Getting in the Car to Weirdsville:

Taking a Trip with Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes

By

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Abstract:

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This project takes as its focus the work of Canadian theatre artist Ronnie Burkett, which continues to delight and disturb mainstream audiences nationally and internationally. There are a number of factors that set the work of Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes apart from that of other contemporary practitioners of the craft: it deviates from European-based traditions of puppetry by delivering multi-layered, text-driven productions; it presents narratives that are specifically for adult audiences–children under the age of fourteen are refused admission; and of particular interest to this thesis is that the works present a sustained critique of the cultural and moral values that underlie the contested relations of power through which subjectivity and identity are constituted. As puppetry, Burkett's theatre practice emerges from a performance tradition that easily lends itself to questioning the power dynamics of dominant narratives and ideologies of social interaction precisely because it is typically undervalued among the arts in contemporary Western culture, and for this reason has greater license to present alternative interpretations of the psychosocial relations upon which subjectivity is dependent. I employ key Freudian and post-Freudian concepts of the abject, mourning and melancholia, the fetish, and the uncanny as well as some of the most

well-established and well-recognized aesthetics and philosophies of modern drama, including Brecht's alienation-effect, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, Expressionism, Symbolism, and Cabaret through which to analyze four of Burkett's mature works. What makes his work a particularly fertile object of study is that the anxiously fraught terrains of trauma and loss explored in the plays under discussion employ the medium of the puppet as a means of considering various aspects of the difficult negotiations of human relations and subject constitution.

For

Mary Marsh (1929–2005)

and

Holly Griffith (1952–2007)

They never stopped believing.

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Illustrations

All photographs courtesy of *Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes*

Chronology

June 10, 1957	Ronnie Burkett is born in Lethbridge, Alberta and adopted by Ray and Eileen Burkett of Medicine Hat, Alberta
1968	appears in *The Three Bears* dir. Eleanor Townsend at the Medicine Hat Public Library and the Medicine Hat Auxiliary Hospital
1973	appears in *Cinderella* dir. Eleanor Townsend at the Medicine Hat Public Library
1974	performs and directs puppet play, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, with fellow-puppeteer Danny Hall at the Medicine Hat Public Library
1974	performs *An Evening of Us* with Jerry Thompson at Medicine Hat High School
1974	performs puppet plays, *The Fisherman and His Wife; Little Red Riding Hood; Rapunzel*, at the Medicine Hat Public Library
1974	appears in musical *A Fair Price* dir. John Komanchuk at Medicine Hat College Theatre
1975	appears in ensemble performance of *Here We Are; The Store; This Property is Condemned* dir. Sara Stanley at Medicine Hat College Theatre
1975	designs sets and costumes for *The Miracle Worker* dir. Sara Stanley
1975	directs *Early Frost* at Medicine Hat High School

1975	appears in *The Real Inspector Hound* dir. Sara Stanley at Medicine Hat College Theatre
1975	performs in puppet play *The Threadbare Mayor* dir. Sara Stanley at Medicine Hat College Theatre
1975	appears in *Treasure Island* dir. Sara Stanley at Medicine Hat College Theatre
1976	directs one-act musical, *The Diary of Adam and Eve* at Medicine Hat College Theatre
1976	appears in *Box and Cox* dir. Sara Stanley with Lunchbox Theatre at Firehall Theatre, Medicine Hat, Alberta
1976	attends Moscow International Puppet Congress, where he meets puppeteer Bil Baird
1976	auditions for Baird on his 19th birthday, is hired, and moves to New York
1978	designs and creates puppets for *Cinderabbit*, children's television special for KBYU Television
1980	returns to Canada, moving to Calgary, Alberta
1982	puppet show, *The Plight of Polly Pureheart*, touring various local venues, Calgary, Alberta; performs this production at the first Fringe Festival in Canada (Edmonton), where he meets the members of One Yellow Rabbit Theatre ensemble
1983	co-produces *Together Again for the First Time*, a blend of puppetry and dance with Denise Clark (OYR) at Reeve Theatre, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta

1983	creates and performs, *Suitcase Theatre*, touring various venues in Alberta
1986	creates and performs *Fool's Edge*, his first show to use marionettes exclusively, produced by Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary, Alberta
1986	Incorporates Rink-a-Dink Inc., the business arm of Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes
1987	designed puppet of "Deadly" for video project "AIDS: Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself", produced by AIDS Calgary
1987	performs with One Yellow Rabbit in the lead role in *Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp* dir. Gyllian Raby at The Secret Theatre, Calgary, Alberta
1987	creates marionettes and design for One Yellow Rabbit production, *Tears of a Dinosaur* at Margaret Greenham Theatre, Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta
1988	tours *Fool's Edge* across Canada
1988	creates and performs *Virtue Falls* for Lunchbox Theatre at Firehall Theatre, Calgary, Alberta
1989	performs G.B. Shaw puppet play, *Shakes vs. Shav* for Shaw Festival, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario
1990	creates and performs *The Punch Club*, which tours Calgary, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto
1990	writes *Prisoner of Panto* (a puppetless play) for Lunchbox Theatre at Firehall Theatre, Calgary, Alberta

1991-1993	creates and performs *Awful Manors*, which tours across Canada; the production sells out at the Canadian Stage Company (Toronto)
1993	creates and performs *The Daisy Theatre* produced by One Yellow Rabbit in Calgary, Alberta
1994-2002	creates and performs *Tinka's New Dress*, which subsequently tours across Canada, New York (USA), UK, Germany, Australia, Holland, and Ireland
1995	puppets of Preston Manning, Jean Chretien, and Ralph Klein appear in Triangle Gallery exhibition *From Caricature to Comics* in Calgary, Alberta
1995	collaborates with Noreen Young (CBC children's series "Under the Umbrella Tree") on television puppet production *Wacky Palms*
1998	creates and performs *Old Friends*, a puppet show without dialogue for young audiences, which tours across Canada
1998-2002	creates and performs *Street of Blood*, which subsequently tours across Canada, UK, USA, and Sweden
2000-2003	creates and performs *Happy*, which tours across Canada, UK, and Germany
2003-2005	creates and performs *Provenance*, which tours across Canada, UK, Austria, Australia, Germany, and Sweden; this production breaks advance sales records at the Canadian Stage Company (Toronto) previously held by Tony Kushner's *Angel's in America*

Introduction

This project takes as its focus the theatrically innovative work of Canadian theatre artist Ronnie Burkett, which continues to delight and disturb mainstream audiences. There are a number of factors that set the work of Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes apart from that of other contemporary practitioners of the craft: 1) it deviates from European-based traditions of puppetry by delivering multi-layered, text-driven productions; 2) it stages narratives that are specifically for adult audiences–children under the age of fourteen are refused admission; and, of particular interest to this thesis, 3) it consistently critiques the cultural and moral values that underlie the contested relations of power in the Western world through which subjectivity and identity are constituted. Burkett's adult puppet shows examine the troubled and troubling relations in which subjects and abject 'others' perform within sociality, and routinely play to sold-out mainstream houses–as opposed to Fringe or other more sub-cultural venues. What makes his work a particularly fertile object of study is that the anxiously fraught terrains of trauma and loss explored in the plays under discussion employ the medium of the puppet as a means of considering various aspects of the difficult negotiations of human relations and subject constitution. Burkett's puppet theatre practice emerges from a performance tradition that easily lends itself to questioning the power dynamics of dominant narratives of social interaction precisely because it is typically undervalued among the arts in contemporary Western culture, and for this reason has greater license to present alternative interpretations of the psychosocial relations upon which subjectivity is dependent. Indeed, my project will argue that Burkett's recurrent thematic concerns with loss, trauma, memory, and

community relations staged through masterful and experimental puppetry are best analyzed through a psychoanalytic framework which allows for a nuanced consideration of self/other dynamics in the constitution of subjectivity. Specifically, key Freudian and post-Freudian concepts of the abject, mourning and melancholia, the fetish, and the uncanny are particularly helpful in elucidating Burkett's layered productions. Further, Burkett's mature work, which is the focus of my dissertation, engages with some of the most well-established and well-recognized aesthetics and philosophies of modern drama, including Brecht's alienation effect, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, Expressionism, Symbolism, camp, and cabaret. In some cases I read these as intentional adaptations in the service of Burkett's political, personal, and thematic interests, while in others I consider them aesthetic gestures that take on greater significance when read in relation to the psychoanalytic dynamics mentioned above. Folded within these 'high' modern drama re-citations are Burkett's continual reference to and manipulation of the histories and genres of puppetry that he knows so well, along with his own original innovation of puppetry techniques. As I will argue over the course of this dissertation, these technical adaptations and innovations–which never fail to enthral critics and audiences–become the material means through which Burkett's theatre successfully stages rich explorations of complex dynamics of human experience, power relations, and subject formation. In the North American popular imagination, puppetry is typically regarded as an art form most often associated with 'light' children's entertainment, or 'quaint' folk art. In spite of the fact that this attitude has been changing in recent years, given the enormous success of stage productions such as Avenue Q (2003) and films like "Team America: World Police" (2004), puppetry is still most often relegated to the theatrical margins as 'specialty fare' among mainstream theatre houses and audiences. Burkett's work as an

award-winning playwright deserves scholarly attention, particularly in a culture that routinely refuses to accord puppetry the respect enjoyed by other forms of theatre. The acclaim that his full-length adult-themed puppet shows have garnered for this internationally recognized Master Puppeteer is the result of many years of refining his skills as a puppet theatre artist to the point where the narratives he stages are directly informed by his art practice. For this reason I find it useful here to give a brief history of Burkett's productions prior to those examined in this thesis.

By the time he incorporated Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes under the name Rink-a-Dink Inc. in 1986, Burkett had been developing his skills as a puppeteer for twenty-two years, starting at the age of seven when he discovered puppets in the World Book Encyclopedia on his family's bookshelf (Morrow, Wild Theatre 312). As a gay teenager growing up in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Burkett spent much time, when he wasn't performing in drama productions at Medicine Hat High School or being driven by his father to public libraries, church halls, shopping malls, and community centres to perform puppet shows he had designed and built himself, building puppets in the basement of his family home. A meticulous researcher, Burkett consumed every book on puppetry he could find in the local public library[1], and began sending off letters to professional puppeteers like Bil Baird, who designed, built and produced the puppets in the Lonely Goatherd scene for the 1965 film, "The Sound of Music". Burkett saw the film repeatedly in order to study Baird's technique. In 1976, while attending the Moscow International Puppet Conference, he finally met Baird and was invited to stop in New York to audition on his return from Russia. So, on the day of his nineteenth

[1] Burkett now owns his own extensive library of books on puppetry–comprising histories, as well as the theoretical aspects and the practical applications of building and performing.

birthday, Burkett auditioned for Baird in New York and was hired. Burkett would later discover that, although Baird had never answered his many boyhood pleas for a job, he had kept all the letters (Morrow, Wild Theatre 313). While the dream of working in a professional puppet theatre didn't last–Baird's theatre closed a few months after Burkett's arrival, before the season ended–he learned a great deal about his chosen profession from the 'old boys', including how to drink and smoke. After Baird's theatre closed, Burkett stayed in New York for the next three years, doing children's television puppetry, which had become very lucrative as a result of the phenomenal success of Jim Henson's Muppets. When he admitted to one elderly puppeteer that what he really wanted to do was marionettes, he was advised to go back to Canada and follow his dream, "'cause if you stay here, you'll never do it" (qtd. in Morrow, Wild Theatre 315). Taking that advice, Burkett moved to Calgary in 1980 where he continued to hone his craft, touring his traveling show, The Plight of Polly Pureheart, across Alberta. It wasn't until 1982, however, that Burkett, the perpetual puppet-geek loner, discovered a theatre community that would embrace his work.

When Edmonton hosted the first Fringe Festival in Canada in 1982 Burkett presented The Plight of Polly Pureheart–and met the members of the newly formed One Yellow Rabbit Performance Theatre. From that point on Burkett began developing his own, very adult, style of puppet theatre that continues to be a signature of his work. In 1986 he collaborated with Blake Brooker of OYR to write Fool's Edge, a campy, bawdy, musical send-up of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition. With Fool's Edge Burkett not only began to develop a niche, but he also performed for the first time using marionettes instead of hand puppets. As a result, he incorporated his company, Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes, under the umbrella of Rink-a-Dink Inc. As well, he

began in earnest to manipulate the conventions of puppetry that had been drilled into him by his mentors. In Fool's Edge, for example, he appeared in full view of the audience costumed in a wildly decadent Cavalier costume while manipulating the nine characters. With his mentors–the 'old boys'–gone, there was nobody to tell Burkett that he couldn't buck tradition and stand in the open with his creations, which ultimately gave him the freedom to experiment[2] (Enright 11). For the first time, Burkett had a community of contemporaries, young theatre artists experimenting in various media who encouraged him and embraced what he was doing. Not feeling like a lone misfit had a profound effect on Burkett. This is evident not only in the number of reviews and interviews where he credits the Rabbits with helping him to establish himself, but also in the productions I explore later in this analysis, each of which presents a variation of a community of outcasts and oddball characters banding together in common cause. Having found his own community Burkett stayed in Calgary–when he wasn't touring new shows–and continued his association with the Rabbits.

Between 1982 and 1988 when Fool's Edge was remounted and taken to Toronto's World Stage Festival by Burkett and the Rabbits, they continued to work closely together on collaborative projects such as Tears of a Dinosaur (1987), for which Burkett contributed the design and the marionettes. He also appeared as the lead in Blake Brooker's Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp (1987) in full, outrageously campy drag, a role later reprised by fellow-Rabbit Denise Clark, to whom he remains very close (Morrow, Wild Theatre 317). After the success of Fool's Edge in Toronto, Burkett was invited to mount G.B. Shaw's minor puppet plays, Shakes Versus Shav and A Glimpse

[2] While he was departing from puppetry tradition by appearing in full view of the audience, his debt to his mentors was acknowledged when he incorporated their names in the proscenium arch that framed the stage (Sontag, Calgary Herald).

of Reality, at the Shaw Festival the following summer. In the meantime he continued creating new works of his own, including Virtue Falls (1988), which satirized Victorian operetta, and The Punch Club, a production that lampooned Punch and Judy. These one-act plays got generally good reviews, and Burkett then followed these with his most ambitious undertaking to that point, Awful Manors (1991), a lavishly detailed full-length parody of the Gothic mystery genre in which forty-six marionettes were built to represent the twenty-two characters. The response to this production was overwhelmingly positive, and resulted in a cross-Canada tour, including Toronto's Canadian Stage Company where it played to sold-out houses (Morrow, Wild Theatre 318). This sprawling work incorporated all the high-camp puns, double entendres, and sexual innuendo that the primarily Western Canadian audiences familiar with his work had come to expect, but the technical virtuosity the show required was what really impressed the critics. Awful Manors was ultimately the show that gained Burkett's work national attention. Toronto theatre critic Liam Lacey commented that Burkett "has single-handedly made adult puppetry a viable form of theatre in this country" ("This Man Pulls His Own Strings") when the show ran at the Canadian Stage Company in 1991; Adrienne Clarkson did a profile of him for her CBC television series while the production was at Alberta Theatre Projects in 1992 (Morrow, Wild Theatre 318); and film producer and director Margaret Mardirossian produced the documentary "Ronnie Burkett: A Line of Balance" for television in 1992. With the realization of his dream of bringing puppetry to the legitimate theatre, playing before live mainstream audiences who took his craftsmanship and wit seriously, Burkett began to turn his attention to producing work that had more political resonance. For this, he returned to the Rabbits

who premiered The Daisy Theatre as their season opener in 1993 in their intimate Calgary space, the Secret Theatre (Morrow, Wild Theatre 319).

The Daisy Theatre was really the test ground for what would become Tinka's New Dress. Relying on scenes improvised from the contents of the daily newspapers, this production introduced characters such as Edna Rural who would go on to be the protagonist of Street of Blood in 1998. Phyllis Stein, an embittered Canada Council officer who had appeared in Awful Manors, returned to 'The Daisies' for an encore engagement. Provincial and Federal politicians such as Alberta Premier Ralph Klein, Prime Minister Jean Chretien, and Reform Party Leader Preston Manning were built for the show and lampooned mercilessly to the delight of audiences. These shows demonstrated Burkett's natural quick wit, and studied in more detail throughout this thesis, his love of cabaret performance. As well, the high camp comedic elements that are a consistent feature of Burkett's work were delivered most particularly through the figure of Esmé Massengill, a character who reappeared in a more fully developed version of the much more politically-driven Street of Blood. Not only did Burkett introduce his political themes through the 'Daisy' characters onstage, but he also made the show resonate with his own personal politics when the show was brought back for an encore performance the following March, donating a cook-book 'created' by Edna Rural of dreadful 1960s recipes called "Keep Your Fork, There's Pie" as a post-show fundraiser for AIDS Calgary (Morrow, "Strings"). With The Daisy Theatre Burkett's work began to develop a more sustained cultural/political edge in which his social commentary on human relations presents a thematic arc that links subsequent works. The emergence of a more sharply defined cultural critique that began with The Daisy Theatre was taken to a new level in his next play, Tinka's New Dress, a production that

brought Burkett's work to the attention of international audiences. Burkett really began to refine the intellectual content of his work with Tinka's New Dress, and subsequently came to be defined as a playwright as well as a builder and puppeteer of incomparable technical skill.

The primary works under consideration here include Tinka's New Dress (1994), Street of Blood (1998), Happy (2002), and Provenance (2003). I have chosen these particular works as the focus of my thesis for three reasons: first, Tinka's New Dress denotes the successful transition beyond local and Canadian borders to claim the attention of audiences in the international theatre market; second, these are also the first scripts to be published, first by the now-defunct River Books (Edmonton), and then by Playwrights Canada Press (Toronto)[3]; and third, from this point on Burkett's work evolves from the strictly parodic and satirical entertainment through which he established his credentials as a theatre artist to more nuanced productions that invite discussions of loss and trauma that mark the human condition. To support my project I make use of the existing literature, which consists of a portion of a chapter in Martin Morrow's Wild Theatre: The History of One Yellow Rabbit (2003), and journal articles and interviews in Puppetry International (Fall/Winter 2003), Beyond Borders (Fall 1994), and Canadian Theatre Review (Fall 1995) in order to analyze and document the development of Burkett's work. As the first full-length scholarly study of Burkett's puppet theatre productions, my project offers a substantial contribution to the field of theatre study. Each chapter focuses on a separate play, and the chapters follow one another in the same chronological order in which the plays were produced. Through the

[3] Annie Gibson, publisher at Playwrights Canada Press confirms that a new anthology of these four plays is set to be released and should be available by the end of the year (Email interview 24/07/08).

use of the play scripts, archival reviews that situate the socio-historical context of each production and provide evidence of the reception of each one, as well as interviews with Burkett and various members of the theatre community with whom he has worked[4], my analysis of these productions takes note of the narrative content as well as the performance strategies and puppetry traditions Burkett deploys, and how these are manipulated. My interest in Burkett's work stems from deep and abiding concerns regarding representations of social interaction that responds to notions of belonging and exclusion, as well as the ramifications of personal and political resistance to structures of power that threaten to foreclose subjectivity. With these preoccupations foregrounding my thinking, this project explores these more recent works in order to consider the extent to which the conscious staging of trauma in these productions, particularly in the representation of non-normative subjectivities, interrupts and estranges conventional values and ideals, and invites the audience to envision alternative modes of interacting in the world in ways that exceed the bounds of normative discourses of being and belonging.

Given the painful psychic landscapes that Burkett stages in these works, and following the thinking of Patrick Campbell that "psychoanalytic processes are endemic to the performing arts" (1), my project is framed within the theoretical discourses of psychoanalysis supported and informed by theories of performance. I have chosen this framework since the performance of human behaviour represented onstage before an audience invites a psychoanalytic reading. At the same time psychoanalysis, with its

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[4] Interviews with Iris Turcott, dramaturge at CanStage; Terri Gillis, Artistic Associate of Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes; Cathy Nosaty, composer; and Diane Goodman, Artistic Director at Alberta Theatre Projects have been invaluable. As well, archival materials, most particularly theatre reviews, have been supplied by Morag Carnie and Martin Morrow.

staged scenes–such as the Oedipal drama–and its prescribed 'roles', invites a consideration of human behaviour as theatre. I take to heart Campbell's assertion that "if performing is a process in which individuals, physically present on stage, think, speak and interact in front of other individuals, then that very activity must throw into relief crucial questions about human behaviour . . . [and] the logic of performance infuses psychoanalytic thinking, from 'acting out' hysteria to the 'family romance' of desire" (1). As an analytic tool that originates in the theories Freud developed through the close study of human behaviour reflected predominantly in the literary and dramatic arts, psychoanalysis enables a comprehensive exploration of the stories Burkett stages. The fact that these narratives are delivered through marionettes rendered in exquisitely detailed human form makes psychoanalysis especially useful to my analysis in its consideration of the ways that objects–and certainly puppets qualify in that–act as a means through which to work out responses to trauma. I make extensive use of both Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories in my readings of the plays under discussion. In conjunction with these theories I turn to the work of theatre practitioners and theorists such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, whose often conflicting approaches to theatre practice I contend can be seen at work in Burkett's staging, and resonate especially in the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the plays I examine. As well, I make use of Richard Schechner's theorization of the relationship between theatre and ritual in conjunction with notions of community, a thematic concern that recurs in all the works I explore. Finally, I also turn to the work of puppetry theorists such as Henryk Jurkowski, Scott Cutler Shersow, and Steve Tillis, whose examinations of the history and practice of the craft link my psychoanalytic and aesthetic interpretations of the plays under discussion in this thesis.

For example, in Chapter One I examine how Burkett's discovery of the history of Czech puppeteers who were detained, and in many instances killed, by the Nazis during the Second World War marks a conscious politicization in Tinka's New Dress, which was his first production to tour internationally. I explore how the moments of metatheatrical staging signal his intentional political turn, and the ways in which this staging strategy serves to implicate the audience in the political commentary offered in the play. As well, I consider how he uses humour, reformulates notions of community, and deploys theatrical alienation as tools of resistance to the repressive politics represented in the play, which features the characters of Carl, a gay puppeteer, and his sister, Tinka, who are imprisoned in a detention camp for ridiculing the ruling regime through their art practice. In performing these illegal puppet shows Carl's performances reflect Freud's contention that "by making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him" ("Jokes" 103). In this production I consider Burkett's affinity for 'camp' humour, which is a constant feature in all the works I explore, and the extent to which puppets as performing objects are particularly disposed to contravening social norms through comedy. While neither Carl nor Tinka are spared the harsh treatment visited upon political prisoners by fascist regimes, I argue that the intent of such structures of power to erase dissident voices insofar as the camp to which they are relegated becomes its own reconfigured community of socially disenfranchised 'others'. The idea that community can and does manifest in various forms at different times and places is nowhere more evident than in the theatre. In this chapter I draw on the work of noted theatre theorist and practitioner Richard Schechner, who suggests that "[people] are using performances for a variety of purposes, including entertainment, ritual,

community-building, and socializing" (81). Focusing on this notion of making community through the highly ritualized performance of attending a production, Susan Bennett remarks that "the spectator comes to the theatre as a member of an already constituted interpretive community" (139). Not only, then, do we see how community is made and re-made in this play through the forcible 'othering' of a group of dissident individuals on the stage, but we are simultaneously reminded that, as the audience, we are, during the time of performance another kind of community. If community is established when a group of individuals comes together in common cause, such as when audience members arrive to attend a performance as Bennett suggests, I contend that Burkett reminds us of this collective connection most explicitly through the use of direct address in this production. I note how and when Burkett uses direct address in which the puppets exact a response from the audience. I suggest that such a demand not only enables the conscious recognition that the audience is a community who are 'in this together', but further operates to implicate the spectator in the scene and elicit a critical response rather than simply an emotional reaction. I argue that this strategy is similar to the alienation effect theorized by Brecht, who proposed that theatre must enable the spectator to "transform himself from general passive acceptance to a corresponding state of suspicious inquiry" (qtd. in Willett, 192). In creating such dissonance–such as when a puppet demands interaction with the audience–Burkett's use of Brechtian techniques offers the opportunity to thoughtfully consider the cultural and political ramifications of practices of 'othering' that are at the heart of this production. I suggest that Burkett consciously manipulates the dissonance created by the subject/object slippage that is inherent to puppetry to the effect that it underscores the thematic concerns of the narrative.

In his next play, Street of Blood, which is the focus of Chapter Two, the Brechtian strategy of alienation continues to manifest, particularly through the presence of the stage manager Terri Gillis, who remains visible onstage throughout the show, handing props to the puppet characters and assisting in moving set pieces while calling the cues over a headset. Paradoxically, however, since their theories are diametrically opposed in many ways, Burkett also experiments with elements of Artaudian staging strategies to propel a narrative that responds to the intensification of the AIDS crisis in Canada as a result of the tainted blood scandal. This narrative presents the painfully conflicted relationship between elderly small-town widow Edna Rural and her adopted gay son Eden following the death of Edna's husband Stanley, who died after contracting AIDS from a tainted blood transfusion. Abounding with metaphors of blood, the play challenges the normative ideologies, delivered through religious and secular institutions such as the Christian church and the family, which constitute and constrain subjectivity. In this chapter I examine how Burkett deploys an Artaudian sensibility in such a way as to demonstrate the damaging effects of the social abjection of non-normative subjects. For instance, I argue that Eden exemplifies Artaud's cruel hero when he responds to the homophobic attitudes in the small town of Turnip Corners, Alberta, by setting off bombs in local gay and lesbian businesses in order to make queer oppression visible and incite other gays and lesbian to resist the homophobic politics of 'The Prairie Revival Party'. Here I suggest that Eden's terrorist actions, which are made known through exposition rather than actual staging, recall Artaud's desire to directly confront the audience with the latent cruelties of human existence. Further, I explore how Edna's 'crisis of faith' allows for a careful consideration of how the dogmas of spiritual belief work to contain and constrain those who fail to conform to the demands of heteronormative social

interaction. Using the psychoanalytic theories of abjection–particularly those elucidated by Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler–I examine how the familial dynamics presented in this production, especially with respect to adoption, demonstrate how notions of 'difference' reflect the inherent cruelty that is Artaud's concern. Combining Kristeva's notion that abjection is a process necessary to the individuation of the subject, and Butler's insights into the ways that abjection contributes to the production and/or repudiation of social subject, I explore how Street of Blood critically examines the uses to which spiritual faith are put, and calls into question what constitutes the conventional ideals of 'family' in which the ideologies and practices of 'othering' originate in the first place. Since Burkett is a gay adopted son who has himself been on the receiving end of homophobic intolerance growing up in the Canadian prairies, I maintain that this rendering of the highly conflicted psychosocial dynamics of 'otherness', which features a disparate array of characters that range from the simple, unsophisticated members of the Turnip Corners Ladies' Orchestrale to an improbable troupe of celebrities-turned-vampires, is one of Burkett's strongest scripts precisely because it reflects a deeply personal investment in issues of subjectivity and belonging. This narrative concision and clarity of intention that makes Street of Blood such a powerful play is equally evident in Burkett's next production, Happy, which is the focus of Chapter Three.

In this chapter I demonstrate how and when Burkett employs elements of Expressionist staging techniques in a play that dramatizes the psychoanalytic processes of mourning and memory. This play emerges out of Burkett's experience of double loss when a friend committed suicide in the aftermath of her husband's death. Returning to his preoccupation with self/other relations and notions of belonging that inform the constitution of the subject, in Happy Burkett presents another community of misfits,

each of whom struggles to cope with the loss of a loved one. Beginning with the unexpected death of Carla's young husband Drew, the play follows his youthful widow's grieving process, exploring and then challenging the conventionally accepted five stages of grief first proposed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in 1969. Burkett's set design uses a rotating cabinet to distinguish between the rooming house inhabited by this community of characters and the psychic space of Carla's unconscious in which her grieving processes are enacted, which manifests as the Gray Cabaret. I argue that this design, with its sharp contrast between neutral tones and the colourful effects of lighting, evokes the sensibility of the German Expressionist dramas of the early-twentieth century that sought to express, rather than merely represent, subjective experience through "the artistic synthesis of life's tragic contradictions" (Kuhns 12). I contend that Burkett's use of elements of Expressionist staging in which Carla's experience of grief is enacted compel a psychoanalytic interpretation of the processes of mourning that we witness. Turning to Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia, I consider how this production enacts the complex ways in which we navigate the anxious and often overwhelming terrain of loss. I argue that Burkett complicates and challenges the conventional wisdom of Kubler-Ross' formula, and considers how memory operates as an imaginative means of encountering mourning and negotiating loss. Central to my argument is the contention that the self/other relations that ground the subject compel a fear of a loss of self when the 'other' is lost to us. In this play Burkett presents characters who attempt, with varying degrees of success, to overcome this fear, particularly through the use of memory. While Carla is unable to overcome this fear and opts to commit suicide, overwhelmed as she is by fragmented memories that only remind her of Drew's absence, the title character Happy, an elderly arm-chair philosopher who is no stranger to the

grief of personal loss, tells us that Raymond and Ricky, for example, have employed memory as a means of disavowing, or denying, loss, keeping their loved 'others' present through this imaginative means. The result of what can only be regarded as a melancholic response to grief is that Raymond and Ricky are unable to move beyond the pain of loss. Both characters employ memory as a means of reconfiguring an imaginary present in which their lost 'others' move through the play as uncanny figures–that is, figures who are simultaneously present and absent, familiar and unfamiliar. I explore Freudian and post-Freudian notions of the uncanny as they manifests in this play in relation to the processes of mourning and melancholia, and consider the correlation between the uncanny and the abject that Burkett's production stages. For Kristeva, "the corpse . . . is the utmost of abjection" (4). Carla's suicidal solution to her grief bears witness to Kristeva's contention that the abject is "imaginary uncanniness and real threat [that] beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (4). While puppets by their nature as performing objects register at the level of the uncanny, I note in this chapter how this uncanny presence disrupts the distinction between subjects and objects and reveals that the divide between self/other is a necessarily and permanently unstable one. In consciously manipulating his puppet characters to address the deeply personal and difficult negotiations of mourning that are so often repressed in North American culture, Burkett makes the best use of his talents as a puppeteer and playwright in Happy. What makes this play so powerful is its invocation of such primal responses to the painful and simultaneously productive psychic landscapes of grief and loss.

While Happy emerges from Burkett's own traumatic encounter with loss, his next play, Provenance, is a less emotionally invested examination of how notions of beauty are used and misused. In this production Burkett brings past and present together

through the characters of Leda, the eccentric madam of a Viennese brothel; Herschel Flechtheim, an elderly patron of the brothel; plain Pity Beane, an Art History graduate student drop-out who has come to Vienna in search of a painting that has been the object of her desire since the age of thirteen; and a young soldier, Tender, the subject of the painting who was raped and left to die near a French battlefield during the First World War. The painting, which is executed in a blend of Art Nouveau and Symbolist styles, connects the past and present of the narrative, in which the romanticization of war and the ideology of 'heroic masculinity' are marked by a Symbolist intention to beautify a harsh reality. Whereas the press release suggests that "Provenance explores beauty: our obsession with it, our fantasies about it, our addiction to it and our ownership of it" (John Lambert & Assoc., Inc.), I argue that, through its discussion of beauty, this production actually challenges the normative social construction of masculinities reinforced by militarist ideologies, which promote homophobic violence. To support my argument I provide extensive historicization of the inter-war period reinforced in the play's memory scenes, in conjunction with Freud's psychoanalytic studies of war and aggression, which support this history and set the tone of these scenes. Further, I argue that these historical and psychoanalytic underpinnings link directly to the contemporary context of the U.S.-Iraq war in which Burkett writes the play. While Burkett never overtly connects these wars in the play, I draw upon social histories of the First World War and the U.S.-Iraq conflict to illustrate a connection between militarist ideologies, masculinity and homophobia. I argue that Freud's observation that "civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration" (Civilization 69) not only marks the historical past reflected in the play, but echoes the sentiments of the contemporary moment in which the play is produced. Although it lacks the conscious political

commentary of previous productions like Tinka's New Dress and Street of Blood, this play is especially powerful in the moments when Burkett directly engages with issues of homophobia with which he is much more personally invested. Indeed, Burkett's strongest works–which I contend, within the scope of my study, are Street of Blood and Happy–reflect the artist's deepest engagement with certain thematic concerns that reappear in all four plays that are the focus of my project.

For instance, as a gay performer, Burkett consistently inserts a queer aesthetic, along with the sustained critique of the normative cultural values that foreclose the subjectivities of non-normative 'others' in each of these four productions. For example, in Tinka's New Dress the characters of the gay puppeteer, the radical lesbian poet, and the drag queen are 'disappeared' by the ruling fascist regime; in Street of Blood a homophobic cultural response to the spectre of AIDS is a focal point of the production; in Happy, which has a gay couple in its ensemble cast, the show ends with a wash of light that bathes the stage in the rainbow colours that signify gay pride; and in Provenance the protagonist, Pity Beane, relates the homophobic violence that is visited upon her directly as a result of growing up in a gay household. However, rather than being categorized as 'gay plays' in the same way as works of other Canadian playwrights–notably Brad Fraser, Daniel McIvor, and Sky Gilbert–Burkett's productions are infused with a queer presence that registers the effects and processes of social 'othering' commonly put into practice to constrain and contain non-conformist subjects of many stripes. The disavowal of the queer subject is not privileged, but rather linked to the politics and practices of abjection that refuse the presence of a variety of 'others'. In narratives that challenge the social practices of disavowing the 'other', Burkett's plays

also routinely present reconfigured communities in which non-conformist, misfit characters are recuperated from the margins of sociality.

While I explore Burkett's reformulation of community at length in my examination of Tinka's New Dress, it should be noted here that this theme reoccurs in all the works studied in this thesis. The idea of community, which speaks directly to notions of subjectivity that promote a sense of belonging, figures prominently in all these plays. For instance, in Street of Blood Burkett foregrounds a discussion of what comprises a family–which is itself a microcosm of the larger social community–through the lens of adoption. Towards the end of the play Edna remarks that "family isn't always about blood" (76), indicating that family–and community–can extend beyond conventional definitions. The setting for Happy is a rooming house that is home to the colourfully eccentric and charmingly odd neighbours who share their struggles with the processes of grief and mourning. In Provenance the action predominantly takes place inside the walls of a Viennese brothel, which is itself another community of misfits. In a world that would never accept an elderly Jewish man's love for an aging black whore, Herschel tells Pity that, for him, the house is a refuge (33). Further, these plays are also thematically linked not only in their recasting of notions of community and critiques of the politics and practices of 'othering' and disavowal, but also through considerations of how the self/other relations that contribute to the constitution of the social subject are reinforced through the operations of memory.

While all four of the productions in question reflect on the importance of remembrance in which the past is implicated in the dynamics of psychosocial relations, the publication of the first three scripts as volumes of 'The Memory Dress Trilogy' consciously acknowledges the role of memory in these plays. Ironically, and perhaps

necessarily, this acknowledgement only came in hindsight when these plays had been written and were transitioning to become part of Burkett's production history. As he notes in "at the beginning of working on Happy, I realised that . . . all three plays were of a time in my discussion(s) with an audience about memory, the Holocaust certainly, about family and loss. So it was only on the third play that it became a trilogy. Not a beginning intention, but rather, an understanding near the end" (Email interview 2008). As plays that commemorate the past in ways that signal both the personal and collective dimensions of memory, Burkett notes that "Tinka is a memory of a time I never knew. Street of Blood is about characters who won't face the past and can't go forward. And Happy is about a lot of characters who live only in the past" (qtd. in Matwychuk, "Life of the Marionettes"). Together, the plays of 'The Memory Dress Trilogy' demonstrate the importance of recovering our overlapping cultural and personal histories, encourage us to speak of the losses often associated with remembering, and serve as a warning against remaining caught in the past. Although Provenance was first produced after the publication of the trilogy, it continues to reflect a preoccupation with the role of memory as a central feature of human interrelations, given that the term itself is a reference to the history of ownership of an art object. In fact, in all four plays a symbolic object overtly signifies the connection between past and present. In each of the trilogy plays, for example, a dress is employed as a memory object that simultaneously evokes joy and trauma, both of which are then witnessed as constitutive of subjectivity and identity. In Tinka's New Dress remembrance of the atrocities of the Nazi regime is foregrounded through the legacy of a dress given to Tinka by her benefactor. In Street of Blood it is a wedding dress that recalls traumas of loss in the past for Edna, Eden and Esmé. In Happy it is Lucille's discarded dress that keeps Raymond bound to a memory of the past

that prevents him from living in the present. Similarly, the painting of Tender in Provenance is the object that brings past and present together, signalling a connection between ideals of heroic masculinity circulating within the contexts of the First World War and the U.S.-Iraq conflict. Not only do the dresses and the painting become catalysts that compel us to consider and reconsider personal and collective social histories that inform the constitution of social subjects, but they also connect the characters onstage to one another, as well as to the audience through acts of memorialization. As Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey note in their study of the functions of memory in material culture, "the strains of memory are twofold: they are generated in desired attempts to regain what is irrecuperable and they also emerge with the unsought material insistence of loss" (126). Thus, in their relation remembrance and loss, the dresses and painting function simultaneously as fetish objects for the characters within these narratives, much as the puppets themselves do in their relationship to the audience.

As fetish objects, Burkett's puppets stand in as 'things' through which to negotiate the psychic terrains of loss and longing. In her insightful reinterpretation of Freud's reductive assertion that "the fetish is a substitute for the penis" ("Fetishism" 351), E.L. McCallum suggests that "fetishism is, at heart, a hermeneutic strategy, one which aims to interpret the world by negotiating the difference between self and other" (xvi). In narratives that stage the contested social interactions of self and 'other' that recall subject/object relations, Burkett's plays function to "shrink the world in order to examine it" (Burkett, personal interview 2004). While I focus my discussion of how these relations are troubled specifically in my analysis of Happy, I return throughout my thesis to the consideration of how and when Burkett's puppet characters exemplify a

subject/object aspect of fetishism that "although it involves ambivalence, indeterminacy, contradiction, it remains reassuring or satisfying" (McCallum xvi).

Since he first presented his work on international stages in 1994, Burkett's puppet theatre has continued to attract the attention of 'serious' theatre patrons who have encountered puppetry that explores very adult and often traumatic themes like sexual violence, homophobia, political repression, and the pain of loss and death. It is my contention that Burkett's work resonates so profoundly among audiences and critics largely because these deeply troubling themes are mediated by the presence of puppets. In their association with a time of childhood when play and performance are routinely employed as strategies for exploring and making sense of the world, puppets predispose the audience to engage with the traumatic narratives Burkett presents in miniature before them in which violent and cruel acts of rape, murder, child abuse, racism, misogyny, and homophobia are encountered. I argue that it is the very status of the puppet 'performers' as inanimate objects–like the dolls employed in the role-playing games of childhood–that enables an adult audience to engage with the horrific scenes of physical and emotional violence being staged. In his comprehensive study of puppetry aesthetics, Steve Tillis notes that "although many audiences for puppetry are far removed from playing with dolls, all such audiences have some notion, however attenuated, of the life-giving and controlling power of childhood fantasy" (53). Following Tillis' reasoning that if puppets enable an adult audience the youthful fantasy of control and power over the psychic fears of pain and loss that originate in the time of childhood when we are most vulnerable, I contend that, in part, these traumatic narratives are made bearable through the technical brilliance and continual innovation of Burkett's puppetry practice. With the 'old boys' gone, Burkett continues to experiment with and refine his craft,

sharing knowledge and vision with another community of puppeteers who have become peers.

He has retained a close relationship with master puppet builder Noreen Young, who won the Order of Canada in 1995 for her work in the field of children's television, and is most well-remembered for her CBC show 'Under the Umbrella Tree', which aired from 1986-1993 ("Noreen Young's Biography"). She established the annual Puppets Up! festival in Almonte, Ontario, in 2005. As part of the evening cabaret performance at the festival in August, 2007, Burkett and his partner, jazz musician John Alcorn, turned up to perform a musical tribute (sans puppets!) to Young. He also maintains a long-standing friendship and working relationship with Canadian puppeteer Luman Coad, whose extensive list of credits includes working as a puppeteer on the enormously successful 1999 film "Being John Malkovich". In all the plays examined in this thesis Coad is credited with the building of the marionette controls. Burkett and Coad have worked together on all the plays under discussion here, inventing new marionette controls such as a special ball-and-socket joint used in Tinka's New Dress and a neck joint for the marionettes in Happy that allowed the characters to "look up and swivel" (Nicholls, "Everybody Get Happy").

Under the hand of such a master manipulator of puppets and marionettes audiences willingly suspend disbelief and accept Burkett's invitation to "get in the car to Weirdsville" (Personal interview 2004). Burkett compels the audience to work in collusion with the puppeteer to breathe life into the puppet bodies. Employing technical innovation and strategies of performance with which he continues to experiment, he consciously utilizes a puppetry aesthetic that destabilizes the categories of subject and object to the effect that, during the time of performance, the puppets become 'real'. In

continuing to hone the techniques with which his uncannily life-like characters come to life, Burkett is able to deliver complex narratives that allow us to engage with the traumas of loss and pain inherent to the self/other relations of sociality. The slippage of this subject/object–and by extension, self/other–split is nowhere more evident in Burkett's work than in his production Provenance, in which the audience is instructed in semi-darkness at the top of the show to "follow my voice" (5). In this instance "the autonomous voice, whether it is the voice of a god, or a spirit, or the more abstract trope of the voice of the spirit, or of nature, derives its power from its ambivalence, from the fact that the voice separated from its source is an object of perception which has gathered to itself the powers of a subject" (Connor 83). Thus, the disembodied voice re-embodied in the figure of the uncanny fetish object–that is, the puppet–signals an ambivalence that suggests not only the impossibility of constituting stable and discrete subjects and objects, but also marks a potential for making, unmaking, and remaking a myriad of subject positions within the realm of sociality. Beginning with an analysis of Tinka's New Dress this project explores how Burkett's theatre art enacts "the personal contribution to the ever-continuing conversation about life" (Provenance 15). The conversations compelled by Burkett's work invite the audience to expand the cultural imagination and transform the normative ideals that found the subject within a social realm that extends beyond the performance stage.

Chapter 1

Comedy, Community, and the Art of Alienation in *Tinka's New Dress*

> Comedy . . . derives from situations of opposition which, instead of resolving as winner and loser, generally provoke a domino effect of losses.
> Susan Bennett
> Theatre Audiences (1997)

> In closed or structured societies, it is the marginal or "inferior" person or the "outsider" who often comes to symbolize what David Hume has called "the sentiment for humanity", which in its turn relates to the model we have termed "communitas".
> Victor Turner
> The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (1982)

> The exposition of the story and its communication by suitable means of alienation constitute the main business of the theatre.
> Bertolt Brecht
> Brecht on Theatre (1964)

Following the national success of Burkett's Gothic thriller, Awful Manors (1991), Tinka's New Dress (1994) represented, for many critics, a departure from the 'bad-boy' fare that had helped establish his credentials as an avant-garde theatre professional. Audiences used to seeing Burkett's puppets engage in bawdy humour and the endless sexual innuendo of his previous productions were confronted with, as one reviewer noted "for the first time . . . a production that nourishes the spirit as well as pleas[es] the senses" (Prokosh, "Puppeteer Explores Truth in Art"). In response to reviewers who saw this production as a change in his style, Burkett responded "no, I've found my style" (Faulkner, "Puppetry of a Penetrative Mind"). Admittedly growing tired of "singing little ditties with puppets" (Enright 12) in shows that relied solely on his wit to deliver high camp jokes, Burkett suggests that Tinka was the production in which he found his true style and voice (Morrow, Wild Theatre 320). In this production, Burkett's implementation of direct address that demands a verbal response implicates the spectator

in the performance by the breaking of the fourth wall, and cues the audience to recognize their role as a community of spectators that must actively participate in the development of his work. The camp humour and sexual innuendo for which Burkett's previous work is so notable, and which informs much of the audience's expectation of a Burkett performance are not missing in this production, but rather are employed more sparingly and strategically to deliver a full-length theatre production with a more nuanced political edge in comparison to his earlier works.

For the first time Burkett utilizes his considerable technical skill to present an overtly political narrative that considers how the recovery of cultural memory and the deployment of art practices can be utilized as tools of resistance to the politics of oppression. Using the metatheatrical convention of presenting a play-within-a-play, the production poses the questions of what is art and how it is used as a political tool to challenge the complacency of spectators in a particularly fraught cultural landscape. Recalling the social climate of Europe during the rise of fascism particularly during the reign of the Nazi party in Germany, Burkett engages in Brechtian staging strategies that rely heavily on dark humour to encourage the spectator to momentarily detach from simply identifying with the characters in the narrative in order to think critically about the relationship between art and politics they represent. Further, the audience is challenged through the demands made for their verbal response to consider the responsibility of the individual to the community, which signals Burkett's expectation for his audience to self-reflexively engage with the history and politics that circulate throughout the production. In this chapter I explore the links between Burkett's use of Epic Theatre staging techniques and the ways that these foreground a discussion of art

that is mediated through the aesthetics of puppetry, an aesthetics that descends from a historical tradition of resistance to oppression.

Recovering History

After reading that "more than a hundred skilled puppeteers and writers died under torture or in concentration camps" (Baird 172), Burkett was intrigued enough to do considerable research into this period in puppetry history. With extensive help from the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington "he began to unearth the extent and importance of these performances" (Gardner, "Nothing to Lose"). Living in Alberta at the time, and witnessing the cuts to arts funding, particularly affecting projects that might be considered politically or culturally offensive by the right-wing conservative government there, Burkett realized that the danger of doing 'subversive' art, although not nearly as extreme as the situation during the Nazi occupation of much of Europe, was still a relevant topic. To that end he staged a series of 'Daisy Theatre' plays, performances of contemporary political satire based on the idea of the original daisy plays presented in underground performances by Czech puppeteers. 'The Daisies', as they were known, were so called because "apparently a daisy can grow in the dark . . . they were underground, satirical shows that the censors didn't know about" (Burkett, qtd. in Morrow, "Burkett's Puppets"). In his own re-enactment of the artistic response of Czech puppeteers such as Josef Skupa to the socio-political conditions under which they performed–marked by his use of their terminology of the Daisy Theatre–Burkett improvised large sections of the show each night, relying on newspaper stories of the day to provide material with which to lampoon local and national politicians and policies. The Daisy Theatre was enormously popular with audiences, and out of that was born Tinka's New Dress. As a tribute to Czech puppeteers who continued to perform

illegal shows under Nazi occupation, Tinka's New Dress marks a particular historical moment of resistance to oppression through art. Without ever mentioning the term 'Holocaust', the play connotes this dark period of twentieth-century history, and stands as a reminder to spectators not to take their freedoms for granted. In spite of its serious, dark theme this production makes ample use of satiric humour to lampoon right-wing political ideologies that continue to be at the heart of artistic censorship. Burkett specifically makes use of satire as a political tool in this play that brings the audience together during the time of performance as a potentially politicized community.

Set in "a vaguely European city and an internment camp on the outskirts" (i), the events of the play could take place in any totalitarian state, although clearly the fascist politics and practices of Nazi Germany are being recalled here. Carl, a young, gay puppeteer puts himself and his sister Tinka continuously in jeopardy when he performs puppet shows that are openly critical of the ruling government, ominously titled The Common Good. While the audience is entering the auditorium even before the play begins, pre-recorded announcements from The Common Good are played sporadically over loudspeaker to insert "the omnipresence of the government" (2). Messages like "compliance is the core of civilization. Resistance to The Common Good results in chaos. Thank you for your civility. This has been a message from The Common Good" (2) set the thematic tone of the production. These disembodied addresses that resonate through the theatre space serve to implicate the spectator within the narrative even before the lights go down and the play proper begins. In fact, the audience is first cued to their role as political witnesses through the set design. As the notes on staging indicate, the set:

> *is a carousel, somewhere between human and puppet scale. There are twenty-one animals in two rows . . . The entire puppet cast, including duplicates, hang from the centre poles of each carousel figure, 'riding' on the animal. The carousel is faded, almost ghostly, painted in sepia tones like a faded photograph . . . On the front curve of stage decking, which is one foot high, are wooden cut-outs of letters reading 'JAKO SVEDEK A VARONVÁNÍ'. This is a Czech translation of 'As a witness and a Warning'.* (ii)

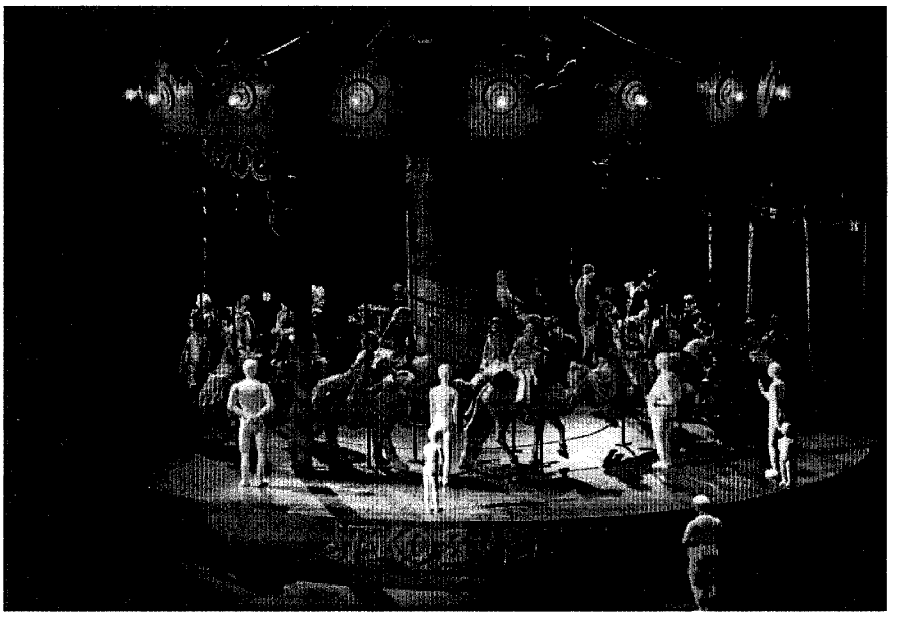

Figure 1 – Carousel from Tinka's New Dress

The carousel itself represents Burkett's personal tribute to Skupa, recalling one of his most famous puppet scripts, Carousel on Three Floors, in which life is allegorically compared to a carousel that is continuously in motion (Enright 18). Burkett's carousel revolves, and with each movement a change in scene is signalled. As Burkett notes, the animals of the carousel set the tone for the scene about to play, so "if it's an angry scene the lion or tiger will be the one that stops dead centre" (qtd. in Enright 17). As the

carousel revolves and the narrative unfolds Burkett presents the audience with a cast of characters struggling in their community to cope with the consequences of political dissent that result in death and loss. While we witness how community materializes through the experience of trauma in this production, we also encounter a community coping with the effects of fascism, including the death and disappearance of those who resist the oppressive political regime. In representing and staging the tragic effects of such loss on the community, these productions illustrate that "the peculiarity of tragedy . . . is that it emerges as a communal experience" (Kottman 92). While Burkett stages the communal experience of the consequences of repressive political regimes through a narrative that is simultaneously tragic and hilarious, the temporal communities framed within the bounds of the performance space also serve to enact an interpretive community of spectators, individuals coming together for the common purpose of experiencing the theatrical event.

Making Community

As Susan Bennett remarks, quoting noted literary theorist Stanley Fish in her comprehensive study of theatre audiences, "interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies" (40). She goes on to point out that "interpretive communities are not stable, holding privileged points of view, but represent different interpretive strategies held by different literary cultures at different times" (40). As an interpretive community, the audience attending Burkett's production–or any theatrical event, for that matter–arrive with their own culturally determined methods of creating meaning regarding the spectacle staged before them. As Bennett further suggests, theatre, more than other forms of literary production, depends upon "an interactive process, which relies on the presence of spectators to achieve its effects" (67). In theatre,

where Schechner notes, performance combines "ritualized behaviour conditioned and/or permeated by play" (52), spectators complete the communicative circuit in which meaning is made. So, while the audience may be physically removed from the action on the stage, as is the case in the production under scrutiny here, this is not to suggest that the audience is merely a group of disconnected, passive individuals isolated and distanced from the performance.

For instance, there are multiple moments in this production where spectators are encouraged to actively participate in the action through verbal response, thus implicitly connecting the audience to the performance by virtue of a hermeneutic circle of production and reception (Bennett 71). For example, Burkett employs the metatheatrical convention of presenting a play-within-a-play in which he takes the role of Carl to present the underground puppet shows that will eventually result in Tinka and Carl's deportation to the camp. In one particular exchange the audience is invited–if not bullied–to verbally interact with the onstage puppet characters. In this scene Burkett not only shapes the audience, teaching us how to engage with him and the artistic vision he is developing, but also foregrounds the very audience/actor relationship of which Bennett so convincingly writes when the overbearing character of Madame Rodrigue rehearses the audience on how to properly greet a superstar diva. The audience is variously instructed to scream with delight, nudge their neighbours, and wildly applaud her arrival on stage. The stage directions indicate that "*depending upon how well (or poorly) the audience participates, Madame will either commend them on their effort, chastise them accordingly, or single out specific culprits to stand up and do the action solo*" (31). Once the audience has executed Madame's direction sufficiently, and the applause subsides, Madame asks rhetorically, "Now don't you feel like you've gone out

for the night?!" (33). In blatantly breaking the fourth wall in this fashion, the audience is not only reminded of its importance to the success of a theatrical night out–for both themselves and the performer(s)–but in its participation in this scene, they also form a communitas; that is, a temporary community rooted in the present moment (Turner 113), coming together in a common endeavour–even if that endeavour is only to avoid being publicly ridiculed by Madame. Further, the humour of the situation serves to relieve the tension of a narrative that painfully reminds us of the historical consequences of fascism in the earlier part of the twentieth century.

In a work that presents an emotionally fraught narrative made more bearable through its use of derisive humour, this production is particularly representative of Schechner's theory of theatre that combines ritual and play. As Schechner suggests:

> Rituals are collective memories encoded into actions. Rituals also help people (and animals) deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies, and desires that trouble, exceed, or violate the norms of daily life. Play gives people a chance to temporarily experience the taboo, the excessive, and the risky. (52)

In Tinka's New Dress the audience is invited to encounter the risks of resisting the fascist politics represented in the play while joining in the rituals of theatre–a pre-determined time of gathering, the demand for cell phones to be turned off, and the audience to give their attention to the performance–that, in this case, compel remembrance. As a tribute to the Czech puppeteers who performed illegal puppet shows during the Nazi occupation, Tinka's New Dress invokes the collective memory of a violent and volatile period of social history. Simultaneously, the production introduces aspects of this cultural memory that have been disavowed–that is, refused

acknowledgement. With the discovery of Baird's assertion that so many Czech puppeteers died at the hands of the Nazis, Burkett began doing research that initially hit the proverbial brick wall. When he contacted European puppet experts asking for information to support Baird's statement, few admitted to knowing anything, and some denied the report altogether. When Burkett contacted the Holocaust Museum in Washington, they became interested and began to help unearth information (Gardner, "Nothing to Lose"). It should not be at all surprising that Burkett encountered such resistance to unearthing a past that has proved so traumatic for so many from so many perspectives and experiences. For example, Burkett relates how one evening following a performance in Hannover, Germany, a woman approached him and asked when they would ever be allowed to forget this part of their national past. When Burkett responded that no one should ever forget it, the woman sighed, nodded and walked away (Interview, February 2004). This woman's uneasy reaction to the play demonstrates the conflicted response to acts of memory that take on socio-political significance. Such an anxious response recalls theatre theorist Jeannette Malkin's observation that "postmodernism is crucially bound up with agendas of remembrance and forgetting, serving, at least in part, to re-call the past from repression or from its canonized 'shape' in order to renegotiate the traumas, oppressions, and exclusions of the past" (1). While Burkett's audience member demonstrated a longing to forget a troubling national past, others have made an equally impassioned plea for remembrance. For example, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, many sought to forge a unified Germany, which for some, like the East German playwright Heiner Müller, would require an act of forgetting that would erase the experiences, and thus the subjectivities of those who had lived under the repression of the GDR. John Rouse notes in his consideration of Müller's

work within this social and political context that "the work of articulating a memory of the GDR will proceed slowly, and it will proceed against the repression of memory, the forgetfulness, of a posited unified German identity" (Heiner Müller 68). From such a perspective, Tinka's New Dress brings past and present together in a dialogue in which "the present animates, 'redeems', and also thinks about itself through the past to which it is drawn . . . By recalling the past to memory, the (repressed, often marginalized) past is saved from oblivion and becomes an extension of the present it illuminates" (Malkin 27). For theatre audiences embedded within the deeply conservative cultural climates of the 1990s in which this production was mounted, this play urges us to remember how easily the rights and privileges we take for granted can disappear, as they have in the past.

While Burkett's production intentionally does not mention the Holocaust and its history, critics noted such details as a mood that evoked a "Weimar-like republic" (Gates, "Life is a Carousel"), and "Czechoslovakia under the Nazis" (Feingold, "Puppet States"). Significantly, others commented on how the play made many spectators aware for the first time of a history in which Czech puppeteers "used puppet theatre as a subversive tool of resistance to Nazi occupation" (Thompson, "Potent Morality Tale"). And as the appreciative reviews and the long list of awards this play garnered demonstrate[5], Burkett's audience was thoroughly enmeshed in the process of remembering the troubling political history out of which the play emerges. As Malkin reminds us "theatre is the art of repetition, of memorized and reiterated texts and gestures . . . [and] also depends on the memoried attentiveness of its audience with whose memory (and memories) it is always in dialogue" (3). One of the primary means

[5] See Appendix for a list of awards Burkett's productions have received.

through which memory is evoked is through a connection to objects–most particularly in this play through the dress referred to in the title.

Mid-way through the play, wealthy arts patron Mrs. Van Craig, whose open defiance of the policies of the ruling administration culminates in her own detention in the camp to which Tinka and her brother are forcibly relocated, gives Tinka a beautiful gown to be remade and worn at a gala party she is to host in direct contravention of the newly enacted law against public gatherings.

Figure 2 – Tinka and Dress

Here, the dress functions as a memorial object, passed to Tinka–and metaphorically to the audience. Hallam and Hockey suggest that "objects serving the practice of memory in the past are, in the context of the present, a resource for reinterpretation of history" (9). As a memorial to a troubled and troubling history that has informed much of twentieth-century social and political thought, Tinka's New Dress employs this particular dress as an object transformed and invested with meaning in the present

through its relationship to the past. Thus, while the dress signals Tinka's inheritance of a memoried object from her benefactor, it also metaphorically represents a legacy to the audience, an inheritance of a memory whose function is to prevent our forgetting a distressing past that has culminated in the 'disappearance' of millions under the Nazis and other fascist regimes.

Thus, as the play self-consciously comments on the constitutive mechanisms of memory in relation to the social subject, it also produces memories for the audience. As Malkin has remarked "theatrical performance . . . leaves its trace only in the memory of the participating viewer" (12). Thus, the audience is directly implicated in the processes of memory that form part of the narrative being staged. Memory becomes an ever-expanding field in which representation is linked to objects of memory–in this case, the dress–and performed by characters that are themselves objects; that is to say, puppets, momentarily invested with life during the time of performance. Objects mediate our relationship to memory, and to the histories to which memories, both personal and cultural, attach. In their capacity as memory objects, the dress, and indeed puppets in general, are overlaid with meaning outside their status as 'things' that function as E.L. McCallum suggests to "condense social narratives" (139). Not only is the narrative condensed, then, but it simultaneously expands to include perspectives of historical memory attending to those social narratives, like the fraught political history of Czech puppetry, that often remain on the margins.

While the audience is reminded of the transgressive politics of social resistance and implicated in the action in their role as a community of witnesses, they are also confronted with the subversive humour that links to transgression, and for which puppets are so well adapted. For example, when Carl is about to debut his politically dissident

puppet show at the 'underground' cabaret, The Penis Flytrap, the host Morag advises him to "make the bastards laugh. That way they won't know you've said anything important until it's too late" (15). Given that we, as the audience witnessing this exchange are the same audience within the mise-en-abyme, the joke is on us since we are implicated in the scene as the ignorant 'bastards' to whom Morag refers. Although the humour may momentarily create a distance for the audience from any political content, it also cues the play's intent of generating subversive cultural meaning covertly. The humour here draws upon a long history of political resistance through comedy in puppet theatre. Burkett notes "the only continual thread throughout puppet history is that when it's been good, it has always been satire, and it has always gotten puppeteers into trouble" (qtd. in Enright 18).

One such example related in 1923 by Russian folklorist and linguist Pyotr Bogatyrev tells of the response of Czech folk puppeteer Matej Kopecký (1775–1847) to the Habsburg authorities occupying the region that would officially become Czechoslovakia in1918. Kopecký, whose Czech nationalist sentiments were widely known, apprenticed as a puppeteer with his father, and is venerated as the most famous of Czech puppeteers of this period, according to Lenka Saldova, curator of the puppet museum in Prachatice (Willoughby, "History of Czech Puppet Theatre Recalled"). During the Habsburg occupation the use of the Czech language was made illegal, so when Kopecký was brought before the magistrate for staging puppet shows in Czech, his defence was that "although he could speak German his puppets did not know the language" (Bogatyrev 90). Touring the traditional puppet repertoire of classical dramas such as Faust and Don Juan from a traveling cart with his family, Kopecký, as puppet historian Henryk Jurkowski notes, was often summoned to explain himself to the

authorities. Jurkowski observes that "he refused to send his children to school; he allowed his older son to perform with his father's licence; his sons lived unmarried with young women, to the outrage of society, and he avoided sending his sons to the army" (283). So renowned was Kopecký's name that other famous Czech nationals, like composer Antonin Dvořák, dedicated works to him.

Unlike his famous itinerant predecessor, another legendary Czech puppeteer, Josef Skupa (1892–1957) trained as a student at the Artistic-Industrial School and soon after graduating he began working with puppets at the Municipal Theatre in Pilsen. In the beginning of his career he dedicated much of his energy to modifying the traditional figure of Kaspárek, a Czech version of the English Punch character, which, of course, originated from the commedia dell'arte character Pulcinella in seventeenth-century Italy. After numerous attempts, Skupa realized he needed a totally new character to accommodate modern sensibilities and in1920 he introduced the figure of Spejbl. In this inter-war period Skupa strove to create a comic character unlike the caricature of the slow-witted, long-suffering peasant that was the common stock figure. Of his creation, he says "I wanted to create another kind of character, also comical but in a nicer way (after all we needed laughter at that time as much as we needed salt). I wanted to create a type who would be a synthesis or caricature of *all* human foibles and foolishness" (qtd. in Jurkowski 94, emphasis in the original). While Spejbl won the praise of many, it was not until the creation of Hurvínek–who the public decided must be Spejbl's son–that Skupa's work gained the reputation that would bring him the unwanted attention of the authorities during the Nazi occupation of the Second World War. Together these comic characters represented, on the one hand, the uncompromising ideals of youth, and on the other, an unquestioning respect for authority. As Skupa declared of his creations, "I put

all I hold dear into Hurvínek and everything I despise into Spejbl" (qtd. in Jurkowski 95). With the occupation of their lands, Czech cultural freedoms were severely reduced. The disjuncture between Czech loyalists and those aligning themselves with the occupying powers created an atmosphere of fear to the point where an article appeared in the journal Prague Voice that castigated Hurvínek and Spejbl in the following terms: "There is no more exact caricature of the degenerate Jewish mongrel than these two idiotic figures, spreading abroad the vainglory of their despicable blood" (qtd. in Jurkowski 175). Increased censorship finally made any theatre work almost impossible, and in 1944 Skupa was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp in Dresden (Jurkowski 175). During the allied fire-bombing of Dresden in February 1945, Skupa escaped, and later that year established the Spejbl and Hurvínek Theatre in Prague, which continues to operate on the same site today (Spejbl and Hurvínek). Born in the same year in which Skupa died, Burkett's fascination with this revered icon of Czech puppetry provides the impetus for this play.

Like Kopecký and Skupa, we see Carl, the young puppeteer in Tinka, use his craft to illegally perform puppet shows that are openly critical of the ruling regime. Despite the fact that his mentor Stephan tries to warn Carl that "it's not your soapbox. It's just a puppet stage" (6), he continues to perform at the illegal cabaret. Unlike his rival Fipsi, Stephan's other protégé, Carl refuses to use what he has learned in the service of the clearly fascist state. In a heated exchanged between the two where Fipsi tries to talk Carl out of performing at the cabaret because it's dangerous and "it's not going to give you any sort of a career", Carl responds that art is not a vocation but a discussion "of the sacred versus the profane" (15-16). The dark ideological underpinnings of the play are insinuated as their exchange escalates:

FIPSI. Please, Carl, I beg of you, don't do this. Don't go in there. Not with these people.

CARL. Fipsi, these are my people.

FIPSI. What? Outcasts and perverts and queers?

CARL. Come on Fipsi, you know that I'm...

FIPSI. Yes, I know you're...different. But Carl, you're a decent one. You fit in . . . (*he turns to walk* away) They'll stop you, Carl. Any way they can, they will stop you.

CARL. What's to lose, Fipsi? Like you said, I'm different. In their eyes I'm already dead. (16-17)

Eventually Carl is deported to the camp along with Tinka, while Fipsi goes on to become a State Artist, producing propaganda, and remaining 'safe'.

Despite their confinement, the cabaret performers continue to put on illegal shows, which the play suggests are probably similar to the ones for which they were confined to the camp in the first place. The cabaret performances within the confines of the camp recall the history of Nazi camps where, as Peter Jelavich has extensively chronicled in his study Berlin Cabaret, and Eileen Blumenthal has noted in her rigorous study, Puppetry: A World History (195), Jewish and politically dissident cabaret performers produced shows–most particularly at Westerbork (Holland) and Theresienstadt (Czechoslovakia)–for other inmates as well as their captors on a regular basis. And although Carl ultimately disappears, and Tinka tells us he is dead, the outcast community in and for which he has performed continues to wield political resistance, if only by the very fact of its survival. At the end of the play, after Carl has been murdered, Tinka is reunited with their mentor Stephan and their patron Mrs. Van Craig, who have

both been relegated to the camp. Despite the fact that their audience has been severely depleted and many of their friends, including Hettie and Morag, have been 'disappeared', Stephan, drawing upon Carl's belief in the power of art, insists that the puppet show must continue. I contend that the social and political refusal of erasure that manifests in Stephan's resolution to continue the tradition of political puppetry that Carl adamantly espouses illustrates the Foucauldian argument that power and resistance are always simultaneously present (History of Sexuality 95). Within this dynamic of shifting power relations–a dynamic that also applies to the relations of self and 'other'–the twin lens of death and loss is what founds the community.

Associated as they are with folk traditions and low comedy, puppets provide an exemplary vehicle through which to demonstrate how anthropologist Victor Turner's theorizations of communitas and French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of community operate in the broader theatre experience, and within this production in particular. As Nancy has noted in his study The Inoperative Community, "loss is constitutive of community itself" (12). Nancy further contends that "death is indissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself" (14). Following the thinking of Bataille, Freud, and Heidegger during the anxiously fraught inter-war period of the early twentieth century, Nancy proposes the impossibility of community except as it is "revealed in the death of others" (15). Only in the death of others, then, can the subject ironically understand his or her own sense of being and belonging, as well as the limits to which beingness must adhere. For, as Nancy suggests:

> Community is given to us with being and as being, well in advance of all our projects, desires, and undertakings . . . Only the fascist masses tend to annihilate community in the delirium of an incarnated communion.

> Symmetrically, the concentration camp–and the extermination camp, the camp of exterminating concentration–is in essence the will to destroy community . . . Consequently, community is transcendence: but "transcendence" which no longer has any "sacred" meaning, signifying precisely a resistance to immanence (resistance to the communion of everyone or to the exclusive passion of one or several: to all the forms and all the violences of subjectivity). (35)

According to Nancy, community is not something that can be created as a defensible structure, but something that simply is, a social entity constantly in flux. Thus, the marginalized community of the camp represented in Burkett's production presents a temporal and amorphous unit that not only refuses complete social erasure, but simultaneously draws the audience into its own liminal community through a poignant narrative of not only death and loss, but also resistance. In its representation of the effects of social and political oppression, Tinka's New Dress enacts the historical truth of Nancy's observation that "political or collective enterprises dominated by a will to absolute immanence have as their truth the truth of death" since, as the history of Nazi Germany has borne out, the very urge for a 'pure' community ultimately resulted in the destruction of the governing regime that sought to exterminate its 'others'. What the Nazis failed to realize, and Nancy articulates, is that "community is that singular ontological order in which the other and the same are alike" (34). The fear, then, of the 'other', the outsider, revolves–like the carousel–around a fear that the stranger residing at the liminal margins of sociality is no different from those in the dominant cultural

group[6]. As Turner reminds us, the liminal is a blend of "lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship", which "implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (96–97).

Theatre theorist Susan Bennett points out in her application of Turner's theories of social performance that theatre performances are purposefully structured events "which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known 'world'" (105). Puppets are uniquely positioned to offer just such a pointed social critique of the culture, given their ability to say and do things onstage that exceed what is generally acceptable in a human actor. In his extensive study of the aesthetics of puppetry, Steve Tillis notes "the puppet is especially capable of pointing out the foibles, on every level, of humankind" (Aesthetics 36). In Tinka's New Dress the puppets satirize the political landscape in which repressive regimes exist and, at least for a time, flourish. A prime example of this is during Carl's performance of his puppet show in the underground cabaret in the camp. As Carl, Burkett performs the puppet-show-within-a-puppet show featuring the characters of Franz and Schnitzel, who bear a striking resemblance to Skupa's puppets Spejbl and Hurvínek[7]. When naïve, elfin-like Schnitzel comments that his place has always been on stage left, cynical, self-serving Franz responds acidly "yeah, well no one stands on the left anymore" (21). In the marginalized community of outsiders staged before us, we are confronted with the reality that if we, the audience,

[6] Here we might recall Shakespeare's memorable character, Shylock, whose impassioned speech in which he asks "Hath not a Jew eyes?" (Merchant of Venice 3.1) places the accent on the similarities rather than the differences between Jews and Christians.

[7] Because the cabaret scenes in which Franz, Schnitzel and Madame Rodrigue were improvised in performance to include political topics of the day, the published play text does not accurately convey the political content Burkett intended.

are not prepared to take a political stand, then we must bear some of the responsibility for the inevitable erosion of human rights that often leads to the death and disappearance of dissidents like Carl, Hettie, and Morag. If we take to heart Nancy's contention that community is forged through loss and death, then Burkett's production becomes all the more remarkable in that it not only stages such a trauma, but it also confronts the audience with our own collective responsibility and brings us into communion with characters that, by their very nature as puppets, are dead, bereft of being before and after the time of performance. Thus, during the time of performance the audience becomes a community–or communitas, as Turner would have it–that "breaks through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority" (Turner 128). In the liminal space of the theatre auditorium–removed briefly from the outside 'real' world–the audience comes in contact with the marginal community of disenfranchised 'others'.

Within the confines of the camp the socially disenfranchised come together to form a community of abject 'others' through a reconstituted process of subject formation that relies on the mechanisms of interpellation and recognition noted by Althusser, who proposes that the individual is constituted as a subject when he or she is hailed by another and responds to the address (163). In what he terms his "theoretical theatre" (163), Althusser argues that the interplay that produces interpellation is governed by the ideological structures of institutions like family, state, and church in a seemingly paradoxical condition in which "*individuals are always-already subjects*" (164, emphasis in original). Following and expanding upon Althusser's theory of subject formation by reading it through J.L. Austin's speech act theory, Judith Butler contends that the subject is always a *social* subject, constituted through recognition generated in a

performative speech act. Butler asserts that in performative acts in which speech enacts the thing it designates, in this case the individual subject:

> the 'I' only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated, to use the Althusserian term, and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the 'I' . . . paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition *precedes and conditions* the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject. (Bodies 225-226, emphasis in original)

Butler goes on to suggest that the subject can never fully inhabit one's social identity, making the category of the subject incomplete and unstable (Bodies 226). Thus, as Carl's subjectivity within the dominant social realm is eroded when he speaks against The Common Good, his social subjectivity is not erased, but becomes recognized by a different social order marked by its otherness. He becomes a member of the outcast community when he is invited by Morag to perform his subversive puppet show at the underground cabaret, and is subsequently welcomed into the fold of anti-social subjects following his performance. As Hettie the radical poet tells Carl "you're in honey. You became a card-carrying member of the outcasts the minute you stood on that stage tonight and opened your mouth" (43). So, although Carl and Tinka are disavowed as subjects of mainstream sociality, they retain subjectivity of another register as members of the camp community.

Similarly, these processes by which the social subject is constituted are witnessed in the relational dynamic between the audience and the 'performers' within the space of the theatre. In several scenes in which the fourth wall is ruptured when the puppet characters on the stage address the audience directly, and demand a verbal

response in return, not only does the audience become a temporary community through their presence as spectators, but this communal experience extends to include the puppet actors through the direct address. The interpellative moments between audience and puppets are staged in such a way as to invite the audience to connect directly with the puppets–and by extension, with Burkett whose critical social commentary is delivered through them.

While the scene with Madame Rodrigue previously discussed utilizes bullying tactics to compel the audience's communal response, another scene, in which Schnitzel directly engages the audience uses a very different strategy–one that specifically invites the connection of the audience to the puppet figure. During this scene, Schnitzel, described as an "elf-like child", nervously and shyly announces his love for the members of the audience before prompting them with, "well, don't feel you have to say it back or anything" (90). As the script notes indicate "to date, there has been only one audience wherein no one has yelled back 'I love you too.' Usually many, several, or just one brave soul will blurt out their affection for Schnitzel" (90). This scene allows the audience to return to a time of psychic attachment–as in childhood–wherein traversing the realm of the fantastic allows for the displacement of desire onto dolls and puppets in order to negotiate a connection with the world[8]. While I address this 'uncanny' aspect of the audience relationship to the puppet in more detail in Chapter 3, suffice it to say for now that Schnitzel's direct address interpellates the audience and invites them to identify with the character at the threshold between fantasy and 'reality' that is marked by the

[8] The reinforcement of the audience's attachment to the characters serves the dual purpose of expanding the horizon of expectations specific to the direction and development of Burkett's work as a theatre artist and relies on such attachment to enable a commitment to future productions.

theatre space. It must be noted, however, that Burkett does not allow our identification with Schnitzel's puppet character to go unquestioned.

'Alienating' the Audience

In response to Schnitzel's 'bonding moment' with the audience, Franz, described in the stage directions as a "grotesque psycho clown" (i) returns to the stage and caustically reminds Schnitzel that he's 'only' a puppet, and therefore by definition cannot engage in human emotion and interaction. When Franz orders Schnitzel to join him downstage, Schnitzel who is clad in a nightshirt for this scene, dragging a teddy bear with him, asks if he can bring his bear, to which Franz replies "Well he's sewn to your fucking hand, I guess you'd have to!" (91). Thus, the audience is confronted with the fact that we have accepted Schnitzel as a 'live' character, and serves to remind us of the theatrical illusion.

Figure 3 – Franz & Schnitzel

In Brechtian terms that call for the audience to be estranged or alienated from the scene, we are refused the complacency of simple entertainment here, the escapist moment of

complete identification with the character. Rather, our attention is diverted from the characters and drawn to the mechanism of theatricality–in this case a puppet–a move that reminds us that, although we are an audience of sophisticated adults, we have nevertheless been taken in–perhaps even consciously–by the 'cuteness' of Schnitzel, whose only dream is to transcend the enclosed world of the theatre and fly (Tinka 23). In moving beyond the closed sphere that contains the individual subject into the realm of the social subject, our attention is thus returned to the play's focus on collective resistance and transformation in the face of political and cultural oppression. In effect, Burkett uses Franz's caustic remark to enact Brecht's notion of verfremdungseffekt, or de-familiarization, in order to compel the audience to detach from the scene and examine it critically. It is fitting that Burkett would employ Brechtian elements of Epic theatre in this production that evokes the troubled climate of Nazi politics, since, as Brecht himself notes, during the reign of the Third Reich "in Berlin, fascism put a violent end to such a theatre" (Martin & Bial 30).

As a playwright, actor, and director who trained with Edwin Piscator–the originator of the term Epic Theatre–Brecht sought to break from the Aristotelian strategies of drama, which he felt were "no longer capable of treating the complexities of modern, tumultuous Germany" (Martin & Bial 1). Emerging within the context of the rise of Hitler's Nazi regime, Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) developed what has come to be known as 'Epic Theatre' in order that "the spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences by means of simple empathy with the characters in the play)" (Willett 71). Rather than simply identify with the characters, Brecht wanted to expand the spectator's experience to include critical thinking about what was being staged. He notes that "we have to make it

possible for [the spectator] to take a critical attitude while he is in the theatre (as opposed to a subjective attitude of becoming completely 'entangled' in what is going on)" (Willett 78). To promote this critical attitude of the audience Brecht deployed the technique of alienation, which he describes as "one which allows us to recognize [the representation's] subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (Willett 192). Of the Epic Theatre, cultural theorist Walter Benjamin writes that "the art of the epic theatre consists in producing astonishment rather than empathy . . . instead of identifying with the characters, the audience should be educated to be astonished at the circumstances under which they function" (75). As Martin and Bial have noted, "influenced by his reading of Marx in the 1920s, Brecht took the view that history is fluid, negotiable, and controllable" (2). While many contemporary theatre audiences are familiar with Brechtian dramatic strategies, Burkett employs them at a different register; not so much to educate with the didacticism associated with Brecht, but to remind the audience of the need for intellectual engagement in balance with the pleasure of being entertained.

Utilizing a Brechtian episodic structure, Burkett's fable moves between the central narrative and the metatheatrical puppet show scenes. During the touring of the production, the 'puppet show' scenes were improvised, based on newspaper articles of that day. Burkett notes that "the whole point with those improvised sections is that you have to see work that's about something" (qtd. in Enright 12-13). What this improvisation does is allow the audience to consider the themes in question as they relate to their own particular cultural moment, and not just fall under the hypnotic spell of the central narrative. Like Brecht, Burkett wants the audience to focus on the political message. As he remarked in 1994 "I see the impact of the right wing on health and in

issues of sexual equality . . . I see a definite polarization in the community in which I live. And that polarization is parallel to what happened in the late 20s and 30s in Europe" (Enright 14). As well as utilizing improvisation to return the audience's attention to the issues of the day, Burkett also makes a deliberate choice to make the mechanics more visible by leaving the puppets hanging on the carousel when they were not actually in use during a scene. Going against the grain of much Western puppetry practice that dictated keeping the mechanics–and usually the puppeteer–invisible in order to reinforce the stage illusion, Burkett wants "to show the audience how those things work, to show the guts" (Enright 18). By revealing the theatrical mechanics of puppetry, Burkett retains a Brechtian dialectical approach in which the "historical determinants–the economic, political, and social factors that influence the social conditions . . . must be made recognizable as constitutive elements in the individual occurrences between human beings" (Rouse, Brecht 29). Like Brecht, who "gives the text . . . absolute priority" (Rouse, Brecht 28), Burkett is not only a puppeteer and actor, but significantly, regards himself as a playwright[9]. He has commented that "what makes me a freak in the international puppet world (is that), for most people, it's a visual form. But I'm a text-based puppeteer" (Faulkner). After admitting that much of his previous work was a forum for showing off his technical virtuosity, Burkett contends that "I've geared up my political and social opinions and I can't separate them from the work anymore" (qtd. in Enright 12). If he shows reverence for the text and the politics that inform it, however, it is just as often through an irreverent humour that serves to produce Brecht's alienation effect.

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[9] Given that he has won the Chalmers Canadian Playwright Award twice–for Old Friends (1998) and Street of Blood (1999)–it would appear that others agree.

Send in the Clowns

In their influential study of humour and comedy in puppetry, Sherzer & Sherzer remark that it is, of course, "this very nature of the puppet, its very semiotic constitution, [that] is a source of humour in the basic sense in which Freud defines it, that is, as an unexpected and incongruous juxtaposition of quite distinct entities" (48). They go on to suggest that it is the vocal characterizations of the puppeteer, which often include imitations of a variety of dialects and accents that enlarges the comic aspect of puppetry, particularly through the "copresence of upper and lower class" (48). Certainly notions of class are brought into sharp relief in Burkett's production. The characters of Franz and Schnitzel are juxtaposed to reflect the political and class-based hierarchies of the setting. Franz espouses the dominant ideology of the conservative right-wing promoted by the self-serving government, The Common Good. Conversely, Schnitzel is representative of a left-wing political will in which social change is possible and differences between people are celebrated rather than feared. Carl conflates class and political ideology in his performance of the Franz & Schnitzel Show as a means of satirizing the conservative politics of The Common Good. For example, in the scene where Franz denigrates the left, Schnitzel asks innocently "what's so great about the right?" Franz replies "There's more of us, and we're organized!" (21). When he is subsequently left to entertain the audience while Franz goes backstage to prepare the show, Schnitzel draws the audience into the scene, making a point of noting the predominantly middle-age, middle-class demographic of audiences in mainstream theatres like the National Arts Centre (Ottawa), the Barbican (London), and Canstage (Toronto), where this production toured. Addressing the audience directly, Schnitzel observes "wow, look at you. What a

sophisticated, hip, urbane, tony crowd with high disposable income you are" (23). Schnitzel then proceeds to acknowledge the expectations of such an audience:

> I know why you're here. You've come to see The Franz and Schnitzel Show! So my friends, you will have the spectacle you've paid money to see. Any minute now, I will raise the gold brocade curtain and dazzle you with the variety acts for which we have become internationally famous! Clowns, contortionists, jugglers, showgirls! Singers and dancers in an extravaganza the likes of which you've never seen! (26)

Moments later when the clownish diva figure of Madame Rodrigue makes her entrance, the audience is gently castigated. When Schnitzel points out that the audience has not properly greeted a star of Madame's stature, she responds in a stage whisper "Schnitzel, you're right. Who are these people?", to which Schnitzel replies "Bus tour? Subscribers? Americans?". With typical sardonic wit, Madame Rodrigue retorts "Ah! That explains everything!" (27). Although Schnitzel has, just moments previous, flattered the audience, we are not allowed to remain complacent consumers of middle-class privilege. This comic exchange retains the quality of satire that has within it the intention of being, as Henri Bergson has observed in his essay on laughter (71), a social corrective. The social corrective here is a reminder for the audience that middle-class entitlement does not automatically equate with intellectual sophistication. A further irony is that the audience is being mocked by a grotesquely rendered 'diva' sporting a tutu and clown makeup, the incongruous sight of which can only incite the laughter of the audience, and as Bergson notes, "there is nothing disarms us like laughter" (149).

The outrageous aspect of this clown-like diva character, which does disarm us through laughter, also prepares us for a further diatribe. When Franz returns to the stage

he explains to Schnitzel that they will no longer present "old style entertainment" (35), because that's no longer what the audience wants. Instead, he tells Schnitzel:

> **FRANZ.** They want post-modern new millennium electronic Dutch dance wank performance art.
>
> **SCHNITZEL.** Huh. What's that?
>
> **FRANZ.** No one really knows. And that the beauty of it, Schnitzel. You can present anything on stage, call it that and they'll love it.
>
> **SCHNITZEL.** I don't understand.
>
> **FRANZ.** Neither will they!
>
> **SCHNITZEL.** It doesn't sound very entertaining.
>
> **FRANZ.** Oh, it should never be entertaining, Schnitzel. See, if you give them something that's accessible, they'll call it sentimental crap. But if you give them crap that's inaccessible, they'll call it art! (35)

In this instance the values of the audience are confirmed rather than derided, since this gibe is especially aimed at critics, particularly those who accuse Burkett's work of being overly sentimental, while simultaneously praising his avant-garde deployment of puppetry as a theatre art. At the same time, the biting satire here draws a correspondence between the complacency of those patrons who unquestioningly accept the opinions of critics, the supposed 'experts', and those who bow to governmental policies without examining the potential effects of those policies. This is precisely the warning that Burkett flags throughout the production–even to the point of inscribing it on the set: we fail to have a critical eye on the cultural policies that affect us to our own peril. The barbed wit exemplifies a Brechtian sensibility that encourages the spectator to maintain a critical distance, not in order to erode our enjoyment of the spectacle, but to keep in

mind that this is a narrative concerned with how social forms of expression–particularly theatre art–are among the first to suffer the effects of oppression and censorship by repressive political regimes. Thus, the humour here serves to remind us how fragile and often fleeting are the rights and freedoms of the individual following the horrific applications Enlightenment thought, in which Horkheimer and Adorno pessimistically suggest that there is tendency for enlightened reason to self-destruct (Kearney & Rainwater 195).

Predating Horkheimer and Adorno's dire assessment of social relations, Freud, in his study of jokes, contends that humour serves as a mode of release in the face of cultural repression:

> The repressive activity of civilization brings it about that primary possibilities of enjoyment, which have now, however, been repudiated by the censorship in us, are lost to us. But to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost. (Jokes 101)

Within Freud's cultural context, as well as the performance context of Tinka's New Dress, what humour serves to retrieve–or at least point out has been lost in the first place–is the freedom of individual expression, particularly dissent. At the time that Freud was considering the function of jokes in 1905, Germany was fomenting civil and social unrest through an aggressive expansionist politics that would eventually result in war. As Michael Patterson notes "it was not that Germany was any more expansionist than the other European Great Powers; it was just that was more aggressively so . . . But the more vociferously Germany asserted its strength, as in two Moroccan crises of 1905

and 1911, the more it weakened its own position" (11). It is within this cultural landscape of anxiety and fear provoked by intense nationalism that Freud postulates that "[jokes] make possible the satisfaction of an instinct (whether lustful or hostile) in the face of an obstacle that stands in its way. They circumvent this obstacle and in that way draw pleasure from a source which the obstacle had made inaccessible" (101). For Freud, what is inaccessible is what is being repressed, and in typical Freudian logic the repressed is always linked to the sexual. Noting this, he contends that "tendentious jokes are especially favourable against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority. The joke then represents a rebellion against authority, a liberation from its pressure" (Jokes 105). As comic figures, Franz and Schnitzel in particular are well positioned as rebels against authority, much like their numerous predecessors, including Spejbl and Hurvínek, Mr. Punch, and many others. While the humour offered by these figures 'liberates' the audience momentarily from the intensity of the drama/trauma being staged, the content of the humour functions to simultaneously remind the audience of the politics of resistance at play. Much of the comedy in this play is what Freud would call tendentious, given the constant sexual innuendo delivered first by the drag queen host of the illegal cabaret, Morag, and then in a much darker tone by Franz.

For example, in the first scene in which we are introduced to the cabaret, Morag and Carl are engaged in a bit of pre-show banter that focuses entirely on the male body. The stage directions indicate that "Morag is obviously male, but dressed in a turban and an elaborate feminine dressing gown. Underneath the loosely belted gown we see men's boxer shorts and a singlet; fishnets and flat slippers" (12). The combination of this outrageous costume that flouts the conventional moral values of the play's cultural context and the dialogue, stand in stark contrast to the very serious scene just previous in

which Tinka expresses her fears about Carl's outspoken political opinions in a period when "it's not a good time to be controversial" (11). The humour partially diffuses the dark undertone of the prior scene, while at the same time it serves as a reminder of the danger homosexuals are often in when repressive regimes are in power:

> **MORAG.** Darling, there you are! Carl, what are you doing out here? You're on after my next number.
>
> *Carl looks at Morag.*
>
> **CARL.** In that?
>
> **MORAG.** Let me be the bitch, Carl. I've had far more practice.
>
> **CARL.** Shouldn't you be padding something Morag?
>
> *Morag looks at Carl's crotch.*
>
> **MORAG.** Some of us opt for a more subtle approach.
>
> **CARL.** Sorry hon, no padding there.
>
> **MORAG.** *Mon Dieu!* A genius, and he's hung! Which will bring you the greater fame, I wonder? Strange, Carl, well-endowed men usually lack ambition. They don't need it. No, ambition is for their admirers. Alas darling, it's those of us who are genitally challenged who strive so for success . . .
>
> *They embrace. Morag looks at the Officer figure, SR.*
>
> **MORAG.** Wouldn't they just love this little tableau? Mister and Mister Common Good! (12-13)

Figure 4 – Morag

With its camp sensibility that enacts the "strategies and tactics of queer parody" (Meyer 9), the humour here exemplifies Sherzer & Sherzer's contention that "puppets constantly and dangerously test the boundaries of the licit and the illicit" (4). In the thinly veiled references to gay male desire, and by extension the 'otherness' implied within a heteronormative cultural climate, the exchange between Morag and Carl prepares us for the darker comic overtones of the sexual banter that will be delivered by Franz.

In our first introduction to the Franz and Schnitzel Show[10], Franz begins the scene by describing the intoxicating smell of an audience to the naïve Schnitzel:

> **FRANZ.** It's the most beautiful smell in the world, Schnitzel! Some of them are nervous, some are excited. Some are wearing expensive perfume, others have pomade in their hair. Some of them have bathed, others have the scent of a long day on them, but it all combines into one glorious aroma, and oh Schnitzel, look what it's doing to me now!

[10] As the stage directions indicate, "this scene is improvised . . . The scripted text following is based upon a general format that has evolved through performance" (19).

Franz has begun to rock, his pelvis moving back and forth.

SCHNITZEL. No, no! Not that!

FRANZ. Yes! My diamond pants are doing their magic dance again!

I've got a woody, I've got a woody! (19-20)

Throughout the production, Franz continues to exhibit the bawdy language and gestures so often associated with puppetry. Frank Proschan notes that "sexuality, bodily functions, and obscenity provide a rich resource for comic exploitation in folk puppetry" (31). As the play becomes progressively darker in tone, which is signalled by the colour palette in both the costumes and lighting, the language of Franz becomes more suggestive–one could almost say sinister–as it draws a correlation between dominant ideologies and the debased, sexualized body. In a later scene, for example, Franz attempts to disabuse Schnitzel of the notion that the audience loves him:

FRANZ. What do you think you are to these people, Schnitzel?

SCHNITZEL. A benign comic character who embodies hope?

FRANZ. No. You're fourteen inches of fun in the dark, that's all. (92)

In this interplay between Franz and Schnitzel, the double entendre in which the diminutive puppet body on the stage is made analogous to a sex toy marks a cynical elevation of the debased sexual body and the deviant desires associated with it, and is juxtaposed against a generalized hope for humanity. In other words, what is represented here is the classic, hierarchical split between mind/body that descends from Enlightenment thought in which the debased body with its unruly sexual desires is seen as a visible symptom of a debased mind.

In their material design, the characters of Franz and Schnitzel are well disposed to challenge the distinctions between high and low culture and the social values attached

to these differences. The stage directions specify that they are "designed to look decidedly more puppet-like than the naturalistic marionettes in the dramatic body of the play" (i). With their clownish puppet-like aspects, Franz in particular and Schnitzel to a different degree, recall notions of the carnivalesque. In their important discussion of transgressive representations that includes a careful analysis of Bakhtin's theorization of the grotesque and the carnival, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White note that:

> Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a *political* imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing 'low' conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other . . . The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level. (4-5 emphasis in the original)

In their alliance with "a profane (rather than sacred) nature and structure" (Jurkowski, qtd. in Tillis, Aesthetics 27), puppets exemplify the grotesque 'other' that threatens the stability of self within the social order. The carnivalesque–to which Franz and Schnitzel gesture in physicality as well as speech–operates as a highly discordant inversion of the dominant social order. As Stallybrass and White observe "carnival gives symbolic and ritual play, and active display, to the inmixing of the subject, to the heterodox, messy, excessive and unfinished informalities of the body and social life" (183). Within the context of the play, Franz and Schnitzel, in their resemblance to carnivalesque figures incite both a fear and desire that is born of disorder. In the face of the anxious ambivalence this produces, as Freud has noted, laughter is a common reaction; one that is a response to both the comic features and underlying dark implications of the

grotesque figure (Yates 2). It should be remembered, however, that carnival is not simply or only a force of resistance to dominant structures of power as Bakhtin claims, but it has come to be a contained spectacle, a social fissure that Terry Eagleton reminds us is "a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony" (qtd in Stallybrass & White 13, emphasis in the original). Thus, the 'dark implications' of the degraded humour implicit within the language Franz uses are similarly contained and regulated within the theatrical spectacle. This, however, does not prevent Franz from once again making the audience the bitter focus of the underlying social commentary.

For instance, when Schnitzel asks why Franz has to make everything dirty when he compares Schnitzel to a sex toy, Franz responds with the following:

> Because that's what they want, Schnitzel. You think they love you? No. I'll show you what love in the theatre is about. Watch this.
>
> *He begins to rock his pelvis suggestively.*
>
> See, Schnitzel? That's what they pay for. The silly clown with his dancing pants! That's what they come to see. They don't want you. You're a freak, you're dangerous. You ask them to think and feel and care, and that's not why people go to the theatre. (92-93)

Burkett deftly treads a fine line here, challenging the audience to recognize that the bawdy, sexual humour for which he is well known doesn't have to negate the critical analysis of political repression the play simultaneously installs. As Freud notes, "tendentious jokes are especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority" (Jokes 105). He goes further to observe that the target of a joke's aggression or invective "may equally well be institutions, people in their capacity as vehicles of institutions, dogmas

of morality or religion, views of life which enjoy so much respect that objections to them can only be made under the mask of a joke and indeed a joke concealed by its façade" (108-109). Since "a puppet show is a veritable microcosmic reframing of the sociolinguistic structure of a speech community" (Sherzer & Sherzer 50), puppets present a ready-made façade through which to deliver an invective social critique.

So, while the satiric humour of the dialogues between the puppets does incite laughter that serves to disarm the audience, it bears remembering that part of our response to the puppets comes from a dissonance created by the fact that "there is another level of incongruity because the puppet's mouth is not the site of language" (Gross 111). While it is all too easy, as the numerous reviews of Burkett's work demonstrate, to lose sight of the puppeteer, it is Burkett's voice that presents the social critique of political and cultural oppression. As Dina and Joel Sherzer have noted "the fact of putting words in another's mouth, especially the mouth of an inanimate object and in a language, dialect, style, or accent distanced from one's own, seems to make puppetry a particularly appropriate form for social and political satire, especially in situations in which other means are not permissible" (61). Certainly a topic that remains as contentious as Holocaust history comes under the category of what is dangerously close to impermissible in social discourse, particularly when presented through a comic lens.

Burkett is well aware of the cultural minefield that engaging such a discussion presents. He insists that "Tinka's New Dress must not be a Holocaust piece . . . I wasn't there. It's not my direct history . . . But the puppeteer aspect of it *is* my history" (qtd. in Enright 14, emphasis in original). Burkett's comment, which supposes a lack of discursive entitlement to Holocaust history, however, is somewhat disingenuous. Given

that homosexuals were among those targeted by the Nazis for extermination, Burkett responds to notions of 'otherness' as these emerge in relation to Holocaust history as an openly gay man. Having grown up gay in rural Alberta, Burkett is no stranger to the role of the outsider, a stranger standing on the margins of the privileged realm of heteronormative culture, and remarks that "a gay Canadian puppeteer is about as much an outcast as you can get" (Gardner, "Nothing to Lose"). Thus, while the Holocaust is never discursively introduced in the play, Burkett insures that the historical memory of the persecution of homosexuals as well as the Czech's and other political dissidents is recovered.

For instance, the characters who are 'disappeared' in the play are those whose sexual politics and sexual identities are suspect within a heteronormative landscape–Carl is an openly gay puppeteer; Hettie is a radical lesbian poet; and Morag is the drag queen host of the underground cabaret who falls in love with Tinka. With respect to such sexual dissidence Jonathan Dollimore observes that:

> the displacements which constitute certain repressive discriminations are partly enabled via a proximity which, though disavowed, remains to enable a perverse return, an undoing, a transformation . . . [Further], the perverse dynamic denotes certain instabilities and contradictions with dominant structures . . . [and] signifies that fearful interconnectedness whereby the antithetical inheres within, and is partly produced by, what it opposes. (33)

In other words, that which is repudiated as 'other' by the dominant order can never be fully repressed or disavowed, since it has its origins within the social mainstream in the first instance. Framed in this way, Burkett's focus on the politics of 'othering' reflected

in the repression of disavowed desires and bodies in Tinka's New Dress serves not simply to displace normative ideologies of power, agency, and subjectivity, but functions as an instance of "transgressive reinscription" (Dollimore 33).

In recovering the marginalized history of other groups who came under the oppressive weight of Nazi fascism, this play does not do disservice to the well-known history of atrocities against the Jewish race, but rather expands the field of discussion to make it equally compelling across multiple communities of practice in a more contemporary context. Certainly, despite his adamant rejection of "becoming politically correct" (Enright 18), Burkett's trepidation about creating a play that references the Holocaust does reflect a cultural concern for what became known as 'political correctness' before the term was hijacked to serve the ends of the right-wing conservatism it was intended to protect against. While it is not my intention to explore the highly divisive debates that continue to rage regarding who has the right to speak for whom in terms of issues of cultural and political domination here, I do want to draw attention to the fact that despite the difficulties of utilizing comedy within a Holocaust context other attempts have been made with varying degrees of success.

Perhaps the most notable in the contemporary moment is the staged version of the 1968 Mel Brooks' film musical, The Producers (2001), which was so successful that it picked up 12 Tony Awards in its first year and ran for 2,502 performances on Broadway before closing in April of 2007 (Internet Broadway Database). While Brooks' and Burkett's treatment of the topic is markedly different–live actors versus puppets; the St. James Theatre venue on Broadway (over 1700 seats) versus more physically intimate Studio space at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa (250–300 seats); large ensemble cast versus solo performer–both utilize comic strategies to point to a central critique of

contemporary middle-class life in North America. Certainly, a major difference in the two productions is that Burkett's satire combines a Horation approach of mocking humanity bemusedly with a serious Juvenalian moral tone while Brooks' production remains staunchly Horatian. Both, however, employ satire to ridicule present-day, predominantly white, middle-class excess in juxtaposition to a traumatic history that arguably sprang from a similar set of ideological excesses and excessive ideologies. In his discussion of the original 1968 film version of The Producers, Andrew Stott contends that "the Holocaust acts as a grave reminder against which the self-centredness of the over-privileged modern bourgeois is made utterly risible" (121). In Tinka's New Dress, however, while the audience and critics are being ridiculed, they are simultaneously being interpellated as a "sophisticated, hip, urbane, tony crowd" (23). The packed houses to which this production played suggests audiences did not take offense when they became the aim of Burkett's wit. At the points where the audience *is* the target of the biting satire, this can be understood simply as the price of their temporary admission into what may be otherwise perceived by some audience members as a closed community.

Both Burkett and Brooks approach their productions as members of social collectives that are culturally perceived to have the privilege of speaking to the issue at hand–Burkett as member of the profession of puppetry and a gay man, and Brooks as a Jewish artist. As members of groups who are accorded access to the traumatic discourses of the Holocaust, they invite spectators to temporarily join the group in order for the underlying political discussion to take place. The simultaneous mockery and flattery of the audience presents a satirically comic moment for self-reflection, and it is precisely the comic aspect of these works that entices audiences.

Not the end, but another beginning

In the very complex social dynamics mapped out before us, the comedy incites laughter, which in turn incites the formation of this temporal community of the theatre audience. Further, the laughter also provokes in the audience–at least those who are aware that they are being held up to scrutiny–the Brechtian moment of thoughtful alienation. As Stott notes:

> Across the centuries, laughter has been variously understood as vice or cowardice, as light caused by surprise, the product of defamiliarization, a means of averting antisocial conflict, or an extra-linguistic bark signalling the limits of understanding . . . Laughter is never just fun, as in all accounts of it the human being is using laughter to serve a social, psychological, or physiological need. (127-128)

Burkett's marionettes in Tinka's New Dress provide the audience with the means to cope with the traumatic cultural history the play gestures to through laughter, while simultaneously offering an opportunity to engage critically with the contemporary values and ideologies underlying the humour. At one level, it is the very fact that Burkett's puppetry delivers its social commentary through humour that makes it so compelling. As Sherzer and Sherzer remind us "puppets offer an alternative to the serious world we live in and when satirical and socially and politically critical provide a carnivalesque letting off of steam" (62). As with Brecht's directive to the actor, Burkett presents more than one face to the audience. Brecht argued that "there's no A-effect when the actor adopts another's facial expression at the cost of erasing his own. What he should do is to show the two faces overlapping" (Messingkauf Dialogues 76). Burkett goes further, given that he presents several faces that overlap, although it should

certainly be recognized that each of the puppet faces presented are aspects of the puppeteer himself.

In relation to Tinka's New Dress Burkett admits that "the work is undeniably becoming very personal. I think people are seeing more when they come to the work– this is Ronnie's soapbox, and where Ronnie begins and where the puppets end and vice versa, is totally personal. I know now it's all me" (qtd. in Enright 13). Drawing a correlation between the increasingly conservative social policies bringing their weight to bear on moral values through the financial censorship of art in Canada in the mid-90s and the fascist politics of Nazi Germany that resulted in the horrors of the gas chambers, Burkett uses his puppets to speak critically through a historical lens to remind his audience of the price of complacency. Moving between empathy and Brechtian alienation, and as is typical of Burkett's productions, the closing scenes of the play simultaneously hold out a warning and hope.

For instance, in the final Franz and Schnitzel scene Schnitzel takes a resolute stand against Franz–and metaphorically against the acceptance Franz represents of repressive ideologies. When Schnitzel tells Franz that it's the end, Franz replies "you stupid fairy. It's not the end Schnitzel. It's just the beginning" (93). At this point the stage directions indicate that:

> *A loud police whistle is heard as a glaring search light hits Ronnie's face, beginning a rapid-fire sequence of sound and light cues. The puppet show lights snap out, and all light on the carousel and stage begins flashing. Music becomes chaotic, underscored by barking dogs and the sound of glass being shattered repeatedly.* (93-94)

Here the sound and lighting effects produce a double signification: the spotlight that focuses our attention on Burkett signals his connection as a gay artist to the history of persecution evoked by the Holocaust, while the sound cue evokes the horrors of Kristallnacht, an event that marked the intensification of the Nazi's 'final solution' for Jews and other 'undersirables' in Europe. In the scene immediately following we are returned to the camp, where we see Tinka "in the early, but obvious, stages of pregnancy" (94) as a result of her brief affair with Morag. While this moment can be readily viewed as a bit of rank sentimentality, it can also be considered as an instance of hope for the resilience of humanity against oppression as well as a pointed critique of the assumptions of heteronormative culture regarding the otherness of non-normative sexualities. Within this anxiously encumbered social landscape, Burkett uses his puppets to explore and expose how cultural disavowals of difference result in the destructive force of 'othering' that refuses the individual and fractures communities. Like Kopecký and Skupa, who constantly came under the force of political oppression for breaking the rules of social discourse with their art, Burkett creates puppets that transgress cultural ideologies of belonging and illustrate effects of the injurious politics of abjection. While Tinka's New Dress marked the beginning of Burkett's rise to international attention, it also marked a shift in his stagecraft toward the representation of a deeper political consciousness with respect to the relationship between the social subject and the 'other'. In the following chapter I consider how Burkett's next production, Street of Blood, continues to explore the psychosocial cost of political and cultural practices that enact the erasure of the individual as a social subject within the context of the AIDS crisis and the tainted blood scandal in Canada at the end of twentieth century.

Chapter 2

Walking with the 'Other' Down a *Street of Blood*

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in
blood: and his name is called The Word of God.
Revelation 19:13

The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and
thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation
bursts forth.
Julia Kristeva
Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection (1982)

If the essential theatre is like the plague, it is not
because it is contagious, but because like the plague
it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization
of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the
perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an
individual or a people, are localized.
Antonin Artaud
The Theatre and Its Double (1938)

Dedicated to Burkett's adoptive parents, Street of Blood challenges the institutionalized homophobic attitudes to the AIDS epidemic intensified by the Canadian Red Cross tainted blood scandal at the turn of the last century. Through metaphors of blood associated with the tripartite structure of family, church, and state–kinship, salvation, and sacrifice–Burkett explores how these institutions regulate individual behaviours and social practices. In a cultural landscape made anxious by the spectre of AIDS, the production installs elements of Theatre of Cruelty, including the figure of the cruel hero and the plague in order to challenge the power relations and the processes of abjection that signal a disjuncture between the individual and the social subject. It calls into question the manifestations of trauma and shame that serve to contain and constrain the non-normative subject and compel a consuming rage. In the Artaudian sense, rage presents as an infection operating at both the psychical and physical levels. The play

stages the violent effects of such rage, and includes elements of fantasy, and the bodily excesses of camp humour to mark the connection as well as the disparity between the social subject and the individual subject of psychoanalysis within the specific cultural concerns of the late twentieth century.

In the Beginning . . .

The play revolves around the intersecting lives of Edna Rural, a prairie widow; Edna's adopted gay son, Eden Urbane, who entertains patients in hospices as a karaoke singer; Esmé Massengill, a faded film star turned vampire; and Jesus Christ, played by Burkett. Near the beginning of the play Edna is startled by the news that her favourite film star from an earlier era has arrived in her small town of Turnip Corners, Alberta, and pricks her finger, bleeding on the quilt that she has been making. For Edna, the pattern created in the blood resembles the face of Christ, and as she tells the neighbour who has brought the news, "it's the Shroud of Turnip Corners" (9). From this point on Burkett appears as Jesus to Edna–and later to other characters. Edna, however, is less interested in speaking with Jesus–whom she blames for the death of her husband–than in delivering the news of Esmé's arrival to her son Eden, who now lives in the 'big city' and rarely comes home. She sends Eden a covert note, which he later reveals simply reads "Turnip Corners. Meet me there. I'm waiting. Your real mother" (6). Edna knows that this news will compel him to return home, since she is aware of Eden's fantasy that Esmé is his birth mother, and that "he's always been Esmé Massengill's biggest fan" (11). Like many gay men and women who grew up in rural areas–including Burkett–Eden left home as soon as he was old enough, realizing that his "only hope of survival was to get out" (35). Esmé, however, has literally returned from the dead–transformed into a vampire along with her troupe of actors-turned-vampires that include Spanky

Bishop and Uta Häagen-Daz[11]–and has come to Turnip Corners in search of "pure, uncontaminated blood" (30). Gesturing to the tainted blood scandal, she tells Jesus that she and her troupe are stockpiling a collection of plasma "because he–or she–who controls the blood supply controls the world" (30). Esmé's thirst for power is concretized in her thirst for blood, reminding the audience that the two are metaphorically linked–especially in a social and political climate in which the fear of AIDS produces an intensified moral panic.

When Street of Blood premiered in April 1998 at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg the world was less than two years away from the end of the millennium, and Canada was dealing with the effects of a plague that many saw as the beginning of the complete breakdown of order within the culture–AIDS. It had been less than six months since the findings of the Krever Commission's investigation into the Canadian Red Cross tainted blood scandal had been released[12]. The weeks and months leading up to the release of the Commission's report witnessed an intensification of moral panic relative to fears of the transmission of infectious disease–particularly HIV/AIDS–as a result of contact with contaminated blood products. Because AIDS was understood in the popular imagination primarily as a disease affecting gay male communities, it was

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[11] This is a reference to Uta Hagen (1919-2004), the German-American actress whose credits include both stage and screen work. She taught acting for many years at the HB Studio in New York that was founded in 1945 by her husband, Herbert Berghof.

[12] The Krever Commission was established by the Canadian Government in October 1993 to investigate the standards and procedures of blood collection practices of the Canadian Red Cross following the announcement in 1989 of a $150 million dollar compensation fund for the estimated 1,250 Canadians who contracted HIV from transfusions of tainted blood products. As well, the Commission report released in November 1997 alleged that approximately 28,600 patients were infected with hepatitis C between 1986 and 1990 as a result of inadequate testing of blood products. As of November 2004 provincial and federal governments paid out billions in compensation to those infected with HIV and hepatitis C as a result of receiving contaminated blood products. Almost twenty years later, in the summer of 2006, the Conservative government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper re-opened the issue and promised to compensate those whose health had been jeopardized by tainted blood, but had never received any financial assistance ("Canada's Tainted Blood Scandal: A Timeline" CBC on-line).

gay men who were initially targeted with fear and loathing as carriers of a plague that threatened to sweep indiscriminately through the population, destabilizing the moral and social landscape while leaving death and destruction in its wake. An increase in incidents of overt homophobic hatred began to manifest, exemplified by the response of one woman during a radio talk show in Alberta who expressed fears of quarantine because of "them homos and their AIDS" (De Freitas, "Petty Minds"). Just three weeks before Health Minister Allan Rock was to release the findings of the Krever Commission in 1997, Burkett's Calgary home/studio was the target of a Hallowe'en prank in which the windows of the building were liberally soaped with blatantly homophobic graffiti (Morrow 322). Initially "so enraged [he] didn't know what to do" (Frisch 20), Burkett subsequently channelled his energy into Street of Blood.

Panic at the end of the Century

Not only were homophobic incidents on the rise in Canada at the time when Burkett was writing Street of Blood, but the waning of the twentieth century was witnessing a significant intensification of anxiety linked to fears of the end of the world at the turn of the millennium. As the editors of Marketing Apocalypse: Eschatology, Escapology and the Illusion of the End point out in the introduction to their text, a significant body of apocalyptic literature emerged at the end of the twentieth century echoing the 'doomsday' anxieties witnessed in the fin de siècle period at the close of the nineteenth century[13]. Pre-millennial tension, or PMT as the phenomenon became known, appeared in a diverse range of sources–everything from literary magazines and

[13] The word apocalypse comes from the Greek word for a "revelation" from God; knowledge that was previously concealed is uncovered with the result that massive social changes–potentially both positive and negative–become inevitable. Descending from religious doctrines that cover the spectrum of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, apocalyptic literature concerns the prophesying of events that result in such cataclysmic change.

economic analyses to newsletters devoted to UFO sightings. Perhaps one of the most significant events to exemplify PMT was the rampant fear of Y2K–the belief that computer systems had not been designed to adequately handle the transition to the new millennium. Panic ensued in the belief that if computers that stored information relative to the operations of economic, social, and governmental structures were to fail, the world would be doomed to descend into chaos. Thus, PMT and Y2K were among the most prevalent signifiers of the impending and apocalyptic breakdown of order within the social systems that governed daily life.

Fears of the world coming to a crashing halt through ecological disasters such as global warming or the ozone layer depletion, or "overpopulation, resource depletion, famine, pestilence (AIDS in particular), earthquakes, tidal waves, incoming meteorites, alien invasions, and depending on the scientific theory one subscribes to, the sudden implosion, or gradual running down, of the universe" (Brown, et al, 2) were commonly discussed in all seriousness at great length. Presaging with ominous foreboding the emerging 'terrorist culture' of early 21st century America, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention published the article, The Prospect of Domestic Bioterrorism, in the July-August 1999 edition of its newsletter in response to millenarianism in general, and PMT in particular. The author of the article, Jessica Stern, writing on behalf of the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, captures the emotional tone of the anxieties associated with PMT succintly:

> Slight tension connected with the millennium presumably affects most people. Many are concerned with the Y2K problem, the prospect that computer systems will malfunction or fail at the end of 1999. Some fear the breakdown of air-traffic control systems and are planning to avoid

> traveling around January 1, 1999. Others fear an accidental launch of Russian nuclear missiles due to malfunctioning computers. Many are stockpiling food and medicine or will have extra cash on hand in case automated banking systems fail. Some feel vague religious fears. Members of antigovernment groups and religious cults are often vulnerable psychologically and appear to be especially affected by premillennial tension. (par. 7)

The biological terrorism that Stern describes exemplifies the three distinct categories of apocalyptic destruction noted by the editors of Marketing Apocalypse: 1) a traditional religious model in which members of a select righteous cult are spared by an omniscient deity; 2) a secular model in which humanity brings about its own destruction through various means such as environmental catastrophe, nuclear aggression or the unchecked spread of some contagion; and 3) a nihilistic model that assumes the inevitability of an apocalyptic end to humankind (Brown et al, 4). Further, such "millenarianism is usually associated with times of economic distress, political turmoil and social dislocation, and tends to involve *marginalized, disadvantaged, or persecuted groups* within the host society" (Brown et al, 7, emphasis added). Harnessing such apocalyptic anxieties, Burkett presents the audience with a mother/son dyad struggling to come to terms with its own fears and hopes in the aftermath of the father's death from AIDS as a result of a tainted blood transfusion. Within the context of the play Burkett employs the archetypal figure of the caregiving mother through whom the psychosocial conflicts are negotiated.

Against all of the rage and angst circulating in the public discourses reflecting the millennarianist tensions most particularly associated with AIDS, and tainted blood, Edna Rural represents the stereotypical image of a refuge of calm, sheltering, maternal

resolve. Her homespun simplicity and dogged determination to see the world in a better light stand in stark contrast to the cultural malaise and the dire prophesies of humanity's impending doom that pervaded the public consciousness. As the 'good mother' who provides support and nurturance to her family, Edna is routinely adored by audiences and critics wherever she is heard to deliver such sage council as "keep your fork, there's pie", a homey bit of wisdom that she repeats several times throughout the production. Reviewers variously describe her as "a 'good woman'" (Nunns, "Holiday for Strings"), an "aging, sweet-faced widow" (Coulbourn, "Street"), an "apple-cheeked, gray-haired farmer's wife" (Brantley, "Jesus May Pull the Strings"), and a "nice, homely old biddy" (Gardner, "Street of Blood").

Figure 5 – Tibby and Edna

She refuses to speak of her late husband in the past tense, and remains 'faithful' to him even after his death. In fact, when a local widower invites her to accompany him to a fundraiser dinner dance hosted by the conservative "Prairie Revival Party", she vehemently refuses his attentions. She tells her would-be suitor that:

> Company is all fine and well Don. But dinner and dancing and dates, well, that's just taking it a bit too far. Stanley Rural is the only man I've ever been with, and I intend to keep the vows of my marriage intact . . . I am a married woman . . . Doctor Divine. I will always be a married woman. (25)

It is not until much later in the play that the audience discovers that Edna is herself HIV positive. Her reiteration of "if there's one thing I am, it's positive" (6, 74, 90) takes on an ironic double meaning once her status is revealed. Unaware that Stanley is infected with the AIDS virus, he and Edna celebrate their last Christmas together shortly before his death in early 1987 by having sex, with the result that Edna becomes infected. Demonstrating a typical ignorance of the elderly with respect to sexuality, Eden reflects that "the only saving grace was that Mum and Dad were so old that, well, you know, at least she wasn't at risk" (69). In hindsight, then, Edna not only defends herself against the social stigma attached to the disease, but she also guards against the possibility of passing it to someone else while she protects her son from knowing the truth. Like many women of her generation, Edna understands motherhood as a female role of self-sacrifice in which women put the needs and wants of others ahead of their own. Beginning with Edna, I consider how the larger concerns of the play are negotiated in several scenes that demonstrate how the characters self-identify, and how they interact with one another in relation to their roles within the institution of the 'family'.

Family Dynamics

In a scene that is both hilariously funny and deeply painful, Edna mediates between father and son in order to diffuse the tension that results when Eden announces over Thanksgiving dinner that he is gay. Edna narrates her memory of this 1982

Thanksgiving directly to the audience. After Eden makes his declaration she tells us that Stanley slowly begins to turn a deep angry red, and Edna desperately looks for a way to avert a volcanic outburst:

> Suddenly, Stanley slammed his cutlery down on the plate with a crash. Put both hands on the table and lifted himself up to his full height . . . I had to do something. Say something. Fix this . . . I put the jellied salad down, placed my hands on the table and stood opposite Mr. Stanley Rural, staring him down . . . His eyes locked with mine, like two gunfighters, fingers twitching for their pistols. I shot first . . . I spoke as calmly and as bravely and as sensibly as any Canadian woman in my situation would. And I said to him, "Stanley Rural, keep your fork! There's pie." (39-40)

Edna does manage to diffuse the volatile situation–although it is an uneasy, silent truce that results–through sheer force of will. By this point in the production, the audience is already aware of the power that Edna, in all her compassion and simplicity, wields.

At the top of the play, for example, she refuses to continue with the performance until the audience has risen to its feet and sung the Canadian national anthem[14]. The move between Edna's address to other characters and this direct address to the audience serves to implicate the spectator directly in the action – much as we saw in Tinka's New Dress, with the effect that the audience is subjected to the will of the maternal figure in the form of the puppet. In her maternal role as a disciplinarian, Edna cajoles the spectators to "pretend you're at a hockey game. We're not going any further until we get

[14] The singing of the national anthem prior to the beginning of a production still occurs in some regional and amateur theatres, like the Ottawa Little Theatre.

this over with. This wouldn't be a problem if we were in the United States of America. They might be a war-hungry bunch of bullies, but at least they're patriotic" (4). From the outset then, Edna establishes herself through her visage and demeanor as the gentle, but resolute maternal figure who *will* be obeyed. Audiences in every city where the production was performed rose–in some cases, grudgingly–at Edna's command (Burkett, Interview February 2005). While Edna's maternal authority reigns supreme with audiences, however, Eden's relationship to his mother is much more conflicted. Eden retains the fantasy that his "real" mother is Esmé, the 'Golden Age' film star whose romantic melodramas he watched repeatedly with Edna when he was a young boy. Esmé is everything that Edna is not: glamorous, slim, elegant, and urbane. Eden's fantasy is recalled for the audience through a scene in which he narrates a dream that reveals the psychic contest between what he imagines and the reality of his adoption.

In this scene, which connects the figures of mother and son in a familial dyad, the stage directions indicate "*very dream-like*" lighting that illuminates Eden who is surrounded by clear spheres, each of which contains a fetus (6). He describes how he has been "dreaming of babies . . . All these babies, floating. And I'm with them. Not one of them, but there. Seeing things from their point of view" (6).

Figure 6 – Eden and 'dream' baby

Here, Eden illustrates the struggle to navigate and situate oneself in a place of belonging, which is particularly acute among adoptees, and has been theorized extensively by adoption counselor Dr. Betty Jean Lifton. As Lifton–an adoptee herself–notes, "adoptee fantasies can also be seen as an attempt to repair one's broken narrative, to dream it along"(22). While child psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott contends that "all children have ideas of being the offspring of parents other than their own–perhaps of a king and queen" (On Adoption 129), he suggest further that "the adopted child has a special task here, since the fantasy of other parents gets all mixed up with the fact that there are other parents (who are not available)" (On Adoption 129). For Eden there is an important distinction between his 'real' mother, "the one I've never met" and "Edna, that's my Mum" (6). This negotiation between the 'real' and the 'pretend' substitute is a common struggle among adoptees, a struggle recognized by Burkett, an adoptee who did locate and meet his birth mother (Personal interview 2004).

Contributing to this struggle, as Winnicott points out, is the fact that adopted children are often subject to the cruelly intentioned taunts by other children of not being

the 'real' child of their parents (On Adoption 127). The notion of 'real' here assumes a sense of belonging, of entitlement to belong, and ultimately accords social value and worth. The fear that the taunt instills is that if the parents are not the 'real' parents, then the child must also be not 'real', but a fake, a pretender who could be dethroned without warning. In the "closed adoption system" that demands a denial of the adoptee's origin there exists a very real fear of a "psychic split, beneath which lies the threat of fragmentation and disintegration" (Lifton 25). Jonathan Dollimore suggests that "personal authenticity has operated as a subcategory of the real, the natural, the true, categories second only to the divine as principles of identity formation" (43). Lacking the personal authenticity that Dollimore suggests, the adoptee is expected to deny his or her genetic heritage, "step out of his own narrative and into the narrative of the adoptive parents" (Lifton 21). Negotiating the psychic split between these two narratives presents enormous difficulties for many adoptees, and it is thus significant that, even in the dream sequence, Eden remains on the outside, unmoored and detached without actually belonging among the babies. While Winnicott acknowledges there are developmental differences for adopted children, the only concrete suggestion he has for successfully negotiating this potentially difficult terrain is to tell the child of their status as early as possible in order to avoid the inevitable situation in which the child inadvertently discovers his/her origins (On Adoption 127). Winnicott recognizes that there is a sense of shame that attaches to adoption that requires a warning. And shame, of course, as Burkett illustrates in the interrelations between Eden and his adoptive parents, is a close cousin to abjection.

Negotiating Abjection in the Family

Following the psychoanalytic framework established by Freud and redefined by Lacan, Julia Kristeva theorizes abjection, physicalized through the repudiation of the maternal body, as necessary for the constitution of the individual subject–that is the subject of psychoanalysis. For Kristeva, the child must recognize and maintain the boundary that separates him/her from the rest of the world in order to sustain his/her integrity as a separate physical and psychical being. While the mother's body functions as the originary 'rest of the world' against which the child first recognizes itself as a self, the category of abject remains necessary to sustain the self. Kristeva contends that "the abject appears in order to uphold the 'I' within the Other" (15). So while the mother must be the abject 'other'–that which is cast out–in order for the child to establish its own sense of self, the mother is not to be altogether abandoned. Rather, the mother as the originary abject signals the effect of being. What Kristeva's formulation fails to consider–aside from the fact of the consequences of adoption on the individual–is the effect of societal forces in shaping and constituting the self not just as an individual, but a social subject.

Expanding on Kristeva's formulation, Butler considers the effect of the social as part of the dynamic that simultaneously constitutes and delimits the subject. In Bodies That Matter she notes:

> Abjection (in latin, *ab-jicere*) literally means to cast off, away, or out and, hence, presupposes and produces a domain of agency from which it is differentiated . . . the notion of *abjection* designates a degraded or cast out status within the terms of sociality. Indeed, what is foreclosed or repudiated *within* psychoanalytic terms is

> precisely what may not reenter the field of the social without threatening psychosis, that is, the dissolution of the subject itself. (243, n. 2, emphases in original)

In reading the Kristevan formulation of abjection that constitutes the individual as the subject of psychoanalysis, in conjunction with Butler's theories of the formation of the social subject, we are reminded that the institution of the family is itself a social structure, constituted and policed externally by moral and social values that circulate within the culture. Thus, the shame that clings to adoption–experienced by both the child and the adoptive parents, although differently–demonstrates another layer of abjection that moves beyond the realm of the mother/child dyad and into the broader social sphere. In a scene toward the end of the play, we see Eden and Edna navigate this psychosocial terrain, which has caused each of them so much difficulty.

When Eden reveals to Edna his interpretation of her previous refusal to discuss his adoption as shame that he is not her biological, 'real' child, the following exchange takes place between the two:

> **EDNA.** Oh Eden, no. No. I was always so proud of you. That you were my little boy . . . Most people who can have children are stuck with what life hands them. Your father and me got a special baby. It's like . . . well, you know when you go to the IGA and want to buy a roast? The butcher doesn't just hand you any old piece of meat. No, he puts them all on display and lets you choose the best one. Well, that's what your father and me did. We chose the prime cut. We chose you.
>
> **EDEN.** Mum, you're so weird. I always thought you were ashamed of me because I wasn't part of you.

> **EDNA.** You are a part of me. But Eden, it was different when I was younger. We didn't have the talk shows telling us how to think of what was right. We had something worse. Ladies' Church Groups. A bunch of mean-spirited women who said one thing to your face and another behind your back. And if you couldn't have a baby, those holier-than-thou mothers looked at you as if you were broken. They whispered things about you. They made you–they made me–feel less than a whole woman. It's true, Edie. I couldn't talk about this because I was ashamed. But not of you. Of me. I'm ashamed of broken, barren Edna. (78)

Edna's shame of her inability to bear children–and thus, her inability to authenticate her own existence through the act of reproduction (Creed 11–12)[15]–results in a disavowal marked by the refusal to speak of Eden's adoption. However, it is this very refusal to speak that causes Eden to misinterpret his adopted mother's silence as her shame of *him*, which then allows him to continue to fantasize about his 'real' mother, the mother who, unlike Edna, would save him from the cruel rage that is the legacy of his father.

In a terrifying scene that culminates in the physical and psychological abuse of the child, the audience witnesses the initial re-enactment of the heternormative parental relationship as it is perceived by Eden as a young boy. In this memory sequence staged with the figures of a young Eden, along with his childhood friend Ogden, we see the two boys mimicking the roles of adults. Ogden, who takes the part of the Dad, is dressed only in his underwear because, as Eden tells him "it's what my Dad wears to bed" (53), and Eden is wearing his mother's wedding dress, which is much too big for him. He

[15] For women of Edna's generation, class, and cultural location, motherhood becomes the proof of authenticity in terms of the feminine ideal; in other words a 'real' woman is one who is, or can assume to become, a mother.

carries a purse over his arm to complete the costume because "it goes" (54). When Ogden questions whether or not Eden wants to be a girl, he replies "I'm not dressed like a girl. I'm dressed like a star!" (53). Later when confronted by his father, Eden tries to defuse his father's anger by explaining that he was only pretending to be his mother "except she was like a movie star" (55). Eden has constructed a unitary figure–one where the real and the imaginary overlap–to create his own version of the perfect mother that comprises aspects of both Edna and Esmé. He conflates the figure of the mother and the 'star', melding them through role play, into a single organism with which he identifies a source of nurturing comfort and the means to imaginatively constitute himself as an individual. Winnicott reminds us that "it is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self" (Playing and Reality 54). In acting out one narrative of the trauma of adoption before an audience, Burkett is able to directly engage with his own history as an adoptee, although he is quick to point out that Eden's story and his own are quite different, given that he has always been very close to his adoptive parents, to whom the script of this play is dedicated (Personal interview 2004). While the moment of make-believe for Eden represents a space in which to work out the Oedipal drama of familial relations conceived by Freud, Burkett employs it to stage a homophobic response that resonates with many gay and lesbian adults who grew up in culturally conservative climates.

When Stanley inadvertently discovers the boys in their game of dress-up, he sends Ogden home and confronts Eden with "how dare you touch that dress, you little bastard" (56). As indicated in the stage directions, Burkett, in the role of Stanley, violently pulls the young Eden up to his level and says, "look at you. Look at this . . .

Eden, the spoiled fruit!" (56). At this point the stage directions indicate a sound cue–"*Music sting. Short. Brutal. Loud*" (56)–that punctuates the action, which culminates in Eden being savagely cast down to reveal the back of the bloodstained wedding gown to the audience. Returning to the present moment, the adult Eden tells the audience that "my mother's wedding dress was covered in blood. And I had lost the only man I ever loved. I hated him for that. And that's when I learned the power of rage" (56). Within the particular familial dynamic presented in this scene, Eden's anger at the memory of his father's homophobic fury is compounded by the fact of his adoption. As Lifton suggests, the result of living in a "family climate of denial" in which adopted children feel forbidden to express anger at their difference, their abandonment, and their lack of knowable origin "can erupt as uncontrollable rage" (23). When Eden's rage finally does erupt it is directed, like Burkett's, at the right-wing political organizations that attempt to erase the cultural presence of homosexuals.

In a direct address to the audience, that makes use of exposition rather than an actual staging of past events, Eden tells us that he chose to act alone in response to the "Christian bullshit noise about 'the homosexual agenda'" (37). Noting that "someone should have told [the Prairie Revival Party] that you can't organize fags to agree on anything" (37), he sets off bombs in local gay businesses, making it look like the work of the right-wing Prairie Revival Party whose homophobic discourses are then exposed. These actions are not staged, but midway through the production Eden recalls the events in a direct address. He tells the audience that he learned how to make pipe bombs on the internet while surfing through militia websites. He notes that there were "hundreds and hundreds of websites devoted to my extinction. Man, I had no idea I was such a threat to them" (36). Following the success of his first bombing, Eden continues his 'terrorist'

activities until the media begin to take notice and turn their attention to the ideals espoused by the Prairie Revival Party. Rather than diminishing his anger through these covert actions, Eden's rage escalates to the point that it threatens to overtake him. Like a virus–or a plague–Eden's rage eventually infects his psyche to the point where he is overcome by what is understood in a twentieth-century context as madness, where the breakdown of order is understood as a loss of reason.

As Michel Foucault asks us to consider in his genealogy of madness, "does [madness] not transmit–to those able to receive it, to Nietzsche and to Artaud–those barely audible voices of classical unreason, in which it was always a question of nothingness and night, but amplifying them now to shrieks and frenzy?" (Madness and Civilization 281). So when Eden begins to perpetrate his terrorist rage against those who would foreclose his subjectivity we can understand him to be resisting the forces of civilization that Foucault suggests have demanded a repudiation of the 'natural world' and the desire it unleashes (Madness and Civilization 282). Eden's madness then, is a violent response to homophobia and the legacy of rage conferred by his father.

While it is his father's rage that Eden remembers and inherits, the audience is privileged to witness another aspect of Stanley. Edna recounts having to tell Stanley of her discovery that she could not produce a baby early in their marriage. As she relates this memory, Burkett, taking the role of Stanley, acts out the scene, a staging strategy that complicates the subject/object relations, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three. The stage directions indicate that "*he is Stanley . . . Ronnie enacts what Edna is describing*" (35). Edna recalls that this was the one occasion in all their married life when she didn't make supper. As she relates her memory of this poignant event in their married lives from her armchair at centre stage, a dim light comes up on a younger

version of Edna on stage left in her wedding gown. The elder Edna tells the audience that when she informed him of her infertility Stanley retreated without saying a word to her. She tells us that "I stayed on the bed, memorizing the rag rug on the floor, listening to him downstairs. A terrible racket. I thought he was breaking things, or packing to leave" (35). What he is doing, in fact, is cooking bacon and eggs for them both. While Burkett mimes the bacon and eggs, Edna tells us that Stanley returns with his version of 'supper'. As Stanley, Burkett ties an apron on the marionette of the young Edna in her wedding dress, and as the elder Edna relates:

> He knelt down, took a piece of bacon in his fingers, and held it up to my mouth . . . We stayed there for a long, long time. Me in my wedding dress and an apron, Stanley on his knees before me. Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Rural. Crying over a plate of bacon and eggs. (35)

The tenderness of this scene stands in stark contrast to brutal confrontation between young Eden and his father.

While we clearly see the emotional pain Edna endures as a result of her infertility, we never witness the effect that Stanley's inability to produce a child has on him, unless we consider his language when naming Eden "bastard"–a moment that can be interpreted as a manifestation of Stanley's *impotent* rage. As Veronica Strong-Boag notes of the social construction of 'family' in Canada in the 1950s/60s, this era in which Edna's 'church ladies' judged her so harshly, "drew on a pervasive familialism that regularly conflated femininity–and to some degree, masculinity–with parenthood" (683). This relationship between femininity and parenthood that relies on a long and troubling tradition of biological determinism for women is much less clear in terms of the masculine counterpart, despite Strong-Boag's vague acknowledgement of a similar

relation between masculinity and fatherhood. As Street of Blood exemplifies, notions of fatherhood and paternity present a complicated psychosocial landscape that often reduces the person of the father to little more than a shadow figure.

As literary scholar Silke-Maria Weineck notes in her exploration of role of the figure of the father in the plays of German playwright Heinrich von Kleist, there is a troubled distinction in the Freudian configuration of the Oedipal crisis between the "biological father, the one who begets, and the legal father, the one who wields power" (70). Since prior to the advent of DNA testing paternity could never be certain, the masculine relationship to fatherhood has been the source of much consternation, both from the biological as well as the legal perspective. Whereas biological motherhood[16] is grounded in an embodied relationship, fatherhood relies more on a contractual agreement, bound in a capitalist social economy to notions of naming and inheritance. As Weineck points out, in certain instances–adoption, for example–the procreative aspect of fatherhood is rendered null and void by the law. Ultimately, according to Weineck:

> Fatherhood, then, for as much as it is constituted by contract or document, also appears in the name of a nature that thus simultaneously subjects and is subject to the law; the law, in turn, itself manifests the power of the third, the symbolic father–God, King, Sovereign, or the institutions they represent and by which they are represented. (70)

[16] Although Edna is an adoptive, rather than a biological mother, motherhood as a social institution retains a pervasive hold on the cultural imagination.

This view of relations between family members in a late twentieth-century Western context aligns with that of sociologist Radhika Chopra, who notes that, "the archetype of the family in industrial western societies is characterized by the father's absence and the woman's exclusive mothering" (446). Such an archetype, of course, is founded on a heteronormative family group where heterosexuality is the default position. These formulations of the psychoanalytic familial structure, however, often fail to consider how this dynamic alters when that family group consists of members whose desire is not heteronormative.

In his examination of absent fathers in gay drama Daniel Dervin notes that in heterosexual modern dramas from Ibsen to Sam Shepard "to be absent, the father must be more than simply dead or missing; he must be alluded to, represented (often metonymically), and affect the action. His absence must register" (53). Certainly Stanley's absent presence in Street of Blood exemplifies Dervin's observation here. Dervin argues that while psychoanalytic discourse privileges the boy's mother as object of desire while removing the father through the incest taboo, it is the penis/phallus that is the externalized object of desire for the boy harbouring homosexual fantasies. For Dervin, whether or not the real-life drama turns toward a homosexual resolution depends on a number of factors, including a longing to connect with the remote father (58). Thus, the father who is present through absence in gay drama is not simply the Oedipal father whose authority has been vanquished by the conquering son. Rather, he is also the figure whose absence signals desire, and as Dervin observes "by producing his absence, we *hope* to reproduce his presence" (54, emphasis added). This conflict between the father whose presence is longed for and whose absence simultaneously signals the son's entry into subjectivity is exemplified in Street of Blood. The rage Eden inherits from his father

is not only anger at Stanley's physical abuse during the cross-dressing episode, but also comes from Eden's frustration at the abrupt and brutal loss of his father as the object of his desire, "the only man [he] had ever loved" (56). It is thus the very structuring of the Freudian Oedipal family drama that Burkett simultaneously installs and undercuts in order to demonstrate its insufficiency within a familial dynamic that includes the possibility of the homosexual (masculine) subject.

In the right-wing conservative culture that the Rurals inhabit, Eden's flamboyant homosexuality is recognized as misdirected, improperly developed masculinity–hence, Ogden's questioning of Eden's desire to be female. Taking this a step further, in this cultural climate Eden's behaviour not only reflects on the parents' (in)ability to properly instil moral and social values, it also casts a deep suspicion on Stanley's own locus of desire as a man. He and Edna have no 'biological' children, a fact that could be interpreted to mean a lack of heteronormative desire on Stanley's part. Because 'proper' masculinity is so deeply entrenched in conservative notions of male desire, any suspicion that Stanley might harbour misplaced homoerotic desire also calls into question whether or not Stanley is a 'real' man. Stanley's reaction to Eden's homosexuality–both in the cross-dressing scene, and later when Eden announces his orientation–stages the very foreclosure of the social subject of which Butler writes. When we consider the intersubjective nature of human relationships, it becomes evident that both Eden and Stanley are caught in an impossible situation where the conservative moral values of their environment delimit subjectivity at the level of both the individual and the social.

For instance, Eden's heteronormative subjectivity is foreclosed by his inability to identify with the father. Unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge the 'other', Stanley

violently repudiates, and literally casts away his abject source of shame–his adopted son, whose 'queer' presence is a continual reminder of Stanley's failure as a father and a man. Stanley does, however, retain his masculine authority over language, conferring on Eden the epithet "bastard", in a move that severs the tenuous emotional bond–but not the legal one contracted through adoption–between this particular father and son. Upholding the moral values of the conservative community, Stanley's repudiation of his adopted son operates against Eden both as an individual and as an ostracized member of the larger social collective. Thus Eden's individual subjectivity is foreclosed while he is cast into the realm of the socially abject. At the same time, because Stanley's masculinity is suspect, his own subject position is also far from secure, a point illustrated in Burkett's production.

As the spectral figure of the play, not only does Stanley register as a present absence, he registers as *both and neither* subject and object. He cannot be wholly constituted as a subject, given that he only appears in flashback memory scenes narrated by either Edna or Eden. Nor is he, in the strictest sense, simply an object, since he is not represented by a marionette, as are the other characters, but is instead played by Burkett. There is no puppet of Stanley. Thus, while the other characters remain characters after a performance–albeit returned to object status–Stanley disappears altogether, leaving behind in his place only Burkett as the actor who performs him. Unlike his co-stars Stanley does not continue to exist as an object outside the space of representation. As not subject and not object, both inside and outside the confines of the performance time and space then, Stanley can only register as an abject presence–that which resides in the liminal space. Like Spivak's "subaltern" who "has no access to social mobility" ("The Public Face of Ethics"),

Stanley is marginalized and constrained within the terrain of abjection. Stanley's marginalization through death–the corpse being the ultimate abject figure–is ironically compounded by the fact of his *cause* of death through AIDS, and the associated valence of shame.

The shame associated with AIDS that precludes Edna from even speaking it aloud is precisely the element that produces what Butler describes in terms of the socially rejected, repudiated, and abjected. Indeed, Edna's loss of her husband is further compounded by her inability to speak of the cause of that loss. Thus the shame that renders Stanley abject in death is directly linked to the heteronormative familial dynamic that upholds the Law of Father in the first place, since to speak of a thing is to acknowledge its existence. In the case of speaking of the abject thing that has been repressed there is the potential for conjuring it into being through what Butler would call performative utterance (Bodies 226), with the subsequent risk of being overtaken by it; and I would argue that it is precisely this fear of conjuring the loathed, socially abject thing that incites Stanley's bloody outburst against the young Eden.

Unlike Eden, whose legacy of rage ultimately overtakes him, however, Burkett redirects the fear and loathing that result in social abjection by presenting this play as a creative response against homophobic injustice. In what theatre critic Martin Morrow calls "Burkett's most personal play" (Wild Theatre 322)–given that Burkett is himself an adopted gay son who grew up amidst the conservative climate of mid-twentieth century Medicine Hat, Alberta–Street of Blood responds to the cruelty of social relations that threaten to erase the existence of subjects like Eden who fail to conform to the demands of the dominant order. The cultural landscape in which Burkett produces his "prairie gothic" (Morrow, Wild Theatre 322) response to the devastation

of AIDS corresponds in large measure to the unsettled social terrain of Europe earlier in the century out of which Artaud's experimentation with theatrical practice emerged.

Cruel Puppetry

As Artaud notes in The Theatre and Its Double, theatre of cruelty "is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies, carving up our personal anatomies, or, like Assyrian emperors, sending parcels of human ears, noses, or neatly detached nostrils through the mail, but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us" (79). In structuring his ideas for a theatre of cruelty Artaud takes up the discursive practices that link disease and contagion with moral and social decay. He theorizes a medical model for his theatre of cruelty that would encourage the theatre patron to "go to the theatre the way he goes to the surgeon or the dentist. In the same state of mind–knowing, of course, that he will not die, but that it is a serious thing, and that he will not come out of it unscathed" (Artaud qtd. in Garner 11). Theatre, for Artaud, is not to be simply a cerebral exercise, but should be a visceral experience as well. Theatre of cruelty in Artaud's formulation, like the plague, infects the spectator at the level of both mind and body. As Garner Stanton notes, "like Artaud's theatre of cruelty, the plague follows the laws of necessity, inflicting upon its victims/spectators an extreme disorder as it disrupts the personality and the moral/social order that sustains it" (9). Artaud is not interested in simply representing cruel violence, but rather, he wants the audience to experience the confrontation directly, and thereby be able to gain an insight into the latent cruelty of the human condition. After years of attempting and failing to realize his theatrical vision, Artaud, following his release from the asylum at Rodez, performed one last time, giving a lecture in 1947, at the Vieux-Colombier theatre in Saint Germain-des-Prés. His

frustration at the inability of his audience to appreciate or share in his vision is expressed in a letter to André Breton after the performance:

> I appeared on a stage, *once again*, for the LAST TIME, at the Vieux-Colombier theatre, but with the visible intention of exploding its framework, exploding its framework from the inside, and I do not believe that the spectacle of a man who wails and yells fury to the point of vomiting his intestines is a very theatrical spectacle . . . I abandoned the stage because I realised the fact that the only language which I could have with an audience was to bring bombs out of my pockets and throw them in the audience's face with a blatant gesture of aggression . . . and blows are the only language in which I feel capable of speaking. (qtd. in Barber, 184, emphases in original)

For Artaud theatre is an act of creation that can only be enacted as destruction. As Jane Goodall notes in "The Plague and its Powers in Artaudian Theatre", "in Artaudian metaphor, the power base of horror is always inside, a molten core of being which erupts, like the plague, in defiance of all logically calculated defences" (67). Street of Blood echoes this Artaudian sentiment, particularly through the character of Eden, whose terrorist actions erupt as a violent outpouring of his own fury.

Eden tells the audience that he has set bombs off in gay and lesbian businesses in order to "blow the lid off our bottled rage" (40), and shake the gay community out of its complacency. With these actions he represents nothing less than Artaud's cruel hero, the figure who is "heroically criminal and audaciously, ostentatiously, heroic" (Artaud, Theatre 28). Eden's point is not to inflict physical pain and suffering on members of the

queer communities–he sets off his bombs when there is the least likelihood of actually harming anyone in these establishments–but rather to incite a revolution among them. Of the first bomb he set off, Eden recounts "the cops took it seriously, the press covered it, and best of all, the gay community got scared . . . And indirectly, fingers started pointing at the Prairie Revival Party" (37). With Artaudian intent, Burkett demonstrates a desire to rain psychic blows down on the audience through Eden in order to shock them into re-thinking and re-envisioning, rather than resignedly accepting, the moral values that structure the social order and foreclose the presence of the 'other'–in this case the homosexual subject. Through the character of Eden, Burkett's play reflects the struggle to refuse the social processes of abjection experienced by Artaud.

As a man struggling with the politics of marginalization himself–particularly within the milieu of mental illness–Artaud strenuously sought a form of theatrical expression that would demand that the audience confront its own politics and practices of repudiation with respect to notions of difference that these evoke. Like Artaud, "for [whom] cruelty could embody in one word all of his creative preoccupations and his personal suffering" (Barber 69), Burkett exposes the latent cruelty of human interrelations. Innovatively deploying puppet theatre aimed at an adult audience, Street of Blood, illustrates in ways that Artaud's theatre experiments never did, "how the experience of theatre, the theatrical 'as if', stands at the beginning of a subject's becoming" (Finter 22). Shortly before his death in 1948 Artaud penned the following poem that theorizes his vision of a theatre capable of moving the audience to engage actively with its emotional and psychical traumas:

> And I shall henceforth devote myself
>
> exclusively

to the theatre

as I understand it

a theatre of blood

a theatre which at every performance will have achieved

Some gain

bodily

to him who plays as well as to him who comes to see

the playing,

moreover

one doesn't play

one acts.

The theatre is in reality the *genesis* of creation.

It will be done. (qtd. in Esslin 89–90, emphases in original)

Echoing Artaud's vision of cruelty as a generative force that "could communicate a remaking of worlds" (Barber 69), Burkett presents a cruel hero who violently responds to the homophobic cruelty directed against him. Consumed by rage, at one level Eden corresponds to the characters of the revenge tragedies that Artaud found so compelling.

In an attempt to communicate his theatre of cruelty, in 1935 Artaud presented his own revenge tragedy, The Cenci, a production of Shelley's 1819 verse play. Demonstrating an understanding of the double-vision that connects a puppetry aesthetic to his preoccupation with the notion of the double that was a crucial concept in his theorizations on theatre, Artaud incorporated "a considerable number of dummies"

(Artaud, The Cenci 126). For Artaud, whose conflictual relationship to the dualist notions of Gnosticism pervades his writing, the double recalls the tension between good and evil with which he felt all humanity was in a continuous struggle. Goodall, quoting Artaud, argues that "the theatre of cruelty has the gnostic aim 'to give objective expression to secret truths, to bring to the light of day through active gestures that fugitive element of the truth which was lost beneath forms in their encounter with Becoming'" (74). Artaud's desire to uncover 'secret truths' witnesses a conflict for supremacy between the dualistic poles of life and death, a psychic split that threatens the fragmentation of the self according to the psychoanalytic theories of psychiatry to which Artaud was repeatedly exposed during his various confinements in mental institutions. Barber contends that "for Artaud, however, fragmentation is not to be combated–it is itself a weapon, with which to attack and dismantle social systems and languages, and by which the body operates a reclamation of the silenced self" (14). The juxtaposition of dummies–which are, of course, puppets of a kind–and the chaotic actions of live actors in Artaud's The Cenci speaks directly to the dualist nature of a mind/body split that prevents the possibility of a cohesive human subject brought into a communicative balance. Susan Sontag reads Artaud's formulation of his theatre "as a psychological manual on the reunification of mind and body" (Approaching Artaud 89). It is however, a reunification that can only take place through a violent rending of both in order to fully transform and transcend the cultural limitations that foreclose the non-normative subject. It is in the spirit of communicating such transformation that Burkett employs Eden's rage as a means of advancing a social commentary on the effects of the violent repudiation of subjects.

It is primarily the effect, however, rather than the enactment of violence that the audience witnesses in Street of Blood; and this effect is concretized through images of spilled blood. These images of the brutal after-effects of violence–such as the blood-stained wedding dress–serve to make visible the disconnection between people that results in the abjection of those who do not conform to the dominant heteronormative demands of sociality. The disconnection operating between father and son is likewise seen in Eden's confrontation with Esmé, the former film star and now vampire whom he mistakenly takes to be his birth mother. Fueling Eden's fantasy that she is his birth mother simply by refusing to deny it, Esmé turns her own rage upon Eden who represents the fans who have used her for years to live their adventures for them while they remain within the safe confines of their homes in front of the television set. She feeds on him and then chains him to a cross to die in a Christ-like pose.

Figure 7 – Esmé Massengill

The presentation of Eden's naked, bleeding body chained to a crucifix recalls the disturbing vision of young Eden in his mother's blood-stained wedding gown; in both cases he is rendered vulnerable as a result of the betrayal of his love. In the staging of both instances of brutality Eden endures, the violence enacted upon him is the result of uncontrolled rage expressed outwardly–Stanley's homophobia, and Esmé's response to the sexual abuse she suffered as a child star, which is ultimately the cost of her celebrity. In these instances such cruelty–staged with Artaudian intent–shocks the audience through a visual assault on the senses that forces a confrontation with normative values and ideals. The sight of a male child's blood staining the mother's wedding dress extends to a metaphorical sullying of the institution of heterosexual marriage, while the image of the adult Eden chained to a cross naked and bleeding can be equally interpreted as a mockery of the Christian symbol of salvation, as well as a metaphor of how the Christian church 'crucifies' the 'other'. It is this potential desecration of Christian symbolism that caused some consternation for the marketing department of Toronto's Canadian Stage Company prior to the opening of the play.

When Street of Blood was preparing to open at Toronto's CanStage Theatre, Burkett supplied publicity stills, following conventional practice, for use in advertising the production. The company refused to use one particular photograph on the grounds that subscribers might be more offended than curious, and the risk of losing revenue was deemed too great (Burkett, Personal interview 2005). The potentially offensive image presents a head and shoulders shot of Burkett, eyes closed, with his head–adorned with a crown of thorns–turned to one side. As well, there are two puncture marks on the neck from which blood is flowing down the throat toward the bare chest. Not only does the image clearly evoke a reconfigured crucifixion scene, but it also presents a highly

homoerotic visual, while simultaneously gesturing to multiple readings of vampirism. Burkett ultimately respected CanStage's request to withdraw the offending photograph of a homoeroticized Christ. The production, however, retains its challenge to the audience to consider the often-conflicted relationship to the doctrines of religious belief.

A Crisis of Faith

While theatrical and filmic depictions of Christ are not unprecedented[17], most necessarily focus on his humanity rather than his divinity, and Burkett's portrayal of Jesus retains this same intent. Appearing in contemporary street clothes, Burkett's Jesus is vehemently resisted by Eden, who expresses his disappointment in this new image:

> Man, you don't even look like you . . . I'm used to the beard and long hair, ok? That looked good. Real good. I used to have such a crush on you. You were so hot. Well, him. That Sunday School Jesus. But this aging club boy thing doesn't really work on someone your age. (50)

Eden's nostalgia for the 'Sunday School Jesus' echoes Michael Warner's homoerotic confession in his essay "Tongues Untied: Memories of a Pentecostal Boyhood" in which he notes that "Jesus was my first boyfriend" (228). Eden's response to Burkett's reconfigured Christ signals a disappointment in the loss of homoerotic attachment marked by Warner, who also notes that "Anglo-American culture has developed a rich and kinky iconography of Jesus, the perma-boy who loves us, the demiurge in a dress" (228). As well, because Burkett's Jesus fails to resemble Eden's fantasy of him, Eden's

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[17] Jesus Christ, Superstar (1971 stage production, 1973 film version), Jesus of Montreal (1989 film), Corpus Christi (1998 stage production), and The Passion of the Christ (2004 film) are some of the more contemporary examples. Despite adhering to canonical representations of Christ's humanity, these examples incited controversy. Terrence McNally's stage production of Corpus Christi, which premiered in the same year as Street of Blood resulted in death threats to the playwright for his representation of Christ and his disciples as gay men.

ability to sustain faith falters–and hence the beliefs with which that Christ is associated begin to break down, leaving Eden disappointed and angry[18].

Against Artaud's final response to what he sees as the fiction of redemption through Christ's sacrifice, seeing God not as merely ineffectual in relieving suffering, but in fact malevolently promoting misery as a condition of human reality, Eden's angry disillusionment can be understood in Freudian terms as a failure of the promise of the Christian God to "defend against nature" (Illusion 19), since it is the arbitrariness of nature that inspires terror in the individual. The purpose of religious belief, according to Freud, is to "exorcise the terrors of nature . . . reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and . . . compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them" (Illusion 23). Not only does religious belief allow the individual the psychical comfort of imagining a level of control over these unruly forces of nature, but without such belief, Freud suggests that civil society would experience an extreme psychosocial rupture, since the social belief in a just God instils "an obligation to obey the precepts of civilization" (Illusion 44).

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[18] Eden's angry conflict with the figure of Jesus echoes Artaud's own furious response to religious faith, particularly evident in his 1947 essay, "To Have Done with the Judgment of God", in which he pours forth his outraged contention that:

> the so-called christ is none other than he
> who in the presence of the crab louse god
> consented to live without a body,
> while an army of men descended from a cross,
> to which god thought he had long since nailed them,
> has revolted,
> and, armed with steel,
> with blood,
> with fire, and with bones,
> advances, reviling the Invisible
> to have done with **GOD'S JUDGMENT.**
> (qtd. in Sontag, Artaud, Selected Writings 562)

Within a context of a crisis of faith Street of Blood examines the institutions and doctrines through which civilized society structures belief. We are invited to consider what happens when our faith in systems and structures intended to defend against the onslaught of chaos fail us. This difficult navigation of belief, faith, and anger is another level where Eden and Edna demonstrate a connection that transcends the biological blood ties of 'family'. It is blood, however, upon which such notions of connection and disconnection are signalled at the top of the production.

Beginning with the moment when she renders the face of Christ in blood on the quilt she is making when she pricks her finger, Edna's anger with the failure of her faith to protect her and those she loves is made clear. When Jesus tries to speak to her she tells him "you're wasting your time, Jesus. You'd be better off appearing to someone else. Someone who . . . has time for this. For you" (11). Later still when Eden is returned to Edna by Spanky after his encounter with Esmé in which it is apparent that he will die from loss of blood, Edna's wrath erupts. When Jesus tells her that he can only offer Eden peace, not healing, Edna retorts:

> Peace? You've got some cheek waltzing into this house and using that word, mister! All the slaughtering and hatred and sacrifice made in your name. You call that peace? Once I thought all paths led to you, but I see you for what you really are. You're nothing. Nothing more than a road of sadness. Of despair. Damn you! Damn you and your street of blood! (83)

As well as losing faith in the redemptive power of Jesus, Edna's confidence in secular institutions is ultimately eroded as well, despite her initial efforts to sustain her belief in their ability to maintain coherent moral and social order. When she demands that the audience rise to their feet for the singing of the Canadian national anthem at the top of

the show, she demonstrates her allegiance to the state–a state that is responsible for regulating the medical practices upon which she depended to restore Stanley to health prior to his death. In an attempt to sustain her conviction in the power of the state and the medical establishment, she tells the audience that when Stanley was hospitalized with pneumonia in July:

> [Eden] kept pestering me to get some blood tests done on his father . . . I finally just had to tell him, Lord love a duck Edie, we've got a medical doctor, government health care and the blessed Red Cross on our side. I think if we needed a bunch of fancy tests they would have let us know by now. (68)

Ultimately, however, Edna's faith in secular institutions proves to be as untenable her religious convictions. Like Jesus, who is unable–or unwilling, depending on the perspective–to restore Eden after Esmé's vicious attack, neither the Canadian health care system nor the Red Cross are able to save Stanley from succumbing to the ravages of AIDS. In the face of such loss Edna's initial response is one of denial and anger.

In a scene poignantly enacted between mother and son just before he dies, Edna finally relinquishes her anger against all the losses she has suffered, and verbally acknowledges that her husband was a victim of AIDS that she begins the process of claiming her own subjectivity. She finally admits to Eden, who has known all along, that "your father . . . my husband, Stanley Rural, is dead. He died from complications brought about by AIDS . . . I said it out loud. I said it out loud, Eden" (69). Through this admission Edna effectively enters into the realm of the Lacanian symbolic, using language to open up the possibility of her own subject position, one that does not confer an identity only through her relation to the masculine as a wife and mother. Having

suffered numerous psychical losses throughout the play Edna offers the possibility of bridging the gulf between sociality and individuality. She has acknowledged the failure of moral ideologies linked to metaphors of blood–including blood relations, clean blood, and blood sacrifice–to sufficiently constitute her as either an individual or a social subject. Having finally found her own voice, with Eden's encouragement, she tells the church ladies who have made her feel incomplete to "fuck off" (81). With this Edna moves from being defined by others to consciously determining her own individual subjectivity within a social landscape. No longer simply Mrs. Stanley Rural, she is now also Edna Urbane, having taken up Eden's karaoke business. And unlike her son, Edna exhibits no difficulty accepting the appearance of a contemporary Jesus who bears little resemblance to the transcended and distant model of the institutional Christian church. Played by Burkett, an openly gay performer, this Christ refuses the limits of proscriptive moral values–values that foreclose the possibility of non-heteronormative subjectivity–but rather extends the boundaries of faith to include a desiring, embodied self that is equally present at the level of the individual and the social subject. While the plague of AIDS and the contagion of delimiting moral ideals continue to circulate, Edna ultimately refuses to repress her knowledge of them–and be repressed by them in return–but rather chooses to perform herself within and against the demands made by both secular and religious structures of power.

In fact, it is these very power structures that are examined and ultimately found wanting. Edna loses her husband and her son despite the faith she has initially in both the state and the church. Neither institution was present when Esmé was being abused as a child performer. Nor, as Spanky Bishop tells Edna, did they do much to intervene in the slaughter of millions of Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals at the hands of the Nazis

despite the fact that it was well known what was happening in Europe during the Second World War. When Spanky delivers Eden back to Edna, he tells her that he became a vampire "to kill Nazis" (76). The blood metaphors connected to both secular and religious institutions and ideologies–blood ties, blood sacrifice, and tainted blood, for example–are revealed here to be not only ultimately inadequate to relieve cultural and individual anxieties, but in fact, ironically, exacerbate the tensions. Despite the traumas and tragedies that abound in the production, however, humour–particularly Camp humour–keeps the play from descending into the depths of earnestly serious didacticism. The barbed wit in Street of Blood ironically exposes the failure of ideologies and doctrines in which civilized society is encouraged to put its faith, but it also satirizes the institutions intended to contain and control the behaviour of citizens.

Subversive Laughter

Humour often provides a release from the anxious tensions that are encountered in daily life. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Freud suggests the joke presents the opportunity for rebellion against the authority of "institutions, people in their capacity as vehicles of institutions, dogmas of morality or religion, [and] views of life which enjoy so much respect that objections to them can only be made under the mask of a joke" (Jokes 109). He further suggests that "the wishes and desires of men have a right to make themselves acceptable alongside of exacting and ruthless morality" (110). Despite the fact that he consistently and violently disavowed psychoanalysis owing to his experiences as a psychiatric patient, Artaud was influenced by Freud and "emphasized the necessity of 'LAUGHTER – DESTRUCTION'" (Barber 71). Echoing the sensibilities of Freud and Artaud, Street of Blood elicits laughter from the outset as a means of subverting the conventional moral codes of the dominant social order.

For example, Winnie Wismer of the Turnip Corners Ladies Orchestrale begins the performance by speaking to the audience while the house lights are still up, reminding us that the production has no intermission, "so if you have to piddle, please go now" (2). The reference to bodily functions, particularly the elimination of bodily waste, is not only a way of acknowledging the very bodies–and their predisposition to leaking–that moral prescriptives typically seek to erase, but is also a subversive tactic historically common to puppet theatre[19]. Thus, Winnie's scatological reference signals an irreverent tone and cues the audience's expectations for what is to come–namely a move from gently poking fun at our discomfort with bodily functions that mark the processes of abjection common to all human beings to the satirically edgy camp humour that forces a confrontation with the failed promises of social and moral ideologies and their associated power structures. As a way of making our engagement with the difficulties of encountering the traumas of failed promises and loss more palatable, humour–a term that originally designated bodily integrity[20]–provides a necessary emotional release through satire.

M.H. Abrams defines satire as "the literary art of derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation . . . [that] uses laughter as a weapon" (284–5). This weapon is brandished with razor-sharp precision particularly in the sub-genre of camp, which is a recurring trope in all of Burkett's work. Like other satirical forms that are equally cutting and

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[19] As puppetry theorist Dina and Joel Sherzer note, the scatological language of puppets from Guignol in Lyon, France to the Karagoz theatre of the Turkish empire were routinely banned. (61)

[20] Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello reminds us that the word humour originally referred specifically to the four humours contained within the body–blood, bile, phlegm, and melancholy–that, according to Roman philosophers, needed to be kept in balance in order to maintain good physical and mental health. See On Humor (University of North Carolina Press, 1974).

often cruel, Camp, according to Moe Meyer is "both political and critical" (1). Further, Meyer argues that camp is not simply a conscious exaggeration of artifice as Susan Sontag's famous 1964 essay asserts, but is a "total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility" (5). Camp then, might be understood here as the weapon that incites laughter in order to undercut conventional moral and social values, and results in making the performance of queerness visible. Nowhere is camp more obvious in this play than in the drag queen-like figure of Esmé Massengill. From her first entrance on stage, Esmé commands our attention as any worthy Diva, dripping from head to toe in beads, feathers, and large glittering sunglasses.

In her quest for untainted blood Esmé tells Tibby Harbrecht, another member of the Ladies Orchestrale, that she and her troupe have arrived to rehearse a new production –a scene of which is later staged for the audience. Esmé tells Tibby that the new show is "Called "Oh, Mary!"[21]. The life of the Virgin Mary, told in word and song and dance. I of course portray the titular role of Mary. Mr. Bishop here is Joseph . . . [and Miss Häagen-Daz is] the angel who appears to Joseph, telling him to take flight to Egypt. It's a dance role" (20). The humour here works on a dual level: it provides a relief/release from the threat of being overwhelmed by Eden's admission in the scene immediately prior that he provides karaoke entertainment to patients in hospices, hospitals and nursing homes in order to "live through the fictions of other people's lives" (13); and, as well, it registers with members of the audience who recognize the thinly veiled references to the stereotypes of queerness, thereby inserting a gay presence in precisely the fashion described by Meyer in his treatise on camp humour. The queer subject is

[21] "Mary" is derogatory slang used by gay men to denote the effeminacy of other gay men.

thus consciously constituted in full view within the performance space, recalling Ann Pellegrini's reading of Althusser's formulation of subject constitution as a highly theatrical process (178). In this instance the subject who emerges before our very eyes comes into being through the overworked trope of musical theatre–the singing, dancing fag–as it has come to be associated with the flamboyantly queer gay man; and part of the subversion here is the fact that it is a gay male performer *not* excessively coded queer who makes visible the queer subject. In other words, the queer performer in this instance–Burkett himself–uses the stereotype of the effeminate gay male to satirize homophobic constructions of the sissy boy, or as Eden designates himself when he perpetrates the terrorist attacks, "Purse Boy" (63).

The satirical humour that challenges the ideological assumptions circulating within contemporary Western culture is punctuated in this production at one level through the practice of naming, a practice that–as 'Purse Boy' exemplifies–works to reclaim power through the word. Language that demonstrates dichotomous thinking hierarchically valuing either/or binaries–country/city, queer/straight, and mind/body immediately come to mind–is continuously disrupted. Beginning with Eden, the contest between urban and rural sensibilities is signalled where Eden renames himself Eden Urbane when he leaves home and moves to the city. The assumptions that city folk are more sophisticated yet disconnected or distant from one another, or that country folk are at best naïve in their unworldliness are called into question at the end of the play when Edna, whose name in Hebrew means 'pleasure', is seen moving with ease within and between both these worlds. And of course, the name Eden itself evokes notions of Christian faith that have traditionally repudiated difference in much the same way, since Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden for the sin of embodied desire according to

the Christian creationist myth. As well, the name Esmé Massengill instantly recalls the body, given that this character represents the idealized feminine of Hollywood's so called 'Golden Age', and her surname gestures to a company that produces what they euphemistically refer to in their advertising as 'feminine care products'. In a similarly ironic and irreverent vein, the name of the stage manager, Fluffer, references the porn industry, where the job of the fluffer is to "facilitate a male porn star's erection (usually via oral stimulation)" (P. Baker 122). Ironically, in this production, Fluffer is visually coded as a stereotypical lesbian in overalls, print shirt and red sneakers, once again signalling a queer presence, despite the fact that she resists Esmé's conflation of the term 'dyke' and the theatrical profession of stage manager (58). Throughout the play the cultural significations upon which subject constitution depend are simultaneously and often humorously reinforced, resisted, and finally reconfigured in ways that lead us to recognize the arbitrary nature of sign systems erected within the frameworks of institutional power.

Simultaneously relying upon and subverting the audience's recognition of stereotypes, Esmé, of course, invokes the figure of the drag queen, signalling an overt queer presence in the production. Eden exemplifies a stock representation of the flamboyant gay male, signified as such through colourful costuming, 'bitchy' speech patterns, and an affinity for the Hollywood celebrity represented by Esmé. Conversely, Burkett, in the role of Jesus, does not rely on the conventional significations of queerness, but rather 'queers' the symbology of iconic Christianity by presenting a contemporary Christ figure whose difference from his human compatriots is not discernible through visual cues, but by his own openly gay status. Similarly, Edna's representation of the maternal feminine is a seemingly contradictory mix of self sacrifice

and self preservation; as a mother, Edna defends her husband and her son, and as an elderly widow determined to carry on with her life despite her own status as HIV positive, she refuses the erasure typically brought to bear upon older women. Among these characters that variously resist the strictures visited upon them within conventional, conservative sociality, I contend that it is those who ultimately and paradoxically refuse to conform who remain visible. Both Esmé and Eden, in their clichéd representations of queer identity are erased, while Edna and Jesus remain visible on the stage. At the close of the play, having more fully embraced her own subjectivity, Edna departs with Fluffer for a 'gig' at a hospice in the city. Edna announces that she's decided to embrace life more fully, and reminds us one final time to "keep your fork, because I guarantee . . . there's pie" (90). In the final moment of the play Ronnie/Jesus is alone on stage, waving goodbye and giving Edna–and the audience–the thumbs up. Thus, following the traumas and loss that Edna endures, we are encouraged to maintain hope in the face of an uncertain future.

World Without End, Amen

In this highly personal and political production, Burkett offers a response to the anxious social terrain of the late twentieth century in which the plague of AIDS circulates within Canadian culture as a result of tainted blood. The multiple metaphors of blood signal and disrupt the conflicted relationships of the individual and the 'other' within the space of trauma marked here by the contagion and shame of AIDS, a plague whose presence confers the status of abject upon the victim. While Eden suffers the effects of abjection through the homophobic violence visited upon him by his father, in this play it is important to recognize that it is not the gay male character who is the carrier of contagion, but the conservative heteronormative father who spreads the virus.

Burkett's production stands in sharp contrast to Tony Kushner's acclaimed AIDS play, Angels in America: The Millennium Approaches, in which the AIDS-infected gay protagonist is cast in the role of a reluctant prophet, and compelled by the angels to make the public aware of the crisis. Unlike Kushner's lavish spectacle, Street of Blood takes the unlikely figure of Edna, a conservative rural widow, as a protagonist whose struggle to come to terms with her losses and her condition as an infected victim of the disease resonates within and beyond queer communities. As an HIV positive woman, Edna exemplifies the idea that contagion is always/already present within the culture. The cultural fear of contagion that gets projected onto the abject 'other' is, in Burkett's production, ultimately the latent cruelty within the individual subject and the social order that violently erupts when confronted by what has been repressed and simultaneously produced by the culture itself. The rage that is a result of the fear and loathing of the socially abject 'other', evident in Stanley, Eden, and Esmé is seen as the ultimate contagion that threatens the individual and society with chaotic collapse. Within a cultural context marked by a loss of faith in secular, political and religious institutions to sufficiently protect against bodily and spiritual collapse, Edna represents a definitive locus of hope, reminding us that it is the dialogism of intersubjective relations that enable the self and the 'other' to exist and co-exist.

Through metaphors of blood, Burkett reconfigures the normative ideals mounted to contain and suppress the abject. For instance, the blood ties normally associated with notions of kinship and belonging are reconfigured through contamination here to represent the breakdown of the institution of the family as it is conventionally understood. In an Artaudian reading, this breakdown is seen as necessary to expand the limited and limiting notion of what constitutes kinship. In fact, in a gesture that could

easily be read as an acknowledgement of Burkett's adopted family, Edna tells Spanky that "family isn't always about blood" (76). As well, drawing upon a long-standing tradition of stage and film representations of Christ's humanity, Burkett's Jesus gestures toward a compassionate Christian doctrine in which the abject, the 'other', is not repudiated and repressed, but is in fact a necessary component of the social and spiritual landscape. Where Artaud's earlier ideal of a gnostic drama suggests that "primal repression is bound up with an enquiry into the great religious themes of becoming, creation and chaos" (Goodall, Artaud 124), Burkett's production compels a revelation that spiritual and psychical peace resides in an acceptance of the repressed, which, like the plague, is always/already within us. Finally, then, whether metaphoric or concrete, "the return of the plague to centre stage is the true return of the repressed" (Goodall, Artaud 115). The encounter with the repressed, however, is never an easy one.

If the repressed, the abject, is that which already resides within the individual and the culture, Street of Blood demonstrates the uneasy social negotiations between the familiar and the alien. While the puppets in Street of Blood are deployed to examine the navigation between self and 'other' in a cultural landscape overshadowed by the fear of contagion and death, Burkett's next play considers how these self/other relations are disrupted and renegotiated within the psychic landscape of death and mourning. In their nature as objects that are simultaneously 'living' and dead, Burkett's puppets are compelling yet frightening representations that gesture to the traumatic negotiations of the boundary between subject/object and self/other. Both animate and inanimate, they simultaneously produce delight and dread–a paradoxical response to that which is both known and unknowable. In the next chapter I examine how Burkett's puppets enable us

to confront the contradictory psychical landscape of the simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar–the realm of the uncanny.

Chapter 3

Meeting Uncanny Strangers in *Happy*

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.
> Sigmund Freud
> "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917)

> At some level the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or 'homesickness', in other words a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive.
> Nicholas Royle
> The Uncanny (2003)

> The Expressionist stage, like the ancient theatre, was not intended as a place of mere entertainment; rather, it claimed for itself the status of a sanctuary wherein the deepest spiritual truths of the culture were embodied and apprehended.
> David F. Kuhns
> German Expressionist Theatre (1997)

Where Burkett's work since Tinka's New Dress reflects a general preoccupation with how the individual seeks to constitute subjectivity within sociality, Happy specifically focuses upon the psychic and cultural landscape of mourning through which individual and social subjects negotiate the difficulties of the loss of a loved one. As an examination of the stages of grief originally proposed by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her 1969 pop-psychology volume Death and Dying [22], here Burkett stages through puppetry the experience and effects of loss, grieving, memory, mourning, and melancholia in order to expose how such formulaic approaches fail to adequately account for the diverse range of experiences and responses to loss. In effect, Burkett's

[22] For clarification, Kubler-Ross suggested that the stages consisted of 1) denial, 2) bargaining, 3) anger, 4) depression, and 5) acceptance. Variously espoused and debated, this formulation of the grieving process has come to be accepted as conventional wisdom within the pop-psych self-help contingent of Western culture in the latter twentieth century.

characters literally perform what have come to be understood in the popular imagination as the stages of grief, demonstrating how the traumatic experience of the loss of the 'other' threatens to derail the project of constituting and sustaining the self, particularly within the context of Western culture. The effects of mourning and melancholia that manifest within this play reveal the extent to which the loss of the loved object–the 'other'–signals an underlying, and overwhelming fear that the self alone cannot be sustained. In dramatizing these stages, Burkett makes use of elements of Expressionist staging techniques to explore the limitations of Kubler-Ross's model of mourning and takes us beyond these limits, moving from a psychic teleology to a psychic topography. Through Happy we come to see the how the processes of mourning can also be constitutive and sustaining of the subject/self in the traumatic encounter with death.

Burkett created Happy after the suicide of a good friend, precipitated by the death of her husband, which compelled him to think about how we approach grief. The play was a means of working through his own mourning. He notes in a review during the run of the production that he was "struggling to be happy the whole time of its creation" (Nicholls, "Everybody get Happy"). While writing the show, Burkett was in the midst of ending a long-term relationship in Calgary and relocating to Toronto to be near John Alcorn, his current partner, whom he had met in 1999. This production, which premiered in April 2000 in Toronto, responds to his own experience of mourning that encouraged him to "wonder aloud why happiness is perceived as something only the chosen few get" (Donnelly, "His World on a String"). In Happy, Burkett explores this question through a community of misfit and uncanny characters whose various strategies for coping with the loss of a loved one demonstrate the effects of memory and mourning on

the constitution and sustainability of the self[23]. In examining the complex relationship between bereavement and memory, Happy stages the uses and limits of pop psychology responses to grief as well as the more nuanced underpinnings of psychoanalytic theory.

Given Patrick Campbell's contention that "if performing is a process in which individuals, physically present on stage, think speak and interact in front of other individuals, then that very activity must throw into relief crucial questions about human behaviour" (1), Burkett's interweaving of pop culture and intellectual endeavour becomes all the more significant as a means of exploring the difficult navigation of mourning. Further, "the metaphorical association that the puppet invites in its audience" (Tillis, Aesthetics 54) underscores the poignancy of using puppets to navigate traumatic psychic landscapes. Burkett is well aware of this connection between the audience and his characters when he reveals his desire to "talk about our human condition, and do it with puppets, which aren't human" (Gefen, "String Theory"). As performing objects, that is, objects consciously invested with life by the puppeteer and the audience, puppets are in a unique position to mediate the difficult terrain of loss and longing brought to the fore with the death of a loved one. Bil Baird contends that "[puppetry] is a means of communication, an extension of human expression" (13). As extensions of human expression, then, puppets by their very nature as animated inanimate objects are already predisposed to evoke the uncanny, that which is at once familiar and unfamiliar. The characters in this play purposefully draw our attention to this notion of uncanniness and its relation to mourning through the twin lens of loss and grief. Thus, here I consider the

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[23] As well, I employ a psychoanalytic reading of the processes of mourning being enacted on the stage in order to consider the limits of a formulaic Freudian approach to the contested field within which subjectivity is constituted in mourning.

interplay of a range of dialectic considerations–mourning/melancholia; subject/object; self/other; animate/inanimate; individual/community; social space/performance space–as they circulate within a production that demonstrates how these are implicated in constituting and maintaining the self as a social subject navigating the traumatic encounter with loss.

Staging Mourning

Set within the community of a rooming house in Western Canada, this play illustrates what happens when a rupture occurs in the reciprocal relations between self and 'other' through a cast of social misfits that include Happy, a war veteran; Raymond, the elderly caretaker; Ricky, a flamboyantly gay shampoo boy and Kenny, his boyfriend; and Lucille, a chain-smoking senior, as well as Carla, a young poet and Drew, her husband. With the unexpected death of Drew at the top of the play, Carla descends into a psychic space of grief that takes us into a realm of memory inhabited by the uncanny. Narrated by the title character, the action of the play slips between two stage worlds: Carla's external reality as a grieving young widow among the members of the rooming house community and the interior space of her unconscious where she tries to come to terms with Drew's death. The two spaces–or 'realities'–are distinguished on stage through the use of a revolving cabinet, which is tellingly described by the theatre critic Lyn Gardner as "a kind of keep-tidy of the psyche, where memories can be tidied away into drawers" ("Happy"). One side of the cabinet presents the rooming house playing space, while the other manifests the world of the Gray Cabaret where we see the various stages of Carla's grief enacted. Described in the stage directions as a "neutral realm" (15) that only comes into play when a traumatic event evokes an overwhelming sadness,

the Gray Cabaret is hosted by the highly androgynous, campy and clownish figure of Antoine Marionette.

Figure 8 – Antoine Marionette

Like the eighteenth-century French queen that his name recalls, Antoine's visage conjures notions of excess, dressed as he is in lacy knee-breeches, a fitted lace jacket heavily flounced at the sleeves and ruffled at the neck, and high-heeled buckle shoes; a froth of silver hair with a black stripe through the centre completes the look. While this emblematic figure of Death ironically invokes notions of drag performance and gestures toward excess and exaggeration, the unrelieved monochromatic silver/gray tones of his costume suggest that there are limits even to extravagance. Juxtaposed against the wash of neutral, gray tones of the Cabaret, the playing space of the 'real' world of the rooming house is, by contrast, marked by a variety of colours that evoke the multifaceted richness of everyday life. I suggest that such a distinct visual contrast recalls the staging

strategies of German Expressionist drama of the early twentieth century that marked both the disillusionment and the hopes of a culture in chaos[24].

As David F. Kuhns notes, the experimentation of theatrical practice, with an eye to reforming social consciousness, came in three distinct styles that focused their attention upon different aspects of the human condition: Schrei (the scream), Geist (the spirit), and Emblematic (signification of the idea)[25]. Burkett's Happy reflects aspects of all three forms, but primarily makes use of the theatrical strategies of Schrei drama in which the emotional experience of loss is expressed and foregrounded through the characters of Carla, Raymond, and to a lesser extent, Ricky. With its aim of externalizing human experience (Titford 17), Expressionist theatre is recognizable in the use of chiaroscuro effects that produce high visual contrast to differentiate between the external world and one's emotional response to it. Not only do the costumes and set design make use of colour to denote this interior struggle in Happy, but equally important is the lighting design. Burkett's production notes indicate that "*upstage . . . are seven four-foot by eight-foot wooden Venetian blinds. These are the cyclorama and constantly shift in colour throughout the play. These blinds, the floorboards of the deck, the cabinet and the chairs are all stained white. Colour exists only from the ever-shifting lighting design*" (ii). While I am not suggesting that Happy falls within the purist framework of Expressionist drama–Burkett does not, for example, reject discursive language in favour of rhythmic exclamatory dialogue (Innes 46)–the delineation

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[24] Peter Jelavich provides an extensive description of the Cabaret clubs in which Expressionist artists and intellectuals gathered in his volume Berlin Cabaret (Cambridge University Press, 1993). As well, Michael Patterson explores Expressionist drama in The Revolution of German Theatre, 1900-1933 (Routledge, 1981.

[25] For a much fuller discussion of Expressionist experimentation with dramatic production see David F. Kuhns comprehensive study German Expressionist Theatre: The actor and the stage (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

between the rooming house world and the playing space of the Gray Cabaret evokes a sensibility that links the aesthetics of both Expressionist drama and cabaret performance, including musical acts introduced by an emcee who interacts directly with the audience. Employing these cabaret conventions, Burkett stages Carla's struggle to overcome the loss of the 'other' that Drew's death forces her to confront.

Mimicking the structure of the station dramas[26] of early Expressionist theatre that episodically presented the ritual journey of the individual toward self-realization (Patterson 52), each stage of Carla's mourning is presaged by a musical number presented by one of the performers of the Gray Cabaret. Antoine Marionette, the host of the Gray Cabaret, presents as an androgynous Grim Reaper, a sardonic emblem of Death, who appears to introduce each of the stages of grief experienced by the bereft young widow. In his role as the cabaret host, Antoine wittily introduces and explains for the audience each of the acts about to be staged. As with cabaret entertainments of this ilk–theatrical modes noted for their "parody and eroticism" (Kuhns 59)–a variety of talent is presented that includes comedy, and in this case, various musical stylings. With each of the four cabaret performers, the audience witnesses a separate aspect of grief, albeit one that is doubly mediated by the fact that the 'actors' are puppets and thus 'dead' figures themselves that subvert the trauma of loss through a humorous distortion that makes such an emotionally fraught experience more bearable. For example, chanteuse Cleo Payne represents the stage of denial; opera singer Maureen Massey-Ferguson[27] leads us through the bargaining phase; cellist Jacqueline Dupressed explores

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[26] Michael Patterson notes that the station dramas, or 'stationendrama', were probably named for the stations-of-the-cross enacted in Medieval pageant plays (52).

[27] Massey-Ferguson refers to the Canadian manufacturer of agricultural equipment once owned by the influential Massey family. Vincent Massey (1887 – 1967), the son of the manufacturing magnate, was the

the darkness of depression; and lounge singer Perry Homo croons toward acceptance of a harsh reality. Of course, part of the humour here is that each of these characters is based on a real-life counterpart whose achievements are being acknowledged at the same time that they are being lampooned: Cleo Laine (b 1927) is a black English jazz singer and actress who was named Dame Commander of the British Empire[28] in 1997; Maureen Forrester (b 1930) is a Canadian opera singer who served on the Canada Council, and in 1967 was made a Companion of the Order of Canada[29]; Jacqueline DuPré (1945–1987) was a renowned English cellist whose career, which began at the age of 16 when she made her formal concert debut, was cut short by Multiple Sclerosis[30]; and Perry Como (1912–2001) was an American singer famous for his style as a 'crooner'[31]. For an audience familiar with these celebrities, such parody accentuates the comic aspect of what could otherwise be a painful exploration of bereavement and loss. In fact, this satirical approach to such a painful experience presents what Anne Ubersfeld has noted of the theatrical experience in general, as the condition where spectators are "at one and the same time required to engage themselves in the spectacle (identification) and to back off from it (distancing)" (23). Burkett's edgy humour thus makes it possible to endure the encounter with loss by distancing the audience from

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eighteenth Governor General of Canada (1952 – 1959). He headed the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences which lead to the creation of the National Library of Canada and the Canada Council. He enthusiastically supported the establishment of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, which offered its first performances in 1953, and was instrumental in promoting the construction of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, which opened its doors in 1969. His younger brother, Raymond (1896 - 1983) became an actor of note in Hollywood and on Broadway. For more information on both Massey brothers, including essays on the role of theatre in forming and contributing to cultural ideologies, see Don Rubin's Canadian Theatre History (Playwrights Canada Press, 1996).

[28] DBE is the equivalent of a female knighthood.

[29] More information can be found on Maureen Forrester's vast contributions to arts and culture in Canada at thecanadianencylopedia.com.

[30] For more on Jacqueline DuPré's remarkable career as a cellist, see jacquelinedupre.net.

[31] Perry Como's obituary, published by the BBC News can be found at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1327726.stm.

what is emotionally overwhelming in order that we may consider thoughtfully the limits of conventional mourning practices. In fact, the physical representation of each of the performers serves to escalate the humour and intensify the irony at play.

For example, Maureen Massey-Ferguson makes her appearance draped in the finery of an opera diva, complete with tiara. The stage directions indicate that "when she hits her high notes, her neck extends" (41), a move that collapses the distinctions between high and low culture, given that this technical mechanism recalls the bawdy performances of Punch and Judy puppet shows that are linked to the carnivalesque of the fairground; there is usually one character in a conventional Punch and Judy puppet show who manifests the extendible neck as a comic device. As well, the character of Jacqueline Dupressed appears in a male Pierrot[32] costume complete with baggy white trousers and tunic, black skull cap and white face, linking this character to the silent tradition of mime, which found renewed favour among Expressionist directors and actors[33].

Although bereavement is a deeply distressing emotional experience, the ironic representations of the Cabaret performers and their satirical musical numbers work to keep the audience at a safe emotional distance from such trauma while still drawing our attention to its effects. For example, in his introduction to the act depicting depression,

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[32] Like Punch and Judy, Pierrot descends from the Commedia dell'Arte tradition in Italy before developing into the traditional French mime character we see here. For more on Commedia characters and traditions, see Commedia dell'Arte: An Actors Handbook by John Rudlin (Routledge, 1994).

[33] In his work German Expressionist Theatre: The Actor and the Stage, David F. Kuhns suggests that German Expressionist dramatists who were seeking "a new grammar of physical expression" (67) experimented with the exaggerated stylizations of mime acting. As well, Christopher Innes notes in his study, Avant Garde Theatre 1892–1992, that the silence of the mime artist "which led to stylized, exaggerated gestures and the transformation of his face into a mask" (21) presented an intense emotional surface upon which to explore the psychological depths of character (Routledge, 1993).

Antoine Marionette observes that while most people can empathize with Carla's depression to some degree, there is a limit to our compassion:

> But really, after a while it gets so boring . . . And have you noticed the funny thing about depressed people? They never stay at home and work it out there . . . You're at a cocktail party, for example, canapé in hand, drink in the other. Someone comes up to you and you say, "How are you?", they say "I'm depressed", you say "I have to go", they say "Read my journal" and you say "Stab me in the face with a fork instead!" (50-51)

Couched behind such caustic jesting, I would argue, this scene reflects not only a fear of being unable to relieve someone else's torment, but by extension the unhappy fact that each of us is alone with our own traumas. Following depression, then, according to the conventional wisdom introduced by Kubler-Ross is anger: anger at being abandoned, and anger that we have no control over the situation and cannot change it. In Happy this stage is enacted by hand puppets of Carla and Drew performing a Punch and Judy scene in ornate eighteenth century costumes similar in style to that worn by the cabaret's emcee.

That the stage of anger should be performed in Punch and Judy fashion has much resonance, given the tradition of violence associated with such performances. Burkett follows the course of a typical English Punch and Judy show[34], adapting the story to the

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[34] In a typical English Punch and Judy show, the anarchic Mr. Punch is usually pitted in a violent battle with one other character at a time, typically beginning with his wife Judy. With gleeful intent Punch kills Judy and their baby and then is often chased by the police constable, the doctor, and often the Devil himself–all of whom he beats to death with his slapstick. In many contemporary versions, Mr. Punch does ultimately get caught and punished for his deeds, but the satirical sensibility that is the legacy of these performances remains intact. For a comprehensive examination of the Punch and Judy tradition in England, see George Speiaght's Punch and Judy: A History (Studio Vista, 1970). Burkett's use of these

circumstances of this play. For example, here it is Judy who vengefully runs amok, beating Mr. Punch mercilessly. As the scene progresses, the vocal distinction between the characters of Punch/Judy and Drew/Carla becomes less rigid, until each has re-assumed their own voices and speech patterns. Because there is so much to discuss in this scene, I reproduce it in full here:

> **CARLA.** Mr. Punch! Mr. Punch, where are you?!
>
> **DREW.** Ah Judy, my beautiful wife! Give us a little kiss then.
>
> **Carla:** A kiss?
>
> **DREW.** A quick caress, my comely consort!
>
> **CARLA.** You want a kiss?
>
> **DREW.** Oh yes, my blushing bride.
>
> **CARLA.** 'Tis not a blush you rogue, 'tis anger you see 'pon my cheek.
>
> **DREW.** And what a lovely cheek it is! Give mine a kiss then!
>
> **CARLA.** I will brush your cheek, you rake. Take that! (*She slaps him)*
>
> And another, lest you forget the sting of my passion!
>
> **DREW.** Judy, my shrewish spouse, like why do you visit these furies upon me, man?
>
> **CARLA.** Where's the baby?
>
> **DREW.** The baby, my love?
>
> **CARLA.** Our baby. Where is it?
>
> **DREW.** You speak mysteries to me, Judy, for there is no baby. (*The Punch and Judy "acting" is dropped and they become themselves*). (30-

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characters departs from the tradition in that while conventional Punch and Judy characters never actually die–they return again and again despite the violent acts perpetrated against them–Burkett's puppets in Happy do present traumatic and tragic scenes of death and grief.

31)

At this point Drew resumes his own speech pattern and addresses Carla/Judy as Carla. Carla, however, is not done venting her anger at Drew for having left her through the act of dying. She continues to slap him for having 'tricked' her, and when he protests that he didn't deceive her, she replies:

> **CARLA.** Liar! To think that you could so easily slip from our marital knot. A knot which now chokes like a noose around me! (*She hits him again*)
>
> **DREW.** Stop it, Carla!
>
> **CARLA.** Carla? No, I am Judy, hear me roar!
>
> **DREW.** No baby, you're Carla. Come on, Carla, forgive me. (*She throws him to the ground and stands over him*)
>
> **CARLA.** Why should I absolve you, asshole?
>
> **DREW.** Because I died, baby. (32)

At this point the stage directions indicate that "*the hand puppet of Drew slips off, revealing Ronnie's bare hand*" whereupon Carla begins to savagely beat the hand while angrily screaming "I hate you!" (32). What is particularly interesting here, is that not only do we witness the enactment of Carla's anger, but we see it through multiple frames in a trajectory that leads from Burkett as actor/puppeteer to Carla and Drew through which (whom?) Burkett's acting is delivered down to the characters of Punch and Judy that further mediate the puppet performances of the Carla and Drew figures, and then back to Burkett–or rather, Burkett's hand. These multiple frames of performance that culminate in the "unmasking" of the hand in conjunction with Drew's reminder that he is dead moves us from the realm of pop culture/pop psychology to

invoke a more profound reading of grief that signals the uncanny–that is "a particular commingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar" (Royle 1) in which absence is paradoxically and simultaneously foregrounded as presence.

Enter the Uncanny: The Presence of (Lost) Objects

Certainly it is disturbing to come upon a 'naked' hand where there was once a character that we, as audience, have invested with life. Like viewing a corpse, there is an unsettling defamiliarization that takes place; the thing before us *looks* like something we know, but is not. In this instance, Burkett's hand marks a double signification as both part of the puppeteer and the dead body of Drew. This moment of doubling signifiers marks the difference in semiotic systems through which hand puppets operate, and recalls the contention of renowned Russian puppeteer Sergei Obraztsov (1901–1992), that "my right hand, on which I wear the puppet, lives apart from me with a rhythm and a character of its own" (qtd in Tillis, Aesthetics 19). Steve Tillis goes on to explain that:

> the hand that wears the puppet "lives apart", and is perceived as apart from the actor, and partakes, in perception of the audience, of the same nature as the rest of the figure. That is, it is perceived not so much as a hand, as it is an *object.* (Aesthetics 19, emphasis added)

This failure of the integrity of boundaries between things–in the case of the delineation between the puppeteer and puppet witnessed in Burkett's scene between Drew/Punch and Carla/Judy–is commonly witnessed in the art of puppet theatre.

The collapsing of the psychic distance between puppet and puppeteer signals the conflicted and complex relations between subjects and objects, and compels a similar dynamic between the puppet and the audience, wherein "the puppeteer's movements send the message of potential life through the puppet's body, and the audience claims it"

(Zelevansky 287). During the time of performance we witness how "the puppeteer transfers his own energy and affect to the puppet, so that the puppet can appear to act for itself" (Zelevansky 278). Through the direction of the puppeteer, "the puppet is a willing pawn serving the needs of stories and life lessons . . . [and] communicates verbally and non-verbally and may move between human and animal expression…without disrupting its sense of coherence as character, because its life is provisional" (Zelevansky 272). It is, of course, this very provisionality of the puppet's existence–its life–that marks it as uncanny in the first instance.

As performing objects, puppets are inherently linked to the uncanny, giving free rein to the imagination well beyond the capabilities of human actors. Eric Bramall, for example, in his instructional volume Puppet Plays and Playwrighting acknowledges that puppet plays have an advantage over live theatre because, "since the puppet is not human to begin with, and the audience accepts this fact, the most outrageous flights of fancy can be indulged in without putting any undue strain on the audience's imagination" (12). Thus, Burkett's hand can simultaneously signify as part of his own human body and that of the puppet character Drew, evoking an eerie aura that is at once disturbing and compelling. Scott Shershow suggests, "puppets strike us as grotesque and comic because [in the words of linguist Otakar Zich] 'we consider them puppets, but they *want* us to consider them people'; that is, the comic effect arises from an incongruous (and hence comic) attribution of agency to the mere stage sign" (215, emphasis in the original). Corroborating this view of the dissonance created by the presence of puppets, Tillis contends that "the signs deployed by the puppet are as intentional as theatrical signs can be; their intent, whether or not this is acknowledged by the puppet-artist, is to lead the audience to imagine life while it perceives an object . . .

the puppet's abstracted signs of life provoke the process of double-vision" (Aesthetics 115). Shershow, quoting Laplanche and Pontalis, argues convincingly that we can understand the common response of 'double vision' when we consider the psychoanalytic uses to which the puppet has been put:

> Psychoanalytic interpretations of puppet therapy commonly invoke the concept of psychic 'projection'–that is, the "operations whereby qualities, feelings, wishes, or even 'objects' . . . are expelled from the self and located in another person or 'thing'" . . . The notion that puppets provide a relatively unmediated access to the 'other scene' of the subconscious thus reveals itself as inseparable from, or transparent with, the conceptual hierarchy of theatrical representation. (224-225)

Burkett pushes this concept of doubling even further in Happy with the inclusion of Carla and Drew costumed as Punch and Judy figures. There is thus a magnification of the already present estrangement that occurs when the audience witnesses a puppet character impersonating other well known puppet figures; the expectation that characters–unlike live actors–are fixed is thus made unstable here. This sense of doubling and dissonance is heightened by the mise-en-abyme of the Punch and Judy scene in which Carla's anger is staged. The sight of Burkett's hand shocks us because we are reminded that we have willingly suspended our disbelief in order to accord human characteristics to the puppets. In this moment of disturbing dissonance, then, we are not only reminded that Drew is dead, but also that, as a puppet, he was never truly 'alive' in the first place–at least not in the sense of being a fully autonomous subject capable of sustaining his existence outside the time and space of performance. The life/death dyad that is such a crucial consideration in the play–here seen as more integral

than simply dichotomous–simultaneously resonates with the subject/object pair whose reciprocity is a focal point of attention. Thus, we find ourselves in the realm of the uncanny in which we encounter "a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality" (Royle 2). Theatre, of course, always already presents a liminal space in which the audience is encouraged to encounter and explore the ramifications of fantasy and desire. Puppet theatre, perhaps even more so than live actor performances due to the inanimate nature of its actors, connects to the realm of the fantastic, linking spectators to desire and fantasy–and hence, the unconscious–through the uncanny.

As Tillis reminds us, "in puppet performance, an inescapable tension exists within the puppet itself, which is at once a material object (or a part of the body treated as a material object, as in the case of Obraztsov) *and* a signifier of life" ("The Actor Occluded" 114, emphasis in original). While many reviewers note the routine suspension of disbelief that occurs among the audience in a Burkett production, one remarks that "to create life from lifeless objects you need a special sort of appreciation for your own existence" (Koentges, "Puppeteer Pulls no Punches"). That Burkett has such an appreciation is borne out by the reviews of Happy, where one critic comments on how the puppeteer renders "the inanimate human, to the point that a magical transference of personality seems to occur" (Donnelly, "His World on a String"); another observes that "we cry and laugh with the dolls *as if they're real people*" (Gefen, "String Theory", emphasis added).

Not only do Burkett's puppets stand as uncanny witness to the slippage between subject and object, but the presence of human actors punctuates this dissonance. As numerous reviews of his work demonstrate, Burkett's constant presence on stage evokes a curious response of disavowal. Michael Feingold, for example, admits in his 1998

review of Tinka's New Dress that he came to "deny the existence of a puppeteer" ("Puppet States"). Departing from the traditional practices of Western puppet theatre where the puppeteer typically remains out of sight, Burkett's productions are more evocative of the Japanese Bunraku form in which, as Tillis notes, there is no attempt to disguise the presence of the human agent (Aesthetics 60). Unlike Bunraku, however, where the puppeteers' interactions with the puppets are strictly limited to their highly choreographed manipulations, Burkett often performs as an actor with the puppets, making it virtually impossible to deny his appearance on stage. That Feingold and others manage to dismiss the presence of the puppeteer despite the fact of his visibility on stage throughout the shows suggests that Burkett's own subjectivity is momentarily erased–or more precisely, split, given the number of characters he enacts during a performance–by those who refuse to confer their recognition of him.

To further complicate the unstable terrain of subjects and objects, former Stage Manager and now Artistic Associate Terri Gillis remained visible on stage during the production of Happy as she had done previously in Street of Blood, calling the cues over a head-set. In Street of Blood, for example, Gillis handed Edna her quilting at the top of the show in full view of the audience. Not only was Gillis visible, but just in case the audience should attempt to disavow her presence, Edna acknowledged it by announcing her as a "local girl, comes in to help out every now and then" (Street 5). In Happy when the title character appears naked in the bathtub scene it is Gillis as the SM who, according to the stage direction, "appears with a towel and dries him off a bit", to which Happy replies, "thank you dear" (49). Thus, not only is the distinction between the human subject and puppet object made visible, but the presence of the Stage Manager also exposes the mechanics of theatre as well. Drawing attention to the theatrical

apparatus exposes the illusion and functions to further alienate the audience from identifying with the characters and the scene. In a further rupture of the theatrical illusion, Burkett used white strings, rather than the black ones traditionally used in puppetry (Donnelly, "Burkett's World on a String"). The result of such staging is that the strings are much more visible to the audience under the stage lights, a move that contributed to the overall neutral tone of the set while pointing to the objectness of the marionettes. Despite such overwhelming evidence to the contrary–or reality-testing as Freud would have it–audiences remain committed to the fantasy of the 'liveness' of the puppet, at least during the time of performance.

Gillis, for example, recalls that following a performance of Street of Blood one evening, an audience member commenting on the proliferation of simultaneous action taking place on the stage revealed that she had momentarily feared that Edna would begin speaking before Burkett could physically get to her (Interview, June 2004). While this telling admission reveals the extent to which the audience is willing to buy into the illusion, it also reveals the degree to which the uncanny is operating in Burkett's work. In her fearful response, this spectator reveals her anxious experience of a momentary slippage between subjects and objects, despite her certain knowledge of the concrete delineation between the two. Further, the contested duality of subject/object relations seen to be at operation here between the human audience and Burkett's puppets is also reflective of the difficult negotiations for supremacy between self and 'other'. So, while the uncanny nature of the puppets gestures toward the contested borders between fantasy/reality, self/other, and subject/object, there is a further disjunction channelled through the other characters in the play–some of whom inhabit the performance as dead characters, manifesting in the realm of the living only through the work of memory.

Memory, Mourning, and Melancholia

Through Happy's narration the audience discovers that while the characters of Lucille and Kenny–representing Raymond and Ricky's lost objects of desire–are in fact dead, they physically manifest on stage as the embodied desires upon which Raymond and Ricky depend for their constitution as individual subjects. Unlike Carla, whose overwhelming grief results in her inability to continue living, Raymond and Ricky reconstruct memories in an attempt that is never entirely successful to disavow past loss in order for them to sustain the reciprocal self/other relations that enable the constitution of self. In other words, Lucille and Kenny embody the memories of the 'other' against which Ricky and Raymond see themselves reflected as subjects. As Happy tells Carla:

> Ricky doesn't like to look in the mirror . . . because what he sees makes him sad . . . So Kenny became his mirror. Someone who will stand right there in front of him and reflect him, and never leave . . . So Kenny still lives here with us. And Ricky keeps him fat. (63)

We learn that Ricky refused to say goodbye when Kenny died three years previous due to some unspecified lingering illness that rendered him "so thin at the end" (63), with the result that the work of remembering sustains Kenny as an uncanny presence in the play. What this uncanny presence demonstrates is one possible manifestation of the Freudian formulation of melancholia, where mourning for the lost object results in a diminished regard for the self, or the ego. As Freud notes of this process:

> The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning–an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world

> which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. ("Mourning and Melancholia" 254)

Similarly, Deborah Britzman observes that "in melancholia, the love for the object becomes agitated and ambivalent in loss. Love reverses its content, becoming a hatred of the world and of the self" (131). Not only, then, does the grieving person lose a loved one, but in the case of melancholia he or she also loses the hope of being able to sustain a stable, coherent self, given that the 'other' against whom the self is reflected is gone. According to Freud's hypothesis, the relation of the self to the lost object is complicated by ambivalence, that is the contest between love and hate that operates in most relationships where there is a high investment of feeling ("Mourning and Melancholia" 266)[35]. Thus, Carla's observation that Ricky doesn't even like Kenny (63) does not negate Ricky's need to preserve a vestige of his 'other' self, that is, the part of himself that Kenny represents. The memories that Ricky uses to sustain the fiction of Kenny's presence do not, therefore, necessarily need to be of a positive nature. Happy observes that "not all memories are good ones dear. Sometimes we hold onto the bad ones just to remind ourselves why we're so miserable" (63). Despite Carla's observation, Ricky needs Kenny to sustain a phantasmatic past that he has employed to constitute the self he desires, a project that requires a set of consciously constructed memories, which allows him to disavow his own past.

Midway through the play when Ricky's mother arrives to take him 'home' to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan we discover that he is not Puerto Rican as he has led Kenny

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[35] In his essay "Two Classes of Instincts", Freud provides a further clarification his usage of the term ambivalence: "clinical observation shows not only that love is with unexpected regularity accompanied by hate (ambivalence), and not only that in human relationships hate is frequently a forerunner of love, but also that in a number of circumstances hate changes into love and love into hate" (On Metapsychology, vol. 11, 383).

to believe, but instead is the son of a Chinese immigrant mother and a Native Canadian father. His mother reveals that "Ricky see West Side Story when he was fourteen. Ever since, he say he from Puerto Rico" (45). Having reconstructed a past, it is only a small step for Ricky to rework the present. When his mother attempts to take him back to Moose Jaw he tells her that "the day I left that town you both became dead to me . . . You're dead to me! Now go away and stay dead" (47). Conversely, when Kenny dies, Ricky repudiates his knowledge of the loss because he needs Kenny to sustain the self he desires to be. He tells us that "I'd fucking die if I couldn't be who I'm pretending to be" (48). While he acknowledges that he is 'pretending' in order to maintain the melancholic fantasy that is at the core of constituting his identity–the fantasy that Kenny is not dead, but his mother and father are–Ricky must repudiate the social world inhabited by his parents. Pointing to a gap in Freudian psychoanalysis that fails to consider the importance of sociality, Judith Butler notes in her exploration of the processes of subjection that "the effect of melancholia, then appears to be the loss of the social world, the substitution of psychic parts and antagonisms for external relations among social actors" (Psychic Life 179). For Ricky, this conflicted relationship–he does admit that his parents probably mean well after his mother has exited–demonstrates a deep ambivalence that is never resolved, an ambivalence from which, as Butler suggests, "there is no reprieve" (Psychic Life 193).

Similarly, Raymond's memories of Lucille reflect a level of ambivalence that produces the tensions of a highly conflicted relationship. From the beginning of the play when Raymond makes his first appearance on his daily journey to the store to pick up rations "in case of global disaster" (9) his strained relationship with Lucille is

foregrounded. The following exchange is indicative of the continuous tension exhibited between these characters:

> **LUCILLE.** Raymond, pick me up a pack of smokes.
>
> **RAYMOND.** I most certainly will not do anything of the kind, Lucille.
>
> **LUCILLE.** Aw c'mon, don't be such a goody two-shoes, Raymond. I need a pack of smokes!
>
> **RAYMOND.** You need to stop smoking Lucille.
>
> **LUCILLE.** What's it going to do? Kill me? (5–6)

This question elicits laughter since, as a puppet, Lucille is not really alive in the first place. At the level of the narrative, however, once it has been revealed that Lucille has died many years previous, the full force of the irony resonates on multiple levels. Of particular interest here, once we understand that Lucille is not among the living as a character, is Raymond's apparent concern for her health, since it is only through his imagined memories that Lucille inhabits the space of the rooming house community at all. He tells us that he has kept those he loves intact by "remember[ing] them all back to life" (56). We discover that Raymond originally learned this strategy through which to avoid the pain of loss by disavowing the knowledge that his mother died in childbirth. Raymond's response exemplifies the conflicted emotional state initiated by traumatic loss. Of this response to such loss, Cassie Premo Steele notes:

> Either the loss can be dealt with by introjection, by letting the reality of the loss settle upon the psyche, which opens the way for possibility of internalization of the lost object, allowing it to become part of the subject–or the loss can be dealt with by negation, by rejecting the loss

> within the psyche, which closes the door to internalization, and results in a hardening of the subject. (5)

These difficult negotiations can be seen through Raymond's strategy of quoting advice from his dead mother as a means of coping with this 'abandonment' by her. For example, he tells us:

> My mother always said, "You're an empty-headed dreamer you are, Raymond. Someday you'll wake up my lad, and your dreams won't be able to comfort you then. I should know, I almost died because of you". She told me that all the time. (56)

In order to free himself from "all those memories I've made up that won't be quiet and let me rest" (56), Raymond finally begins to confront the knowledge he has been disavowing, noting of his mother that:

> She died because of me. Not almost, like she tells me now, but really. Died, when I was born. A little baby, all alone in all that awful light. But I couldn't be alone. I couldn't be just me, just Raymond. So as soon as I could understand it I started to remember it. But not the real way. My way. Raymond's way. It's better that way, because now no one ever leaves me. They can't. (56)

Until this admission that marks the beginning of Raymond's acceptance of loss, the ambivalence that marks his relationship to Lucille is equally evident in his connection to this fantasy mother. In both instances, the phantasmatic women that Raymond creates dominate him in ways that manifest in verbal cruelty; Lucille derides and calls him names, while his mother's counsel carries with it a continual undercurrent of ridicule. Rather than simply being read as an instance of misogynist representation of strong

female characters as overbearing bitches, what we witness in this situation are the mechanisms of ego defense in relation to loss that Freud outlines in his essay on "Mourning and Melancholia". For instance, Freud suggests:

> The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open . . . The conflict due to ambivalence gives a pathological cast to mourning and forces it to express itself in the form of self-reproaches to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object, i.e. that he has *willed* it. (256–260, emphasis added)

Thus, for Raymond there is a conflict between anger and loyalty; his anger at being abandoned by those with whom he most desires connection, and a resultant turning inward of that anger in order to sustain a commitment to his love-objects. Futher, there is evidence of guilt feelings having to do with the deaths of Lucille and Raymond's mother. Significantly, for instance, Raymond remarks that his mother died *because of him*, which, paradoxically sets up loss as the constitutive factor that determines his precarious sense of self. Thus, Raymond's subjectivity is overlaid from the beginning with the conflicted tensions of anger and guilt: anger at being abandoned, and guilt that the abandonment was somehow his fault. On the heels of this it is also implied that had he only acted sooner, Lucille might not have died how and when she did.

Late in the play Happy reveals that Lucille died in a car accident shortly after the end of World War II. We find out that Lucille was a vibrant young woman with a passion for life that drew the young men to her. When poor, shy Raymond, who was madly in love with her, finally got up the courage to talk to Lucille at a dance hosted by the town for the returning soldiers, she was just being whisked away by Skinny, a

popular athlete with whom Raymond could never hope to compete. In reflection, Happy says "who knows what might have happened if Raymond had gotten to that intersection on the dance floor first" (59). He tells us that Raymond followed them out to the parking lot where he watched them drive away toward their impending deaths. It was at this point that Raymond found Lucille's discarded dress lying in a heap, and chose to keep it as a way of holding onto her. He later tells Carla "I guess I thought that if I held it close enough it would never go away" (61). This is the same dress he gives to Carla in a gesture that signifies his final letting go of Lucille.

Having missed the opportunity to connect with Lucille in life, Raymond constructs a fantasy relationship that gets played out as an embodied memory on the stage. Even when he finally releases Lucille by saying goodbye, the ambivalence that has marked their relationship–which is really a projection of what Raymond *thinks* their relationship would have been like–remains evident:

> **RAYMOND.** So I need to let this go now. I need to let it be what it was, not what I foolishly hoped it might be.
>
> (*Lucille enters, and crosses the stage to Raymond.*)
>
> **LUCILLE.** Thank you, Raymond.
>
> **RAYMOND.** I love you, Lucille.
>
> **LUCILLE.** I know. (*Lucille is placed in a cloth bag, taking one final look at Raymond.*) Asshole.

While Lucille's acid remark serves to create emotional distance from this painfully poignant moment, the scene also demonstrates how memory can be–and often is–manipulated to create an alternate reality, one that defends against feelings of

overwhelming loss and thus satisfies the ego. For, as Freud tells us with respect to the experience of loss:

> Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition . . . This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis. ("Mourning and Melancholia" 253)

For Raymond, the reality of being alone is too great to bear initially, and so he turns away from the knowledge of her death that instantiates an overwhelming sense of loss.

That Raymond and Ricky perform their disavowals through the construction of false memories is a feat we should not find surprising, since, as Freud observes "memory . . . has an unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions and nevertheless lays down permanent–*even though not unalterable*–memory-traces of them" ("The 'Mystic Writing-Pad'" 430, emphasis added). These memories, however, ultimately fail to satisfy, as they must if we are to accept the Freudian hypothesis that:

> Each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished. ("Mourning and Melancholia" 265)

In the reciprocal relations that depend upon the processes of projection and introjection[36] in which the self is constituted by and through the 'other', Freud suggests that acknowledging the loss of the 'other' poses a threat to the ego's integrity. In other words, wherein the death of the 'other' reminds the ego of its own mortality, the ego must disavow that object and find a new object/'other' to which it can attach.

While Freud's formulation helps us to understand to an extent the processes that ground Raymond's attempts to master the inner traumas of losing his mother and then Lucille, the failure to account for the machinations of sociality presents a limited lens, particularly when we compare Raymond's strategies for overcoming loss to those adapted by Ricky. For, while Raymond does indeed eventually come to realize that he is unable to sustain the fiction that keeps Lucille alive and provides him with an imaginary recollection of childhood in which his mother was living, Ricky consciously chooses to retain the fictions through which he remakes his identity. A key difference between the two characters, of course, is that while both rely on the fantasy of reworked memories to constitute a sense of self, Ricky chooses to refuse the family that fails to produce his desired self while Raymond has no such family to repudiate, and instead creates memories of a mother who never existed. In each case we see how melancholia is variously constitutive of the subject. Where the Freudian configuration of the subject through melancholia stops at the level of the individual, Butler's reading of the processes of subject constitution and subjection includes an interaction with the social world. She notes, for example, that "melancholia initiates a variable boundary between the psychic and the social . . . that distributes and regulates the psychic sphere in relation

[36] Simply put, projection can be understood as the externalization of the internal contents of the unconscious while introjection witnesses the opposite movement of internalizing the external world.

to prevailing norms of social regulation" (Psychic Life 171). What Butler thus notes, and we see enacted on the stage, is both the psychic processes of negotiating loss and the social field in which these negotiations take place. While the social realm presents multiple ways for the subject to 'become', what remains constant–although not the ways in which it is employed–is that memory is a crucial component of the processes through which the subject constitutes him or herself and is in turn, constituted by others. Of course, as Freud notes, memory is easily manipulated. In response to Carla's question of how the remembered ones age, Happy tells her "memories get old Carla. If you hold onto them tight enough they change with you. You look at them differently" (63).

In her examination of the complexities of memory and mourning, Laura E. Tanner notes:

> What Freud describes as the 'intense' opposition between the presence of the lost object in memory and the absence of that object in reality not only fuels but constitutes the 'work of mourning.' Memory cannot speak the body's past presence without highlighting its present sensory inaccessibility; in doing so, memory participates in blurring the very dynamics of absent presence it should, in Freud's model, help to clarify. (95)

The limits of memory, as Tanner points out, are such that the act of remembering the lost person/'object' continuously reminds us of the loss from which we seek to escape. And while Freud's formulation of the operations of mourning is a useful starting place, Tanner reminds us as Freudian psychoanalytic theory fails to do, that the death of a loved one represents not just a psychical loss, but equally an *embodied* loss. As she observes, "the consolation of representation dissolves into its opposite as imagistic

presence only highlights embodied absence" (108). So although Lucille and Kenny appear on stage, we are made aware finally that these presences are chimerical at best; the irony, of course, being that all puppets are always already human metaphors. Thus, while Ricky maintains the fantasy of Kenny's presence in a highly conflicted relationship, the satisfaction that Lucille's imagined presence initially provided for Raymond eventually cannot be sustained, and can only remind Raymond continuously of the loss he feels. But while Lucille's materiality is in question, the dress she leaves behind on the night of her death signifies both her material absence and her uncanny presence. It ultimately becomes an object that "lend[s] grief a form that exposes rather than compensates for bodily absence" (Tanner 178). The difficulty of navigating loss that is felt at both a psychical and, equally importantly, at a physical level becomes apparent in the ways that materiality is accented throughout the production. In fact, from the beginning of the play Burkett exploits the tension of the puppet's double nature as animate and inanimate and draws attention to the conflicted notions of embodiment that is one legacy of the Cartesian mind/body split inherited from Enlightenment philosophy.

Bodily Presence

Figure 9 - Happy

The very first scene in which the title character Happy is introduced takes the body and bodily functions as the focus. Happy draws our attention to the bodily processes of elimination that are simultaneously analogous to the psychical processes of letting go marked in the play. In a direct address to the audience, for example, Happy announces "I feel great today. Had myself a great big bowel movement this morning" (3). He goes on to chide the audience not to "be getting all squirmy about it" (3) and continues to ruminate upon bodily processes that are common to all humans. Given the typical Western response to the body, and most particularly the disavowal of bodily functions having to do with the elimination of waste, Happy's observations of our relationship to both the detritus and the processes of expulsion elicits an uncomfortable laughter mixed with the dissonance of the audience's awareness that the puppet bodies on stage are not subject to the organic operations of the human body. The audience's discomfort–and titillation, given the forbidden nature of public discussion of embodiment–regarding the material functioning of bodies should hardly be surprising in a culture where, as Elizabeth Grosz reminds us, we have inherited the Platonic idea that

"the body is a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason, or mind" (5). This focus on the body and its machinations is not limited to the opening scene, but is witnessed throughout the play. Towards the end of the production we see Happy in his bathtub, again directly addressing the audience on the topic of bodily functions:

> Have you ever noticed that every time you fart in the bathtub, it takes on a greater life than if you had just passed gas in pants while walking down the street? . . .
>
> (He stands up, and looks at his penis)
>
> Now don't be afraid of my little man here, ladies. This noble warrior was put out to pasture a long time ago . . . this little fella brought me so much pleasure over the years I don't mind one bit that he's become as useless as a fart in a windstorm . . . I suppose I should be embarrassed, sitting here all bare assed–pardon my French–but I've spent close to eight decades on this planet encased in clothing like a sausage . . . All you see is a naked old fool. Flesh that has ceased to be interested enough in life to even stand firm. Well, if that's what you need to see, then fine and dandy. But don't think it's what I feel inside this disappointed flesh, because under the skin, there is a heart that beats young and strong. (49)

Not only does Happy remind us of the human body's materiality and functioning–uncannily so, since his own body is a wooden construction–but also that it is matter that is socially and culturally invested with meaning. As Elizabeth Grosz notes "representations and cultural inscriptions quite literally constitute bodies and help to produce them as such . . . As an essential internal condition of human bodies, a consequence of perhaps their organic openness to cultural completion, bodies must take

the social order as their productive nucleus" (xi). Thus, Happy's elderly body, as he observes, is dismissed as no longer interesting, given the cultural veneration of firm, young flesh and its linkage to sexual desire. Paradoxically, it is these very binaries that pit youth and age, and desire and repulsion against one another in a hierarchical system of value that are introduced in the play, only to be denigrated. It is not insignificant that Drew's death comes during a moment of sexual encounter, thus signifying both bodily function and the limits of the body. Both Drew's unexpected death, which signals the transformation from the desiring body to the monstrous (dead) body, and Happy's confrontation with his aging body, demonstrate the ease with which the body crosses the boundary between subject and object in this play. Magnifying the dissonance evoked by these boundary crossings is the fact of Happy's very status as a puppet, which allows a reversal of this crossing through a liminal space from object to subject and back again.

The liminal place that marks the space between subject and object concerns the space–and the condition–of the abject. Turning again to Kristeva, her useful discussion of when and how the body inhabits the threshold between being and non-being informs us:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, is death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance . . . As in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. (3, emphasis in original)

Not only, then, is the dead body an abject thing, as Burkett's hand metonymically becomes in its manifestation as a signifier of Drew's dead body, it is also a thing that reminds us of our own fragility as human subjects, where the move from subject to object to abject is the only certainty, and one that is entirely out of our control.

Thus, our discomfort when Happy confronts us with his aging body registers both dissonance and unease; we are confronted with a body whose fluids and functions signify its decay–despite the fact that the puppet body has no fluids, cannot produce waste, have sex, procreate, or die. Perhaps even more disconcerting is that this character reminds us of the fact of our own deterioration and imminent death. Loss, therefore, is not simply experienced as the loss of the loved object–which, in itself can be devastating enough– but also it is a threat of the breakdown of the self at two levels that include both the psychical and the physical. On one level the threat of self dissolution comes through the recognition that the self needs an 'other'–now lost to us in death–through which to be constituted in the first instance, and on another level, there is the realization that all organic matter is finite, and as such the body is simply another 'thing' that will erode and eventually cease to be. This observation of the body's materiality has prompted Elizabeth Grosz to note that "the body is a most peculiar 'thing', for it is never quite reducible to being merely thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. Thus it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects" (xi). The body–like the puppet–thus, operates as a multiple signifier; that is, it simultaneously gestures to its links not only with subjects, objects, and that which is abject, but also with the uncanny, and the fetish.

Remembering the Lost (Fetish) Object

Within the context of mourning, then, there are (at least) two bodies: the body grieving and the body grieved over. With the loss of the object, the self loses the 'other' against which it knows itself as a subject in the first place. In this instance it is not uncommon for the subject, the grieving body, to take other objects as substitutes–fetish objects[37] if you will–to stand in for the body grieved over, the loved and lost 'other'. In her extensive study of the function of the fetish object, for instance, E.L. McCallum suggests that "as much as fetishism is about the negotiation of differences, sexual or cultural, it is also about the negotiation of identity, through the oscillation between autonomy and connectedness, distance and proximity" (121). In terms of bereavement, she compares fetishism to melancholia "since both are object-relations that produce subjects and both are strategies subjects used to negotiate loss" (110). She further notes that:

> Both fetishism and melancholia involve a loss of a loved object (possibly only at the level of the unconscious), a memorialization of the loss, an ambivalence about knowing that loss, and a lack of shame in one's conduct in resolving that loss. (116)

According to McCallum, the fetish object offers another means by which to mediate the effect of loss because "while the melancholic counters loss of an object with retreat from the object to focus on the loss, the fetishist substitutes the loss with something that can provide satisfaction, thus moving past the lost object" (118). Thus the fetishist, unlike

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[37] Here I am employing a definition of the fetish drawn from E.L. MacCallum's study that suggests an encompassing definition of fetishism wherein the object substitutes for a particular thing or 'other' that has been lost to the subject. For further explication, see her volume Object Lessons: How to do Things with Fetishism (1999).

the melancholic, can remain connected to the world around him or her through establishing a relationship to an altered reality. For Raymond, then, Lucille's discarded dress becomes the fetish object to which he is cathected; that is, it presents as the fetishistic site through which fantasy and reality converge and overlap. The trajectory here in which Raymond's melancholic fetishism is enacted is similarly experienced by the audience who witness the move in which Lucille's (uncanny) materiality becomes reduced to that of her dress as a signifier of her presence, and finally her total absence from the scene when Raymond acknowledges her death. The dissonance, encountered as a loss that incites grief, marks the elision of fact and fiction that McCallum asserts demonstrates "the separation between reality and the imaginary or psychic world is not so clear-cut" (120). Objects, in this scenario, allow such a slippage between the symbolic and imaginary realms of psychoanalysis in the first instance. As Jean Baudrillard argues:

> what man gets from objects is not a guarantee of life after death but *the possibility, from the present moment onwards, of continually experiencing the unfolding of his existence in a controlled, cyclical mode, symbolically transcending a real existence the irreversibility of whose progression he is powerless to affect* . . . Objects allow us to apply the work of mourning to ourselves right now, in everyday life, and this turn allows us to live–to live regressively, no doubt, but at least to live. (96–97, emphasis in original)

Thus, for Raymond, Lucille's dress becomes the object that signifies his grief, and allows him–for a time–to transcend and disavow Lucille's death as well as the inevitability of his own. Holding onto Lucille's discarded dress, Raymond

(re)constitutes Lucille's presence through memory, but it is a presence that simultaneously denotes her absence. This embodied memory allows Raymond to temporarily negotiate through disavowal the debilitating loss that the death of Lucille represents for him. Ultimately Raymond chooses to release his hold on the fetishistic connection to the imaginary realm wherein Lucille is configured as a loved object–particularly since in this case, the object is one that punishes the desiring subject by continually reminding him of what he can never truly possess. As a means of breaking the fetishistic connection he gives the dress to Carla, although not without a certain amount of tortured angst, as we witness when, according to the stage directions, *"Raymond looks at the dress in his hands, and buries his face in it"* (59).

In the scene in which Raymond makes a gift of the dress to Carla–where both are so absorbed in their own grieving that, according to the stage directions "*they are together but separate in their own thoughts*"–Raymond explains to Carla that "just because I have this . . . thing, doesn't make it real. Not real like it was. Real like I wanted it to be. But no amount of wanting, no amount of time, could ever make it into something it wasn't. (61) Indeed, in keeping with McCallum's contention that "foremost among fetishism's virtues is the fact that it is about not suffering, but satisfaction, without regard to social convention" (124), the audience, in paradoxically responding to the cipher-like nature of the puppet takes the characters in Happy as fetish objects. Similarly, Raymond chooses to surrender his fetish when it no longer serves to compensate for the loss that Lucille's death fosters. While giving up the fetish is a difficult act for Raymond, moving beyond melancholia proves to be an impossible task for Carla.

Carla cannot or will not sustain her own sense of self without the presence of Drew; nor is she able to remember him sufficiently to maintain his presence. She tells Raymond that "with every minute passing, ticking me further and further away, I can't remember all of him. Parts and pieces, but not everything that made him Drew" (43). Like Raymond, Carla assumes responsibility for having lost the object of her love. She tells Raymond "I didn't memorize him. And so he's slipping away from me again. I've killed him all over again" (43). Consumed by grief that threatens the stability of her own subject position, Carla exemplifies the processes of grief that Freud suggests becomes melancholia when the person grieving gives over to "an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or interests" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 252).

In a bid to sustain his presence, Carla takes the sweater Drew was wearing in the opening scene as a fetish object in much the manner with which Raymond emotionally invests in Lucille's dress. Her attempts to reconstitute Drew, however, are unsuccessful, and in the end she leaves the sweater for Raymond as a memento. Unable to reconcile the loss of the loved object, the 'other' against whom her own subjectivity is established, and unable or unwilling to transfer her desire to another 'other', she chooses to end her own life, whereupon she moves into the realm of the Gray Cabaret. Antoine tells her: "You're one of us now, Carla. Go take your place in the wings until someone remembers you" (69). According to this logic Carla will be reanimated through memory by those who choose to recall her–in this case the audience, who have collectively agreed to forego the usual demands of the 'real' world in order to invest in and make connections with the characters on stage. Of course, Carla's death is the one that we experience at perhaps the most intimate level of all the characters, since she is the one 'living'

character with whom we have had a prolonged, identificatory relationship before she dies during the course of the play. Following Carla's traumatic death scene in which we are witness to her suicide by hanging we are reminded that we are able to retain our lost objects–and thus our own subjectivity–only through the dual operations of memory and fantasy.

Within the realm of theatre, and certainly across multiple levels in puppet theatre, it is fantasy that structures the dynamic field between self/other, subject/object that makes possible the impossible–the fantastic–in the first place. Further, the processes of identification and mimesis associated with performance and dramatization echo the psychic operations of projection and introjection that establish the ground upon which self/ 'other' relations are enacted, and it is these processes that enable the audience to 'forget' the inanimate nature of Burkett's characters. Dramatic performance lends itself specifically to such negotiations as those that transpire between the self and the 'other' precisely because it takes place within the realm of fantasy, which in turn opens a channel to the desires of the unconscious. At the heart of the matter in terms of mourning then, the function of fantasy may well be to maintain a connection to others–including those whose loss we mourn–in order to sustain a sense of self.

Where Freud first proposed a pathological model of melancholia that is always and only destructive to the self, the contemporary field of psychoanalysis is rethinking the notion that the goal of mourning is to achieve the complete detachment from a deceased love object (J.E. Baker 55). Drawing upon the object-relations work of Melanie Klein, psychologist John E. Baker goes on to suggest that successful–read healthy–mourning focuses on "preserving and restoring the internal object relationship in the mourner's personality" (61). As a process not of detachment but of transformation

of the relationship to the lost love object, the bereaved person is able "to maintain some tie with the inner representation of the love object but . . . also form investment in new relationships and new activities" (J.E. Baker 68). Baker contends that "chronic mourning is characterized by unusually intense and prolonged emotional reactions, in many cases with persistent anger or self-reproach, and with depression as a principal symptom though often combined with anxiety" (61). Unlike such instances where an overabundance of mourning occurs–as in Burkett's example of Raymond–J.E. Baker suggests that by maintaining an internal relationship through image and memory of the deceased:

> The bereaved individual could, at times of stress, turn in fantasy to that inner object representation and experience some of the same emotional nurturance and reassurance that the object would have provided were he or she still alive (Klass, 1988, p. 52). Widows or widowers who review the events of the day in their imagination with the person who died . . . are using the internal relationship to define and maintain their sense of self-identity. (69)

The fantastical internal relationship to the deceased noted by Baker is often supported by the presence of an object associated with him or her. Happy, for example tells us that after his wife's death, he removed all the plastic furniture covers that she had insisted upon, but "sometimes when I miss that woman, I go to furniture stores. And I sit on the brand new sofas and chairs that are covered in plastic. Just to remember her" (73). It is also not uncommon to find people wearing jewellery that belonged to a loved relative or friend who is now deceased. Serving as a "material bridge to a lost body" (Tanner 177), such mementos demonstrate McCallum's contention that "fetishism makes such a

satisfying and successful strategy for negotiating loss, since it provides a structure for the fetishist to work through loss rather than avoid it" (141). In this way, the fetish object can provide the one grieving with a material marker that signals both the reality of loss and the fantasy of connection to the lost 'other' through whom subjectivity and identity are established and sustained.

Within the context of puppet theatre generally, and this play in particular, Burkett's characters provide a similar 'material bridge' that operates akin to fetish objects, in that they signal an overlap between subject/object that extends to self/other relations. In Happy, which stages the very operations of mourning that are constitutive of the subject, we see how reciprocal relationships are continually put in the service of constituting both the 'other' and the self. Premo Steele notes "paradoxically there is no self without the distinction between inside and outside; there is no self without the relation of self/other. It is only when there exists an inside, which has been constructed by relation to the outside, that a 'self' exists at all" (4). In relation to the constitution of the self through mourning, Premo Steele further elaborates that "when what is internal (the 'self') is later checked with that which is external (the 'other'), and there is nothing there, mourning ensues" (4). While mourning is a difficult encounter–one which most of us would avoid if it were possible–it is also a productive encounter through which the necessarily reciprocal relations of self/other are established in public acts and rituals that signify grief, absence, and longing. Such public acts and rituals provide not only the opportunity for the interactions that in part establish the self, but equally such moments of reciprocal exchange reinforce community–that is the gathering of individual subjects within a larger collective framework. Where Burkett initially introduced considerations of community linked to political responsibility in Tinka's New Dress, here we are asked

to contemplate the self/other relations embedded in the community staged before us through an encounter with grief and mourning.

Revisting Community

Expanding the discussion begun in Chapter one, Schechner has observed that within theatre, "the move from aesthetic performance to ritual happens when an audience of individuals is transformed into a community" (81). In Happy we see before us a community sharing the staged space of the rooming house, each connected by the traumas of mourning and loss. As Schechner has noted, while ritual is most often equated with religion, "rituals give form to the sacred . . . and mold individuals into communities" (52). Following Schechner's socio/anthropological approach to performance studies, Colin Counsell notes the correlation between ritual and the theatrical event:

> The ostensible purpose of a ritual may be to celebrate spiritual beliefs but its actual effect is to assert the communal nature of such beliefs, writing them into the collective cultural consciousness so that they become a part of our individual sense of identity. Ritual, then, provides a means of reaffirming the social whole. (144–145)

So, in an age and Western Canadian cultural context where the secular typically takes precedence over religious or institutionalized spirituality, the public spectacle of a theatrical performance in which a common emotional experience takes place can certainly be understood within the context of ritual. Rituals–especially those having to do with grief–come heavily proscribed, however, and as Naas points out "though we are not at the point of completely prohibiting mourning, its scope and public display are being severely limited" (84). In the play's staging of grief and mourning, the audience of

Happy is temporarily given leave to encounter its own deeply personal moments of bereavement through identification with the scene and the actors during the time of performance.

Further, the audience becomes a community through its participation in what Schechner, referencing Turner, terms a liminoid ritual–one that provides a "brief communitas experience" (72)–becoming transported by the experience, that is, emotionally moved by the event, if only temporarily. One reviewer, referring to how the deceased characters were carefully placed in cloth bags and stored in a drawer of the on-stage cabinet noted that "there's something terribly moving about that gesture. Anyone who's had a loved one die can only hope their spirits were treated with a similar degree of care" (Matwychuk, "Dead puppets society"). As Ubersfeld suggests, the spectator participates not only through reflection of the scene staged before it, but also at the level of "contagious passion, trance, dance, and all those phenomena which come to the spectator from the actor's physical movements and which cause the spectator to experience physical and psychological emotions" (30). The audience, then, not only has the opportunity to come together as a community of individuals encountering and sharing the experience of loss–and importantly of hope in the face of loss–but in the case of Happy, the experience of mourning is foregrounded and explored, thus creating a double frame that psychically links the audience directly to the performance being staged.

Driving Toward Hope

Within this double frame in which the separation between performance and audience spaces fails to maintain a stable boundary, many diverse manifestations of mourning are enacted on both sides of the divide. If we consider Freud's observations,

we begin to see that mourning is indeed the very point at which life and death are not only separated, but also overlap paradoxically. For example, in his formulation of drives modeled along dualistic binary structures, Freud suggests that "If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons–becomes inorganic once again–then we shall be compelled to say that *'the aim of all life is death'*" ("Pleasure Principle" 311, emphasis in the original). This should not be read–as it has been typically–simply as Freud's proposition of a death wish, or a will to die. Rather, it is my contention that Freud is proposing that the aim of life is to prepare to meet death–that is, transition from a state of being toward one of non-being–in a controlled, orchestrated way. He says quite clearly that "what we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die *only in its own fashion*" ("Pleasure Principle" 312, emphasis added). Perhaps his most controversial theory, this formulation of the 'death drive' or the 'death instinct' considers how the compulsion to repeat distinctly unpleasurable scenes–like reliving the trauma of loss–necessarily serves as an ego defense. He argues that:

> there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle. In the case of children's play we seemed to see that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. ("Pleasure Principle" 293–307)

In other words, what Freud is suggesting through his theory of the death drive is that the compulsion to repeat traumatic experiences is a necessary experiment employed to gain mastery over the effect those difficult encounters have on the psyche. Certainly, in the

nightly performance of the production, Burkett himself enacts this very compulsion to repeat the trauma of mourning and loss. If we take Schechner's position that "human rituals are bridges across life's troubled waters" (65), and his contention that "every performance–aesthetic or social–is both efficacious and entertaining", then we begin to understand the importance of Burkett's Happy as an opportunity for mastering our own grief and coping with loss. Mourning is one of, if not the most, difficult of traumas for the ego to negotiate; and also one of the most necessary. The ways in which we go about navigating such difficult terrain may vary, but the aim is always the same: transcending and/or surviving the loss of the loved object, the 'other' against whom we measure our sense of identity and worth. The primary difficulty here, as Peter Schwenger remarks, is that "the 'other' is, of course, us, the subjects who seek to apprehend an object's being, and who realize at some level that connection can never be made. Yet the very moment when this lack of connection is realized creates an emotional connection" (7). Within this desire for connection, which would reinforce the subject's own sense of being, mourning becomes a pivotal and painful process–one that paradoxically constitutes plenitude through loss.

As Adam Phillips remarks:

> Certainly mourning can sometimes feel like a punishment for our attachments . . . The stubborn fact of loss, its unspeakableness, sets limits to invention, even if the prodigality of loss in any life, and the necessity of our own death, also prompts our resources. Our ingenuity lies in turning losses into gains. (79)

The fact that it is not uncommon for audiences to return to Burkett's productions during the course of a run[38] would seem to corroborate Freud's notion of the compulsion to repeat the event–whatever it may be–in order to master it, and subsequently find hope in a future inevitably marked by absence and loss. We see in Happy the difficult negotiations of loss and mourning that manifest in a variety ways–Raymond's initial disavowal and final acceptance; Ricky's sustained disavowal and escape into fantasy; Carla's inability to move beyond grief–culminating at the end of the play in the hope, perhaps born of resignation and determination, necessary to engage fully with life.

Moving On

In the final scene Happy reveals his own trauma of mourning, the tragic event of the death of his only child who, as a young boy, plummeted from the roof of the house in an attempt to fly shortly after the end of the Second World War. Happy recounts that his wife Mae blamed him for the death of their son who had eagerly listened to his father's stories of wartime fliers winging their way through the open skies. While his wife became bitter, Happy resigned himself to continuing on in the hope that things would change, if not before, then with either his own death or Mae's. Although the dialogue presents the anxiety and despair of mourning, the presence of Happy in a "*bright yellow rain slicker, a sou'wester hat and rubber gum boots*" (70) suggests hope in the face of loss. Pragmatically, Happy contends that "the way I see it, if you want the rainbow, then you've gotta put up with the rain" (73). While spending time ruminating

[38] My own observations of conversations overheard and engaged in directly, both pre- and post-performance in various theatre lobbies, as well as Burkett's own anecdotal evidence (Interview, August 2007) confirm this finding that many audience members regularly attend a performance multiple times during the course of a run.

from his position swinging back and forth on a park swing, which is metonymically represented by Burkett's foot in this scene, Happy tells us that:

> I get a lot of privacy on days like this. I don't know if it's because people are afraid of the sight of an old fart dressed up like a goddam duck–pardon my French–or if they just know to leave a dreamer well enough alone while he's at work . . . Some people might think that my reach exceeds my grasp. Well, pardon my French, but isn't that the whole goddam point of being alive? (74)

Reinforcing the notion of hope in this final scene, the lighting moves from a wash on the back screen of "*blazing pink and clouds*" to "*the colours of the rainbow flag*"[39] while the "music swells as Happy swings higher and higher" (74). The colourful lighting design, combined with the suggested mise-en-scène of a rainy day–a trope which has traditionally signified growth and rebirth–brings the play to a close on a hopeful note[40].

It is this condition of hope, I would argue, that compels audiences to return time and again to Burkett's productions–especially given that a typical evening with one of his casts is known to provoke both tears and laughter. Perhaps more so than his other works, Happy, with its focus on grief and the uncanny 'others' for whom we mourn–the ones who are simultaneously absent and present in memory–signals the contradiction of connection and disjunction between subjects and objects. As Schwenger reminds us, the once living subject that has now become an object in death–that is to say the corpse–"is the final ironic closure of the gap between subject and object" (157). The corpse, in

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[39] The inclusion of the colours of the rainbow flag–evocative of gay pride–reinforces notions of 'otherness' and difference co-existing within a diverse community of subjects.

[40] While some reviewers accuse the production of being 'sentimental', London theatre critic Lyn Gardner notes that Happy works precisely because it is unapologetically sentimental ("Happy"). And really, what could be more sentimental than hope in our contemporary moment?

Schwenger's account is that object that *is* the border that mediates the space between life and death, bearing as it does "the imprint of a residual subjectivity" (157)[41]. It is the loss of a coherent subjectivity–this turn from subject to object–that is most disturbing to the psyche, reminding us as it does of our own imminent decline. As Hallam and Hockey convincingly argue "the threat of death is very much bound up with the possibility of oblivion . . . Memories of the dead . . . are as much a bulwark against the terror of the forgettable self as an inescapable aftermath of lives which have come to an end" (4). As uncanny figures, the corpse and the puppet–residing as they both do in the liminal space between being and non-being–bring us into contact with the limits of subjectivity, and remind us that there is no subject without its object/'other'.

Figure 9 – Happy and Ronnie

Sitting in the darkened theatre rubbing elbows with our neighbours we encounter in Happy a community of characters on stage brought together to examine their grief,

[41] How like one of Burkett's puppet characters this sounds, being both and neither subject or object, but some vestiges of both during the time of performance.

while we are similarly invited to confront our own losses from our place off stage in the audience. Against a backdrop of loss of the loved object–the 'other' whose absence produces intense pain–the disquieting experience of loss is explored at the levels of content and form. Making use of Expressionist staging strategies that seek to master trauma in order to transcend pain and secure in the subject the sense of a coherent self, an individual identity, Burkett brings together communities of 'others' seeking to get beyond the melancholy of loss. As Schwenger notes, though, the constitution of the embodied subject is dependent upon its relation to the object that is always already lost, given that the object can never be wholly subsumed within the subject (9–10). What Schwenger considers and Happy enacts is the necessarily conflicted relations of subject/object and self/other, relations most readily witnessed in the processes of mourning. As a staging of the stages of grief and mourning, Happy reminds us of the paradoxically contradictory and conflicting processes of bereavement in which self/other relations are invested. As Antoine tells us following Carla's suicide:

> And so, a completion. Of a sort. The unmapped journey of grief. Our young friend chose five stages here in our cabaret, but darlings, don't be seduced into thinking that's the prescription for all. Five stages of grief? Highly disputable crap, in my opinion. Perhaps there's one stage, perhaps a hundred. And who knows? For some, there may be no stages at all . . . Well, the show must go on . . . but when life's too much down there, or too cold down there, or the wetness of despair washes over you down there, come to the gray wooden cabaret, sit back, find comfort. And remember. (70)

Ultimately, in this production Burkett cautions the audience not to live in the past, but "to let memories be memories" (qtd. in Matwychuk, "Life of the marionettes"). So within this encounter with mourning and the pain of remembering, Happy challenges the audience to confront its own fears of loss–most particularly the loss of the self. And although these puppet characters can never truly lose selves that they don't own, but are momentarily granted through the collusion of the audience and puppeteer, they remind us that throughout the performance that loss can never be truly transcended, but only reconciled by recognizing the 'other' as necessary in the relational dynamics of sociality in which the subject comes into being. Like the mythical spirit guides of various faith-based systems whose function has been to facilitate the journey of humankind to the afterlife, the character of Happy acts as a kind of secular angel guiding us through the turbulent and traumatic landscapes of desire and longing associated with death and dying. Through Happy's guidance we see that human beings and human interactions are complicated, conflicted, and often contradictory. The difficult and seemingly contradictory negotiations between subject/object and self/other foregrounded in Happy continue to be a concern in Burkett's next production, Provenance. However, as we will see in the next chapter not only are death and mourning factors in constituting the subject within a cultural community, but also inextricably bound up with notions of 'otherness' is the darker aspect of aggression that circulates within the realm of sociality.

Chapter 4

Gazing on Beauty in *Provenance*

> The goal of all the arts is beauty. And beauty is nothing other than the intense, intoxicating joy which is produced in us by sounds, words, shapes, and colors.
> August Endell
> Quoted in Art Nouveau (1997)

> Masculinity...is mediated not only through class, but through ethnicity and – most important of all – through sexuality.
> John Tosh
> Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain (2005)

> The state has forbidden the individual the practice of wrong-doing, not because it desires to abolish it, but because it desires to monopolize it, like salt and tobacco.
> Sigmund Freud
> "Thoughts For the Times on War and Death" (1915)

In Provenance, Burkett returns to his consideration of the function of art that he began to explore in Tinka's New Dress. Where Tinka recalled the horrors of the Holocaust, Provenance brings the past and the present together, most notably by juxtaposing the cultural legacy of the First World War against the contemporary moment in which the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq overshadows everyday contemporary life; in this case what links past and present is a work of art, the provenance of which ultimately links directly to heteronormative ideologies of masculinity and conventional notions of beauty. When he came across a newspaper article that revealed that many major galleries, including the National Gallery in Ottawa, owned art that had been looted by the Nazis, Burkett began to think of how the term provenance–that is "the history of ownership pertaining to a work of art" (Provenance 17)–can be applied beyond the milieu of the art world. He began to realize that "we all have provenance. People have owned us–parents or institutions or partners" (Crew "Master Manipulator"), which set

him to considering the relationship between art and life, particularly in terms of what gets privileged as beautiful within our culture. While in Calgary during the run of the highly successful Happy Burkett had a conversation with Denise Clarke of One Yellow Rabbit Theatre Company in which he mused that "beautiful people have it so easy" (Morrow, "A thing of beauty"). She suggested he read Nancy Etcoff's anthropological study of beauty, The Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty, published in 2000, which suggests that "biologically, we as a species are programmed to go toward the strongest and the most beautiful" (Burkett, qtd. in Morrow, "A thing of beauty"). With these preoccupations in mind, Burkett created Provenance as a play that moves between the present and the past, recalls the traumas of war, complicates conventional notions of beauty, and explores how the conflicting desires to possess and simultaneously be an object of beauty prevent a productive human connection between the self and others. In this play Burkett uses a contrapuntal structure to examine the themes of the play as they intersect through the lives of the characters. Multiple sets of doubles are put into play here–past/present; beauty/ugliness; youth/age; subject/object; self/other; hope/despair; masculinity/war; and art/war in order to challenge these binaries. He invites the audience to examine how these dichotomies are insufficient to restore order in a world gone mad, and points to the ways that such discrete categories actually intertwine in practice.

In an overlapping tripartite structure Provenance brings together the intersecting narratives of the three central characters. All three have been subject to a separate traumatic encounter that is staged before the audience in a memory scene narrated and enacted by each one. It is these traumatic events through which the past and present lives of Pity, Leda, and Tender become entwined. Moving across time and space, at various points in the production we see Pity in Vienna in the present, Leda during the inter-war

period in Paris, and Tender in a secluded forest during the First World War. The disturbingly shocking events that ultimately link them to one another demonstrate a direct correspondence to the inherently violent cultural discourses and practices associated with idealized notions of masculinity. For each of the characters idealized notions of beauty are put into play as a means of defending against the physical and psychical horrors they experience.

Figure 10 – Leda, Tender, and Pity

Within a narrative that challenges ideals of beauty and the cost of achieving it, the set is dominated by a painting that recalls the Art Nouveau style popular in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and combines ornate detail in its execution with the influence of myth and legend. The beautiful, yet simultaneously unsettling figure that is the central focus of the painting foregrounds a conflict between the idealization of the object of the gaze and the lived experience of the subject and the spectator. The theatrically romanticized style of the painting suggests an overlap

between the play's narrative of trauma and suffering and the meld of Symbolist and Art Nouveau aesthetic sensibilities that result at points in this play in the physical staging of the 'mystical' contents of the unconscious. Here Burkett goes beyond the conventions of theatrical staging techniques, utilizing a blend of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century art and literary practices to stage an examination of the social constructions of femininity and masculinity as they are bound up in a cultural desire for beauty within a psychosocial landscape of violent conflict. As with Burkett's previous works, the moral and social values that impinge upon the constitution of subjects are again explored and contested, this time through a focus on how cultural ideals of art and beauty juxtaposed against a cultural landscape of war foreclose the desires and subjectivity of disavowed 'others'.

In this play the smart but plain Pity Beane, a Western Canadian student, drops out of a Masters program in Art History to search for a painting that has been the object of her desire since she first discovered its existence in an art text at the age of thirteen. With only the word 'Tender' inscribed on the canvas, Pity traces the provenance of the mysterious painting rendered by an unknown artist in 1921 to a brothel in present-day Vienna. The painting, executed in acrylic by Burkett, was digitally transferred by his partner John Alcorn, which is somewhat ironic, given that the very term provenance refers to the history of origin of an artwork. The image remains visible onstage throughout the performance. As the staging notes indicate, it "*depicts a young man, nude save for green silk stockings, leaning against a tree. Wrapping around both the figure and the tree is a swan. The background and border are decorative in a post-Secessionist style*" (i). The subject of the canvas is disturbingly rendered in an attitude of heroic

martyrdom that recalls the figure of Saint Sebastian, the Patron Saint of soldiers[42], and gestures toward the myth of Leda and the Swan. Unlike the myth that it recalls, in which Zeus is said to have come to the beautiful Leda in the guise of a swan in order to seduce or rape her, here the swan is protectively encircling the male figure with one outstretched wing. As a plain, bookish young woman who grew up with her gay father and his partner following the death of her mother, Pity has romanticized the figure in the painting that dominates the upstage wall.

Her obsession with the painting–or rather the figure of the boy within it–exposes the double fantasy of possessing and being an object of desire. Pity imaginatively constructs a sensory portrait of the figure in the painting, consciously endowing him with a scent and voice from an amalgam of the teenage boys who pass by her at school. With pragmatic logic employed to 'flesh out' his image Pity reasons that "if I was going to carry him with me, I would have to find a way to marry all my senses to this angelic boy" (46). As she sits in the stacks of her high school library gazing with rapt attention at the image contained within a book, Pity fantasizes an intimate connection to "the angel in the painting" (35) who will never rebuff or ignore her attentions (34). When 'Uncle Boyfriend', her father's partner, leaves because "it's just not beautiful anymore" (23), Pity uses the generous gift he leaves her to strike out on her own search for beauty.

A Plea for Art

In her search, Pity opts for what seems to her to be "the most sensible road to art and beauty" (24)–a Master's program in Art History–but she is rapidly disillusioned by

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[42] Significantly, St. Sebastian also has a long history of homoerotic associations and figures as a queer icon that appears in many stage and film productions, including the Canadian film *Lilies* (1996) directed by John Greyson, which was based on the stage play *Les feluettes* (1987) by Quebecois playwright Michel Marc Bouchard.

the academic approach. In a scene that will resonate for many graduate students in the liberal arts, she faces down institutional authority during a graduate seminar when she defends her choice of the painting of 'Tender' as her object of study. When Pity notes that the 'serious' art world has dismissed works like this one as "post-Secessionist decorative illustration, or as Professor Turcott himself has called it 'Romanticised crap to match the couch salon painting'" (22), she sets in motion the play's discussion of what, who, and how we define art. In an obvious and ironic nod to Burkett's dramaturge Iris Turcott, Art History Professor Turcott to whom Pity's remarks are addressed stands in for that strain of academia that has long wielded the power of authoritative discourse that privileges an intellectual relationship to art at the expense of an emotional one. In a liberating moment of resistance to institutional authority, Pity suggests that "you know, I know, all of us here in this room know, that if any of us could paint even remotely like that artist, hell, we wouldn't be twitching, bitter academics" (22). Recalling Carl's dialogue with Fipsi in Tinka's New Dress, Pity insists on being able to define art on her own terms, despite the resistance she meets from her academic institution:

> Art is the personal contribution to the ever-changing conversation about life. And I'm having that conversation here today, even if I can't render it on paper or canvas, I want to talk about art, it's my turn . . . I will not stand here and tell you what I think about art. No. I want to talk about how I feel about art, and how it makes me feel . . . Ever since I've been in this department Sir, my feelings have been a source of ridicule, and dismissed as mawkish and sentimental. And why is that Professor? Are you so afraid of my feelings, are they so dangerous to you? Well you should be afraid Sir, because art is dangerous. (23)

With a parting shot that "all I am met with, day after day, are hearts and minds more blank than a post-modernist canvas" (24), Pity's retort to those criticisms against emotional investment in art could easily be Burkett's own response to some critics who have, over the years, complained about the sentimentality of his scripts while encouraging audiences to go to the shows for the technical virtuosity alone. Choosing to leave school, Pity resolves to take the last of her inheritance from 'Uncle Boyfriend' and go in search of the painting that has inspired such a depth of feeling in her. Through her careful research into the provenance of the painting, Pity makes contact with the last known owner of the painting, Herschel Flechtheim, an elderly character who is modeled on a 1926 Otto Dix portrait of the German art dealer Alfred Flechtheim (Burkett, email correspondence 21/06/2008).

Figure 11 – Herschel and Pity

With this discovery Pity subsequently travels to Vienna where, it turns out, the painting hangs in a brothel. Before meeting Herschel, however, she first encounters the owner of this house of ill repute, who we later discover also has a connection to the painting–as the artist. Upon meeting Leda, the elderly Grand Dame owner of the house, Pity tells her that she has "come for the boy" (13). In their subsequent interaction the past and present converge.

Meeting the Past in the Present

As the narrative unfolds the relationship between this painting and the highly charged culture of Europe in the 1920s–particularly the hedonism that followed on the heels of the Great War–is gradually revealed. When Leda exhibits the painting of 'Tender' at a London show of new of new painters in 1921, the response from her overbearing, abusive father propels her to reinvent herself in another city–Paris. Upon learning that her painting was to be publicly shown, Leda's father declaims her "a blasphemous whore" (35) and banishes her from her home. Her response to banishment, at the age of 17, is to flee to Paris where she encounters artists from a variety of cultures and styles in her new role as a prostitute. We learn that she never picks up a brush again, "having painted what needed to be said" (37), and in the context of Paris in 1921 Leda finds her calling, as she says, "by being not the painter, but the painted" (37).

In this scene where Leda describes her experiences as a 'wild girl' to Pity, Burkett evokes the atmosphere of 1920s Paris primarily through sound. The stage directions indicate "music in, an early 1920s jazz rhythm, beginning softly and simply, building throughout the following scene" (36). With the music setting the tone, a young Leda appears "with a cloche hat and a straight, unfitted coat, cut just below the knee. This garment will open completely down the front during the scene, exposing her bare

breasts and satin knickers" (36). Representing the exuberance of youthful rebellion Leda tells us that "Lady Paris taught me, for she held my hips, rubbed against me, let me taste her salty sweat and smell her sweetest secrets. And she whispered in my ear. 'Jazz' she purred'" (36). Taking to heart a Parisian sensibility that heralded jazz "as a breath of fresh air that would reinvigorate a nation exhausted by war and the constraints of traditional morality" (Jackson 3) Leda fully embraces 1920s life in Paris.

Like many Europeans at the cessation of the hostilities, Leda meets others who have come to Paris as displaced persons. She tells us that she has come to Paris in order "to find, to feel, to fuck, to forget" (36). The period immediately following the war was a time of great ambivalence and uncertainty, with the ravages of the bitter conflict taking a significant toll on most of Europe. As Jeffrey H. Jackson notes in his study of French jazz, "the processes of adaptation taking place during the 1920s and 1930s helped France to navigate between the extremes of the immediate past and fears of the impending future to craft a livable present in the midst of profound change" (9). Jazz in Paris invited a cultural inmixing that many musicians–especially Black Americans–had not encountered in their home countries. The Great War had afforded many 'foreigners'–soldiers as well as labourers needed to replace the work force that had gone to the front–an opportunity they might not otherwise have had to visit Paris. Many stayed, and in the ensuing release of pent-up emotion following the war, they contributed to making the city–particularly the sections of Montmartre and Montparnasse that already had bohemian reputations–a veritable melting pot of cultures. Through Leda, Burkett captures this sensibility of cultural diversity in the inter-war period in Paris. The elder Leda narrates her memory of this time, demonstrating a link between nationalist identities, political ideologies, and art that existed in this period.

Leda extends these connections to demonstrate a further correspondence between masculine heterosexuality and the Modernist experimental art practices that emerged in Europe at this time. Complicating and interrupting the subject/object relationship, Burkett inserts himself in the scene, using his foot as the swing on which Leda balances while she tells us about the men she meets during these heady days:

> Some were Spaniards, slippery as olives and sharp on the tongue. Some were Germans, all meat and potatoes, deliciously disconsolate. Some were Americans, sweet as pie, proud and loud and up for anything. Most were French. Oh, the French! Bastard baguettes, dipping into whatever they wanted, mouths reeking of smoke and self-importance . . . I danced with Cubists, who were fading by the time I arrived, but the few who remained were fun...I danced with Expressionists, who were brutes and loved to torture me. Not in reality, but as a representation of the afflictions they so longed to possess. They worked from their inner state . . . They were cynical, socially critical, and sobbed uncontrollably when they came . . . I danced with Surrealists, who painted fantastic images from their subconscious minds, none of which made any sense. I understood them completely. (37-38)

Here, the young Leda symbolizes the attitude of Paris after the armistice, embracing the vitality of life in the aftermath of so much death and trauma.

The effect on the collective psyche of those who participated directly and indirectly in the bloody warfare of the First World War is well documented. In his essay, "Thoughts For the Times on War and Death", Freud succinctly captures the sense of alienation and disillusionment felt by the populations on both sides of the conflict. He

notes that "not only is [the Great War] more bloody and more destructive than any war of other days, because of the enormously increased perfection of weapons of attack and defence; it is at least as cruel, as embittered, as implacable as any that had preceded it" ("Thoughts" 278). Freud's essay is representative of the cultural atmosphere that was especially evident in Germany where the mood of staunch patriotic support for the war, which saw the publication of an average of one hundred poems published daily in newspapers across the country (Jelavich, "German Culture" 32), quickly turned sour as the conflict manifested in the most elementary physical deprivations. Jelavich notes that "on the eve of the war, Germany had been importing a third of its food from abroad . . . By 1916 there were severe food shortages, and the winter of 1916-1917 went down in popular memory as the 'turnip winter'" ("German Culture" 35). As the number of dead and wounded escalated to figures never seen in any prior conflict, the morale of the German populace declined even further. With the signing of the armistice in November 1918 Germany was completely demoralized and there was a pervasive feeling of disenchantment among the public. Again, Freud captures this sensibility well:

> Two things in this war have aroused our sense of disillusionment: the low morality shown externally by states which in their internal relations pose as guardians of moral standards, and the brutality shown by individuals whom, as participants in the highest human civilization, one would not have though capable of such behaviour. ("Thoughts" 280)

Freud's disillusionment with the behaviour of humanity in light of the events and effects of the conflict rapidly descends to the level of a deeply disappointed cynicism later in the same paper:

> Our mortification and our painful disillusionment on account of the uncivilized behaviour of our fellow-citizens of the world during this war is unjustified. They were based on an illusion to which we had given way. In reality our fellow-citizens have not sunk so low as we feared, because they had never risen so high as we believed. ("Thoughts" 285)

Freud's disconsolate response to the hostilities and their culmination in the defeat of Germany, however, is further complicated in light of his identity as an Austrian-German. As Steven Beller notes in his study of Austrian culture during the war, the idea of a national identity upon which a patriotic call to arms depends, cannot be assumed in the case of Austria, a country which had politically separated from Germany in 1866 (127-128). The ambivalence of Austrian-German relations, as Beller suggests, "was not just a product of ideological confusion or a psychological inferiority complex. It had its roots in a disjuncture between political history on the one hand, and cultural and economic reality on the other" (130). The vestiges of such conflicted cultural identity can be seen to be at operation in Burkett's production, particularly through the figure of the brothel manager, the very mannish Vespa Pooperman, whose character was sculpted directly from a 1926 portrait of journalist Sylvia von Harden painted by German painter Otto Dix (Burkett, correspondence 21/06/2008).

Following the opening scene in which the characters of Pity, Leda, and Tender are introduced, we see Pity's arrival at the brothel where she first encounters the formidable Fraulein Pooperman. In the following dialogue we see how each of these characters symbolizes certain stereotypes of their respective national identities:

> **VESPA.** If you're an American, go away. You are not welcome here.
>
> **PITY.** No, no, no. I'm from Canada.

VESPA. Same thing.

PITY. You Germans are so kind.

VESPA. I'm Austrian.

PITY. Same thing. *Sig heil, Fraulein!*

VESPA. *Touché*, my dear. I don't know whether to slap or embrace you.

PITY. Neither, please. I'm Canadian, we prefer not to be touched at all.

VESPA. Welcome to Vienna. You'll fit right in. (10-11)

This reliance on cultural stereotypes, while humorous in this context, gestures to the anxiety over nationalist identities that fuel so much of the discourses on war–discourses that resonate particularly with notions of masculinity.

Although this dialogue takes place between two female characters, they are nonetheless, figures whose femininity–at least as a normative trope–is ambiguous at best. For example, Vespa Pooperman is physically rendered in a severe woman's suit and tie, with short dark hair plastered to a head that bears a distinctly Hitlerian visage. Her physical aspect vividly recalls the female invert first proposed in 1897 by Havelock Ellis in his study of sexual inversion. At another register, Pity, although dressed in feminine contemporary retro attire–"*50s day dress and swing coat with brown Blundstone boots*" (7)–retains the cultural codes of masculinity through her intellect, again drawing attention to normative stereotypes that are a legacy of Modernist distinctions between masculine reason and feminine emotion. In fact, Burkett suggests that "Pity was raised by two gay men, her father and his partner, Uncle Boyfriend. She is really the product of Uncle Boyfriend. So Pity is actually a little gay man in this odd

girl's body" (correspondence, 14/07/08). In effect, Pity is coded as queerly masculine. So, while Pity and Vespa are female, they are both suspect figures, standing outside the normative ideals of gender, given that they bear such strong cultural codes of masculinity. Here Burkett subverts the gendered discourses that circulate within popular culture, inserting a queer presence that purposefully destabilizes gender. As the narrative progresses, this destabilizing of complex gender discourses not only undermines notions of heteronormative masculinity, but also extends to a consideration of what constitutes the beautiful within the culture of war. Certainly the Great War–at least at the onset–reflected the hyper-masculine heroic figure as it was represented in much of the art of the time to symbolize nationalist discourses of power and supremacy.

A 'Crisis of Masculinity'

R.W. Connell notes in his essay, "The History of Masculinity", "masculinities are not only shaped by the process of imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it" (245). Thus the expansionist politics of Germany and the equally vociferous resistance to them by other European countries–most notably Britain and her European and colonial allies–at the onset of the First World War relied heavily on the ideal of the courageous masculine soldier as the necessary foundation of victory on the front lines. The ideals of what Connell refers to as "gentry masculinity" (249) in which the defence of family honour and state security are linked present a rhetoric of rational violence most evident in the tactical military theories written by the nineteenth-century Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831). In the essay "On War", published after his death in 1831, Clausewitz contends that "as the greatest use of force does not exclude the cooperation of intelligence, the ruthless user of force who shrinks from no amount of bloodshed must gain an advantage if his opponent does not do the

same" (qtd. in Moody 423). Certainly the bloody trench warfare experienced by soldiers on both sides of the divide during the Great War in Europe is representative of the influence of Clausewitz's theories of combat. His promotion of ruthless force and rational intelligence can be directly tied to the intersecting ideals of manliness and national identity, as Connell points out (250)[43]. The ideal of the hyper-masculine, conquering hero is, of course, nothing new, and romanticized tales of bravery and glorious conquest are sprinkled throughout the history of most cultures. In fact, in the opening scene of Provenance the character of Tender, represented by a jointed doll figure relates how, at the age of fifteen he joined the military and traveled across the Canadian prairie to board a ship that would take him into the fray of the fighting in Europe. He tells us that he is awed by the vastness of the ocean and inspired by "pirate battles waged upon it in my Boy's Own Companions" (8).

The indoctrination of boys and young men into the culture of masculinity, represented in the play through the figure of Tender, was especially promoted during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in Europe and its colonies through literatures like the "Boy's Own Companion"[44]. As Martin Francis tells us "between 1870 and 1914 the imperatives of empire celebrated a militaristic and robust hypermasculinity, which found its apotheosis in the homosocial world of the boy's adventure story" (640). As an "illustrated volume of pure and entertaining reading", "Boy's Own Paper" printed such articles as 'Duty', which "repeated the core of right

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[43] Such discourses linking 'manliness' with nationalism continue to circulate within contemporary Canadian culture, as demonstrated in a recent letter to the editor, which appeared in the May 12, 2008 issue of MacLean's magazine. Responding to a feature article on retiring Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier, Fraser Petrick notes that "[he] has been a welcomed and much-needed kick in the pants for this formerly vigorous and manly nation . . . Under Hillier's watch, our troops became warriors again, worthy of my father's generation, who stormed the beaches of Normandy and kicked ass."

[44] "Boy's Own Companion" are collections of stories that had previously appeared in the English magazine "Boy's Own Paper".

conduct for every fellow who reads 'BOP': Live clean, be straight, do your duty, act the man'" (MacDonald 522). Not coincidentally, it is in this same period that the Scouting Movement is established in 1907 by retired army general Robert Baden-Powell in England, and quickly taken up in Canada.

R.W. Connell reminds us that while "the scouting movement celebrated the frontier, it was actually a movement for boys in the metropole" with an aim to "foster particular forms of masculinity among boys" (252). In this late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century context, the social training of children remained the domain of mothers in the home. Given the authority wielded by mothers, Connell notes that a pervasive fear circulated throughout Europe and its colonies that "boys would be feminized through too much influence by women" (252). Of course, at the heart of fears of effeminacy was the anxiety that an over-abundance of feminine influence would produce homosexual sons. The memory of the scandalous 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde for 'gross indecency', an act criminalized in the 1885 Labouchère Amendment in England (Connell 252), was still fresh in the memory of the population at home and abroad. In response to such fears of the erosion of masculinity "heterosexuality became a required part of manliness" (Connell 253). Within this cultural landscape Baden-Powell's scouting movement represents an attempt to defend against homosexuality, reinforce hegemonic masculintiy, and produce a new cohort of potential soldiers to defend the homefront should the need arise. John Springhall points out that "the Scouting movement was . . . founded during a time of insecurity and anxiety for the English middle-classes–faced by the threat of socialism from within and Germany from without–by a famous soldier of the largest empire on earth who gave evidence of sharing such preoccupations to the full" (938). Through Burkett's character of Tender–a young

Canadian soldier and subject of the British Empire–we see how the culture of boy's adventure stories, in which the figure of the glorious hero is heavily romanticized, ultimately led to his horrific and untimely death.

In a searing poetic monologue that recollects the sensibility of war poets like Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) whose works often relied on the trope of the 'doomed youth' to condemn the glorification of war, we see how Tender came to be another casualty. Tender tells us of the shelling and death that descended around him, of running without thought from the mustard gas that advanced toward him, and of waking up alone in the wood, separated from his unit. A nameless officer who finds him offers no comfort, but instead forces him to strip off his uniform while telling him "if you can't be a man . . . then you must be a girl. Hairless and pale and afraid. But you're less than a girl, so put on these stockings and then you'll be made like the whore I took them from in Paris" (70). Using a jointed figure of Tender, Burkett enacts the brutal rape of the 15-year-old boy-soldier at the hands of a senior officer. We never know the fate of the officer who leaves Tender for dead after abusing and defiling him, but we can assume, since he is also alone in the same wood, that he, unlike Tender, is a deserter. This blistering speech, in which Tender equates himself with a doll that is discarded as a broken 'toy soldier', is delivered at break-neck speed, and culminates with Burkett standing in as the tree to which the character is bound. In this scene Tender exemplifies the expendability of so many boy-soldiers raised on an ethos of adventure, nationalism, conquest, and heightened masculinity. Burkett's production reflects the attitude during the Great War that saw "the young sent off as sacrificial lambs, of beautiful youth being used as fodder for bullets and cannons" (Burkett, qtd. in Morrow, "A thing of beauty"). Martin Francis concedes that "in the aftermath of the mechanized slaughter of the 1914-1918 war, the

romantic language of heroic masculinity suffered a fatal blow, and there was a reaction, a reassertion of the domesticated and private categories of masculinity . . . The late Victorian 'flight from domesticity' had become impaled on the barbed wire of the Somme" (640-641). As the hostilities of World War I increased, and the violence of the war escalated to what, for some, was intolerable proportions, the imperative to 'act the man' became increasingly difficult to sustain.

As sociologist Michael Roper notes in his study of veterans returning from the First World War, "many men returned home after the war with practical and emotional capacities that challenged traditional ideals of the 'soldier hero'" (251). In the face of shellshock, which affected so many returning soldiers, and contributed much to the theories of psychoanalysis that Freud had begun two decades earlier, the notion of masculine subjectivity was severely compromised. As Roper notes of the returning veterans, in addition to the need for "comfort and rest, they also wanted romance, to be restored as men and to feel desired and admired" (261). The job of restoring or 'containing' the damaged masculinity of the returning soldiers fell predominantly to the women in these men's lives. Rather than containing his damaged masculinity, Leda's canvas, painted within the context of the Great War, presents a highly romanticized version of Tender's death, the cause of which she remains unaware. Not only does the image obscure its connection to war, it also simultaneously queers the ideal of 'heroic' masculinity, incorporating a disruptive mix of masculine and feminine stylization.

The 'Feminine' Ideal in Art

Through the curvilinear lines of the Art Nouveau style of the set and the painting that dominates it, Burkett draws attention to the distinctions and overlaps between masculine and feminine that are one level of a complex multi-layered narrative. Robert

Goldwater notes "the obsessive concern with women" (68) evident in both Symbolist paintings and the images of Art Nouveau should not be surprising given the dominating influence of Nature–with which the feminine has historically been associated–in both movements. As Whitney Chadwick notes, there was a tendency among Modernist artists to identify women with nature, "imaging femininity in its instinctive, enigmatic, sexual and destructive aspects" (279). The flowing lines that typify Nature in both Symbolist and Art Nouveau works, which reify ideals of the feminine, are evident in both the set and the painting in Provenance. The description of the set in the staging notes indicate:

> *The decor is loosely inspired by Art Nouveau, and as such, the set is curvilinear and ornamental. It consists of a two-level deck; the downstage main acting area one foot above stage floor and an upstage level two feet above the stage. These are connected by ramps on either side of the set . . . The downstage acting deck is oval and painted to resemble a swirling mosaic floor . . . The front of the bar unit is painted to suggest an inlaid wood design depicting a forest. At the bottom of this detail are cutouts faced with pebbled clear acrylic which are backlit during the show to suggest the lights of Paris and later a frozen pond...Sitting at the furthest upstage point and running the full width of the set are nine tall cabinets to house the seventeen marionettes used during the performance. The height of these cabinets varies and creates a wave across the upstage set. The fronts are also curved, both inward and out. They are painted in the same style as the bar front, depicting the inlaid wood forest scene. Each door has cutouts backed with acrylic "glass".* (i)

The dominating influence of Nature that marks Symbolist and Art Nouveau preoccupations, and connects both the natural environment with human interaction in more urban landscapes is certainly visible, especially in the design of the cabinets that house the marionettes when they are not in use; the marionettes, when hung in the cabinet appear to be gazing out at the scene and the audience through the acrylic cutouts, as if peering through the forest scene that the design suggests. In keeping with the juxtaposition of urban and natural environments, the lighting design is variously employed to suggest both Paris and a frozen pond. These design elements illustrate the power of suggestion through which Art Nouveau and the Symbolist movement in art and literature sought to express–not simply represent mimetically–an interiority of thought and spirit. Goldwater contends "Symbolists and thought-painters alike wanted to give pictorial form to the 'invisible world of the psyche'" (9). In blending the natural world with the human figure Symbolist artists sought to "make emotion meaningful, by connecting it with humanity at large and by seeing nature as its reflection" (Goldwater 5). Certainly the painting of Tender that serves as the focal point of Provenance reflects a similar emotional response. At the same time, the decorative framing of the painting that extends into the three dimensional space of the set encapsulates a feeling more aligned with Art Nouveau. Burkett's knowledge of the style is informed by the works of his favourite painter, Egon Schiele, whose early works are representative of this form, and have inspired Burkett's fantasy to "run away and be a painter" ("Possessed by beauty").

While Symbolist art aimed to suggest or express this interiority through a relationship to the natural environment, Art Nouveau was more concerned with surface and form, demonstrating the curved lines of Nature infiltrating and extending into

modern urban life. Notable in painting and architecture, particularly in France and Belgium, "Art Nouveau was indeed dedicated to the surface and elaborated it for its own sake with charm and verve; it delighted in calling attention to itself and its inherent sensuous qualities" (Goldwater 18). Presenting a similar aesthetic sensibility, the painting of Tender is at once delicate and haunting, a beautifully decorative rendering that is, at the same time, disturbing.

In its pose, the figure of Tender conjures an image of neoclassical heroic myth favoured by the Symbolists toward the end of the nineteenth century. Positioned in the foreground against a background of trees, the pale flesh of the male figure tied by the wrists to a tree branch above his head, and clad only in green women's stockings, presents an image of achingly vulnerable masculinity. The flaccid penis, upraised arms, and head turned to one side, eyes closed all signal a complex overlay of the sexual and the vulnerable that recalls many Renaissance sculptural and painted renderings of Christian martyrs[45]. In its association with images of martyred saints, the male figure renders a posture that suggests he is more victim than aggressor. In drawing upon the competing discourses of feminized Nature and heroic masculinity that evoke an Art Nouveau aesthetic, the painting of Tender suggests a martyred masculinity, benign in its sexuality. The exposed genitalia marks the biological male sex of the figure, suggesting the possibility of sexual activity, but the fact that the penis is not erect simultaneously reinforces the defenceless attitude of the subject. Further, the green stockings worn by the figure disrupt a romantic reading of the image as simply that of heroic masculinity. In fact the presentation of the clearly male figure wearing female apparel feminizes and

[45] Michelangelo's sculpture "Risen Christ" (1514-1520) reflects a similar attitude. For more on this discussion see Leo Steinberg's fascinating study The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion (1996).

fetishizes the figure, queering it in such a way that equates it with conventional ideologies of the female nude as an available object of visual consumption. With the downcast face and closed eyes the figure of Tender invites the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator. It is precisely this invitation to look, in conjunction with his exposed, and therefore vulnerable, genitals that encourages Pity to imagine Tender as an eroticized object of desire.

In a scene in which she describes her first visual encounter with naked boys in a school locker room, in which she remains unseen by them, there is a voyeuristic consumption of the spectacle of the male body that recalls her relation to Tender. Reversing the more culturally common objectification of the female body, Pity recalls the details of these boys' bodies:

> There was something so, I dunno, sweet about the way their bums danced under the skin, how their boy chests spread like butter on a hot knife when they moved their arms, and the wholly new view of those penises just, well, hanging there. They weren't as big as I had been told they were, but they were cute. I had a hunch that penises and I were going to get along just fine. (60)

Like Tender, whose static image fuels Pity's fantasy, this encounter with boys' bodies heightens her erotic attachment to the boy in the painting, while simultaneously pointing to her own fetishistic objectification of the figure of the male nude. However, towards the end of the play when Leda reveals the painting's provenance, Pity comes to realize the danger of remaining disconnected from the 'real', three-dimensional world in which the privileging of fantasy obscures the possibility of human connection.

Leda tells us of running away in 1917 from her home in England at the age of 13[46], trying to escape the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her father. Lost and alone in the woods of war-torn France, she stumbles upon the young soldier in the pose that she later recreates from memory. In direct address to the audience, Leda describes her meeting with the dying boy:

> He bade that I should kiss him before his life was gone. "I am Leda" said my nearing lips, but he said "No, you are the swan." This angel boy had skin so thin I felt I could see inside of him. Surely he was beauty, surely he was love, surely he was good. What had he done to heaven to be cast out, left bleeding in the wood. If heaven's mercy could not hear an angel's plea, I understood from that day, it never would find me. (71)

As with the Symbolist painters of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century, Leda's execution of the painting reconstitutes a horrific event as a romanticized image of beauty. This romanticized version of youthful masculinity overlaid by feminine, and by extension queer, visual coding disconcerts and fails in its attempt at redemptive salvation of a culture at war. The exposition of the brutal death of the painting's figural subject suggests that the normative ideals of masculinity circulating within the culture are an illusion that operates to compel and reproduce the conditions under which war flourishes.

Obsession and Repression

Despite, or perhaps because of its neo-classical thematic rendering, the painting not only transforms the horrific death of the young soldier into an ephemeral image of

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[46] Ironically, this is the same age at which Pity discovers the boy in the painting that will ultimately bring these two characters together.

beauty, but in effect elides the cultural distinction between masculine and feminine. This disjuncture between masculinity and femininity is further witnessed in the relationship between Leda and Dooley, the man Leda meets during her wild girl days in Paris. Dooley, described in the stage notes as "*handsome, in the old Arrow Shirt ad kind of way*" (39), tells Leda that he is "a collector . . . of beauty" (40). As a wealthy art collector, Dooley sets out to possess Leda as a beautiful object in order to affirm his own worthiness of her. In a proposal that combines both the romance of art and the economics of art ownership, Dooley offers to marry Leda:

> **LEDA.** Shall I be part of your collection Sir, is that what you propose?
>
> **DOOLEY.** No, a different proposal for you, I think, Miss Swann.
>
> **LEDA.** Please, I hate that name.
>
> **DOOLEY.** Then change it.
>
> **LEDA.** To what?
>
> **DOOLEY.** Mrs. Otenreath.
>
> **LEDA.** My word. Can you afford this acquisition, Mr. Otenreath?
>
> **DOOLEY.** Name your price.
>
> **LEDA.** Eternal devotion.
>
> **DOOLEY.** Sold. (71)

Thus, in a Faustian-like scene, Dooley pledges himself to her and they move to London, where Leda plays hostess in the art salon they open. In his devotion to Leda he tracks down her painting of 'Tender' and publicly presents it to her during a party to celebrate her birthday. Unable to cope with this intrusion of her past, Leda leaves Dooley, flees to

Vienna and opens the brothel where she will later meet Pity. She does not, however, entirely leave Dooley behind.

In the scene where Leda travels to Vienna, she is accompanied by Auntie Sari, who appears in the shape of a cow. That Auntie Sari appears as a cow harkens back to the days of Leda's childhood when she imagined those in the household around her as animals. Near the beginning of the production Leda tells us that:

> When I was a little girl, the animals talked. Auntie Sari, always a cow. A grand bovine woman with hooves stuffed into moss green pumps. The cook, Anna, a bleating old sheep, soft tufts of mad wool bursting from her cap. Daddy, the serious snouted pig, digging through his dealings as if they were truffles, his dark dim eyes serious and unforgiving. And Mummy, the show dog. Sleek and elegant, erect and alert, obeying every command her breeding demanded. (8)

Burkett notes, in an email correspondence, that "Auntie Sari . . . is born in Leda's mind post-trauma . . . Returned home, I can only assume a young girl would need to invent a safe, yet magical, companion to discuss things with" (12/09/2005). In a classic case of the Freudian theorization of repression where "*the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*" (Freud, "Repression" 147, emphasis in original), Leda flees from Dooley in order to repress the memory of her abusive father, her flight from home, and subsequent return. However, the work of keeping such traumatic memory at bay takes enormous emotional energy, and as Freud notes "the effect of repression . . . as a rule creates a *substitutive formation*", which manifest as "indications of a *return of the repressed*" ("Repression" 154, emphasis in original). Here, the presence of Auntie Sari signifies the return of the

repressed, which as Freud notes is always tied to guilt feelings that ultimately manifest as conscience[47]. The repressed memory of the sexual abuse perpetrated by her father is linked to Leda's own sense of complicity in that abuse when we see her child-self lost in the woods praying to her father to "let me come home. Where I can be warm and you can touch me in my bed" (65). That Leda is aware of her own inward turn to imagination is made clear when she acknowledges "my conscience is a cow" (51). Not only does Auntie Sari appear in the shape of a cow as Leda's conscience, but Dooley manifests in animal form as well, having been gifted to Leda as Plato, the singing, roller-skating monkey in a tuxedo jacket. Always impeccably turned out in a dinner jacket or formal evening clothes, Dooley is thus transformed from a man in a monkey suit, to a monkey in a man suit. Burkett acknowledges in an email correspondence that "Plato is Dooley, Leda's husband" (12/09/2005).

Symbolic Transformations

This symbolic exchange of human for animal form recalls a Symbolist aesthetic that emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, most notably through the French poets like Baudelaire (1821-67), Mallarmé (1842-98), Verlaine (1844-96), Rimbaud (1854-91), and Valéry (1871-1945). One of the most notable examples of the Symbolist drama of this period is Belgian poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird, which was first produced in 1908 for the Moscow Art Theatre. That production, which Maeterlinck (1862–1949) subtitled 'A fairy play', features a young brother and sister from a poor family who go on a quest for a blue bird– alluding, of course, to the mythical blue bird of happiness–with the aid of numerous fairies and

[47] Freud notes in his essay, "The Economic Problem of Masochism", "we have attributed the function of conscience to the super-ego and we have recognized the consciousness of guilt as an expression of a tension between the ego and the super-ego" (On Metapsychology, vol.11, 421).

talking animals. In The Blue Bird, which remains his most famous play, Maeterlinck returned to using live actors, but costumed them in such a way as to erode, but not entirely erase, their humanness; it is noted in the stage directions with respect to the costumes for the dog and cat that they "should be only discreetly animalised" (The Blue Bird, "costumes"). Maeterlinck had found a way to disguise the actor's humanity, thus allowing both the human embodiment and the symbol to work in unison. In Provenance we witness a similar fusion body and symbol through Burkett's innovation of a headrig, a device not seen in puppetry prior to this.

Figure 12 – Ronnie in Leda headrig

Designed specifically for this production, the headrigs are, as the notes on staging indicate, "headband contraptions holding various character heads directly in front of Ronnie's face" (i). The use of this apparatus physically merges the puppeteer with the figure of the puppet; the distinction between Burkett and the puppets is blurred to the effect that the categories of subject and object overlap, much in the way that the human and animal characteristics are blended in Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird. While this does heighten the eerie doubling effect, producing an uncanniness already discussed

in Chapter 3, it also importantly places the symbol in direct contact with the body of the puppeteer. In eroding the physical distance between the puppets and the puppeteer, the headrigs call attention to the fact that the puppets are, as they have always been, projections of Burkett's own responses to the social conditions explored within the narrative. More often than in previous productions, Burkett insinuates his presence among the puppets in Provenance, interacting with the characters at times as an actor opposite them, and at others as part of the set–Tender's tree and Leda's swing, for example. Given that Burkett's puppets are already symbols of human subjects to begin with, enacting the struggles of humanity, the effect here is the merging of the human symbol with human embodiment. In this elision between puppeteer/puppet, it is not insignificant that Burkett employs the headrigs in scenes that symbolize moments of metamorphosis in the lives of Pity and Leda.

For example, the Art History seminar scene marks the moment when Pity decides to resist the authority of academic discourse and go on her own search for beauty; Leda's final scene marks the approach of her death; and the scene with Mr. Hiro, who never speaks, stages the moment when Pity finally discovers what it is like to be objectified as 'thing' of beauty. The stage directions for the Art History seminar scene–which is when the headrig is first introduced–specify that "*Ronnie wear's a headrig with PITY'S face in front of it. His hands and the rest of his body are used in conjunction with this face, as if it were a miniature mask*" (20). Here, the overlap between puppeteer and puppet signals the symbolic transfer of human qualities that Maeterlinck saw as useful to his Symbolist project of merging the inner world of unconscious desires with external reality. In combining the inner world through the puppet that is always a surface upon which "the spectator project[s] his unconscious content" (Knapp 77), and the undeniable

external reality of the puppeteer's human presence, Burkett stages what Maeterlinck saw as "an analogy between man and the marionette: both are manipulated by outer forces, both are unaware of this control over their lives" (Knapp 77). In effect, then, Burkett's use of the headrigs, in its blurring of the line between subject and object, reminds us of the control that social and cultural structures of power have over our own personal narratives.

Like Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird, Burkett's Provenance is a quest narrative in which the characters struggle against the constraints of life to attain an object–for Maeterlinck's characters it is the blue bird, for Burkett's Pity it is a painting–that represents the source of their desires, which they believe will insure their future happiness. In a similar fashion to Maeterlinck's use of animal archetypes in his fairy tale, Burkett employs animal imagery as a fantastical means of expressing Leda's interior world. Leda's reconfiguration of the human aspects of the characters who are emotionally closest to her into animal form is equivalent to how the audience willingly embraces the illusion of the liveness of Burkett's puppets, characters who symbolize the struggles of humanity in the face of the difficult narratives through which they navigate. Leda re-imagines Dooley and Auntie Sari as a singing monkey and a talking cow in an attempt to make bearable a violently traumatic past. Through Leda–who is herself a 'doll'–Burkett calls our attention to the childhood practice of animating dolls and the adult custom of anthropomorphizing animals that are imaginatively employed as figures capable of offering comfort and hope in the often conflicted negotiations of social interaction.

As Burkett suggests in an email correspondence, "by naming animals and making them do tricks for us, it prevents us from seeing what they really are"

(22/06/2008). And what they are, of course, is precisely what we humans prefer to distance ourselves from–uncivilized creatures guided purely by instinct, and most troublingly by the instinct for aggression. At a time when European nations were gathering their forces for what would result in the Second World War, Freud notes in his inter-war volume, Civilization and Its Discontents, that:

> The element of truth . . . which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned as a powerful share of aggressiveness . . . The existence of this inclination to aggression, which we can detect in ourselves and justly assume to be present in others is the factor which disturbs our relations with our neighbour and which forces civilization into such a high expenditure [of energy]. In consequence of this primary mutual hostility of human beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration. (68-69)

In other words, what distinguishes civilized humanity from animals is the conscious renunciation, or repression, of instinctual aggressive impulses in order to effect humanity's domestication. For Freud, "the word 'civilization' describes the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes–namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations" (Civilization 42). With a characteristic sense of foreboding that marks Freud's writing during this unstable period in Europe, Freud contends that "civilization has to use its utmost efforts in order to set limits to man's

aggressive instincts . . . These endeavours of civilization have not so far achieved very much" (Civilization 69-70).

Where the process of civilizing is reliant upon notions of control and containment, Leda's projection of animal characteristics onto Auntie Sari and Dooley symbolizes her desire to domesticate them, and thereby distance herself from the childhood traumas–the violence of her father's sexual abuse, compounded by her witnessing of Tender's death–to which they are linked in their association with the painting. Auntie Sari was presumably present when Leda executed the painting, and Dooley was the one who returned it to her years later. By turning these characters, upon whom she is clearly dependent, into benignly humanized (read 'civilized') animals, Leda finds a way to keep them with her while manipulating them to serve her own needs. Thus, with her Auntie Sari transformed into a cow and her devoted husband manifesting as a singing monkey, Leda attempts to disavow–and thus make bearable–a traumatic past, symbolized by the painting, from which she cannot, or will not, escape. On the journey to Vienna, for example, Auntie Sari notes that Leda has brought with her the painting that is the source of so much pain. When Leda replies "I cannot escape him" (52), this is symbolic of the impossibility of escaping one's own past. As Burkett notes in an email correspondence regarding Leda's flight and Dooley's transformation, "even if you travel light, [you] take a lot of baggage with [you]" (12/09/2005). So, although Leda leaves Dooley to reinvent herself in Vienna, he accompanies her in the form of Plato the monkey, whose name reflects the transformation of their relationship to a Platonic, rather than a libidinal one. Once Leda arrives in Vienna, Plato continues to play a key role as the mascot for the bar/brothel named, as Vespa tells us, "Affenkaffee, or . . . The Monkey Bar" (13). It is in this establishment where Pity finally confronts her

object of desire, the painting, and meets Herschel Flechtheim, the current owner of it. And it is Herschel who helps fill in the painting's missing provenance, as well as the history of Leda's house.

Herschel tells Pity that he became a patron of the house at the age of sixteen in 1937 in the tumultuous days leading up to the Second World War. Through Herschel's recollections, Burkett returns the audience to the excitement of Vienna in the inter-war period when experimentation with art, literature, and music made it a thriving cultural centre. He recalls that during the inter-war period before the rise of the Nazi party Leda's house was filled with "Schrammel music, cabaret artists, laughter and light, drinking and dancing all through the night" (29). With Hitler's rise to power, Herschel was forced to flee Vienna and the dark beauty of Maybelline, a black American dancer in the house for whom the young man had fallen head over heels. While it was relatively easy for Herschel to leave the country prior to the onset of the war, Maybelline's race made her movements more easily detected, and escape less of an option. Herschel tells Pity that it was the painting of 'Tender' that saved Maybelline from an almost certain death in the concentration camps:

> You see, the Gestapo had discovered that champagne was on ice in this house, and girls who never considered it gave into vice just to survive. And one of those men, who only knew how to destroy, took a fancy to beauty one night. Your white, gleaming boy. In order for that German officer to be colour-blind, Leda gave him the painting so Maybelline would be spared. (29)

Thus, the condition of war out of which the art work originally emerged, continues to be central to the provenance of the painting. Its value as an object of desire–and a queer one

at that, given the German officer's 'fancy' for the queerly coded masculinity of the 'white gleaming boy'–renders it equally as a fetishistic object of exchange, or in this case, ransom. The painting retains its value as an object of exchange and desire when, as Herschel tells Pity, many years later, having relocated to America, he heard about the painting resurfacing at an art auction after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Taking a chance, Herschel purchases the painting and returns to Vienna in hopes of being able to find Leda and Maybelline where he had parted from them so many years prior. In the way of fairy tales, they are, of course, still in the same house. In effect Herschel exchanges the painting in order to be reunited with Maybelline, who remains the object of his desire. The painting is thus returned to Leda's house in the city that was to have so much influence on the developments in art practice in the twentieth century (Provenance 29-32).

Like most of Europe during the turbulent years at the beginning of the twentieth-century, Vienna produced a number of artists experimenting with new ways of making art that resisted the academic approaches of earlier times. The Austro-Hungarian capital, Vienna was the centre of the Secessionist movement led by painter Gustav Klimt (1862–1918). A localized, specifically Austrian movement, Viennese Secessionism was born of the Jugendstil–or youth art–movement centralized in Munich, which was parallel to the Art Nouveau experimentations happening in Paris at the same time. Noted for "the iconic and quasi-religious quality of his art, which transformed all the life it depicted–including sex–into an unchanging, eternally beautiful spiritual creation" (Heller 115), Klimt supported the work of two other young art rebels, Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980) and Egon Shiele (1890–1918). Although these latter two became more associated with Expressionist painting, the influence of Klimt can be seen in both, particularly in

Schiele's stylistic themes demonstrated in his sketches and paintings of nude figures. Schiele was "a rebellious student at the Academy, a sexually obsessed young man with strong confessional instincts, and a struggling and reviled independent artist who was actually imprisoned for his art" (Heller 115). With its coffee house literary and art culture, Vienna was much more vibrant than Auntie Sari's complaint of it as "all waltzes and cake and memories of a lost empire" (51) when Leda chooses it as their destination in the 1930s. Leda tells Auntie Sari that she has chosen Vienna because she is unknown there, and that the city is "a beautiful old dowager, exiled from reality" (51). In fact, both Leda and Pity ultimately seek Vienna as a site through which to escape, or rather exchange, one 'reality' for another–one that each hopes will replace the ugliness they have encountered with beauty. I suggest that one could hardly choose a better setting to 'escape reality' than the city in which psychoanalysis had its birth.

Civilizing 'Beauty'

In his consideration of the processes and effects of civilization, Freud postulates the necessity of beauty:

> Consider the interesting case in which happiness in life is predominantly sought in the enjoyment of beauty, wherever beauty presents itself to our senses and our judgement–the beauty of human forms and gestures, of natural objects and landscapes and of artistic and even scientific creations. This aesthetic attitude to the goal of life offers little protection against the threat of suffering, but it can compensate a great deal. The enjoyment of beauty has a peculiar, mildly intoxicating quality of feeling. Beauty has no obvious use; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it. (Civilization 33)

Certainly, at one level Provenance reflects a similar consideration of the function of beauty in a 'civilized' world. Burkett's production draws upon Symbolist literary concerns and Art Nouveau sensibilities that were concurrent with the time in which Freud explores his interest in the relation of beauty and civilization. Like Symbolist poets such as Stephane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, and Maurice Maeterlinck of the fin-de-siècle period in Europe, Burkett turns to the rhythms and cadence of free verse, experimenting with a staging of language and visual imagery. Here he departs from the witty improvisations for which he is famous to deliver a tightly scripted performance. The opening and closing scenes of the play are rendered in poetic form, recalling the Symbolist ideal that "at the centre of the symbolist poetic is the notion of poetry as an evocation of a hidden reality through symbolic means" (Deák 23). This tactic, with varying degrees of success, draws the audience back to the time in which Symbolist poets were first experimenting with new forms of expression. The employment of such theatrical poetics was seen in the experimental productions at the Théâtre d'Art at the end of the nineteenth century. As Frantiŝek Deák notes in his study of Symbolist staging, the Théâtre d'Art staged seven productions between 1890 and 1892 that included recitations of poetry intended to symbolize the link between "the visual and audial elements" (118). Where such Symbolist staging "envisages . . . a plotless, multi-sensory (total) performance" (Deák 118), Burkett's use of poetic form evokes this period of artistic experimentation, a period that influences the past in which some of the action of the play is set. Unlike the Symbolist experiments of playwrights like Maeterlinck who had their works produced at the Théâtre d'Art, Provenance retains the importance of plot. In Burkett's production the versification draws a correspondence not only between past and present sensibilities of stagecraft, but also to a narrative that moves back and

forth in time. The play is, in essence, poetically bookended, symbolically framing what is perhaps the darkest narrative of Burkett's oeuvre to date. Such a framing device serves to juxtapose the visual beauty of the production values against the violent traumas encountered within the narrative by the characters of Leda, Tender, and Pity.

Return of the Repressed: A Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity

Each of the central characters' traumatic encounters bear a direct connection to masculine violence: Leda and Tender are both sexually abused by male authority figures; Leda's trauma is compounded by her discovery of Tender as he is dying; and Pity's experience occurs within the context of a high school football game. In a memory scene Pity relates how she was badly beaten while in the role of the team mascot in the boys' locker room before a big game. Arriving early and uninvited, Pity dons the homemade beaver costume she had crafted from scraps of material and foam rubber.

Figure 13 – Pity in the beaver costume

Clad only in the stuffy, ungainly costume Pity falls asleep on the floor while waiting for the team to arrive. She awakens to the sounds of the team, who are unaware of her presence inside the costume, "going at it in full teenage boy throttle. Swearing, goofing around, snapping towels, the usual" (60). Narrated from her memory Pity relates how the following scene unfolded:

> I heard someone say, "I dare you to kick that fucking beaver", followed by "No fucking way, that thing stinks. Besides I hear it has AIDS". Peels of laughter rang out. "No shit man, I heard that chick has two fags instead of real parents." Hoots and howls all around, "Yeah, my Dad said they're total cocksuckers man. I bet that girl isn't even a real girl. She's probably like a fag too. I mean, come on, she's too fucking ugly to be a chick man." And, like a scene from Lord of the Flies, crazy chanting "Kill the fag! Kill the fag!" began. (60-61)

The boys continue beating what they think is an empty costume, their chant raging, as Pity clenches her teeth to keep from crying out in pain and shame until the heat and shock render her unconscious. She is discovered by the janitor while the game is in progress and transferred to hospital to recover from the "three broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder, two broken fingers and severe trauma to the head, back and hips" (61). Pity finishes high school by correspondence while convalescing at home. She tells us that "No charges were ever laid. The team had made it to Playoffs. And that was all that mattered" (61). The homophobia that incites this violent attack in a contemporary setting echoes the violence of the homosexual rape perpetrated against Tender within the context of the Great War. In both of these instances, the enactment of homophobic

violence by the openly gay performer heightens the intensity of the horrific scenes staged before the audience.

In Tender's rape scene, for example, the naked jointed doll figure is positioned bent over on the bar unit, with Burkett enacting the role of the nameless officer, viciously and furiously thrusting from behind at the figure while delivering Tender's monologue. Likewise, in the scene in which Pity is violently assaulted by the boys in the locker room Burkett assumes the role of the chorus of boys as they shriek 'kill the fag', punctuating their screams by aggressively stamping on the floor. The effect of watching a gay male performer enact these homophobic assaults is equally disturbing and illustrative. Burkett claims a position of power over the vulnerable–usually feminine and/or queer–body normally associated with heterosexual masculinity at its most destructive register. These scenes incite a particularly visceral response, given that the puppets against which these acts are committed are associated in the popular imagination with the time of childhood–a period in which the body is most vulnerable. At the same time, these scenes call into question the hostility enacted in such bodily violence, and exposes a perceived threat to the coherence and stability of the categories of masculinity and sexuality that underscore the heteronormative dogmas of what it is to be a 'proper' man.

These harrowing representations of brutality stage the effects of an inherent anxiety attending to notions of heteronormative masculinity that continues to be a legacy of nineteenth- century British imperialist ideals. As historian John Tosh points out, "the fin-de-siècle is now in fact commonly seen as a period of crisis in masculinity" (119). Given that "masculinity is always bound up with negotiations about power, and is therefore often experienced as tenuous" (Roper & Tosh 18), it is hardly surprising that

such a 'crisis of masculinity' should occur in Britain at the waning of the nineteenth century. As an imperial power at this time, "the British Empire was held to be vulnerable to the same danger which had allegedly brought the Roman Empire down–sexual depravity at its core" (Tosh 195). This dread of a manly decline and the rise of homosexuality–tied to insecurities regarding the demand for imperialist expansion and fears of too much feminine influence in the home–ironically resulted in one instance in a multiplication of boys' schools for the sons of the middle-class, institutions whose main ambition was to make men of boys. Tosh notes that:

> The boy culture of the public schools despised intellectual ability and aesthetic sensibility; it elevated athletic prowess to become a fetish; and it cultivated a strong but somewhat mechanical group loyalty, easily adapted to an unthinking patriotism and a secular sense of public duty. (112-113)

In this realm of the boys' school, members were expected to uphold the values of the group, particularly with respect to masculine behaviour and desire. Within these male-only domains "manliness is defined through elaborate rituals in which supposedly feminine behaviour is ferreted out and lampooned" (Roper & Tosh 13). The primary setting in which these schools sought to instil the 'proper' moral standards of manliness was the sports field. As Tosh notes, "team sports trained boys to obey (and later to give) orders; they subordinated the individual to the team effort; and they instilled stoicism in the face of pain and discomfort" (198). While such schools are not as prolific or popular in contemporary Canada, the support for athletic proficiency in team sports continues to be upheld, often at the expense of creative pursuits.

Although contemporary Western culture reflects an ideological shift in thinking toward masculinities in the plural, rather than one universal all-encompassing version of what constitutes the masculine, the ideal of the 'team player' associated with masculine notions of virility, muscular strength, intestinal fortitude, and above all heterosexuality, retains its potency. Those who deviate from these norms are immediately cast as outsiders. Burkett, a gay puppeteer, who grew up in Medicine Hat, Alberta is familiar with the role of the outsider. He has commented that "I assumed I was an outsider...Gay in Medicine Hat. A puppeteer. An artist." (Nicholls, "Puppet Provocateur"). His creation, Pity Beane, is also multiply marked as an outsider, a combination of the self-reliant New Woman who posed such a threat to the bastions of masculinity at the end of the nineteenth century, and a product of a gay male household. The exuberantly violent reaction of the boys in the locker room to the presence of her mascot costume exemplifies the anxieties of Victorian and Edwardian England as well as contemporary North America with regard to the acceptable (heterosexual) conduct of young men[48]. For the boys in the locker room Pity represents a threat to the stability of masculine social and sexual relations. They bring their rage to bear down upon the costume with the result that, as Pity tells us, the "foam rubber couldn't cushion that much hate" (61). In effect, these boys who would be similar in age to the young soldier in the painting wage a collective war on the mascot costume. Jonathan Dollimore contends that the repression of homosexuality in contemporary culture is "especially formative in male institutions like the military–hence the hostility to and anxiety about overt homosexuality in such

[48] The brutal beating that resulted in the horrific death of gay student Matthew Shepherd in the U.S. in 1998, and the beating death of gay Ottawa resident, Christopher Raynsford in 2002 are only two of many recent examples that attest to how the demand for heteronormative masculine social and sexual behaviour continues to hold cultural currency.

institutions" (52). What is revealed in Provenance through a juxtaposition of past and present in the cultures of boys' sports teams and the military are the homophobic discourses that gesture to fears of unstable masculinity and ultimately sanction violence against the 'other'.

The Contemporary 'Other'

The anxious rhetoric circulating at the beginning in the late-nineteenth century that linked nationalism with a fear of declining 'manhood' in association with the emergence of the homosexual as a category is particularly visible in the contemporary discourses relative to the on-going U.S.-Iraq conflict that began in 2003 while Burkett was creating Provenance. In her consideration of how American policy has justified its position with Iraq, cultural theorist Bonnie Mann demonstrates a link between the ideologies of nationhood and heterosexual masculinity as each are discursively constituted in opposition to narratives of homosexual rape. Mann contends that "sovereignty becomes . . . a certain style of national masculinity, and war becomes an occasion for its performative constitution, a self-making rather than a self-defending. Indeed, the superpower identity [of the U.S.] can only be maintained and expressed through repetition, through a staging and restaging of its own omnipotence" (155). Certainly Mann's observation echoes Roper and Tosh's observation concerning the tenuous nature of power in relation to masculinity (Roper & Tosh 18). In the days following the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 that acted as the catalyst for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Mann suggests that the rhetoric from the media, in the repeated airing of images of the "two erect towers penetrated then destroyed by the two planes over and over again, became the narrative vehicle that told a story of an extraordinary threat; the threat of the homosexual rape and simultaneous

castration of the United States by a dark, brutal, and overwhelmingly masculine enemy" (155). Citing evidence from a report generated by the National Defense University entitled "Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance" (1996), which outlined a new "theoretical blueprint for the initial military campaign against the people of Baghdad" (154), Mann draws our attention to the notorious treatment of Iraqi prisoners of war by U.S. military personnel in the Abu Ghraib detention facility. The now infamous images that circulated of Iraqi prisoners being physically and sexually tortured at the hands of their American captors reflects the attitude that "sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners of war is . . . integral to the program of shock and awe . . . The homosexualizing of the prisoners, the exposure of the anus, as if for penetration, is a kind of act that is simply germane to the whole program" (Mann 158). Such treatment of male prisoners that aims specifically at demoralizing them through psychological emasculation can, of course, only succeed where attitudes toward homosexuality that reflect a misogynist devaluing of the feminine are operating. The participation of female military personnel in the atrocities conducted at Abu Ghraib, most memorably the role played by Lynndie England (Mann 158), does nothing to mitigate this outlook.

In fact, as Mann notes, the military position that "humiliation by women would be particularly degrading and thus effective in torturing Iraqi prisoners . . . is completely understandable in the U.S. context . . . because this is U.S. American logic too" (159). Certainly the linkage of misogyny and homophobia is nothing new, and the fact that these twin dogmas would be deployed by the American military confirms Mann's contention that "winning is the telos of the masculine nation, and losing is its unmanning" (159). This importance of 'winning' in order to uphold the social power that underscores heterosexual masculinity is equally evident in Provenance when Pity is

beaten in the boys' locker room. My intent here is not to trivialize the suffering endured by the Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib by comparing it to the trauma endured by a fictional character in a puppet play, but rather to demonstrate the ideological fault lines common to both that are being exposed and challenged in Burkett's production. As I have already noted, the end result of Pity's brutal beating reveals that primary importance is placed on the football team winning, thus securing its supremacy among the other teams. Of course, there is an even greater correspondence between the 'homosexualizing' torture conducted at Abu Ghraib and the rape of Tender that serves to ask the audience to consider how the rhetoric of war constitutes a form of masculinity that is founded, in part, on homophobic fears and anxieties. Martin Morrow notes in his review of the play that "Burkett says he didn't begin the play intending to incorporate a war theme again, but the U.S. invasion of Iraq got him thinking otherwise" ("A thing of beauty"). While Burkett could not have known how prophetic his representation of homophobic abuse in a culture of war would be in terms of the U.S.-Iraq conflict, since Provenance premiered in October of 2003 and the scandal of Abu Ghraib was not made public until April of 2004, it is not surprising that such an atrocity could occur, particularly if we think of it as retaliation.

Keeping in mind Mann's analysis of how the media deployed U.S. political rhetoric in the aftermath of 9/11 it becomes clear that the prisoners at Abu Ghraib were being punished in kind for the metaphoric emasculation of the American capitalist economy; the collapse of the twin phallic structures that housed the financial centre of the contemporary imperialist nation represents on a grand scale the punishment that was visited on the Iraqi inmates. Freud understood quite well how such uncivilized behaviour could occur. He argues that civilization requires an enormous sacrifice of humanity's

instinctive aggression, which can only be achieved in civilized society "so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness" (Civilization 72). Of course, this aggressiveness doesn't move in one direction only, but will always be returned by those 'other people' to whom it has been directed in the first place. In such a state, as Freud suggests, "civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security" (Civilization 73). Within such an anxious cultural climate in which security–itself a fleeting and fluctuating notion–civilization seeks ways to diminish the overwhelming fear of cultural and individual dissolution.

In the face of the anxious cultural climate that culminated in the Great War, the turn toward an aesthetic of beauty exemplifies this urge to instil a sense of meaning and order, particularly as witnessed in the Art Nouveau movement that preceded the war in which an evocation of the harmonies of Nature stood in stark contrast to the threat of annihilation. Against the constant threat of aggression from the 'other' to overrun the bounds of civilization, then, beauty–however it is defined within a culture–rather than having "no obvious use" (Civilization 33), as Freud contends, is sought as a means to mitigate fears of the destruction of the culture and the self. As Pity discovers in Provenance, however, beauty is a highly charged concept that can be equally self-destructive.

Upon arriving at the brothel Pity overhears Vespa explain to the 'girls' of the establishment that she is in need of a virgin to serve dinner to Mr. Hiro, a visiting businessman from the East. Pity volunteers to fulfill the role in order "to be the object of desire, anyone's desire, just once" (27). Leda agrees to allow it and when Pity appears costumed like one of the other prostitutes, Leda explains:

> You miss the point of the request, my dear. He does not want a painted whore. He desires your naked innocence . . . Stay silent. You must be an object beyond his grasp. He will pay simply for the pleasure of knowing that...If he finds you beautiful, it is to remind himself of how unworthy he is. Beauty never looks back at us, we stare at it and hope. Surely you know how that feels. (62)

Pity follows through and adheres to Leda's advice. The scene is rendered in silence as follows:

> *Ronnie presents a tray and places it on the bar. We see a nude doll figure of PITY, flat on her back. Taking a small serving dish, he places a small piece of food on her body . . . Turning US, Ronnie puts on the headrig of Mr. Hiro. He turns and bows toward PITY, then . . . leans down to smell her. His hand above her face, as if caressing but without touching, it travels down the length of her body . . . He takes the piece of food and slowly raises it to his mouth. Ronnie thrust his head back and puts it into his own mouth. Hiro puts his hands together, bows, and takes out a money bill and throws into onto Pity. He bows, turns and leaves.* (73)

After Mr Hiro has left, Pity sits up, gazes at the painting of Tender and responds, "Now I know how it feels. Poor you" (73). Unlike Leda, who quietly dies in the following scene, finally released from the demons that have haunted her throughout her life, Pity recognizes that cultural constructions of beauty may be only a surface projection that serve to hide an ugly reality. When Herschel offers to give her the painting to take back home to Canada, she thanks him, but refuses, having come to realize that there is more

beauty in an ordinary, three-dimensional man who would look back at her than in a static image that can only receive the gaze (Provenance 76-77).

In the final scene we see Pity ice skating in circles created by lighting effects that transform the frosted glass around the bottom of the bar into a wintery Canadian pond. The production ends as it began, with a poetic monologue delivered by Burkett in the voice of Tender. Recalling the preoccupation of the Symbolist painters of merging nature and civilization, Burkett draws the attention of the audience to a natural environment within which his characters move. As Pity continues to skate in a spotlight downstage, with the painting lit on the upstage wall, Burkett/Tender delivers the closing lines:

> There were trees in the background
>
> Me in the foreground
>
> And there, in the distance
>
> This unspeakable view
>
> Beautiful, there you are
>
> All this beauty
>
> All of you (79)

As the stage directions note "*Pity continues to skate for a moment, and as the underscore builds she jumps into the air. Lights snap to black*" (79). In this brief moment the audience is reminded that the imaginary fourth wall that separates the audience from the performance is just that–illusionary. In this final scene a shift occurs in which the audience, who have been watching for just over two hours, become the focus of the gaze. In her review of Provenance, Lyn Gardner notes that Burkett "is keen to manipulate the relationship of the gazed and the gazer" ("Puppetry is Ridiculous").

When he looks out into the audience and delivers the final lines–"all this beauty/ all of you"–Burkett recognizes "that tends to unsettle the audience . . . They sit there for two hours watching me, and it never crosses their mind that I am watching them too" (Burkett qtd. in Gardner, "Puppetry is Ridiculous"). Herbert Blau notes that "[the gaze] works upon its object in the security of expressed affection empowered by the object, which is a fetish of the viewing subject, to be embraced, absorbed, and adored in the deliciousness of the gaze" (6). In returning the gaze the voyeuristic pleasure that empowers the audience to consume the spectacle is disrupted, and in this moment Burkett reminds us that we are part of a reciprocal relation between the spectator and performer that extends to the self/other relations beyond the bounds of the theatre.

Looking Back

Moving between the past and the present, Provenance reminds us that history does in fact repeat itself to the detriment of humanity. The social history of the Great War that overshadows the play through Tender's character is further recalled through experimental narrative strategies and scenic design elements concurrent with the period. The use of Symbolist poetics recollects the strategies of early-twentieth-century poets who were experimenting with language and form at a time in Europe especially when language itself failed to make the political and social instability of the culture coherent. Further, Burkett's deployment of an Art Nouveau mise-en-scène establishes a contextual link between these experimental art practices and the underlying sense of alienation that compelled a desire to maintain order through a focus on surface beauty in the first place. Ultimately, the deployment of such narrative and staging components in Provenance exposes the failure of such aesthetics to restore order in the traumatic face of overwhelming anxiety and disillusionment. The past, dominated by the First and Second

World Wars and the tumultuous period between them, is juxtaposed against the contemporary context of the U.S. war with Iraq. As Burkett notes, while he didn't initially intend to incorporate a war theme in this production, "when this show was being created, here we were with another war in the world that didn't make any sense to me . . . Maybe the day I can understand (war), I can stop discussing it" (Morrow, "A thing of beauty"). For Burkett, who has Pity tell us that "art is the personal contribution to the ever-continuing conversation about life" (23), the point of art is specifically to reflect upon and continue discussions of the social dynamics, like those that result in war. In presenting work that recalls the traumas of war and its far-reaching effects, Burkett draws attention to how art functions under these conditions, as well as what gets authorized as art in the first place.

In using puppetry as a vehicle through which to explore the traumatic narratives that his characters endure, Burkett has elevated the art of puppet theatre among contemporary Canadian audiences to the level of serious theatre. In effect, Burkett's puppet theatre compels us to consider how art is defined, what power authorizes such definitions, and what other perspectives might allow us to redefine the function and form of artistic practice. Further, in its relation to cultural narratives that circulate and inform our response to art and art practices, Provenance compels a consideration of the overlapping themes of beauty, art, and war that drive this dark narrative. The form that Provenance utilizes, particularly the use of Symbolist literary strategies and Art Nouveau design elements, extends a critique of art discourses that is thematically echoed in the production. The same contrapuntal structure used to examine the function and form of art is also employed with the respect to the interactions of the characters in relation to the other themes.

For example, through Tender and Pity the dichotomy between hope and despair manifests through their youthful naiveté. Tender's life is forfeit when he lies about his age to get into the army at age 15, eager to join up in light of the cultural glorification of war, while Pity's encounter with conventional notions of beauty leads her to reassess the social values that determine what is beautiful and why. As a counterpoint to the naiveté of youth, the figures of Leda and Herschel represent similar negotiations between hope and despair at the opposite end of the age spectrum. While Leda is never reconciled to the trauma of her youth, instead running from her past and inventing new identities for herself, Herschel acknowledges the impossibility of his fantasy of being able to walk down the streets of Vienna with Maybelline, but takes consolation in the reality of being reunited with her in the 'refuge' of Leda's house. Herschel is also instrumental in helping Pity learn that beauty is, indeed, a subjective category when he tells her that "to these eyes, [Maybelline] continues to be the greatest beauty ever seen" (22). Unlike Herschel, whose appreciation for beauty leads him to return to Vienna and Maybelline, Dooley never leaves Leda, but his devotion to her beauty results in the loss of his own subjectivity. In his transformation from man to monkey, Dooley in effect becomes Leda's pet. Having been a collector of beautiful objects in his role as an art dealer, Dooley is ultimately rendered an object himself, trading his subjectivity, his masculinity, and in fact his humanity, as he tells Leda just before she dies, in order "to stay with you forever" (75). In Dooley's doubling as Plato the audience is confronted with a slippage between subject and object that is emphasized by Burkett's use of the headrigs. In using this experimental staging device, not only is Burkett's presence overlaid on the puppets, but the puppets' objectness is equally superimposed on the puppeteer. In this we see the ease with which subject and object become interwoven, which represents a parallel to

the self/other relations of human civilization that continue to produce so much anxiety in the world. In effect, Burkett's puppet characters act as extensions of humanity in their navigation of the difficulties of human existence. As noted communications theorist Marshall McCluhan suggested in his now famous Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964), "'the medium is the message' because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (8). In Provenance Burkett's deployment of the medium of puppetry, particularly representative in Dooley/Plato and Tender suggests to us that if we allow ourselves to be seduced by conventional ideologies of beauty and war we put ourselves at the risk of becoming puppets, controlled by the political will of others who pull the strings.

Against the cultural backdrop of what U.S. President George Bush has called "the first war of the 21st century" ("President Outlines Strategy") Provenance demonstrates a connection between the discourses of the Great War with those of the current conflict in Iraq. As Burkett suggests in this production, and the speeches of the American President bear out, the rhetoric of war is linked to anxiety over the stability of heteronormative masculinity and the nation that manifests as a fear of the 'other'. In Provenance, Burkett presents an overarching narrative that challenges and disrupts conventional ideologies of gender and beauty as they interconnect with cultural discourses of war that depend upon policing the psychical borders between us/them and self/other. By concluding the performance with the gaze of the performer being turned on the audience, the spectator momentarily experiences what it is like to be the 'other', the spectacle, the object of the gaze. Focused through a narrative that considers the effects of a cultural obsession with beauty, Burkett's production exposes the illusion of a monolithic reading of such categories as beauty, art, and masculinity in order to compel

alternative perspectives through which human subjects may experience the world and their place in it in meaningful ways.

Conclusion

Over the span of his career, Ronnie Burkett has developed his craft to the point where he has realized his dream of bringing puppetry to the 'legitimate' stage as theatre for adults. Moving beyond the realm of what he refers to as "the puppet ghetto" (Personal interview 2005), Burkett has also established his credentials as a puppeteer of extraordinary skill as well as a playwright. He continues to use his puppets to address the contested human relations that bear an indelible stamp on the formation of the social subject, while demonstrating how these painful negotiations can be meaningful and productive. Throughout my examination of the works considered in this thesis–works that repeatedly represent such traumas as child abuse, homophobic cruelty, racism, and sexual violence–it is my contention that Burkett's productions compel the audience to reflect upon the effects of loss, the processes of memory and longing, and the political and cultural practices of marginalization. While representations of these anxious terrains are not new in the realm of theatre, Burkett's approach to exploring these themes through the medium of puppetry expands the field of reflection and extends a hope for the audience of constructively navigating these troubled landscapes. Indeed, while all four plays examined in this thesis traverse uneasy political and psychical territories, they all end on a hopeful note, which has caused numerous reviewers to accuse Burkett of sentimentality in his writing. In response to this accusation, he contends "I actually think sentimentality is a good thing" ("London on a String"). He is adamant that he "will never leave an audience in a dark place" (Email interview 2007). I contend that the hopeful endings Burkett offers are not a limitation in these works, but rather, a necessary

corollary to Burkett's use of puppets as the means to 'work through' the conflicted terrains of sociality.

I argue that puppets are an especially effective means through which adults can examine the power relations that begin in childhood, because they bear such a strong connection in the Western imagination to a time when children insistently explore these dynamics. For example, when Burkett stages political oppression in Tinka's New Dress, and homophobia in Street of Blood, the operations of power are not simply present at the level of the narrative, but are also visible in the mechanics of puppetry in which Burkett's puppets, as surrogate humans, are controlled by forces outside themselves. In other words, content and form mutually reflect these operations. Importantly, the audience is implicated in these power relations, since they are in collusion with the puppeteer, investing the puppets with life during the time of performance. The human desire for mastery finds a momentary satisfaction here, as in childhood when children enact the social relations of power through playing with dolls. Similarly, the presence of Burkett's puppets on the stage enacting human dramas allows the audience to imaginatively engage with narratives of power and control, as children do before they come under the cultural demand to relinquish the power of imagination. While Tillis notes "that sophisticated Westerners have an almost morbid fear of taking the power of their imagination as seriously as their power of perception" (Aesthetics 167-168), I argue that Burkett's puppets invite us to reconnect with imagination, and it is precisely in the realm of imagination that hope resides. Indeed, rather than privileging perception over imagination, Burkett uses his puppets to bring these two fields together.

For example, in Tinka's New Dress and Street of Blood, while the effects of trauma are not magically erased–Tinka remains detained and Edna is still HIV positive–

at the same time, Tinka resolves to continue the puppet shows in defiance of the repressive political regime, and Edna refuses to submit to the shame associated with AIDS. The audience is thus encouraged to move beyond the limitations of perception in which the power relations that remain an inevitable reality, and recognize that the power of imagination enables a resistance to the ideologies and practices of marginalization, which constrain the social subject. Similarly, in Happy and Provenance, Burkett stages the functions and effects of memory associated with loss and longing that underscore a desire for belonging. The difficulty of navigating these traumatic encounters is not negated–Carla is never able to reconcile the loss of her husband, and Leda never recovers from her traumatic childhood encounters with abuse. However, in contrast, Happy acknowledges the balance between joy and sorrow, and resolves that "if you want the rainbow, then you gotta put up with the rain" (73), while Pity ultimately opts to engage with the three-dimensional world rather than remain detached from reality. I suggest that Burkett employs his puppets as a means of recuperating the power of imagination through which the hope for conceiving alternate ways of engaging with the world allows our perception of what *is* to be expanded to what *might be*. Burkett's work exemplifies Tillis' suggestion that "the puppet-stage and the world-stage present figures that are a challenge to comprehend; it is the task of audiences, which are nothing less than humanity, in part or in whole, to arbitrate the nature of being" (Aesthetics 169).

Burkett's ability to create and employ puppets that metaphorically resonate all the complexities of their human counterparts–that is, the audience–may be one, if not the primary reason that audiences return to productions in which so much human suffering is witnessed. In his review of Happy, theatre critic Chris Koentges suggests that "adults find hard truths easier to accept from string and carved wood" ("Puppeteer pulls no

punches"). In the productions I have examined, in which elements of Brechtian alienation, Artaudian cruelty, and Schechner's theatrical rituals of community-building are employed through what Tillis notes is the "ontological paradox of double-vision" (Aesthetics 168) associated with the puppet, Burkett provides us with imaginative alternatives for encountering the complexities of human interaction. Not only has Burkett's puppet theatre engaged critics and audiences in meaningful and productive ways, but his practice has gained new respect for the performance of the craft of puppetry among theatre critics, performers, and scholars.

Burkett's work has significantly expanded the critical reception of puppetry both nationally and internationally, and the success of his company has provided a model for other theatre artists. There is now another generation of puppeteers and puppet theatre troupes whose experimental work in puppetry is receiving notice in this country, most notably Old Trout Puppet Workshop from Alberta, and Quebec-based Théâtre du Sous-marin Jaune. Over the years Canadian theatre audiences have become more sophisticated, and more willing to support work that does not fall within the canonical framework of what is privileged as 'legitimate' theatre. Certainly Burkett has contributed to shaping audiences and expanding our horizon of expectations for what is possible in puppet theatre. For many younger puppeteers–and theatre practitioners in general–there remains the constant battle to find ways of financing the innovative projects they are developing. Within the contemporary Canadian economic climate in which funding for the arts remains a contentious topic, Burkett's thriving theatre company represents a source of inspiration–and often employment–for other practitioners of puppetry. In 1995 Burkett noted that "the only artistic freedom in these reactionary times is to own one's work completely" (CTR 19).

Having had the foresight to recognize that arts funding was being seriously depleted in the late 1980s, Burkett financed Tinka's New Dress by doing television work for children's shows that were produced for a local Montreal audience (Morrow, Wild Theatre 321). He no longer has to do television work, which, while lucrative, holds no allure for him. Now that he is financially able to do the work that inspires him, he remains a solo performer, but the team of builders and associates that support the work of Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes has by necessity expanded to accommodate the demands of performing and touring internationally. His works continue to achieve critical acclaim that has broadened the scope of their reception and considerably increased their audience base. In 2004, for example, Burkett's Provenance broke the advance-ticket sales records at Toronto's CanStage Berkeley Street Theatre previously set by Tony Kushner's Angels in America in 1996. In the wake of his success Burkett continues to experiment with techniques for delivering new narratives that explore the traumas that are inherent to human existence. As he ages his stories reflect his own maturing process.

Now in middle-age, and still retaining vestiges of his 'bad-boy of puppetry' reputation, Burkett is preparing a new production that is set to have its world premiere in Edmonton in October, 2008. Billy Twinkle: Requiem For a Golden Boy is the story of a middle-aged cruise ship puppeteer who gets fired and faces an overwhelming mid-life crisis. According to the press release from Burkett's agent, this production is "for anyone stuck in the middle–mid-career, mid-love, mid-life–caught between our own past and future" (John Lambert & Associates, Inc.). Besides its Edmonton booking, this new production is set to tour theatres in Ottawa, Vancouver, London, Manchester, Melbourne, Sydney, Calgary, and Montreal. Like his previous work, this show promises

to incorporate bawdy, campy, cabaret humour woven into a narrative that considers another anxiously fraught psychosocial terrain. As Burkett has experimented over the years to refine his skills as a master puppeteer his narratives have matured, while they continue to explore the human interrelations that effect the formation of social subjects. Throughout the productions I have considered here Burkett's voice resonates loudly through his puppet characters, and invites audiences to engage in discussions around such difficult issues as political repression, homophobia, mourning, and war. And audiences return time and again to hear what he has to say.

Now, as an established senior theatre artist, Burkett remains committed to continuing to use his art to compel the discussion of "the sacred and the profane" (Tinka 16) that he began in Tinka's New Dress. Although he no longer inserts a tiny photo of one of his closest mentors, Martin Stevens, somewhere on the set of his productions, Burkett still keeps his "obsessive dressing room table photo collection going" (Email interview 2008), which attests to the importance of notions of memory and community that reoccur through his work. The voice of Stevens continues to speak through Burkett when plain Pity Beane adamantly insists that "art is the personal contribution to the ever-continuing conversation about life" (Provenance 23). And while his complex, multi-layered narratives are sometimes hampered by their attempt to address too many issues at once, Burkett's popularity as a performer and puppetry craftsperson attests to the fact that audiences continue to be engaged with the conversations he offers. So, when Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes comes to town and opens the door of the car to Weirdsville there is an ever-expanding audience willing to get in, because they know that the ride isn't over.

Figure 14 – head casts for Billy Twinkle

Appendix

Awards

Provenance	2004 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Production (Edmonton, Canada)
	2004 Patron's Choice Award for best show of the 2004 Melbourne International Arts Festival (Melbourne, Australia)
Happy	2000/2001 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Production (Edmonton, Canada)
	2000/2001 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Edmonton, Canada)
	2001/2002 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Calgary, Canada)
	2001/2002 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Production of a Play (Calgary, Canada)
	2001/2002 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Set Design (Calgary, Canada)
Street of Blood	1998/1999 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Calgary, Canada)
	1998/1999 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Production of a Play (Calgary, Canada)
	1998/1999 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Original Composition (Calgary, Canada)

1998/1999 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Costume Design (Calgary, Canada)

1998/1999 Betty Mitchell Award, Outstanding Set Design (Calgary, Canada)

1998/1999 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Costume Design (Edmonton, Canada)

1999/2000 Chalmers Canadian Playwright Award (Toronto, Canada)

2000/2001 GLAAD Media Award, Outstanding Theatre Production – Broadway/Off-Broadway (New York, NY, USA)

2000/2001 UNIMA-USA Citation of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry (Atlanta, USA)

Tinka's New Dress

1995/1996 Dora Mavor Moore Award, Best Set Design (Toronto, Canada)

1995/1996 Dora Mavor Moore Award, Best Costume Design (Toronto, Canada)

1997/1998 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Production (Edmonton, Canada)

1997/1998 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Edmonton, Canada)

1997/1998 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Original Composition (Edmonton, Canada)

1997/1998 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Costume Design (Edmonton, Canada)

1997/1998 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Outstanding Set Design (Edmonton, Canada)

1998 Evening Herald Award for Best International Show, The Dublin Theatre Festival (Dublin, Ireland)

Village Voice OBIE Award Special Citation for the 1998/99 Off-Broadway season (New York, NY, USA)

1999 UNIMA-USA Citation for Excellence in the Art of Puppetry (Atlanta, USA)

2002 Age Critics' Award at the Melbourne Festival (Melbourne, Australia)

Old Friends

1998 Chalmers Canadian Playwright Award in Theatre for Young Audiences (Toronto, Canada)

Ronnie Burkett

1998 Freedom of Expression Award, Wordfest Writer's Festival Calgary (Calgary, Canada)

2001 President's Award from the Puppeteers of America for Outstanding Contribution to the Art of Puppetry (New York, USA)

2003 Alberta Book Award, Trade Fiction Book of the Year for The Memory Dress Trilogy (Calgary, Canada)

2003 Manchester Evening News, Best Special Entertainment Award (Manchester, UK)

2003 Herbert Whittaker/Drama Bench Award for Outstanding Contribution to Canadian Theatre (Toronto, Canada)

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