here, Emmie assumes a profoundly reparative discourse. Her words fully embrace her descent from Caroline. They also reverberate with pride and love for her mother, whose isolation she understands keenly. It should be remembered, here, that 'love' is '[a]mong Klein's names for the reparative process'.[59] Evoking the Louisiana landscape in which Caroline is submerged, Emmie offers a queered reading of her mother. Her blood flows from the heavens and into the earth, where it is hidden, but not 'trapped tween the Devil and the muddy brown sea' as Caroline often proclaims herself to be (116). It flows outwards, towards the ocean, travelling vast distances, saturating the landscape, and passing down to her children.

Here, Caroline's legacy to her children is not structured by the paradoxical progressive/repetitious movement of a capitalist society, or the limitations of the mammy stereotype. We have already seen that Emmie is not caught in generational lockstep with her mother. However, she has nevertheless inherited something important from her. She and her brothers inherit from Caroline as from the cycles of the earth, and what they inherit is the power to overthrow 'Nightmare Men' (126). In both productions, the play ends with vibrant, rising light. This takes the form of a sunrise in the National production. In the CFT production the children (Emmie/Omonua still crouching on the washing machine) turn to the back of the stage, where Caroline/Clarke appears on the balcony. Finally free and high, she stands in a door that has previously been reserved for the Gellmans alone. Golden light floods outward from behind her, suffusing the whole stage, and affecting a powerful visual change resembled by nothing else in the production.

Emmie's final image of Caroline, and the rising light of this epilogue, can be juxtaposed with the narrative of the mournful Bus. In the first part of the play, when he enters to announce Kennedy's assassination, he sings of bleeding earth imagining

[58] Stevenson, p. 773.
[59] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 128.

'Deluge flood ice water rise' and declaring 'Now come the flood' (34). The Bus's vision of the apocalypse brought about by the death of the President is one of a freezing watery end. Yet, as Emmie points out, JFK was not necessarily an effective president, and didn't fulfil his promises to oppressed minorities once he had gained their votes (43). Caroline, who is often called 'President of the United States' by the admiring Noah, transcends these images of wounded earth and apocalyptic flooding (14). Her flooded landscape gives life to her children.

Emmie's reparative transformation of her mother's vision of being caught underwater casts her legacy in a different light. Caroline's legacy leads to change and progress, but an unsettled, queered progress, brought about by a liquid cycle which is neither a continuous loop nor unrelentingly teleological. The association of Caroline with both falling rain and flowing water links her to the weather, which Sedgwick describes as 'absolutely rule-bound cyclical economy' and 'irreducibly unpredictable contingency', the two always operating together.[60] Caroline's legacy exists at a similar juncture, her repetitions, her particular relationship with the legacies of the past, coexisting with the unpredictable consequences of her love, which transmits nascent, undetonated revolutionary energy. What we see here is 'subterranean' change, unfolding at a radically different pace, even to that evoked by Kushner in his introductory comments about of Lake Charles (xi).

In having Emmie read Caroline's legacy as such, Kushner also plays with two other legacies. On one level, her passionate description of her mother's blood coming to imbue the landscape carries strong echoes of the Transcendentalist tradition. This sense is reinforced by her name's homophonous relationship with the surname of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Like Emerson – and unlike Caroline – Emmie sees the landscape of Louisiana as beautiful. She is like Emerson's lover of nature, 'whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained

[60] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust*, ed. by Johnathan Goldberg (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011) <https://www.dawsonera.com/readonline/9780822394921/startPage/18> [accessed 2 May 2014].

the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood [or womanhood]'.[61] Kushner quotes Emerson's 'On Art' (1841) in the epigraph to *Perestroika* (1992), and his words can also be used to read *Caroline*:

> Because the soul is progressive,
> it never quite repeats itself,
> but in every act attempts the production
> of a new and fairer whole.[62]

Emerson's words connect change, figured as the inevitable alteration of that which is itterable, with the reparative impulses of art, which seeks to construct a 'new and fairer whole'. Kushner's versification of Emerson's sentence emphasises the words 'act' and 'production' in the third line: they have the double valence of human action and the staging of a play. This can never quite repeat itself twice, as each performance is different. Here, Kushner envisages a startling connection between his progressive theatre and the affective realm of the reparative. Each new performance (literally) produces a new and (sometimes) fairer whole.

On another level, Emmie's reading of Caroline as part of the earth and of the weather comes with potentially significant problems. The association of people with nature has an oppressive past. European, colonial assertions that so-called 'natural' peoples (almost always those who were not white) should be subject to direct or indirect rule are one of the areas in which this is manifest. This mentality is reflected in Prospero's colonization of the island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, for example: according to Caliban it rightly belongs to him (though he himself may have usurped the island's spirits). For Prospero Caliban is one 'on whose nature| Nurture can never stick', and he has no qualms about enslaving him and taking his home.[63] In this

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[61] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Nature', in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*, ed. by Larzer Ziff, Kindle (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 37.

[62] Here, I use the versified version of this quotation used by Kushner in early publications of *Angels*. In his most recent, 'Revised and Complete' edition (published almost ten years after *Caroline*) the quotation is not versified. (Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1995), p. 145.)

[63] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest,* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and others, Second Edition (New York & London: W. W. Norton Company, 2009), pp. 1597–1657, IV.1.188-89.

final image, Kushner walks a fine line between grand, reparative gesture and implicit endorsement of yet another damaging and dangerous legacy.

Several factors keep Kushner from crossing this line. The most important of these has to do with the period in which *Caroline* is set. As the anthropomorphisation of moon and machines reminds the audience, we are (albeit contentiously) in the anthropocene, a geological epoch in which the legacy of mankind, and of industry, has brought a fundamental shift in global geology and climate. These changes to the planet are a feature of our global community, which has had a detrimental effect on the environment, but has also joined us with it in new ways. In *Angels in America*, Harper illustrates this through her references to the hole humanity has made in the ozone layer, which she imagines can be 'repaired' by the souls of the dead.[64] Emmie's vision, in its vibrant appeal to the strength that Caroline passes into the earth, suggests something similar: the possibility of healing violent global legacies through forging new connections.

In *Caroline, or Change* legacies are read by characters and audience alike. Kushner and Tesori present a number of different ways of interpreting what is passed down and transmitted between generations. In a play focused on those who have experienced discrimination – the poor, African Americans, Jews, and those who are 'queer' – they draw on both paranoid and reparative modes of reading in a move that at once exposes the damaging legacies of structural inequality, and offers the potential for their repair. These new legacies rely on more than a willingness to change. They arise from Caroline's scepticism, and Emmie's ability to rework her paranoid readings into a force for reparation and change.

To some extent Caroline's legacy remains both hidden and exposed: while the audience and Moon are aware that Emmie is 'the consequence unforeseen', Caroline and many of the play's other characters are not. However, although Caroline's legacy is transmitted through 'hidden veins', it is not secret. It can be

[64] Kushner, *Angels in America (Revised and Complete)*, pp. 284–85.

heard if listened for in the right way. In 'All Sound is Queer', Drew Daniel suggests that while our attachment to 'knowing' (a paranoid, epistemic position), allows us the 'secure grounding of verification and proof' it also protects us from 'the queer surrender of simply listening to [among others] the voices of those who testify to the theft of their labour'.[65] This includes Caroline. In my Introduction, following Jane Gallop, I envisage the process of close reading as a kind of listening: an ethical openness to taking in the voices of others.[66] Daniel writes to this when he comments that we may need to give up the protection of knowing what the consequences of things might be (and of already knowing what we will hear), and allow ourselves to listen openly to the sound of the world, which might 'rupture the commonsense of normative, "straight" life'.[67] In Kushner and Tesori's musical this sound – which includes but is not limited to words – offers new resources for politics and aesthetics, bringing a redistribution of the sensible, and a keener sense of political hearing. This is something pursued throughout Kushner's oeuvre, but which achieves particular success in *Caroline.* Kushner's representation of Caroline's legacy, symbolized by the moving waters of the planet, requires his audience to hear and read with more care and focus. Through this, they are given access to the generative realm where paranoid and reparative readings of legacy work together.

[65] Drew Daniel, 'All Sound Is Queer', *The Wire*, November 2011, pp. 42–46 (p. 45).
[66] Gallop, p. 12.
[67] Daniel, 'All Sound', p. 45.

Chapter Two

Legacy and Dispossession in *The Illusion* and *Homebody/Kabul*

This chapter undertakes a reading of Kushner's *The Illusion* (1989) with his later play *Homebody/Kabul* (2001).[1] Reading these plays with and against each other shows Kushner to treat legacy as both constituted by, and reliant upon dispossession. To argue this, I draw heavily on Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou's interpretation of dispossession, which they ascribe two, contrasting meanings: the movement beyond the boundaries of the self; and the loss of home, livelihood, possessions and land. The former dispossession connects people with each other and can be productive; the later is violent and damaging. In each play legacies dispossess people in one or both senses. However, Kushner's characters are only able to successfully transmit reparative legacies when they acknowledge their complicity in violent dispossession, and are willing travel beyond the boundaries of the self by encountering and learning from others. The legacies of characters that refuse and elide these dispossessions fail to transmit.

The Illusion and *Homebody/Kabul* are disparate in structure, setting, and theme. The former is a translation and free adaptation of Pierre Corneille's *L' Illusion Comique* (1636), which retains almost no lines translated directly from the French. It is the story of Pridamant, a greedy, narcissistic father, who has driven his son away, and now wishes to be reunited with him. It is also about the theatre. In his search, Pridamant employs the magician Alcandre, who conjures the 'memory' of Pridamant's son. He shows Pridamant a series of tragi-comic vignettes in which the son has three different names: Calisto, Clindor, and Theogenes. Pridamant is eventually shown Theogenes' death. As he is gripped by the throes of terrible

[1] A note on editions: *The Illusion* was written in 1988, premiered in 1989, and was published in 1994 (Tony Kushner and Pierre Corneille, *The Illusion* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1994). *Homebody/Kabul* premiered at New York Theatre Workshop in 2001. It was published in 2002, and a 'Revised Version' was released in 2004. I work with this most recent version unless otherwise indicated. (Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul: Revised Version* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2004). Further references to both *The Illusion* and the revised version of *Homebody* are in-text.

remorse and repentance, Alcandre reveals that Calisto/ Clindor/ Theogenes is an actor, and Pridamant and the audience have witnessed scenes from the plays in which he has performed. The son is alive and well. At first relieved, Pridamant's feelings are rapidly undercut by his distrust of the 'black-magic reconciliation' of theatre. He leaves with only ambivalent resolve to reunite with his son (81).

The plot of *Homebody/Kabul* is a partial reversal of this. An original play set in London and Afghanistan in 1998 and 1999, its first scene is an hour-long monologue, spoken by the Homebody, an unhappy London housewife. Her fragmented speech interweaves commentary on her own life, the history of Kabul and a magical encounter with an Afghan store clerk. It ends with her leaving her home, and setting off for Kabul, where the next scene picks up. The second part of the play opens with Doctor Qari Shah's gruesome description of the Homebody's death. She has been torn apart by a mob, angered by her breaking of taboo (34). Her husband Milton and their daughter Priscilla have travelled to Kabul to investigate her death and reclaim her body, which has been lost.

Priscilla refuses to accept her mother's death. Leaving her father at the hotel, she takes to the streets of Kabul in search of the Homebody's story and body (living or dead). She meets Khwaja Aziz Mondanabosh, an Esperanto poet who promises to be her guide. He endorses a non-official version of events: the Homebody has faked her death. She wishes to convert to Islam and marry a Muslim man whose first wife, Mahala, has been driven mad by grief. She further wants to send Mahala to England with Milton and Priscilla, and take her place in Kabul. Khwaja introduces Priscilla to those who corroborate his tale, among them, Mahala herself. He also carries messages from the Homebody, who purportedly refuses to speak with, see, or write to Priscilla. Khwaja's version of events thus remains unconfirmed.

Like Pridamant struggling with visions of his son, Priscilla is never able to resolve which of the Homebody's narratives is true. Unlike him, she cannot physically locate the person that she is searching for. Still unsure as to her mother's fate, she and Milton leave Afghanistan, taking Mahala with them. At the border it is revealed that

Khwaja, who had asked Priscilla to carry Esperanto poems to London, was likely trying to send anti-Taliban documents out of the country. He is killed, but Mahala saves the documents/poems, and returns to London, where she takes up residence with Milton. The play ends with a 'Periplum' (Ezra Pound's word for a voyage that revisits its starting point), a reparative return to the Homebody's kitchen, where Mahala and Priscilla speak of what has passed.[2] As in *The Illusion*, only partial resolution is offered.

These plays are both disparate and resonant, and have seen very different scholarly responses. The limited scholarly response to *The Illusion* focuses on its metatheatre.[3] The more widely studied *Homebody/Kabul* has attracted postcolonial and historiographical readings.[4] While both plays have been compared to *Angels in America* (1991/1992), mine is the first attempt to study them together. I do not do so to establish the direct influence of *The Illusion* on *Homebody/Kabul.* Rather, I am interested in moments at which the two plays resonate together, producing readings that are contrapuntal, rather than one-directional.

Kushner's treatment of legacy and dispossession in each of these plays relies on the relationship between a parent and their adult child. Both Pridamant and the Homebody think of their child as capable of inheriting their legacy and helping it to endure. Pridamant in particular wants his son to help him to 'live after' death. Working with Lee Edelman's analysis of *Hamlet* (1609), I show that the insistence that a child 'lives after' in this way brings together both aspects of dispossession: it forces the child to move beyond the boundaries of the self, but only to make space

[2] 'Periplum, N.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/141036?redirectedFrom=Periplum#eid>.
[3] The three key contributions are: Graham Wolfe, 'Tony Kushner's *The Illusion* and Comedy's "Traversal of the Fantasy"', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 26.1 (2012), 45–64 <https://doi.org/10.1353/dtc.2011.0014>; Felecia Hardison Londré, 'Two Illusions: Cultural Borrowings and Transcendence' in *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays*, ed. by James Fisher (Jefferson & London: McFarland, 2006), pp. 127–34; and Mihaylova, 'Reading Corneille with Brecht'.
[4] Examples include Judith G. Miller, 'New Forms for New Conflicts: Thinking about Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* and the Théâtre Du Soleil's *Le Dernier Caravansérail*', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 16.2 (2006), 212–19 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486800600587211>; and M. Scott Phillips, 'The Failure of History: Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* and the Apocalyptic Context', *Modern Drama*, 47.1 (2004), 1–20 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2004.0050>.

for a parent, whose will then violently displaces them. Kushner wishes to move past such legacies, and towards reparative dispossession, which – to follow the work done in Chapter One – is hopeful, open to heterogeneity, and responds to local contingency. In *The Illusion*, theatre is shown to be capable of productively dispossessing people. However, Pridamant rejects travel beyond the boundaries of the self, unless this involves his living after death through his son. He also ignores the violence and displacement to which he subjects others. As a consequence of this rejection of dispossession, he fails to transmit his legacy. In *Homebody/Kabul*, Kushner expands upon this. Unlike Pridamant, the Homebody is driven to acknowledge and repair legacies of dispossession, including the loss of love that her family has suffered. In the play's monologue, she uses dysfunctional language to reflect on her complicity in both global and familial dispossession, consciously re-working her relationship with otherness in response. Through this process, she decides that the only way to redress these dispossessions is to leave her family. Her journey to Kabul is, among other things, an intentional severing of her bond with Priscilla, intended to end her daughter's obsession with understanding and emulating the Homebody. This is rupture is a reparative legacy, which saves Priscilla, but also Mahala and the Homebody, from despair. This legacy is only successfully transmitted because both mother and daughter are dispossessed: though they violently lose each other, and the Homebody loses everything from her former life, they also meet with and learn to relate to others.

Possession, Dispossession, and Living After/Living On

Kushner's treatment of legacy as reliant on dispossession diverges from and develops readings that associate it with the transmission of possessions. The conceptual joining of inheritance and legacy to possession is epitomised by Immanuel Kant's short but seminal reflections on inheritance as a form of 'ideal acquisition'.[5] Kant's understanding of legacy relies on the possession of property. In his discussion, the reasoned will makes it possible for there to be a 'transfer

[5] For the influence of Kant on Derrida's writing about legacy, see Elizabeth Rottenberg, 'Introduction: Inheriting the Future', in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, by Jacques Derrida, ed. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 6–7.

(*translatio*) of the belongings and goods of someone who is dying to a survivor by agreement of the wills of both'.[6] Here, both the bequeather and recipient of a legacy must agree to its transfer, which then takes place in the moment of death (testator and heir need not be family). Kant argues that this understanding of legacy adheres even if the heir has not yet accepted the legacy at the time of the testator's death, or if the heir cannot 'explicitly accept, so as to acquire by his acceptance' until the testator has died. In these situations the legacy does not become ownerless at the moment of death. Rather, it becomes 'vacant', because the heir (in Kant's formulation) always tacitly accepts the right to accept or reject the bequest.[7] For Kant, so long as certain social contracts are in place, legacies are always possessed: 'the civil condition (the general will in it) confirms possession of a legacy while it hovers between acceptance and rejection and strictly speaking belongs to no one'.[8]

Yet in *The Illusion* and *Homebody/Kabul*, legacy cannot be explained by Kant's logic of possession, because he implicitly assumes the testator will have been clear in bequeathing the legacy. Kant also needs the heir to be accessible, and able to be informed that they can choose to inherit. This is the case in neither of Kushner's plays, where legacies of possession that could unfold along the lines described by Kant don't. In *The Illusion* Pridamant searches for his son in part because he 'want[s] to make him heir to [his] fortune' (6), but the heir is missing, and is not recovered. In *Homebody* the testator (if the Homebody can be called that, for Priscilla is not in search of a legal will) is presented as being both dead and alive. When Milton hands Priscilla the money from the Homebody's life insurance and bank account he does so without verification that she is dead, or any real insight into her will (95). In each case, simultaneous will is disrupted, as are the familial relationships and community upon which the transmission of a legacy depends. Rather, these legacies, involving a child and a dying/dead parent, are either left vacant by the rupture between generations, or constituted by this rupture. They are haunted by the continued spectral presence of the one who is physically absent.

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[6] Immanuel Kant, 'The Metaphysics of Morals', in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. by Allen Wood W. and Paul Guyer, trans. by Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 353–604 (p. 440).
[7] Kant, pp. 441 & 500.
[8] Kant, p. 441.

While Kant's logic of possession cannot explain Kushner's treatment of legacy in these two plays, they are clearly linked to dispossession in Butler and Athanasiou's unusual double sense. Athanasiou and Butler resist falling back on Kant's assumption that property ownership and transmission are the primary force of legacy. They work especially to challenge the idea that the propertied, Western subject is autonomous and self-sufficient. As Butler argues:

> dispossession can be a term that marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings. Yet dispossession is precisely what happens when populations lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood, and become subject to military and legal violence. […] In the first sense we are dispossessed of ourselves by virtue of some kind of contact with another, by […] being moved and even surprised and disconcerted by that encounter with alterity.[9]

Passion, grief, love, rage, and ambition, are all dispossessions in the first sense, 'forms of experience that call into question whether we are, as bounded and deliberate individuals, self-propelling and self-driven'. [10] The second, and more conventional sense of dispossession, which sees people subjected to violence and displacement, is tied into this: loss and deprivation are possible because we are relational.

Legacies can be constituted by violent dispossessions, such as the loss of land, citizenship, and livelihood, or the suffering of civil, social, or literal death. The legacies of genocide and slavery discussed in previous chapters are examples of this. However, in Kushner's plays legacies are also dependent on our status as relational, interdependent beings, and can emerge through encountering and being dispossessed by others, and through having our self-sufficiency challenged. Athanasiou and Butler's analysis of dispossession shows it to be characterised by similar internal tensions to those prevalent in Kushner's treatment of legacy. For example, a key juncture of legacy and dispossession is their mutual concern with

[9] Butler and Athanasiou, p. 3.
[10] Butler and Athanasiou, p. 4.

endurance and disposability: both might be involved in ensuring the survival of something, often to the detriment of someone or something else that is deemed to be disposable.

While Athanasiou and Butler study dispossession's role within global political and economic systems, it can also play a part in familial interactions, and the legacies that are transmitted within this context. Lee Edelman's writing on *Hamlet* – a seminal text on legacy and dispossession – illustrates that the will of a parent to survive death through their child can dispossess that child in damaging ways.[11] Hamlet is literally dispossessed after Claudius takes his father's 'property and most dear life', a legacy that he must recover.[12] However, he is also dispossessed by his decision, in remembering his father, to 'wipe away all trivial fond records' from his memory, so the dead King's 'commandment all alone shall live| Within the book and volume of my brain'.[13] In doing so, he privileges the continued survival of his dead father's will over all else within his brain.

Edelman cites Derrida to understand this survival. Following Walter Benjamin, Derrida differentiates between *überleben*: 'the traces left in the wake of someone's death', (living after) and *fortleben*: 'whatever successfully eludes the grip of death in the first place' (living on).[14] He gives both the child's survival of their parents, and the book's survival of the author, as examples of *überleben*. Edelman argues that these examples speak to a troubled opening in the border that Derrida cites them to define. He agrees that a book acts as a form of living after: it survives the author's death and might tell us more about them than a biological child would. However, a child is something altogether different:

> The child whom its *parents* leave behind is not, like a book, the product of a system we can figure through an author's name, but rather a living organism endowed with such agency as that entails, shaped by and carrying the genetic

[11] Edelman, 'Hamlet'.
[12] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, Revised Edition (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), II.2.505.
[13] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.5.98-104.
[14] Edelman, 'Hamlet', p. 98; Jacques Derrida and Jean Birnbaum, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. by Michael Nass and Pascal-Anne Brault (New York: Melville House, 2010), pp. 5–6.

> materials in which its parents *live on*. At the crossing of *überleben* and *fortleben*, then, those genetic materials which precipitate the child, constitute the site where residual trace and the thing itself coincide, where the very inscription of what is dead throbs with life and life takes its cue from a code, calling into question the distinction between living after and living on.[15]

The child is both the trace of its parents, through which they live after, and the site where their genetic code eludes death, and they live on or continue to survive. Their very existence calls the boundaries between these two states into question. In promising he will wipe clean his memory to make room for his father in the 'book and volume' of his brain, Hamlet draws out this tension:

> Because […] genetic 'living on' can offer by itself no assurance of survival in and as cultural memory, the child as biological survivor *(fortleben*) needs an educational supplement to make its survival similar to that of a book (*überleben*), a supplement that renders the biological organism a support for the ghostly imperative that Hamlet's father intones: 'Remember me'[.][16]

Hamlet, Edelman notes, 'becomes a sort of appendage to this living book, the material substrate of a survival that lives, in more than one sense, in his place'.[17] 'Remember me' becomes 'the fatal text the past inscribes on the Child, preventing the Child from living a life not out of joint with time'.[18]

Edelman's analysis of living after and living on in *Hamlet* shows how parent-child relationships can dispossess us. Hamlet establishes himself as a relational being, opening himself to his father; however, when he does so, his father's will subsumes his own, and Hamlet becomes lost to this. The pressures arising from this, and from the need to see his father's will done and bring Claudius to justice, contribute to his madness (whether feigned or real), his murdering of Polonius, and to the deaths of Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia. As Edelman points out, the spectre of his father, meanwhile, takes on new life.[19] *The Illusion* and *Homebody/Kabul,* while making no direct reference to *Hamlet*, raise similar questions about how the will of a parent

[15] Edelman, 'Hamlet', pp. 98–99.
[16] Edelman, 'Hamlet', p. 99.
[17] Edelman, 'Hamlet', p. 100.
[18] Edelman, 'Hamlet', p. 104.
[19] Edelman, 'Hamlet', p. 100.

can dispossess the child in Butler and Athanasiou's dual sense. In these texts Kushner asks how one might remain open to encounters with alterity brought about by legacies, both parental and otherwise, whilst resisting the violent dispossession that insists that we memorialize our forbearers and conceptualize the future as such.

The Illusion

One of Kushner's earliest plays, *The Illusion* presents legacy as both constituted by and dependant upon dispossession. This is scrutinized through the play's experiments in metatheatre. Throughout, theatre's magic and deception are under inspection, as is the relationship that it establishes between audience and actors. Theatre mediates Pridamant's relationship with his son, and influences his choices regarding the transmission of legacy. For Pridamant, the condition of the transmission of his legacy is that his son must live after him, and act as a supplement to him. He refuses to move beyond the fiction of self-sufficiency, or to acknowledge the different kinds of dispossession that he encounters through Alcandre's theatrical magic and his son's performances. This refusal means that he fails to transmit his legacy.

Pridamant's relationship with his son can be contrasted with that between Kushner and Pierre Corneille, from whose text *The Illusion* is adapted. Although not parent and child, Kushner and Corneille interact along a similar vertical axis: in this case, of authorial filiation. *The Illusion* is an adaptation, in which Kushner inherits and translates Corneille's text, actively re-reading and changing it. Through this treatment of Corneille, Kushner emphasises that the limitations Pridamant places on his legacy – which he will only transmit if it is maintained and not changed by his son – are unnecessary, when legacy can instead be a flexible site for collaboration.

Corneille's *L'Illusion Comique* (1636) was written during and is set in seventeenth century France. Kushner's adaptation is also set in this period, and technically takes place entirely within the cave of the magician Alcandre. In the introduction to his 1989 translation of *L'Illusion Comique*, Ranjit Bolt describes Corneille's play as 'so

wonderfully weird as to defy alteration'. [20] The original was criticised for incoherence, and inconsistent characterization and tone.[21] Corneille described it as a 'strange monster' (*étrange monstere*).[22] Kushner's adapted *The Illusion* around the same time as Bolt wrote his translation. He does what Bolt believes cannot be done, and successfully alters the original. In the Acknowledgements, Kushner states: 'This version of Corneille's *L'Illusion Comique* contains several scenes and many speeches which do not appear in the French original. There are virtually no lines directly translated from French' (np.). Where in their translations both Bolt (1989) and Richard Wilbur (2012) attend to Corneille's rhyming couplets and style, Kushner opts for prose and blank verse. [23] The dialogue is clearly marked with what Ben Brantley calls Kushner's 'densely whorled verbal fingerprints'.[24]

Kushner also structurally alters the play. In Corneille's text, Alcandre presents Pridamant with visions of his son in four parts. In each scene the son, Clindor, interacts with the same characters. Kushner breaks from Corneille by dividing the encounters into three visions/vignettes. The son plays a different character and has a different name in each. So too do the actors playing his rival, his love interest, and her companion. While confused by the name changes, Pridamant believes they are the same character in each vignette. In the first vision Pridamant's son is named Calisto. He tries to woo the rich Melibea. In the second, which most closely resembles Corneille's text, the son is named Clindor. He works for the madman Matamore, the only character to appear under the same name in multiple visions. Through duels, murder, and prison, Clindor succeeds in seducing and later marrying his beloved, now called Isabelle. However, he finds she has beggared herself to be with him, giving up her legacy. In the third vignette, Pridamant's son is named

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[20] Pierre Corneille, *The Liar | The Illusion*, trans. by Ranjit Bolt (Bath: Absolute Classics, 1989)'Introduction'.
[21] J. G. Mallinson, *The Comedies of Corneille: Experiments in the Comic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 163.
[22] Pierre Corneille, *The Theatre of Illusion*, trans. by Richard Wilbur (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc, 2012).
[23] Corneille, *The Liar | The Illusion*; Corneille, *The Theatre of Illusion*.
[24] Ben Brantley, 'Tony Kushner's "Illusion" From Signature Theater - Review', *The New York Times* (New York, 5 June 2011) <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/06/theater/reviews/tony-kushners-illusion-from-signature-theater-review.html> [accessed 5 February 2017].

Theogenes. He is unhappily married to his love interest, now known as Hippolyta. In this final vision, Theogenes is killed for committing adultery. This brings about the cathartic climax in which Pridamant discovers he has witnessed a series of plays. Although Kushner's changes increase the play's structural uncertainty, once the trick at the end is revealed, these interventions retrospectively clarify what has gone on. The many names of Calisto/Clindor/Theogenes are bound together under the unknown name of their actor, Pridamant's son. Corneille's dramatic experiment – its poor coherence, unstable characterization, and shifting style – is elucidated when read against the adaptation.

Kushner is thus engaged in a reciprocal, contrapuntal relationship with Corneille, who is both collaborator and father-figure. Of course, Kushner is free to bend Corneille's play to his volition because it has no copyright and is not possessed by any one group. His free adaptation is backed by an understanding of legacy that sees it as necessary to break away from the will of one's predecessors, and to interpret the world differently to them. Unlike Hamlet, who wipes his present-memory clean to become the vessel for his father's memory, or Pridamant who wants his son to do this, Kushner is not focused on preservation, or ensuring that Corneille continues to live after. His adaptation acknowledges that the things that we inherit and pass on – including texts – should be open to change. This is a key element in understanding Kushner's approach to legacy in theatre, which partakes in adaptation, repetition with difference, and outright transformation.

Pridamant and the Amanuensis

In contrast to Kushner's flexible relationship with Corneille and his legacy, Pridamant has a restrictive understanding of how his son and proposed heir should interact with him. Their future relationship, in Pridamant's eyes, hinges on three things: the re-connection should be painless for him; his son should feel guilty for his past actions, and as recompense should make space in his life for Pridamant; and Pridamant should have the power to lift his son out of imagined poverty by making him his heir. However, within Alcandre's cave Pridamant's will is undercut. As he watches the conjured visions of the past, he experiences increasing pain, passion,

and agony over his son's experiences. He is shown that his property cannot make him completely self-sufficient, and he is dispossessed, in the inter-relational sense outlined by Butler and Athanasiou. Pridamant's dispossession, which he is able to reject, is juxtaposed with that of Alcandre's mutilated servant, the Amanuensis. The Amanuensis both accompanies Alcandre and Pridamant on stage and pierces the barrier of Alcandre's illusions. Dispossessed in the violent second sense of the word, he complicates Pridamant's story and the play's treatment of legacy.

The Amanuensis is another addition made by Kushner. The word 'amanuensis' means '[o]ne who copies or writes from the dictation of another'.[25] He is Alcandre's servant and artistic assistant. While the word 'slave' is never used, he has been 'acquired' by Alcandre, and is vulnerable to the magician (24). Alcandre has removed his tongue and pierced his eardrums, but can return these to the Amanuensis when convenient. The Amanuensis thus experiences terrible violence, dispossession, and instrumental use.

Pridamant and the Amanuensis are introduced together. Pridamant enters Alcandre's dark cave alone. In the stage directions, '*The Amanuensis appears, dressed in black, silent*' (3). Without his hearing or a tongue, he offers Pridamant only silence when asked 'Is this the cave of the magician Alcandre?' (3). His inability to respond to verbal prompts and commands increases Pridamant's anxiety. After unleashing a defensive introduction of himself as a wealthy potential patron and lawyer, Pridamant turns angrily to leave. It is only then that the Amanuensis finally moves, knocking loudly on the floor. Announced by the knock, a voice – Alcandre's – then proclaims from the darkness:

> He doesn't speak because he has no tongue.
> *(Pridamant freezes. Another knock).*
> And because he's deaf he didn't catch your name. (4)

[25] 'Amanuensis, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/6001> [accessed 23 February 2015].

Here, the Amanuensis is a visual figure who uses props to make noise. Mysterious, he fits into what can, given space and budget, be a visually magical theatrical experience. Brantley, for example, describes the 2011 Signature Theatre Company production as having a stage 'wreathed in wonders' and trafficking 'in a special, baroque brand of magic in which flowers bloom out of nowhere, a half-buried piano plays itself, and spectral circles of seemingly airborne lanterns glow wanly, with the threat of sudden darkness always lurking'.[26] However he sees these visual flourishes as less ornate than the 'lavish and picturesque special effects' that come from the mouths of those onstage. The Amanuensis, at first denied the facility of speech, is in stark contrast with the rest of the actors, and especially with the soaring language of the visions.

Where the Amanuensis is at first steeped in mystery, we quickly learn about Pridamant's wish to recover lost memory and reconnect with his heir. He confides:

I destroyed my son. My only child.

This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

(5)

Pridamant uses short sentences and sentence fragments to describe his violent relationship with his son. Both factual and vague, his words carry traces of 'ferocious', excessive love and spine snapping intergenerational desire. When Alcandre asks if he 'murdered' his son, Pridamant notes the he 'might have', but his son ran before he had the chance. Having stolen some of his father's wealth, he has disappeared.

Pridamant's money is the material of the play's crisis of legacy. He ostensibly wants to find comfort in his son, and to pass his wealth onto him. He is willing to pay a high fiscal price to do this. However, his words suggest that a more sinister controlling impulse underlies this. He confides:

[26] Brantley.

> For the first time this year in the early spring I faced death in the form of a sharp, surprising tearing at my heart. A warning. Nothing of my life for the past fifteen years is real to me. I can't stop thinking about him. I can't face death until I see him again. I want to tell him I love him. I want to ask him why he never wrote. I want to tell him that the ghost of him has ruined my life, has sucked dry every present happiness and memory as well. I want to make him sick with guilt. I want to make him the heir to my fortune. He must be very poor… (6)

Pridamant claims his confrontation with mortality has driven him to seek out his child. He wants closure, answers to his son's silence and neglect, and to escape the haunting presence of 'the ghost of him', which has ruined his life. This is reminiscent of *Hamlet*, but the generations are reversed: here the son is the spectre. '[N]othing' of the life that Pridamant has lived without his son is 'real' to him: as if the presence of his child is what determines the solidity and verifiability of his experiences. These lines make clear that while Pridamant wants to return himself to reality by telling his son that he loves him, he also wants to re-establish control over him. When he states 'I want to make him sick with guilt. I want to make him the heir to my fortune', his wish to impart both guilt or illness and wealth is expressed as two, symmetrical sentences that work around the infinitive 'make'. This suggests they are mutually constituted impulses. The son can only receive his legacy if he admits some wrongdoing, and atones for this by feeling bad about it, even being sickened by it. For Pridamant, legacy is as much a tool for retaliation as a force of connection; it is certainly not reparative.

A further condition to Pridamant's renewed relationship with his son is control over how he receives the information of his whereabouts. As he ends his speech, '*Figures appear, dressed beautifully, frozen in a tableau. Calisto stands at centre*' (6). Startled and amazed, Pridamant recognizes his son, but claims that this is too much excitement for his heart. When asked what he expects the magician to give him, he says: 'Information. Memory restored. I don't know. But safely, painlessly. Crystal balls and tea leaves, not this … resurrection' (6).

As Pridamant's transactional language and demands for pain-free memory suggest, his engagement with the past, and with the visions, is explicitly self-serving. He wants to avoid everything that might dispossess him in either sense, but he is especially keen to avoid feeling beyond the point to which his furious relationship with his son has already carried him. While they initially shock him, the visions later seem perfect in this respect: he is literally outside of them, and he finds this wonderful.[27] During the first vision, where he watches his son suffer for love, Pridamant comments: 'I find myself enjoying this vision, this vindication. It's delectable. Memory without pain' (18). This painless enjoyment is not to last. The illusion is so real that it is as if Pridamant has seen a 'resurrection', and his initial shock and pain return repeatedly (6). He is subject to the power of the secret that Alcandre holds: illusion and reality are not what they seem. Even though he is never allowed to physically pass the threshold of the illusion and enter the 'stage', he comes to experience the visions as more real and powerful than his own, un-real life. This eventually threatens to dispossess him.

The play's consideration of dispossession is developed through Pridamant's interactions with the Amanuensis, both during and after the second vision. As the lights fade on the first vision, with Calisto having wooed Melibea, the theatre is filled with a '*tick-tock noise. A dim light comes up. Pridamant is alone with the Amanuensis, who is making the tick-tock noise with his tongue'* (23). Pridamant comments that this is 'impossible', to which Alcandre replies '[i]f I can bring back your son I can restore a simple little tongue' (25). Alcandre has temporarily restored the Amanuensis, but for his own ends. He needs the Amanuensis to enter into the next vision, a 'dangerous' feat that the magician claims he is now too old to perform. While Pridamant (this time by choice) remains on the sidelines, open only to 'consumption, spectation, scrutiny, not participation', the Amanuensis is sent over to take the place of Geronte, the father of Clindor's love interest Isabelle (25). Here we discover that although Pridamant is paying Alcandre money, the suffering of the Amanuensis is also the 'price' of Alcandre's magic. Alcandre explains:

[27]See Graham Wolfe for a discussion of fantasy, desire, and the spectator in *The Illusion*.

> The magic […] costs, you see, it hurts, it's dragged unwillingly from the darkest pools. [… H]is misery's my catalyst, it fuels my work. I regret the pain the journey causes him […] but … I have to keep the work interesting for myself, don't I? (30)

The illusion is fuelled by the Amanuensis's suffering, and by his disposability. He pays the price of suffering so that powerful, moneyed men might ensure the continuation of their line (in Pridamant's case) and their enjoyment (in Alcandre's). This is a violent dispossession in which the Amanuensis' very self is lost.

Once lost to a persona, the Amanuensis is further subject to the dispossession experienced by the characters he plays. Geronte, whom he plays in the second vignette, is an ironic reflection of Pridamant: a controlling father who drives away his daughter Isabelle and loses his money. In this vision, Pridamant's son is named Clindor, and he murders Isabelle's suitor. In the wake of this, she begs Geronte for Clindor's life. In response, he claims she must be a changeling, for she is upset and defiant and thus not 'sprung from the same| Flinty soil' as him (57). He loves his daughter with '[a] clean cold hard white bonelike love' (58). When Isabelle argues with him, he invites her to kill him if she wants her way. At this moment, Geronte seems to have overwhelming power, and the ability that Pridamant desires: to engage with his child without pain. Yet, he is eventually out-smarted by his daughter, her lover, and her maid Lyse. At the vision's end, they flee with his money, and he shouts after them:

> […] Return to me! My gold!
> My child! My gold! My child! My gold!
> Mine! Mine! All mine! All mine! (66)

This is a powerful but impotent invocation of paternal ownership. Geronte has lost his flintiness. His bone-lean love for his daughter still has the power to dispossess him, as he experiences not only the loss of his gold, but that of his child, whose worth he weighs equally with his money.

As this vision ends and the audience is returned to the 'present', the Amanuensis shifts back into himself, his tongue once again in place. Pridamant, recognizing him, comments 'Ah! It was you! Her father, heartless old Geronte[!…] [Y]ou … incarnated him, you did, I've known tight old bastards just like that, I found myself despising you' (66). Pridamant does not see his own similarity to Geronte; he is not open to such self-analysis. He is more interested in the magic that sees the Amanuensis's corporeal body transformed. He asks him to relay the experience of crossing over, and expresses doubt that the Amanuensis has ever had his tongue cut out or eardrums pierced. The Amanuensis responds:

> AMANUENSIS *(Hissing, furious, very fast, as though pursued)* I did! I do!
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> (66-7)

This passage, which is also a metaphor for the role of the actor, shows the Amanuensis's dispossession to operate in several, overlapping ways. His dismemberment is one feature of a larger dispossession. Apparently enslaved, he is dispossessed of himself, forced to comply with his master's will. His speech is 'pursued' because he knows that Alcandre could remove his tongue at any moment, or require him to take on the personae of another. In the latter instance, he must literally be 'possessed' by the demons of the stage and lose control of himself. Though Athanasiou and Butler do not refer to this definition, dispossession can also mean '[t]o cast out (the evil spirit by which any one is possessed); to exorcize'.[28] This would suggest that the Amanuensis is also dispossessed on each return to 'reality'. Finally, the Amanuensis shows acting and dispossession to be radically and

[28] 'Dispossess, V'., *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/55132> [accessed 27 June 2017].

reciprocally linked, the actor losing themself to each new character. Here, multiple forms of dispossession overlap in sinister ways, as encounters with the other become complete, violent (dis)possession by them.

The Amanuensis' words are in part an explanation of what it feels like to act or perform for audiences that do not want to feel or be moved by theatre – who want only entertainment, and no dispossession, passion, fury, or love. They are also the potent expression of a personal experience of dispossession. Pridamant's reaction to this dense speech is shockingly nonchalant: he does not absorb it. In fact, he seems not to hear it at all, dismissing all that has come before by saying that the Amanuensis merely 'seems upset'. He is, in every sense, the vampiric spectator/father, feeding but giving nothing in return, refusing to empathize with the suffering of others, or to recognize his complicity in this.

However, just like Geronte, Pridamant too will eventually be dispossessed. While unable to connect with the Amanuensis in 'real' life, his sense of absorption in the visions grows. He becomes increasingly tangled in them, responding to the cues designed to captivate the audience. Of course, he continues to resist feeling pain: when he sees that Theogenes (his son's name in the final vision) is caught in a desperately unhappy marriage, he responds by proclaiming 'Well I don't like this dissolution. That first vision was the best by far. I'll see if I can remember that and forget the rest of it' (71). He is not given the power of selective memory though. When the prince murders Theogenes, Pridamant finds himself devastated, unable to forget. He attempts to intervene, shouting 'No! Stop! Alcandre, stop this!' even as in the play Hippolyta (Theogenes' wife) shouts 'No! Please! Your Grace! Stop! […] Murder!' (77). In the face of his son's death, Pridamant loses the will to live, wishing to die and share a single grave with him (79). This moment of utter despair and remorse, driven by paternal grief and the impulse not to outlive his child, is what Alcandre has been waiting for. Having collected a diamond-like tear, he reveals the secret Pridamant has remained blind to: Theogenes is dead, but Pridamant's son is not. He is an actor playing the role of Theogenes. Alcandre shows him collecting the gold made by his performance.

Pridamant's response to the return of his son, and the unveiling of his physical location, is a rejection of dispossession, which causes his legacy to fail. Although his reaction to Alcandre's news is at first loving, he soon reverts to ambivalence. Ready to leave in a fit of joy at discovering that his son is still alive, Pridamant cries:

> I can go to him, I can hold him again, kiss him and apologize, beg forgiveness, I can leave behind this void, this cold and haunted emptiness and clutch him to me, warm and strong and breathing and… breathing … he *(He stops in his tracks)* He's … an actor you say.
> […]
> Then none of this was real. Not a fighter, not a pummeler of aristocrats.
> […]
> I don't know that I like that. I remember the day he was born; I looked at him; this small thing he was. I thought, 'This is not like me. This … will disappoint.' And you see … I was right. (81)

Here we see the anticipation of the coming together of father and son, as Pridamant overcomes the 'haunted emptiness' of their severed filial bond. The emphasis on breathing suggests not only life, but that Pridamant's son will now be given the choice to speak, and to accept his legacy. The dual willed transmission of legacy proposed by Kant could be fulfilled. However, as Pridamant absorbs that his son is an actor, he begins to change. Just as Geronte feels Isabelle is a changeling, he is reminded that his son is not like him. Put in Edelman's terms, he may live on in his son's genetic code, but his wild offspring will not take up a supplement through which he (Pridamant) can live after. Additionally, his son does not need Pridamant to make him a self-sufficient, propertied subject because he already makes his own money from acting. Pridamant seems almost immediately able to dismiss all of his renewed filial love, and to blame it on theatre's 'black magic reconciliation' (81). He has manifestly failed to undertake the key task of one of Kushner's audience members: he has not read critically and has – almost without thought – dismissed the power, flexibility, and reparative potential of legacies in the theatre.

Thus, at the end of the narrative Pridamant's legacy is left in a vacant state. This is not the same, expectant emptiness that Kant imagines to hold open those legacies

not yet accepted by the heir. Pridamant's legacy is vacant because he has not offered it to his son, and seems unlikely ever to do so. Although Alcandre says that one night's hard riding will reunite them, Pridamant immediately starts to make excuses to avoid meeting his child. In his final lines, he equivocates: 'I may, if health permits, go to Paris this spring, providing that they've put straw down on the muddy roads and made them passable' (82). Reflecting that it may still be good to see his son again, he ruminates 'Hmmm … All these memories, and I've forgot his name' (82). The very instability of Calisto/ Clindor/ Theogenes' name suggests a freedom from his father's will, a slipping out of parental definition. It reiterates that Pridamant's reluctance to see his son is due to his unwillingness to be once again dispossessed by a child that is not at all like him, and will not fall under his sway. The fact that Pridamant himself is played by an actor is an irony that Kushner uses to illustrate the pointless and fickle nature of this rejection.

Caught up in and dispossessed by the theatre's illusions, Pridamant is able to commit to the son who is not the same as him, and to offer him his legacy. Outside of the theatre, he is merely ambivalent; just as he ignores the Amanuensis's dispossession, he resists his own. For Pridamant the possibilities of transmitting a legacy in real life are framed and exceeded by theatre, which has the power to dispossess audiences and actors alike, and is thus a medium of dispossession. Pridamant's rejection of theatre is a refusal of encounters that take him beyond the boundaries of the self. It results in the re-reassertion of a possessive norm, epitomized by his demands of his child. The consequent foreclosure of his legacy shows that for Kushner – especially in the theatre – dispossession not only leaves legacies: it is fundamental to their transmission. In my analysis of *Homebody/Kabul* I show this to be especially the case for reparative legacies.

Homebody/Kabul

Homebody/Kabul was written ten years after *The Illusion* and continues Kushner's exploration of legacy as a form of dispossession. It shows that embracing one's lack of self-sufficiency, and acknowledging one's complicity in violent dispossession, allows for the successful transmission of reparative legacies. In this play global forces

of dispossession – including imperialism and neo-colonialism – are juxtaposed with intimate ones, such as the force of the Homebody's dysfunctional language. Elliptical and discursive, her language re-arranges and fragments the familiar, bringing those who listen to it – both the audience and Priscilla – into contact with the unexpected and uncomfortable. Through this, the Homebody demands reassessment of the relationship between self and other. For the audience this can be productive, inciting us to critically engage with both the Homebody and the legacies of dispossession that she addresses. In contrast, for Priscilla it is dangerous. She longs so powerfully to understand her mother that she becomes lost in her pursuit of her, much as Hamlet becomes lost in the will of his father. I show that the Homebody's departure to Kabul is her legacy: it severs the dangerous intergenerational bond between parent and child, and through dispossession makes space for change. In this way, it is reparative.

Monologue

Homebody/Kabul opens with an hour-long monologue performed by the Homebody, who remains alone on stage throughout the scene. Chronicling the tensions arising from encounters with otherness and sameness, it covers broad terrain: from the Homebody's family life to a history of Afghanistan and recent colonial interventions there. One of its themes is the difficulty and diversity of language. Kushner frames the play with an epigraph associating the breakdown of language with dispossession. He quotes the testimony of an unnamed woman after the bombing of her neighbourhood in Kabul: *This quotation has been redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.* (8). She links loss of home and property to loss of memory, names, and communication. The dysfunction of language – manifest, in *The Illusion,* in Pridamant's inability to remember names – is here the aftereffect of violent loss. Yet the monologue shows disrupted and dysfunctional language is not only the consequence of dispossession, but also a tool forging reparative responses to both of its aspects. As I will show, the Homebody's use of such language can be a vehicle for reparation, and is the seed from which her attempts to redress violent legacies are born.

The Homebody's language is only one of the many spoken in the play, which includes English, Pashto, Dari, Esperanto, French, and the languages of music, medicine, computers, and the Dewey Decimal system. The monologue is reflective of this diversity in its humorous incomprehensibility, and escape from easy interpretation. It highlights the instability of language, and everything known through it, including historical narrative. The audience is the target of this language. The Homebody explicitly breaks the fourth wall, going beyond *The Illusion*'s playful metatheatre by directly addressing them, reading to them, and anticipating their questions. Kushner recommends it be staged in a manner that gives the audience little but the Homebody to focus on. For example, the 2002 Young Vic production used minimal props: two chairs facing stage-front, a shopping bag, guidebook, coat and pocketbook.[29] Kika Markham presented the monologue without leaving the locus of this kitchen table. The mise-en-scene gave nothing to distract the audience from this small area of visual interest, and the Homebody's 'story' of 'Kabul' (9).

The style of the Homebody's language is a way of performing dispossession and enacting it on the audience. She describes her relationship with words in terms of both 'synchesis' and 'syncresis':

> I speak … I can't help myself. Elliptically. Discursively. I have read too many books, and that's not boasting, for I haven't read *many* books, but I've read too many, exceeding I think my capacity for syncresis – is that a word? – straying rather into synchisis, which is a word. So my diction, my syntax, well, it's so *irritating*, I apologize, I do, it's very hard, I know. To listen.
> […]
> You must be patient. (12-13)

[29] Declan Donnellan, *Homebody/Kabul* (Young Vic Theatre, London: Young Vic & Cheek by Jowl, 2002), National Video Archive of Performance (V&A).This performance was of an early version of the play. The bulk of subsequent revisions between 2002 and 2004 were to its second part ('Kabul'). The monologue remains very similar in both versions.

Synchisis is a rhetorical device, '[a] confused arrangement of words in a sentence, obscuring the meaning'.[30] It is evident in the Homebody's description of reading books, which folds back on itself, introducing and then twice re-framing what 'too many' means. 'Syncresis', as the Homebody suspects, is not a word. However, there is such a thing as 'syncretism', to '[aim] at a union or reconciliation of diverse beliefs, practices, or systems'. [31] There is also 'syncrisis', a rhetorical figure that compares diverse or opposite things.[32] Framji Minwalla reads 'syncresis' as a portmanteau of these words, and hence as an articulation of a paradox.[33] The Homebody's language here is not only confusing, but paradoxically 'exceeds' her capacity to either reconcile or compare diverse things. In this context, the audience must struggle to read and listen to her, and to engage with language so dense it may force them beyond their comfortable boundaries. As a rhetorical technique used by Kushner, rather than the Homebody, synchisis may make a listener reassess the meaning of words and concepts made un-familiar through re-arrangement and fragmentation. This forces them to listen carefully and to realise that understanding is not given, but something that they participate in and actively work towards. Ideally, this self-awareness becomes a basis from which to relate to others.

The Homebody also strays from the norm in the way she reads. This reading is different to that discussed in my work on *Caroline, or Change*, where to read offers clarity, even when one does not engage in symptomatic practices. In contrast, the Homebody has read too much without reading much at all, and it has brought about confusion, obscuration, and a failure to reconcile things. Yet hers is not the purposeful obfuscation of David Cameron's treatment of Shakespeare's colonial legacy. Nor is she like Alcandre, holding a secret over the head of the confused Pridamant. Her apologies to the audience suggest that for her this way of reading

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[30] 'Synchysis, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/196406> [accessed 6 February 2017]. Note: I make use of Kushner's alternative spelling, 'synchisis'.

[31] 'Syncretic, Adj. and N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/196425> [accessed 6 February 2017].

[32] 'Syncrisis, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/196432>.

[33] Framji Minwalla, 'Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*: Staging History in a Post–Colonial World', *Theater*, 33.1 (2003), 29–43 (p. 30) <https://doi.org/10.1215/01610775-33-1-29>.

and speaking is not a rhetorical choice, but a response to her struggles with her relationship with the world, and her place in it as a wife, mother, and propertied Western subject whose language is out of control.

Kushner uses the Homebody's dysfunctional language to help her and the audience – which is assumed to be Western – engage with global legacies of violence and displacement. Her way of speaking is an effective tool for this because it makes obvious the tensions between substance and negativity with which Kushner associates legacies. She asks the audience to think about and respond to the problems that she presents in ways that are broadly queer in Sedgwick's sense of the word: they are non-monolithic, and disturb normative structures of knowledge by addressing questions of the relation between sameness and difference.[34] For example, holding the out-dated guidebook which introduced her to Kabul, she describes her research as 'moth-like. Impassioned, fluttery, doomed', and reflects:

> I can't help myself, it's almost perverse, in libraries, in secondhand bookshops, I invariably seek out not the source but all that which was dropped by the wayside
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> (9-10)

In this snaking speech the Homebody refuses to cleave apart the various components of her 'research' with the firmness of a period. Rather, she uses language that is synchitic and repetitive to describe a process of research-as-collecting. Markham's luminous performance in the Young Vic production is breathless and humorous, barely acknowledging the few pauses that are there. It is not just the Homebody that finds her fragments to be 'irresistible, ghostly, dreamy', but also the audience, who are faced with a worldview in which even the notion of the 'the source' – capitalized as 'The Source' in the play's first edition (2002) – lacks

[34] For a more detailed explanation of Sedgwick's take on queerness, and for Madhavi Menon's illuminating response to this, see Chapter One, p. 57 (See also Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p.8; Menon, 'Introduction', p,6.)

fixity.[35] It could be what we preceded from as in the case of a river, something in the future that we are 'on the way' to, or both. This uncertainty serves as a tool to resist teleology and the unified, progressive narratives of History with a capital 'H', in which the stories of the dispossessed are easily lost.

As she moves moth-like between topics, the Homebody assembles the fragments that she has collected into a story. Through this, she addresses the ways that connection leads to different kinds of dispossession: this might leave a legacy of violence; and it might allow reparation to take place and new legacies to form. This reparation is not only about making amends but – to draw on the kind of reparation discussed in my chapter on *Caroline* – additive and accretive, and open to surprise and the unexpected.

The Homebody describes those connections that lead to violent dispossession through the metaphor of touch, a coming together of bodies, objects, and thoughts. She calls the 'touch which corrupts' the 'touch which does not understand' (28), and feels that in her time everything has been touched:

> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.* Ours is a time of connection; the private is *gone*. All must be touched. All touch corrupts. All must be corrupted. (11)

For the Homebody, connection that lacks understanding is at the root of suffering, especially when this connection is colonial. In her time, such connection is global and inescapable. Her reflections on this are focused through the tale of her foray to a shop in London to buy hats for a party. While there, she meets an Afghan shopkeeper whose hand has been mutilated and goes on an imaginary journey with him to Kabul. This experience allows her to contemplate the ways that she, as a propertied, Western subject, is both complicit in and constituted by legacies of dispossession. It also represents the first time that her 'borders' are 'broached' by another person – before this they have only been penetrated by the '*alien influence*'

[35] Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002), p. 9.

of her books (12). This allows her to consciously re-work her relationship with otherness, which becomes the seed of her legacy to Priscilla.

The shop is a place of dispossession where (to the Homebody's mind) culturally specific artefacts from the third world are transformed into junk. It is filled with:

> artifacts *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.* That which was once Afghan, which we, having waved our credit cards in its general direction, have made into junk. (17)

The Homebody is complicit in this. As she speaks of the shop she picks up the shopping bag that has accompanied her on stage, and removes ten hats that she has bought there, carefully stacking them on the table for the audience to admire. It is clear that these objects have undergone a shift in significance to endure. They are symbolic of the dispossession of those who have, like them, suffered displacement from their original home.

The Homebody quite obviously sees herself and other Western subjects as 'culpable' for the dispossessions suffered by many in the third world. However, she is also commenting on the formative nature of this complicity. Her words are consonant with Athanasiou's description of the Western subject as being:

> constituted through, and inhabited by, processes of desubjectifying others, rendering them usable, employable, but then eventually into waste matter, or of no use: always available, always expendable. Processes of disposability – as well as the spectral traces of endurance, the struggles against it, and the political potentialities emerging within it – lie at the heart of ongoing colonially and postcolonially embedded notions of the self-contained, proper(tied) liberal subject'.[36]

In light of Athanasiou's words, it is possible to read the Homebody's vision of corrupting touch as both reflecting on and unsettling notions of the self-contained

[36] Butler and Athanasiou, p. 27.

Western subject. The corrupting touch that makes everything in the Afghan shop disposable also makes the Homebody's stable and enduring way of life possible. She recognizes that she is not merely complicit in the act of making others disposable, but is also constituted by it. By acknowledging her place within this global network of corrupting touch, the Homebody also indicates that she is not self-contained. This shows Kushner, like Athanasiou, to be sceptical of notions of the self-contained subject, and aware that the self-identity of those in the West rests on the violent dispossession of the third world.

Kushner uses the Homebody's reimagining of her encounter with the Afghan shopkeeper to offer a reparative alternative to this network of corrupting touch. During her retelling of this encounter the Homebody reassembles fragments from many different stories, without attempting to subsume them into a seamless narrative. Though at times unsuccessful, on the whole the resultant connections are open to difference and the queer transgression of boundaries, including her own.

The Afghan shopkeeper works behind the counter at the shop where the Homebody buys the hats. She explains that he is missing three fingers, which have been cleanly removed from one hand. In the performance she shows this to us on her own hand, folding her last three fingers in, but then unfolding them as if to emphasise that her body has been safe where his has not. In the moments during which she signs the credit card slip, the Homebody has an experience that may be fantasy, delusion or magic. Suddenly able to speak and understand perfect Pushtu, she asks him what has happened to his hand.[37] She describes his response, in first person, not as just a story, but a rapid series of stories that seem to belong to many different people (26). He/she explains: 'I was with the Mujahideen, and the Russians did this. I was with the Mujahideen, and an enemy faction of Mujahideen did this. I was with the Russians' (23). The list goes on, establishing an overlapping, obscuring frame of narratives.

[37] In the monologue Kushner uses 'Pushtu' and 'Pushto', both alternative forms of Pashto, which is a language spoken in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan ('Pashto, Adj. and N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/138408> [accessed 22 February 2015].)

As he/she comes to the end of this contradictory list, the shopkeeper/Homebody's tone, shifts towards a rapid, almost-hysterical tirade that retains the broken structure of the list:

> *Look, look at my country, look at my Kabul*
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> *you will never understand*, why are you buying so many hats? (23-24)

This passage, its words suffused with dramatic, even apocalyptic energy, attempts to illustrate the realities of violent dispossession. The extreme narrative disjunction of the shopkeeper's tale is representative of the unaccountable trauma experienced by those living in Afghanistan and Kabul through the last decades of the twentieth century. His many story fragments combine to form a wall of words, a dense tirade that tells the tale of many journeys from Kabul to the UK. Dispossession, in both senses, drives the shopkeeper/ Homebody to tell more than a single tale, to perform more than a single identity, without giving the audience any recourse to choose just one story. The last sentences – upset, but also more understandable than what has come before – make clear that the journeys to the UK being described are not necessarily about progression away from suffering, and do not end its legacies.

This speech seeks to productively dispossess its listeners by sweeping away the boundaries between self and other, whether dispossessed, Homebody, or the audience. Yet the extent to which the Homebody actually achieves this is

contestable. As Minwalla argues, in this moment, she is conferring her own motives and psychology on the Afghan shopkeeper, who speaks in the same way she does – is, indeed, voiced by her. We see the 'projection of her fears, needs, and desires, spoken through his context, [and she here] navigates the most literal boundaries of Orientalism', inventing the Eastern subject in the image of the West.[38] In other words, the Homebody makes the shopkeeper usable, rather than addressing him on his own terms. When he declares that she '*will never understand'*, he reminds us of her complicity in his dispossession: understanding is the only way that one can touch without corrupting, and there is none here. The Homebody's attempt to voice the shopkeeper thus does not achieve reparation.

However, Kushner develops their encounter further, and is able to use a combination of the Homebody's dysfunctional language and moth-like process of collecting to open out its reparative potential. After hearing this story, the Homebody describes watching the Afghan man put her hats into the shopping bag (the same shopping bag which she unpacks onstage). He tells her that he has the afternoon off and offers her his ruined right hand. This touch – though only described to us, the first 'physical' example of this in the text – transports them. As if the London shop occupied two places at once, he and the Homebody step out of its door directly onto the streets of Kabul. These streets are palimpsestic: the ruin of the present exists alongside lush images from the Homebody's out-dated guidebook. Her language, here, is as ghostly and dreamy as the fragments that she collects. She notes 'it is shamelessly sweet, the wreckage rack and ruination all there of course, its ineffaceable now, […] but the gardens of Babur Shah are there too' (25). Here, the Homebody seems to channel Belize from *Angels in America*, who talking to the guilt-ridden Louis about his ex-lover Prior (who is sick from AIDS), uses the coming snow as a metaphor for healing. Looking at the sky, he says: 'Soon, this … ruination will be blanketed white. […] Softness, compliance, forgiveness, grace'.[39] In both cases ruination only temporarily disappears, but this is an opportunity for nourishing, reparative thoughts and emotions to take hold.

[38] Minwalla, p. 37.
[39] Kushner, *Angels in America (Revised and Complete)*, p. 105.

Leaving aside the destruction that cannot be described in words, and never pausing for long enough to warrant the use of a period, the Homebody provides an ekphrastic description of the visual details that accompany a litany of stories about Kabul (25-26). She describes how she and the Afghan man make love beside a grave. This sexual connection seems briefly to make his hand whole, but in a way that is unlike Alcandre's re-membering of the Amanuensis, whose tongue and hearing are returned only so that he can be exploited. Her evocative descriptions end with a pause, and the audience is abruptly restored to the moment at which she signs the receipt, and leaves to return to the safety of her kitchen.

The Homebody's meeting with the Afghan shopkeeper is an unverifiable one. It is possible that it is imagined, or brought about by her consumption of a mix of antidepressants. Regardless, it shows that she can gather together that which has fallen beside the wayside and verbally reassemble it for reparative ends. Through her imaginative recovery of sites in Kabul, the Homebody interweaves both senses of dispossession. She lays things that are effaced and destroyed in the present alongside spectres of their past(s). Her collection and reassembly of texts, words and experiences – which is just as dense as the Afghan shopkeeper's – breaks down the spatio-temporal borders between people and nations, past and present, allowing for encounters with the other, and taking her beyond the boundaries of the self. Her dense language replicates this experience for the audience, who must open themselves to her strange way of speaking and reading in order to achieve understanding. The Homebody's reassembly of fragments into a bewildering, over-layered landscape of beauty and effacement is intended to recover some of what has been lost. It also makes her Western audience aware of the aftereffects of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Their acknowledgement of the legacies of trauma with which they are complicit is, as the next part of the play will show, a necessary step towards establishing different legacies.

A Child

The last part of the monologue explains why the Homebody is so invested in making such changes. For her, these new legacies are also a means to address personal dispossession. Having told the story of the shopkeeper, she turns to an explanation of her relationship with her daughter Priscilla. This is characterised by intergenerational disconnection, lack of touch, and loss of love. The Homebody's interest in redressing global dispossession is to some extent an outlet through which she processes this damaged relationship.

Priscilla – who is not named until the 'Kabul' section of the play – is introduced in a jarring narrative digression, just after the Homebody describes her trip home from the shop. As if in answer to the unasked question 'do you have children?' the Homebody states: 'And yes in fact I do have children, well, *one*. A child' (27). She seems uncertain of what she is trying to describe, beginning by referring to children, and then reducing the number to one. This is in contrast to Pridamant, who remembers precisely how many children he has, but cannot establish other basic details, like his son's name. The Homebody's ambiguity, and the suddenness of her digression, is evidence of her disconnection from her daughter. She treats this as something that can be remedied, but only obliquely, through a mutual connection with the outside world.

The Homebody understands Priscilla to be similar to the world. She says: 'What after all is a child but the history of all that has befallen her, a succession of displacements, bloody and beautiful? How could any mother not love the world?' (27-28). Priscilla and the world are both formed from a 'succession of displacements' that suggests loss, perhaps even the forced movement of dispossession. The Homebody's love for the world is thus also her love for Priscilla. Yet stuck at home, she is unable to understand either of them. She describes herself as 'suffering uselessly' as she watches the metaphorical drowning of those subject to an onslaught of dispossession (28). Unable to join them, she feels herself to be isolated, and unable to express what 'must be expressed or else … death' (28). It is not clear whose death the Homebody refers to here, only that despite the reparative

emphasis of her monologue, her already slippery grasp of language doesn't allow her to say what she must, to the world or to Priscilla. She continues:

> And now my daughter, come home as one does. Mother knows mysteries; hence her implacable scrabbling at my gate. I so wanted her to be out in the world, my daughter. Of use. But she must have and may not budge, and I understand. I am her mother, she is … starving. I … withhold my touch. The touch which does not understand is the touch which corrupts[.] (28)

In the face of her daughter's need, the Homebody cannot offer connection. She is unable to fulfil her maternal role for the fear of corrupting or becoming corrupted. She 'understands' Priscilla's hunger, but she also fears that she 'does not understand'. Thus, she withholds her touch, and her mysteries, much like she withholds certainty, clarity, and continuity from the audience. Yet while for the audience lack of certainty may bring about a positive turn, this is not (yet) the case for Priscilla.

Motivated by her inability to connect with her daughter, the Homebody exits for the world outside, packing the hats away, picking up her coat and heading for Kabul. She says that she seeks to be 'moved […] through an encounter with the beautiful and strange' (30). Thus, having been given the space for an almost-novelistic first person narration in which she has forged a sense of herself rooted in the dispossessions of dysfunctional language, the Homebody disappears. Her encounter with Kabul is something that neither Priscilla nor the audience will hear about first-hand. Instead she haunts the rest of the play, which tracks Priscilla's attempts to find her mother, and to unlock her 'mysteries'. It is unclear whether she actually achieves this. However the Homebody's departure opens the way to save both Priscilla and herself.

Kabul

The Homebody's dispossessing language is a tool through which she engages the audience in her search for a new way to construct her self-identity and connect with others. She cannot, however, use it to mend her relationship with Priscilla. In the second part of the play, she tries to deal with this by externalizing her suffering, and

going to a place where pain is pre-existent. There is similarity here with Pridamant, for Alcandre's visions are at first externalizations of suffering, where Pridamant's dark emotions and inner turmoil are validated by his son's torment. However, unlike Pridamant, the Homebody actively seeks to be dispossessed, and to productively dispossess her child. In 'Kabul' we discover that Priscilla has previously attempted suicide. This was caused in part by the Homebody's lacking response to her unwanted pregnancy. Priscilla is still so caught up in her wish to connect with her mother that she is at risk of losing herself. Instead, the Homebody brings her to a place where she can witness the realities of global dispossession, and recognize that she is a relational being, connected to many people beyond her family. Her release of her mother, which is only possible through productive dispossession, is the Homebody's reparative legacy. It allows Priscilla to continue to live without the burden of searching for her. In place of this, new and more nourishing links with self and others are forged, and forgiveness achieved.

The Homebody's departure to Kabul marks her distance from her husband and daughter. In the Young Vic production, the transition between the monologue and Kabul had them missing each other by moments. As the Homebody – ready to leave – spoke her last words to uplifting music, a man dressed in Afghan clothes approached her. For a moment, it seemed this was the Afghan shopkeeper. Over this, Doctor Qari Shah's voice was heard, beginning a brutally disconnected verbal autopsy that described the tearing apart of the Homebody's body. Blue light filled the space between the Homebody and the man on stage, who was not the shopkeeper, but Qari Shah (Anthony Bunsee). As her kitchen table was cleared away by stagehands, the characters of the second part – Milton (William Chubb) and aid worker Quango Twistelton (Mark Bazeley) – entered and walked about the stage. The Homebody, a suitcase in hand, walked through the collection of actors and crewmembers and off stage, their lack of reaction to her signifying her distance from them, living or dead. The lighting changed, became reddish, and Priscilla (Jacqueline Defferary) appeared in silhouette behind a sheet. This was hung where the table had been, so that she was literally occupying the space her mother had just vacated, but missed the Homebody by seconds. This reiterated their disconnection.

Priscilla's self-assigned mission in Kabul, is to rectify this by uncovering the Homebody's mysteries.[40] She is given her mother's pocketbook, which is familiar to the audience because it sits on an empty kitchen chair through most of the monologue. It contains both a written record and a map. Reading this, Priscilla attempts to trace the Homebody's thoughts and path through Kabul. She is careless of the danger of going outside, and the possibility of seeing a dismembered corpse, saying to Milton: 'if they have ripped her open at least I'll finally get to see her fucking secrets' (42). Though painful, Priscilla – as both daughter and heir – wants this visceral, all-revealing connection. She is also obsessed with finding out if her mother is really dead, reiterating that they 'still don't *know*' what has happened to her, because they do not have a body (28, 39). She feels that it is plausible that her mother is alive and hiding from her, because this is what has happened in their home life. After a day searching Kabul, she comments: 'I was *hunting* her I felt. It was so much like home. She simply couldn't bear to be near' (91). Milton, furious, points to the absurdity of Priscilla's belief that the Homebody has colluded with officials, the doctor, and Reuters to invent her death, 'simply so that she could vanish' (92-93). However, because her mother has previously escaped her, Priscilla is drawn to the story featuring a network of secrets.

The secret of the Homebody's fate remains even at the end of the play. Priscilla never discovers whether she is dead or alive with any empirical certainty. She is told by Khwaja, Zai Garshi and Mahala that the Homebody is alive and married to Mahala's husband, who is supposedly Qari Shah. He is the doctor that presents the Homebody's autopsy, and whom in the Young Vic production seems momentarily to be the shopkeeper. The implication is if Qari Shah were the Homebody's new husband, he would have had the motivation to fake the report of her death. However, it is never confirmed that the Doctor is Mahala's husband, and Khwaja and Mahala have motivation to lie to Priscilla: they both want her to take documents,

[40] This has strong resonances with James Michener's *Caravans* (1963), a mystery about the disappearance of an American woman in Afghanistan. The links between this text and *Homebody* (and between Kushner and Michener) are fertile ground for future study. (James A. Michener, *Caravans* (New York: Random House, 1963).)

disguised as Khwaja's Esperanto poems, out of the country. Mahala is also desperate to escape Kabul and her history of dispossession.

While the Homebody's fate remains hidden, Priscilla's search brings to light other secrets. These explain their damaged relationship and contextualise the Homebody's quest for understanding and openness to dispossession. Two years before the events of the play, Priscilla attempted suicide. She was pregnant when she made the attempt, and the overdose killed the foetus. The Homebody knew about this pregnancy, but provided no comfort to her daughter. In the alien setting of Kabul, Milton – who was never told about the pregnancy – is finally able to confront Priscilla about her suicide attempt. He says that neither the family nor the Homebody ever recovered from it, but then cuts off further conversation, making it clear that he feels there is nothing more to say about this (64). This is the crux of Priscilla's relationship with both her parents. The pressure of the unsaid, gone silent for so long it has become a secret, now constitutes their familial bonds.

This comes to a head later in the play, when Priscilla returns to the hotel from another day's search. Her father, who is high on opium, aggressively attacks her quest:

> Let her rest for pity's sake!
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> (93-94)

Here, Milton adopts the discourse of a parent addressing an adult child, but the philosophy that he imparts to her is riddled with paradox. He wants Priscilla to be fully responsible and accountable for her own actions, and implies that this is a function of adulthood; but he also suggests that the Homebody bore no such responsibility, and blames Priscilla for her mother's choices. Because he still thinks of himself as part of a parental unit or 'us', he also takes Priscilla's 'implacable

scrabbling' for her mother's love, touch and attention as a demand on him. Channelling the fathers of *The Illusion*, he feels that this is dangerous, and insists that she should rescue herself, rather than asking anything of him. He envisages the consequences of this rescue in terms of an entry into the same sort of nuclear family unit on which he has just told her she can no longer depend.

Milton apologizes immediately for these words. Whether this apology is played as horrified or perfunctory, though, Priscilla is driven to respond with the revelation of her secret, which qualifies his assertion that she should, through marrying, establish her own family: 'When I took those sleeping pills I was pregnant' (94). There is a telling pause, before Milton responds, 'I didn't know that' (94). His lack of knowledge is a refrain in the next few minutes, as Priscilla recounts her story:

Killed the, the fetus.

This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

(94)

Priscilla's brittle commentary on having, through her suicide attempt, killed her unborn child, raises several issues. The killing was, she emphasises, unintentional, a mistake or 'oops'. However, talk of the dead foetus turns almost immediately to her mother in a reverse-move that takes the emphasis off progeny (who represent the future) and places it in the past. Describing her mother as always having Calvary (the hill on which Christ was crucified) before her, 'suffering for those she saw suffer', Priscilla remarks on the Homebody's uselessness. It is here that she says that in coming to Kabul the Homebody has moved all of the suffering out from within her home, to the outside, literally displacing her family, and exposing them to violent loss and its legacies.

In her description of the Homebody's suffering and 'crying in the kitchen nights when nobody could hear', it seems that Priscilla understands her mother's isolation, her slow submersion into despair. However, she also feels that in moving from her inner world of suffering into 'the great world beyond' the Homebody has exposed herself and her family to danger. Accidental abortion has occurred within their home, but Kabul is a place of murder. By local legend, it is the city where Cain, first to murder one of his own blood, has been laid to rest, cursing the city seven fold (148). Travelling there has brought the Ceiling family beyond the upper limits implied by their name, and beyond any sense of filial bond. Priscilla captures this when she says: '[w]e're far beyond father and daughter and all that. *You* look, look what she's done, where she's brought us. We're at the stage of blood sacrifices, right?' She does not clarify whether the sacrifice is the Homebody, the foetus, or Priscilla and Milton. Nor does she say to what they are being sacrificed, beside perhaps the Homebody's secrets, and need to journey out into the world. Finally, in response to Milton's bewildered claim that he 'didn't know' she was pregnant, Priscilla reveals the last of her secrets: 'She knew. I told her and told her. She just … couldn't talk about it. All those words, but not one for me' (95). It is apparent the Homebody offered no solace to her child. Her words, which are so effective at dispossessing the audience and drawing them to think of themselves in relation to others, are not capable of bridging the gap between mother and child, and their absence has contributed to Priscilla's decision to commit suicide. Their relationships are so dysfunctional that Priscilla feels the death of the foetus – and perhaps her own potential death – were almost justified, because 'why should there be more like us?' (94).

Milton's response to this is to withdraw his paternal support, substituting it for a fiscal legacy. Though he at first seems willing to engage with Priscilla's fraught emotions, his trailing 'Oh Priss. I'm, I'm […]' does not turn into comfort or forgiveness. Rather, when she tries to hug him he pushes her away and says:

This quotation has been redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

(95)

Again emulating Pridamant and Geronte, his focus on legacy is financial. Milton will not offer Priscilla understanding or emotional reparation, which is what she wants from the Homebody, and possibly him. Instead, he offers her a financial inheritance which comes from her mother, and which is accompanied by the demand that she disassociate herself from him.

Milton's transmission of the Homebody's money to Priscilla raises the question of her legacy, although this legacy is not fiscal. Nor does it see the connection between mother and daughter revived or rejuvenated. Rather, her legacy is to see them both dispossessed, and through this to free Priscilla from the damaging intergenerational relationship in which they are both trapped. In the monologue, the Homebody tells the audience that she wants Priscilla to be 'out in the world', not in pursuit of her, but 'of use' (28). The subtext of this is that before her trip to Kabul the Homebody is neither of these things; Priscilla's going out into the world would thus allow her to break away from her mother. The Homebody does not have the words to accomplish this, so instead, she leaves, forcing Priscilla to follow.

Through her experiences of Kabul, and the people that live there, Priscilla is slowly drawn beyond the boundaries of her relationship with her mother and made to recognize her place in a wider relational network. The evidence of this is already there after her first day in Kabul. She comments that horrible as the things that she has seen are, 'it was *me* there seeing it, *me.* […] I marvelled at myself' (65). At this point, however, she is still framing everything in relation to her mother, saying that she felt 'inappropriate' for marvelling when she was in the proximity of great suffering, and that she 'learnt it' (inappropriateness) from her mother (65).

It is through this new relational network that the Homebody's legacy is made apparent and passed on. Towards the end of the play, Khwaja – maintaining the story that the Homebody is alive – explains that the she will not contact Priscilla

because she is searching for repentance for them both. Offering what he claims are the Homebody's words, he says:

> you have suffered and will suffer more yet, she fears, because your heart which is a loving heart is also pieced through. She prays now to Allah who forgives all who sincerely repent, to forgive her and through her penitential loneliness, to forgive her daughter. (116)

Khwaja suggests that the Homebody's departure was motivated by love for Priscilla and a search for forgiveness, rather than a wish to escape her. He frames forgiveness as a legacy that will be transmitted to Priscilla. This is only achievable if the Homebody is dispossessed in both senses: she must lose her former life, give up the use of the English language, and become someone different.

However, this penitent legacy exists only if Khwaja's story is true. The Homebody's overarching legacy is not forgiveness, but the reparative severing of her bond with Priscilla brought about by their mutual dispossession. Though made possible by Khwaja's story, it is transmitted to Priscilla regardless of whether the Homebody is alive or dead. After hearing Khwaja's words, Priscilla is finally able to accept that her mother is gone:

> She … to forgive me. For …?
> Oh I don't understand. That she came here … For me? Is that what?
> Well perhaps. Perhaps that's so.
> If she is alive, or, or if she is dead.
> Tell her I said she shouldn't have gone, but. Tell her I said good-bye. (116)

Here, Priscilla lets go of the need to know whether her mother is alive or dead. Accepting Khwaja's reasoning for why she might have fled home, but not completely believing it, she follows his advice and says farewell, as the Homebody – whether dead or alive – has always intended her to do.

In doing so, Priscilla is able to establish a new and more nourishing relationship with herself, and the world. At the play's end, she explains that letting go of her mother has saved her. Safely back in London, she visits Mahala, who is living with Milton.

Her very presence is a sign that the borders of Priscilla's world have expanded. They meet in the Homebody's kitchen. Mahala thanks Priscilla for saving her, to which Priscilla responds:

> As I have been saved.
> I … tried to kill myself. Here. In this house. […]
> […] After all I have seen. I'm so ashamed of that now.
> I *need* to be forgiven
> I tried to leave. I was pregnant. I didn't want to be. I didn't want to be a mother. And one of us had to leave. Or both might have died. We … got lost in one another, somehow, so frightening to be so lost, so …
> So she left. (139)

Here, Priscilla explains that her desperate attempts to understand and be understood by her mother had resulted in an inability to meaningfully live in the world. She had become so lost in her obsession with uncovering the Homebody's secrets that she might never leave the home, become independent or become a mother herself. She was at risk of becoming like Hamlet, whose devotion to his father is so fierce that he allows King Hamlet's memory and will to completely subsume his own. He lives after his father, rather than merely living.[41] Where Pridamant wants such living after of his child, the Homebody uses dispossession to purposefully make room for her daughter outside of these damaging intergenerational bonds.

The consequences of this are reparative. By the end of the play, the Homebody has left Priscilla with the powerful sense that she will survive, and with the space she requires to thrive. She says to Mahala that although she misses her mother:

> In the space she's left … Some … joy? or something has been rising. Something unpronounceable inside is waking up. I … I've no words for this.
> Psychopannychy. *(She laughs)*
> […]
> Y'see Mum? One sharp goad from a terrible grief and … the soul is waking up.
> (139)

[41] Edelman, 'Hamlet', pp. 98–99.

Psychopannychy is technically '[t]he sleep of the soul between death and the Day of Judgement'.[42] Priscilla mentions it earlier in the play, citing it as one of the many words that the Homebody used and which she did not understand (65). That she is finally able to treat this with humour, rather than anger, shows how far she has matured. Her soul has awakened through the loss to which her mother has subjected her, and through her new, dispossessing connections with Khwaja, Mahala, and others, who impart both perspective and the tools to say farewell.

Periplum

Both *The Illusion* and *Homebody/Kabul* point to Kushner's treatment of legacy as constituted by and reliant upon dispossession. Though written some years before Athanasiou and Butler's text, these plays examine both incalculable loss, and movements (both forced and voluntary) beyond the borders of the self. These dual aspects of dispossession interact in constantly shifting ways, which shape legacies. Pridamant fails to embrace the dispossession of theatre, and his legacy flounders despite his moment of repentance and grief when he believes his son has died. Meanwhile, the Homebody's quest to truly understand violent dispossession, and to make her own suffering external, is bound with a desire to sever bonds with her daughter. Priscilla is forced to move beyond her desire to cross over into the psychic space of her mother, to be dispossessed by her in the sense that Hamlet is by his father. In the resultant space, she experiences a reparative renewal of vigour and love. It is clear from these instances is that the form of legacy typified by Kant – legacy as simple, fiscal possession – cannot begin to treat the difficult terrain of parent-child relationships, where ghosts and secrets endure. Nor, in *Homebody/Kabul*, can it adequately engage the dispossession and desubjectification wrought by the political structures of the Twentieth Century.

Both *The Illusion* and *Homebody/Kabul* end with a voyage that gestures towards new understanding gleaned through suffering. The epilogue to *Homebody* is titled 'Periplum'. Kushner offers Hugh Kenner's definition of this in an epigraph:

[42] 'Psychopannychy, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/153919> [accessed 30 November 2014].

‘“Periplum” is [Ezra] Pound’s shorthand for a tour which takes you round then back again. And such a tour is by definition profitable, if not in coin, then in knowledge’ (8). Priscilla and Mahala have returned to the Homebody’s kitchen, backed by the sound of rain and Stephane Grappelli’s version of ‘A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square’. It is six months later. With Mahala seated in the Homebody’s chair reading, Priscilla enters, and the audience bears witness to a coming full-circle, ending in the same place as the play began, but at a different time, and with different characters present.

There is a reparative tone to this scene, introduced by the whimsical strands of Grappelli’s violin. Priscilla has found some degree of resolution with her mother’s ghost. Mahala, meanwhile, has been exploring the Homebody’s library and garden (140). She expresses the hope that Priscilla will ‘return’ to visit her (139). They have become richer in knowledge, partly because they have come to know each other. Yet this knowledge is not couched in certainty. The secrets remain. When Priscilla says to Mahala that she won’t ask her about the Homebody, Mahala responds with an ambiguous statement, which can be read as supporting both stories regarding the Homebody’s fate:

I am lying you think. *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.* (138)

By prefacing her reply with what Priscilla thinks, Mahala avoids giving a definitive answer. Priscilla, still desperate for certainty, notes that she ‘get[s] the appeal of fascism now. Uncertainty kills’; Mahala replies ‘[a]s does certainty’ (138-39). Here, the density and dispossession of the monologue is invoked. Both Priscilla and Mahala have been saved, but like the play’s audience their closure is neither neatly tied-up in a certain ending, nor a clean break from the dispossessions of the past.

The Illusion ends on a similar note of uncertainty. After Pridamant and Alcandre have exited, it is left to the Amanuensis to lower the lights. When they are suitably dim,

Matamore – Clindor's mad and hyperbolic employer – enters. Scared away by the murderous events of the second vision, he is on a quest to find the moon:

MATAMORE […]
Pardon, sir, can you tell me the way to the moon?
I'm lost and mapless, a wanderer through the world…

The Amanuensis points. A huge white moon and stars appear, floating in space.

That way? You're certain of that? Yes,
The road that way seems to be going uphill.

Matamore exists. The Amanuensis is alone. He puts a tentative finger in his mouth. The tongue is back. He smiles.

AMANUENSIS Not in this life, but in the next.

He turns out the lights. (83)

This final scene, marked by a breaking of the fourth wall, further destabilizes the division between reality and illusion in the play. Pridamant's frame has been understood to be that which is 'real', yet the Don Quixote-like Matamore has strayed from his vision and into the world of the play's 'reality'. The Amanuensis's final line might refer to his own life, to Matamore's, or to those multiple lives that they both take on as they appear on the stage (or in the plays within the play).

Thus, in their final moments both plays gesture towards the possibility of new beginnings gleaned through suffering. This is an important undertone in Kushner's work, which not only seeks to better understand legacy, but to generate new legacies that redress (even if only partially) the aftereffects of an oppressive past and present. In these plays, reparative legacies depend on an open engagement with dispossession. They are generated and successfully transmitted when characters acknowledge that they are relational beings, who are both potentially complicit in violent loss and displacement (as Pridamant and the Ceilings are), and able to experience it in both senses. In the case of parent-child relationships, this must be accompanied by the rejection of the demand that children 'live after' their parents,

for this demand for sameness restricts the capacity of both to be productively dispossessed. Legacy is explicitly dependant on human interconnection, and when characters and audience embrace the move beyond the boundaries of the self, the opportunities to redress violent dispossession are evident.

In his Afterword to *Homebody/Kabul*, written just days after the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks, Kushner states:

> Great historical crimes reproduce themselves. One injustice breeds new generations of injustice. Suffering rolls on down through the years, becomes a bleak patrimony, the inheritance for the disinherited, the key to history, the only certain meaning of life.[43]

Here, Kushner argues that those who have been violently disinherited and dispossessed inherit suffering in the place of the legacies that might have been passed down to them in a world without colonialism, displacement, and war. The repetition of suffering, which is a 'patrimony' passed down by fathers like Milton and Pridamant, becomes the key to our stories of the past, and to the meaning that we take from life. Kushner later comes to wonder if 'cataclysm and catastrophe [are] the birth spasms of the future […] the Nothing out of which Something is born' (147-48). However, he later counters this vision, finishing the afterword by examining a short passage about repentance and reparation from a booklet of Jewish spiritual inquiry, put together by his shul:

> And so […] I read the following sentence, which suggests another kind of prologue to creation, perhaps offers hope for some prelude other than destruction, some other way for the future to commence; from the Talmud (BT Nedarim 39B):
>
> Repentance preceded the world. (149)

[43] Tony Kushner, 'An Afterword', in *Homebody/Kabul: Revised Version* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2004), pp. 141–49 (p. 147). All further references to this Afterword are in-text.

Repentance usually comes after and not before something; it is a process of review, and contrition for something done or not done.[44] It seems that just as Hamlet is 'born to set [time] right!' so the world is preceded by repentance for all that is to come in the future. Of course, when Hamlet kills Polonius he 'do[es] repent' but with the caveat: 'but heaven hath pleased it so, |To punish me with this, and this with me, |That I must be their scourge and minister'.[45] The difference between Hamlet's vision of himself and Kushner's repentance is significant. Hamlet must avenge his father, undo his mother and uncle's incest, and he must do so while playing supplement to his father. Kushner's repentance, on the other hand, is not necessarily a drive to correct, and it is certainly not an aggressive move to 'set right'. It is about self-reflection, regret, and contrition. It is an intentional decision to constructively and meaningfully engage with the past from the present. It requires awareness of one's connection to other beings, including to local or global communities; therefore dispossession helps it to thrive. Through their treatment of dispossession, of endurance and of loss, Kushner's plays echo this radical hope for a future springing from the inheritance of a different legacy, lived on different terms to those of spilled blood.

[44] 'Repent, V'., *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/162742> [accessed 28 June 2017].
[45] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.4.171-73.

Chapter Three

Survival, Legacy, and Darwin in *Angels in America*

At the end of *Angels in America, Part Two* (1992), Prior Walter demands the blessing of 'more life' from the seven Continental Principalities, the Angels who make up Heaven's 'Permanent Emergency Council' (270, 279).[1] Prior has HIV/AIDS, and is extremely ill with related complications. He is also the Angels' prophet, and they have commanded that he help them to halt human progress, and end the 'Virus of TIME' (169). In this context, his demand for more life is an attempt to keep open historical movement and the flow of time. Placing himself within a context of global suffering, he tells the Angels:

> We live past hope. If I can find hope anywhere, that's it, that's the best I can do. It's so much not enough, so inadequate but …
> Bless me anyway. I want more life. (279)

Though ambiguous and syntactically erratic, his words suggest that humans can survive beyond optimistic expectations of outcomes, or cherished desires. He has no certain answer to why, as Kushner has put it, 'human beings survive things that seem so unendurable'.[2] All Prior knows is that however inadequate, hope found anywhere will and must do. The 'habit' of life persists, and we keep on living, sometimes despite ourselves.

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[1] A note on editions: *Angels in America* has an extremely complex history of performance and revision. *Part One: Millennium Approaches* premiered in 1991, and has been revised twice (1993, 2013). *Part Two: Perestroika* premiered in 1992 (it was performed with Part One at Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles). It has been revised three times (1994, 1995, 2013). Unless otherwise indicated, I refer to the revised 2013 Theatre Communications Group publication, which contains both *Part One* and *Part Two* (see *Part One: Millennium Approaches*, in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Revised and Complete Edition)* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2013), pp. 1–126; and *Part Two: Perestroika*, in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Revised and Complete Edition)* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2013), pp.127-290). Further references to each part are in-text. References to other versions of the text appear in footnotes. Note that Nick Hern Books published the revised version of the play in the UK in 2017. It is identical to the 2013 version used in this thesis.

[2] Patrick Pacheco, 'Tony Kushner Speaks out on AIDS, Angels, Activism & Sex in the Nineties', in *Essays on Kushner's Angels*, ed. by Per Brask (Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing, 1995), p. 21.

Prior's call for survival is about legacy because it is a demand to endure. In the previous chapter, I show Kushner to scrutinize the ways that legacies can brutally dispossess people, making some disposable to ensure that others endure.[3] This suggests that legacies mark both what has continued and what has gone – or is going – away. In *Angels in America* the tension between endurance and loss is the central feature of Kushner's treatment of legacy. Here, legacies of endurance encompass not only leaving things to one's children, or 'living after' or 'on' through them, but also the force of continued survival with or without progeny. They can follow the model of the reparative legacies seen in *Caroline, or Change* and *Homebody/ Kabul*. However, they can also take on violent qualities, which see people discriminated against and abandoned. As they battle with survival and leaving legacies, Kushner's characters are always engaging with the co-existence of endurance and loss.

I elucidate the relationship between these two aspects of legacy by placing the play in conversation with the work of nineteenth-century evolutionary theorist Charles Darwin. Darwin's poetic-scientific language of progress and cataclysm forced the reassessment of humanity's place in the world, and as Gillian Beer has argued, offered new linguistic tools to engage with this, poising his empirical argument on the edge of metaphor.[4] This language – particularly his way of writing about progress – had long-lasting after-effects, or legacies. It showed biological life to be far older and less hierarchical than Biblical tenants had suggested. Each species is the inheritor of millennia of biological change, capable of enduring, but also subject to the threat of extinction. While Darwin spoke with confidence of human endeavours to progress and survive into the future, these are haunted by the inevitability of degradation and death. Kushner's treatment of legacy in *Angels* answers to Darwin's understanding that the struggle for 'more life' is global, connective, and always interwoven with loss. Building on this, Kushner critiques ways of understanding legacy that seek to control this inevitable loss by limiting who

[3] For my analysis of this see the sub-section entitled 'Monologue' in Chapter Two, especially pp.108-09.

[4] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Third Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

is allowed to endure, preserving some, and purposefully disposing of others. In response, Kushner calls for inclusive legacies that draw on Darwin in their acknowledgement that flux, change, and destruction go hand in hand with survival. Where Charles McNulty and others have called the ending of Angels uncritically hopeful, this Darwinian reading shows it to treat progress sceptically, as always accompanied by loss.[5]

I argue this by looking at the ways Darwin's theory and language influence three of the play's characters: Roy Cohn, the Angel, and Prior Walter. Each has a different discourse on legacy, which engages with and can be explicated by Darwin's work. I begin by considering Roy, who like Prior is ill with AIDS, and whose approach to legacy is reliant on a twisting of Darwin's language. Roy is a Social Darwinist – he manipulates evolutionary theory, applying it to society and race in a way anathema to Darwin's actual work. A foil to Prior, he presents himself as an isolated individualist at the top of a social hierarchy in which only the fittest – those with power – survive. Working with Michel Foucault I show Roy draws on a eugenics-inspired taxonomy of homosexuality to insist that people with AIDS and 'homosexuals' are unfit for survival. Yet, he simultaneously resists such taxonomies by excluding himself from this hierarchy, twisting performativity, and vehemently denying the power of these 'labels' over him (46). Kushner undermines Roy's discourse by showing that his survival is dependant on a homoerotic, right wing network within which power is propagated by transmitting legacies between 'fathers' and 'sons'. His Social Darwinist vision of legacy is hypocritical, dangerous, and characterised by stagnation that is contra to the flux of Darwin's actual writings.

Roy's language is comparable to that of the Angel, who like him wishes for stagnation. She wants to end time and human progress by passing Prior a legacy of stasis. Scholars have emphasised the influence of Walter Benjamin on the Angel's

[5] David Savran, 'Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation', in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. by Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Charles McNulty, '*Angels in America*: Tony Kushner's Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Modern Drama*, 39.1 (1996), 84–96 <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.1996.0078>.

conception of progress. I claim that Darwin must be placed alongside Benjamin as a progenitor of Kushner's thought on this matter. Reading the Angel's words through the lens of Darwin's scientific-poetic language allows me to examine her plea for cessation and her conception of legacy from a new angle. I show this to be both a reactionary response to Darwin's story and a misunderstanding of the relationship between flux, progress, and extinction. This is caused in part by the Angel's lack of imagination, and results in her attempts to make humanity inert.

Prior's demand for survival is juxtaposed with the discourses of both the Angel and Roy. He implicitly rejects Roy's Social Darwinism, and explicitly turns down the legacy of stasis that the Angel attempts to pass to him. In place of this, he establishes an inclusive, global community, from within which he and others might seek to survive in different and queer ways. To be gay, as Prior is, is to know that one's legacy will not necessarily be transmitted through having children, within a nuclear family structure, or even through Roy's metaphorical fathers and sons. Prior's evocation of 'more life' exceeds a Darwinian model in which legacy is transmitted through reproduction. Though his understanding of the will to live is inclusive of and empathetic towards parent-child relationships, and he plays with the idea that it is 'just the animal' or biology that drives him to survive, Prior quickly moves past this. Rather, his will for more life is dependant on acknowledging the potential for negativity – extinction and apocalypse – and balancing this with hope and strength drawn from a community of sufferers. Though dissonant with aspects of Darwin's theory, this echoes his acknowledgement of the entangled, wondrous nature of life, which persists despite the constant threats to it. Prior's legacy, imparted to the audience at the play's end, seeks to keep open the boundaries of time, and to embrace life in its flux, change, and struggle. This call resonates throughout Kushner's oeuvre, and is all the more powerful for *Angels*' foundational place within it.

On the Play, Theatre, and Evolution

Angels in America is an epic play: consisting of two parts, *Millennium Approaches* (1991) and *Perestroika* (1992), it takes seven hours to perform. It is Kushner's most

prominent work, subject of a rich body of scholarship, and several adaptations.[6] *Angels* stages a multi-tiered exploration of survival and legacy. All of its characters are battling for survival in different ways. Prior, for example, must live through a series of AIDS-related illnesses (including pneumonia), and survive the grief of abandonment when his boyfriend Louis leaves him. The Angel's visitation of Prior, and her demand that he halt time, deny profusion, and embrace death, is a response to this situation. Prior's journey is juxtaposed with that of Roy Cohn, whom he never meets, and who is to some extent the play's 'villain'.[7] The only historical character in the play, Roy is also fighting AIDS-related illness. Unlike Prior, he dies before the play's end. Embroiled in a battle against disbarment, he paradoxically comes to feel that he can survive as a lawyer if he dies before he is disbarred. This goal is not met: he is informed of his expulsion from the bar minutes before his death.

Although Prior and Roy's struggles with biological survival make them the primary focus of this chapter, other characters, while not urgently physically ill, struggle with emotional and mental survival. Louis, wracked by guilt after leaving Prior, at one point declares 'I'm dying', to which Prior's best friend Belize replies 'He's dying. You just wish you were' (104). Also engaged in a struggle for survival are the married, Mormon couple Joe and Harper Pitt. Joe is a staunch Republican and Mormon. Harper is agoraphobic and addicted to Valium. Both must survive the fracture and turmoil of Joe's incipient coming out as gay, which sees him temporarily leave Harper for Louis. Joe's mother Hannah Pitt moves to New York when he comes out to her, and must survive and adapt to both the city and the new shape of her life. As a gay African American, Belize's struggle for survival is continuous; he strives against old orders, and for the birth of new ones. Finally, even the Angels are under threat from 'heavenquakes', caused by God's abandonment of Heaven.

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[6] Adaptations include Mike Nichols' HBO miniseries (2004), and Péter Eötvös' opera. (Mike Nichols, *Angels in America* (HBO Video, 2004); 'New Opera - Angels in America', *Peter Eötvös - Composer, Conductor, Professor* <http://eotvospeter.com/news/60> [accessed 19 September 2017].)

[7] Charlie Rose and Tony Kushner, 'Tony, Tonys, and Television', in *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, ed. by Robert Vorlicky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 44–50 (p. 46).

The play's form echoes the ruptures in these character's lives, and particularly the fragmentation and devastation brought about by the dual crises of AIDS and Reaganism. Kushner breaks with the starkly realist AIDS theatre of the 1980s – epitomized by Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985) – to offer a fantastical, disruptive experience that draws the audience to watch sceptically.[8] As Monica Pearl comments, this fragmentation is in some ways a reflection of AIDS itself:

> because of its fragmented – even, postmodern – existence, [AIDS] resulted in fragmented, postmodern works of art and narrative. AIDS changed the rules and boundaries of the genres that were engaged to represent it. […] *Angels in America* is a complicated and unwieldy play, a good example of how form mimics and spells out the very experience it is representing.[9]

Kushner uses multiple techniques to this end, writing fantastical characters such as the Angel, and instructing directors to make their special effects obviously theatrical, encouraging the audience to think critically about what they see onstage. To suggest fragmentation he gives each actor multiple roles, and uses split scenes, very short scenes, and over-lapping dialogue.

Evolution, like AIDS, has a rich metaphorical relationship with theatre. *Angels* is only on the periphery of this, and Darwin is only one of the many theorists of evolution with whom playwrights have engaged.[10] As Kristen Shepherd-Barr argues, theatre demands adaptation during each performance, which will always introduce the condition of flux and change.[11] This represents a consonance between theatre and evolution, and hence tangentially between the work of Darwin and Kushner. Darwin's language marks this link. While he looked unfavourably on 'the tricks of the stage' he used theatrical metaphors to describe species' appearance, writing that they came successively 'on the stage'.[12] This implicitly links their emergence and

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[8] Larry Kramer, *The Normal Heart* (London: Methuen, 1985).
[9] Monica B. Pearl, 'Epic AIDS: *Angels in America* from Stage to Screen', *Textual Practice*, 21.4 (2007), 761–79 (p. 763) <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502360701642425>.
[10] For the history of evolution on stage see Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, *Theatre and Evolution from Ibsen to Beckett* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[11] Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, *Science on Stage* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 117.
[12] Shepherd-Barr, *Theatre and Evolution*, p. 19; Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species (Fourth Ed.)* (London: John Murray, 1866), pp. 505 & 561 <http://darwin-

lives to performances, perhaps with Darwin and his readers as imagined audience members.

Evolution and Legacy in Darwin's *Origin of Species*

Darwin is not directly cited in *Angels in America*. Neither his name nor the key terms 'evolution' and 'natural selection' appear in the play. As I will go on to show, though, *Angels* repeatedly rubs up against questions conceptually linked to Darwin's work: these involve evolution, specification, social Darwinism, progress, time, and eschatology. The play is also clearly concerned with theory. In a scene analysed in my Introduction, Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov introduces *Perestroika* with a horrified vision of the collapse of grand theories (138). While Prelapsarianov is speaking about Marxism, Darwin's work can be counted among those grand theories that must, in Kushner's mind, be looked at and read with awareness that they cannot explain everything.[13] This understanding of theory underlies my analysis.

Darwin's texts are seminal, not only in their scientific material, but also in their use of language. In *Darwin's Plots*, Gillian Beer shows Darwin was thinking 'against the grain of the language available [to him]', re-casting scientific and poetic language alike.[14] His work, in other words, offered new tools for thought. Beer argues that his 'ideas profoundly unsettled the received relationships between fiction, metaphor, and the material world'.[15] This is resonant with legacy's evocation of substance and negativity, and its flexible crossing of concrete and abstract worlds.[16] He influenced contemporaries like Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom Kushner explicitly cites in *Angels*. Yet I am not only making an argument for Darwin's indirect influence on Kushner's work through such figures. The legacies of his thought are

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online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=F385&viewtype=text&pageseq=1> [accessed 13 August 2015].

[13] See the 'Methodology' section of my Introduction for Kushner's comments on 'theories now hav[ing] to also reveal their own lies and their own slippages'. He does not mention Darwin here, but does talk about Stephen J. Gould, who was one of Darwin's heirs. Gould tried to extend Darwin's theory to explain everything through the notion of 'punctuated equilibrium', which argued that periods of evolutionary stability are followed by ones of great activity. See Kinzer and others, p. 214.

[14] Beer, p. xviii.

[15] Beer, p. 27.

[16] Beer, p. xviii.

actively operative in *Angels in America*. They offer new ways to analyse Kushner's treatment of legacy, which reciprocally heightens awareness of Darwin's language.

The intricacies of Darwin's thought and language are evident in his seminal *Origin of Species* (1859).[17] The full title of the first edition of *Origin* is: *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: Or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. 'Or' here formulates an analogy between the scientific terms of the first part of the title, and the more colloquial wording of the second. The tensions between these different ways of writing about evolution are spread throughout Darwin's study. Take, for example, his description of the struggle for life. This is a core premise of his theory: 'as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life'. He continues:

> In looking at Nature, it is most necessary to keep the foregoing considerations always in mind – never to forget that every single organic being around us may be said to be striving to the utmost to increase in numbers; that each lives by a struggle at some period of its life; that heavy destruction inevitably falls either on the young or old, during each generation or at recurrent intervals. Lighten any check, mitigate the destruction ever so little, and the number of the species will almost instantaneously increase to any amount. The face of Nature may be compared to a yielding surface, with ten thousand sharp wedges packed close together and driven inwards by incessant blows, sometimes one wedge being struck, and then another with greater force.[18]

The last sentence of this passage is present only in the first edition of *Origin*, and was likely removed due to its vagueness. In these three sentences, Darwin couples an ordered consideration of the 'checks' offered by nature's destruction with a violent metaphor, which is useful but ambiguous. Elsewhere, he makes clear that

[17] A note on Darwin's editions: There are six versions of *Origin*, the first of which was published in 1859, and the last in 1872. Darwin made significant revisions in many of these. Following Beer, I work with the second edition of *Origin* unless otherwise indicated. Published six weeks after the first, this edition saw some emendations but retains much of Darwin's poetic language, which was often pared down in later versions.

[18] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species (First Ed.)*, ed. by John van Wyhe and Sue Asscher, 1st edn (London: John Murray, 1859), pp. 66–67 <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=F373&viewtype=text&pageseq=1> [accessed 13 August 2015].

the wedges represent competing species; as they are driven into the surface of nature, they gain better purchase for themselves, but displace others.[19] In this passage, however, it is unclear what this metaphor relates to. Are the wedges and blows described meant to represent the 'checks' and 'destruction' that frame them? Alternatively, are the wedges representative of species? If so, how are we meant to read the 'blows', which cause the topography of wedges to rise and fall? The depth to which each wedge has penetrated could equally be a marker of disappearance or endurance. Overarching this uncertainty is the discomfort of personifying the surface of nature as a 'face' penetrated by these wedges. Here Darwin's language is both poetic and cobbled together. It is ambiguously evocative, stretching metaphor and imagery to attempt to capture the scale of the scientific breakthrough he is describing. This linguistic complexity inflects the ways Darwin's theory interacts with legacy.

Darwin's theory is concerned with inheritance, but not with the legacies of intentional acts. Its central tenant is 'natural selection', the means through which 'slight variations' or adaptations give some organisms a better chance of surviving and reproducing.[20] Beneficial adaptations tend to be preserved from generation to generation, so that physiologically, our suitability for survival is partly inherited. The scope of this biological inheritance is vast and chaotic. While attempts to pass down biological legacies through partner selection, gene manipulation, and eugenics have been made, what is inherited from biology is not handed down purposely. However, both evolutionary theory and the language that Darwin used to express this have very tangible legacies: a long lasting effect on human self-conception.

Darwin's work changed perceptions of the scope of history, and humanity's place in it. Following on from geologists such as Charles Lyell, he found that the world must

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[19] Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Natural Selection*, ed. by R.C. Stauffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 208, Darwin Online <http://darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1975_NaturalSelection_F1583.pdf> [accessed 18 March 2017]; Charles Darwin and James T. Costa, *The Annotated Origin: A Facsimile of the First Edition of On the Origin of Species* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 67.

[20] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species (Second Ed.)*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 338.

be tremendously old for evolution as he understood it to have taken place, writing that human history would 'be recognised as a mere fragment of time compared with the ages elapsed since the first progenitors'.[21] This sense of scale can be juxtaposed with the complaint made by the ghost of Prior's seventeenth-century ancestor, Prior 2, '[t]he twentieth century. Oh dear, the world has gotten so terribly, terribly old' (120). For someone like Prior 2, who takes the human-centric view that three centuries is a vast measure of time capable of making the world old, Darwin's global timescale would shake the foundations of his understanding of history.

Darwin's focus on long timescales also involved the privileging of reproduction, multiplication, and continuance over the individual.[22] Beer argues that in his schema the individual's brief lifespan means that once they've procreated they are 'done' in evolutionary terms. However, she complicates this by recognizing that the individual also 'carries the freight of evolutionary change through the slight variations encoded in each organism or person'.[23] In *Angels*, a play about survival in which five of the eight key characters are gay men without children, and Harper wishes to find herself pregnant but does not, this latter aspect of evolution takes primacy. The language of evolution sweeps up individuals and generations alike.

A further consequence of evolutionary theory was the debunking of literal readings of the Book of Genesis. Here man is presented as being made in God's image, and bequeathed 'dominion' over all creatures of earth, air, and sea by God the creator-father.[24] These words establish an order, maintained through a separation of species, and later through the establishment of a chosen people, descended from Abraham. Darwin, in contrast, argued that all life could be represented as 'a great tree', where 'the green and budding twigs may represent existing species', and the branches and trunk older species from which we have diverged.[25] His finding that

[21] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, p. 359.
[22] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, p. 51.
[23] Beer, p. xx.
[24] Due to *Angels'* link to Jewish tradition, I refer to the *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures According to the Maroretic Text (A New Translation)* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917), p. Genesis 1: 27-28 <http://jewishpub.org/pdf/Tanakh1917.pdf>.
[25] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, pp. 99–100.

mankind is descended from common ancestors with other mammals, and that all species are part of some 'community of descent', undercuts the Biblical hierarchy of Genesis.[26] The cosmology with which the Angel presents Prior in *Perestroika* replicates this crisis as the Angels – who view themselves as God's privileged creations – must reassess their self-conception after humanity's arrival (168-170). Darwin's poetic appreciation of the 'marvellous' qualities of the most 'humble organism' did not lead him to become anti-hierarchical. He continued to call other species 'lower animals', and in *Descent of Man* he insists on man's superiority to other species.[27] Yet as Beer notes, in *Origin* '[i]nstead of theology and forward plan, the future is an uncontrollable welter of possibilities'.[28] As I will show below, this coupling of possibility with the uncontrollable is pivotal to understanding the Angel's mission to Prior.

While Kushner deals only indirectly with Darwin in *Angels*, in his later work he refers to him more explicitly. In *A Prayer* (1994), *Caroline, or Change* (2003) and *Lincoln* (2012) he shows the ways in which Darwin's popularized legacy has been taken up by those who follow after him. In all cases, the pivotal figures talking or learning about evolution are children, and Darwinian theory is something that they struggle with, or are asked to incorporate into their self-understanding. In *Lincoln*, the most recent of these texts, Lincoln's youngest son Tad speaks (presumably) of Darwin's impact on science of the day:

> Daddy's meeting with a famous scientist now and he's nervous because […] the man is angry about, 'cause there's a new book that Sam Beckwith says is about finches, and finches' beaks, about how they change, it takes years and years and years but –
> […]
> – but what's made every one really cross with the man, the man who wrote the finch book, is he says people are cousins to monkeys, but he was going to say –[29]

[26] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, p. 352.
[27] Charles Darwin, 'The Descent of Man', in *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition (Third Edition)*, ed. by Philip Appleman (New York & London: W. W. Norton Company, 2001), pp. 175–254.
[28] Beer, p. xviii.
[29] Tony Kushner, *Lincoln: The Screenplay* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2012), pp. 51–52.

Tad's language encapsulates a range of adult responses to Darwin's work. He struggles to express complex concepts and emotions in the terms of a child. His speech is also Kushner's anachronistic reading of Darwin from several removes. Though important to his development of evolutionary theory, Darwin made limited mention of 'finches' in his published texts.[30] Works such as David Lack's *Darwin's Finches* later popularised the close association between Darwin and these birds (1947).[31] This interlude shows that that Darwin's legacy has been swept well beyond him by the interpretive acts of others.

In *Caroline,* written between *Angels* and *Lincoln,* Noah's father Stewart uses Darwin to reflect on emptiness:

> There is no God, Noah,
> We don't believe in God.
> In all that corny stuff.
> We're scientific people!
> Space is infinite and empty and cold,
> people are descended from apes, actually
> and usually act worse than apes,
> and a boy your age should sleep without a
> light on,
> and your mother is dead
> and there is no God.[32]

Here, Stuart is responding to Noah's declaration that 'God made' everything. Noah, whose very name is a reminder of Genesis, has been listening to different explanations of his mother's death, including Caroline's religious one. Stuart dismisses this consolation. Such beliefs are 'corny' and sentimental. Noah must accept that 'Space is infinite empty and cold' and that 'people are descended from apes, actually'. Bert Stern calls Stewart 'a strict Darwinian determinist and materialist, with its emotional legacy of our being lost in the stars'.[33] Using Darwin,

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[30] Frank J. Sulloway, 'Darwin and His Finches: The Evolution of a Legend', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 15.1 (1982), 1–53.
[31] David Lack, *Darwin's Finches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947).
[32] Kushner, *Caroline, or Change*, p. 22.
[33] Stern, p. 208.

Stewart tries to impart to Noah a belief characterized by absence: of God, of a full universe, of good human behaviour, of light, and of Noah's mother.

This should not be taken to suggest that Kushner necessarily associates Darwin's theory with desolation. Stuart's declaration to Noah is semi-autobiographical, based on a conversation between Kushner and his uncle. Here, as in *Lincoln*, Darwin's science is passed down to a confused child. In *A Prayer*, written for the National Day of Prayer for AIDS in 1994, Kushner addresses God, the 'you' to whom he speaks:

> When I was ten an uncle told me you didn't exist: 'We descend from apes,' he said, 'the universe will end, and there is no God.' I believed the ape part—my uncle had thick black hair on his arms and knuckles, so apes was easy—and the universe become a nulliverse, that too was scary fun. And since his well-meaning instruction I have not known your existence, as some friends of mine do; but you have left bread-crumb traces inside of me. Rapacious birds swoop down and the traces are obscured, but the path is recoverable. It can be discovered again.[34]

Kushner's equation of his uncle's hairy knuckles with our descent from apes, and his appreciation of the 'scary fun' of a 'nulliverse' again reflects the conceptual steps of a child trying to come to grips with evolutionary theory, and with extinction itself. He accepts the 'well meaning' nature of his uncle's instruction, the legacy of which stretches into his adult life. As in the other two texts, Darwin is constitutive for the young Kushner, and has a lasting effect on his sense of the universe.

There are, of course, no children in *Angels,* bar Harper's imagined Arctic baby and the Mormon dummies. Yet adults, who have grown out of children affected by these theories, can use them in mature ways, which – as in *Caroline* – allow for reparation. In *A Prayer*, Kushner's Darwinian scepticism may obscure God, but it also gives him the footing to demand from God a 'cure for AIDS. For racism too. For homophobia and sexism, and an end to war, to nationalism and capitalism, to work as such and to hatred of the flesh' (222). He warns:

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[34] Tony Kushner, 'A Prayer', in *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness: Essays, A Play, Two Poems and A Prayer* (New York: Theatre Communications Group Inc., 1995), pp. 216–23. Further references are in-text.

> If you cannot do these things for us, we will do them for ourselves, but slowly, because we can't see far ahead. At least give us time to accomplish the future. We had a pact; you engendered us. Don't expect that we will forgive you if you allow us to be endangered. Forgiveness, too, is a lesson loss doesn't teach.
>
> (223)

Playing off the lexical resonances between 'engendered' and 'endangered', Kushner asks a question about legacy spurred by Darwin's work. For Darwin, living and dying, continuation and extinction, are bound together. Kushner acknowledges this, but argues that an engendering God should offer the 'cure' for some of the worst things that endanger life: AIDS, racism, homophobia, war, nationalism, and capitalism. God – if he exists – can be rejected if he does not offer protection. This discourse is a development of Prior's 'more life' speech, which both appeals to the Angels and rejects their message, asking to live, even though he knows that he will die young. Prior does not deny the mapping of extinction and death onto life, but he is willing to fight the Angel's eschatology and work to accomplish the future anyway. This future will not be accomplished merely through his passing on of genetic material to another generation: as I will show below, it requires the establishment of a global community, linked by suffering and hope. Here, Kushner answers to the legacy of Darwin's theory, its troubled scepticism regarding God, and its recognition of the continuum of life and death. This is done in a way that opens Darwin's global community of living things beyond the boundaries of the biological.

Roy Cohn, Social Darwinism, and Homosexuality

Darwin's evolutionary theory both bears on contemporary conceptions of legacy, and exerts its own legacy on humanity's self-understanding. Human self-doubt is not, however, the only difficult and problematical thing to arise from Darwin's work on evolution. Embedded in his language were also the seeds of Social Darwinism. This extends the determinism of evolutionary theory beyond the physical properties of humans, to their social existence, and to psychological attributes like reason,

religion and morality.[35] Social Darwinism is immensely flexible and thus easily appropriated for laissez-faire capitalism, political conservatism, and racism. It has fuelled eugenics, the insidious idea that selective breeding might 'improve the inborn qualities of a race'.[36] In *Angels*, the issues of Social Darwinism are both raised and challenged by Roy Cohn, whose twisting of Darwin's concepts underpins his damaging conceptions of legacy.

Social Darwinism is not Darwinian. It is associated with the term 'survival of the fittest', coined by Herbert Spencer, and taken up by thinkers who envisaged a battle for survival between races and classes, where only the strongest would survive.[37] Darwin was a proponent of neither Social Darwinism nor eugenics. He vehemently rebutted claims that some races were innately more intelligent than others. However his fashion of writing of Europeans as 'civilized populations' and other races as 'savages', and his dismissal of non-European socio-cultural practices, allowed for an interpretation of his work that supported social and racial hierarchies.[38] There are powerful Social Darwinist trends embedded in both historical discourses about homosexuality, and the Reaganite refusal to address the mounting HIV/AIDS crisis throughout the 1980s.[39]

Roy's unique brand of Social Darwinism is fed by these discourses, and has two inter-related aspects. The first re-inscribes both gay people and people with AIDS as inherently powerless, and unfit to survive. Although Roy sleeps with other men and has AIDS, he considers himself exempt from this because he is self-sufficient and powerful, part of the top tier of a social hierarchy from which these others are

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[35] Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 31.

[36] 'Eugenics' was coined by Francis Galton. See his 'Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims', *The American Journal of Sociology*, X.1 (1904), 1–6 (p. 1).

[37] For reflections on the interpenetration of Social Darwinism with the thinking of Darwin see: Hawkins; Gregory Claeys, 'The "Survival of the Fittest" and the Origins of Social Darwinism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61.2 (2000), 223–40 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3654026>; Christopher R. Versen, 'What's Wrong with a Little Social Darwinism (In Our Historiography)?', *The History Teacher*, 42.4 (2009), 403–23.

[38] Darwin, 'The Descent of Man', p. 201.

[39] For a sense of this see ACT UP resources from this period. See especially Silence = Death Project, 'Reagan's AIDSGATE', *ACT UP New York*, 1987 <http://www.actupny.org/reports/reagan.html> [accessed 28 March 2017].

excluded. To make these claims, Roy both draws on and undercuts early, pathological discourses about homosexuality. This is one of the ways that Darwin's legacy shapes the play, for such discourses were influenced by Social Darwinism and eugenics, and fed pejorative discourses around gay men and AIDS. The second aspect of Roy's Social Darwinism seems to contradict the first. Having established his self-sufficiency he paradoxically attributes it to others: an elitist network of surrogate fathers and sons. Through this network, from which gay men, all women, and people with AIDS are wilfully excluded, 'sons' are equipped to survive and propagate themselves as well as their 'father's' dreams. Roy attempts to draw Joe Pitt into this network as his metaphorical 'son'. He wants to use the homoerotic transmission of legacies to Joe as a means to maintain the illusion of self-sufficiency, as well as his real political, social, and legal power. Kushner shows Roy's twisted conceptualization of legacy to be powerful but logically inconsistent, resulting only in stagnation. Meanwhile, as a gay man struggling to accept his sexual orientation, Joe must wrestle with Roy's language both of Social Darwinism and legacy. Though ultimately unsuccessful, he attempts to embrace a queer legacy that is transmitted through mutual desire and exploration, rather than a Darwinian model of reproduction or Roy's toxic re-reading of the father-son relationship.

The historical Roy M. Cohn rose to prominence in the 1950s, as chief council to Joseph R. McCarthy during his Communist-hunting Senate investigations. The play features the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, sentenced to execution during the Red Scare trials, partly due Cohn's manipulation of her trial. Although his career as a lawyer ended in disbarment before his death in 1986, he was powerful, rich, and fashionable, even acting as a mentor to Donald Trump.[40] Louis calls Cohn 'the most evil, twisted, vicious bastard ever to snort coke at Studio 54' (249).

Kushner's interest in writing Cohn partially stems from this 'villainy'. Kushner describes him as 'a person who [was] a closeted homosexual […], who was […]

[40] 'Eavesdropping on Roy Cohn and Donald Trump', *The New Yorker* <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/eavesdropping-on-roy-cohn-and-donald-trump> [accessed 2 July 2017].

outed, in a sense, by AIDS, and a person who worked assiduously all his life for homophobes and in homophobic causes'.[41] He was unexpectedly moved by Cohn's death:

> I was kind of upset at the way that he was discussed in the press at that time that he died because I thought there was a great deal of homophobia and homophobic gloating over the fact that he had died of AIDS. In a certain sense, his dying of the disease made him a part of the gay and lesbian community, even if we don't really want him to be a part of our community. [42]

Kushner's inclusion of Cohn 'in a certain sense' in the gay and lesbian community is juxtaposed throughout the play with Roy's vitriolic language of self-sufficiency. As I will show below, he uses the language of specification and Social Darwinism to discriminate against anyone identified as gay, even though his power relies upon a homoerotically charged network of father-son desire. Twisted Darwinian thought comes to underpin his contradictory understanding of legacy.

As Stephen J. Bottoms claims, Kushner's Roy is one of several theatrical depictions of the historical Cohn to 'raise important questions about the condition of America's multicultural, heterogeneous society, and particularly about the perpetuation […] of certain dominant, narrowly homogenized views of social and sexual "normality"'.[43] These views are raised in in the first of several conversations that Roy has about having AIDS and being – or, as he violently proclaims, not being – 'a homosexual'. The legacies of Social Darwinist language are clear in Roy's discourse about this. We first hear that Roy has AIDS at the same time he does, in the office of his doctor Henry. Henry's opening lines show the fear and confusion brought about by AIDS in the 1980s: 'Nobody knows what causes it. And nobody knows how to cure it' (43). Roy's reaction, upon learning that Henry thinks he has AIDS, is to wrest control of

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[41] Rose and Kushner, p. 46.

[42] Kushner and Rose, p.46. For similar sentiments regarding Roy's 'pinklisting', see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 242; See also Michael Cadden, 'Strange Angel: The Pinklisting of Roy Cohn', in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. by Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 78–89.

[43] Stephen J. Bottoms, 'Re-Staging Roy: Citizen Cohn and the Search for Xanadu', *Theatre Journal*, 48.2 (1996), 157–84 (p. 158).

the conversation from his doctor. He frames AIDS with pejorative language, calling it a 'disease' (Henry corrects him, calling it a 'Syndrome') and noting that it 'afflicts mostly homosexuals and drug addicts' (49). In Marianne Elliott's 2017 National Theatre production Nathan Lane plays Roy, and says these words calmly, his speech logical, even understated.[44] Roy is drawing on discourses linking AIDS to gay men, an angle pushed by the media throughout the 1980s, and best epitomised by the case of Rock Hudson, who died in October 1985 (the month *Millennium Approaches* begins). As Richard Meyer argues, for many 'homosexuality supplant[ed] HIV as the origin and etiology of […] Hudson's illness'.[45] Having established a link between not only AIDS and homosexuality, but also between AIDS and drug use, Roy aggressively baits Henry to say that he is a homosexual, commanding:

> No, say it. I mean it. Say: 'Roy Cohn, you are a homosexual.'
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> (45)

Roy's demand for definition within the space of a doctor's office recalls Foucault's writing on the emergence of the term 'homosexual' in the late part of the nineteenth-century as part of a medical discourse influenced by evolutionary myths and ideas regarding eugenics. Roy both plays to and rejects this discourse.[46] In this period, the '*incorporation of perversions* and the new *specification of individuals*' saw '[a] homosexual bec[o]me a personage, a past, a case history […] in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology'.[47] Foucault goes on to write that for many thinkers at this time 'the sodomite had been a terrible aberration; the homosexual was now a *species*'.[48] This specification – by which I refer to both the becoming of a species, and the more conventional act of identifying through

[44] Marianne Elliott, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* (National Theatre, London, 2017); Marianne Elliott, *Angels in America: Perestroika* (National Theatre, London, 2017).
[45] Richard Meyer, 'Rock Hudson's Body', in *Inside/ Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 258–88 (pp. 275–77).
[46] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), I, pp. 54, 101.
[47] Foucault, I, pp. 42–43.
[48] Foucault, I, p. 43. My italics.

detailed description – imitates Darwin's language of heredity and evolution, without actually being Darwinian.[49]

Foucault further points to the stubborn blindness that characterized such discourses. Unlike the study of the physiology of reproduction, medical theories of sexuality were not aimed at stating the truth. They sought to 'prevent its very emergence' and were constituted by 'a refusal to see and to understand; but further […] a refusal concerning the very thing that was brought to light and whose formulation was urgently solicited'.[50] That said, Foucault continues by noting that while discourses about 'species and subspecies of homosexuality' and other areas of 'perversity' allowed for the advance of social controls,

> it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.[51]

Roy's language rejects the medicalized discourse around homosexuality, but also discards any attempt to demand legitimacy and naturality on the part of gay men, lesbians, or people with AIDS. This plays into discourses of eugenics in different ways. He does this in order to re-define what homosexuality means, and to exclude himself from it, just as his statement 'Roy Cohn, you are a homosexual' is intended to stop someone else from using it to define him.

In the face of Roy's threat to ruin him, Henry cannot bring himself even to say the word 'homosexual', but he reiterates that Roy has had sex with men and that it has given him AIDS. Roy's response seeks to wrest the definitional power of language away from Henry. In Lane's performance, this speech is again tightly controlled and logically presented:

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[49] I use the term 'discourse' loosely in this chapter, following Foucault's insistence that 'There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations'. Foucault, I, p. 101.
[50] Foucault, I, p. 55.
[51] Foucault, I, p. 101.

> Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> Homosexuals are men who know nobody, and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. Does this sound like me Henry? (46)

Roy claims that the word 'homosexual' does not mean what Henry 'believes' it does. Its reality is not about sexuality at all, but about power: if you are a homosexual, your identity is of someone with no clout. As Roy has power, he is not a homosexual. He continues: 'w*hat* I am is defined entirely by *who* I am. Roy Cohn is not a homosexual. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man, Henry, who fucks around with guys' (47).

Roy's denial of the link between homosexuality and sexual preference implicitly deconstructs the historical practice of specification traced by Foucault. When he conflates the labels 'AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian', Roy is not just dismissing the differences between gay people, lesbian people, and people with AIDS. He is also undermining the case studies and pseudo-medical discourses that have sought to specify, categorize and define them according to who they desire. However, even as Roy moves away from this quasi-Darwinian medical discourse, he sets up his own restrictive – and equally eugenics-inspired – Social Darwinist one through elaborate language, which seeks to alter the norms of recognition. He has a keen awareness of 'performativity' in the sense used by Judith Butler, where it refers to the 'reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names including queer identity'.[52] Butler argues that the conventions, laws, norms, codes, and contracts that we cite when we construct and perform identity are artificial, rather than natural. They only appear to be necessary within a context where the forming and signification of, for example, the sexed body 'will be a set of actions mobilized by the law, the citational accumulation and dissimulation of the law that

[52] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 2. I consider J. L. Austin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's inter-related notions of performativity in Chapter Four.

produces material effects, the lived necessity of those effects as well as the lived contestation of that necessity'.[53] Roy has a powerful understanding of this, and of the lived contestation to the law. Just as he sees the judicial law as 'a pliable, breathing, sweating … *organ*' (69), in his conversation with Henry he treats the ideologies and conventions of the social world as his own to manipulate. Whether or not this is actually possible is not the point: Roy uses Social Darwinist discourse to twist logic and language, and in his mind at least, set up a different citational chain.

Roy elides and re-works the power of society to define him as homosexual, because the options of self-definition available are, in his mind, awful. The tone of the historical Cohn's pinklisting after death forcefully confirmed his stance.[54] As Butler comments in *Undoing Gender*, our 'sense of survival' can be dependent on 'escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred'.[55] Recognition, after all, can make life unliveable; even if one may feel that some recognisability is needed to live, the terms that 'confer "humanness" on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status'. [56] Roy's attempt at redefinition combats what, for him, would make life unliveable: a lack of power. In his attempts at redefinition, however, he does not allow space for anyone to be unintelligible. His own sense of intelligibility depends on ensuring the terms by which both he and others are recognized change, and become 'reality'. At the end of their conversation he says to Henry:

> I don't want you to be impressed. I want you to understand. This is not sophistry. And this is not hypocrisy. This is reality. I have sex with men. But unlike nearly every other man of whom this is true, I bring the guy I'm screwing to the White House and President Reagan smiles at us and shakes his hand. (46-47)

In the National production, it is only here that the fury of Lane's Roy breaks through. Henry must 'understand' what makes Roy the individual exceptional, 'unlike nearly

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[53] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 12.
[54] I use Michael Cadden's definition of 'pinklisting', the speculation that someone – particularly someone famous – is gay. Cadden, p. 78.
[55] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), p. 3.
[56] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, pp. 2–4.

every other man' who has sex with men. And while Roy certainly uses sophistry and obscuration, he is clear that in his mind there is no such specious argument involved in his self-definition. It is ironic that while Roy claims that this isn't sophistry, and that language is in essence unreliable, his argument is totally dependent on manipulating and entrenching new labels. Although he says '*what* I am is defined entirely by *who* I am', he means that he wants what he is to be defined entirely by who he says he is.

Enforcing a restrictive, assimilative definitional model on millions of people, Roy makes being homosexual, gay, lesbian or infected with AIDS the marker of powerlessness, which in turn becomes the marker of the whole gay community: 'Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows' (46). In Roy's view only the fittest – those with power, among which he includes himself – can define themselves, dispense with anti-discrimination bills, and take their same-sex partners to the White House. Roy misses the juncture of recognisability and unintelligibility where, according to Butler, critique emerges: at this point one might 'establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation'.[57] All others are left subject to labels that see them discriminated against, their differently structured, non-heteronormative legacies obscured.

Thus, reading Kushner with Darwin shows Roy's understanding of legacy to emerge from within a pre-existing Social Darwinist discourse, but also to battle against it. Roy's vision of society is a re-reading and twisting of Darwin's language into 'survival of the fittest' to enforce a power-dynamic that ensures the continued dominance of those with 'clout'. Part of Kushner's unravelling of Social Darwinism occurs through Roy's increasingly desperate attempts to force this exclusionary and implicitly heteronormative doctrine to include him, and to support the transmission of his dreams and ambitions. For Kushner the most pressing feature of Roy's discourse on legacy is the way he understands it to be transmitted. While he emphasises his

[57] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p. 4.

dominance as a self-sufficient, exceptional individual, his power is covertly underpinned by a discourse of proliferation and transference, not through actual biological reproduction, but through cronyism, metaphorical father-son relationships, and political or social descent. Homoerotic but also rooted in the denial of desire between men, this version of legacy pretends to move sons into the future. However, it actually pushes for status. Kushner examines the injurious nature of such legacies through the relationship between Roy and his protégé Joe Pitt.

Throughout *Millennium Approaches* Roy attempts to manipulate Joe into going to Washington to interfere with his disbarment case. He insists that a bond like father and son exists between them, while also playing with homoerotic subtext, and attempting to pass his Social Darwinist vision to Joe. In a key moment, Roy and Joe share a split scene with Louis. Joe and Roy are together in a bar. In Elliott's National production, they stand close together centre-stage, the scene well lit but intimate. Meanwhile Louis, guilty at having abandoned Prior, has a sadomasochistic sexual encounter with a man in the park (he is traditionally played by the same actor who plays Prior). Elliott has them move about each other on the dark peripheries of the stage. In this context, everything that Roy says to Joe is literally framed by queer sex, which Roy is known to participate in but also revile. Roy, whom Lane plays as tipsy and nostalgic, is trying to impart his wisdom to Joe:

> Like a father to a son I tell you this: Life is full of horror;
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> (61)

His words, separated into short clauses by semi-colons, are like aphorisms. Michael Cadden writes of this as a statement of 'Roy's personal brand of social Darwinism, the primacy of the individual in the struggle for an existence'; it is a 'gospel of self-sufficiency'.[58] He attempts to pass this view of the world down to Joe 'like a father to a son' and wants to inspire feelings like his own in his well-meaning protégé.

[58] Cadden, pp. 84–85.

Yet, as Cadden notes, in acting as a father to Joe, Roy also demands loyalty to himself. Earlier in the same conversation the following interchange takes place:

> ROY Everyone who makes it in this world makes it because somebody older and more powerful takes an interest. The most precious asset in life, I think, is the ability to be a good son.
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> the father is continuance. The son offers the father his life as a vessel for carrying forth his father's dream. (58-59)

Roy, the isolated individualist, is not actually alone. His power is maintained through a line of 'substitute' fathers, to whom he is still 'a good son'. He 'owe[s his] life' to these men, to whom he is linked through the Red Scare trials and the Republican Party. Rejecting an accurately Darwinist model, he does not see procreation as leading to endurance. Women may offer birth, but 'continuance', survival, is only possible within the father-son dynamic. In his patriarchal community, forged through Social Darwinist discourse and the power to bend language to its will, the son inherits the father's dream, and is literally inhabited by it; his life becomes its vessel. This is Roy's alternative conception of legacy.

The sexual subtext of Roy's words is clear. Vessels not only carry things: they have orifices through which something – dreams, penises, bodily fluid – can enter. The father metaphorically penetrates the son, whose position is, comically, a 'precious *ass*et', just as the man in the park will soon anally penetrate Louis. Stanon B. Garner Jr. argues that Roy's 'language of love, struggle and transmission […] is animated by a subtext of sexual encounter', forming a counterhistory where Roy's broader

homophobic discourse is underwritten by homosexual desire.[59] In *Perestroika*, Belize refers to this counterhistory. When he tells Louis that Joe is Roy's protégé, he says, 'I don't know whether Mr. Cohn has penetrated more than his *spiritual* sphincter. All I'm saying is you better hope there's no GOP germ, Louis, 'cause if there is, you got it' (228-29).

Belize's reference to the 'GOP germ' establishes an analogy between HIV/AIDS and Roy's vision of the transmission of legacy within the Republican Party. This is a further counterhistory, which highlights the hypocrisy and danger of Roy's discourse, and of the relationship that he wants to establish with Joe. Louis's split scene encounter with the man in the park explicitly links the father's dream, as a metaphorical cipher for sex, to the possible transmission of HIV, and hence to AIDS. Louis and the man begin to have urgent, uncomfortable sex just after Roy's speech, but the man stops when condom that he is wearing breaks (59-60). He tells Louis, who desperately responds: 'Keep Going.| Infect me.| I don't care' (60). Louis's guilt-fuelled wish to become ill like Prior, makes the man break off, slap Louis, and leave. This frames Roy's comments on *famiglia*, on sons becoming vessels, and on 'a father's love' having 'to be very, very hard' (59). Roy's statement unknowingly suggests that the transmission of both HIV/AIDS and the 'GOP germ' are the metaphorical corollaries of his legacy: all are (or can be) 'passed down' through blood and semen. Roy's legacy, and the network of ostensibly heterosexual Republican men through which it is transmitted, is thus knotted up not only with homoeroticism, but also with HIV/AIDS. Kushner's point is not merely that Roy's Social Darwinist version of legacy is hypocritical, unsound, and bound to that which it reviles. It is also dangerous in the way of a virus, capable of proliferating and killing indiscriminately.

Part of the danger of Roy's virus-like legacy is that he is fixed on using it to bring about stasis through the agency of Joe, his adopted heir. Denis Flannery argues that

[59] Garner, p. 181.

in the first part of Roy's speech, he semi-coherently attempts to replicate the past in the present, particularly his implicitly erotic relationship with Joe McCarthy:

> The past/present distinction is something [Roy] is intent on collapsing at the expense of the present. In telling this little story he reproduces its structure twice, with himself as Joe McCarthy taking on the role of seductive patron to the young and ambitious man; and, in choosing as his object a man called Joe, he reverts to his self of thirty years past and becomes the young man eliciting the response of inexplicable tenderness from the stern and 'difficult' father.[60]

Flannery argues that this is a way of seeking stasis, which gives Roy some equivalence with the Angel. In collapsing past and present he can paradoxically remain a lawyer until he dies. Roy's will for stasis is reflected in his last words before death. Speaking faintly, he says: 'Next time around: I don't want to be a man. I wanna be an octopus. […] *(Punching an imaginary button with his finger)* Hold.' (255). His last living word, 'Hold', is a demand for cessation. His words are also a failed attempt to replicate exactly his first line from *Millennium Approaches*, which is: 'I wish I was an octopus, a fucking octopus' (11).

This suggests that when Roy speaks of a son or Joe 'carrying forth his father's dream', he does not want him to actually progress. He wants to keep things the same, and thereby ensure both his survival and that of the Republican order to which he attaches himself. While temporary stasis is an aspect of evolution and flux, permanent stasis is not. Roy's Social Darwinist vision is characterised by stagnation that is counter to the constant flux and movement of Darwin's actual writings. His final encounter with Joe epitomises this. He offers Joe the father's final blessing, as if to cement that through him some of Roy's dreams may live on. However, when Joe subsequently reveals that he has been living with Louis, Roy reacts so ferociously that he rips his drip out. Bleeding dramatically he proclaims: 'I want you home. With your wife. Whatever else you got going, cut it dead' (214). When Joe says that he cannot, Roy violently grabs his shirt, covering him with blood that carries both HIV and the 'GOP Germ', and which is the metaphorical corollary of his legacy. As if

[60] Denis Flannery, 'Engines and Instruments: The Cyborg Parallels of *Angels in America*', *Irish Association for American Studies*, 11/12 (2002), 101–17 (p. 106).

channelling the nineteenth-century discourses on homosexuality, which he partially rejects, he seeks to reverse Joe's coming out, but is unable to do so. He sends the bewildered Joe away. Their final living meeting is thus one of rupture. This is epitomized by Belize's instruction that Joe should throw away his blood soaked shirt, and with it the risk of HIV, the GOP Germ, and implicitly Roy's legacy. Their parting shows Roy's fatherly dream of continuance and stasis to be impossible.

Throughout the play, Joe battles to extract himself from the legacy of Roy's language, something he never quite achieves. He struggles with self-definition, and against the Social Darwinist discourse that Roy embraces. In *Millennium Approaches*, Joe's slow move from trying to 'pass' (56) to acknowledging that he is homosexual is framed by father-son imagery, even when he is away from Roy. When he eventually phones his mother Hannah to tell her that he is gay, he begins by asking if his father loved him (78). Hannah deflects his question. He then haltingly tells her 'Mom. Momma. I'm a homosexual, Momma' (79). Her response is: 'You're old enough to understand that your father didn't love you without being ridiculous about it' (79). Joe's first coming out is thus met with denial, and a pseudo-psychoanalytic suggestion that his feelings for other men are rooted in an inability to process fatherly rejection. Again channelling nineteenth-century discourse, this makes his desire seem a neurosis, and reactionary rather than inherent. Joe must carry such discourses as he works to find a way to address his desires.

Louis helps him to achieve this by tapping into a different language, which re-works that of Roy and the bible in a scientific frame. In their first sexual encounter in Louis's grim, bare apartment, Joe is clearly both uncomfortable and aroused, on the verge of leaving before things can move from touching to sex. Louis, desperate and comical, seduces Joe by offering him a new vocabulary through which to understand his desire (139). This is a language (and logic) of breath and the senses. Beginning by explaining that smells are 'made of the molecules of what you're smelling', Louis slowly breathes into Joe's will to act upon his desires by getting him to 'inhale' and pointing out the ways that smell already takes us 'beyond the boundaries … of ourselves'. There are 'Little molecules of Joe' up his nose (141).

Louis's language of breath and scent re-works an area of Joe's language that has been manipulated by Roy, and influenced by religious teaching. Just before they get together, Joe asks Louis if he knows about Lazarus, explaining that 'Jesus breathed life into him' to resurrect him (121). Joe is here picking up on a series of earlier conversations, including one where Roy says that if Joe doesn't go to Washington and play 'the game of being alive' he might as well be dead (71). Joe – who has tried to reject his sexuality by learning 'to live dead' (81) – absorbs this. When he tells Roy that he cannot go to Washington, he says: 'Maybe you were right, maybe I'm dead' (112). In this context, Joe's reference to Lazarus is a request for Louis to breathe life into him, as if acknowledging his desire for another man can resurrect him. The fact that he can frame this biblically makes it more permissible to Joe, and allows him to temporarily shake the Social Darwinist strictures of Roy's discourse.

Louis's language is a direct response to Joe's request. Having established a language of breath, which links it to scent, Louis continues to expand Joe's vocabulary by moving on to tasting. He evocatively describes the mineral taste of bodies, the salt of Joe's cheek (142), while Joe remains mostly inarticulate, speaking in trailing monosyllables like 'I…' and 'Um…'. In the delicately played National version, Joe (Russell Tovey) is constantly trying to leave but obviously longing to stay, and Louis (James McArdle) must frequently slow down or speed up his seduction to stop Joe/Tovey from departing. When Louis finally asks Joe to articulate what he tastes like after a kiss, Joe's answer is more metaphorical even than Louis's. Louis has said Joe tastes like 'Salt' and minerals (142). Joe thinks that Louis tastes like 'Well … Nighttime' (142). Joe is convinced to stay in part because Louis gives him a vocabulary through which to interpret their sexual encounter – though he later quiets Joe and returns to breath alone, saying 'words are the worst things. Breathe. Smell' (142). Thus, through language Joe is taken beyond the inflexible, flagellating self-definition we see in his act of coming out: 'Momma. I'm a homosexual, Momma' (79). However, he is never quite able to exorcise Roy, who returns to him as a strikingly tender ghost after his death, showing he has not shaken Roy's legacy.

The exploration of the gay, male body helps Louis and Joe to establish a language of their own, which has its own genealogy. It is part of a generational dynamic far more generous than Roy's. Later in *Perestroika,* Louis and Joe visit Jones Beach. Standing, looking out, Louis says:

> Exploration. Across an unmapped terrain. The body of the homosexual human male. *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.* (201)

Louis establishes a gay ancestry, and a different American frontier to that of the nineteenth-century Mormon. Although Joe is comically incredulous at the analogy, Louis describes their gay predecessors as exploring with as much conviction as Joe's Mormon ancestors. 'The body of the homosexual human male' is here mapped by other gay or bisexual men. This is an alternative to their mapping by all of the medical discourses that have come before them: they have a history that exceeds these. These explorations have (like the Mormons' trip into the desert) led to the deaths of many. Prior will eventually be one of these casualties. As in Darwin's nature, these are random, difficult blows, which have nothing to do with justice.

Darwin's work is pivotal to understanding Roy's alternative vision of legacy. Kushner uses his manipulations of Social Darwinism – itself an unethical twisting of evolutionary theory – to make evident the hypocrisy and danger of Roy legacy to Joe. It is against this that Joe must battle to connect with a different, explicitly queer legacy and genealogy. Here Kushner offers an alternative to Roy's Social Darwinist discourse, which seeks an elitist survival of the fittest through the vessel of the son, but to the exclusion of movement and flux. In contrast, Louis and Joe prepare the audience for Prior's evocation of 'more life'. Like Prior's words, Louis's language is inclusive. It educes a nuanced understanding of the relationship between people and generations of people, which allows for flexibility and movement beyond Roy's stagnant, Social Darwinist manipulations of language, generational ordering, and legacy. These scenes between Louis and Joe are also experimental in various ways. In the seduction scene, Joe is testing a new language, and Louis is testing Joe

(though not in an antagonistic way). Meanwhile, in Louis's 'explorer' speech, he probes the idealized, undocumented past of other gay men, chronicling their need to adapt to change – just as Joe has so recently done. In both instances, there are hints of Darwin's process of bringing together different sorts of language to deal with new contingencies and situations.

The Angel, Progress, and Design

It is not only Roy who engages with Darwin's language and theory, but also Kushner's Angel. The Angel recalls Darwin in several ways, including by using grafted together, metaphorical language similar to his, and situating herself against nineteenth century religious and poetic thought. Like Roy, she wishes to bring about cessation, but unlike him she believes Darwin's work to be the very thing that stasis must restrain. The Angel's eschatological fears are rooted in the Darwinian knowledge that progress and improvement are always under pressure from degradation and loss. However, where Darwin was able to creatively respond to these pressures through story making, the Angel is without imagination and cannot emulate him. Instead, she understands progress – epitomized by the way Darwin's theory increased human understanding – to have terrible consequences, literally leading to the unmaking of heaven. These fears imitate those arising from Darwin's challenge to arguments from Design. In response, she seeks to pass a restrictive legacy to Prior, and through him to humanity. It is only through the critical choice to reject this legacy, and an insistence that progress, movement, and human interconnection remains open, that Prior is able to survive.

Progress is a key term for the Angel, Kushner, and Darwin. *Perestroika*'s epigraph, which I analyse in Chapter One, is taken from Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'On Art' (1841), and reads: 'Because the soul is progressive, it never quite repeats itself, but in every act attempts the production of a new and fairer whole' (135). Reading Emerson, Kushner associates progress with both repetition and change, as well as the creative and reparative process that attempts to make a new and 'fairer' whole. Kushner's use of this quotation places him within a long genealogy of thinkers on progress including Walter Benjamin and Darwin. Although evolution and progress

are not scientifically linked, Darwin's *Origin* can be read as a story in which progress meets (and, for humans, triumphs over) the threat of destruction. Progress in turn has close ties with legacy, as both can facilitate advancement or movement through time. In *Angels,* the Angel, Louis, Prior, Belize, and Harper all speak explicitly or implicitly about it. The Angel has the most developed response to this term.

Critics have tended to read the Angel's resistance to progress in relation to Walter Benjamin's angel of history. Benjamin is an overt and palpable presence in *Angels*. Prior Walter was named for him: his surname is Benjamin's first. Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' introduces the angel of history:

> This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[61]

Benjamin's angel does not perceive history teleologically. The chain of events that we see appears to him as a single, accumulating catastrophe, geological in its force, piling layers of sediment-like wreckage before his feet. Progress, in this context, is a storm that prevents the angel from closing his wings, stopping and repairing the damage that he sees, and awakening the dead. It is irresistible, and it propels him into a future that he cannot see.

This has explicit resonances with Kushner's Angel, whose loathing of progress is one of the play's twists. In traditional productions, the Angel crashes through Prior's bedroom ceiling with booming noise at the end of *Millennium Approaches*, showering his bedroom in rubble and declaring 'Greetings, Prophet; | The Great Work begins | The Messenger has arrived' (125). The start of a 'Great Work', coupled with her literal breaking down of barriers (Prior's ceiling), suggests a

[61] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 257.

determined movement forward. Yet, in *Perestroika* this is quickly undercut: the audience learn that the Angel wants to end 'PROGRESS!' and 'MOVEMENT!', which she believes can bring only death and destruction to humanity and her fellow Angels. She wants the end of time itself (169-70). Her Benjaminian undertones are clear: she is reactionary, caught up on the winds of terrifying progress.

Kushner however, also diverges from Benjamin's conception of progress in several ways. Both Charles McNulty and (to a lesser degree) David Savran argue that *Perestroika*'s ending – including Prior's 'more life' speech – is driven by a wishful idealism that is not Benjaminian. McNulty reads Prior's demand for more life, and the play's utopian declaration that 'the world only spins forward' as an 'uncritical faith in Progress [that] would have been anathema to Benjamin, and to the Kushner of the first part'.[62] Savran writes, 'Regardless of Kushner's intentions, *Angels* sets forth a project wherein the theological is constructed as a transcendent category into which politics and history finally disappear'.[63] Working with the unrevised text, both read its idealistic ending as at least partly deficient. Reading *Angels* with Darwin allows me to answer to and complicate these critiques by looking beyond Benjamin's influence, and towards the nineteenth-century discourses of evolution and progress to which Kushner also responds. It shows Kushner's evocation of progress to be questioning rather than uncritical, characterised by the same tense intersections between movement forward and inevitable loss that appear in Darwin's work and inform the Angel's discourse.

The relationship between evolutionary theory, Darwin's writing, and progress is often misunderstood. Scientifically, there is no equivalence between evolution and progress. As Shepherd-Barr argues, it is a common but 'false and implicitly elitist (as well as anthropocentric) assumption, [that] natural selection brings mankind ever forward in a linear, progressive fashion'.[64] Explicitly, Darwin rejected this assumption as unscientific, writing that 'the theory of natural selection […] implies no *necessary*

[62] McNulty, p. 92.
[63] Savran, p. 29.
[64] Shepherd-Barr, *Science on Stage*, p. 121.

tendency to progression' or increased complexity.[65] However, Darwin's writing also implicitly contradicts this. It has what Beer calls an 'onward and upward motion', which links evolution to progress.[66] For example, he writes the following of natural selection:

> It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the hand of time has marked the long lapse of ages[.][67]

Careful to remind his readers that he is writing metaphorically, Darwin gives natural selection agency, 'working' for its ends. He describes it as 'scrutinizing' every minute variation, and as 'rejecting' bad and 'preserving and adding up all that is good'. There is an urgency to his first sentence, where each new clause comments upon and modifies that which proceeds it, as if Darwin were trying to encapsulate the vast scope of natural selection's reach. In this metaphor, the work done by natural selection is 'silent' and 'insensible', but it is also opportunistic, taking every opportunity to improve each organic being in relation to its context. It is these slow changes, not visible outside of 'the long lapse of ages', which Darwin marks as 'progress'. This progress is double: the changes are themselves a form of progress, but so is our ability to observe them.

This progress is in tension with the realities of extinction and loss. Despite this implicit privileging of progress, Darwin did not offer a vision of the forms of the future to which humanity and ecology might progress; he understood these to be unforeseeable. Nor did he deny the many ways progress might be prevented or undone. As Beer shows, his stories of progress and improvement are constantly

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[65] Charles Darwin, 'Letter 2503 - Darwin Correspondence Database', 11 October 1859 <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-2503> [accessed 28 August 2015].
[66] Beer, p. xix.
[67] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, p. 66.

under pressure 'of other, darker stories – of rapine, degradation, and loss'.[68] Evidence of extinction is forged into a story balanced by his hopeful observation that, based on what he can see of the past, we can 'look with some confidence to a secure future of […] inappreciable length', and that 'all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection'.[69] Progress is, here, a form of endurance, but one which nature only 'tends' toward, so even in this most hopeful of statements there is the possibility of degradation and loss.

The Angel is unable to creatively interpret the interplay of these forces in the way that Darwin does. She cannot reconcile preservation with negativity, and misunderstands progress to be the cause of loss, rather than concomitant with it. In response to this, she attempts to turn the transmission of legacy into a tool for stasis that will allow her to end progress and thereby endure. From the outset this mission, and her very persona, are designed to provoke critical thought in the audience. Kushner explicitly wrote the Angel to demand dialectical engagement, through both staging and language. The mechanics of her cataclysmic physical entrance onstage are, in Kushner's instructions, meant to be a bit 'of wonderful *theatrical* illusion'.[70] He comments:

> [It] very obviously both *is* and *isn't* at the same time. The play demands that the audience extend its empathic imagination. But simultaneously, the audience – both the individual audience member and the collective animal – is skeptical. […] That disbelief is engaged in a dialectic with the surrender of skepticism.[71]

Here, Kushner draws on scepticism similar to that which animates his engagement with the word 'legacy'. By insisting that the audience be sceptically empathetic and imaginatively doubtful he ensures that they ask questions that are self-reflective, possibly seeking more than one way to interpret what is happening onstage. The Angel's staging can be adapted to do this in different ways. In productions such as

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[68] Beer, p. xix.
[69] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, p. 360.
[70] Tony Kushner, 'Notes About Staging', in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Revised and Complete Edition)* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2013), pp. vii–xi (p. 313).
[71] Steindler and Kushner.

the 1993 world premiere at the National Theatre, the Angel is played by a woman wearing vast wings, and rigged with wires to fly. Elliott's 2017 production foregoes this for an essentially flightless Angel (played by Amanda Lawrence) who is not suspended on wires, but rather appears with a number of featureless figures called 'Angel Shadows', who are her puppeteers.[72] Her mottled wings are separate from her body, and are moved by the Angel Shadows, who must lift her off the ground when she falteringly attempts to fly. While her movements are awe inspiring and terrifying for Prior, she is also obviously weighted to the earth in a very human way. In both this staging and the original, Kushner asks dialectical engagement from the audience, whose individual and collective scepticism both reminds them that the Angel is an actor in a play, and implies that she could be a manifestation of Prior's unconscious, a fever-dream caused by his extreme illness, or a psychological safety-net representative of his will that time, sickness, and heartbreak end. She certainly shares many things with him: afflicted by the 'Virus of TIME', she (along with the other Angels) has been abandoned by her lover, God (169). During the Angel's first physical appearance, such scepticism is represented by Belize, who says he 'smell[s] a motif' (171) and insists 'this is not real' (176). He acts as an audience within the play, a surrogate for the larger audience's doubts about Prior's story.

The whole of Prior's first encounter with the Angel is framed to help the audience read it sceptically. It is shown to us in a flashback shared by Prior, the Angel, and Belize during *Perestroika*'s second act. The flashback is provoked by Prior and Belize's attendance of the funeral of a friend who has died of AIDS. For Prior this raises the spectre of his impending death, which has been heightened by the Angel's visit (158). When Belize asks about his strange behaviour, Prior recounts the vision, literally crossing the stage space from the street on which they stand into his bedroom, changing onstage from '*prophet garb*' (a dark, cobbled together outfit that makes him look like 'Morticia Addams', and is redolent of his morbid state of mind) and into his pyjamas. He is directed to *'[do] this quietly, deliberately, forcing himself back into memory, preparing to tell Belize his tale'* (160). Whereas in early versions

[72] *Angels in America: Programme* (London: National Theatre, 2017).

of *Perestroika* Belize remains on the street throughout, watching and commenting, in the 'Revised and Complete' version he is '*drawn into the bedroom*' (160). In the 2017 National production, the interactions between Prior (Andrew Garfield), Belize (Nathan Stewart-Jarrett), and the Angel (Lawrence) invite the audience to question the reality of Prior's experience. Belize is exclusively focused on Prior, who is speaking to him, but often becomes completely caught up in his re-enacted memory. The Angel/Lawrence does not talk to Belize, but she looks at and moves around him. She can see him despite the fact that this is a flashback and he was not there when she originally appeared. Meanwhile, Belize cannot see her, even when they sit together on Prior's bed. Though he at one point hears thunder from Prior's vision, he knows the Angel only through Prior's words. The audience can thus hear and see things that Belize cannot. This heightens our sense that the Angel is theatrical, imagined, and probably unreal.

When the Angel speaks, she provokes further demands on our scepticism and empathetic imagination through her language. This also links her to Darwin. Her way of speaking shares the stitched-together, metaphorical quality of Darwin's work, and like *Origin* is constructed from many different and competing sources. It also revisits various nineteenth-century texts, forging a link between the time of Darwin's thought and the Angel's thought. She deploys this language to explain a theory, not of evolution, but of theological history. Going beyond Joe and Louis finding a language of desire and genealogy, like Darwin she must reach past the boundaries of pre-existing language in order to express an alternative view of the world.

Dale Peck describes Prior's visions as existing 'within a devolving continuum of what we think of as reality, a dislocation achieved more than anything else by the play's language, which moves from the quotidian to the metaphysical in ever-accelerating cadences'.[73] The Angel is the key producer of these metaphysical cadences, and she

[73] Dale Peck, 'The Lector Effect', *Slate*, 12 December 2003 <http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2003/12/the_lector_effect.html> [accessed 17 April 2015].

does this in part by interweaving metaphor, metonymy and allusion with plain speech. For example, she describes herself as follows:

> I I I I
> Am the Bird Of America, the Bald Eagle,
> Continental Principality,
> LUMEN PHOSPHOR FLUOR CANDLE!
> I unfold my leaves, Bright steel,
> In salutation open sharp before you[.] (160)

She describes herself as like a bird because she has wings, but she is also a specifically American bird, the Bald Eagle, which stands metonymically for the spirit of America. Although physically she manifests as one, she uses a separate 'I' for each of her four 'emanations' (129). After giving her title (Continental Principality), she lists their names: 'LUMEN PHOSPHOR FLUOR CANDLE!' All of these associate her with heat and light. Finally, she describes her steel feathers and wings as 'leaves', perhaps literally sharp, but also 'sharp' in appearance. As if all four of her emanations have different voices, her speech draws on a vast and eclectic array of different narrative styles, which never settle into a single mode of speech, and can only be identified as hers. For example, she speaks by turn in archaic, biblical language and twentieth-century slang, as if they belonged seamlessly together. She addresses Prior:

> American Prophet tonight you become,
> American Eye that pierceth Dark,
> American Heart all Hot for Truth. (170)

Here, the Angel adds an archaic suffix to 'pierce', which becomes 'pierceth', before saying that Prior, as American Prophet, is 'all Hot for Truth'. This turn of phrase has ancient roots (the *OED* shows there are twelfth-century precedents for describing desire as 'hot'), but this could also be 1980s or 1990s slang.[74] The coming together of different ways of speaking and thinking is thus evident in her words.

[74] 'Hot, Adj. and n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/88782> [accessed 9 September 2017].

Her language also makes various references to nineteenth-century texts, which show Kushner to be actively engaged with the thought of Darwin's era. For example, she tells Prior to wear opaque, seer stone glasses, which are a comical imitation of those purportedly used by Joseph Smith to translate the *Book of Mormon* in the 1820s. This image activates a uniquely US religious history (which was coeval with Darwin's childhood) as a precedent for the play.[75] The cadence of the Angel's language, meanwhile, is drawn from Darwin's contemporary Walt Whitman. This is evident in the Angel's vocal invocation that Prior:

> Prepare for the parting of the air,
> The breath, the ascent,
> Glory to… (66)

The consonance of these lines, their open ends, and the half-rhyme of 'pre*pare'* and 'air', are suggestive of Whitman's free-verse form. The Angel's description of herself as breath and air is, further, redolent of imagery that repeats throughout Whitman's 'Song of Myself' (1855), which Kushner has cited as an influence on the play.[76] Although this does not offer a direct link to Darwin's *Origin*, which was only published after 'Song of Myself', Whitman was already interested in evolutionary theory in the 1850s. As Hertha D. Wong shows, he was also increasingly influenced by a specifically Darwinian model of evolution in later years.[77] The Angel's powerful evocation of Whitman thus shows her to be speaking back to and drawing on the language of Darwin's age.

The Angel, then, deploys a highly metaphorical language, derived from many sources and textual citations, which is resonant with Darwin's and drawn from the language of his time. Her words are an almost classic example of a Barthesian Text, a 'tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.[78] This feature of her

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[75] Joseph Smith, 'Book of Mormon', *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, 2013 <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm?lang=eng> [accessed 7 September 2015].
[76] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 34.
[77] Hertha D. Wong, '"This Old Theory Broach'd Anew": Darwinism and Whitman's Poetic Program', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 5.4 (1988), 27–39 <https://doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1190>.
[78] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image - Music - Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142–48 (p. 146).

language, which is shared with Darwin, is used to heighten another shared characteristic: a concern with the tensions between beauty and destruction. When the Angel describes Heaven – a city like San Francisco, under threat from heavenquakes – she says:

> *This quotation has been redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> (167)

Her sentiments – heaven is 'more beautiful because imperiled' – are resonant with Darwin's writing on the struggle for life. For example, writing of American forests, he describes '[w]hat a struggle' and 'what war' must have gone on between the trees and insects and animals to create 'beautiful diversity', with 'all striving to increase, and all feeding on each other or on the trees or their seeds and seedlings, or on the other plants which first clothed the ground and thus checked the growth of the trees!'[79] In a similar manner to the Angel, Darwin uses exaggerated language to reflect on the ways that beauty is made sharper when accompanied by danger.

However, the Angel offers a story of creation, of time, and of legacy, that is very different to Darwin's, and is presented in a far more fragmented manner. While her language is less disjointed than that of the Homebody in *Homebody/ Kabul*, it shares the qualities of making strenuous demands on the attention of the audience. In the 2017 National Theatre production Lawrence's performance is staggering, epic, switching without pause to mundane and vulnerable. At times, her words are echoed by a recording of many other voices. When this effect is absent, her words are more human; when it is present, they are larger-than-life. The audience, buffeted by these many different kinds of language and ways of speaking, must listen raptly in order to keep up. They are caught within a dialectic of disbelief – at the reality of her existence, at her unorthodox and unscientific narrative of creation – and empathetic imagination.

[79] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, pp. 59–60.

According to the Angel God is (as Prior describes it) a '*male* Hebrew letter' (166). In her cosmology, prelapsarian angelic ecstasy fuels the engine of creation: 'Not Physics But Ecstatics Makes the Engine Run' (164). However, the advent of humankind has altered the fundamental processes of her universe. Speaking in turns, she and Prior explain that God, seeking something new, made people. In doing so 'He awakened a potential in the design for change […] For random event […] For movement forward' (168). With disgust and envy the Angel tells Prior 'In YOU the Virus of TIME began' (169). In the 2013 *Perestroika* (where the whole of this scene has been significantly revised) Prior struggles to find the words to tell the Angel's story, making it seem even more impossibly strange, but credulously believes her message that time (and the potential for change) is a virus like HIV, an organism that infects creation and makes it ill.

In the revised version Belize has at this point moved into the bedroom, and his doubtfulness shores up that of the audience. As the Angel proclaims with great loathing that '*PROGRESS!*' and '*MOVEMENT!*' shake God, Prior explains more of her story to Belize, with the tremors of Heaven sounding in the background:

This quotation has been redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

(170)

In a reversal of conventional, Biblical tenants, God (the father) imitates humankind (the child). This has terrible consequences, for in learning from humans, he begins to

abandon the Angels, imitating humans and 'sail[ing] off on Voyages, no knowing where' (170). The consequences of this for the Angels are 'Absence', 'Nasty Chastity and Disorganization', heavenquakes, and eventually (on April 18 1906, the date of the Great San Francisco Earthquake) the potentially irrevocable departure of God (170).

So, the march of progress, both physical and mental, not only creates a metaphysical shaking: it displaces the Angels' sense of their priority. They begin to feel as if 'We are only| The dream of *YOU*' (169). The Angels, as beings older and more powerful than humankind, wish to return things to their status quo, and to do so they choose Prior as their prophet, for he shares the qualities of having been abandoned, and of being infected by a virus that limits his time. To accomplish their task, they pass a book down to him: the 'Anti-Migratory Epistle', the 'Tome of Immobility'. When – after some struggle – Prior eventually removes the Tome from a suitcase that has been hidden under his kitchen floor the Angel says:

> From the Council of Continental Principalities
> Met in this time of Crisis and Confusion:
> Heaven here reaches down to disaster
> And in touching you touches all of Earth. (163)

This book is a legacy. The Angels are beings that precede humanity, and they literally hand something 'down' to Prior. The book is integrally linked to them: at one point the Angel even proclaims, 'I I I I am| The Book| Read' (163). Prior must intentionally accept this Tome and literally read it to uncover its secrets. This is an act of interpretation, along the lines of those required of Kushner's characters in *Caroline, or Change*, and also by Derrida's heirs in *Specters of Marx*.[80] The Angel's words are also consonant with Roy's, which further associate the book with legacy. Roy wants to transmit his legacy to a son-become-vessel; she claims that the Angels have made Prior 'Vessel of the BOOK' (174). The Angels' legacy, like Roy's, seeks the preservation of an old status quo through the imposition of stasis on an heir. Only through the end of all progress can they end both human suffering and their own.

[80] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

While the Angel's cosmology manifestly conflicts with Darwin's theory and writings, her understanding of human life – and its effects on everything else – is not fully at odds with his. In fact, her eschatological fears are rooted in precisely those tensions that Beer identifies within Darwin's work, where progress and improvement are always under pressure from rapine, degradation, and loss. These tensions are made worse for the Angel, because she has 'no imagination' (166). Darwin was able to 'look with some confidence to a secure future of […] inappreciable length' in part because he was capable of imagining, and built a progressive narrative from his empirical observation.[81] Unlike him, the Angel cannot invent or create (166). Instead of the ability to imagine the future, she has disturbing, partial glimpses of it. In Heaven, the Angels have a 1940s radio, which they do not have permission to use, but make use of anyway. On it, they receive broken transmissions of things to come. Prior's visit to Heaven – during which he delivers his 'more life' speech – occurs in January 1986.[82] When he is there, reports of the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl (April 1986) play on the radio, giving a glimpse three months into the future (272). These fragmented future glimpses worry and even terrify the Angels, and help to cement their sense that progress and destruction do not merely go hand in hand – as they do in Darwin's description of his wedges – but that progress causes destruction.

In light of this, the other aspect of Darwin's story – the idea that through natural selection we will progress towards perfection – is a powerful contributor to the Angel's crumbling heaven. Even if it is pointed out that evolution is not necessarily a force of progress, the mere realization that it exists contributes to humanity's often flawed, but nevertheless advancing understanding of the planet's history, ecology, and biology. Speaking of God, the Angel appeals to Prior:

YOU HAVE DRIVEN HIM AWAY! YOU MUST STOP MOVING!

[81] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, p. 360.

[82] Early versions of the play, the final act takes place in February 1986, rather than in January. Kushner's slight shift in the timeline of the 'Revised and Complete' edition has Roy's collapse, Joe and Louis's first sexual encounter, Hannah's relocation to New York, and the Angel's visitation of Prior happen in December of 1985, rather than January 1986. This shift does not have to do with historical accuracy – the historical Roy Cohn, for example, only died in August of 1986.

> […]
> Forsake the Open Road: Neither Mix Nor Intermarry
> Let Deep Roots Grow: If you do not MINGLE you will Cease to Progress.
> *Seek Not to Fathom the World and its Delicate Particle Logic:* You cannot Understand, You can only Destroy, You do not 'Advance,' You only Trample. (172; my italics)

After her initial, powerful shout (represented here in all-caps) the Angel's subsequent words are soft, gripping, urgent. At first she seems to want the end of physical movement, but 'the Open Road' (a reference to Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road'), quickly becomes a metaphor for stopping the potential for change. Once again showing echoes of Roy, she implores humanity not to 'Mix [or] Intermarry'. This evokes Jim Crow laws against miscegenation and Roy's taxonomies of eugenics, even as it associates progress with the interactions between different races, cultures, and ideas. Belize has already taken umbrage with this aspect of her story, and will do so again in the next scene.

Her final lines are even more telling: humankind must not seek 'to Fathom the World and its Delicate Particle Logic'. The term 'Particle Logic' could come from physics, where in non-quantum theory particles have 'logic', are predictable, and follow certain laws. We know, however, that the Angel believes that 'Not Physics but Ecstatics Makes the Engine [of Creation] Run' (164). In her view, the processes that structure and assemble the minute matter of the universe are not robust enough to withstand the trampling of human minds. Her reference to the damage done by 'understanding' may refer to the threat of nuclear holocaust, the potential for which is achieved by breaking atoms (particles) apart. On another level, the particles of which the Angel speaks may not be scientific at all. As Prior says to Belize, '[e]verything's coming unglued' (169), including his relationship with Louis and his health. Roy is literally being 'dismantle[d]' by AIDS (212). Joe and Harper's relationship, and later Joe's relationship with Louis also come apart, as does Hannah's sense of her place in the world.

The Angels' story about themselves, and about creation is also coming unglued. 'Logic', derives from the word '*Logos*', which can refer, among other things, to

words.[83] 'Particle Logic', then, also connotes the ordering or logic of language and linguistic units, and even the theories expressed through this. Here, the Angel's particle logic might refer to her Darwin-like employment of many discrete kinds of language (from the epic to the quotidian) and linguistic sources from many periods to communicate a theory of creation that cannot otherwise be fully expressed. The difficulty that Prior has in expressing her story may be a symptom of his inability to understand this. However, the sometimes-disruptive coming together of her 'particles' of language may also be evidence of her story failing to hold together. Later, when Prior is in Heaven, the Angel once again attempts to convince him that he should not pursue more life, imploring:

You have not *seen* what is to come:

This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

(277)

The Angel's words are poetry. The complete loss of light in her final image elicits the threat of utter extinction, executed by the coming apart of 'Design'. The loss of that which directs creation, and gives it the pattern, coherence and logic of divine thought, spells the end for the Angels. They are experiencing the complete collapse of the stabilizing narrative of 'the Work of Eternity'. The impact of humankind's progression on the Angel's vision is analogous with the force that Darwin's theory of evolution had on a culture invested in Design. A contributor to humanity's 'progression', his theory also directly contributes to the Angel's eschatological fears. The legacy of Darwin's language is thus the collapse of the Angel's Heaven and in turn the reactionary mission that she attempts to pass to Prior.

[83] 'Logic, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/109788> [accessed 24 September 2017]; 'Logos, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/109857> [accessed 24 September 2017].

Prior Walter and 'More Life'

Roy and the Angel each adopt a discourse of legacy that responds to Darwin's theory and language. Roy twists it into Social Darwinism. The Angel rejects both the progress that Darwin represents and his implicit emphasis on inevitable loss. Both attempt to pass on legacies that ensure endurance by enforcing stasis on others: Joe must take up Roy's ideology and help him to remain a lawyer; Prior must accept the Angel's book, end human progress, and save heaven. Both conceptions of legacy are dangerous and damaging to those envisioned as their heirs. In answer to this, Kushner offers a third understanding of legacy. Expressed through Prior, it is connective, global, and constitutive of communities that endure not by standing still, but by striving towards the future. Although this future is not dependent on biological reproduction, it is characterised by a Darwinian evocation of the inextricable connection between progress, endurance and loss. Kushner's final treatment of progress and legacy shows them to be closely linked, but not in a way that guarantees continued progress towards perfection.

When we first hear about progress in *Millennium Approaches*, it is through Louis. Talking about himself in the third person, he says that he has this 'sense of the world, that it will change for the better

This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

' (25). However, this vision of progress is, in Louis's over-rationalised terms, the reason that he cannot deal with Prior's illness. He says that he 'can't, um, incorporate sickness into his sense of how things are supposed to go' (25). The Angel, in her words to Prior, describes progress as precisely the opposite of this: it can never lead towards happiness and perfection, and it is the sickness that Louis fears. In the end, both are shown to be wrong.

Prior's insistence that the Angels 'bless' him and grant 'him 'more life' at the play's end is more than a demand for survival: his critical choice is to reject the Angel's book, and to keep open the possibility of temporal and physical movement. Both the Angel and Louis foreclose this in different ways, and so too does Roy, with his Social

Darwinist discourse. Prior's evocation of 'more life' is a literal demand for more time, which revisits the incident from Genesis in which Jacob wrestles with a nameless angel and leaves with 'life […] preserved'.[84] This story pre-figures Prior's wrestling match with the Angel. Kushner takes the link between 'blessing' and the demand for 'more life' from Harold Bloom's translation of this Biblical incident, which associates it with time (297). In Bloom's reading Jacob's story is about time, rather than space:

> When Jacob wrestles all night with a nameless angel, the struggle is not for a place, but *to delay the angel*, whose temporal anxiety is overwhelming: 'Let me go, for it is daybreak!' The angel is not God (a Protestant misreading) but perhaps the Angel of Death, and Jacob's victory depends upon the angel's refusal to confront the dawn. […] Blessed by the new name of Israel, Jacob limps away from Penuel, with the sun rising upon *him*, but not upon the supernatural being who has fled. Israel's limp testifies to having been crippled at a particular place, but the far more vital testimony is to the triumph of having prevailed into a time without boundaries.[85]

This reading is resonant with Prior's attempts to keep open his temporal boundaries – to live for longer, even if it means facing eventual death.

The spatial limits that Prior opens when travelling to heaven are, equally, indicative of his rejection of the Angels' legacy. When he climbs the ladder to Heaven, having defeated the Angel, he moves not only vertically, but laterally as well. In the script, Heaven is a city that looks like a wrecked San Francisco, so Prior (who lives in New York) has made a passage across the continental US. In the 2017 National production, Heaven has no clear location, but the opening out of space is literally enacted. The rotating structures used to suggest rooms and buildings in the first part of *Millennium Approaches* retreat and disappear towards the end of *Part One*, so that *Perestroika* is performed on an almost completely bare stage. Here the boundaries of rooms are suggested by freestanding doors, squares of light on the floor, and cloth walls wheeled about by Angel Shadows. This empty space is dominated by a massive steel rig in the shape of a map of the US, which hangs from

[84] *Tanakh (Old JPS)*, Genesis 32:32.
[85] Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *Musical Variations on Jewish Thought*, by Oliver Revault d'Allonnes (New York: George Braziller, 1984), p. 13.

the ceiling. It is largely an object that reflects, rather than produces light. By the time Prior/Garfield climbs a neon ladder, explores a darkened heaven, and finds the Angels' Council Chamber, it feels that the space cannot be made any bigger. But when he reaches the Chamber, the curtains at the side of the stage are rolled back to reveal the bare, lateral space that has previously been backstage, and the steel rig lights up in green, red, and orange. It is within the cavernous, ruined space of the Angel's Chamber, with torn plastic sheeting hanging down and banks of buttons ostensibly connected to the blinking, steel map above, that Prior makes his demand for more life. The scale of his surroundings and of the metaphorical distance he has travelled emphasise his humanness, the size of the world that exists beyond him, and his refusal to stop moving.

When he talks to the Angels, Prior is finally able to draw a line between the stopping of everything and the stopping of the plague. Speaking against the rumbling that sounds every time he says the word 'God', he tells the Angels:

> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> this plague, it should stop. In me and everywhere. Make it go away. (276)

The Angels are all played by the actors who portray the other main characters. The Angel of Australia (played by the actor playing Louis) responds that they have been trying to do as much. However, just as Henry cannot cure AIDS, they 'Do not know how' (276). We discover that the six continental principalities (dressed, in the stage directions, like judges), are not only fallible, squabbling over antiquated technology that they do not understand, but are nervous of Prior. In the placating words of Africanii (performed by the actor playing Harper), they have been 'Making Progress' (275). Their progress is, however, constituted by their attempts to read (or rather, listen) to future events on their battered radio.

Prior rejects this foreclosure in favour of establishing a new kind of community, one that is not based on the status-quo of Heaven, and which might better withstand the

trials of the future without needing to know precisely what these will be. To do so, he sets up a new genealogy which does not follow the lines suggested by Roy, or even the tree-like structure that Darwin envisages when he writes of evolution. This genealogy is net-like and non-monolithic, intricately connected at multiple points. Through it, Prior both acknowledges a different legacy to that of the Angels, and leaves his own.

Prior's genealogy is raised several times in the play. One of the reasons he is chosen as prophet is that he is the last in an ancient line that he can trace back thirty-four generations, all the way to the Bayeux tapestry (91). The Angel addresses him as 'Prior WALTER| Long-descended, well-prepared' (160). His WASP roots are age-old and relatively unchanging, a reflection of the Angel's proposal that to stop progress we must neither mingle nor intermarry. Although Prior himself is not of the Angel's mind-set, this history makes him an ideal prophetic candidate.

However, it is also implicitly acknowledged that Prior shares another genealogy. Before the appearance of the Angel, the ghosts of two ancestors, Prior 1 and Prior 2, visit him. Both are heralds who have been chosen because of their 'mortal affinities': they died of the plague, and Prior is also at risk of doing so (91). This forges a different sort of connection between generations. While Prior's ancestors are not there to impart a legacy to him in the way of the Angel, or of other theatrical ghosts (Hamlet's father, for example), they show him that although he is technically alone – Prior 1 obsesses over his childlessness (120) – he shares mutual suffering with those who came before him. This echoes the words of Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz, who at Part One's outset describes Louis's grandmother Sarah as having 'worked the earth' of an ancient, European Jewish home into her children's 'bones'. While these children cannot repeat her voyage and struggles, they 'pass' this legacy of travel, suffering, and home to their children (10). Prior's ancestors, who share his name, leave a similar legacy, albeit figured differently.

Well before visiting Heaven, Prior shows signs that he will embrace this legacy: his place within a community of sufferers. After telling Belize of the Angel's visit to his

bedroom, he refers to the connection between all those who have HIV: 'So maybe I am a prophet. Not me alone, all of us, the, the ones who are dying now. Maybe the virus is the prophecy?' (176) In saying that prophecy may be caught, like a virus, Prior starts the process of acknowledging his place among the generations of people who have suffered, unpredictably and undeservedly, for many thousands of years. He also rejects the idea that he is the lone prophet of the Angels. At this point, however, he is still fearfully contemplating the respite of death.

Prior's 'more life' speech, presented to his angelic caucus of judges, represents a more powerful development towards this human genealogy of sufferers, focusing on those living in the present, and incorporating both those who are ill and those who care for them. He says:

> Bless me anyway.
> I want more life. I can't help myself. I do.
> I've lived through such terrible times, and there are people who live through much worse, but … You see them living anyway. When they're more spirit than body, more sores than skin, when they're burned and in agony, when flies lay eggs in the corners of the eyes of their children, they live. Death usually has to take life away. I don't know if that's just the animal. I don't know if it's not braver to die. But I recognize the habit. The addiction to being alive.
> (279)

Prior starts by saying that he, as an individual, has lived through terrible times, but he immediately moves on to talking about others, who have gone through worse. He speaks about these others in terms of generations, honing in on people suffering because their children suffer. This, combined with his uncertainty as to whether it is 'just the animal' that pushes him to survive, addresses the aspect of Darwin's theory in which survival and legacy are figured in terms of the continuation of offspring. For Prior, the relationship between different generations, and the wish to see children live, is an important part of the will to survive. It is however, also something that parents can live beyond, and that he happily lives without. His sense of the importance of legacy incorporates but is not dominated by parent-child relationships or heteronormative reproduction, and is different from Darwin's in this way.

When Prior gives reasons for death having to take life away, he does so inclusively, for everyone. He continues with the grammatically unstable lines typical of those moments in which Kushner most keenly pushes the audience to read: 'We live past hope. If I can find hope anywhere, that's it, that's the best I can do. It's so much not enough, so inadequate but … Bless me anyway. I want more life' (267). In the first sentence, Kushner seems to establish hope as something that exists in a communal, linear time scale: we can live past it. Yet in the next – where Prior returns to talking about himself specifically – he acknowledges that even having gone past hope, he continues to search for it. No matter where he finds it, he must make do with what he has. Hope, as the Rabbi says in a scene removed from the revised version, can be found in '*Indeterminacy!*', which can among other things leave the sort of open times and spaces for which Prior searches.[86]

As Prior turns to leave, the Angels silently make mystical signs at his back, and he begins to feel visibly ill once again. In the 'Revised and Complete Edition', he turns and presents the Angels with further lines:

> You haven't seen what's to come. You've only seen what you're afraid is coming. *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> The earth's my home, and I want to go home. (279)

Here Prior does not reject the future, but rather the impulse to read it in a narrow and un-sceptical way, to focus on what one fears. The future is open, because it has not yet arrived.

While Prior is not concerned with reproduction in the same way as Darwin is, his words nevertheless resonate with the ethical dimensions of Darwin's evolutionary theory, which are powerfully present in the final lines of *Origin:*

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[86] See Tony Kushner, 'Two Omitted Scenes from *Perestroika*', in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Revised and Complete Edition)* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2013), pp. 323–26 (p. 324); Tony Kushner, 'Introduction', in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Revised and Complete Edition)* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2013), pp. vii–xi (p. x). All further references to these writings are in-text.

> It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. […] [F]rom the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. [87]

This passage emphasises the interconnectedness between all things. In his first sentence, Darwin uses a long string of clauses to describe the presence, position and actions of a variety of organisms. These plants and creatures clothe the earth, sing, flit and crawl, participating in an ecosystem which humans can observe. Darwin juxtaposes the processes of evolution – represented in such minute creatures as insects and worms – with the cycle of the planet, gravity, and the 'endless forms' produced on the earth. There is an ethical imperative here, and it has to do with acknowledging the interconnectivity, wondrousness, and complexity of life.

The struggle for more life is itself miraculous – and when Prior says that it may be 'just the animal' that wishes to remain alive, he is perhaps underestimating the grandeur of this fact. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the importance of adaptation, flux, and change, as well as the inevitability that he will not survive. He makes the statement: 'The earth's my home, and I want to go home'. Implicit here is a global interconnectedness, in which Prior takes not New York, but the whole planet to be the place that he lives, and the place where he will die.

This ethical critique is echoed in Kushner's essay, 'With a Little Help from My Friends', which is often used as the afterword to *Angels*.[88] He argues: 'Together we

[87] Darwin, *Origin (Second Ed.)*, p. 360.
[88] This essay is discussed at length in Chapter Five of my thesis. It appears both at the end of the *Revised and Complete* edition of *Angels* and in Kushner's *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems*

organize the world for ourselves, or at least we organize our understanding of it' (333). In doing so, we can 'grieve over its savagery' and discern 'places from whence hope may be plausibly expected' (333). Kushner finishes with the resonant line: 'Marx was right: The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction. From such nets of souls societies, the social world, human life springs. And also plays' (333). Here, he proposes an alternative beginning: 'human life *springs*' from 'nets of souls', as do societies and the social world. Highlighting the constitutive nature of human connection, which incorporates but is not limited to those between generations, Kushner offers a strategy to meet the 'savagery' of the world we live in. Among other things, such savagery can be organized by science, which is a communal effort extending from generation to generation, passing down legacies both good and bad, evolving, moving and progressing. Meeting it also requires human community, and the processes of play, reflection, refraction, critique and grieving that arise from it. When he returns to earth from Heaven, Prior is met with just such a community: Belize and Louis, Hannah and his nurse Emily await him. Emily calls his waking 'the dawn of man' (280). Her words suggest this is a new beginning, but in light of what has come before, this beginning does not have a stable origin. As has been pointed out by Savran, none of the play's couples survive to this point.[89] The duos – Louis and Prior, Harper and Joe, and Louis and Joe – disperse. New groups form, adapting to change.

Prior's final lines, which he offers in an Epilogue that takes place in 1990 (showing he has indeed been granted 'more life'), encapsulate this turn towards global community:

> This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away.

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of Virtue and Happiness. All further references in this chapter are in-text, and refer to the version that appears in the 2013 version of *Angels.* (See Tony Kushner, *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness: Essays, A Play, Two Poems and A Prayer* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1995); Tony Kushner, 'With A Little Help From My Friends', in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Revised and Complete Edition)* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2013), pp. 327–33.)

[89] Savran, p. 16.

> We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come.
> Bye now.
> You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.
> And I bless you: More Life.
> The Great Work Begins. (290)

This speech is Prior's legacy. His final line echoes that with which the Angel ends *Millennium Approaches*, where she represents rupture, 'history […] crack[ing] wide open' (118). Prior, however, replaces her end of times with continuation, a struggle for life, which is also undertaken by the dead. The dead, here, are not completely lost: they are commemorated by the living, to whom they are joined as part of a global network of citizens. This speech offers the illumination of death and suffering, and the extension of citizenship to the world. This includes the audience, whom Prior addresses here. In the 2017 National production, the lights in the theatre came up as Prior/Garfield spoke, breaking the fourth wall, and incorporating the audience into the play by lighting them to the same extent as the cast.

Savran, McNulty and others have used this to label the play as being overly sentimental, overly optimistic, or in Leo Bersani's influential argument, 'pretentious' and filled with gay men who are made easy for hetero-normative society to digest because they are 'innocuously full of significance'.[90] Yet, this is also to miss the ways in which Kushner's ever-complicated, sceptical sense of legacy operates with and against this optimism and significance. Commenting on the revised edition in 2012 (before its publication), Kushner notes: 'I am much more uncertain about the future existence of my species than I was when I started writing *Angels*. Time has vindicated some of the play's conflictedly optimistic spirit; progress has been made. *Angels* is not teleological, its apocalyptic forebodings not withstanding' (xi). Yet the play's apocalyptic forebodings 'loom darker and resound more ominously for contemporary audiences and readers' (xi). He does not give examples of what has vindicated his optimism and increased his foreboding, but he presents them as dual impulses, which drive the play together. He also describes these as having developed

[90] Bersani, p. 69.

even tighter links with each other as the twenty-first century has brought with it both further progress, and looming catastrophe in the form of resurgent right-wing politics and environmental catastrophe.

Harper encapsulates this 'conflictedly optimistic' sense of things in her final lines, spoken on a night flight to San Francisco (to an earthly heaven): 'Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind, and dreaming ahead' (285). These words ring only partially true: while people may return from the dead as ghosts, some things, such as the play's romantic dyads, or Roy's status as lawyer, are lost forever. In fact, neither she nor Joe (whom she has left behind, and for whom she presumably longs), are present in the play's Epilogue, so they are lost to the audience, who never discover what has become of them.

Angels treats legacy as being about both endurance and loss. The potential for negativity – extinction, apocalypse, and the reaching of an end-point of history – is balanced by our continuing survival, manifest both by the presence of our physical bodies, and by the metaphorical support of those who have died. Kushner's language of progress, inflected by Darwin's drawn together, poetic and scientific prose, develops this aspect of legacy. In *Angels,* legacies may support many different kinds of preservative impulses, but may also set us on a trajectory towards cataclysm. Prior's legacy, which is to bless all those in the audience who have been driven to sceptically and empathetically engage with this tremendous act of theatre, finds a balance: it opens out the boundaries of more time, without determining the form that it will take, or how we should read his blessing. We must acknowledge both sides of the coin: life is wondrous in its advancement, its flux and change, its entanglement, but the shadows of darker stories remain. They do not, and cannot, go away.

Chapter Four

Legacy, the Law, and Slavery in *Lincoln*

Lincoln (2012) is Kushner's second collaboration with director Steven Spielberg.[1] In it, Kushner and Spielberg explicitly attempt to pay tribute to Lincoln's legacy by reimagining it through film, and drawing their audience to engage with and appreciate it. They are particularly concerned with Lincoln's interventions into the law on the issue of slavery. They present these institutions, and Lincoln's legacy, as integrally bound to each other. In doing so, Kushner and Spielberg play with similarly tense intergenerational exchanges and spectral uncertainties to those that characterise Kushner's oeuvre. In my previous chapters, this has been evident in the cyclical, paranoid legacies of *Caroline, or Change* (2003), the dispossession wrought by legacy in *The Illusion* (1989) and *Homebody/Kabul* (2001), and its intersections with destruction and entropy in *Angels in America* (1991/1992). However, as I will come to show, in its attempt to fill in the gaps of history *Lincoln* elides these darker legacies in a manner anathema to Kushner's theatrical texts. Kushner's fierce critique of legacies of structural inequality, and his push to find reparative ways to address these, becomes diluted when combined with Spielberg's ambition to memorialize Lincoln in a Hollywood blockbuster. Thus, while early on the film plays with the slipperiness of Lincoln's place in relation to slavery, the law, and legacy, this is not carried through to its end. It is eventually undercut by a drive to frame the Thirteenth Amendment not in relation to its complicated aftereffects, but narrowly, as an example of the brilliance of Lincoln's legacy.

Although the bulk of this chapter considers the film's treatment of legacy in relation to the law and slavery, I open by reflecting on the significance of a shift from studying plays to screenplays and film, and on the differences between Kushner as a stage writer and Spielberg as a filmmaker. I show Kushner and Spielberg to construct

[1] A note on editions: *Lincoln*'s world premiere was in 2012, the same year as it was published. See Kushner, *Lincoln: The Screenplay* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2012); Steven Spielberg, *Lincoln* (Dreamworks Pictures, 20th Century Fox and Reliance Entertainment, 2012). All further references are in-text.

the film so that the audience is drawn to engage not only with Lincoln's actions in the film's present, but also with the ways that he is leaving behind legacies. They use the motion picture format to explicitly challenge the audience to think about *Lincoln* in terms of legacy: both that of the man, and that of the film. However, Spielberg's vision of what the film's legacy should be – a detailed and carefully controlled memorialization of Lincoln and of its makers – impedes Kushner's questioning pen.

Kushner and Spielberg focus their memorialization on Lincoln's struggle to overturn the legal backing of slavery. The film follows final months of Lincoln's life, and the push through January 1865 to pass the Thirteenth Amendment and abolish slavery. This is, inherently, a story about the ways that the law and slavery are integrally bound to each other, and to many legacies. As Colin Dayan contends, the 'racialized idiom' of slavery in America developed through metaphors of stigma and tainted blood, transmitted between generations.[2] These legacies were then entrenched by the law, which made persons slaves by imposing upon them the 'legal fiction' of civil death. If, as Cory Rosenberg claims, *Lincoln* is '[c]harged with the herculean task of considering the legacy of "the Great Emancipator"', then this must unfold within the context set out by Dayan.[3]

Kushner's screenplay at first promises a thorough investigation of the relationship between legacy, slavery, and the law, framed through Lincoln's language. To legislatively end slavery, Lincoln and his allies must both rely on, and at times unsettle, the law and its performative power. Working with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, I show that Lincoln actively points to the instability of his presidential performative power, and to the slipperiness of the law. I argue that in doing so, he attempts to force open a space in which new laws – including the amendment – can be made. Here, Lincoln is shown to be a brilliant politician, working in realpolitik, meeting numerous challenges in a bid to end slavery. Yet late

[2] Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 40.
[3] Cory Rosenberg, 'Spielberg's Lincoln: An Ambitious Pastiche', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 80.2 (2013), 329–32 (p. 329); See also: Brian J. Snee, 'Saving the Emancipator', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 18.1 (2015), 141–45.

in the film, as things grow desperate, his position shifts, and he closes down this instability by calling on a language of incontrovertible presidential power to insist that the votes to pass the amendment are acquired. While traces of the earlier slipperiness remain, the law comes to seem located in and empowered by his will, and the amendment to belong to him: a legacy without negative aftereffects. This interpretation of Lincoln is epitomised by House Representative Thaddeus Stevens (Tommy Lee Jones), who at the film's end describes the amendment as being '[p]assed by corruption, aided and abetted by the purest man in America' (150). This is the impression with which Spielberg and Kushner leave their audience.

Kushner's uncharacteristic step back from a sceptical exploration of legacy is also evident in the film's approach to slavery, and its limited treatment of African American characters. *Lincoln* has attracted criticism for its presentation of African Americans as comparably passive in the fight to end slavery, and for privileging the stories of powerful white men. This is evident in Kushner and Spielberg's decision not to directly represent the lives of those who have experienced slavery. Instead, they bring traces of this into Lincoln's domestic space through a series of glass plates featuring photographic images of slaves. Spielberg uses lighting to draw links between these spectral images of slaves (subject to social death), and Lincoln, who appears spectral in his own way (because it is assumed the viewer knows he is always moving towards his assassination). Spielberg and Kushner use this similarity between the enslaved and Lincoln to ensure that he is not only credited with the end of slavery, but understood to be bound to those that he freed. They thus make the African American experience secondary to preserving a sterilized version of Lincoln's legacy. Kushner and Spielberg do not allude to the ways that the wording of the Thirteenth Amendment was the grounding for new disabling intuitions of mass incarceration for African Americans, the consequences of which still affect people in the present.[4]

Kushner and Spielberg's use of language and photographic images epitomises the

[4] For analysis of Spielberg's elision of this, see Yarimar Bonilla, 'History Unchained', *Transition*, 2013, 68–77 <https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.112.68>.

problems with the film's treatment of legacy. In attempting to maintain a focus on Lincoln as an exemplary president and father figure, the film elides the difficult question asking that drives other works by Kushner. While *Lincoln* is an imaginative recovery of the past, there are things that it purposefully does not reconstruct, because they would disturb our admiration of the sixteenth US President. The film's treatment of legacy is subject to the same struggles with substance and negativity, endurance and disposability seen in Kushner's other texts; however, it does not always actively engage with these. This does not signal an outright change to Kushner's approach to and understanding of legacy. Rather, his collaboration with Spielberg on a motion picture about a lauded American President offers a less fecund medium for Kushner's sceptical readings of legacy. Where his theatre creates open spaces in which reparative legacies are formed and persist, this film obscures and closes off, following a memorializing impulse at odds with the rest of Kushner's oeuvre.

Legacy and Film

Prior to this, I have worked with Kushner's treatment of legacy in essays, librettos, and plays, but over the last decade film has played an increasingly prominent role in his writing.[5] In the early 2000s, he wrote the screenplay for Mike Nichols' miniseries of *Angels in America* (2004).[6] Recently, he and Denzel Washington collaborated on the film adaptation of August Wilson's *Fences* (2016).[7] Kushner has also previously worked with Spielberg. The first screenplay he wrote for Spielberg was *Munich* (2005), a critique of the legacies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was co-

[5] I refer to 'film' in a loose sense, as a story recorded either on film or (recently) in digital form. In the case of *Lincoln*, it refers to a motion picture with a self-contained narrative, screened in cinemas and later made watchable on DVD, television, and the Internet. By 'cinema', I refer both the theatres in which films are shown, and the art and industry of filmmaking. To follow John Belton, cinema is 'a site where aesthetic machinery provides its subjects/spectators with an aesthetic experience', through 'the projection on a screen of life-size – or bigger than life-size – images before an audience'. See John Belton, 'If Film Is Dead, What Is Cinema?', *Screen*, 55.4 (2014), 460–70 <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hju037>.

[6] Nichols.

[7] Robert Viagas, 'Tony Kushner and Denzel Washington Collaborating on Fences Film', *Playbill*, 2016 <http://www.playbill.com/article/tony-kushner-and-denzel-washington-collaborating-on-fences-film-com-382902> [accessed 20 May 2017].

written by Eric Roth.[8] Meanwhile, one of his newer projects is an adaptation of the screenplay for Spielberg's *The Kidnapping Of Edgardo Mortara*, currently in pre-production.[9]

I chose to study *Lincoln* rather than *Munich*, because its screenplay is the most recent of Kushner's published texts bar the revised *Angels*, and offers the benefits of examining how Kushner's oeuvre has changed in recent years. It has also attracted a far wider and more sustained scholarly response than *Munich*, or any of Kushner's plays aside from *Angels*. Finally, *Lincoln* develops several themes at work in my first three chapters. I am thus able to examine the ways that legacy in the US is bound to slavery and its afterlives (a minor focus of my chapter on *Caroline*) with an improved understanding of how legacy can both respond to and rely upon dispossession and loss.[10]

The centrality of legacy to Kushner's screenwriting in *Lincoln* makes evident its pervasive scope within his oeuvre. Yet, while theatre and film are in some ways closely connected, both the medium of film and the hand of Spielberg place pressure on Kushner's screenplay and his way of conceptualizing legacy. In approaching *Lincoln*, I work from the premise that Kushner's screenplay and Spielberg's film are closely intertwined. To follow Steven Price, screenplays are both inside and outside of what is seen on screen, a 'textual form glimpsed through the veil' of the film.[11] That textual form is not Kushner's alone. As Wai Chee Dimock argues, his screenplay was 'crowdsourced': it emerged from a 'four-way juggling act' in which Kushner worked with the preferences of Spielberg, Daniel Day-Lewis, and Doris Kearns Goodwin (whose biography *Team of Rivals* (2005) formed the basis for the

[8] Roth (whose screenwriting credits include *Forest Gump*) wrote the initial script, which flagged until Kushner was convinced to re-work it. See Steven Spielberg, *Munich* (Dreamworks Pictures and Universal Pictures, 2005); Fisher, *Understanding Tony Kushner*, p. 147; For a thorough analysis of *Munich* see Daniel J. Levine, 'Munich : Warp-Speed Storytelling and the War on Terror', *Theory & Event*, 9.3 (2006) <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2006.0035>.

[9] 'The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara', *IMDb*, 2017 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3675680/>.

[10] *Lincoln* also helps me to continue to develop my understanding of Kushner's relationship with nineteenth-century thinkers such as Darwin.

[11] Steven Price, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 44, 50–51.

screenplay).[12] In short, as Kushner has readily acknowledged, as a screenwriter he has much less say in the final product than he does as a playwright.[13] The published version of *Lincoln: The Screenplay* adheres so perfectly to the contours of the film that it has clearly been edited to incorporate any changes made by Spielberg and editor Michael Kahn in production and post-production. Kushner was also on set every day of filming and was an active collaborator throughout the filmmaking process.[14] In this context, rather than trying to define what 'belongs' to Kushner alone, I treat both screenplay and film as collaborations between Kushner, Spielberg, Goodwin, Day-Lewis, and many others.[15]

Even before his turn to screenwriting Kushner's theatre had an appreciative relationship with film, and has persistently opened the boundaries between these media. For example, in *A Bright Room Called Day* (1987) cinematographer Husz evokes the power and scope of film, imagining his life made into a film, which features the following scene:

> [A h]uge closeup, the mouth of Dziga-Vertov, thin lipped, saying 'Film is the perfect medium, the only medium for the age of machines, because it is mechanically made, uses mechanical construction, montage, juxtaposition, not focused on the small inner life but on the grand scale, capable of recording an entire revolution!' Jump to the ear of Husz, deep, empty, listening, filling up. Interior shot, from the ear to the heart. [16]

For Husz, everything in machine-made film is grand, including the 'huge closeup' of seminal Soviet film maker Dziga-Vertov's mouth, and its ability to penetrate his body

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[12] Wai Chee Dimock, 'Crowdsourcing History: Ishmael Reed, Tony Kushner, and Steven Spielberg Update the Civil War', *American Literary History*, 25.4 (2013), 896–914 (pp. 902–3); Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

[13] Nelson Pressley and Tony Kushner, 'Copyright, or Health Insurance? Kushner on Benefits of Stage vs. Screen', *The Washington Post*, 6 November 2014 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/copyright-or-health-insurance-kushner-on-benefits-of-stage-vs-screen/2014/11/06/773a6148-613f-11e4-8b9e-2ccdac31a031_story.html> [accessed 21 October 2015].

[14] Davies Dave and Tony Kushner, 'Kushner's "Lincoln" Is Strange, But Also Savvy (Transcript)', *NPR.Org* <15 November 2012> [accessed 5 September 2017].

[15] For in-depth discussion of the collaborative impulse of Kushner's work and its relation to legacy, see Chapter Five of this thesis.

[16] Tony Kushner, *A Bright Room Called Day* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1987), p. 49.

through the ear. Husz is able to verbally bring to life the techniques of film on stage. This is echoed later, when the play uses mechanical construction and verbal montage to bring the Devil onto stage. This scene shows the porous boundaries between theatre and film in Kushner's work, and suggests *Lincoln* (and Kushner's other screenplays) can be read in close relation to his theatrical production.

Lincoln's treatment of legacy embraces the potential of the 'grand scale' so admired by Husz. The possibilities of presenting Lincoln's story on this scale were part of Spielberg's motivation for making the film. In response to the question 'Why Lincoln, why now?' Spielberg states:

> Lincoln […] has been […] a part of the landscape of, of America for so long that we don't even see him anymore. I mean he's all but disappeared from our consciousness, and it just seemed like it was interesting from the perspective of film-making that there hadn't really been a motion picture about Lincoln since, you know, the 1930s.[17]

Here, Abraham Lincoln's disappearance from American public consciousness is epitomized by his absence from motion pictures. Spielberg discounts or is unaware of other film media presentations of Lincoln, including the many miniseries and made for TV movies filmed in the last seventy years.[18] He presents the making of his film as capable of bringing Lincoln out of the 'landscape' and into the cultural view. This is an undertaking of great scope, though it does not translate into a literal focus on Lincoln in the American landscape. Rather, the film is visually and narratively closed-in, providing insight into the inner workings of Lincoln's world, and taking advantage of the camera's ability to fill the screen with larger-than-life, portrait-like detail.[19]

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[17] Stephanie Abrahams, 'Steven Spielberg, Daniel Day-Lewis and Tony Kushner on the Terrifying Process of Making Lincoln', *Time* <http://entertainment.time.com/2012/10/26/steven-spielberg-daniel-day-lewis-and-tony-kushner-on-the-terrifying-process-of-making-lincoln/> [accessed 19 October 2015].

[18] These include Lamont Johnson's *Lincoln* (1988) and Jack Bender's *The Perfect Tribute* (1991). He also neglects to mention the contemporary *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012), a fantasy pulp piece.

[19] For further commentary on the visual scale of Lincoln, see Pete Hammond and Rick Carter, *Q&A: 'Lincoln' with Production Designer Rick Carter*, 2012 <https://soundcloud.com/kcet-digital/lincoln-q-a> [accessed 27 August 2017] (my transcription).

The film's historical detail plays a pivotal role in forging this portrait, and according to Spielberg, in engaging Lincoln's legacy.[20] At the Richmond Forum, speaking alongside Kushner and Goodwin, he states:

> The ambience of creating – […] the sets, the actors knowing that that was the colour of the wall paper, that those were the colour of the floors, that's what the frocking looked like – all of these things add to a feeling that you're doing something, not pretentious, but you're doing something lasting, you're doing something that is going to, perhaps, stand the test of time. Lincoln certainly has, and we did not want our movie to be anything *less than* a tribute to his legacy. It was such a privilege to be part of his legacy, to hopefully also be able to stand a modicum of that test of time.[21]

This frames the film as a 'tribute to [Lincoln's] legacy', but not in a simplistic way. According to Spielberg, *Lincoln* attempts to achieve a certain 'ambience of creating' rooted in historical accuracy. Spielberg refers here to set designer Rick Carter's careful adherence to detail, and attempts to make the set (in Carter's words) 'as intimate and real as possible'.[22] It is also evident in Kushner's screenplay, which was carefully checked for anachronism, and in Spielberg's insistence that the cast stick word for word to the script without improvisation.[23] Daniel Day-Lewis was similarly focused when developing Lincoln's stoop-shouldered shuffle and lyrical, unexpectedly high-pitched voice, working from photographic images, contemporary

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[20] I do not intend here, to suggest that all portraiture must be detail-oriented, but that this is the case in *Lincoln* specifically.

[21] 'Steven Spielberg, Doris Kearns Goodwin & Tony Kushner Discuss "Lincoln" at the Richmond Forum', *YouTube*, 2013 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag9PGQez_Pg.> [accessed 29 October 2013].

[22] Hammond and Carter.

[23] For a discussion of the processes used by Kushner, see Ben Zimmer, 'How Tony Kushner Made Lincoln Talk', *Boston Globe*, 2012 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/12/02/how-tony-kushner-made-lincoln-talk/qCfdFEbbM823WoqWJ2eQHP/story.html> [accessed 21 May 2017]. For concise discussions of Lincoln's use of language in his performative moment, see Ivy G. Wilson and Faith Barrett's articles in *The Cambridge Companion to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For Spielberg's discussion of sticking to Kushner's script, see the 'Richmond Forum' interview: 'Richmond Forum'. Finally, for a discussion of anachronism in Kushner's writing, see Benjamin Schmidt, 'Did Anyone Say "Racial Equality" in 1865? The Language of Lincoln', *The Atlantic*, 10 January 2013 <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/01/did-anyone-say-racial-equality-in-1865-the-language-of-i-lincoln-i/266990/> [accessed 21 May 2017].

descriptions, biographies, and Kushner's script.[24] Spielberg links this pursuit of authentic, surplus detail to the film's longevity: it means that the film itself will be 'lasting', and has a chance to 'stand the test of time', and to 'hold up' to Lincoln's own, long-lasting legacy.

However, the relationship with reality that Spielberg proposes here is a complex one. As Roland Barthes argues in relation to the Realist novel, intentionally included details that are irrelevant to the plot (such as having accurately coloured frocking) might seem to have no intelligible 'meaning', except that the text is true-to-life. Yet, 'just when these details are reputed to *denote* the real directly, all that they do – without saying so – is *signify* it'.[25] In other words, superfluous detail comes to signify 'the category of "the real" (and not its contingent contents)', and becomes the signifier of realism, rather than of the real itself. This observation is applicable to Spielberg's 'ambience of creating': it simultaneously signifies the film's project to be serious, to represent that which is historical and real (including Lincoln's legacy), and points to its status as an aesthetic object, something that is 'created' to be realistic, but which is not 'real'. Spielberg's statement thus highlights that the film is not only trying to represent Lincoln and his legacy, but also attempting to become 'a part of that legacy', by adding to and supplementing it. It also has its own dramatic legacy, which is not identical with Lincoln's.

Yet Spielberg's statement that all of the film's careful details 'add to a feeling that you're doing something, not pretentious, but you're doing something lasting, you're doing something that is going to, perhaps, stand the test of time' also shows that he approaches this legacy in a very different way to Kushner. This has to do with his dismissal of pretentiousness, and Kushner's embrace of it. In the 1990s, having been accused of pretentious writing, Kushner rose to its defence by pointing out that his pretentiousness was an American legacy, which drove the political engagement of

[24] Charles Mcgrath, 'Daniel Day-Lewis on Playing Abraham Lincoln', *The New York Times*, 31 October 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/movies/daniel-day-lewis-on-playing-abraham-lincoln.html> [accessed 2 January 2016].
[25] Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 141–48 (p. 148).

his play. He argues that 'Pretentiousness, overstatement, rhetoric and histrionics, grandiosity and portentousness are, as much as they are tropes of fascists and demagogues everywhere, American tropes'.[26] Situating himself as the 'heir' to American authors such as Melville and Whitman, who have handed pretentiousness down to him, Kushner calls it his 'birthright as an American' to be pretentious.[27] Acknowledging the difficulties of pretentiousness – it is a trope of fascists and demagogues – he insists that it is also key to his readings of politics, continuing:

> [e]mbracing pretentiousness as a trope, as a stratagem and a tool, becoming ironically aware rather than ashamed of grandiosity, enables us to make literary and perhaps political hay out of the distance between what we would like to have done, and what we have actually accomplished.[28]

What matters here is not pretentiousness itself. Rather, it is the critical imperative of Kushner's pretentious inheritance, which opens a dialogue about why there is a difference between what he would like to have done, and what he has actually produced. It demands that failures to reach our goals be acknowledged and productively critiqued, rather than hidden.

Spielberg's statement, in contrast, distances his film from pretentiousness, and takes a more cautious approach to such failures, and to legacy. It suggests that he does not wish to monopolize Lincoln's legacy, or to assume the importance of his film in relation to it. However, his litotes – using understatement to emphasise a positive – modifies this. When he says they're doing something 'not pretentious, but […] lasting', and which cannot be 'less than' a tribute, he suggests that the film can earn its inclusion in that tradition and attain its own sort of longevity by holding up to scrutiny on the level of detail. It is through this – rather than through grand gestures and robust engagement with what cannot quite be achieved – that the film must last, and be transmitted forward into the future. If Spielberg succeeds, Abraham

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[26] Tony Kushner, 'On Pretentiousness', in *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1995), pp. 55–80 (pp. 61–62).
[27] Kushner, 'On Pretentiousness', pp. 61–63.
[28] Kushner, 'On Pretentiousness', p. 67.

Lincoln will be memorialized, but so too will the film's creators, whose artistic project is also being honoured and preserved.

This is not to say that Spielberg's work is not, by Kushner's definition, pretentious. Pretentiousness is a feature of the director's oeuvre, which Kushner highlights in *Angels*. Prior meets the arrival of the Angel through his ceiling amidst a blaze of triumphal music and rapid switch of lighting with the awestruck whisper: 'God almighty.| *Very* Steven Spielberg.'[29] Prior humorously associates his unbelievable and grandiose experience with Spielberg, whose canon of technologically and culturally significant Science Fiction and period films such as E.T. (1982) and *Amistad* (1997), show the purposeful overreach that Kushner defines as pretentious. *Lincoln* is no different. From the opening battle scene, to its grand themes (slavery, government, the law, war), to Kushner's script, it is filled with rhetoric and literary allusion, portentousness and grandiosity. It is characterised by the ambition with which Spielberg's name has become synonymous, and in some ways its very determination to be so lasting is pretentious.

Even so, the contrast between what Spielberg and Kushner say about pretentiousness is indicative of a difference in the way that they approach legacy in *Angels* and *Lincoln* respectively. In his early play Kushner embraces the grand, messy tropes passed down to him, and counts this a fundamental feature of his play. Pretentiousness allows him to undermine and problematize his own narrative style, and its encounters with legacy. Spielberg carefully defines what parts of these pretentious tropes he wants to embrace in *Lincoln*, how he wants to recognize the president's legacy, and how his film's legacy will be secured. He does not want to erase critical engagement, but he is more conservative, less willing to make difficult, troubled work. Kushner and Spielberg's differing stances on pretentiousness are indicative of a tension in the film, between Spielberg's controlling interest in legacy, and Kushner's openness to its many different forms. The result is a film in which

[29] Kushner, *Angels in America (Revised and Complete)*, p. 125; For a discussion of the relationship between this lighting and that used in Spielberg's oeuvre see Flannery, 'Engines and Instruments'.

active and critical engagement with legacy is invited, but also at times obscured by the fervour of memorialization.

An example of this is Lincoln's dream scene, which has two of the characteristics that Kushner sees as pretentious: grandiosity and portentousness. In this scene, Kushner and Spielberg work in synchrony, evoking both film and theatre history to draw the audience into a relationship with Lincoln that is both idealizing and critical. The scene offers a privileged glimpse into Lincoln's inner world, designed to have the audience fall under the spell of his brilliance in a way that will later stifle critique. However, its portentousness also drives the audience to think of themselves as consumers of history, and to meditate upon and problematize Lincoln's legacy from a distance. This answers to Kushner's ambitions for pretentiousness.

The dream introduces the film's second scene. Having opened with the brutality and chaos of the Battle of Jenkins Ferry, and then shown Lincoln interacting with mustering soldiers, it cuts to a strange image: Lincoln, standing tall, is shot in high contrast sepia, his surroundings blurred, his soundtrack a sinister rise and fall of strings. Cutting to a long shot, he stands alone on the prow of a metal ship with a gunnery tower, staring forward fixedly. He narrates in voiceover:

> It's nighttime. The ship's moved by some terrible power, at a terrific speed.
> […]
> Though it's imperceptible in the darkness, I have an intuition that we're headed towards a shore. No one else seems to be aboard the vessel. I'm alone.
> (10)

After these last words, the scene cuts from the dream to a partially obscured shot of Lincoln in repose. As the camera moves, it is evident that he is reflected in the boudoir mirror of his wife Mary Todd Lincoln (Sally Field). Quoting *Hamlet*, he continues: 'I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space ... were it not that I have bad dreams' (11).[30]

[30] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Appendix 1, ll.2.16-18.

This scene is grandiose and portentous, but also domestic, and awash with the careful detail that Spielberg privileges. The visuals of the dream are sharply juxtaposed with the high definition images and clear sound of the rest of the film, creating a separation from reality. This visual difference, combined with Lincoln's narration, tells the audience that this is a privileged insight into his inner world, which is grandiose in its scope and scale. The cut to Mary's boudoir, where he reclines in his shirtsleeves, indicates that great things are happening within his mind, even when he is in repose. The dream is the only explicit look into Lincoln's thoughts that the audience receives, and in it Lincoln is swept away from them, and towards an unknown horizon. This is a metaphor for their relationship with him through the rest of the film: they are encouraged to pursue an understanding of who he is, and how he operates, but are never allowed fully to catch him. Lincoln's explanation of his dream encapsulates this. He discloses that he has 'intuition' about what it 'seems' to be saying. However, rather than explaining this clearly, he offers an un-cited and easily-missed quotation from *Hamlet*.[31] As Tom Prasch argues, Hamlet's talk of dreams relates to ambition, which suggests that Lincoln may think that the dream is about the amendment, which at this point is unlikely to pass.[32] It is only when Mary (also trying to keep up with Lincoln), comes to the same conclusion that the audience is given enough context to understand what he means. The audience are thus guided to be both awed by Lincoln and in pursuit of him; he is idealized, and his perspective privileged, but also obscured. This is indicative of Spielberg's approach to legacy in the film.

This is not to say that the scene poses no questions to the audience. Their distance from Lincoln, combined with the portentousness of the dream, presses them to watch self-consciously. For example, in the dream light flickers wildly and white

[31] This sort of quotation was very typical of the historical Lincoln, and is a mark of the extent to which Kushner became immersed in his language. For further discussion see Bill Moyers and Tony Kushner, 'What We Can Learn from Lincoln | Moyers & Company', *BillMoyers.Com* <http://billmoyers.com/episode/what-we-can-learn-from-lincoln/> [accessed 1 September 2017]; see also the analysis of this interview in Dimock, p. 902.

[32] Tom Prasch, 'FILM: Lincoln's Moment - Leading by Example: Lincoln's Rhetorical Strategies', *The Ryder*, 2013 <https://www.theryder.com/2013/01/12/film-lincolns-moment/> [accessed 21 May 2017]. Guildenstern's precise response to Hamlet's statement is 'Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very| substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream' (Appendix 1, ll.2.19-21).

spots occasionally stream past Lincoln. This effect is similar to that of a very early film camera (though these were not yet invented in Lincoln's period). This impression is accentuated by a sound that underlies the tense strains of music: an extremely subtle crackling and distortion, reminiscent of surviving early films, including D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* (1930). The fact that when the dream cuts to Lincoln's image in Mary's mirror it is not immediately apparent that we are seeing his reflection, emphasises that the film is not real but merely realistic, reflecting on history. This allusion to film is a prod to the audience to remember that they are consumers of historical cinema, rather than watchers of history itself.

Their self-awareness is called upon shortly after this. Mary bitterly calls herself Lincoln's 'soothsayer', reading his dreams for glimpses of the future (12). This may remind the audience that unlike Mary they already know Lincoln's future. It is assumed that they are aware that he was assassinated, and may interpret his irresistible passage towards an unknown shore as his trajectory towards death.[33] By framing the scene with the spectre of Lincoln's death, Kushner and Spielberg encourage thinking about him not only in terms of what he is doing now in the film's present, but also in terms of the fact that these are things that he will leave behind, and which will eventually come down to the audience as legacies. This moment is typical of Kushner's work, not only because he commonly uses dream scenes to heighten dramatic engagement (as, for example, in *Millennium Approaches* and *Caroline*), but because the spectator is asked to be an observer. They are invited to self-consciously think about and respond to what is on screen from their specific historical context. As the film progresses, this question asking is increasingly in tension with its idealization of Lincoln and his perspective.

The dream scene's reference to both the history of filmmaking and theatre also begs the question of how these media interact and differ from each other, and what this means for studying legacy. Alain Badiou, whose work on theatre is examined in my

[33] For more on the film's compressed timescale, which is always ticking down to both the vote for the amendment, and Lincoln's death only three months later, see Rose Lucas, '"My Captain!"', *Screen Education*, 2013, 102–9.

Introduction, argues that theatre is necessarily constituted by an incompleteness that allows plays to be transmitted 'from actor to actor, from body to body, from State to State, all the while preserving its fundamental meaning'.[34] Unlike plays, the motion picture is not live (although the medium of digital film making means that it technically could be). It can be watched in a darkened cinema, but the cinema is not necessary to watch the film. Indeed, according to Badiou the cinema does not require an audience, it needs only 'the walls surrounding a viewing public'. The theatre, on the other hand, requires what he calls the '*spectator*', who is an active participant. If there is no spectator, 'the representation […] changes over into a supplementary rehearsal'.[35] The cinema is not, for Badiou, a public place. Rather, because it is 'crassly mixed up with capitalist infrastructure', the cinema is a site of 'private spectacle' and does not hold the same dialectical power as theatre. He finds it absurd that the director of a film might enter a cinema, receive the public, and feed, educate, and democratically debate with them.[36] Badiou calls this film's 'triviality'.

Yet, this very feature of film, which Badiou understands to mean that it cannot be politics at all, allows it to establish an intimate relationship with its audience, which can repeatedly consume and read it. The video or digital recording, once edited and released to the public (perhaps also released as a director's 'final cut', 'extended', or remastered edition) is essentially unchanging. Each performance of a play is singular because it cannot be repeated. Film is singular in a different way, because it can be repeated with absolute fidelity with each screening. This is coupled with the changing technology of film in the twenty-first century, which has forced it to be adaptive in a different way to theatrical performance. As Paul Young argues in *The Cinema Dreams its Rivals*, film has had to adapt to new technology, changing constantly: '[t]he Internet's emergence may be fading now, but its movie legacy, a newly refined version of the cinema as an interactive experience, is apparent

[34] Badiou, p. 227.
[35] Badiou, pp. 187–88.
[36] Badiou, p. 205.

wherever we look'.[37] *Lincoln* was made with the knowledge that it would quickly move beyond the cinema, and onto the DVD/ Blu-ray, and to distributors on the Internet. In this context, the audience can rewind, pause, re-play. We can watch the same film, simultaneously, with audiences around the world whilst never sharing space with them.

As the dream scene shows, though potentially dispersed and disparate, the audience's experiences are still fundamental to the film. Its devices, especially its camerawork, are always suggestive of our gaze. This is why detail – which makes the piece such a convincing signifier of its own realism – matters so much to Spielberg. If audiences are to receive the film and preserve its legacies, then to do so they must be given materials that are somehow visually and verbally authentic, and stand up to repeated scrutiny. *Lincoln* challenges us to engage with legacy in a less complicated way than theatre does, because we are dealing with a finished product: this is all that the film will ever hand down to us. Spielberg's controlling hand and more conservative approach to legacy is a by-product of this, and it is against this impulse that Kushner's exploration of legacy strains.

The Law and Slavery

Lincoln, then, is an attempt to recover Abraham Lincoln, and to bring him to the foreground of public consciousness. It tries to pay lasting tribute to his legacy by offering a highly detailed picture of a very short period in his life. Yet in the decision to focus on the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, Spielberg and Kushner tie this legacy to questions of slavery and its dispossessions, which are in turn integrally bound to the law. The links between legacy and the law are many, one of the most obvious of these being that laws can be legacies in the sense that they can be handed down from one generation to the next. As I will show below, in the film the Thirteenth Amendment is presented as Lincoln's legacy. Legacy also has etymological connections to '*lex*', Latin for law. The terms come together, as John

[37] Paul Young, *The Cinema Dreams Its Rivals* (Minnesota and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 193.

Mowitt notes, 'where legacy is indexed to the right to assign or bequeath'.[38] So the law can both shape legacies, and forge and control the channels along which they are transmitted. This is precisely what it did in the case of US slavery.

In *The Law is a White Dog*, Dayan tracks the developing legal logic of slavery. People cannot, she insists, become slaves, without making them so legally. She writes:

> What [Orlando] Patterson called the 'violent act of transforming free man into slave' was institutionalized by law. For how could one have slaves without making them so legally? If the law did not deal explicitly with the slave in terms of 'personhood', then the natural, inalienable rights of persons would devolve onto the slave.[39]

As Dayan argues, US slavery had to be enacted legally. According to her, in the American social order, the 'racialized idiom of slavery' depended on 'the legal fiction of "civil death": the state of a person who through possessing *natural life* has lost all *civil rights*'.[40] The law, here, is not only a tool for upholding the civil order; it is also capable of violently turning human difference into hierarchies that allow for and even invite subordination.[41]

In turn, the legal fiction of civil death was dependent upon an imaginary legacy: a metaphor of corrupt blood, stretching back to Biblical times. In Psalm 109, for example, David's enemy is cursed by having multiple generations of progeny barred from inheritance.[42] One term for such punishment is attainder, which entails the severing of bloodlines in both directions, as a consequence of a judgement of death or outlawry. As the logic of slavery in the Americas developed, the accidental lexical similarity between 'attainder' and the term 'tainted' became a convenient means of exclusion. Dayan states that metaphors of blood tainted by felony 'set the stage for the blood tainted by natural inferiority'.[43] She writes:

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[38] Mowitt, p. 272.
[39] Dayan, p. 44.
[40] Dayan, p. 44.
[41] Dayan, pp. 40–41.
[42] *King James Bible Online*, Cambridge Edition, 2015 <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org> Psalms 109, 10-15 .
[43] Dayan, pp. 46–48.

> Corruption of the blood operated practically as a severing of bloodlines, thus cutting off inheritance, but also metaphorically as an extension of the sin or taint of the father visited on his children. If we treat *blood* and *property* as metaphors crucial to defining *persons* in civil society, then it is easy to see how corruption of blood and forfeiture of property could become the operative components of divestment. By a negative kind of birthright, bad blood blocked inheritance. Whether slave or criminal, both are degraded below the rank of human beings, not only physically and morally, but also politically.[44]

Slavery, as a particular form of social and civil death, was maintained by the metaphor of corrupt blood. The law used this metaphor as grounding to block certain kinds of inheritance (of property, for example), and to ensure that progeny would continue to be defined in terms of an inherited 'taint' carried down from generation to generation. Thus, the coming together of a metaphorical legacy and the law – which has the power to define and enforce legacies – allowed for the maintenance of a strictly hierarchical, racialized social order. *Lincoln*'s treatment of the relationship between the law and slavery engages with this history. Throughout the film, the law is presented as potentially unjust, exclusionary and subject to political machinations, personal opinion, and careful manipulations of logic, which in turn become legacies of dispossession. The film asks whether the law, which is linked to Lincoln's performative power, has the power to undo slavery and the legacies that it has previously entrenched.

Performativity and the Law

Kushner and Spielberg's treatment of Lincoln's legacy is strongly shaped by their presentation of his relationship with the law, and with the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment. They offer two competing interpretations of this. In one Lincoln's power is unstable, and the law is slippery; both are open to critique, and must work creatively to respond to dispossessing legacies. In the other, which is a feature of the late film, Lincoln's exemplary presidential will supersedes the law and drives forward the amendment. It is consequently presented as a legacy belonging primarily to Lincoln, memorializing his power and purity.

[44] Dayan, p. 45.

I argue this by close reading two scenes – one early in the film, and one close to its end – in which Lincoln makes linguistic interventions in the law in an attempt to pass the amendment. In the first scene that I analyse, Lincoln places his interventions in relation to other speech acts and contexts in order to open a space where the legal end of slavery is possible without his wartime authority. I use Eve Sedgwick's spatial analysis of periperformative language, and Judith Butler's work on the citational basis of performative power, to show how his language warps and displaces the locus of his presidential power. Lincoln's performative power is revealed to be unstable in its relationship to the law, while the legacies that it produces are shared, troubled, and open to critique. However, later in the film this slipperiness is dismissed in favour of a more idealized and stable depiction of Lincoln's legacy. In the second scene that I read, which takes place close to the film's end, Kushner and Spielberg present the amendment as secured by the force of Lincoln's exemplary will. It becomes specifically his legacy, a memorialization of his brilliance and ethics, and its damaging ramifications are hidden.

I am using 'performative' here in the sense of J. L. Austin, to refer to utterances in the first person present indicative active tense. These utterances do not merely describe doing something, but actually do or perform it.[45] The US president's oath of office contains the performative 'swear' or 'affirm': 'I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.'[46] We do not see Lincoln use many performatives in the film: he does not take his oath of office on screen, and he does not marry, promise, request, bequeath, bet, disavow, renounce, or name anything using a performative utterance. Yet, as I will go on to show, the film is rich in what Sedgwick calls periperformatives.[47]

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[45] Austin; Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 67.
[46] 'The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription', *National Archives*, 2015 <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript> [accessed 23 May 2017].
[47] 'Around the Performative' in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

Periperformatives are specific referential utterances alluding to a performative. Where the performative must be exemplary, a singular speech act, periperformatives introduce relation to other acts of speech and other contexts. Sedgwick describes this relationship spatially, using the metaphor of a neighbourhood where periperformatives are arranged around performatives. As an example, she uses Lincoln's Gettysburg Address of 1863: 'But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow – this ground'.[48] Here, the historical Lincoln speaks in the negative and expresses the inability of those at Gettysburg to dedicate, consecrate and hallow. Periperformatives 'warp, transform, and displace' the performative's authoring energy, partly because their force does not decrease on an even gradient as they move away from it, but 'concentrates in unpredictable clusters [and] outcrops'. [49] They also offer the flexibility to respond to situations in specific, referential ways. They are important tools for speaking about slavery, which powerfully marked the modes of meaning possible in its 'performative ambit'. Sedgwick argues:

> It was increasingly true during the final century of legalised slavery that one human being's explicitly performative acts of buying, selling, willing, inheriting, claiming, advertising for, and manumitting another human being created the conditions for a kind of chronic incipiency of crisis in the understanding of performativity tout court, along with every other social, linguistic and spatial form that presumed an intelligible notion of human ontology and agency. It required local, rhetorical, and specifically periperformative acts, however, to make something of such a chronic incipiency.[50]

Lincoln's discussions of slavery and the law are informed by this ever-incipient crisis of understanding, forged by the law and its legacies. Part of this crisis is that the power to effect social change hinged dangerously on the performative power used to enforce and entrench slavery. In a context where Lincoln is attempting to forge new legacies, he must use local, periperformative acts to disturb the law and open the space where the end of slavery after the Civil War is made possible.

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[48] Abraham Lincoln, 'Gettysburg Address Transcription', *Library of Congress* <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/gettysburg-address/ext/trans-nicolay-inscribed.html> [accessed 27 August 2017]. In Kushner's screenplay, part of the Gettysburg Address is quoted to Lincoln, but these lines (along with the whole central portion of the address) are excluded.
[49] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 75.
[50] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 79.

This can be illustrated by turning to a scene where Lincoln speaks to his cabinet about the need to pass the amendment before the end of the war. The audience, by this point, knows about Lincoln's proposed course to push the amendment through the House, and is aware that Mary fears that it is 'sure defeat' (13), and Seward that a battle in the House would 'tarnish [Lincoln's] invaluable lustre' (19). Seward also illustrates that the public would not necessarily support the passing of the amendment were the war's end not understood to hinge on it (25). Lincoln tries to gain the support of his cabinet by placing the amendment in the context of his Emancipation Proclamation, a pivotal legal act made on 1 January 1863, two years before the action of the film. Using the executive powers granted to him during the state of war, and working on a federal level, Lincoln had used the proclamation to change the legal status of enslaved persons within rebelling States from 'slave' to 'free'.[51]

Lincoln's speech to his cabinet takes place in his office, which is made to feel intimate and closed-in through the use of lighting, sound, and foreground framing. Although it is daytime, the room is dim, and feels small when so full of people, all men, darkly dressed, and wreathed in cigar-smoke. The camera-work is close in: most shots are close-ups or medium. As is common in the film, medium shots are often over-the-shoulder, or they use characters as foreground framing. Longer shots use deep focus, keeping all around the table in view. While this further heightens the room's intimacy, it also establishes some historical distance: the gaze of characters who were actually 'there' in 1865 mediates that of the cinematic viewer. The only time this mediation is absent is during close-ups of faces and hands, and here the camera is explicitly directing us. This works to mark the audience's historical distance; as in the dream scene, they must actively engage with what is on screen.

[51] Abraham Lincoln, 'The First Edition of Abraham Lincoln's Final Emancipation Proclamation', 1863, Library of Congress <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/lprbscsm.scsm1016> [accessed 8 June 2017].

Secretary of the Interior John Usher (Dakin Matthews) sets the speech in motion by arguing that Lincoln has done enough to end slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation. He claims that Lincoln's attempts to pass the Thirteenth are now forcing the 'unwarranted intrusion of the Executive into Legislative prerogatives', and thereby putting the amendment at risk (34). He refers here to the fact that the amendment must pass in the House of Representatives, where Lincoln should have no power because he is part of a different branch of government.[52] Lincoln's response to this is initially humorous. He reflects that although the Proclamation was passed by Attorney General Edward Bates as a measure of war, he does not 'recall Bates being any too certain about the legality of [the] Proclamation, just it wasn't downright criminal. Somewhere's in between' (34-35). He follows this with a lengthy anecdote about how justice is not always served by following the letter of the law with precision. It is apparent that there is a grey area between legality and criminality, which the President sometimes occupies, and that despite the requirement that it be objective, the law is subject to 'recall' and speculation.

When Usher protests that that he does not see the relevance of this point, Lincoln changes tack, altering his body language and tone, and launching into a monologue intended to win over his cabinet. Up to this point he has been serious but also amusing and nonchalant, not quite making eye contact. Now he straightens, pulls his chair in, places his fists gently on the table before him, and starts speaking in earnest to them. With the camera retaining its deep focus and gradually zooming in on him, drawing the audience to contemplate his face and words in ever more detail, Lincoln offers a reading of his performative and periperformative language. He shows that his power and position are unstable in relation to the law. Alone, he cannot achieve a lasting end to slavery: he must work with his cabinet to open a legal space where the end of slavery is possible without his powers of war.

[52] The US constitution enshrines the separation of the Executive and Legislative branches of government. It should also be noted that Lincoln's realpolitik approach to the law contrasts with that of characters in Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997), written by David Franzoni. Based on a historical story, it is about a group of enslaved Africans who are put on trial for murder after they revolt against their captors while at sea. The film presents realpolitik as a tool only of those on the side of slavery. (Steven Spielberg, *Amistad* (Dreamworks Pictures, 1997).)

He begins his speech by reflecting on the shakiness of these powers:

> I decided that the Constitution gives me war powers, but no one knows just exactly what those powers are. Some say they don't exist. I don't know. I decided I needed them to exist to uphold my oath to protect the Constitution, which I decided meant that I could take the rebels' slaves from 'em as property confiscated in war (35-36).

Lincoln's triple use of the verb 'decided' is periperfomative. It has two meanings, which overlap: he has both determined that the Constitution gives him war powers and chosen to take up these powers. 'I decided to' is not a performative in Austin's sense. It is not in the present tense, and does not achieve what it says. However, Lincoln's decisions are integrally connected to performatives, including his oath of office, and those within his Emancipation Proclamation. In the latter document Lincoln used performative verbal structures to 'order and declare', 'designate', 'enjoin', 'recommend', and 'invoke'.[53] To use Sedgwick's spatial formulation, in this passage Lincoln is speaking 'around' these performatives. He is also destabilizing their authoring power. Take, for example, the oath of office: his decision to award himself war powers is a response to the need to 'uphold [his] oath'. However, his oath is also what allows him to award himself these powers. So the performative power that authorizes his decisions is simultaneously upheld by them in a shaky, circular motion.

One of the reasons that Lincoln's performative power is unstable is that (even for a president) performative power does not come from individual will. Rather, as Judith Butler writes in response to Sedgwick, it derives from 'a reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence and instability'.[54] For example, the judge 'authorizes and installs the situation he names', but the force of his words does not come from his will or a prior authority.[55] Rather, it comes from citing the law:

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[53] Lincoln, 'Emancipation Proclamation'.
[54] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 225. Notably, like Sedgwick Butler extensively re-works Austin's performative.
[55] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 225.

> it is through the invocation of convention that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor his will, but in the *citational legacy* by which a contemporary 'act' emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions.[56]

So Lincoln's performative power emerges only as part of a citational legacy, wherein each of his performative speech acts (his oath of office, his proclamation) refers to innumerable binding conventions. His citation of these conventions, in Butler's formulation, produces his authority. One of the reasons the law is slippery for Lincoln is that in making the Emancipation Proclamation based on war powers, he has acted without the full weight of citational legacy. '[N]o one knows just exactly what those [war] powers are', so he is not even certain that his intervention is legal. Lincoln's use of this executive power thus paradoxically shows his power to be limited. The force behind the Emancipation Proclamation exists only in exceptional circumstances; he has 'caught at' a specific opportunity, but his authorizing power alone cannot carry him beyond this.

As Lincoln continues, he elaborates on the limited context in which his performative power works, and explains that the amendment is necessary because the proclamation is legally 'slippery'. By this point in the speech, the camera has moved about a third of the way down the table at which he and the cabinet sit, bringing Lincoln into sharper focus. His tone has also shifted, become more rapid and intense. With the camera moving steadily towards him, he continues:

Now here's where it gets truly slippery.

This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. (Continued onto next page)

[56] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 225.

(Continued from previous page) This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

I felt the war demanded it; my oath demanded it; I felt right with myself; and I hoped it was legal to do it, I'm hoping still. (37)

Lincoln is caught in a double bind, which he presents with both gravitas and carefulness. There are two performatives in this speech: 'I insist' and 'I maintain', but the first of these is prefixed with 'if' and is part of a question that marks Lincoln's uncertain power. Meanwhile, in 'maintain[ing]' that it is not the actual Southern states in rebellion, Lincoln places himself in a difficult position where he is in effect 'cancelling State's laws' with his proclamation. The slipperiness of this situation is emphasised by the structure of the speech, which sees Lincoln repeatedly make statements then turn back and re-examine or directly question them, without offering definitive answers. Meanwhile, the word 'law' appears seven times in the speech. Lincoln describes himself as using, respecting, and cancelling laws, but also talks about the law's ability to determine things, and speaks about its 'force'. As both a tool to be used and something exerting force, the law is shown to be malleable and mutable. So, too, is Lincoln's power. He ends by saying that he hoped, and still hopes, that his actions were 'legal' – which he cannot know for certain because the Emancipation Proclamation was based on war powers, not on the extensive citational precedent that can be offered by passing a bill through the House of Representatives. In this context, he needs to use the amendment to ensure continued emancipation, and to set up new, binding conventions (36).

As he ends his speech, Lincoln continues to both make reference to and question his performative power. By this point, the camera has zoomed in close – we see only Lincoln and his secretary John Hay (Joseph Cross), who is seated behind him. With his singular importance visually reiterated, Lincoln/Day-Lewis continues by leaning forward, compelling and exasperated:

> Two years ago I proclaimed these people emancipated – 'then, thenceforward and forever free.' But let's say the courts decide I had no authority to do it. They might well decide that. Say there's no amendment abolishing slavery. Say

> it's after the war, and I can no longer use my war powers to just ignore the courts' decisions, like I sometimes felt I had to do. Might those people I freed be ordered back into slavery? That's why I'd like to get the Thirteenth Amendment through the House, and on its way to ratification by the states, wrap the whole slavery thing up, forever and aye. As soon as I'm able. Now. End of this month. And I'd like you to stand behind me. Like my cabinet's most always done. (36-37)

As Lincoln/Day-Lewis states that he wishes to end slavery forever his sentences seem to blend into each other, and he emphatically stabs the table with a finger as he proclaims 'Now. End of this month'. These words are an act of oration fully intended to capture both his cabinet and the film's audience, not only in Lincoln's logic, but also in the conviction fuelling it. This is clear from the camera work, the carefully constructed argument, and slow increment to the determined demand that the amendment happen 'Now'. Yet this statement also gives a nod to the citational performative, and puts Lincoln's present actions in relation to both his own past and those of others by quoting his proclamation and citing the precedent set by his cabinet. Because his power is unstable, these others must continue to support him if he is to succeed, and it soon becomes clear that his speech has not managed to convince them all.

In its wake Usher, not dissuaded, comments that Lincoln is describing his own actions in a way that would suggest that he is 'the sort of dictator the Democrats have been howling about', ignoring courts and twisting the law (37-38). While Lincoln maintains that 'the people' are there to rein him in, he is both certain and uncertain of his actions. He finishes, his face alone caught in a close-up:

> I felt I was within my power to do it; however I also felt that I might be wrong about that; I knew the people would tell me. I gave 'em a year and half to think about it. And they re-elected me.
>
> *(Beat.)*
>
> And come February the first, I intend to sign the Thirteenth Amendment. (38)

Here, Lincoln ends his speech with another periperformative: 'I intend'. As with his earlier use of the verb 'decided', this periperformative evokes other illocutionary acts. Among these are the Gettysburg Address and the Emancipation Proclamation,

his oath of office, the US Constitution, and also all of the smaller acts that the film follows. These include the realpolitik conversations between Lincoln and Seward; those between Lincoln and Thaddeus Steven; and the machinations of W. N. Bilbo (James Spader), and Seward's other political operatives. Sedgwick claims that the periperformative excels at articulating historical change by 'invok[ing] illocutionary acts in the explicit context of other illocutionary acts'.[57] This is what happens here, as Lincoln both reminds the audience of the performative power on which he draws, and destabilizes it by pushing out the space around him, drawing others to support the development of new citational legacies beyond his proclamation, and evoking the many challenges to his authority through which the amendment must penetrate. Thus, at the end of this scene, the amendment stands as something that Lincoln works for, but which is not his alone. Through it he wishes to leave a legacy, to 'wrap the whole slavery thing up, forever and aye', but he does not envisage this as a legacy belonging to him, nor does he shy away from the problematical features of his engagement with the law.

Yet, as the case of his war powers attests, as president Lincoln is also positioned in unique relation to the law. Later in the film, Kushner and Spielberg put the spatializing periperformativity of this early scene – which worries about the slipperiness of Lincoln's power base and his relationship with the law – in tension with a contrasting image of the unquestionable authorizing power of his will. Less than two days before the vote, and still short several of the abstentions and votes needed to see the amendment passed, we see Lincoln embrace the extent of this power, although again without resorting to performatives. The scene echoes the one discussed above, but with significant differences. Lincoln is seated in the same place as in the earlier scene, but it is night and the room is darker, and contains only five people: Lincoln, Seward, radical Representative James Ashley (David Costabile), and the conservatives Preston and Montgomery Blair (Hal Holbrook and Byron Jennings). Their meeting is tense and hostile. As Ashley and the Blairs argue with each other and attack the actions Lincoln has taken during the film, the camera gives us

[57] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 79.

Lincoln's back. This is never done in the earlier scene, and it leaves the audience even more uncertain than normal as to what he is thinking. As the argument between Ashley and the Blairs simmers, the camera cuts to a close-up of Lincoln's tired, frowning face in profile. We see his hand rise, and he slams the desk in a demand for quiet. In the earlier scene, he merely places his hands on it to cease his cabinet's argument. Here he demands attention, where in the earlier scene it is willingly given. Speaking passionately, urgently, he states:

> I can't listen to this anymore! I can't accomplish a goddamned thing of any human *meaning or worth* until we cure ourselves of slavery and end this pestilential war, and whether any of you or anyone else knows it, *I* know I need *this*! *This amendment is that cure!* We're stepped out upon the world's stage *now,* now, with the fate of human dignity in our hands! Blood's been spilt to afford us this moment! (127-28)

As he states that he knows he 'need[s] this' he stabs the papers before him with two fingers. Pointing around the table at Ashley, Monty, Preston, he continues:

> *See what is before you! See the here and now!* That's the hardest thing, the only thing that accounts! Abolishing slavery by constitutional provision settles the fate, for all coming time, not only of the millions now in bondage but of unborn millions to come. Two votes stand in its way, and these votes must be procured. (128)

In response to Ashely's exasperated 'Yes, but *how*?' Lincoln rises and (the directions state) '*keeps rising, till he seems eight feet tall*'. He declares 'I am the President of the United States of America, clothed in immense power! You will procure me these votes' (128).

This scene is potently theatrical. Lincoln literally calls the 'world' a 'stage' and describes himself as being 'clothed' in power, having donned the mantle of president. This wording is an extension of the power dynamics presented in the earlier scene. The power that Lincoln exerts is something that he wears. It belongs to him, and he is using it in an extroverted manner to demand something of his audience. Yet in using the metaphor of clothing, he also implicitly acknowledges that he is playing a role. Kushner thus invokes the intersection between theatrical and

linguistic performativity to show that the power of Lincoln's position, and of his words, is temporary and contingent on the conventions that uphold it.[58]

However, the way in which this scene is shot and performed, along with other aspects of Lincoln's language, obscure the complexity of his relation to performative power in ways that counter the subtle implications of the idea that power merely 'clothes' him. As he says 'I am the President of the United States of America, clothed in immense power!' Lincoln is alone on screen, his body facing the audience but his head slightly turned towards Ashley, to whom he is talking. He is also shot from a slight, low angle. This makes him seem powerful and intimidating, and emphasises that he has 'immense power' at his command, which singles him out, and allows him to do things that others cannot.[59] This time Lincoln does not invoke the power of his cabinet, the House of Representatives, or law makers, but focuses solely on what he wants: '*I* know I need *this*!'. 'I' here is not just Lincoln, but President Lincoln, whose evocation of '*See what is before you! See the here and now!*' suggests that he is somehow more fully aware of the present than his companions. In this moment the outcome of the amendment – which concerns 'the fate […] not only of the millions now in bondage but of unborn millions to come' – is localized onto Lincoln's presidential will, rather than on the legal history and legacies that authorize the House to pass it.

This destabilizes the law in a different way from Lincoln's previous, periperformative play. This is a more explicitly commanding intervention of the executive into the legislative prerogatives than previously seen. To gain votes Lincoln has before now hired agents (through Seward), and even campaigned for amendment votes himself. This alone has not been enough. Now, right before the vote, Lincoln must fall on an explicit verbal assertion of his power because all other avenues have been exhausted. His will must tip the balance and ensure that the necessary work is done.

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[58] For a concise explanation of such intersections, see Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, pp. 7–8.

[59] The fictional Lincoln is also citing the real Lincoln. See Kearns Goodwin, p. 687; Joshua Zeitz, 'Fact-Checking "Lincoln": Lincoln's Mostly Realistic; His Advisers Aren't', *The Atlantic*, 12 November 2012 <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/11/fact-checking-lincoln-lincolns-mostly-realistic-his-advisers-arent/265073/> [accessed 11 September 2017].

That Lincoln knows the end of slavery to be right, and the creative team forging this film are fully in agreement, transforms this scene into a potent memorialization of his power and legacy, which seems (albeit only momentarily) to function over-and-above the law. Here, the amendment comes belong to him in a less ambiguous way than previously seen. Kushner's imaginative recovery of Lincoln's language in the first of these two scenes complicates his role in passing the amendment, and shares it with others. He is shown to be compassionate, set on justice, and both subject to and manipulator of the law's crippling restrictions. In this second scene, the fight for the amendment culminates with Lincoln's exemplary will; the Thirteenth Amendment thus becomes his legacy. This is the lasting impression with which Spielberg and Kushner leave their audience.

Slavery, Photography, and Lighting

The film's attempt to uphold this exemplary image of Lincoln causes it to slip – much like Lincoln's language – over some of the most troubling features and legacies of his legal intervention. In this final section, I demonstrate this through an analysis of *Lincoln*'s use of photography and lighting. This offers a means of reflecting on the relationship between the film's treatment of African Americans, slavery, and Lincoln's legacy. The film's portrayal of African American characters has become central to the body of scholarship on it. The key critique of many scholars is that *Lincoln* focuses almost solely on the role of white men in abolishing slavery, giving relatively little agency to the mere handful of African Americans that appear on screen.[60] Its representation of slavery is similarly minimal, largely confined to a

[60] This was first raised by Kate Masur in 2012, soon followed by Eric Foner (author of *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*), and Aaron Bady. The debate was continued in an *Atlantic* roundtable, in which Masur took part. It has since been taken up in a variety of scholarly articles, by scholars such as Dimock and Daniel Itzkowitz. *See:* Masur, 'Passive Black Characters'; Eric Foner, 'Opinion | Lincoln's Use of Politics for Noble Ends', *The New York Times*, 26 November 2012 <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/opinion/lincolns-use-of-politics-for-noble-ends.html> [accessed 4 September 2017]; Aaron Bady, 'Lincoln Against the Radicals', 2012 <http://jacobinmag.com/2012/11/lincoln-against-the-radicals-2/> [accessed 21 May 2017]; Kate Masur, 'For All Its Strengths, "Lincoln" Is Still a Comforting Fantasy', *The Atlantic*, 7 December 2012 <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/12/for-all-its-strengths-lincoln-is-still-a-comforting-fantasy/266050/> [accessed 21 May 2017]; Dimock; Daniel Itzkovitz, 'Lincoln and the Radicals', *Transition*, 2013, 78–98 <https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.112.78>.

series of photographic images of slaves, with which Lincoln and his young son Tad interact. I argue that through the use of lighting, the film creates complex resonances between the spectrality of these photographs (which show people who have suffered civil death) and Lincoln (who is at the heat of civil life, but always headed towards death). These are used to reiterate that the matter of slavery always haunts Lincoln's legacy. However, despite the careful establishment of this resonance, the film does not deal with the most difficult ramifications of the Thirteenth Amendment: its complicity in mass incarceration and the continuing impact of this on the lives of African Americans. Turning again to the film's lighting, I argue that Spielberg's intention to bring Lincoln out of the landscape and (literally) into the light restricts the film's engagement with the fullness of his legacy, and guides Kushner to write about this in a more conservative manner than is found in his theatre.

For a film that takes as its focus the legal abolition of slavery, *Lincoln* spends little time exploring slavery itself. It takes as a given that the twenty-first-century audience will be aware of the dynamics of slavery leading into the Civil War.[61] In a context where representations of the Civil War are already dominated by narratives of white men moving history, *Lincoln* contains very few speaking black characters. There are five: the film opens with Private Harold Green (Colman Domingo) and Corporal Ira Clarke (David Oyelowo), who speak to Lincoln about the war. Clarke eloquently and forcefully reminds him of the continuing fight for equal rights in the North. William Slade (Stephen McKinley Henderson) is Lincoln's valet, and has a few lines, and a close relationship with Lincoln. Mrs Elizabeth Keckley (Gloria Reuben) is Mary's companion and seamstress. The only established ex-slave in the film, she is its major black character. Finally, Lydia Stevens (S. Epatha Merkson) appears late in the film, when it is revealed that she is Thaddeus Stevens' partner; directly after its passing, Stevens brings her the amendment's Bill, and we first hear it read aloud in her voice. There are many other black characters in the film: servants, soldiers, hospital workers, and a group of men and women invited to watch the vote for the

[61] As I explain below, the UK DVD release gives a brief explanation of the lead-up to the Civil War, accompanied by photographs from the time.

amendment. None of them have substantial lines, nor are they seen to actively engage in the fight against slavery.

Commenting on this issue, Kate Masur argues that the film presents African Americans as being too passive in the fight to end slavery:

> [*Lincoln*] helps perpetuate the notion that African Americans have offered little of substance to their own liberation. While the film largely avoids the noxious stereotypes of subservient African-Americans for which movies like 'Gone With the Wind' have become notorious, it reinforces, even if inadvertently, the outdated assumption that white men are the primary movers of history and the main sources of social progress.[62]

Masur offers several possible places in which African American engagement with abolition could have been accurately and even easily included in the film. For example, Elizabeth Keckley's active role in organizing other black women in Washington to gather donations and raise money for fugitives goes un-acknowledged.[63] Even when Mrs Keckley speaks of slavery in a scene that Kushner has called the 'cornerstone' of the film, her words fall slightly flat.[64] Returning from the theatre, Lincoln asks her what is to come for 'her people' after slavery (115). In response, Keckley says that she 'cannot say' what lies ahead for her people, continuing:

> Negroes have been fighting and dying for freedom since the first of us was a slave. I never heard any ask what freedom will bring. Freedom's first. As for me: My son died, fighting for the Union, wearing the Union blue. For freedom he died. I'm his mother. That's what I am to the nation, Mr. Lincoln. What else must I be? (115)

Mrs Keckley's sharp response to Lincoln, and her refusal to generalize or to act as prophetic voice for all African Americans, leaves room for difference, complexity,

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[62] Masur, 'Passive Black Characters'.

[63] For more on William Slade's active role as a leader of Washington's African American community, see Natalie Sweet, 'A Representative "of Our People": The Agency of William Slade, Leader in the African American Community and Usher to Abraham Lincoln', *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 34.2 (2013), 21–41 <https://doi.org/10.2307/23622059>.

[64] John Williams, 'It's Elizabeth Keckley's Year in Civil War History', *The New York Times*, 9 January 2013, section Books <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/books/its-elizabeth-keckleys-year-in-civil-war-history.html> [accessed 1 July 2017].

and change. She also acknowledges the continued struggle for freedom by active African Americans, including her own son. The passive grammatical formation 'for freedom he died' places 'freedom' (the object) in the place of the subject; it is literally first here, and it is her son's legacy. However, Keckley's demurral means that the views of others shape the film's future-scape. While Ira Clarke talks about the future at the film's outset, the visions of Lincoln and Thaddeus Stevens are given precedence as the film goes on (76-78, 156-57). [65]

Spielberg and Kushner have addressed the film's lack of black voices as a matter of historical accuracy. The film is about Lincoln, and Kushner felt that it would have been 'dishonest … to create … [a] politically pleasing but historically inaccurate relationship' between Lincoln and a figure such as Fredrick Douglass, for example.[66] In an interview with Daniel Itzkovitz, Kushner answers the question of why, after *Caroline, or Change*, the film has so few black characters. He notes that 'this is a film about Lincoln, and about government, not about slavery. But I'm sympathetic to that critique. African American slavery has been so radically under-represented in popular art and popular entertainment.'[67] He goes on to comment on the difficulty of representing or dramatizing the 'evil of slavery', which he describes as an external state that becomes an internal one. For Kushner, this involves 'a soul murder that's […] a life-long process, and a generational process that's very hard to represent'.[68] *Lincoln* makes no attempt at doing so. However, while Kushner and Spielberg maintain that the film is not 'about' slavery, in choosing to take the Thirteenth Amendment as their focus, they place slavery at the fore.[69] Despite Kushner and Spielberg's protestations, their treatment of those who have been enslaved is pivotal to establishing Lincoln's context, and his legacy.

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[65] For a discussion of the usefulness of a 'microhistory of crowdsourcing' in accounting for the local oscillations in the presentation of African American characters in the screenplay, see Dimock, p. 905. She looks especially at the contrast between the opening scene, with the eloquent Clarke and Green, and the rest of the film.

[66] 'Richmond Forum'.

[67] Itzkovitz, p. 112.

[68] Itzkovitz, p. 112.

[69] Kearns Goodwin's use of slavery to frame and draw *Team of Rivals* together may also have contributed to this.

The film's treatment of slaves consists of two elements: a brief commentary from Elizabeth Keckley; and photographs of slaves, which appear several times in the film, and are my primary focus here. The film's use of photography can be partially attributed to Kushner, who spent much time looking at reproductions of nineteenth-century daguerreotype and ambrotype photography when writing the screenplay.[70] He states that these images mark the distance of time, but familiar details in them might also '[collapse] 150 years of distance between you'.[71] He further notes that photographic images from the Civil War have 'the remarkable power to make us feel this […] absolutely central event in American History, and I would say World History, as if it was happening right now. And in a way of course it is; right now we're still in the Civil War, working it out'.[72] Photography, in this context, serves as a tool not just for bringing the past into the present, but also for collapsing the two. Kushner's sense that 'right now we're still in the Civil War' suggests that this historical moment has not gone away; its long lasting after effects or legacies continue to determine actions and outcomes in the present. In light of this, the photographic images in the film supplement the project of bringing the past into the present and paying tribute to it. They make the audience actively think about their relationship with the past, even as parts of this are left purposefully obscure.

The film's photographs of slaves appear on series of heavy glass plates, which are in Lincoln's possession, and with which his son Tad is fascinated.[73] As both Cara Finnegan and Mary Niall Mitchell note, the glass plates are unusual objects to see about the White House. While people of Lincoln's period may have had photographs of slaves, they would not have taken the form of such large, expensive, and fragile

[70] Jason Berry, Tony Kushner, and Russell Lord, *NOMA - Tony Kushner in Conversation with Russell Lord*, 2014 <https://vimeo.com/90389490> [accessed 25 August 2017].
[71] Berry, Kushner, and Lord (My transcription).
[72] Berry, Kushner, and Lord (My transcription).
[73] While it is not part of the screenplay, it is interesting that in the UK DVD release a short, explanatory note precedes the opening of the film. It offers a brief account of the Civil War, accompanied by three images. One of these is a stereograph by James Gibson, entitled 'Cumberland Landing, Va. Group of "contrabands" at Foller's house'. It features a group of escaped slaves (the 'contraband' of the title). Photographs, here, serve to elucidate and offer historical shorthand to the audience. See '[Cumberland Landing, Va. Group of "Contrabands" at Foller's House]', 1862 <//www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003000055/PP/> [accessed 4 September 2017].

glass plates.[74] Rather, they would have taken the form of *cartes-de-visite*, paper photographs printed on card stock. The glass plates were likely used in the film because they are visually impressive, and emphasise the spectral qualities of their subjects.

These photographic images appear, or are referred, to in three scenes. We first see them early on, just after Lincoln's first conversation with Mary, when he goes to find Tad to put him to bed. Kneeling on the floor where Tad sleeps beside a fireplace, Lincoln finds his young son has been playing with the plates, and picks two of them up. One depicts a single child, the second two children. Each image is labelled with details: 'Slave child, age 12 - $600'; 'Two young boys - $700'. Lincoln views these images of human commodification and objectification with a deep frown, and it is evident that he is taking in the images, and that they are playing on his mind. The plates are next brought up by Tad, who comes to Lincoln in his office, upset because they have been taken away from him. Lincoln comments, 'You had nightmares all night, mama's right to –' but Tad (speaking plaintively and extremely fast) interrupts, 'But I'll have worse nightmares if you don't let me look at the plates again!' (26). In the third instance, two further plates are viewed by Tad, who has obviously found them or had them returned. He views them while Lincoln gets ready for a party. These plates are of adults. The first is of the widely disseminated image known as 'The Scourged Back'.[75] It shows the extensive scarring on the back of a fugitive slave, resulting from a whipping. The last plate, to which Spielberg's camera gives almost no time, is of an adult African American woman.

As a record of human suffering, the plates are a means to bring enslaved bodies into the White House and to the attention of characters and audience. As Jay Prosser

[74] Cara A. Finnegan, 'Slave Photographs in Lincoln', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 18.1 (2015), 129–34; Mary Niall Mitchell, 'Seeing Lincoln: Spielberg's Film and the Visual Culture of the Nineteenth Century', *Rethinking History*, 19.3 (2015), 493–505 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2015.1006869>. Historically, it is unlikely Gardner would have sent such one-of-a-kind, fragile, and valuable plates to the White House

[75] Finnegan, p. 131; For a detailed analysis of what is known of this photograph, its subject, and its possible photographers, see David Silkenat, '"A Typical Negro ": Gordon, Peter, Vincent Colyer, and the Story behind Slavery's Most Famous Photograph', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 15.2 (2014) <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2014.939807>.

shows, photographs are a memorable way of conveying the pain of others, offering a single moment, which might work in contrast with film or words.[76] They are also, though, part of *Lincoln*'*s* imbalanced treatment of people of colour. In *Picturing Fredrick Douglass,* John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier show Fredrick Douglass to be the most photographed American of the nineteenth century. They argue that for Douglass, photography had power to 'bear witness to African Americans' essential humanity, while also countering the racist caricatures that proliferated throughout the North'.[77] The images of *Lincoln* do not elide this message, but nor do they fully propagate it. The bodies of African Americans become props to be used to tell the audience about Lincoln's legacy, rather than their own.

The plates, as Finnegan indicates, serve three functions in the film. They put characters in visual relation to slavery. They 'invite reflection on photography's capacity to fuel the desire to look'.[78] Finally, they 'erupt' into the story at moments when political calculation needs to be balanced, in a timely way, with moral imperative: they always appear at moments when Lincoln has just been discouraged from pursuing the amendment. I would supplement Finnegan's points with a few further observations. The first is that the plates establish a distinct relationship between slavery and Lincoln's domestic life, symbolised here by the hearth and the flame. Lincoln finds Tad sleeping with the plates scattered beside a fireplace in the first scene in which they appear. The scene is also shot with a halation or glow effect, so all the light is made to look even more soft and luminous. In the second scene, Tad's complaint about the plates interrupts a conversation between Lincoln and Seward, during which Lincoln/ Day-Lewis first builds up his office fire and then exhaustedly leans over the mantelpiece. In the final instance, the scene opens with a candle flame, which is reflected in the reverse side of 'The Scourged Back' plate, as if licking the back of the man depicted. Tad's face appears behind it, studying it

[76] Prosser, p. 8.
[77] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Fredrick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York & London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), p. xi.
[78] Finnegan, p. 129.

intently, before the camera moves out to show Lincoln and Slade, getting him ready for the big 'shindy' that they are holding. Here, domesticity is emphasised: in particular, as Lincoln goes through the every-day task of readying himself for an engagement, his domestic equilibrium is threatened by the insistence of his eldest Robert (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) that he be allowed to fight in the War. Finally, towards the end of this scene, Tad asks Slade if he was beaten 'when' he was a slave. Slade remarks that he was born free, but Mrs Keckley enters at that moment, and Slade says that Tad should ask her if she was beaten, because she 'was a slave' (68). Although Lincoln cuts off most of Tad's eager question to Mrs Keckley, she answers anyway: 'I was beaten with a fire shovel when I was younger than you' (69). This latter sentence is the summation of first-person descriptions of slavery in the film.

In evoking (even in Mrs Keckley's description of being beaten with a fire shovel) the domestic hearth, Spielberg and Kushner are foregrounding the importance of opening out what Sedgwick calls 'the portal of quasi-familial privacy behind which the violence of the slave system had been supposed to shelter unwitnessed'.[79] Slavery is not just a matter of national debate and Civil War; it penetrates Lincoln's family space, albeit in a relatively distant way. The plates are also associated with Tad, and with Lincoln's relationship with him as both father and adult. Tad's frequent penetration into Lincoln's work-life is not invented – Kearns Goodwin makes clear that he was indulged and had the run of the White House – but his constant presence when the experience of slaves is raised makes slavery into a generational issue.[80] If ending slavery is Lincoln's legacy, then his decision to do so is at least partly motivated by his relationship with his child. It is as a father that Lincoln has the power to enact change, to create a new legacy.

The flickering of flame shining through or reflecting on the glass plates also creates a sense of ghostly movement within these semi-transparent images, which gives them an incorporeal, spectral quality. Kushner and Spielberg use this to point to the

[79] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 83.
[80] Kearns Goodwin.

spectrality of enslavement, and to link this to Lincoln. As Dayan argues, when a 'natural creature possessed of personal status dies not to be reborn in the spirit but in the body of civil society', their body becomes metaphorically spectral.[81] Kushner makes a similar claim when he states that 'there's a soul murder that's being done to slaves that is a life-long process, and a generational process'.[82] The photographic plates visually replicate this spectrality to represent the dispossessions of slavery. However, they are also used to visually link Lincoln to these enslaved people.[83] The visual language of these plates is prepared for by the dream sequence, where Lincoln is utterly still, staring straight ahead, as if in a portrait. It is the scenery around him – especially the flickering light of the background – that gives him a sense of movement. Once the flame-lit photographs appear, they serve to emphasise the spectral iconography of this dream, which unsettles both Mary and Lincoln when it occurs.

The imagery of these glass plates is also alluded to in Lincoln's deathbed scene. Dressed in a white nightshirt, Lincoln lies at a strange angle on white sheets. Male bodies in dark clothing surround him, as in the cabinet meeting. Only Lincoln and the bed are clearly lit, suffused by a greenish yellow light, which is far steadier than that of the early, flickering images that I have described. However, in the foreground there is the lambent flame of a gaslight. As it is announced that the President 'is no more' and 'belongs to the ages', the camera zooms in on Lincoln's body (163). It lingers on Lincoln, who is utterly still, as if in a photograph. The camera then shifts further to the right, bringing the gaslight slowly into view, until flame encased in glass occupies the whole shot, and we cannot see Lincoln. At this moment, we hear a voiceover: Lincoln, delivering his Second Inaugural Address. In the midst of the glass-enclosed flame, a semi-transparent, spectral image of Lincoln appears. This is deeply resonant with the glass photographic images and their coupling with flame. He is giving the last part of the address: 'Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray,

[81] Dayan, p. 42.
[82] Itzkovitz, p. 112.
[83] The plates are also linked to Lincoln's dead son Willie, who is mentioned twice just after they are shown, and whose photograph also appears in the film. Willie's photograph is distinctly different from those of the slaves, because it is not on glass and has no transparency. This contrast further points to the deliberateness with which the film's makers chose the glass plates.

that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away' (164). As he continues, the flame slowly fades and becomes transparent. Lincoln's inaugural scene is revealed, and he becomes corporeal again. Lincoln/Day-Lewis is at his most charismatic, and is speaking words written not by Kushner, but by Lincoln himself:

This quotation has been redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

(164) [84]

Although Lincoln's legacy does not require his death to be passed on, his death comes to signal the transmission of all that he has achieved to those that come after him. In this context, his visual coupling with the enslaved – the film's other spectral people – emphasises that Lincoln and his legacy are tied up with and implicated with slavery, and its end.[85] This helps to reassert the idea already established by Lincoln's final interventions in the law: that the amendment, and the freedom of African Americans, is his legacy.

Despite this, the film does not actively ask how Lincoln's legacy continued to interact with the afterlives of slavery. In particular it does not make the connection between the Thirteenth Amendment and the continuation of disabling metaphors that associate race and corruption within the US. This connection is indicated by Dayan, who traces the link between the civil death suffered by the slave, and the civil death suffered by the felon. Section One of the Thirteenth Amendment states:

> Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.[86]

[84] For the full citation of Lincoln's Second Inaugural see 'Abraham Lincoln, [March 4, 1865] (Second Inaugural Address; Endorsed by Lincoln, April 10, 1865)', *Library of Congress* <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d4361300))> [accessed 24 September 2017].

[85] There is not, I hasten to add, any suggestion that Lincoln is himself enslaved by his office, or subject to the sort of prolonged atrocity depicted in the plates.

[86] 'Congress, Wednesday, February 01, 1865 (Joint Resolution Submitting 13th Amendment to the States; Signed by Abraham Lincoln and Congress)', *Library of Congress* <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-

While the amendment here outlaws slavery, it does so with an ambiguous 'except': slavery and involuntary servitude can still exist as a punishment for a crime, if someone has been 'duly convicted'. This marking of slavery as a punishment for the convicted has had a crucial role in shaping incarceration in the US. Dayan sees it as marking, 'the discursive link between the civilly dead felon and the slave or social nonperson. Criminality was racialised and race criminalised'.[87] The legacy of the amendment was not just to free those who had once been enslaved: its exception was a crucial step in ensuring that the violent dispossessions and burdens of enslavement could continue in both North and South, through the criminalization of African Americans. It is difficult to think of how this future might be represented in this Hollywood blockbuster, without disrupting its tremendously affective final scene, prepared for throughout the film. Lincoln's amendment would, though, play a crucial role in the movement towards the twentieth- and twenty-first-century system of mass incarceration. Loïc Wacquant sees this as the end-result – the deep legacy – of slavery.[88]

This darker legacy is elided in *Lincoln* not despite, but because of its focus on a specific kind of memorialization. To the limited extent the two can be separated, this is more closely associated with Spielberg's direction and camera, than with Kushner's screenplay. This is particularly obvious in the use of light in the film. *Lincoln*'s cinematography is a study in contrasts – against dark interiors and darkly dressed people, natural light and the light of flame and gas lamps shines, flares, and streams inwards in long rays. However, while light is everywhere, it also belongs in some senses to Lincoln, who actively notices light and, for example, tries to soak it in with eyes closed on his daily carriage rides. Against the dark, quiet interior of Lincoln's office, where a clock always ticks, are tall windows with sheer curtains, through which light streams. At the climax of the film, as bells announce that the

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bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d4361100))> [accessed 24 September 2017]. See also *Lincoln,* p. 151.

[87] Dayan, pp. 64–65.

[88] Loïc Wacquant, 'From Slavery to Mass Incarceration', *New Left Review*, 13 (2002), 41–60; see also DuVernay.

amendment has passed, Lincoln and Tad (who is with his father during the vote) go into this bright rectangle, disappearing behind the sheer curtain. Lincoln has thrown the window open, and the curtain billows and shifts. Through this luminous, moving veil both Lincoln and Tad are ghostly and numinous in appearance, their bodies partially fading from view. As the camera moves in for a mid-shot we can see Lincoln turn to face Tad, look down on him, and reverently run his hand over his young son's hair. The Thirteenth Amendment, it is made clear, is for this child, as much as for all other children. The film cuts away, showing the celebrations in the House – where an audience of black men and women have watched from the gallery, and celebrate along with Mary, Mrs Keckley, and the white men that have dominated the film. Lincoln's legacy, this implies, is lasting, powerfully good, a triumph. There is a strong sense here that the past is a source of light, and that Lincoln has been brought back into the light.

Lincoln was far from perfect, and Kushner and Spielberg are quite willing to show his practical realpolitik, his difficult relationships with Mary and Robert, and his frequent uncertainty regarding his choices. They make it clear that Lincoln's decision to pursue the amendment caused the War to go on longer. But they do not acknowledge that the very people freed by the amendment were also, in the long-term, disabled by it. For all of its periperformative unsettling of the law – and hence also of the many legacies that are dependent upon it – the film is fixated on Lincoln's individual will, represented within the cinematic masterpiece of Spielberg, Kushner, and their collaborators. Spielberg's more conservative vision of legacy dominates. The film constantly addresses the fact that in Kushner's words, 'things die and go away and […] we'll never know certain things'.[89] Yet, there are things that we do know, that it does not reconstruct or leaves ambiguous, because they would unravel the story's focus on Lincoln as an exemplary president and father figure whose legacy is good, pure and worthy of the great effort of placing him back in the public eye through the singular medium of the motion picture. In *Munich*, their previous collaboration, Kushner and Spielberg do not shy away from such difficult questions –

[89] 'Richmond Forum'.

something that is, perhaps, easier because they are not dealing with a revered American president. Nor does Kushner shy away from this in his most closely related text, *Caroline, or Change*. On this level, and in this film, the dialectical dynamism of Kushner and Spielberg's collaboration falls flat.

Chapter Five

Collaborative Nets in 'Reverse Transcription', *A Bright Room Called Day*, and *Widows*

This chapter claims that theatrical collaboration establishes net-like structures along which reparative and resistant legacies might pass. In 'With a Little Help from My Friends' (1995), Kushner describes collaboration as fostering profound human interconnection, forming 'nets of souls [from which] societies, the social world, human life springs. And also plays'.[1] I claim that legacies both travel along the connective lines of such nets, and emanate from them. Countering what Kushner calls the 'myth of the individual', these collaborative legacies destabilize the boundaries between self and other. Without clear beginning or end, they offer alternatives to vertically structured generational hierarchies and models of authorial authority. Through this, they present the means to collectively resist oppression.[2] It is evident from my work on *Lincoln* (2012) in Chapter Four, that collaboration does not always achieve these ends. Kushner's work with Spielberg, and their focus on memorializing Lincoln as father of a nation, limits his critique of disabling legacies. However, in Kushner's early works even collaborations that fail – those that disintegrate, or produce no shared output – make space for non-monolithic, heterogeneous legacies that call his audience to read with critical imagination.

I develop Kushner's theorization of collaboration through close readings of two of his single-author plays, and analysis of his participation in an artistic collaboration with Ariel Dorfman. I also juxtapose Kushner's (and later Dorfman's) reading of collaboration and legacy with those of Harold Bloom and Maud Ellmann, and Wayne Koestenbaum.[3] Their disparate theories – variously concerned with authority, hierarchy, and broken boundaries – challenge and clarify Kushner's treatment of

[1] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 40.
[2] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 40.
[3] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*; Maud Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Wayne Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989).

collaborative legacies, whether because he directly cites them, or works in ways consonant with their output.

In 'With a Little Help from My Friends' Kushner explicitly contrasts his approach to collaboration with Harold Bloom's vertically oriented and patriarchal theory of poetic reading.[4] Bloom sees strong poets as working to supersede their predecessors, each individual struggling for absolute authority over the canon. In contrast, Kushner labours to undo individual autonomy, and establish net-like and egalitarian intergenerational connections. I develop this with the help of Maud Ellmann's reading of Modernist networks, which she characterises as being rhizomatic, and whittling away at the boundaries between self and other. Where for Modernists this was a source of anxiety, for Kushner it is to be welcomed.[5]

This is evident in two of his single-author plays, 'Reverse Transcription' (1996) and *A Bright Room Called Day* (1987).[6] While neither was co-written, both scrutinize collaboration through their characters and plot. In 'Reverse Transcription: Six Playwrights Bury a Seventh', Kushner represents a collaborative network through his six playwright characters, who labour together to bury their dead friend in a graveyard too exclusive to accept him. Their collaboration is an act of resistance towards the individuated, patriarchal and elitist legacies from which playwrights are excluded. *A Bright Room Called Day*, in contrast, represents the disintegration of such a network in the face of Fascist politics. Kushner's answer to this is a re-purposing of the holes left behind by eroding connections to open boundaries between past and present, through which legacies of the political Left can pass. In both plays it is acknowledged that, especially in the theatre, collaboration forges unexpected connections along which legacies might travel.

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[4] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 40; Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*.

[5] Ellmann.

[6] A note on editions: 'Reverse Transcription' was written for and performed at the Humana Festival in 1996. *A Bright Room Called Day*, the earlier of these works, was written in 1985, its premiere taking place in 1987, the year of its publication. All further references to these plays are in-text. See Tony Kushner, 'Reverse Transcription: Six Playwrights Bury a Seventh', in *Death & Taxes: Hydriotaphia & Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2000), pp. 1–18; Tony Kushner, *A Bright Room Called Day* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1987). Kushner, *A Bright Room Called Day* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1987).

Kushner's collaboration with Ariel Dorfman in *Widows* (1991) offers a case study of how such connections function, both on and off the page, to resist oppression and destabilize authorial authority.[7] I show this by contrasting Dorfman's reading of the act of male collaboration that brought *Widows* forth with an analysis of the female figures that dominate the play. *Widows* originated with Dorfman. He describes Kushner (his collaborator) as the 'midwife' who delivered it onto the US stage (78|82). He thus implicitly compares himself to a mother and Kushner to the person (etymologically, the woman) who is with her at birth. I show this to be consonant with Wayne Koestenbaum's reading of collaborating male 'dyads', who he says symbolically 'usurp' female, generative power in order to produce a text, which is read as both shared woman and child.[8] Yet in the play Dorfman and Kushner represent women who do not generate life, but embrace death. The eponymous widows collaborate to resist a brutal military regime, sacrificing both their lives and those of their children in an act of civil disobedience that disrupts generational ordering and the primacy of patriarchy. The female power that Dorfman envisages himself and Kushner to usurp is thus not generative; it offers access (albeit limited) to non-monolithic connections that fuel intense political resistance. *Widows* shows that collaboration can take characters, audience and authors beyond the boundaries of the self, and towards a radically inter-connected and resistant understanding of legacy. The play, in turn, opens the borders of Kushner's oeuvre to different legacies.

Collaboration, Influence, Reading

'Collaboration' is, etymologically, about shared labour: its roots are in the Latin '*col*' meaning together, and '*labōrāre'* to work.[9] Kushner tends to reserve the word for those who have worked with him in fairly specific ways. In his Acknowledgements to

[7] Widows has an extremely complex history of revision and publication. This history, and my approach to working with it, is explained at length in a dedicated section below (see Dorfman and Kushner, *Widows* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997)Dorfman and Kushner; Ariel Dorfman, 'Widows', in *The Resistance Trilogy* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1998), pp. 1–85.)

[8] Koestenbaum.

[9] Collaboration can also mean 'traitorous co-operation with the enemy', though this definition is only of partial relevance to my analysis in this chapter. 'Collaborate, V.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/36195#eid8876375> [accessed 21 July 2016].

The Illusion (1989) for example, he calls director Brian Kulick a collaborator. He does not use this word for Corneille, even though the published text emphasises that the play is Corneille's, suggesting that a diachronic collaboration has taken place.[10] As I show in my chapter on *Caroline, or Change* (2003), Kushner also understands reading to be a kind of collaboration. The theatregoer is an active and critical 'reader', who participates in constructing the performance.[11] Here, he offers a similar insight to Roland Barthes, who contends that the text 'asks of the reader a practical collaboration', requiring them to 'produce the text, open it out, set it going'.[12]

Legacy and collaboration are not inherently linked. The multifaceted possibilities of shared labour mean that collaboration might unfold with no recourse to the transmission of legacies. However, in Kushner's work their mutual dependence human interconnection means that acts of collaboration inform the transmission and conceptualization of legacy. Kushner theorizes this in 'With a Little Help from my Friends', an essay that serves as the afterword to *Angels in America* (1991/1992).[13] Here, he motivates for a global collaborative network that produces legacies that are egalitarian and anti-patriarchal.

Kushner's conception of shared artistic labour, and his concomitant reflections on legacy, respond to and conflict with Harold Bloom's antagonistic theory of artistic interaction in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom is the subject of part of 'With a Little Help from My Friends'. Kushner used his translation of the Hebrew word for 'blessing' in *Perestroika*, and says that he is 'indebted' to him, though they have 'never met'.[14] He singles Bloom out partly because of he is ironically anxious about his appropriation of this predecessor's work.[15] In my Introduction, I write briefly

[10] For a fuller analysis of Kushner's adaptation of Corneille see Chapter Two.
[11] Steindler and Kushner.
[12] Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image - Music - Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 155–64 (p. 163).
[13] Kushner, 'With A Little Help'. I refer, throughout this chapter, to the version of the essay that appears in *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness*.
[14] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 38.
[15] Kushner's interest in Bloom is reciprocal. Bloom included *Angels in America* in his *Western Canon* in 1994, and edited a collection of essays on Kushner in 2005. See Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*; Harold

about the differences between Bloom's theory of influence and Kushner's heterogeneous and non-monolithic understanding of legacy. Influence and legacy are not identical, but have many conceptual links. Bloom argues that the strong, post-Enlightenment poet is actively engaged in misreading their predecessor's work. Upon reading his 'Great Original' or father, this later poet – almost inevitably male – feels anxiety at his belatedness. In response he undertakes 'misprision', the misreading and 'the re-writing of the father', so that 'a poet is not so much a man speaking to men as a man rebelling against being spoken to by a dead man outrageously more alive then himself'.[16] Strong poets such as Milton 'achieve a style that captures and oddly retains priority over their precursors, so that […] one can believe, for startled moments, that they are being imitated by their ancestors'.[17] The move to become self-begotten breaks legacy's forward-oriented cycle because the successor can metaphorically switch places with the predecessor. However Bloom does not challenge the vertical thrust of inter-generational relationships, or their hierarchical orientation. His is a theory of disproportionate heights, where poets are given primacy depending on how original they seem to be. Their struggle makes collaboration impracticable. The younger poet is not interested in shared labour across generations or within them; they only want to surpass those who have come before.

This structure is the consequence of Bloom's focus on the individual, something that Kushner actively resists. Kushner opens 'With A Little Help From My Friends' by referring to the Capitalist 'myth of the Individual', which propagates '[t]he fiction that artistic labor happens in isolation, and that artistic accomplishment is exclusively the provenance of individual talents'.[18] In this politically charged narrative the 'guarantor of value […] is that you pretend you play it solo, preserving the myth that you alone are the wellspring of your creativity'.[19] Bloom's self-

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Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994), p. 567; *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Tony Kushner*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005).

[16] Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, p. 19.

[17] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 141.

[18] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', pp. 33–35.

[19] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 33.

begotten poets are attempting to do precisely this, under pressure from the fact that their imaginative space has already been filled by the father. This is also the case when Bloom writes about the stage. He sees Shakespeare as struggling, for most of his career, to 'exorcise' Marlowe'.[20] Bloom goes so far as to state that 'generosity' and 'mutual' interaction are the hallmark of poets that are 'minor or weaker' and 'poorer'.[21]

In contrast, Kushner's vision of shared theatrical labour is open to the possibility of dynamic horizontal and vertical relationships, which offer far more flexible possibilities for legacy. For example, describing collaborations with his peers, he frequently deploys intergenerational metaphors, where he is figured as the successor or child. He introduces his close friend Kimberly T. Flynn as part of his 'intellectual genealogy', explaining her role in his developing awareness of a number of historical and literary predecessors, such as Walter Benjamin. He then describes Oskar Eustis, who commissioned *Angels,* as more than a collaborator:

> We have no words for the people to whom we are indebted. I call Oskar Eustis a dramaturg, sometimes a collaborator; but collaborator implies co-authorship and nobody knows what 'dramaturg' implies. […] Oskar continues to be for me, intellectually and emotionally, what the developmental psychologists call 'a secure base of attachment' (a phrase I learned from Kimberly).[22]

In referring to Eustis as his 'secure base of attachment', Kushner intertwines metaphors. Where he has 'no words' for those to whom he is 'indebted' and he feels that the traditional bounds of collaboration have been tested, he describes a generative, peer-to-peer or 'horizontal' relationship in terms usually reserved for the 'vertical' relationship between adult and child. The idea of a 'secure base' comes from John Bowlby, who primarily used it to describe attachment behaviour in children. A secure base offers the confidence to make 'sorties into the outside world'.[23] He theorizes that '[i]n essence this role is one of being available, ready to

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[20] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. xxxvi. My italics.
[21] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 30.
[22] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', pp. 37–38.
[23] John. Bowlby, *A Secure Base* (Routledge Ltd, 2012), p. 12 <https://www.dawsonera.com:443/abstract/9780203440841>.

respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary'.[24] Kushner's evocation of Eustis as his secure base of attachment suggests a quasi-vertical relationship that operates in contrast to Bloom's. It holds the possibility of departure and return, nourishment, and intervention, and goes beyond collaboration.

Kushner's very different understanding of shared labour and of the nature of vertical relationships, is rooted in his net-like conceptualization of human interaction. He ends his essay fully cognizant of the tensions inherent in his own position – resistant to the myth of the individual, but still the 'primary' labourer – by proposing a radical reformulation of the concept of the individual. Reflecting on his essay, he writes:

> Guilt plays a part in this confessional account; and I want the people who helped me to make [*Angels*] to be identified because their labor was consequential. I have been blessed with remarkable comrades and collaborators: Together we organize the world for ourselves, or at least we organize our understanding of it; we reflect it, refract it, criticize it, grieve over its savagery and help each other to discern, amidst the gathering dark, paths of resistance, pockets of peace and places from whence hope may plausibly be expected. Marx was right: The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction. From such nets of souls societies, the social world, human life springs. And also plays.[25]

In this conclusion, collaboration fosters critical thinking and reflection, camaraderie and organization. It allows one to share grief, resist the 'gathering dark' of our world, and to identify and ground hope. The 'indivisible human unit' is refigured as consisting of two people, not one. But these connections also go beyond the dyad: we are part of 'nets' from which both the social world and human life spring. Harper describes such a net at the end of *Angels*, when she envisages the souls of the dead rising and joining hands to heal the ozone layer.[26] In punning on the word 'play', in the sentence fragment 'And also plays', Kushner also brings this statement into the theatre. If 'play' is read as a verb, it might refer to vigorous interaction, the movement of human life as it 'plays' out from such nets. If 'plays' is read as a noun,

[24] Bowlby, p. 12.
[25] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 40.
[26] Kushner, *Angels in America (Revised and Complete)*, p. 285.

it describes theatrical texts, which (like life) spring from these nets. Here, the theatre offers lightness that can press back against the 'gathering dark'.

This vision is utopian; Kushner's essay remains a guilty, 'confessional account', steeped the language of indebtedness that is a legacy of the Capitalist myth of the individual. However, the nets that he envisages offer possibilities for interaction that may move beyond this. Nets are made of many cords or strands, knotted together so as to form a weave that is intentionally riddled with holes; some things can pass through them and others cannot. They do not need to be as ordered as Harper's vision of souls joined at the hands; their knots of connection are not always regular. They are flexible, might bend, fold, see separate parts touching. Nets are also things that 'catch', in both senses of the word: they might capture, restrain and prevent escape. They might also save one from a metaphorical fall (as it is implied, Eustis has often saved Kushner). Finally, the net suggests the system or grouping of the network.

The use of the metaphor of the net to interrogate the boundaries between self and other, including those through which legacies must pass, is not new. In *The Nets of Modernism*, Ellmann describes modernist production of the early twentieth century as concerned with 'the entangled nature of the self, caught in the nets of intersubjectivity and intertextuality'.[27] She examines a range of Modernist portrayals of 'the human subject as enmeshed in relations of exchange – sexual, linguistic, financial, pathogenic – that violate the limits of identity'.[28] She argues that '[w]hat is peculiar, though not unique to modernism, is the association of these nets with the violation of individual autonomy'.[29] Kushner's work addresses and revises these tensions. For him the undoing of individual autonomy is not about violation, at least not on the surface. The fiction of the one is damaging; the more-than-one is reparative. This has explicit, and challenging ramifications for the conceptualization of legacy, particularly when it is envisaged as singular, linear, and dependent on the

[27] Ellmann, p. 1.
[28] Ellmann, p. 1.
[29] Ellmann, p. 169.

notion of individual wholeness. This is the structure of Bloom's model, even if sons might displace the father.

Patriarchal structures are especially vulnerable to Kushner's net. Ellmann points to this when she associates the net with a rhizome, an underground stem, which grows horizontally between other things. Working from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, she envisages this structure as having 'neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overspills'.[30] An example of a potentially rhizomatic structure is the network of the navel or omphalos. Ellmann describes the navel as a footnote in the flesh, 'marking an indelible debt to the lost mother'. In Joyce's *Ulysses* the navel cord signifies matrilineal nets, linking us all together. However, the navel is also the sign of a severing connection, the exile of the infant from the body. It thus stands for 'both gap and knot, both beak and hinge'.[31] Ellmann opposes this net of double-meaning with the vertical or 'arboreal structure of the family tree, governed by the name of the father'.[32] In the following sections, I close read 'Reverse Transcription' and *A Bright Room Called Day* to argue that legacies, like meaning, can be envisioned as moving along the strands of a horizontal net established through collaboration. They pass through the rhizome, between characters, playwrights, crews, actors, and audiences.

Collaboration and Playwriting in 'Reverse Transcription'

In 'Reverse Transcription: Six Playwrights Bury a Seventh, a Ten Minute Play that's Nearly Twenty Minutes Long' (1996), six playwright friends, tasked with labouring together to bury their deceased companion, discuss the writing of plays. Kushner shows the collaboration of playwrights to surpass the Capitalist 'myth of the Individual', which hinges on the preservation of an exclusive vision of origin and descent. Rather, writing for the theatre is a pre-originary process, leaving legacies that are expansive, liminal, and connected with both life and death. This shows

[30] Ellmann, pp. 9–10; Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[31] Ellmann, p. 5.
[32] Ellmann, pp. 9–10.

Kushner's difference from Bloom, whose poets desperately wish to be their own wellspring of creativity.

As the title suggests, 'Reverse Transcription' is an experiment in the ten-minute play format. Biff, Happy, Aspera, Ottoline, Flatty, and Hautflote have travelled to Able Hill cemetery with the body of their friend Ding, who has died from HIV/AIDS-related illness. Buying a plot there is unreachably expensive, so they have decided to fulfil Ding's wish to be put to rest there by burying him illegally. Although intent on the burial, the playwrights' reluctance to disrupt the graveyard is palpable. Ottoline articulates this as unwillingness to disturb Able Hill's 'authentic' air. She is an African American woman in her 50s, inadequately remunerated despite her great theatrical influence, and is keenly aware of the inequalities represented by the cemetery. She describes its space as 'Forefatherly. Originary' (11). Remarking that they are 'afraid to stick the shovel in' she later says that they sense: '*pedigree*, not *holiness*. Blood, genes. Of which we playwrights are envious. We're mutts. Amphibians' (15). Playwrights, here, are interstitial creatures, 'Not of the land nor of the sea. Nor of the page nor of the moment', continues fellow playwright Aspera (15). They are not rooted in the clear, 'forefatherly' lines present in the graveyard.

Another of the playwrights, Happy – who in fact no longer writes for the theatre – builds on this when he says:

> Writing began with the effort to record speech. All writing is an attempt to fix intangibles – thought, speech, what the eye observes – fixed on clay tablets, in stone, on paper. Writers *capture*. We playwrights on the other hand write or rather 'wright' to set these free again. Not inscribing, not *de*-scribing but … *ex*-scribing (?) … 'W-R-I-G-H-T,' that archaism, because it's something earlier we do, cruder, something one does with one's mitts, one's paws. To claw words up...!' (22)

As if he will free words from the earth itself, Happy then falls to his knees and begins to dig with his hands, the first to break the cemetery's ground. His description of being a playwright sees it as something old, crude, early. A 'wright' is an artificer; as

a verb it can mean to build or construct.[33] Happy implies that playwrights go back before the sort of construction that seeks to preserve. Writing leaves a record. Playwrights, however, don't 'inscribe' or 'de-scribe' by putting pen to paper. They 'ex-scribe', a word that Happy pronounces as a question. The prefix 'ex' can have the sense of 'out' or 'forth' (as in *ex*it), of bringing into a certain state (*ex*acerbate), or of *ex*pulsion, removal, even deprivation.[34] It suggests a simultaneous bringing forth and absence. Ex-scribing playwrights are alien to whatever produces the 'authentic', 'forefatherly', 'originary' aura of the graveyard, where money and legacy will eventually be settled in stone.

Happy's description of pre-originary writing can be juxtaposed with what Bloom would call *apophrades*, where the poet seeks to set himself up as the new father, making past poets his sons. In contrast, Kushner's vision shows playwrights to be out of sync with genealogical time altogether. Happy even suggests that they are like HIV. He previously notes 'the HIV virus, which has robbed us of our Ding, reads and writes its genetic alphabets backwards, RNA transcribing DNA transcribing RNA, hence retrovirus, reverse transcription' (15-16). Reflecting on whether there might be some secret to this reverse transcription, which brutally throws life into reverse, he comes to no clear conclusion. He continues reflecting on this reversal as he digs with his hands, declaring that 'wright[ing]' is: 'To startle words back into the air again, to … evanesce. It is … unwriting, to do it is to die, yes, but. A lively form of doom' (23). Playwriting (playwrighting) and death, then, go hand in hand. There is a resonance here, with the form of theatre itself. Time limits are built into the structure of plays and into Kushner's screenplays. As Denis Flannery notes: 'Theatre has a primal affinity both with human life and with all life forms: it comes into being,

[33] 'Wright, n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/230697> [accessed 6 July 2016]; 'Wright, V.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/230699> [accessed 6 July 2016].
[34] 'Ex, Prep.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/65504> [accessed 6 July 2016].

it stays, it changes, it triumphs, it falters – it goes'.[35] This is particularly keen in this ten-minute play, hanging onto life for twenty.

The play represents theatre's paradoxical, 'lively […] doom' by closing with an act of collaboration that simultaneously associates the playwrights with endings and with birth. All six set their shovels to the ground, and Ottoline says: 'Push in' (24). 'Push' carries connotations of childbirth, where the infant is pushed out into the world. The playwrights are, however, pushing 'in' to the earth. Their collaborative act is a phallic penetration of 'originary' ground, which is also the digging of a grave. It is reminiscent of Pozzo's final lines in *Waiting for Godot:* 'They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more'.[36] In Beckett's image, the brief gleam of a life falls directly, and possibly already dead, into its grave. Kushner's playwrights' breaking of earth is more generative than this. Although we do not actually see him buried, when Ding enters the ground the graveyard will be inseminated by what it actively excludes. The net will widen. It also shows playwrights to have access to different legacies, outside of forefatherly genealogies. Their legacies pass along collaborative lines, embracing both preservation and loss, and involving the interchange of words, ideas, love, and labour. Legacies don't only, however, pass along unbroken lines. As I will show below, under sufficient pressure collaborative networks can disintegrate, but the empty spaces they leave behind can also allow for the transmission of legacies.

'The Borders are Full of Holes': *A Bright Room Called Day*

The Kushner that figures writing plays as embracing a 'lively form of doom', is more mature than the writer of *A Bright Room Called Day* (1987). The earliest of Kushner's plays in this thesis, it was written almost a decade before 'With A Little Help From My Friends' and 'Reverse Transcription'. *Bright Room* is a political piece intended to draw parallels between Hitler and Ronald Reagan. It is about the ways that Fascism penetrates private lives and destroys the nets that bind people. The play is partially

[35] Denis Flannery, 'Chaos, Death, Questions: Margaret Edson's *Wit*', in *Wit: Programme* (Manchester: The Royal Exchange Theatre, 2016).
[36] Samuel Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1990), pp. 7–88 (p. 83).

set in Weimar Germany, at the rise of the Nazi Party, and the nadir of German Modernism. Nazi rule saw the censure of modernist movements such as psychoanalysis, and the exile of writers such as Berthold Brecht.[37] Ellmann claims that the great anxiety for modernists was a 'networked world [that] threatens to reduce the human subject to a knot or intersection, rather than an independent agent'. [38] Kushner's play answers to this modernist fear, contending that the individual's isolation – their tearing away from the webbing – is far worse than the loss of individual autonomy. Fascism, figured as the Devil, breaks down networks of friends, collaborators, and comrades, and is literally life threatening. Yet this malevolent politics – which shares the obsession with elitism, hierarchy and male lineage evident in the Able Hill graveyard – can be resisted even from within damaged nets. Kushner's characters – especially those who are women – use the holes and ruptures left behind by eroding connections to travel beyond the borders of the self. They establish new networks, and impart legacies in unexpected and non-monolithic ways.

The Weimar period portion of *A Bright Room Called Day* follows a group of Left-supporting friends, who experience the country's rapid descent into Fascism, and slowly find themselves coming apart. Also on stage, and connecting the Weimar Era with Kushner's time, is the character of Zillah. She is the frame narrator, an American conspiracy theorist living in the 1980s. While present onstage, she does not interact with the 1930s characters directly. Her role is to be didactic and presentational, drawing 'parallels' between the two periods. Although she is a self-proclaimed 'completely convinced, humourless paranoiac', the similarities that Zillah senses between the two periods are real (54-55). As David Garrett Izzo argues,

[37] Kushner has said that *Bright Room* was in part a response to Brecht's *Fear and Misery In the Third Reich* suggesting – while explicitly resisting getting '"Bloomy"' – that *Bright Room* was an attempt to 'wrest an independent persona from this progenitor'. See Carl Weber and Tony Kushner, 'I Always Go Back to Brecht', in *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, ed. by Robert Vorlicky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 105–27 (p. 112).

[38] Ellmann, p. 2. While Ellmann works with Freud, she is not focused on a specifically German Modernism, but on figures that spanned American, British, and European movements.

Kushner is responding to 'Fascist creep' a phenomenon visible not only in Germany in the 1930s, but in the US between the 1980s and the early 2000s.[39]

Bright Room's Weimar group has benefited from the cultural flourishing taking place in Germany through the 1920s and early 1930s. Agnes and Paulinka are actresses, Gotchling is an artist and graphic designer, Husz is a cinematographer, and Baz a research psychologist. Their creative and intellectual output, often collaboratively made, is woven throughout the play, which opens with the friends lounging on the floor of Agnes's apartment on New Years Eve, playfully taking turns at 'compos[ing] together' a story (8). Most of the characters' artistic energy is directed towards the political Left, to which they all have ties. Marianka Swain has gone so far as to declare that the play's characters are 'more useful personifications of political viewpoints than fully developed characters'.[40] While this is the case for Husz and Gotchling, it is less so for Agnes, whose dedication to politics is badly shaken over the course of the play. The play's lead character, she is also the tenant of the apartment in which the play is wholly set. Kushner instructs that this should be 'wonderfully warm and inviting', even 'verging on the fantastical'.[41] Seb Harcombe's 2014 Southwark Playhouse production achieved this through the use of texture: rugs, cushions, curtains, and an upholstered chaise longue created the inviting warmth for the theatre's floor space.[42] Agnes (played in this production by Alana Ramsey) is introduced by her lover Husz (Ethan Holmes) as '[o]ccupant prima of our affections, immovable tenant of this small, solid room' (6).

At the outset of the play, her immovability is coupled with newfound political action. Feeling that the world is on the cusp of something big, she offers her services to the Communist party, even though she is not a member. They ask her to put together a

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[39] David Garrett Izzo, 'Then and Now: W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Tony Kushner, and Fascist Creep', in *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays*, ed. by James Fisher (Jefferson & London: McFarland, 2006), pp. 56–97 (p. 56).

[40] Marianka Swain, 'A Bright Room Called Day, Southwark Playhouse | Theatre Reviews, News & Interviews | The Arts Desk', 2014 <http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/bright-room-called-day-southwark-playhouse> [accessed 18 April 2016].

[41] Tony Kushner, 'Production Notes', in *A Bright Room Called Day* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1987), pp. ix–xi (p. ix). Further references to these notes are in-text.

[42] Sebastian Harcombe, *A Bright Room Called Day* (Southwark Playhouse, London, 2014).

skit about the 'Red Baby' for a strike rally (19-20). In it, she attempts to capture her sense of burgeoning change. We see her practicing late one night: 'RED WORKERS OF BERLIN! ARISE! THE WORLD IS PERCHED ON THE BRINK OF … SOMETHING … CHOOSE! COMMUNISM OR FASCISM!' (20). The unseen performance apparently goes well, for KDP functionaries Malek (Elizabeth Andrewatha in the Southwark production) and Traum (Jonathan Leinmuller) are sent 'to convey congratulations to you and your *comrade collaborators* for a highly successful agitprop performance' (36, my italics). So although we see Agnes speak about the skit only briefly with a half-asleep Husz, it is acknowledged that it has been shaped by more than her mind and hands: she is part of a collaborative net, and others have had input, and helped to generate it, in part through the challenging political discussion that we see throughout the play.

The closeness of Agnes to her collaborators is altered by the deteriorating political situation in Germany. Kushner has Agnes, Husz and Paulinka literally summon the Devil in physical form one evening, spurred on by their despair at Hitler's appointment as Chancellor. The encounter is at once playful and chilling, and is notable for its treatment of both legacies and networks. The ability to summon the Devil is the legacy of Husz's family of devil worshipers, from whom he has inherited the skill. Like Goethe's *Faust* – quoted in an epigraph to *Bright Room* – the stage becomes a space through which to travel 'Past Heaven, through the Earth, to Hell' (xiv). This is a modern devil, summoned by cinema-obsessed Husz's cry: 'Then lights! Camera! Action!' (74). There is a blackout, we see the red eyes of the devil's dog; and when the lighting comes up the room's furniture has been re-arranged. The Devil enters in the form of the comical Herr Sweets, a flatulent, asthmatic furniture salesman with a terrible limp.

During his visit Herr Sweets is given full license to describe himself. His tale is filmic, a verbal montage, marking the passing of time by switching between a series of inter-related incidents. As he traces his long history, relating his separation from God, it becomes clear that his sense of himself is antithetical to the sort of collaborative net that Kushner describes in 'With a Little Help From My Friends'.

This is particularly evident when he comes to describe the twentieth century. Before this point, he has been wracked by intense intestinal and heart pain, which the stage directions instruct should be '*one*' with his words (78). As he begins to talk about the twentieth century his pain diminishes, and he transforms, growing strong and straight, stating:

> And in this century, still new,
> when questions of form
> are so hotly contested,
> my new form seems to be
> no form at all.
> I am simply
> unbelievable. Nonobjective.
> Nonexistent. Displaced.
> Stateless. A refugee.
> The accumulation of so much,
> the detritus of so many weary years,
> I have at last attained
> invisibility.
> […]
> I become increasingly diffuse,
> like powdered gas taking to air,
> not less potent, but more,
> spreading myself
> around. (79-80)

In this passage, Herr Sweets refers directly to modernism's 'hotly contested' engagement with form, contrasting it with his trajectory towards diffusion. Modernist experiments with form involved a break with convention and assumption, but also the re-appropriation of texts, as in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), or objects in Marcel Duchamp's 'readymades' (c.1913). The latter have the added feature of making detritus seen. Herr Sweets presents himself as being diametrically opposed to this. Where modernism breaks from the past, he represents accretion 'the accumulation of so much,| the detritus of so many weary years' (my italics). He makes this detritus unseen, becoming 'like powdered gas'. This image is redolent of the mustard gas of WWI, but the devil is more insidious than this because he is both 'invisible' and 'unbelievable'. He can thus spread everywhere.

The Devil represents erosion, dispersal, the crossing of and dissolution of boundaries. Like a refugee, he is dispossessed, without his home or network, but this has only worked in his favour, allowing him to move freely, and to occupy Germany more potently. He resembles the rat, a creature Ellmann shows to have significant presence in modernist texts from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), to Freud's Rat Man (1909). For Ellmann, rats epitomize modernist anxieties. They infest modern networks, whittle away at the boundaries between ancient and modern, and spread in hoards through sewers.[43] The Devil's diffusion and 'spreading […] around' is comparable to this, and he certainly erodes the border between his ancient past and the present. Yet, unlike the rat, which can burrow through walls and connect things, Herr Sweets presents himself as being beyond all others. He brags: 'My ignorance is beyond calculation […] I only know myself' (77). In strange consonance with Bloom's poet, he considers himself to be self-begotten: as he later tells Paulinka, 'I gave birth to Myself' (80). He is thus outside of genealogical time, though also a symbol of the genealogically obsessed proto-Fascist Germany. He represents both the end of a modernist will to connect, and a taking to extremes of modernist fears about connection. As he tries to leave, the terrified Agnes stops him and, as if unsure of what else to say, welcomes him to Germany. As he graciously thanks her, exiting to the exploding chords of Maher's Second Symphony (aptly titled *Resurrection*), the lights go dark, as if predicting the fate of Germany itself.

Faced with the force of the modern Devil, the friends' network begins to erode. At the outset of Part Two, which begins with the Reichstag burning, we see a very different Agnes to the joyful collaborator of Part One. Struck by uncomfortable bodily sensations and a sense of unimportance, she retreats to her house, unable to cope with people leaving (92-93). She says to Gotchling, 'People shouldn't be leaving […] Whose going to fight? What are people like me supposed to do if people like you just leave?' (103). Vulnerable without her network, Agnes eventually cannot bring herself to leave her once beautiful apartment. She is haunted at night by Die Alte, an old woman who lives on her fire escape, and whose terrified, paranoid reflections on

[43] Ellmann, pp. 33–34.

past, present and future come to seem more and more an echo of Agnes's own psyche: at one point, while fiercely comforting an upset Agnes, Die Alte even whispers: 'Time is all the separates you from me' (122).

The breaking of Agnes's network is rapid. First Baz, then hen Husz and Paulinka are involved in incidents with Nazis; they all have to leave. Agnes refuses to accompany Husz to America, but cannot fully explain why, saying: 'Really. I can't move. I can't move. I'm sorry. Later maybe' (129). Repeating herself, her words closing in, she cannot fully express her motivation for staying. Her need for her room – a secure base from which she can venture out safely – underlies her refusal, but so does a rejection of change. She physically pushes Husz away when he attempts a farewell, and tears up the fake visa that he has left her.

Agnes does not figure the erosion of her network in terms of the making of holes, but rather as a shrinking, or contraction. When Baz leaves, she says:

> You'd think, when a person goes, a whole person just goes away, it would leave a hole, some empty place behind, that's what I thought, I imagined that, but … it doesn't. Everyone's going but it isn't like the world has gotten emptier, just much smaller. It contracts, the empty places … collapse. (136)

Against this contraction, Gotchling – the last of Agnes's collaborative network to leave – offers an alternative. By this point Agnes's apartment has grown barer and colder, representing her increasingly vulnerable state. During her last visit, Gotchling asks that Agnes perform the dangerous task of sheltering a fugitive escaping from the Nazis. Agnes at first refuses to risk her life. But Gotchling draws on the power of their once-collaborative bonds:

> If you say no to this, Agnes, you're dead to me. And we both need desperately to keep at least some part of you alive. Say yes, and I promise to carry you with me, this part of you that's dying now. […] Say yes, and I will take your heart and fold it up in mine and protect it with my life. And some day I may be able to bring it back to you. (141)

Here, we see the net of souls in action. Agnes's emotional death can be prevented by Gotchling's dismissal of the boundaries of the individual. Zillah, who has a strange connection to Agnes, tells the audience that she will eventually die at home from a broken heart (118). While this suggests that Gotchling is not able to return to her, it means that her heart may survive longer than she does. Gotchilng's offer to take Agnes's heart with her is not precisely a legacy – legacies usually cannot be returned – but it suggests that collaborative networks might allow one to live on, or to be carried forward, beyond the boundaries of the self.

Supplementing the network offered by Agnes's friends are other collaborative connections. Unknowingly, the fugitive that she has agreed to harbour is Rosa Malek. When she arrives, Agnes is terrified, already overtly regretting helping her. After a tense discussion, in which Malek tries to impart the reality of the Left's dire situation, Agnes becomes furious and gets up to go to bed. Malek, reacting compassionately, stops her. With Agnes still facing away, refusing to look at her, she tells her of a house on the border where the front is in Germany and the back in Czechoslovakia, and of how she might leave the country there: 'If you need to. Ask for the way to the Green Front. The borders are full of holes' (146). This disputes Agnes's claim that the loss of collaborators creates only contraction. For Malek, such departures leave empty spaces, which become passages through which people might pass to reconnect.

However, when Agnes makes a connection it is not through a rupture in space, but through a theatrical rupture in time, possible in the shared space of the stage. Unlike those of Gotchling and Malek, this is not a connection that can save her. Throughout the second part of the play, Zillah and Agnes circle ever closer to each other. At first, Zillah tells us that her dreams have been 'invaded' by a woman whose photograph she has seen – a young woman old before her time, at a rally where everyone but her is giving the fascist salute (89). This seems to be a woman who refuses to collaborate, in a specific WWII sense, referring to cooperating with the enemy. At first, Zillah finds this enervating:

> She still can't sleep. Restless, like me. I'm calling to her: across a long dead time: to touch a dark place, to scare myself a little, to make contact with what moves in the night, fifty years after, with what's driven, every night, by the panic and the pain... (89-90)

As the play progresses, it is made clear that this woman is probably Agnes. For example, in a later scene Zillah tells us that she hears the woman moving about at nights sometimes; as she does Agnes moves around the stage, stopping occasionally to listen, as if she can almost hear her. When in this same scene Zillah mentions that Agnes will die of a broken heart, she starts, terrified (117-18). Meanwhile, Agnes is haunted by Die Alte, who penetrates ever-further into her life, with her wild ramblings about a lost past (120). There is a generational symmetry to this, as in each time period a woman is haunted by someone from the past, establishing a genealogy outside of the patriarchal narrative of Fascism, best epitomized by Baz's characterization of Hitler's followers as wanting 'a fatherly boot heel to lick' (25).

The possibilities for the interaction between Agnes and Zillah vary dramatically based on production. Kushner has explicitly written that Zillah's interruptions should be updated to reflect events at the time of production:

> Ideally there should be a continual updating of the specifics of Zillah's politics of paranoia, in the form of references to whatever evildoing is prevalent at the time of the production. Though I think she should stay true to the zeit informing her particular geist, namely the Reagan-era, there might be politically useful emendations made, if intelligently done, and never without my approval. (x-xi)

He includes an alternative series of 'Interruptions' in which Zillah has moved to Berlin as an Appendix to the published script.

The Southwark production uses something between these two versions of the interruptions. Zillah (Charlotte Jacobs) starts in the US, but later leaves for Berlin, where (lifting lines from the Appendix) she explains you cannot escape from the

ghosts.[44] The play's epilogue takes place after Zillah has arrived in Germany, and just after we have heard Malek's assurance that the borders are full of holes. It sees Agnes (Ramsey), Die Alte (played by Elizabeth Andrewatha, who also plays Malek), and Zillah (Jacobs) not only metaphorically in the same room, but possibly quite literally so. Agnes and Die Alte have most of the lines here – both speak poetically about their situation, as an apocalyptic orange light suffuses the room. Agnes/Ramsey's final lines are spoken above an increasing din – the sound of warplanes, perhaps – and she seems to describe the Devil, and all his human isolation:

> Clubfoot.
> Smell of sulfur.
> Yellow dog.
> No Shadow.
>
> Welcome to Germany. (151)

Just before these, however, Zillah/Jacobs, also shouts, as if trying to reach out to her:

> Now.
> Before the sky and the ground slam shut.
> The borders are full of holes. (151)

Though there are no stage directions to this effect, director Seb Harcombe has the lights go down as Agnes screams and cowers in terror, unable to hear Zillah, or to penetrate this border. She is very much alone.

These final scenes – even when performed without Harcombe's dramatic twist – challenge Agnes's statement that the loss of her collaborators has not left holes, but is rather a contraction, or 'collapse' of 'the empty places' (136). Holes do remain, and though these can be open like wounds, they are also potentially paths for connection. One of the standout features of Ellmann's analysis of modernist networks is her reflection on doubling. That which connects can also mark a

[44] Tony Kushner, 'Appendix', in *A Bright Room Called Day* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1987), pp. 153–70 (pp. 160–61).

separation – just as the telephone might allow us to speak with someone physically distant, or the navel signals the continuing connection to the dead mother in Joyce. This doubleness characterises the holes in the borders of time and space figured in *Bright Room*. It is fairly certain that Agnes will never use the physical border-hole – she is immobilized within her contracted world, too small now that her collaborators have left. The real potential here is in the holes through which Zillah can reach back to Agnes. These are dependant on the possibilities of theatrical space and time. Unknowingly, Agnes has connected with Zillah, who once again expands or fills out her network.

Thus, in *Bright Room*, Kushner juxtaposes collaboration's empty places – the holes in the nets that bind us – with Agnes's perception of contraction. The actors playing Agnes and Zillah are themselves collaborators: within their shared stage space, imagined holes in time give Agnes the opportunity to re-capture some of her fragmented network, to pass beyond the boundaries with which she is comfortable, and to leave a legacy. This legacy is the confirmation of Zillah's paranoia: having sensed or seen Agnes, Zillah will not allow herself to slide into political unawareness. Although she is alone in her time, she will carry through her revolution however she can, sharing the labour of the Left, and disrupting the unceasing march of time so lovingly described by the Devil. The collaborative networks that both arise from and feed these interactions between women offer possibilities for the transmission of legacy that push the boundaries of space and time, as well as those of what Kushner calls the 'human unit'.

Widows **and the Erotics of Male Collaboration**

In *Bright Room* and 'Reverse Transcription', Kushner represents varied forms of shared labour, artistic, intellectual, and physical. In both plays, collaboration forges expansive human nets. These offer alternative lines of transmission to the forefatherly ancestries of Able Hill, the Nazi party, and Regan, and allow the activist legacies of the political Left to be passed between generations. Yet the collaborations that I examine here are only those represented on Kushner's page; I do not analyse the ways that Kushner's real-world collaborations bear on his

treatment of legacy. Theatre and film are powerfully collaborative media, and all of Kushner's texts involve some sort of collaboration.[45] As he notes, '[p]art of playwriting is communal, collaborative – at least, it is if you allow it'.[46] In *Caroline, or Change*, Kushner shared his labour not only with Jeanie Tesori, but also with director George C. Wolfe and actor Tonya Pinkins. Alongside texts like *Caroline* or *Lincoln*, where Kushner still appears as sole author of the published libretto or screenplay, he has also participated in numerous writing partnerships. These include *A Dybbuk* (1998) with Joachim Neugrochel (translated from S. Ansky); the co-edited critical volume *Wrestling with Zion* (2003) with Alisa Solomon; and the film *Munich* (2006) with Eric Roth.[47]

Widows (1991/1997/1998), written with Ariel Dorfman, is of the same period as *Bright Room* and 'Reverse Transcription'. In the subsequent analysis, I read this text against the history of the writing of the play, and alongside Wayne Koestenbaum's reading of the erotics of male collaboration. I use this to develop the argument that both authoring dyads and communities can use shared labour to forge non-hierarchical, non-monolithic lines of transmission between generations. In *Widows*, these lines emerge through collaborative groupings that recall a theatrical chorus, and are a means to fuel resistance to tyranny and patriarchy, and to connect the disenfranchised. For Dorfman and Kushner, they provide the opportunity to forge a 'wrighterly' network that is rhizomatic in structure. This challenges the limits of authorial authority, and opens Kushner's politically charged understanding of legacy to the more nihilistic impulses of Dorfman's work.

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[45] Collaboration should not be understood to be less challenging in the theatre. It faces many practical impediments. Seem fir example, Margherita Laera, 'Theatre Translation as Collaboration: Aleks Sierz, Martin Crimp, Nathalie Abrahami, Colin Teevan, Zoë Svendsen and Michael Walton Discuss Translation for the Stage', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 21.2 (2011), 213–25 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2011.561490>.)

[46] Steindler and Kushner.

[47] Kushner, *Caroline, or Change*; Dorfman and Kushner; Tony Kushner, Joachim Neugrochel, and S. Ansky, *A Dybbuk and Other Tales of the Supernatural* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997); *Wrestling with Zion*, ed. by Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon (New York: Grove Press, 2003); Spielberg, *Munich*.

The Collaborative Dyad

Kushner's collaboration with Dorfman is framed by a highly complex history of authorship and publication, which Dorfman describes in terms that both challenge authorial authority, and frame the text as a legacy. *Widows* is adapted from a novel of the same name, written by Dorfman without Kushner's involvement. Dorfman is an Argentinian-Chilean who was forced into exile in the years of the Pinochet regime. His novel was written as a response to these experiences, and deals with the 'disappeared', those abducted, held, tortured and killed by the state. Dismissing the image of himself as authoring father, Dorfman describes *Widows* as emerging not from his own will, but from that of a woman. She appeared to him in 'an image, almost a hallucination: an old woman by a river, holding the hand of a body that had just washed up on its shores' (72|75).[48] He says that 'She wanted […] to be narrated, told in time, filled with a world and filling it. That old woman wanted a further destiny and she would not rest until I had given it to her' (74|77). Dorfman thus presents himself as an intermediary for this character.

Widows the novel was published in 1983.[49] At this time Dorfman further distanced himself from a position of authority by adopting a pen name, at first necessitated by political circumstances, and then intentionally retained even after these changed. Dorfman was unable to publish the novel under his own name in Chile, and thus adopted the pen name Eric Lohmann. A fictitious Danish man, Lohmann was meant to have written under Nazi rule, and been 'disappeared' by the Gestapo before he could finish his book. Lohmann's novel was made to speak allegorically about Chile. It is set in Axis-occupied Greece in 1942, where Sofia Angelos – Dorfman's old

[48] A note on references to *Widows*: As I discuss below, there are two published versions of *Widows*, one released in 1997, the second in 1998. These are near identical, but for the inclusion of a frame narrator in the 1997 version. While in earlier chapters I deal with such issues by primarily using the most recent version of each text, the particular circumstances of *Widows*' authorship, and the nature of the 1998 revisions (which simply excise parts of the text) have lead me to offer page numbers from both versions where possible. Page numbers are presented as such: (1997 page number| 1998 page number). Where quotations differ between texts – as when I am dealing with the Narrator that appears only in the 1997 version – I will indicate this by prefacing the page number with the year, eg. ('97, 40). Dorfman's 'Acknowledgements in the Guise of an Afterword' appear on pp. 72-80 in the 1997 text and pp. 75-85 in the 1998 text.

[49] Ariel Dorfman, *Widows*, trans. by Steven Kessler (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

woman – fuels an explosive surge of resistance towards the secret police who have abducted her father, husband, and two sons.

Wanting to put himself at even further distance from the work, Dorfman gave Lohmann a son, Sirgud, who was presented as the editor of the text. Sirgud's fictional foreword stated: 'In the months preceding his arrest and disappearance, really from the moment he knew for certain that someone like me was on the way, my father set out in his spare time to write a work of fiction'.[50] The novel was thus presented as a legacy left to Sirgud, who had found and reassembled as much of it as he could. To complete the illusion Dorfman left sections out of the novel. These were presented as fragments of 'lost' text that Sirgud had explicitly chosen not to supplement or fill in. Sirgud, it is implied, felt nothing of Bloom's anxious *misprision*; his interest was only in doing his father's will. When his intricate plans for publication in Chile fell through, Dorfman published *Widows* under his own name in the West, but retained this frame. The novel thus has two title pages: the first lists Dorfman, and (in the English version) translator Stephen Kessler; the second reads: '*Widows*| A novel by Eric Lohmann'. Thus the novel, which Dorfman already partially attributes to the 'old woman', is presented as the creation of two further fictional people. Lohmann's lingering presence also frames the novel as a legacy – Lohmann allegorically taking Dorfman's place, followed by Sirgud.

This history of complex authorship was carried forward to the writing of the play. When he tried to adapt the novel for the stage, Dorfman struggled to 'free' the dramatic version 'from the magic of the novel' (77|81), which has a mythical quality characterised by layered narration, use of pronouns, and direct and indirect speech. Early productions of *Widows* the play were unsuccessful, and in 1989 it was suggested that Dorfman bring in a collaborator to help him write a better, more dramatically developed piece. It is at this point that Kushner enters the story.

[50] Dorfman, *Widows*, p. 3.

Dorfman invited Kushner to collaborate because he had read *A Bright Room Called Day*, and an early draft of *Angels in America*. It was hoped that Kushner, who was still working on *Angels* at the time, could help Dorfman to make his novel accessible on the U.S. stage. Kushner initially adapted it into a script independently, but Dorfman wished to be more involved than this, and the two collaborated intensively over a relatively short period of time, to produce the version of *Widows* performed in the 1991 production at the Mark Taper Forum.[51] Dorfman has not granted permission for the use of this early rendering in this thesis: in an enquiry made through the Centre Theatre Group via his agent, he said that he has recently made a habit of not circulating early drafts of his work.[52]

The earliest copy of this script that I will use then, is the edition published from the 1997 UK run of the play at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. Here, Dorfman undertook revisions with Kushner's full permission, but without his direct involvement. The differences between the 1991 and 1997 versions are generally small, with one major exception: the addition of a frame narrator. As Dorfman writes:

> besides a couple of minor alterations, shifts in emphasis, a heightening of the lyrical and mythical qualities of the drama, the major modification – one which, in fact, I only could have accomplished by myself, by going into my own pain one last time – was to frame the play with a narrator who is himself, as I had been, an exile who watches, witnesses, suffers the action from afar.
>
> ('97, 79)

This frame narrator is a male figure living in exile. Like Zillah in *Bright Room*, he offers an explicit, didactic outlet. This version of the play was published in 1997, but it received mixed reviews, with the Narrator in particular seen as an 'awkward' addition.[53] Dorfman enacted further revisions in a final, 1998 version, published alongside *Death and the Maiden* and *The Reader* in a collection entitled *The*

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[51] James Fisher, *The Theatre of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope* (New York & London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 161–68.

[52] Personal Correspondence with Joy Meads, 'RE: Request for Information: Mark Taper Forum Archives - Ariel Dorfman and Tony Kushner, Widows (1991)', 11 March 2016.

[53] Ian Shuttleworth, 'Review of Widows: Cambridge Arts Theatre/ Touring', *Financial Times*, 1997 <http://www.cix.co.uk/~shutters/reviews/97019.htm> [accessed 18 April 2016].

Resistance Trilogy. The frame narrator was removed, though few other changes were made.

There are, however, major differences in the way the 1997 and 1998 versions present Kushner. The 1997 Traverse Theatre version is billed as being authored by 'Ariel Dorfman with Tony Kushner'. The 'with' suggests a tradition of complex and uneven collaborations on both ends of the spectrum. It is the phrase used in celebrity autobiographies that have been ghost written, such as Clive Davis' *The Soundtrack of My Life*, with Anthony DeCurtis or Meatloaf's *To Hell And Back: An Autobiography*, with David Dalton. In these cases, the story is the celebrity's, but often the labour of writing belongs to the person with whom they write. Writing 'with' may also, however, point to more mutually productive interactions, as in Lauren Berlant's practice of 'reading with', which is characterised by an idealised openness to the different or even 'alien' epistemology of an artwork or text'.[54] This metaphor might be extended to the collaborative process, particularly in an instance where two strong writers such as Dorfman and Kushner are meeting over, reading, and re-writing texts.

The 1998 version of the play, in contrast, does not explicitly present itself as having been authored with Kushner until the afterword, where Dorfman recounts the play's history. Kushner is so hidden that in the 2008 59e59 Theatre production in New York, his role seems all-but forgotten: Charles Isherwood's *New York Times* review, and even the play's own Bios sheet, go without mentioning him.[55] One might ask if there something here of Bloom's struggle, in which Dorfman has completely eclipsed Kushner, to the point that he seems to have disappeared. Yet when Kushner is mentioned in the afterword – which also appears in the 1997 publication – he is not framed as one of Bloom's struggling fathers and sons, but as having attributes conventionally associated with women. Dorfman says that he acted as 'midwife' to

[54] Lauren Berlant, 'Lauren Berlant Discusses "Reading with" and Her Recent Work', *Artforum.Com*, 2014 <http://artforum.com/words/id=45109> [accessed 10 February 2015].
[55] Charles Isherwood, 'Widows - Review - Ariel Dorfman - Theater', *The New York Times*, 21 January 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/21/theater/reviews/21wido.html> [accessed 14 February 2016]; '59E59 - Widows' <http://www.59e59.org/archive/widows.html> [accessed 19 February 2016].

the play, the 'bridge [he] had been looking for to enter the world of theatre and reach the U.S. audience' (78|82). Here, Dorfman doubles the sense of writing 'with' Kushner, for 'midwife' is derived from combining '*mid*', meaning 'with', with 'wife', meaning 'woman'. The original sense was a 'woman who is with the mother at childbirth'.[56] Having already established several other ways in which the text both is and is not his, Dorfman compares himself to a woman giving birth to it, aided by Kushner, who also takes on feminine attributes.

Kushner's exclusion from this last version of the play raises questions regarding his authorial authority, and the status of *Widows* in my single author study. I do not follow James Fisher, who in order to preserve the illusion of Kushner's authority identifies *Widows* as one of Kushner's adaptations, writing of it: '[t]he least important of Kushner's adaptations is a work that is not, in a sense, a true adaptation'.[57] Fisher makes this claim by writing primarily about Kushner's initial, single-author draft of *Widows,* re-hashing the differences between this and the 1991 collaborative production. His choice to highlight Kushner's solo adaptation, rather than the collaborative script, is rooted in a concern with Kushner as individual authoring figure. Although all drafts of the play are technically adaptations of the novel, discussing Kushner's initial effort without Dorfman flips the power relation, and restores Kushner to primacy.

This dismisses the capacity of collaboration to generate meaning, and to expand the non-monolithic net of connection that Kushner works towards in 'With a Little Help'. Wayne Koestenbaum examines such connections in *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*. He contends that '[b]ooks with two authors are specimens of a relation, and show writing to be a quality of motion and exchange'.[58] Collaboration – especially when authorized by the double signature – offers tremendous interpretive freedom. He highlights that even if one writer produces

[56] 'Midwife, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/118259> [accessed 6 July 2016]. My italics.
[57] Fisher, *The Theatre of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope*, p. 161.
[58] Koestenbaum, p. 2.

more of the work than another the very decision to collaborate determines the work's contours.

Koestenbaum does not look specifically at Dorfman and Kushner. Though *Double Talk* is roughly contemporaneous with *Widows*, it is focused on long-lasting collaborations in an archive stretching from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Several of the figures that he looks at – Freud, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound – also appear in Ellmann's study, and in Bloom's. Koestenbaum argues that male-male collaboration is often portrayed as mysterious and myth-shrouded. However, in contrast with Bloom's mythical evocation of the struggle between predecessor and heir, he argues that such partnerships are frequently informed by '[t]he desire and the pursuit of the whole – the wish to unite with a lost twin and form a blended soul'.[59] This is resonant with Kushner's idea that within the net of souls, 'the smallest indivisible human unit is two'.[60]

For Koestenbaum, collaboration is a 'complex and anxiously homosocial act'. His psychoanalytic claim, put bluntly, is 'that men who collaborate engage in sexual intercourse, and that the text they balance between them is alternately the child of their sexual union, and a shared woman'.[61] He draws his analysis from a carefully selected series of case studies. These are saturated with the language of generation and the generative. Writing *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Wordsworth is resistant to being inseminated by Coleridge, while in *The Waste Land* (1922) Pound remakes Eliot's hysterical, female language 'in a man's image'.[62]

At the heart of Koestenbaum's study is Freud's collaboration with Josef Breuer and Wilhelm Fleiss in *Studies in Hysteria*. Here, he points to Freud's connection between collaboration and a 'legacy of labour'.[63] Koestenbaum takes this phrase from a letter written by Freud to friend and collaborator Fleiss on the birth of the latter's son;

[59] Koestenbaum, p. 5.
[60] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 40.
[61] Koestenbaum, p. 3.
[62] Koestenbaum, pp. 110 & 114.
[63] Koestenbaum, pp. 37–41.

Fleiss was able to accurately predict the child's birth date, and Freud viewed this as a usurpation of female power that might be passed on to the child: 'May his calculation be correct, and, as the legacy of labour, be transferred from father to son'.[64] Early collaborations between Freud and his mentor Josef Breuer (with whom he authored *Studies on Hysteria*) facilitated a similar transmission. These were based on the exchange of secrets about the body of patient Anna O., who became a sort of property and legacy that Freud was bequeathed, and later passed down to his collaborator-heirs. Working from this, Koestenbaum argues that regardless of sexual preference, in these periods men 'collaborated in order to separate homoeroticism from the sanctioned male bonding which upholds the patriarchy'.[65] Whether expressed or concealed, the very ambiguities of the discourse between male collaborators at this time gave a 'taboo' subject 'some liberty to roam', while stealing the generative power that women's bodies might seem to present.

This paradigm cannot be straightforwardly applied to Dorfman and Kushner. For example, Kushner's boundary-breaking work in *Angels,* coeval with *Double Talk*, shatters some of the taboos on which Koestenbaum's analysis relies. It replaces the 'mystery' of homoeroticism with that of survival itself, figured at one point as Prior's grandiose battle with the hermaphroditic Angel. The erotics of male collaboration, between Kushner and Oskar Eustis for example, are different in this later context. Yet, Kushner and Dorfman's collaboration is characterised by a gendered tension similar to what Koestenbaum describes. They offer a story about women and their collaborative power in a situation of absolute political oppression. The male usurpation of female power is ever-present in the play. This is figured in many ways, including in the play's title, which places implicit focus on the missing men who have made the women 'widows'. Alongside this, there is the three-way power struggle between three characters: a Captain, his Lieutenant, and Dorfman's old woman, who is named Sofia Fuentes. While there are no clear victors, it is strongly implied that the men survive their encounter and that the women do not. In the 1997

[64] Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess*, ed. by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1985) Letter from Freud to Fleiss, 29 December 1899, pp.393-94.
[65] Koestenbaum, p. 3.

version, the Narrator's voice further privileged the male, narrative position, framing a tale about the absence of men with his presence. There is also the status of the story as an object first willed by a fictional woman, but later figured as a legacy passed from Dorfman or Eric Lohmann (fathers) to readers, audiences, and Sirgud (Lohmann's son). Finally there is the role of the authoring duo themselves; Kushner, called its 'midwife', is overtly given a role etymologically linked to women, leaving Dorfman to occupy the space of the mother.

Kushner has pointed out that 'gender is always an issue' when 'shared intellectual and artistic labor' is at stake.[66] This raises the question: to what extent is Dorfman and Kushner's collaboration also a usurpation of the purportedly generative power of women's bodies, and how does this relate to Kushner's treatment of legacy and collaboration? *Widows* itself helps to answer this, by presenting a chorus of women whose collaborations are not inherently generative, but eventually lead to their deaths, and those of some of their children. Their story is resonant with others in Kushner's oeuvre, but also bleaker, its ending less hopeful. Reading the play suggests that rather than thinking of *Widows* as both a shared woman and a child, produced by both Dorfman and Kushner, but not equally, it should be read as the product of a wrighterly network which – like that of 'Reverse Transcription' – is linked to both life and death. Through the act of 'ex-scribing', this network highlights unexpected possibilities, and offers alternative legacies routed through non-patriarchal, net-like structures.

Collaboration and the Chorus

The story that emerges from Kushner and Dorfman's collaboration flows along lines characteristic not only of Dorfman's oeuvre (best epitomised by *Death and the Maiden* (1990)), but also of Kushner's. There are powerful resonances with the themes central to this thesis. Like so many of Kushner's plays and screenplays, *Widows* investigates familial bonds that have been put under strain by dispossession and terror. In *Angels, Homebody* (2001), and *Caroline,* these familial bonds find their

[66] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 36.

binding force in the relationships between generations of women: Hannah with Harper, the Homebody and Mahala with Priscilla, Caroline with Emmie. Here, it is Sofia with her daughters, daughter in laws, and granddaughter. This particular collaboration is, however, also darker and more nihilistic than many of Kushner's single author projects, contrasting heavily with pieces such as 'Reverse Transcription', which deals with the serious issue of burying one's dead with dark levity. There are no laughs in *Widows*, and it lacks the reparative undertones of many of Kushner's major plays, which often present a hopeful epilogue (or Periplum in the case of *Homebody*).

Widows retains the mythic, allegorical qualities of Dorfman's novel, but moves out of WWII Greece, and into an unnamed South American country some time in the twentieth century. The play tracks a group of women whose men have all disappeared or been abducted during a civil war against a wealthy landed class, who monopolize the valley's fertile areas. Sofia Fuentes, the old woman from Dorfman's novel, has lost an aged father, her husband, and two sons, each of whom has their own family. With the hostilities officially over, and the landowners victorious, the women go about their daily lives, hoping for the return of their men. Their movements include much shared labour, not least doing their washing at the river.

The play opens with the arrival of a Captain, new to the area. He brings visions of 'forgetting' the past, and is presented as wanting to use a softer hand than his predecessors. Sofia's daughter-in-law Alexandra embraces his recommendations in order to protect her daughter Fidelia and son Alexis. Alexis is the last man left in the family, and while young, he is in danger of abduction. The women do not seem to think themselves as at risk of disappearance. The new status quo is disrupted when a completely unidentifiable male body washes downriver. Sofia, who is waiting beside the river for such a moment, pulls it to shore and claims it as the body of her father. The Captain's violent Lieutenant, who is complicit in the disappearance of many men, quickly confiscates and burns it. A spark has been awoken though, and when a second unidentifiable body washes up on shore, Sofia claims it again, this time as that of her husband.

Thus a series of struggles begin: the Captain, threatening Alexis and working with fellow villager and collaborator Cecelia, confiscates the body. Soon more women begin to claim it is the body of a missing male family member. This is both a form of closure and an act of resistance pointing to the pain, inhumanity, and even the absurdity of their dispossession. The Captain tries to appease the women by offering the return of a man for their good behaviour. Again, they concede. Sofia's second son Alonso, husband of Yanina, and father of a young baby is returned, but he is a broken man. This is the tipping point: taking her husband's chair, symbolic of his authority, Sofia drags it to the riverbank to wait for more bodies. Many of the women join her. In a theatrically potent act of civil disobedience they burn the chairs, which are symbolic of masculine presence and absence. In the 1997 version, over the course of two sequential scenes, the same chair is sat in by the Captain (who is told that Sofia's husband Miguel sat there many times), then left empty onstage and examined by the Narrator, and finally spot-lit as Fidelia, looking at it, addresses her absent father ('97, 39-41). The burning of chairs is thus an explicit protest against the loss of the men.

The Captain, under pressure from local landowners the Katstorias, arrests Sofia and Alexis, driving more women – even Alexandra – to drag chairs to the river and set them on fire. Fidelia, Alexis' sister, is left behind with the care of Alonso and the baby. In a last attempt to stop the small uprising, the Captain threatens to execute Alexis if Sofia doesn't call the other women off. Sofia refuses, and she and Alexis are killed. Coming out of the blackout in which we have heard two shots, presumed to be for her grandmother and brother, Fidelia tells the baby, the 'one who comes after':

> You must learn how to talk. You'll need to talk. There are things you'll have to tell.
>
> But if you decide never to speak, your stories will get told anyway. There are stories that cry out to be told and if the words aren't there they will seep through the skin. (70|73).

The play opens with the women discussing the fact that the baby has not yet started to speak. His silence must become the capacity to bear witness to what has happened to those who came before him, the trauma of three familial generations (including his own). He takes on a role similar to the Narrator in the 1997 version, who speaks and writes as a way to fight back against his exile (97', 58-59).

In the final scene the remaining women form a powerful chorus, facing off against the armed forces of the Captain. As the Captain declares 'Men: I want the riverbank cleared', and he and the women look at each other (71|74). There is the loud cry of an animal or bird, and all look up, and then down again as the river begins to 'sound':

> *The WOMEN move to the river, silently, then go into the water and carry a body out onto the riverbank. They advance towards the soldiers, then stop. They look at each other. Then they advance again – perhaps dancing, perhaps singing, perhaps only moving forward, as they rock the body like a newborn child.* (71|74)

The play ends here, in blackout. The women's final, shared look is a reminder that they are choosing to resist, and that they know what is likely to come; the soldiers have their rifle bolts drawn. It is heavily implied that the women at the river will be killed.

Widows then, presents the women as both performing chorus and determined political activists, who are only partially contained by violence. This comes to represent a profound and effective form of collaboration, which is implicitly rooted in theatrical performance, and which leaves a lasting legacy. In contrast to the dyad that makes up the authoring team of this play, the community of women that they have written about has been de-coupled, and are without their husbands and lovers. This loss does not completely isolate them however, for their community of women remains.

The women act as a chorus at moments of heightened emotion. This is something derived from the novel, where their choral voice is situated within a complex, and

highly patriarchal context. Throughout the novel, the women not only use shifting third-to-first-person pronouns, but have long interactions reported in indirect speech. Even when direct speech is used, 'I' and 'we' are deployed together:

> Then for the second time that that day Fidelia uttered the words we were all waiting for, we saw her adolescent frame step forward.
> 'Alexis,' I said to my brother […] 'Alexis, what shall we do?'[67]

In contrast, the voice of the Captain, and his Orderly Emmanuel are clear and individuated. In the novel even the young Alexis is expected to make decisions for the family, and retains a clearer sense of 'I' than his female relatives.[68] When Alexis is taken away (in the novel he is sent to prison) and the women confront the Captain and his men on the riverbank, the Captain sees them as hydra-like: 'Together they […] formed a floating, savage mass, one huge spread-out female with fifteen or twenty heads'.[69] The novel's final moments are from the women's collective perspective. The 'I' has completely disappeared: the widows are a 'we'. They wish to be left to return to the 'difficult peace of the earth and the loom', even as they take action against the forces that have sent their men away.[70]

The play does not precisely emulate these aspects of the novel; there is less evident machismo with the loss of the first-person perspectives of the Captain and Emmanuel, and the women are less likely to appeal to men for guidance. Kushner and Dorfman are, nevertheless, invested in ensuring that the women's individual voices are part of a slow-rising chorus, possible through theatrical collaboration. In place of the novel's over-layered narrative and use of plural pronouns, Dorfman and Kushner make use of synchrony, both visual and verbal, to achieve a choral effect. The audience is used to seeing the women working together, talking to each other: they are doing so at the very opening of the play, conversing about Yanina's unspeaking child. It is thus extremely effective when this naturalistic flow of

[67] Dorfman, *Widows*, p. 52.
[68] Dorfman, *Widows*, p. 52.
[69] Dorfman, *Widows*, p. 144.
[70] Dorfman, *Widows*, p. 145.

conversation and movement ceases, and the women begin to speak and act almost as one, as if they were a Chorus from Sophocles.

At the head of this chorus – its Leader – is Sofia. It is she who provokes the widows' first choral moment by drawing the poison of their suffering to the surface. Through their treatment of her, Kushner and Dorfman challenge the preconception that as mother and grandmother Sofia should preserve life and hand it down to her grandchildren. This has significant bearing on Koestenbaum's model of collaboration: if Kushner and Dorfman are arguably usurping feminine power, then they present this power as closely bound to death as well as life, and their own collaboration as equally fuelled by this.

The first choral moment occurs after the first body brought by the river has been confiscated and burned. Sofia returns from speaking with the Captain to find her daughters-in-law and granddaughter preparing for market. Although it is unclear from the stage directions, the scene demands that some of the other women of the valley (of which there are a minimum of three) should also be on stage, working. Sofia is furious that the body has been taken from her, and confronts Alexandra, who is in turn angry that Sofia has put her children in danger through her resistant act (28|28). When it is brought up that the body was removed while under Fidelia's care, Sofia shows no concern for the danger of further molestation, rape, and even death in which she has placed her granddaughter. 'She should have died before she let them take his body away!' she proclaims (29|29). The blood in Fidelia's veins should make her 'understand' this, even if Alexandra – who does not have any Fuentes or Mendes blood – cannot. Sofia proclaims:

> you'll sell the living, you'll sell the dead, nothing's horrible enough to stop your selling […] you should all be down like stones by the river
>
> *This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.*
>
> Where is your husband and my father and where is Alonso, Antonio, where's Theo,

> where's Luis, Raul, Pablo, Hernando, Claudio, Joaquin, where are they? Juan, Enrique, Luis, Rafael, Pablo, Armando, Benito […] (29-30|29-30)

Sofia does not trail off here, but continues to repeat, again and again, the names of these men. The effect of her speech is electrifying, and in response the women, but for Alexandra and possibly Fidelia, cry together:

> Not the names, stop, not the names they'll hear you, they'll hear, no names, no more, no more, not one more name, they can hear, they can hear don't say the names, don't say it, don't say it, don't say… (30|30).

This scene evokes collective grief – almost hysteria – rooted in real danger. The women, like Sofia, chant their lines over and over again. It is left to Alexandra to command her children to gather their grain and to move away, before turning to Sofia:

> YOU CRAZY OLD WITCH YOU GIVE THEM NAMES, YOU GO TO THEM AND YOU TELL THEM NAMES […] YOU CALL ATTENTION, […] YOU'LL KILL THEM ALL, don't you understand old woman they've got our men.
>
> *(Little Pause)*
>
> My husband is not dead! Emiliano is not dead. No! (30|31)

At this moment, the sack of grain that Fidelia is picking up splits at the seam. The spill of grain across stage stops the overlapping voices of the women, and there is total silence. Then all go down on their hands and knees to gather it up, physical labour halting words.

Sofia's proclamation that Fidelia should have died protecting a rotting body whose identity is uncertain is shocking. There is no sentimental privileging of the child-as-future here.[71] Although Sofia retains her sense of generational ordering – she claims the bodies of her men in order of age – giving her father burial has become more important to her than preserving those who live on. In a move that distances this

[71] For a reading of the phantasmagorical child as privileged link to a future free of alienation, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004).

text from plays such as *Homebody/Kabul*, Fidelia is expected to protect the one from whom she has inherited her blood, rather than being saved by them. Alexandra resists being drawn into the widows' fearful, grief-stricken chorus, because as a mother, she continues to represent a generative, preservative force. She cannot let herself fall into despair. At the height of the tension brought about by these layered voices and perspectives, the interruption of spilling grain, and the collective act of gathering it (literally bringing the dispersed pieces back together) returns everyone to the same time or 'now'.

Sofia has quite clearly, travelled beyond the boundaries of the every day – beyond the boundaries of what is expected of a woman in her context – and she expects the other women to do the same. Although her attack on 'selling' is an indictment of Capitalism, with which the captain and landowners are also associated, it is equally an attack on routine activities. The image of the women like stones by the river, rending their laundry at the waterside, is indicative of this. Here stones are used in a different way to 'Reverse Transcription': where in Kushner's one act stones symbolize that which is forefatherly, in *Widows* they represent weight, and sometimes the experience of women.

Sofia herself has become increasingly stone-like; her refusal to work and insistence on waiting for the bodies of her men unsettles everyone. Before the first body appears she is described as a 'river rock', 'stubborn, bitter, a tombstone' (11|11). When asked to get up from beside the river, she replies:

> I can't. I'm carrying the weight of my four men. I have a father. Husband. Two sons. Where? Each one is heavy. Each time I think of him, is he hungry, does he need water, is he cold, he gets heavier. I am a stone. […] I remember the missing so sharply I've forgotten everything else, how to bake or plant or walk or even stand. I can't move. I'm waiting here because…
>
> […]
>
> Because I can't bear waiting anymore. (11|11)

Sofia is carrying the unknown fate of her men. She has reached a threshold where she can no longer 'bear waiting'. It is as if the homonymic relation of 'wait' to

'weight' has made her heavy as stone. Her burden of care is at the heart of her role as instigator of the other women's resistance, and her refusal to preserve life.

There is a powerful resonance here, with Sophocles' *Antigone*, which is also about a woman who only wants to bury her dead. In Robert Fagles' translation, Antigone explicitly asks her sister Ismene if she will help her to bury the dead: 'Will you share the labour? Share the work?'.[72] Like Antigone, Sofia will stage her protest alone if she needs to; she would, however, prefer to share the labour with the other women, with whom she already shares the bonds of blood, friendship, and camaraderie. Sofia is slow to win the women over, but building on their routine she draws them into acts of verbal (non-literary) collaboration that transcends the every-day boundaries of the self.

The switch to choral voice has elements of the mythic – and along with that, undertones of the supernatural, of awe, of the earliest roots of human history and storytelling. It also emphasises what Ellmann might call the rhizome-like quality of the women's power, which Sophia expects to expand in all directions, through the actions of all of the women, regardless of age or ordering. This power is necessary in order to support the arboreal family tree, which is associated with the absent men, carefully ordered by age whenever Sofia mentions them together.

More of these choral scenes are provoked by the further loss of men. For example, after the second body is found and buried under a 'false' name, the women gather by the grave, claiming that they all feel that it is the body of a male relative. With the sound of the river rushing around them, they slowly join each other in a choral incantation:

ours is a river that is shallow, cold and brown, and it brings us our men,

This quotation has been partially redacted by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

it brought us back one, and the godless

[72] Sophocles, 'Antigone', in *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. 61.

> they burnt it, and it brought us another, to bury on the hill […] it found us this body, and it made it any body, and it made it every body, and it's mine, it's mine, oh please don't let it be mine[…] (47|49)

This continues on until each woman turns individually and says, 'It's mine' (47|49), breaking up the chorus. Together-but-separate, they collaborate here, as they make the body symbolically into 'any body' and 'every body', belonging to each individually, although each hopes that it does not.

The widows' chorus slowly develops, from fear to resistance. Although their final act is performed without speech, it is done facing the Captain and his forces as a unit, having just pulled a third body from the river. Dorfman and Kushner do not limit the shape of this final moment: as noted above, they allow the production to decide whether the women will dance, sing, or only move forward, '*as they rock the body like a newborn child*' (71|74). Again, this is resonant with Kushner's idea of a collaborative net: 'Together we organize the world for ourselves, or at least we organize our understanding of it; we reflect it, refract it, criticize it, grieve over its savagery and help each other to discern, amidst the gathering dark, paths of resistance'.[73] There are no 'pockets of peace' for the widows to retreat to, and their only plausible hope lies in Alexandra's final words to Fidelia, which echo Gotchling's promise to Agnes: 'Carry me with you, be a home for me' (67|69). Yet, working together, nurturing a corpse like a child, they are able to resist.

These choral moments establish an understanding of community, collaboration, and of legacy that breaks away from the forward-oriented, patriarchal sense of things epitomised by Abel Hill Cemetery in 'Reverse Transcription'. In *Widows* this is firmly entrenched through the final scenes, and particularly the deaths of Sofia and Alexis. Before their deaths, the two are allowed a brief exchange. In the novel – where they do not die – this takes place inside Alexis' head. On stage, however, Sofia asks to touch Alexis. As she places her hand over his heart the lighting changes suddenly, leaving them alone on stage. This is a moment that fits clearly within Kushner's

[73] Kushner, 'With A Little Help', p. 40.

oeuvre, where the primacy of the onstage connection is seen in the link between Agnes and Zillah, in the nighttime sequences of *Caroline,* and in the dream scenes of *Angels*. Speaking only for Alexis, and having asked for and been granted forgiveness by him, Sofia says the following:

> There are villages of the living and villages of the dead, surrounding us always. Press up against the wall behind you. There's a hand in the stone. Reach for it, hold it.
> […]
> It's your father. You know his hand.
> […]
> It's a strong hand. It's so gentle for you. So you can be brave. For the one who comes after you, for the ones who come after. People like us don't die. We will be there, in the stones of the wall, you and I and the many others, we will be there together, my little man, my baby, till the walls come down.
>
> (70|73)

Drawing on the imagery of stone concomitant with waiting and the weight of the dead, Sofia establishes a very specific sense of legacy. This legacy is turned towards 'the one' and 'ones' who 'come after': Fidelia, who is not yet a wife or a widow, and the baby left in her care. As Sofia and Alexis speak, she draws the hand of his missing father into the fold, so that three rather than two generations of their family are present. Each has or will suffer death in order to resist those that have built walls around the village, blocking access to the land. In death, they become one with the stones of that land, living on in an altered state, supporting those who continue to resist, and to bear their weight. This altered state is not stable or singular though. There is not merely 'a' village of living and 'a' village of dead – there are multiple 'villages' of both, and Sofia gives us no sense as to where the boundaries between them lie. Her description of herself as having already symbolically turned to stone suggests an overlap.

While Sofia's lines suggest a straightforward generational progression – from grandmother to father to son – her decision to allow Alexis to be killed disrupts the relationship between those who come before and who come after. Alexis is Sofia's grandson: he is young, barely more than a child, and he is himself one of those who come after. Sofia explicitly refuses to save his life, just as she expected Fidelia to be

willing to sacrifice hers. She does not resist his death, but instead offers him a temporary after-life, which will last as long as their support is needed. Here, the matriarch – daughter, wife and mother – generates death, rather than life, as part of a radical resistance to tyranny.

Nets and Holes

'With a Little Help', 'Reverse Transcription' and *Bright Room* show that for Kushner, collaboration can produce a radically inter-connected understanding of legacy. In this context, it is intriguing that in the 1997 version of *Widows* Dorfman's Narrator, the masculine frame to a story about women, is explicitly concerned with the trouble that can come from the wrong kind of interconnectedness. Right at the play's end, he addresses the audience, saying that these are his last words '[b]ecause if I stay, if I continue to speak, I will inevitably start to speak about myself' ('97, 58). Reflecting on his departure, he continues:

> This is not my story.
>
> I do not want to be the one figure in this story that other people will be able to identify with, find familiar, like a journalist who comes in, comfortably determines who is good and who is evil, and then, feeling superior, tells the outside world about the atrocities.
>
> I do not want to become that figure. It cannot be that the only way to make people care about this perverse fairy tale is to give them a personal hook. ('97, 58-59)

The Narrator is not Kushner's: he came after the collaboration, and is explicitly an autobiographical presence, reflecting Dorfman's own struggles while in exile. He is also temporary, in that he was excised completely from the 'final' version of *Widows*. That Dorfman had read *Bright Room* means that Zillah may have been an influence here, but speculating on this might quickly lead to a sort of forensic attempt to discern whose voice is whose, which is neither possible nor desirable in this instance. However, the Narrator's anxiety about becoming the wrong sort of 'hook' is telling. At the heart of his sentiments is the writerly – rather than wri(gh)terly – fear that the audience will connect or 'identify' with the wrong person. He worries that their connection to him would make comfortable their relationship with the rest of the play, which is meant to unsettle them, to leave a

record, and to make them aware of the plight of others. In short, he is worried that he will disrupt travel beyond the borders of the self. Where Zillah speaks to Agnes through the holes in the borders of space and time, the Narrator leaves the widows to act out their story without his interference.

Yet, as Henry James wrote '[r]eally, universally, relations stop nowhere'; it is the artist's job to make it appear that they do, to give boundaries to the text.[74] The Narrator of *Widows* fears that he will fail to enact this stoppage. Ellmann's doubling net is operative beyond his control: solitude and interconnectivity, absence and entanglement are not separate in his story, but interlinked. This is especially the case because he is not narrating a novel, but a play. *Widows'* performance runs down borders and boundaries. It takes the actors and audience beyond the solitary figure of the 'one', through the authoring dyad, and out into a collaborative space occupied by women. These women work together against the patriarchal force of the Captain in order to allow those who follow after to resist oppression. Their integral interconnectedness is perhaps, why the Narrator finds himself disappearing into the widows' story.

To return to the questions raised by Koestenbaum's theory of collaboration, do we view *Widows* as the woman shared by Kushner and Dorfman, and also as their child, delivered by or rather 'with' Kushner as 'midwife'? Its performance suggests that if we do so, we need to understand Dorfman and Kushner as situated in a liminal space that is fuelled by intense political resistance. Sofia's refusal to preserve, and the willingness of her chorus of collaborators to embrace death in the name of both those who have died and those who live on, challenges the notion that women's bodies must be generative. The erotics of Kushner and Dorfman's collaboration have resulted in a 'child' that counterbalances the urge to procreate with the death drive. So, as in 'Reverse Transcription', the playwrights' power to create carries with it the potential for death, negativity, and absence.

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[74] Henry James, 'Prefaces to Volume 1 of the New York Edition (Cotaining: Roderick Hudson)', *Henryjames.Org*, 1907 <http://www.henryjames.org.uk/prefaces/home.htm> [accessed 19 June 2017].

Their collaboration also opens Kushner's treatment of legacies to different readings. Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* can be read as having been influenced by the final scene of *Widows*, as Priscilla's attempted suicide and terminated pregnancy upends the expected progression of the family, and sends her mother on a voyage to break the burden of 'living after'. Prior from *Angels* also channels the widows' act of resistance. His demand for more life and painful progress is profoundly different from Sofia's sacrifice of both her own life and that of Alexis; however like her he understands part of living on to mean facing death. The question here, becomes not how much of Kushner's authority is in *Widow*s, but rather, how this play shows Kushner to be part of a collaborative net of writers interested in resisting the tyrannies of patriarchy, capital, and right-wing politics. Inserted into this net, *Widows* resonates with and against Kushner's oeuvre, not because of, but perhaps despite his authority.

Rather than viewing Kushner and Dorfman as fathers atop the arboreal structure of the family tree, they should be envisaged as the hands reaching through stone, or less phallically, as offering the holes through which we (the audience) might penetrate beyond the everyday. As *Bright Room* illustrates, the stage itself may be envisaged as such a hole. In both cases, absence and connection coexist, offering the possibility of reaching beyond the self, the individual, the myth of the one. Legacies that travel along the paths of more-than-one are connected beyond the linear band of time, and beyond the veil of death. To an extent, even the image of the net falls short here. More chaotic and web-like, these legacies span in many directions, entangled, and dangerous. They allow every touch on the threads to resonate through the whole, though acknowledging that some empty spaces cannot be traversed.

Conclusion

Reading Legacy, Reading Kushner

Kushner's interest in legacy is rooted in a career-long concern with resisting injustice and enacting change. Treating legacies as readable, he pushes audience and characters alike to critically interpret them. Through reading with a combination of scepticism and empathetic imagination, he is able to identify legacies that propagate violent dispossession, and develop reparative alternatives. By activating legacy as a locus for Kushner's thought, I have addressed a significant, but previously unstudied facet of his work. This in turn has enabled me to respond to and develop already-existent scholarship, such as David Savran and Charles McNulty's readings of progress in *Angels in America* (1991/1992), and Kate Masur's analysis of the treatment of African Americans *Lincoln* (2012).[1] A further significance of this research has been my use of Kushner's work to develop 'legacy' as a critical term. Though frequently written and spoken about in literary, theatrical, and political texts, 'legacy' has received relatively little attention outside the work of Jacques Derrida. Kushner offers a clear understanding of what legacy is, and how it works. He shows it to be typified by the unceasing interplay between substance and negativity, endurance and disposability, loss and perseverance. He also points to its reliance on human interconnectedness. He mobilizes these instabilities to uncover legacies that fall outside of patriarchal, heteronormative, or elitist norms.

Through this study, I have shown theatre to both influence Kushner's understanding of legacy, and offer a productive medium through which it can be read. Theatre shares with legacy the quality of being concerned with preservation and loss. Each un-recorded performance is proof of the continued survival of the play, but disappears once done. Film, in contrast, challenges the audience to engage explicitly with legacy and memorialization. My work on *Lincoln* (Chapter Four) shows that in Kushner's oeuvre film has a less ambiguous relationship with its own longevity, and this (among other things) causes Kushner's critical treatment of legacy to flounder. Theatre is more open than film to adaptation, flux, and the breaking of hierarchical

[1] Savran; McNulty; Masur, 'Passive Black Characters'.

boundaries between self and other. It enables Kushner to develop one of the core premises of his treatment of legacy: the things that we inherit and pass on, including texts, should be open to change.

My thesis is rooted in close readings of Kushner's highly varied body of work, and is one of only a handful of studies to work with Kushner's oeuvre in so comprehensive manner.[2] I follow Jane Gallop in envisaging close reading as listening to, and for, the voices of others.[3] Kushner shares Gallop's conviction that remaining open to otherness is an ethical necessity, and makes this a caveat for the transmission of reparative legacies. In response to this, I develop my argument by following the contours of his texts, remaining open to different voices, and acknowledging that they may produce readings and theories of their own. I develop these through the work of authors and theorists who challenge or clarify Kushner's understanding of legacy, among them Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Athena Athanasiou, Charles Darwin, Colin Dayan, Wayne Koestenbaum, Maud Ellmann, and Harold Bloom.

This research is timely in a way that could not have been envisaged when I began it in late 2013. Aside from the 2014 Southwark Playhouse production of *A Bright Room Called Day* (1989), there were no major productions of Kushner's work in the UK until 2016, when he and Michael Boyd brought *iHo* (2009) to London for the first time. Kushner chose to wait for this moment in part because he wanted to play to be 'completely finished' before it premiered in London. Speaking in the context of the run up to the 2016 US election, he further suggested that it was 'a good moment for the play to be seen'.[4] *iHo* is set in 2008, before the US election in which Barak Obama first came to power, and at one point Empty talks about what would happen if a Democrat got into the White House after George W. Bush. I saw this play on 7 November 2016, the night before the US election in which Donald Trump was voted into the presidency. In the audience, there was an audible murmur and intake of

[2] Other comprehensive, single-author studies include Fisher, *The Theatre of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope*; Fisher, *Understanding Tony Kushner*; Al-Badri.
[3] Gallop.
[4] 'This Week in Politics: Playwright Tony Kushner on Roy Cohn and Donald Trump', *WNYC News*, 2016 <http://www.wnyc.org/story/week-politics-playwright-tony-kushner-roy-cohn-and-donald-trump/> [accessed 31 July 2017].

breath as she spoke. As part of that collective animal, waiting tensely to see what the outcome of the election across the Atlantic would be, Kushner's work spoke to my political uncertainty and fears for the future.

Kushner's plays are left-leaning and politically engaged. They embrace the ethical need for interconnectivity, and mutual understanding of past and present, and unfold this with humour and thoughtfulness. The non-heterogeneous legacies represented in his plays offer particularly helpful tools for thought in our current political context, post-Brexit referendum and 2016 US Elections. *iHo* has been followed by productions of three more of Kushner's plays in 2017 and 2018. Marianne Elliot's major twenty-fifth anniversary revival of *Angels in America* was performed at London's National Theatre in 2017, and transferred to Broadway in 2018. Similarly, Michael Longhurst's 2017 production of *Caroline, or Change* (2003) opened at Chichester Festival Theatre, and was then transferred to the Hampstead in 2018. In November 2017, Southwark Playhouse produced Berthold Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* (2009), translated by Kushner. Between them, these plays point to America's history as a land of immigrants, highlight the legacies of the struggle for gay, civil, and worker's rights, explain the horrors of war, and point to the difficulties of surviving in corrupt times. These are apt themes for a post-Brexit UK, and a world overshadowed by Trump's rhetoric.

What makes this study even timelier is the current prevalence of the word 'legacy' in the media, where it has been a keyword in coverage of Trump.[5] Kushner – who in July 2017 announced that he is writing a play about the new president – has not been exempt from this tendency. He uses this word when speaking of Roy Cohn's mentorship of Trump:

[5] Two of the most interesting pieces in this vein are by Francis Fukuyama and Peter Baker: while speculative, they move away from the language of obfuscation identified in my Introduction. See Francis Fukuyama, 'Opinion | Trump Has Already Started Building a Legacy. It's Highly Negative.', *Washington Post*, 2017 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-has-already-started-building-a-legacy-its-highly-negative/2017/04/28/4260bb9a-25e9-11e7-bb9d-8cd6118e1409_story.html> [accessed 6 August 2017]; Peter Baker, 'Opinion | Can Trump Destroy Obama's Legacy?', *The New York Times*, 23 June 2017, section Sunday Review <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/23/sunday-review/donald-trump-barack-obama.html> [accessed 7 August 2017].

> The part of Roy's legacy that we see most visibly with Trump is the art of The Big Lie. It's a Joe McCarthy trick. He developed it. It's the kind of thing that a person who is profoundly damaged at their core is particularly good at.
>
> I don't know when Trump lies – about the size of his inauguration crowd, winning the popular vote – if he is aware of it. Maybe sometimes he is, sometimes he isn't. I didn't have the sense with Roy that he lost sight of where the divide between fantasy and reality lay, which Trump does I think.[6]

This description of Cohn's 'legacy' is similar to some of Kushner's other uses of the word. In my Introduction, I offer examples of this: he has written about the legacy of Reaganism (which drives a wedge between people and their political reality); and of trickle-down (which suggests that social change will eventually happen from above). Like these examples, the legacy of the 'Big Lie' has great sweep, and is driven by an impulse to bend reality to the will of those propagating it. Trump, as heir to McCarthy and Cohn, gives it a new character though: one where the liar loses their sense of the divide between fantasy and reality. Kushner's demand for critical engagement and empathetic imagination offers his audiences and readers tools to respond to this obfuscation.

Kushner's analysis of Roy's legacy is of interest not only because it may feed into future scholarship, but also because it epitomizes his characteristic practice of reading in a resistant manner. This is evident throughout his oeuvre, from his comparison of the legacies of Reagan and Hitler in *Bright Room*, to his refusal of 'living after' in *Homebody/Kabul* (2001). This way of reading is linked to Kushner's evocation of queer possibility, particularly in terms of his openness to legacies that don't signify in monolithic ways. In my chapter on *Angels*, the only core text in this thesis to deal at length with explicitly gay characters, queer possibility means being open to legacies that are transmitted through non-heteronormative, and non-reproductive relationships. In the 1990s Kushner further associated queerness, in the form of an emergent 'theatre of the fabulous', with the re-examination and

[6] Tim Teeman and Tony Kushner, 'Tony Kushner: Why I'm Writing a Play About Donald Trump', *The Daily Beast*, 19 July 2017, section arts-and-culture <http://www.thedailybeast.com/tony-kushner-why-im-writing-a-play-about-donald-trump> [accessed 31 July 2017].

open dissemination of history once hidden.[7] This spirit of double examination and dissemination helps Kushner to resist normative structures of affect and knowledge, and fuels both his resistant reading and his representation of queer legacies. These might be related to sexuality, as Prior's is, or to a broader interpretation of 'queer' as referring to unexpected possibility, as in *Caroline*. The combination of queerness and critical reading has shaped the possibilities for this research, including facilitating some of the bold moves it has made. These include reading together texts as disparate as *The Illusion* (1989) and *Homebody/Kabul* (Chapter Two), and activating Darwin as a locus for Kushner's thought in *Angels* (Chapter Three).

I have devoted much of this thesis to examining how legacies can be read, resistantly or otherwise.[8] There are literal senses in which legacies might require reading. In *Homebody/Kabul* Priscilla's reading of her mother's pocketbook leads her to out into the world. In *Angels* Prior eventually returns the 'Anti-Migratory Epistle', refusing to read it; in doing so he opens a space to forge his own legacy. Affective reading is also evident in Kushner's work, as seen in *Caroline, or Change*, where characters adopt paranoid and reparative positions to selectively scan and amplify their responses to various legacies. Supplementing the reading that takes place in his plays and screenplays is that which Kushner asks his audience to perform. As I showed in my chapter on *Caroline* (Chapter One), Kushner's understanding of reading has a close kinship with consideration, interpretation and discernment. He claims: '[w]atching theater, you learn that existence is legible but that you have to have a critical mind if you're going to read it. […] the whole point is to interpret and to understand.'[9] For Kushner legacy, like existence, is made legible when engaged through theatre. One of his means to incite his audience to read legacies is the use of disrupted language. Examples of this are the Homebody's synchisis and 'syncresis', and Prior Walter's disjointed attempts to express his will for more life. Both require the audience to listen carefully in order to follow what is being said, and to work actively to join

[7] Tony Kushner, 'Foreword: Notes Toward a Theatre of the Fabulous', in *Staging Gay Lives: An Anthology of Contemporary Gay Theatre*, ed. by John M Clum (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1996), pp. vii–ix <http://www.questia.com/read/100848879> [accessed 30 April 2014].
[8] Steindler and Kushner.
[9] Steindler and Kushner.

together fragmented narrative. This encourages a combination of what Kushner calls 'scepticism' and 'empathetic imagination': this is the self-conscious and empathetically heightened reading through which audiences actively scrutinize legacies.[10]

For Kushner, legacies are best envisaged as things that are transmitted between people, often across time; they require more than one person. Interconnectivity is at the core of his presentation of legacy, and its capacity to see change enacted. This is important for studying legacy, both in general and specifically in Kushner's work, because 'reading' becomes not only the means through which legacy can be critiqued, but also potentially the means through which new and different legacies can be passed on. My work with *Caroline* has shown reading and interpretation – including that of characters, playwrights and theatrical audiences in the theatre – can forge the connections through which legacies are transmitted. Caroline's paranoid reading of her situation offers Emmie the driving energy for the reparative acknowledgement of a new legacy – that of Caroline's strong blood. In other plays, legacies arise or are maintained through different kinds of connectivity. We see it in *The Illusion* (1989) and *Homebody/Kabul*, where characters are forced beyond the boundaries of the self. Their dispossession shatters visions of legacy that hinge on the idea of living after through one's children. In *Angels in America,* Prior's legacy is to pass the blessing of more life to an interconnected, global community, which is cognizant of the world's darkness and the certainty of death. Although it elides the damaging after effects of the Thirteenth Amendment, *Lincoln* shows the president's legacy to spin out to both his intimate circle and all Americans. Finally, we see this connectivity in the collaborations of 'Reverse Transcription' (1996), *A Bright Room Called Day*, and *Widows.* The sheer range of these texts shows connectivity to be a concern throughout his oeuvre.

If Kushner's plays and screenplays have helped me to develop a clear understanding of legacy's readability, intricate internal tensions, and reliance on

[10] Steindler and Kushner.

interconnectedness, studying legacy, in turn, has developed my approach to his work. Among other things, it allows me to respond to the critique that Kushner's early work especially is too uncritically hopeful.[11] As I have commented previously, most of the plays or films studied here have about them a painfully uplifting turn at their end: Emmie's appearance in the Epilogue of *Caroline*; the Amanuensis' look to his next life in *The Illusion*; the Periplum of *Homebody*, which sees Mahala metaphorically 'planting' (rather than burying) her dead in the Homebody's garden. Kushner has never escaped the success of *Angels in America*, whose final evocation that the world 'only spins forward' has been the subject much criticism. Yet his treatment of legacy in these plays challenges this critique. For him, legacy is always about more than one thing: substance and negativity, plenitude and loss, endurance and disposability.[12] Legacies operate in time, helping some things to survive, and participating in or relying on the loss of others. Kushner's hopefulness struggles constantly with the different and mutable configurations of legacy's internal tensions. So long as these are not elided, his hopefulness remains rooted in a critical appraisal of reality. In some of his texts, this takes form in more nihilistic endings, from the misery of Agnes in his early work *Bright Room,* to the alienation of Gus from his children in his most recent play *iHo*.

The potential exception to this is *Lincoln.* As the citation of Lincoln's painfully uplifting Second Inaugural closes the film, resistance to despair discontinues critique in a way that is not evident in Kushner's earlier works. Kushner's failure to harness collaborative energy and fully critique Lincoln's legacy is, as I demonstrated in Chapter Four, partly due to Spielberg's conservative influence, which restrains Kushner's left-wing politics. Yet it is also, paradoxically, a sign that Kushner's hopefulness has become more strained in the twenty-first century. Speaking in 2016, at the Hampstead revival of *iHo*, he claims that globally, 'we are in a time of terrible crisis.'[13] He understands environmental crisis and the resurgence of fascism to require response, remarking: 'either we get out of this mess or we face

[11] This might be seen in Leo Bersani, Charles McNulty and David Savran's responses to *Angels in America*, for example. See Bersani; Savran; McNulty.
[12] Khan and Kushner.
[13] Mortimer and Kushner.

apocalypse. We will make the planet uninhabitable. We may have already got there, but we're still hoping its not too late. I am very scared, but I firmly believe that hope is a moral obligation.' [14] In *Lincoln* this increasingly difficult moral obligation to hopefulness is combined with an impulse to memorialize and fix Lincoln's legacy; this overwhelms critique. This limitation is not evident in *iHo*, which Kushner worked on in the period during which he wrote *Lincoln*, and has subsequently continued to revise. The play is similar to early texts such as his short play *Slavs!* (1995) in its searching treatment of the political left. [15] Here, Kushner successfully and unflinchingly evaluates the legacies of the Marcantonio family. He offers the possibility of an ending in which Gus does not commit suicide and choses instead to embrace different aspects of his left-wing legacy, but leaves his decision unmade and unpredictable, redolent of the continuous interplay between hopefulness and loss.

In reading with Kushner extensively and slowly, it becomes evident that his work – especially in the theatre – is characterised by an undertow of fierce scepticism, fuelled by political conviction. In the same interview where he speaks about Roy Cohn's legacy to Trump, Kushner comments: 'There is requiem and rage in everything I write. Everything I write has a mix of grief and loss and rage'.[16] Kushner's reading of legacy is so rich because it is always informed by the tension between grief, loss, endurance, hopefulness, and rage – a word repeated twice in this comment. This is evident throughout his oeuvre, and constitutes the legacy of theatrical adaptation, stunning prescience, and political awareness that Kushner actively passes down to his audience.

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[14] Mortimer and Kushner.
[15] Kushner, 'Slavs!'
[16] Teeman and Kushner.

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