

# WRITING

## INTERMALE SEXUALITY

### HISTORY PLAYS

by Stephen M Hornby

HEADMASTER: There's a vacancy in history.

IRWIN (*Thoughtfully*): That's very true.

HEADMASTER: In the school.

IRWIN: Ah.

- Alan Bennett *The History Boys* (2006)

PhD Thesis

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**Dedication:**

Cynthia Marlton, Roy Hornby and Alan Beck, parents of different kinds.

## **Abstract**

My PhD is a practice led research investigation into writing plays for performance from archive. In order to conduct this research, I have written two full-length history plays. Each piece required a detailed engagement with archive materials, existing historiographies and other related secondary material in order to reach a state I am terming “historical literacy”. From that state, an original creative response was then made in the form of playwriting. The thematic focus is on sexual and emotional intimacy between men, a topic which has, in terms of archival records, often been ignored, deliberately left coded, or even destroyed. Subsequent historicisations of the materials have frequently compounded this, mis/interpreting the few extant records with a heteronormative bias. I am exploring the extent to which playwriting can address this and the mechanisms by which it might do so and complementing my own exploration by interviewing six other leading screen and stage writers who have undertaken historical dramatisations about their processes.

The researching and writing of the plays acts as a form of inquiry into the dramaturgical, historiographical and expositional strategies involved in such writing. This is documented, forming a record of the methodological approaches taken to such a task, and the plays themselves are evaluated as forms of historiographical enquiry. As approaches and techniques for archive-based creative writing emerge, I suggest a nomenclature for them. I am also proposing specific strategies for dealing with the absent, coded, and/or nullified record of intermale sexuality.

There are academic accounts of history plays featuring intermale sexuality, vocational texts on playwriting, and a growing body of work on performing heritage, the use and ethics of docudrama and queer dramaturgies. However, little addresses the history playwriting process methodologically and the detailed mechanics and historiographical implications of the playwright's use of archive. I review the fields of narrative history, experiential archaeology and biography for applicable paradigms, and test my methodology against interviews with other writers. My aims are to provide insight into writing from archive generally, to illuminate the specific issues in the representation of intermale sexuality in a contested record of the past and to explore the case for the playwriting process from archive as a form of historiographical enquiry or, at least, as a disruptive challenge to pre-existing historical narratives.

# **CHAPTER ONE:**

## **Introduction**

The research and writing of a new history play is not a tabula rasa. It is contextualised, informed and challenged by the history of the history plays that have come before it; by the existing historiography of the events that it is seeking to dramatise; by the levels of primary historical materials that are extant to in/validate this; and by the cultural history of the representation of intermale sexuality on the stage. Moreover, there is the fundamental epistemological challenge to the validity of any historicising of the past, whatever its narrative form. As Miller states, "To reconstruct something is to reconstruct it in accordance with current interests" (1986, p.28). In that sense, any history play is always more about the present than the past.

Although specific intermale sexuality history plays have been considered academically and critically, very little has been written about them specifically as history plays. What has been written has focussed primarily on their content and not on their dramaturgical strategies in relation to archive. Similarly, although there is a growing body of vocational literature of how to write successfully for the stage, within it there are very few accounts of the process of writing from archive, especially through the prism of intermale sexuality. Those accounts offered by playwrights themselves tend to occlude more than they reveal. There is an absence about how to write about an absence.

Connerton (1989) argues that telling each other stories about our past is a human fundamental in coming to know each other. Gay men may suffer a form of double-absence in this regard. Firstly, in terms of the established discourses of history, intermale sexuality is often ignored, wilfully misinterpreted or deliberately suppressed. Secondly, there is a deeper sense in which a gay man's story is not the story their fathers told them, at least in most cases. Both Isay (1993) and Downs (2005) explain in different ways the psychological wound that most gay men can suffer in being raised by heterosexual parents, often in the absence of affirming peers. Jones (2009) also notes, "...the troubling and irrevocably troubled relationship between gay men and history" (p.34) which can even see them collude with a self-erasing of the history of their own lives that they have been taught or adopted as a survival mechanism. Perhaps, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans) History Month itself can be understood partly as an act by those groups of pushing themselves back into history, into the places where they are unaccountably absent. That was certainly part of the motivation for me in taking on the roles I currently hold as both LGBT History Month's National Playwright in Residence and National Theatre Coordinator.

My first work for LGBT History Month in 2014 was a commission to write a piece based on new historical research into the arrest of 47 men at the Hulme Temperance Hall in Manchester in 1880. After the success of what became *A Very Victorian Scandal*, LGBT History Month asked me to stay on and to involve other playwrights in an annual cycle of what we now term "Heritage Premieres". Commissioning new writers involved the articulation of what "Heritage Premieres" are, how they use the available historical record, what dramaturgical strategies are permissible and what

degree of supposed verisimilitude we are aiming for. Answering these questions in a vocational and pragmatic way threw up a more complex, compelling and academic set of issues, which I have shaped into the research questions which drive this project:

1. How does the existence and use of historical evidence influence the content and dramatic form of a play featuring intermale sexuality?
2. Are there distinct approaches to writing a history play about intermale sexuality that can be grouped by different relationships between the research, dramaturgical and playwriting processes?

A secondary research question that flows from these is:

3. How can historical playwriting respond to any absences and possible distortions in the public and private records of intermale sexuality?

The project has the specific objectives of:

1. Describing in detail the process of playwriting from archive through researching and writing two full-length plays which are taken through a structured script development process;
2. Comparing my methodology with that of others through original interviews with six writers of history plays and an analysis of other secondary sources (such as theatre programme notes);
3. Exploring the specific problems that intermale sexuality poses in terms both of its presence, absence and coding in historical collections, and in terms of its meaning when recreated for a contemporary audience;



4. Testing the degree to which the act of researching and dramatising the historical record of events is itself a form of historiographical enquiry capable of yielding a new reading of the past;
5. Writing two new full-length history plays that demonstrate the distinct ways in which presences, absences and distortions in the available historical record can be responded to dramaturgically in historically literate ways to create stage drama.

There were a number of external cultural and academic factors that were indicative of the potential for this research finding traction. In May 2012, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council was abolished, and the Arts Council of England was given responsibility for their funding. This brought with it a new focus on how creative arts could interface with these institutions and fostered a more general willingness from libraries and museums to becoming sites for performances. Whilst a clear steer from a major funder helped re-invigorate this connectivity, it was in fact already well established. Jackson (2011) offers an overview of heritage performance, with the genesis of his book resting with the work of the Performance, Heritage and Learning Project (2005-8). This was itself a marker of a new academic focus on an area that, according to Jackson, had previously been fragmented and largely ignored, "Its practice has often been ad hoc, and its evidence base anecdotal" (p.1). Jackson's book provides a number of springboards for further research.

In addition to facilitative changes in industry funding arrangements, and a new interest from academics, museums themselves are undergoing wider, deeper

changes to their culture which is also enabling, creating what Bennett (2013) calls the “new museology”. This is typified by, amongst other things, a shift from display to experience, from observation to collaboration, from school visit to an educational emotive experience, from viewing a collection to being part of the collection, from a silent visit to a shrine to participatory meaning creation, from one authoritative viewpoint (white, male, colonial, heterosexual) to many in dialogue and sometimes opposition. Performance is not just potentially helpful in all of these transitions; it can embody them.

By dramatising the historical record (and non-record) of the past I am not only providing specific new historiographical readings of intermale sexuality in the plays themselves, but also outlining, evolving and validating the methodology by which they were made and providing that methodology for other playwrights with a degree of detail that will be helpful in their own endeavours. This is ultimately a radical and political act. The plethora of new and still emerging acts of historicisation that LGBT History Month showcases each February demonstrates the scale and scope of the absences and erasures that there has been. This research makes its own contribution to counter-balancing that.

Formulating the correct conceptual and descriptive language for the sexual and emotional expression of intimacy between men is particularly elusive in the periods in which the proposed plays are set, which span from 1816 to 1894. An act of sex between two men could variously be described at different points in this period as “sodomy”, “gross indecency”, “queer” or “homosexual”. Each act of labelling carries a distinct, often oppressive, meaning in the period in which it was applied (Foucault,

1976), and only some of those meanings may be retrievable to a writer or an audience today, or perhaps none are if poststructuralism prevails.

There are conventional historical accounts of the levels and likely meanings of inter-male sexuality throughout this period which can provide context (Cocks, 2003, Walkowitz, 1992, Cook, 2007, Brady, 2005, Robb, 2003). Though the meaning of specific events is contested between the texts (e.g. the introduction of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885), they provide a frame for dramatisation. Sodomy is punishable by death until 1861, and by imprisonment until 1967, with full legal equality not achieved until 2001. Under the pressure of such strictures, there remains an overwhelming silence about intermale sexuality, as de Jong (2008) pithily puts it when accounting for his research writing *A Plague Over England*, “The details of precisely what happened are lost in the mists of gay reticence.”

The degree to which sexual behaviour was indicative of sexual identity is a point of contention when looking across the 19th century. The proposition that the “homosexual” was invented as category of person, as opposed to “sodomy” as a sinful temptation against which all men must guard, is outlined by Foucault (1976), Weeks (1979) and Cook (2007). Against this proposition are traditionalists like Norton (2010) who assert that “the essentialist position is that although an individual’s sexuality is the subject of several constraining discourses – notably the law and religion – the body itself is the initial mediator of desire and that there is a ‘sex drive’ that operates independently from social discourse”. I have remained pointedly ambivalent about the alternative essentialist and post-structuralist frames for understanding sexuality, an ambivalence that is reflected in the two plays.

Whatever the precise aetiology, however, there is a body of evidence that the second half of the 19th century saw significant cultural and linguistic efforts to determine and (re)define a distinct category of person by their sexual behaviour and to position this as dominant in their personality and to position them as other and identifiable for legal control.

Evans (2016), working from the perspective of a hermeneutical historian, also outlines the complex linguistic challenges when working with the record of past sexual behaviour amongst men from 1850-1970. Whilst much of the terminology of the past is associated with religious transgression and expressions of secular hostility, he argues that terminology such as “gay” and “queer” is expressive primarily of a political viewpoint signalling divergence or reclamation. Houlbrook (2005) highlights the shifting nature of the term “queer” in his consideration of its use at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a label whose “meanings were...never self-evident, stable or singular” (p.7). Evans is also cognisant of Katz’s (2001) warning of the ahistorical errors that can follow from “retro-labelling”, i.e. conflating present day behaviours with past behaviours, which then imbues the past behaviour with a set of ideological equivalences that it is unlikely to have possessed. He proposes “inter-male sex” as an “expansive placeholder” to encompass consensual and variously coercive behaviours and for ages of males that from today’s perspective would be considered to be minors. Whilst “inter-male sex” is persuasive as a term for the purposes of a longitudinal review of criminal records, I require a term that places significance on the meaning of sex acts in terms of self-identity construction; that allows for the definition of “sex” to be entirely what a specific character considers it to be; and that allows for someone to desire something but not act upon that desire. So, I am

adapting Evan's "inter-male sex" into "intermale sexuality". This is an expansive term in as much as it can contain what might otherwise separately be termed "homosexual", "gay" "bisexual", "sodomitical" and occasionally "queer", but it is limiting in that it requires within the text of the play that there is an actual, or implied, or consciously coded (by the playwright) sexual desire or act represented between males, either in performance or off-stage.

The final piece of terminology that requires some consideration is "history play". Stern (2012) offers as a generic definition, "*(a play with)* focussed engaged depiction of real events, which assumes responsible engagement with the sources on the part of the playwright and independent, historical knowledge on the part of the spectator" (p.81). Rokem's (2000) detailed study of theatrical representations of the holocaust and the French Revolution leads him to say, "*(history plays are)* aesthetic adaptations or revisions of events that we more or less intuitively (or on the basis of some form of general knowledge or accepted consensus) know have actually occurred" (p.5). The applicability of these definitions to my research is limited, as my work seeks to allow for irresponsible engagement with history (if this is taken to mean deliberately eschewing empirical evidence). Far from being based solely on the "real", the depiction of events in the plays may be nothing more than well-researched creative guesses and may be blurred, self-contradictory or even deliberately and purposefully wrong.

If these definitions of what constitutes a "history play" are unhelpful, it is because they rely upon consensual notions of history and spectatorship, appropriate to researchers in uncontested areas, but not to uncovering hidden histories, as this

often requires a disruption to a prior consensus. Perhaps, a playwriting based definition is deployable. Explicitly, the purview of my research is of those plays where the playwright has indicated that all or part of the action is set in a researched past, relative to the time of writing, and where there is an actual, or implied, or consciously coded intermale sexual desire represented either in performance or off-stage. In order to make the endeavour manageable within the parameters of one discrete piece of research, my initial frame is limited to plays performed and published in the UK from 1925 to 2019, taking *The Prisoners of War* by J.R. Ackerley (1989) as the first modern intermale sexuality history play, in common with de Jongh (1992) and Clum (2000).

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction:**

There is a growing body of writing about writing for stage and screen: from the seminal work by Egri (1942), through to Yorke (2013), the originator of the BBC's Writing Room. Despite the gap of over 70 years, Yorke acknowledges that much of what he is articulating is actually still re-working elements of Egri's work. There are a number of other playwrights turned playwriting tutors who offer their own guides to the playwriting process: Ayckbourn (2002), Edgar (2009), Gooch (2001), Grieg (2005), Jeffreys (2019), and Waters (2010). Across this literature there are rules set out for the building blocks of playwriting: inspiration, narrative structure, characterisation, foreshadowing and symbolism, often set out alongside textual analyses and writing exercises. There are some differences of tone, emphasis and expositional strategy, but also a remarkable consistency in the analysis of what makes for the making of a good play. There is, however, no consideration in the vocational literature of whether and to what extent the playwriting process might be different for a play working with historical records. How different practical and ethical approaches to archival research influence the dramatic form and content of a stage play is rarely covered.

Consideration of these issues in relation to the process of writing history plays that specifically feature intermale sexuality is rarer still. At best, there are occasional nods to the issue in unpublished theatre programme interviews with playwrights,

usually brief, vague, retrospective accounts. Kelly's (2015) statement about writing his play *Mr Foote's Other Leg* is typical, "...it is right for the dramatists to let their research slough away as best they can, whilst being true to the spirit of things". Kelly acknowledges that he moves the location of events, writes speculatively about Foote's sexuality and conflates different actual people into a single dramatic character. Yet he maintains the genre assertion of 'history play' with the attendant implied veracity claims. Quite what Kelly's sloughing away process is and how to be true to the spirit of something that is often only implied by absences and erasures remains unclear from this quote but is addressed by Kelly in Chapter Eight.

If the playwriting vocational literature does not focus on these issues, then the allied fields of biography and heritage performance do offer some insights. Both engage with the record of the past in different ways and through a creative process bring representations of it into the present. Beyond them, the two other disciplines of past knowledge making are history and archaeology. More specifically, narrative history and experiential archaeology will be reviewed for methodologies and techniques that are transferrable, particularly in relation to addressing absence in the archival record. The history of the representation of intermale sexuality on the stage and its attempts to bubble up through the 20<sup>th</sup> century into 21<sup>st</sup> century queer embodiment will also be considered. It is itself another history of erasure, but one which has been, at least partially, overcome.

### **Narrative History**

A comprehensive consideration of the philosophy of narrative history is well beyond my purview. It is only necessary to make some framing observations that assist in



addressing the research questions. Narrative history considers the value of narrative in the writing and experience of history, indeed as a fundamental cognitive structuring device to even comprehending the past. Mink (1978) states that, "The significance of past occurrences is understandable only as they are locatable in the ensemble of interrelationships that can be grasped only in the construction of narrative form" (p.148). Jameson (1994) theorises historical understanding in a similar way and writes that "history is inaccessible to us except in textual form ... it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization". Collingwood (1994) notes that as the past does not exist as a thing that we can see and touch and visit, it is created first and fundamentally through being re-enacted in the mind narratively. In this sense then, they all agree that the story of the past *is* the past. Rigney (2001) also identifies the need in historians for coherence, "the desire to make sense of the past at a later point in time" (p.3) , i.e. to tell a single unified story that fully explains the past to the present. She sees this as being in tension with the desire for *accuracy*, all the mass details of past events, which resist generalisation into a single, unified story. She defines "accuracy" as "the desire for a correspondence between the image of the past presented and the past as it actually was" (p.4). Rigney argues there is an "inherent incongruity" between wanting a history that is both accurate and coherent. She argues that the past did exist apart of representations of it, but that we can never recover it, both for lack of sufficient evidence and for an inescapable lack of objectivity.

For Jones (2009) any given history is only a story about the past written by someone from the near past and told in the present. Post-modern historical scholars, like White (2014), go further arguing that historiography can never be anything more than

a form of fiction and re-locate it from a science to mythology. This invites a consideration of whether creative fictional responses can also offer historiographical insights, especially where the historical record is weak or non-existent. Holderness (1992) asserts that some of Shakespeare's history plays were a form of original historiographic enquiry. Jones (2009) makes a slightly more mystical version of the same argument to validate historical fiction as historiography and Doan and Waters (2000) also argue for some lesbian fiction as a legitimate historiographic resource. Schneider (2014) notes how women, queers and blacks have often been removed or reduced in history, or as Rowbotham (1973) would have it "hidden from history". As Wilkinson (1996) succinctly puts it, "Not everything in the past has left traces" (p.80). History then can be seen as a form of structuring narrative about the past which is dependent upon invoking the authenticating power of surviving documents and artefacts, which are themselves the highly partial and often random remains of what actually existed. The gap between what happened in the past and "history" is apparent.

This must necessarily be more so in relation to the people who are not equally represented in conventional archives. That inequality will remain unless other forms of doing history are validated. Schneider (2014) argues for just such a non-conventional form of historicising:

Theatre and dance, the embodied arts par excellence, would seem the prime places to explore what bodies nevertheless may have retained of knowledge, of stories of modes of transmission alternate to, or at least in addition to libraries and archives...Studying performance practices on the stage and in

everyday life and their often extremely complex overlap in the making as well as in the telling of history's stories, can only aid in the challenge of thinking and feeling cross-temporally. (p.61).

More widely, Taylor (2003) argues that, in a Western sense, many colonized peoples simply had no history, therefore, "Recognising performance as a valid form of analysis contributes to our understanding of embodied practice as an episteme and a praxis, a way of knowing, as well as a way of storing and transmitting cultural knowledge and identity" (p.278). The project of decolonising the archive requires that performance and oral testimony are seen as valid ways of knowing and transmitting knowledge. There is therefore, both a questioning of fictional narrativising in historical discourses from a white, heterosexual, Eurocentric perspective which disrupts claims to accuracy, and a valuing of creative and oral traditions for exploring and transmitting the past. These can be seen as part of a wider process of the decolonisation of archival records and of the careful setting aside of mononarratives in how history and museums create meaning and how that meaning is transmitted.

Jones (2009) recognises that the historical record of intermale sexuality is either purposefully absent or is a record from the position of the repressive organisations and mechanisms that have attempted to punish and extinguish such behaviour. Typically this is the criminal justice system, but also latterly medical and psychiatric accounts, "...the scant surviving evidence of gay and lesbian history derives from negative sources. One might go so far as to say that the study of gay and lesbian history actually chronicles various forms of this oppression more than anything else"

(p.45). Jones also notes the “self-erasing” nature of gay history, i.e. that gay people chose not to note anything personal down, or to conceal and to code. The people who then inherit what records there are may also add another layer of destruction, editing, censoring and denying. This leads Jones to suggest other ways to negotiate generational difference and inheritance “...broadening the very notion of lineage and ancestry beyond the heterosexist cultural bias that privileges biology as the strongest foundation for human connection in turn allows for a wider variety of possible understandings of what it means for gay and lesbian people to be family, to be kin, to be in the present” (p.146). Historical playwriting might almost stand as the opposite of historical self-erasure. It can be a purposeful engagement with the past, imagining the words that should’ve been committed to the pages and left uncoded, the diaries and documents that should not have been destroyed but celebrated, and positioning them within drama to create dialogue between past and present generations. In this way, it can attain a reconstituting power. Perhaps, the transmission of the past into the creative present is not as amenable to theory as any of these positions suggest. Schneider (2014) observes there is a randomness at work, “The temporal travel of things, signs and signs of signs can wash history up on the unlikely shores of our theatre stages as often as stand it behind glass in our object based archives” (p.85).

### **Biography & Biopics**

Biography as a term has been increasingly differentiated into specific and sometimes still emerging subgenres that limit and licence different relationships between fact and fiction. Debates around researched, surmised and invented elements of writing about someone’s life have consistently been addressed within the field of biography

and creative non-fiction for many decades often through the lens of wider ontological debates within poststructuralism and postmodernism. The focus of this research is not ontological philosophising, but there are parallels to the debates in narrative history about the ability to know the truth of the past and the requirement of narrative structuring to make it comprehensible. Any clear distinction though between writing about the past based on fact or fiction is neatly challenged by Doctorow: "I could claim that history is a kind of fiction in which we live and hope to survive, and fiction is a kind of speculative history" (1977, p.217). As I have noted, Rigney (2001) makes associated points about the historian's propensity for systemic totalising to create "coherence" in their accounts obscuring the impossibility of ever fully recovering the past (both because of a lack of any way of creating comprehensive records and the impossibility of notions of temporal objectivity). In terms of biography's view of the past, Nardel (1986) not only recognises that the biographer's approach is "akin more to the creative writer than the historian" (p.11), he also suggests that strict fidelity to facts may actually impede the vision that the biographer has for their work and asks whether facts themselves are even necessary for a work of biography to succeed. The precision of the language chosen by the biographer and the reception of that language by the reader is, of course, a complex nexus of transferred meanings and assumptions, unlikely to transmit "facts" without some shifts in the knowledge that is transmitted. Beyond this, Nardel acknowledges that biography is shaped by "contemporary theories of narrative form and fictional technique" (p.5) and asserts the validity of alterations and omissions in order for the biographer to realise their vision of their subject's life. Nardel's assessment relies on the independent, external facts about a person's life being stable and retrievable and implies that the biographer is simply sifting and shaping those facts into a cognitively

digestible version of the past for the reader to meet genre expectations. It should also be noted that the narrative techniques of which Nardel speaks are not different for playwriting.

Garber (1996) agrees with Nardel that biography is a form of fiction, asserting that this a truth “so old that only willed cultural amnesia can make it new,” but suggests that postmodernism has profoundly changed biography: “For the biographer and the autobiographer, postmodernity means understanding that there is no secure external advantage point from which one can see clearly and objectively...”(p.175). Any attempt by a biographer to assert historically researched “truth” then becomes a deployment of ideologically and ahistorically constructed knowledge discourses. Whatever the writer asserts is “true” can readily be recreated as “fiction” if it is *read* as fiction. This is both a licence and a limitation. It licences queer biographical readings of the historical remains of anyone’s life, but limits, even obviates any “truth” claims that can be made of such readings. However carefully researched, the biographer is stuck with a work of fiction that can only reflect them and the ideological framework in which that act of biography was created. Or, as Parke (1996) asserts, a “tug of war” has taken place among fiction, biography, and history, “with biography in the middle” (p.xvi).

Aside from the changing context of cultural theory, the breadth of biographical endeavour in culture itself and the recent history of its multimodal expressions are illustrative of dilemmas in representing past lives. Though Hamilton’s (2007) focus is mostly on literary biography, his adoption of the term “real life depiction” is an expansive one that incorporates docudrama, plays, blogs, museum exhibitions,

biopics and the range of more or less accurate virtual embodiments of dead people on social media. He demonstrates how, since the 1970s at least, each mode of real life depiction has inflected upon the other self-consciously. His case-in-point, the seminal biographies of Lytton Strachey by Holroyd (editions runs from 1967-1994), which also explore some of the dilemmas of dealing with intermale sexuality. Up until the first edition of Holroyd's biography in 1967, Strachey's personal relationship and desires were not widely known, and neither were the sexualities (evidenced or implied) of the wider Bloomsbury Group of which he was a core member. Holroyd (1994) in this introduction to the last version of the biography describes his initial immersion in the archive of the papers of the Bloomsbury Group: "My work held something of the excitement of an archaeological discovery. The vast terra incognita represented by the Strachey papers seemed like a lost way of emerging into the light" (p. xvii). He emerged with a revelation, that Strachey was homosexual and that many of the group were involved in different degrees of same sex physical and emotional expression.

Hamilton (2007) believes Holroyd's declaration of Strachey's sexuality was transformative. Firstly, in the specific terms of naming something which had previously been unsaid, not just of Strachey, but more comprehensively across the field of biographical work, he broke forever the heterosexual assumption about lives of the past. Secondly, that a wider interest was thereby demonstrated in the sexual lives of biographical subjects both legitimising itself with an appeal to the form of the Freudian case study whilst simultaneously appealing to prurience in a reading public that translated directly into more sales. The timing of the original publication in 1967 is, of course, also significant in that it is the year that male homosexuality was

partially decriminalised in England. This was not simply an issue of zeitgeist commissioning. For the Bloomsbury Group survivors who had given access to their letters and diaries, this was a matter of serious legal significance. Evidence was now no longer criminal evidence, but even so, Hamilton alleges that some documents were destroyed by their owners out of fear firstly at the success of the original biography and subsequently at the prospect of dramatisation. So, the relationship between documentation and publication becomes a form of destructive feedback loop where the more successful and public the biographical accounts of homosexuality in the group become, the more likely the limited documentation of it is to be destroyed, making it scarcer and through that scarcity fuelling further interest.

Gaber (1996) raises some additional problems in the biographical representation of an individual's sex life. In considering the nature of accounting for the sexual desires of that person, she imagines that a complete sound and film recording could be made of their sexual activities which upon review might be thought to comprehensively prove something about a person's sexuality. Except, of course, that it doesn't, at least not fully. The man recorded may be having sex with a woman but in his head could be picturing a man or vice versa. Very few people have kept sex diaries, and even when they have their veracity as acts of autobiography might rightly be questioned. Crucially, it is this very move into the sexual life of subjects that Gaber argues invokes speculation, requires creative interpretation, often moves beyond anything that is readily verifiable. "Instead of revealing the 'truth' beneath the gauze, the newly liberated biography, freed from the convention of reticence, replaces concealment with augmentation - good guesses, connecting the dots, speculative fictions" (p. 21). As the biographer comes to address the sexual tastes,



actions, desires and fantasies of their subject, so this requires more and more speculation and therefore fictive approaches. This strengthens the hold of both on the biographical form. Several of the writers interviewed (see Hynes and Fillis in Chapter Eight) make reference to exactly this, that the more personal and revealing a moment of dramatising sexual and emotional intimacy is, the more they have to use fiction. The truth of the intermale sexuality of the past emerges then as a kind of steam on a mirror, evaporating as it is observed, leaving without a trace.

Hamilton (2007) details how Holroyd wrestled with the many dramatists who approached him to adapt the Strachey biography for stage or screen and the protests from detractors at the prospect. Hamilton believes that there is an essential tension between the extensive twin volume biographical form and any attempts to dramatise it, which he thinks inevitably will lead to over-simplifications. Moreover, given the high costs associated with producing historical drama for screen, the content and tone he believes would have to be shaped to appeal to the largest possible potential audience. These reservations are indeed realised when a film that uses Holroyd's work is eventually made, *Carrington* (1995). The film focusses not on Strachey, but on Dora Carrington, the woman he had an intense, but sexless relationship with, speaking very much to the moment of production, "...in a Western society confronting the ravages of AIDS, the tale of Carrington and Strachey's platonic love proved a balm – indeed, a new form of homosexual embalming" (p.263). The demands of female-centred story-telling and the contemporary strictures around homosexual sex had combined to form a limiting and censoring of the original biographical material. Russo (1987) catalogues the wider absence, reactive coding, asexualising and pernicious stereotyping of gay men's screen

representation in film. The themes of his work have subsequently been built on and updated by many, including Streitmatter (2009).

Behind the specifics of any one biography or set of people being biographised, there were other wider important industry based issues that were transformative at the end of the twentieth century, Hamilton (2007) argues. Firstly, there was a professional intermingling with biographers adapting their work into plays, becoming directors and subsequently deploying their new sense of story-telling skills into their biographies (something amply demonstrated by Kelly's account of *Mr Foote's Other Leg* – see Chapter Eight). Secondly, as the biographical form becomes more and more popular, so it becomes more invasive, more overtly politicised and more speculative in its narrative. The most obvious polemic attacking this trend is Malcolm's book studying the biographies of Sylvia Plath, *The Silent Woman* (1994). In it, Malcolm documents the repeated biographical eviscerations of Plath's partner, Ted Hughes, who is blamed in a variety of different ways by different biographers for her suicide. Biography emerges as a burden, an almost unbearable intrusion into grief and a constant that actually becomes part of the story itself in terms of the life of Hughes after Plath. Moreover, Malcolm is dismissive of the basic biographical act seeing it reductively as voyeuristic, offering the thrill of spying at the bedroom door keyhole without the risk of getting caught. An unlikely return to the Victorian hagiographic form would seem to be the only satisfactory response. The line between restoratively addressing the absence of intermale sexuality in the historical record and falling into gratuitous, even specious, sexual speculation may be a hard one to navigate.

Twenty-first century biography-based writing has had an increasingly plastic and positive relationship with creativity. Hamilton (2007) catalogues some literary critics at the end of the twentieth century expressing their disappointed acknowledgement of the post-modern fragmentation of truth into truths, He believes, however, that this is in itself a more truthful way of presenting biography by acknowledging the subjective narrative and creative elements to it. Indeed, he suggests that the popularity of biography may now in fact indicate a kind of category swap, "...inverting the Victorian fiction– fact paradigm. It may be said, in fact, that biography has largely changed places with fiction. Where once factual biographical reporting seemed hard and certain, while fiction could be dismissed as 'make-believe', the roles are now reversed" (p. 283). Scandals around the "falsification" of some memoirs and biographies could suggest otherwise and indicate an ongoing expectation from readers (usually expressed in the critical literature as a "contract") that includes an attempt at fidelity and accuracy. The blistering attacks on James Frey began after it was revealed that his memoir *A Million Pieces* (2003) contained fictional elements. This is well documented (Barton, 2006, Lazar, 2007, Peretz, 2008) and is presented as a cautionary tale in managing reader expectation. This moral context of biography is a repeated theme in the literature and goes beyond managing reader expectations of genre compliance. Backscheider (2001) outlines some other moral dimensions to the form: clarity about what is interpretation and what is fact and recognising the power of biography as reputation/myth maker/destroyer. She argues simply that, "practising the biographer's profession 'irresponsibly' is immoral" (p.10). Certainly, the power of the responses to some biographical acts imply that the genre comes with a set of (perhaps moral) expectations and that having been found to have broken any of these requires contrition. Frey later appends an apologetic

acknowledgment of his fictionalisations to later editions of *A Million Pieces* (2003). But Frey is, perhaps at the time unwittingly, part of a wider movement that emerges in life writing, biofiction, which is distinct in its ability to interweave fictional elements with biographical elements, and the rebirth, reforming and re-theorising of the biographical novel.

Lackey (2017) trumpets a critical reappraisal of biographical fiction in his volume on the genre. He argues that biographical fiction writers are often judged against the standards for a historical novel or for traditional biography and by either measure found wanting, when in fact the writers have persistently explained and asserted that their work is fiction. The crucial genre difference is the approach to the historical record of a life and the events surrounding it. For all biography may deploy narrative devices, there is always an attachment to the historical record of events, whereas writers of biofiction unapologetically alter facts. Lackey draws out the distinction thus:

“There is an expectation that biographers will represent the life of the subject with as much accuracy as possible. Now, of course, an informed reader will know that the author's ideological orientation will inflect their representation of the biographical subject, so what readers get in a biography is a biased version of their subject's life. But there is a big difference between an inadvertent misrepresentation and a purposeful and strategic alteration of fact...in biofiction, history and biography take their cue from the vision of the creative writer rather than from the reality of the external world” (p. 9).

So, in biofiction historiographical demands might be secondary, incidental or not even demands that the piece recognises at all. A parallel to the competing demands of dramaturgy and historiography can be made in writing history plays.

Inevitably, a strategy of creative practice that priorities altering facts selectively invokes a set of more fundamental epistemological questions about the nature of truth itself, its knowability and recoverability. This deliberate strategy of alteration is not simply a result of some capricious creative impulse. Lackey (2017) suggests that biofiction writers use the historical record of someone's life as a starting point for expressing a truth about how they as a writer see the world. Biofiction licences the writer to connect the past with the present by altering the pattern of events, the place of event, the pace of events in any way they require to transmogrify the real person into a metaphor. To make the truth as resonant as possible, the writer will alter things in its service, and thereby create something that bridges the past and present and, if done well, becomes a literary symbol attaining some metonymic power.

Lackey's argument seems to require the writers of biofiction to be well-versed in the literary theory of the form and he ascribes a set of grand intentions to such writers in terms of examining socioeconomic or psycho-political truth. Whether either of these is true in specific cases or not, the essential argument is that the kind of truth that fact-centred biography can offer is actually illusory, whilst the deliberate distortion of facts to suit a creative agenda in biofiction can open up different forms of compelling truth.

Truth itself has a complex relationship with notions of accuracy and both relate to the partial historical record of the past in fluid rather than fixed ways. Is truth about the

past affirmed through a scientific rationale tested through experimentation involving verifiable externals, or is it primarily experienced in emotional terms as a kind of empathy for peoples passed? In the introduction to a collection of essays on creative non-fiction Lazar (2008) poses a similar set of such ontological questions asking if truth is, “accuracy, sincerity, a form of authenticity”, problematising the notion of any objective truth in order to justify fictionalising, even self-consciously in autobiographical writing, through the common literary devices of “invention, compression and the use of imagination” (p.10). Whilst Lazar notes that the contributors to his volume are not consistent in where they place the boundary around the exercise of creativity, he believes the overt and covert mixing is justified, “Non-fiction blends fact and artifice in an attempt to arrive at truth, or truths. This frequently includes great leaps of the imagination.” Foley (1995) problematises the basic bifurcation using Doctorow’s maxim, “There is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction: there is only narrative” (p.9), she then widens the philosophical parameters of the debate further by placing the binary fiction/non-fiction in the wider context of Western dualist thinking. She surveys that poststructuralists attempts to reduce everything to forms of intertextual fiction and draws out the importance of the reader in the relationship between fiction and non-fiction. Foley outlines how the decision to read something as fictional is itself a product of historical and ideological positions. This is amply demonstrated in the genre debates around Kramer’s last book (2015) which started as a work of history claiming the homosexuality of Presidents Washington, Lincoln and Nixon and ended with the subtitle, “A novel” (see Helmore, 2015). In Foley’s consideration of the documentary novel, she argues that such novels frequently deploy the reproduction of documents as a way of authenticating their fictional elements. Both Foley and

Lazar argue for the acceptance of an overt blend of fictional and non-fictional elements in order to reveal a truth which is considered to have more value and power than fact-based truth, which may in itself be another fiction. Quite how the writer is to achieve the alchemical mix and how it is to be known that a deeper, greater truth has so been conjured up is unclear, but the somewhat paradoxical postmodern proposition is established.

Sanders (2006) consideration of the use of historical records in adaptations includes the notion of an “authenticating strategy”. Here “facts” about the past are deployed to confirm the historicity of the piece because, “as readers we are trained to trust the historical evidence of archival material” (p.141). Sanders consideration of the motives of a writer doing this include both the notion of trying to use them to say something about the present and the notion of the retrieval of lost or repressed voices, i.e. that the writer is specifically addressing an absence in the canonical historical account (p.140), “History, literary or otherwise, is being redeployed...in order to indicate those communities and individuals whose histories have not been told before, the marginalised and the disenfranchised”. Sanders also points out that where the person is well-known, then the readers’ foreknowledge and expectation become a vital element in narrative structuring. The writing of any play can artfully acknowledge this and allow the degree to which its subject is well-known to become a dramaturgical asset, for example by minimising exposition and allowing for narrative compression.

Different forms of writing depicting someone’s life does not have to engage with the additional questions of verisimilitude that dramatisation raises through the prospect

of physical embodiment. The history of the biopic also introduces the politics of the production process and raises the prospect of a new way of both engaging popular audiences and of discovering forms of historical truth. Bingham (2010) starts his overview of what he argues is the discernible genre of biopic with some bemusement at the lack of scholarly interest in the form, a lack that mirrors the relative lack of interest in the wider form of creative non-fiction. He argues that the critical derision of the biopic was initially as a result of major Hollywood studios using the genre as a repeated appeal to respectability in the early years of the Motion Picture Production Code (a form of industry self-censorship introduced in 1934) and producing hagiographies. This repeatedly sees studios casually altering the history they were attempting to represent, not in search of some deeper biographical truth, but in order to improve the film's chance of being commercially successful (a goal which also led to many dubious casting choices) and to ensure compliance with the Code. They are seen as a mendacious form and one in which the narrative structure is essentially the same: a progression from early life towards the big thing that the person is known for, which plays out climactically in a celebration housed in a bed of conservative politics and phoney historical positivism. Rosenstone (1995, quoted in Bingham, p.5) summarises the critical view of biopics as if it were a question asking what would you have left of a biopic if you removed, "alteration, compression, invention, and metaphor? Nothing." This pejorative assessment by historians is also noted by Collins (2007), "We know that many historians are dismissive of motion pictures because they manipulate facts, conflate historical characters, and communicate through symbols and microcosms rather than employ word-laden discursive techniques." He argues, however, that a successful biopic will use creative licence to alter things in the service of the truth.



North (1999) outlines how the narrative needs of film create a reductive binarism of complex historical events into the simplicity of protagonist and antagonist and bemoans the reductivism of what he terms “fidelity criticism”, i.e. measuring the worth of an adaptation only by how closely it renders a facsimile of a historical novel onto the screen. Rosenstone’s defence of the biopic contends that invention does not of necessity have to form an oppositional binary to truth, and that in production, with all that dramatisation must invent as the past becomes embodied, a truth can emerge. Rosenstone states:

We must recognise that film will always include images that are at once invented and true; true in that they symbolise, condense, or summarize larger amounts of data; true in that they impart an overall meaning of the past that can be verified, documented, or reasonably argued. And how do we know what can be verified, documented, or reasonably argued? From the ongoing discourse of history; from the existing body of historical texts, from their data and arguments. (p.71)

Rosenstone’s validatory appeal is to the external of an objective historical knowledge (a notion whose flaws have already been discussed) is problematic but his disruption of a simplistic binary between invention and what is historiographically *claimed* as truth has potential. Writers on the biopic, like some writers on biofiction, defend altering “facts” in the service of a deeper truth, but again offer no way of defining what the limits of the licence to alter are, or should be, and no way of assessing whether the alterations have indeed served to reveal a previously unknown or

unrecognised truth. The same impasse is reached by another route, and history offers no recourse as a benchmark, as Pingree (2007) argues in his consideration of the documentary's role in past life depiction. He points out that we have to understand the complexity of the process of representation and its relationship with a past which is inaccessible without representation. We can't test the claims of history, films or fiction to be representing the past as we have no way of knowing what the past was like with any high degree of probability. He concludes that we engage with history as if the past is knowable when it isn't. History is the unreliable ghostly outline of the past. In the end, nothing is capable of consensus other than that time passes, and even time can be deconstructed and challenged through quantum physics or ontological philosophy. He argues: "History is neither the static remains nor the reliable evidence of something so much as it is a process of searching: what we are able to do, what we choose to do." Perhaps the historicising impulse is simply one of self-reflection. Perhaps past life depiction is just a way of holding a mirror. Perhaps there is a deeper, almost atavistic pleasure at work in biography as Bingham (2010) concludes, "We want to live as characters in a story to the extent that we want our lives to have shape, purpose, and meaning. And we watch biopics so as to plumb that mystery of humanness, the inability completely to know another person, and the absolute importance of knowing them and ourselves" (p.379).

### **Archaeological Approaches**

Outside of narrative historiography and biography, there is another allied way of reconstructing versions of the past, one more attuned to dealing with absence and increasingly one that validates creative responses to absence as a form of approximating the historicity of prior events. At its broadest, archaeology is always

about absence or partial glimpses as Cole wryly observes: “Archaeology is the discipline with the theory and practice for the recovery of unobservable hominid behaviour patterns from indirect traces in bad samples” (quoted in Clarke, 1973, p.17). This absence can become the imperative to drive further physical explorations and excavations. It can lead to the resignation that some past things are simply unknowable. Or, it can lead in some branches of archaeology to attempts to create a sketchier category of knowledge. This may be highly contingent and provisional but none the less it may be able to offer some apprehension of the past. These forms of past knowledge-making offer paradigms for considering archive-based dramatisation as a similar form of epistemological endeavour and for how absence can best be addressed.

Ethnoarchaeology concerns itself with the relationship between the remains of material culture and human behaviour (Beck, 2015). It requires an analogic methodology of cross-cultural and cross-temporal generalisation and inferences, taking some core drives of human nature as relatively fixed constants, whilst also increasingly recognising the environmental, climatic and ethnic specificity of some human behaviours and the limitations to simple cross-cultural transpositions. It is based on hypothesising from what we know about how people behave in a particular material culture in the present to form an analogy for how people in similar material conditions would have behaved in the past. Da Silva (2018) surveys this use of temporal analogy. Whether the form is ecological, biological, functional, or structural its use is always legitimated by the belief that if the conditions are sufficiently similar in the past and in the present, so should the process of production, associated behaviours and inhabitations be. He summarises the recent questioning of analogy,

which criticises it for being lazy and too open as a blanket methodology but acknowledges that it still remains at the crux of the discipline. The contested but enduring central premise is to connect behaviour patterns that we can observe in the present with material conditions in the past and assert that similar physical factors would have been likely to produce similar behaviours. So, evidence of past behaviours having happened per se is not required to assert that they would have probably taken place. All that is needed is just a knowledge of the environment and material culture that people existed in and an approximation to the nearest possible current experience of these. The claims to knowledge that the analogous methodology creates, therefore, is necessarily limited but not without some merit.

Applying the analogy methodology to intermale sexuality could offer the playwright useful insights. If a form of sexual expression is prohibited by religious, societal, legal and moral strictures at one point in the past in English society and the same mechanisms are enacted again in the same way, against the same forms of sexual expression in the present then an analogy can be formed investing the nascent picture of the past with the knowledge of how people respond to the same strictures in the present. To extend the logic of the methodology, comparative periods within history should also see similar behaviours from people, if similar conditions apply and the surrounding cultural context is not too removed. So, the explicit state endorsed homophobic oppression of intermale sexual and emotional intimacy of the 1950s (Houlbrook, 2005; Higgins, 1996) and the 1890s (Cook, 2007) may create similar behaviours and responses. Thus, if we know more (in a conventional historical way of knowing based on extant text based analysis) about the behaviour of people in the 1950s than we do in the 1890s, we can use that knowledge to create

an analogy that offers a form of provisional knowledge about the 1890s, when we know less, or even to earlier periods.

The other form of archaeology that offers a helpful methodology is experimental archaeology. This involves the imaginative act of hypothesising about the past within a set frame of references. The hypotheses are then tested with some form of recreation in the present be that of an object or a process (Busuttil, 2013; Hansen, 2014; Holten, 2014; O'Sullivan & Souyoudzoglou-Haywood, 2019; Petersson & Narmo, 2011). The method does not require the presence of an artefact from the past to be part of the experimentation, indeed, it is usually conducted without any artefact in response to a puzzle over absent knowledge. It is a conjecture, not a random one, but one that is informed by present contextual knowledge of the past to create what the experimenter might ultimately only be able to present as a "best guess".

Mathieu (2002) distinguishes between and further develops a taxonomy of four distinct sub-forms: object replication, behavioural replication, process replication and system replication. The experimental archaeology activity of simply showing how tools were made and used or how impressive pre-historic monuments were built (quintessentially Stonehenge) has been set alongside replications that are based in behavioural and phenomenological approaches, observing and recording how humans behave, what they sense and even how they feel to build a sensorial outline of the past. There is an immediate parallel to historical playwrighting where the process of writing and script development could be seen as a form of behavioural replication.

Narmo and Petersson (2011) consider the field of experimental archaeology nearly a decade later, placing archaeological methodology in the wider epistemological context of the twenty-first century. They propose that the general re-balancing away from the science-based production of objective knowledge towards subjective, emotional and empathic forms of knowledge has been reflected within experimental archaeology. They see the future of experimental archaeology as resting in the intersections between experimental archaeology, museums and re-enactments. The notion of revivifying a speculative version of the past and embodying it to make discoveries that have a level of “truth” embedded in them is a significant methodological expansion. They are exploring how one strand in experimental archaeology is performative and offers some valid form of provisional knowledge and arguing for a wider change in epistemological attitudes away from the binary of scientific experiment versus subjective experience. They develop the case for what they term “humanist experimental archaeology” which moves away from a strict hypothetical-deductive theoretical paradigm towards a hybrid methodology that can include sensory and emotional understandings of the past. Their proposed panoply of techniques includes “the development of new methods such as conscious use of anachronisms, renewal of techniques for documenting and communicating experiments, and use of the human body and senses as an experimental field (p.27).” This offers a new epistemological horizon from which knowledge can be gained, a horizon that Mathieu (2002, p.76) thinks can be captured specifically through embodiment “by allowing the experimenter to potentially put themselves in the shoes of a past person, experimentation lets us confront the world of possibilities

as past people may have.” This “putting on” to understand the past could readily be applied to a playwright finding the voice of a character.

Narmo and Petersson (2011) note, however, that attempts to generate embodied knowledge are frequently bracketed off within the profession under the slightly pejorative term of “experiential archaeology”, something which falls short of the gold standard of scientific objectivity, but which might have some residual value as a signpost to more rigorously constructed work. They deploy the alternative term “action-mediated knowledge” to describe the insights offered by people typically working in open-air museums undertaking various forms and depths of re-enactment. In addition they offer a graduated taxonomy of the experiences that might be on offer at such a site (p.33) which included “the re-enactors in costume *dramatis(ing)* a living past to the public.” The degree to which any or all of these can be considered to be experimental archaeology they concede is contested, but specifically note that this may be due simply to the cultural category that they are assigned as either theatre, play or show. The fact that something’s mode of production is from within another discipline, should not, they argue, forbid it from being able to produce knowledge within another, once it’s methodologies and intentions have been examined (p.35): “In a humanistic experimental archaeology it is necessary to implement narratives relevant to the senses. Artistic interpretation and performance should be part of the accepted ways of understanding the past.” Action-mediated knowledge thus licences the costumed performance of historical plays as a way of knowing the past.

Narmo and Peterson (2011) also argue that this knowledge should not be dependent upon the existence of specific artefacts or historical documents to be persuasive.

They discuss the work of Thor Heyerdahl, who reconstructed a balsa craft and sailed it from Peru to the Tuamotu Islands in pursuit of his conviction that New World mariners from the East might have sailed into Polynesia (Van Tilburg, 2002). This experiment did not create a raft based on extrapolating a boat design from a specific recovered artefact nor did it depend on any documented evidence. It simply used a generic understanding of the level of technology that was likely to have been available. The nature of the knowledge that such an enactment produces is not of the order of proof. The experiments demonstrate that something is possible, Heyerdahl might argue probable. And Narmo and Petersson (2011) assert that such a methodology of the probable is an interesting extension of the way we can comprehend pre-history. So, contextual knowledge in the absence of specific information, or even an analogous anchor, can be used to construct something as tangible as a boat to carry six people across an ocean. The execution of this embodied experience can produce an understanding of the past, which is a category above speculation and below certainty, but which maintains a level of epistemological validity. Indeed, for Narmo and Petersson it is a vital constituent part of the progression they map for their humanistic experimental archaeology, "it is important to dare to fill the knowledge gaps with possible solutions. It is in the encounter between present and past, the mental movement from present times to another time and place, that deeper reflection has a chance to occur" (p.46).

Interdisciplinary approaches that bring artistic and creative methodologies into archaeology and imbricate them with modes of experimental and experiential archaeology are at the heart of the work of Michael Shanks (a classical archaeologist) and Mike Pearson (artistic director of Brith Gof/Faint Recollections),



detailed in their book *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001). The focus of their interest in theatre is less about scripts and more about devised work, site-specific pieces, performance art and generally what might be termed post-dramatic performed heritage responses. Pearson advances the contention that, "It may be that the archaeological imagination constitutes a kind of dramaturgy" (p.68). He applies his reasoning to a consideration of a Brith Gof performance at an abandoned coal foundry, a place that lacks any of the overt historicising of heritage sites (signs, displays, guidebooks, tour guides) but from which more chaotic knowledge of the past may be created. Through the act of performing there "...the techniques developed in such apparently valueless places may serve to suggest animations of historical locations which can juxtapose varying orders of the dramatic material, contemporary and historical, documentary and fictive, without monopolising interpretation, without suggesting 'this is exactly how it was'" (p.68).

The form of knowledge generation that Pearson (2001) is articulating is a heteroglossic one, one which makes multiple, fleeting and circumstantial claims to the past. He considers the Brith Gof production of *Gododdin*, a medieval Welsh poem, in terms of its treatment of history. Firstly, he notes how history can be seen in dramaturgical terms as a series of inciting incidents, and that those incidents can conflate around a theme, moving the past and present together. Thus an account of the flooding of a Welsh village in the 1960s to provide a reservoir for Liverpool becomes read by the audience as a pan-historical synonym for all colonial exploitation. Pearson champions the bricolage approach to text, narrative and temporality present in his work, "...performance in heritage contexts can conflate the documentary and the fictive within a given location or architecture...without laying

claim to historical accuracy or authenticity” (p.111). This leads him into a wider discussion about the complex nature of claims to authenticity. Pearson argues that authenticity is not an innate property that something possess in any context. It is the result of a process of regulated cultural production that ascribes authenticity to something in a specific context. It is the relationship between the present and the past that creates notions of “authenticity” as a form of always meaning-making and not anything innate to the object.

Pearson (2001) then critically considers heritage performance in the context of claims to “authenticity”. Fundamentally, he argues that the theatrical performance is inauthentic. The premise is that people are pretending to be something they are not, saying words that are not theirs in clothes that have been designed or hired for them, enacting actions and relationships that they would not otherwise undertake. Thus everything about a conventional theatrical performance is inauthentic and requires a joint endeavour with the audience to suspend the reality of what is being presented. To choose such an already inauthentic medium to discover authenticity is, then, perhaps a flawed enterprise from the start. The actors cannot escape their embodiment of the present in terms of the physiology of their bodies, the mannerisms of their unconscious gestures and the inflections of their voices. Moreover, for the past to be embodied in a characterisation that exists in a single narrative, a staged biographical fiction, is, Pearson states, a “banalisation” of the jumbled mass of the possibilities of the past. He argues that whatever the claims are for authenticity of a script-based heritage performance, the reality of audience engagement is that we are never fully seduced by its pastness, “And whatever the degree of verisimilitude of costume drama, we always suspect that they are wearing

modern underwear” (p.117). Pearson is, of course, over-generalising to make a point. He cannot possibly know how all audiences respond to scripted heritage performance or what they are thinking. But his consideration of the fundamental contradictions at the heart of any history play’s claim to represent the past “authentically” resonate. Pearson suggests a rich alternative agenda for performances that connect in some ways with the past:

It may be possible to create theatrical presentations which are not reliant upon the re-enactment and singularity of interpretation of conventional dramatic practice, which make no pretence at verisimilitude, which juxtapose alternative interpretations simultaneously, which reveal site continuously and which serve to evoke rather than to monopolise meaning, rupturing rather than consoling. Such interpenetrative hybrids may include anachronism, lack of congruence, fantasy, the overlaying of ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ in order to stimulate the imagination of the spectator, to provoke questioning and to embrace her in an interpretive and critical process. Their parts never fully coalesce, and they contain irreconcilable discontinuities within their juxtapositions of material. They are purposefully unauthentic. (p.119)

Rather than attempting accuracy through a series of authentications, Pearson is suggesting that the very opposite might reveal more about the multiple pasts. It is not a process of simply being inaccurate, but one of deliberate and jarring distortion, a highly distinct view of the relationships between dramaturgy, the record of the past and the claims to representations of it.

### **History Plays, Heritage Performance and the Archive:**

The literature in relation to history plays focusses on the modes of stage representation and on the likely interpretation by audiences. The process by which the playwright engaged with the historical record to create the history play is relatively ignored or dealt with minimally. Some unpublished theatre programmes do have some short accounts from playwrights of their writing process, but again the detail of the methodology of archival engagement is sparse or occluded with poetic language. Heritage performance is a distinct genre where the site of performance is a determinant both meta-textually of the meaning of that performance and physically in terms of how audiences interact it. However, some of the literature researching it is helpful in relation to working from archives. There are accounts not simply of the content of a piece and its reception but also of the process of its creation, including archival engagement. These accounts introduce some key conceptual language outside of the nomenclature used in playwriting. Farthing (2011) gives a detailed overview of the archival research and writing process for a commissioned museum piece. They are still, however, relatively rare and do not deal with the specific issues of historicising an absent or obfuscated record of intermale sexuality for the purposes of dramatisation.

Rokem (2000) shows how history based performance can be used as an act of wilful resistance to dominant discourses and specifically as a critique of existing interpretations of the past. He situates the actor in such works as a “hyper-historian” embodying a link between the present and the past in the moment of performance, thus paralleling the process of writing such pieces to puzzle-solving. He notes the constant tension between selecting from mass of events and people to create

narrative from the chaotic nature of what actually happened, a common concern with biography, narrative history and the biopic.

Jackson (2011) suggests one solution to the limitations of narrative structuring is the deployment of “heteroglossia”, which is a narrative style in which many viewpoints are presented without one being privileged, leaving the viewer to create meaning.

Jackson’s survey of performance in museums and heritage sites introduces several other concepts that expand the vocabulary for this work: “unsettlement” a process by which the visitor/viewer has their expectations and assumptions challenged, and the counter-balancing “narrowing tendency” a kind of creeping in to any work performed in a museum of its existing dominant narratives, and the view by the receivers of the work as “authorised” by the museum and so possessing a certain historical truth.

Smith (2011) adumbrates the associated concept of Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) a process of legitimating meaning-making at heritage sites that performance can be seen as being a part of and subject to. Talbot (2011) outlines the concept of “slippage” in museum-based performance, a process by which different versions of identity and its institutional and historical construction can be revealed. Bush-Bailey (2012) proposes a form of performance/research methodology where the historian is present in the performance, avoiding the dangers of “presentism” because the distance to the past is acknowledged and not conflated. She, like Lamb (2008), notes the long-lasting, powerful emotions that can be associated with re-enacting real events, especially at the site of their occurrence, not just for the visitor/audience but for the embodier/performer too.

### **The History of Intermale Sexuality (History) Plays**

To understand intermale sexuality history plays, it is necessary to consider the representational codes, prohibitions and stereotypes of intermale sexuality on the stage, as they impact directly on the emergence and development of such plays. Three seminal books attempt to chart their development on the British stage broadly across the twentieth century: de Jongh (1992), Sinfield (1999) and Clum (2000). Though they each consider a number of history plays, only Clum offers any detailed consideration of them as a genre, taking a thematic approach based on narrative content. He also offers a succinct summary of a century's worth of theatre studies, "The history of the representation of homosexual desire onstage is a series of moves from nothing, to innuendo and gesture, to discussion without any physical signs of attraction and affection to, finally, showing" (p.7).

As the above quote from Clum suggests, intermale sexuality has a series of identifiable evolving devices, plots and tropes in terms of its dramatic composition and representational strategies. Most fundamentally, there is a basic distinction between dramaturgical approaches that create intermale sexuality as an outside corruptive force to be addressed and those that constitute it as the viewpoint, a lens through which to see the world. Wylie in *Sex on Stage* (2009) notes how these reflect more general public attitudes towards sexuality at any given time. They are also a reflection of a complex intersection of other factors: censorship (either exercised directly by the State, or as the internalised conventions of taste in Artistic Directors, or as the priorities of funders, or as hashtag power of social media); the modes of production (especially the growth of public sector subsidy of the theatre after World War Two); the legal and cultural status of homosexuality itself (which changes profoundly in the period under consideration); the career aspirations of

individual playwrights (being “out” has variously been a potentially ruinous scandal, a positive asset, a matter of indifference and more recently a position of supposed privilege in the LGBT coalition); and the prevailing politics of sexuality and gender (during a period which sees gay men attack closeted homosexuals of the previous generation and then themselves be marginalised by gender fluid subsequent queer and post-queer generations).

In considering the absence of intermale sexuality from the historical record, it is necessary to include within that the history of its absence from the stage and the attempts to address this absence over time. In terms of the literal legal right to represent intermale sexuality on the stage, de Jongh (1991), Sinfield (1999) and Clum (2000) all acknowledge the significance of the state censorship of the stage via the Lord Chamberlain’s office until 1968. This applied to all new publicly staged dramatic work and restricted homosexuality from representation on the stage until 1958, though some rare earlier examples are allowed, and then allowed limited representation until 1968. Clum notes two possible responses to this, either to use implication (conveyed through tone, casting or performances) or subversion (by performing in private arts club spaces which were outside the Lord Chamberlain’s purview). Sinfield suggests that, despite these prohibitions and strictures, that there was more representation than some accounts allow for as revivals were not covered by the Lord Chamberlain’s office. If implication was to be deployed as a dramaturgical device, what would be the shape of a semiotic shadow that would both be coded enough to get past the censor and explicit enough to register with an audience, or some parts of it? Clum suggests that Oscar Wilde provides the model with his novella *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) for, “a clandestine stage

iconography of the homosexual” (p.16). The crux of the code is a male character being sensitive, artistic, delicate and narcissistic. The presence of these could be used to imply what could not be stated and, Clum contends, gradually became recognised as such, “By the 1920s, the dandy-aesthete was reckoned, in a swift organising caricature, as a likely homosexual” (p.23).

Coward is the first playwright to manipulate these tropes for more positive, or at least neutral, effect. De Jongh (1991) notes how in *The Vortex* (Coward, 1925) some oblique references to intermale sexuality are made. Sinfield (2000) charts how the positive critical and commercial response of this led Coward to develop and elaborate a dramaturgy for dual audiences: one middle brow, middle class, heterosexual seeking light entertainment, perhaps with the mildest frisson of disrespectability, and another more sophisticated audience who were in on a private joke which repeatedly inferred intermale sexuality: “His project was to comprise both audiences in one text... – the uninitiated and those in the know” (p. 106). Clum (2000) asserts the apotheosis of this approach is in *Design for Living* (1933), noting how the play masks homosexuality as bisexuality and then achieves both its presence on and absence from the stage. By the time Terence Rattigan’s plays arrive on the stage in the late 1930s, the representation options for intermale sexuality have been only slightly augmented into a repertoire which Sinfield summarises as “...comic low-life stereotypes, discreetly anguished characters and ambiguously drawn sophisticates” (p. 159).

By the 1950s, any representational radicalism that early Coward plays might have contained has more than waned, it has inverted. Coward, along with fellow closeted



homosexual producer Binkie Beaumont and playwrights Terence Rattigan and Somerset Maugham, are seen by some as ossified, upper middle-class hypocrites particularly, according to Wyllie (2009), by George Devine at the Royal Court. As the topic of homosexuality becomes an open part of public discourse (perhaps signified most vividly by the commissioning of the Wolfenden Report in 1954 to review the legal status of male homosexuality), so the coding and gender switching in plays, which playwrights such as Rattigan still used to mask homosexual characters as women, seemed increasingly arcane and the dramaturgy of the closet started to break down. Sinfield (2000) notes how what he calls, “the cat and mouse game with censorship and decorum has become not an occasional awkwardness but a structural factor in many significant productions. In a very real sense, it became what the plays are about – almost what theatre is about” (p.166).

In dialectical opposition to Rattigan and Coward’s contorted dual dramaturgy, emerges John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1956), with an off-stage named homosexual character, and the direct staged representation of Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* (1958). Sinfield (1999) describes the main dramaturgical premises open to the playwright in the mid-1950s in presenting intermale sexuality, “...the bachelor of suspect sensibility and occupation, the buddy relationship which might be sexual, the boy who might be going wrong, the sinister intruder, the rough lad, the false accusation, the damaging consequences of self-repression, the risk of police attentions” (p. 241). Whilst these plays reflect rather than challenge these norms, they are significant for de Jongh (1991) in that, “The homosexual is brought in from the cold” (p. 93). He is no longer a medical condition to be identified and treated and

is now a social problem to be pitied and tolerated, much in line with the formulation offered by the Wolfenden Report itself upon publication in 1957.

The Wolfenden recommendations are finally enacted in 1967. This, coupled with the ending of state censorship in 1968, ushers in a significantly altered creative environment for playwrights in which to explore new representation strategies for intermale sexuality. In his consideration of the period 1969-1981, de Jongh (1991) describes the growth of a definable gay subculture in London which, along with the political catalyst from the Stonewall riots in America in 1969, facilitates gay men in creating their own explicit, public culture. He outlines how a self-reinforcing loop of gay playwrights working for gay audiences reviewed by gay critics in gay publications is vital in explaining how gay men gain the confidence to experiment with new dramaturgies to represent themselves on stage openly for the first time. Sinfield (1999), de Jongh and Wylie (2009) all agree on the significance of Gay Sweatshop (a theatre cooperative founded in London in 1975) as one of the primary theatrical organisations through which these highly politicised debates were had, and the results embodied into stage productions which toured the country.

The Gay Liberation Front (the most radical intermale political organisation in the UK) had argued since its formation in 1970 that heterosexuality was a socially constructed element of a capitalist society. Sinfield (1999) and de Jongh (1991) both believe this informs the choices of agit-prop or social realism as the main dramatic forms used by Gay Sweatshop (and others) in this period. Perhaps inspired by Marxist ideas of historical materialism, Gay Sweatshop starts to reconsider the past and its meaning to the present. They produce *As Time Goes By* (1977) by Drew

Griffiths and Noël Greig, which politicises as it historicises as it dramatises three separate periods: the aftermath of the Oscar Wilde trial, Weimar Germany and the Stonewall riots. Seeing this play, directly influences Martin Sherman to write *Bent* (1979), an account of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. De Jongh argues that *Gay Sweatshop* influences not only *Bent*, which became the first intermale sexuality history play to achieve mainstream success, but two other such plays Julian Mitchell's *Another Country* (1981) and Hugh Whitemore's *Breaking the Code* (1986). De Jongh says, "These plays...created and celebrated suitable gay heroes; they rescued from obloquy supposed gay villains. In all three plays rebellious homosexuals attempt to assert a homosexual identity and to live their sexual lives in societies that outlawed their sexualities." All three plays were dramaturgically radical in taking the homosexual man as the protagonist. This enabled an audience to see what the normative heterosexual world from his vantage point as an often murderously oppressive one. With this dramaturgical approach applied, a traitorous homosexual threat can become a sympathetic rebel (as in *Another Country*), a perverted loner becomes a national hero (as in *Breaking the Code*), and the lowest caste in the horrors of the holocaust become rebels asserting their humanity in the worst extremes of persecution (as in *Bent*).

Clum (2000) is markedly the first writer to give the intermale sexuality history play serious and detailed consideration in terms of their use of history. He notes, "List-making was the central historical act in early post gay liberation plays, where identity and pride come from a symbolic joining of celebrated homosexuals from the past and present" (p.162). For example in *The Normal Heart* (1985) and in *As Time Goes By* (1977) it essentially forms the narrative structure of the play. Clum is sceptical of

this device for a number of reasons: either the people listed didn't conceive of themselves as gay, or were not proud to be so, or they represent distinct categories of sexual experience that aren't easily conjoined with or conflated into "gay". Clum suggests that it speaks to an urge in playwrights to make historical connections to create a sense of culture that is not just sexual. This urge was especially important during the AIDS crisis peak. Clum argues that the 'historical impulse' in the playwright is linked to three other impulses:

1. The 'anarchic impulse': to celebrate creative anarchy as a positive counter to regulatory oppressive order;
2. The 'romantic impulse': to posit loving relationships as the norm for gay men (the right to love is at stake in the battle against oppression, not just the right to sex with another man)
3. The 'canonical impulse': to celebrate gay creativity by dramatising the experience of gay artists, reinforcing awareness of the pantheon of creatives, and laying claim to a space for an openly gay identity.

Norton (2010) shows that this appeal to a lineage of great homosexuals in history is in fact at least as old as the 1698 sodomy trial of Captain Rigby. The Court records show it incorporated into Rigby's attempt to overcome another man's reticence, "Rigby replies, 'It's no more than was done in our fore-fathers time', telling him that Jesus and John were sodomitical partners, and claiming 'that the French King did it, and the *Czar of Muscovy* made *Alexander*, a Carpenter, a Prince for that purpose'. Like homosexuals throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Rigby justifies

his homosexual desire by claiming it was practised by famous people throughout history (p.38).” It is unsurprising that this should be reflected on stage.

In terms of the intermale history plays themselves, Clum (2000) identifies five major themes, which are outlined below with some suggested additions:

1. **Martyrdom:** He presents *Edward II* (1592) by Christopher Marlowe as the first intermale sexuality history play and also as the first gay martyr, punished not just for his sexuality but also as a breaker of class and gender rules. Clum argues this is still playing out in the 1980s for example in *Breaking the Code* (1986). Moreover, to this could be added the 21<sup>st</sup> century protagonists of *Mr Foote’s Other Leg* (Kelly, 2015) and *How To Win Against History* (Davies, 2017) and most, if not all, of the dramatisations of Oscar Wilde’s life, including *The Judas Kiss* (Hare, 1997), *In Extremis* (Bartlett, 2000) and *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (Holland & O’Connor, 2014).
  
2. **Traitors.** *Edward II* also stages the first gay traitor. Treachery is cast as revenge for being brought up in a heterosexist and homophobic society. Clum argues that love and not sex is usually the pivot to treachery. Clum identifies *A Patriot for Me* (1965), and *Another Country* (1981) as plays that explore this themes, to which could be added Bennett’s *An Englishman Abroad* (1988) and *A Question of Attribution* (1988) and de Jongh’s *A Plague Over England* (2008).

3. **War:** Clum discusses only one American play only, *Streamers* by David Rabe which makes this category hard to distinguish meaningfully. In *Streamers*, intermale sex is the great destroyer of the male on male bond, the homosexual a cipher through which straight men enact their destructive fantasies upon one another. In terms of topic, though not perhaps in terms of that specific analysis, *The Prisoners of War* (Ackerley, 1925), *Poppies* (Grieg, 1983 ) and *The Night Watch* (Waters, 2016) could all be considered under this category.
  
4. **Resistance:** These plays feature a militant assertion of a positive gay identity, the new “us”, and a re-positioning of society’s homophobia/heterosexism as problematic, the new “them”, and often feature a wise, proud, politicised mentor figure and coming out narratives. Clum suggests more pejoratively that these are a sort of “gay’s gay play”, or as he terms it “an insider gay play” and offers *As Time Goes By* (Grieg and Griffiths, 1977), *Bent* (Sherman, 1979) and *Street Theatre* (Wilson, 1982) by Doric Wilson as examples, to which might be added *Mother Clap’s Molly House* (Ravenhill, 2008).
  
5. **Heroic Making:** Clum argues that these plays function as an alternative to the “criminal as gay martyr narrative” offering instead “gay artist as hero” (even if the hero is sometimes quite flawed). They are historical biographical dramas that assume a knowledge of the artists output and usually unite gay and heterosexual audiences around an appreciation of their creative output. Example plays include: *Total Eclipse*

(Hampton, 1968, on Arthur Rimbaud & Paul Verlaine), *The Dear Love of Comrades* (Grieg and Griffiths, 1979, on Edward Carpenter), and *Once in A While Odd Things Happen* (Godfrey, 1990, on Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears). To this could be added *Colquhoun and MacBride* (Byrne, 1992 on titular painters) by Jon Byrne, *The Invention of Love* (Stoppard, 1997 on A.E. Housman) by Tom Stoppard, *Bacon* (Towler, 2006 on titular painter) by Jeremy Towler, *A Plague Over England* (de Jong, 2008 on Gielgud) and *The Habit of Art* (Bennett 2009 on Auden and Britten), *Britten in Brooklyn* (Lewis, 2016 also on Auden and Britten) all of which feature creative protagonists.

Clum's categorisations are a thematic investigation of the state of intermale sexuality history play at the end of the twentieth century. They begin to tease out the common narratives, tropes, dramaturgical strategies and some of the character types. The ability to add more recent intermale sexuality history plays to these categories, proves some degree of durability. But there are many other plays that do not fit readily under these themes or at least under the characterisations of them. The more ambivalent protagonists of mostly recent plays such as *Mr Foote's Other Leg* (Kelly, 2015), *Epstein* (Sherlock, 2012) *Ross* (Rattigan, 1960), *Lawrence After Arabia* (Brenton, 2016) and *Prick Up Your Ears* (Bent, 2009) do not sit easily in categories about heroes or traitors. Many characters in intermale sexuality history plays were neither figures of resistance nor martyrs. These positions are only for a valorised few and don't allow for ordinariness, for average people in the past. The hairdressers of Ackland's *Absolute Hell* (1988), the Leeds sixth-former from Bennett's *The History Boys* (2004) and the mundane drag queen of Nichols *Privates*

*on Parade* (1977), to name but a few, are left without neat taxonomical homes. As the stage representation of intermale sexuality in the past has pluralised to allow for more complex, nuanced and neither necessarily heroic, cowardly or victimised characters to emerge, so the need for a neat taxonomy has become unclear. The increasing number of plays that sit outside of the ability of Clum's categories to define them is a testimony to 21<sup>st</sup> century's mainstreaming of intermale sexuality in plays that no longer problematise or validate that form of sexuality as a theme.

Clum also sets out some codifying of the semiotic strategies that playwrights use to enact the homosexual experience on stage. In essence these amount to three things: (i) kissing, (ii) male nudity and (iii) drag, some or all of which are used by plays after the 1969 fault line. He identifies the great problem of AIDS plays in relation to this, i.e. how to enact a sexually transmitted illness that often ravages the body, and suggests that AIDS dramas force sex into being a historical act by making gay men consider the past, reviewing the disruption in what they might have thought would have been a linear progression through queer Whig history to ever greater acceptance and freedom.

The impact of AIDS is a vast, multidisciplinary topic and it dominates the staging of intermale sexuality drama from the moment it is recognised as an epidemic primarily affecting gay men (arguably from 1983 in the UK). Clum (2000) asserts that the demands of the crisis were so compelling that it forced political theatre off the stage and on to street in movements like ACT UP, who used stage devices in their demonstrations. Sinfield (1999) suggests a number of dramas deliberately model themselves on the five stage model of grief and trauma. Clum identifies a specific



device common to a number of AIDS plays, what he calls the “aria of reminiscence”, whereby a gay male character both affirms the validity of the sexual past and of a vastly changed sexual present. Sinfield notes how the intense trauma of the health crisis in the present, drove some UK playwrights into exploring the past, for example Bartlett’s with *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1989). Speaking about American drama, Fisher (2008) states that the response was almost the opposite, “...with the appearance of AIDS...homosexuality became a dominant – if not the dominant – topic in serious American drama” (p. 2). A key product of this, *The Normal Heart* (Kramer, 1985) contains a list of historical cultural figures which the lead character claims as gay, asserting the value of a culture that is not just sexual, something already noted above. De Jongh (1991) is dismissive of it: “It is no more than a conjuring trick to imagine that gay culture sweeps into existence through the naming of great homosexuals in history, when the homosexuals who he names have a necessarily different sense of their identity, and may not even have a homosexual identity in the sense we understand it” (p.185). The play does use one unique dramaturgical device which Juntunen (2008) sees as crucial: the writing each night of performance on a prominent part of the set of the current number of current AIDS-related deaths. “In the moment when fictional time and non-fictional time collided, a new community was formed...and the production became a ritual about remembering the dead and refusing to be silent about how to save the living” (p.32).

Both Wyllie (2009) and Sinfield (1999) are critical of the British stage’s response to AIDS, which neither see as producing any great work in the 1980s. Wyllie suggests this is because AIDS hit the US earlier and harder than the UK and so plays from America, like *The Normal Heart*, were imported or American plays were developed in

the UK, like Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, and the crisis was experienced to some extent vicariously in theatrical terms until plays like Elyot's *My Night With Reg* in 1994. This argument ignores some successful AIDS-related work in the UK by Gay Sweatshop such as *Compromised Immunity* (Kirby, 1985) and most significantly by Consenting Adults who staged the world's first HIV/AIDS play *Anti Body* by Louise Parker Kelley in 1983. However, it would be true to say that until *My Night With Reg* homegrown plays about the UK AIDS/HIV experience had remained on the fringe.

The extreme level of homophobia that also accompanied the AIDS crisis invoked a crisis in representation that has been noted by Clum and many other critics (see Moor, 2000, Jarman, 1996, Burston, 1995 and Crimp & Rolston 1990). This regularly brought into question the value of gay men to society and created synonyms of illness and homosexuality with the inherent implication that homosexuality could be caught and should be eradicated. In this context, the political importance not just of exploring AIDS in the present, but also of demonstrating the cultural contribution that gay men had made and the positioning of those men in a form of lineage to similar men in the past, was a radical act of resistance. Clum adumbrates one specific example with the National Theatre staging a biographical history play about Benjamin Britten in 1990, *Once in A While Odd Things Happen* (Godfrey, 1990) that with its focus on a same sex family unit, could be seen as a radical response to Section 28 of the Local Government Act which banned Local Authorities from promoting homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

The 1980s is the peak (in terms of the number) of intermale sexuality history plays and also the peak of AIDS-related homophobia. This would appear to be more than coincidental. The deployment of heritage is a radical device for playwrights to adopt at this point. A survey of contemporary tabloid reportage of the AIDS pandemic reveals a mass of myths not just about the illness itself, but also about intermale sexuality. Two repeatedly appear in different forms with different notes of pernicious moral panic sounding through them:

1. Homosexuality has become more prevalent and those engaged in it have become more promiscuous as a result both of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1967 and of the gay liberation movement that came into popular culture after the Stonewall riots in America in 1969.
2. Gay men are a risk to heteronormative society, both in moral and medical terms, and society needs to contain or even eliminate this risk.

At its most simplistic, the first myth is challenged by placing intermale sexuality into the past, the pre-AIDS and pre-pre-AIDS past (i.e. not the 1970s as the last pre-AIDS decade but specifically pre-Stonewall and the sexual liberation that may have followed) examples include *More Lives Than One* (1854-1900), *Another Country* (1930s), *Poppies* (World War Two), *An Englishman Aboard* (1956), and *Cock Ups* (1967). The device of historical list-making that Clum notes above, notably in *The Normal Heart* (1987), is another form of historicising intermale sexuality as not only always present, but also always present in many of the names from history that are associated with cornerstones of civilisation. This connects with the way in which

history plays can address the second myth, through the bringing into consciousness of the contribution that gay men have made, for example Alan Turing's contribution to winning World War Two in *Breaking The Code* (1986), or by neutralising and re-positioning gay men's bad behaviour as a form of resistance to heteronormative oppression, for example, Joe Orton's promiscuity in *The Diary of A Somebody* (1989) and Anthony Blunt's espionage in *A Question of Attribution* (1988).

*Angels in America* (Kushner, 2007) is seen as dramaturgical turning point by Clum (2000) in that it both specifically represents intermale sexuality in the context of the AIDS epidemic and makes gay characters and intermale sexuality generalised as metaphor. Fisher (2008) similarly praises the play's ability to use AIDS and homosexuality as key metaphors within a state of the nation drama. The play contains elements of magical realism and several historical characters. Sinfield regards some of these elements less favourably as, "unhelpfully mystifying" (p. 205). For all its commercial and critical success, the play fails to usher in a new era of writing about intermale sexuality, in some senses its shadow stifles it. Robert F. Gross in *The Last Gay Man* (2008) tries to explain the absence of a "new great flowering of queer drama" that the play invokes in its famous, "Let the great work begin" closing line. He considers the lacuna in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, experienced as a result of AIDS losses. *Angels in America's* representation of drag as the dying form of cultural expression, equivalent to African American's Uncle Tom's racial stereotype, also proved to be a misread of what is to come. Sinfield (1999) points out that as Judith Butler's theories of the performativity of gender filter through the 1990s they in fact re-licence and inspire a whole new exploration of drag on stage as part of the emergence of a distinct set of queer

dramaturgies. He discusses the relative merits of different deployments of drag and camp as part of finding a progressive dramaturgical style, "...it is a mistake to conclude that there will be one, truly dissident dramatic form – social realist, Brechtian, camp or otherwise... The dissident potential of camp and drag has to be assessed not in the abstract, but in particular instances" (p.339). Drag has the potential to be subversive but equally to be mainstream as Bank's (2020) summary of what he sees are problems with the ubiquity of RuPaul's different forms of drag show has demonstrated, "The controversy can be summed up by the poet laureate Ms. Jasmine Masters' famous statement, '*Rupaul's Drag Race* has fucked up drag'."

At the turn of the century, Sinfield (1999) believed there was still space for an exploration of a specific set of gay concerns: the limits of assimilation, the need for discretion or disclosure, gendering and the demands of different communities homogenised into the acronym LGBT. However, as queer dramaturgies developed specifically exploring sexuality, gender and increasingly issues of race, nationality, species, body shape, technology and class, often in one person shows using autobiographical devising, so the issue of intermale sexuality simultaneously became marginal in playwriting for the stage. A decade later, looking back Wyllie (2009) points to Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping & Fucking* and to Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) as texts in which intermale sexuality is featured but it is not the focus of the drama. He concludes, "...by about 2000 the gay or lesbian play as such had perhaps achieved all that it could for the time being" (p.109).

Clum (2000) believes that in all the plays representing intermale sexuality progressively there are expressions and elaborations of some or all of the following five elements:

1. Display: of the male body and of the devices of theatricality;
2. Polemic: a dialectic with the mainstream, but one which sets out areas on which there can be no compromise;
3. Self-Examination: both of the individual and the individual relationship with a community or series of communities;
4. Transformation: through theatricality and ironical appropriation of the modes of oppression;
5. Celebration: of courage, resistance, difference and chosen community/family.

Clum, however, also ponders whether there is a dramaturgical future for “gay” and whether (page 317), “...the terms has outlived its historical moment.” It would be fair to say that being “gay” has proved to no longer be a dramaturgical proposition in the context of the British and American stages in the contemporary drama of the last two decades. In that sense, Clum was correct. However, as the above plays I have tentatively added to each of Clum’s thematic categories for the gay history plays suggest, there has continued to be a steady flow of dramatisation of intermale sexuality which explore the past with different dramaturgical strategies, and different claims to authenticity. Intermale sexuality in most of these plays is still at the centre of their drama. “Gay” then may not have had a dramaturgical future, but it still has a dramaturgical past.

### **Queer Dramaturgies**

Jill Dolan in *Theatre & Sexuality* (2010) thinks that a new set of political and social concerns emerged in the gay community after the battle with AIDS was effectively won (in terms of it being a terminal condition for men in the UK). These amounted to a liberal assimilationist agenda: equal marriage, serving in the Armed Forces, adopting children. She argues that queer dramaturgy was in opposition to this and rejected social realism in favour anti-realist devices such as: characters commenting on themselves, revealing the mechanics of staging, non-realist sets and costumes, reading out stage directions, direct address to audience and even physical contact with the audience and their involvement in the plot in immersive ways. Savran (2003) makes an allied list of queer dramaturgical devices, adding: shuffle of temporal sequence, use of memory, fantasy and desire, cinematic intercutting, use of drag, spectacularising the male body, reimagining community or family, and universalizing white queer subjectivity. In either, the acts of gender, performance, drama and theatre are all deconstructed and unpacked as a conscious dramaturgical device.

The queer dramaturgies of the twenty-first century offer some insights into how the opening up of sexuality has enabled a wider breaking down of seemingly fixed categories of being and of knowledge about the past and present, but their influence overall upon staged written and published text has been limited. Fintan in *Performance & Queer Praxes* (2011) notes the propensity for autobiographical solo work, an observation which Dolan (2010) also makes arguing that this leads to the work being difficult to re-stage by other people and therefore far less likely to get published. Queer dramaturgy does offer a pathway for intermale sexuality to become more metaphorical and move away from previous modes of expression, perhaps

addressing Wyllie's concluding admonishment that "The male gay play of the 21st century can either depress us all or broaden its scope" (p.110).

Campbell and Farrier (2016) provide an overview of queer dramaturgies. In the introduction to their collection of essays, they offer personal accounts of seeing performances in which there was a sense of transgression, of a boundary having been crossed or of something being different from their expectations. They later came to see this frisson this created for them as the recognition of something "queer". Theorising from such moments to a coherent set of performance approaches that might then be grouped together to form a dramaturgy, or a series of dramaturgies or dramaturgical processes is not an easy task. However, they believe that the starting point is the performance, i.e. where performance can lead queer, rather than where queer can lead performance.

There are a variety of definitions available for what queer is as the theoretical underpinning to what queer dramaturgy might be. Campbell and Farrier quote David Halperin's definition (1995, p.62) as, "*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant". Eve Sedgwick's (1993) seminal first public definition was, "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituents elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically." Judith Butler (1993) places an emphasis squarely on the performative aspects of gender, i.e. that it is understood in the doing of it, in the performance of gender to the internal and external self and to others. The imbrication of these definitions is perhaps less relevant than their application on stage, what the moment of being unsettled that



Campbell and Farrier describe looks like. They define queer dramaturgically in terms of its contrast to gay dramaturgy (2016, p.13). This is worth quoting at some length as it provides a kind of diagnostic reference point for the later consideration of the plays written for this research and their degree of queerness:

“...while they (queer works) are, of course, about aesthetic composition and the narrative content of the work, they are also intricately bound up with the identity of the maker/s (self-identifying as queer), the making process and the context in which they are seen, taken together these are the elements that render these dramaturgies as ‘queer’ rather than what we might call ‘gay’... ‘gay theatre’ might focus on recognisably gay stories and characters, but perhaps within a character/plot-based form that asks for empathy from a mainstream audience, and without drawing attention to the theatrical act as construct, or questioning the idea of coherence of ‘character’... In other words, these works largely remain in the (heteronormative) dominant western theatrical mode of psychological realism and attached to the neoliberal focus on the ‘subject’ (and their rights).”

They go on to list the narrative content and dramaturgical strategies of typically gay works. A significant volume of gay plays can be divided into two dominant types: the coming out plays and early AIDS dramas, where in both the focus is on a plea for equality and understanding from within the existing paradigm. Examples of such plays would be *Beautiful Thing* (Harvey, 1993), *The Normal Heart* (Kramer, 1985) and *Another Country* (Mitchell, 1981). They each comply with the conventions of narrative, in terms of Aristotelian cause and effect plotting, feature consistent

characterisation, a linear treatment of time and coherent topographical logic. They mark themselves out chiefly by their major thematic focus on gay sexuality. In line with Sinfield (1999), Clum (2000) and Wylie (2009)], Campbell and Farrier identify *Angels in America* (Kushner, 1993) as the mainstream stage's transition into embracing emerging forms of queer representation. The play does behave conventionally in terms of its characters and plotting, but it also has magical realist elements that queerly burst through, disrupting psychological coherence and simple spatial and temporal locality. Campbell and Farrier argue though that to be truly queer, a performance must not just feature a "queer" lead (often just another term used for a post-gay character, i.e. one whose intermale sexuality is not the focus of their narrative or used as the sole validation of their position within the piece). The *mode of delivery* must be queer too. This is typified as involving meta-theatricality, disrupting hierarchies and expectations, multi-role playing, direct address to audience and any device that draws attention to the performer performing the performance and not just the performance. Campbell and Farrier also signal how the crucial notion of disruption within "queer" can be applied to notions of race, ethnicity, nationality, species and to notions of authenticity and temporality.

Greer (2016) extends queer's parameters further to include challenges to the notions of truthfulness in relation to documentary theatre in his consideration of the play *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (Price, 2014). He argues that queer can disrupt the categories of fact and fiction, even when dealing with living people's biography and testimonial aspects of their story. He considers the variety of claims that plays make in terms of verisimilitude, typically "inspired by a true story" or "semi-fictionalised", and the un/intended reversals that can be contained in assertions of

fictionality when dealing with real people and real events. He explicates Canton's (2008) notions of truthfulness, where the "truth" lies in depicting the effect and consequences of something rather than in recreation of it in literalised temporal sequence, to queer the space between the fact based and creative elements of a play. Similarly to the earlier consideration of both biofiction and the biopic, the notion is proposed again, equally undefinably, of "truth" being generated by something other than the mimetic replaying of actual events.

Farrier and Campbell base some of their consideration of queer temporality on the work of Elizabeth Freeman. She sets out her notion of "temporal drag" (Freeman, 2000) as a phrase with two meanings. It is the weight of the past upon the present, a kind of temporal undertow, in which, for her, the identity category 'lesbian' from the past exerts an influence on the category 'queer' in the present. It is also the chrono-disruption inherent in the lip-synching drag queen whose act is both in the moment of the performance and in the moment that the recording was made that they are lip-synching to. She argues that some camp humour depends not just upon the sharp contrast between male/female and high/low culture but also on the resurrection of obsolete texts and codes, a queer blending of past and present in the moment of performance and reception. Farrier (2016) elaborates on Freeman in a chapter specifically on the relationship between lip-synching in drag performance and the past, suggesting, "...it is possible to envision drag queens as potentially serving a non-heteronormative heritable link to the past" (p.199). A lip-synched star from the past is re-enacted, re-embodied and enjoyed cross-generationally, fostering a living connection through times, not just the moment of recording and the moment of performance, but also between other absent but implied generations who have also

enjoyed the same song lip-synched by other drag performers. By extension, the repetition of the cultural touchstones of intermale sexuality (the plays of Wilde, the poems of Whitman and Byron) could also have encoded in them a kind of inheritance experience, a connection to something more than the quality of the writing. There are clear connection in how Bartlett talks about queer embodiment and the body's potential for historical transmission (see Chapter Eight). Beyond that, Farrier offers an application of Freeman's work that places value on the ordinary in the extraordinary moment of embodied transmission, saying it guides a form of historical embodiment, "...the past should not be made present through a reconstruction of historical detail, but through thinking of temporality as porous, accessed not only through dominant historical narratives but also through valuing every day, quotidian knowledges" (p.198).

Freeman (2010) develops two parallel notions that Farrier and Campbell (2016) also draw on in their survey of queer dramaturgies: chrononormativity and erotohistoriography. She draws into question the whole direction of queer studies, reorienting it to be not at the disruptive edge of insights to come, but rather "to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless" (p.xiii). Chrononormativity is essentially an analysis of the construction of time that argues that it has evolved both as a mechanism for regulation and control. As 19th century industrialisation required a greater temporal sophistication than agriculture's dawn and dusk, so an ever more demarked, shared and standardised linear way of measuring existence is adopted. This is marked by heteronormative milestones: birth of children, parenting, marrying, etc. In reviewing several creative examples, Freeman teases out how such chrononormativity can be

exposed and disrupted. She examines different notions of public and private time and how these become gendered into different discourses of temporal logic that can be queerly unpicked and reconfigured.

Freeman's (2010) final notion is of erotohistoriography, an embodied queer practice that challenges conventional ways of knowing the past and existing methodologies of historiography. Freeman returns to Georgian notions of emotionally sympathetic historical understanding:

For Edmund Burke, writing *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), both jurisprudence and the historical method involved a certain level of sympathy, manifest in the ability to imaginatively inhabit and re-enact the behaviour codes of prior time...Crucially, though, the Burkean historian must use the identificatory process to apprehend differences in his feelings and those of the past, in order to grasp the larger historical differences...(p.101).

Erotohistoriography is a way to extend and invert that, not to feel the distance from but the proximity to the past. It is a way to connect to it in a sensual, somatic way and further to embody the past and the connection to the past. Freeman states that it does not seek to comprehensively represent the past by writing it fully into the present, rather it discovers it already in the present, by treating the present as a hybrid. For Freeman, the body is a tool to enact that encounter and offers a different form of knowing to book-based knowledge. Historical consciousness becomes something involved with somatic sensations. Freeman considers Frankenstein's creature as an ideal demonstration of some of her concept. The creature is made of

other people's bodies, all of them born and died at different points, all of them marked by different events, yet the creature embodies all these pasts in the moment of his present, "In erotohistoriographic mode, *Frankenstein* stages the very queer possibility that encounters with history are bodily encounters, and even that they have a revivifying and pleasurable effect" (p.105). She concludes with a discussion of the complex historical context and content of sadomasochism and an invitation to think of some forms of sex itself as forms of historiography.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

In order to address my research questions, I have adopted a practice-led research methodology which has involved writing two full-length history plays. I have conducted a literature review which draws on several fields in terms of constructing knowledge about the past, the history of representing intermale sexuality on the stage and practitioner guides to playwriting. I have also interviewed six professional writers who have dramatised historical same sex behaviour about their process. This served as a selective practice review against which I could test and develop my emerging thinking. The rationale for my playwriting and interviews are considered below, along with a wider consideration of practice-led research. Chapter Two provides the details of the scope and rationale for the literature review.

#### **Playwriting**

The creative practice for this research involved the use of ALMS (archives, libraries, museums and special collections) to create two full-length, original historical stage plays. Significantly, the protagonist in each play kept a form of diary in relation to some of the key events which are dramatised, though there are many other pieces of archival evidence in each case. The first play, *The Adhesion of Love (TAOL)*, is based on the leader of an informal reading group in Bolton, known as the Eagle Street College (ESC), and its members from 1885-1894. During this period a correspondence started between the leaders of the group, Wallace and Johnston, and the American poet Walt Whitman, and both of them separately visited Whitman. I extensively consulted, in

person, material in relation to the ESC in Bolton Library in their Whitman Collection and in the John Ryland's Library Special Collection in Manchester. Online, I briefly consulted Whitman records in the University of Philadelphia Library and the Library of Congress in Washington in the United States of America.

The second play, *The First Vampyre (TFV)*, is based on the life of Dr John William Polidori (1795-1821), who for a period of some months in 1816 acted as Lord Byron's personal physician. This time included the notorious ghost story-telling evenings of June 16-18th in Geneva, which Polidori shared with Mary Shelley, Byron, Claire Clairmont and Percy Shelley. Whilst the genesis of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is well-explored, the writing of Polidori's novella *The Vampyre* (2005), which creates the modern vampire myth, is less well known, though thoroughly researched and explored by a range of people from serious academics, such as MacDonald (1991), to a panoply of what might be best termed "vampire enthusiasts". Many of the original papers in relation to Polidori form a part of the Helen Rossetti Angeli-Imogene Dennis Collection in the Special Collection Division of the University of British Columbia Library in Vancouver, which I consulted online, along with some associated papers in the British Library in London. My most significant primary research was in person, in the John Murray Archive held in the National Library of Scotland, which contains letters and papers relating to Polidori, Byron, Mary Shelley and Hobhouse (Byron's close friend). Unlike Wallace and Johnston, Polidori has appeared as a character in a number of films, for example *Gothic* (Russell, 1986), plays, for example *Bloody Poetry* (Brenton, 1984) and in historical fiction, for example *Imposture* (Markovits, 2007). This provided an additional layer of research, comparing these secondary creative sources to academic historical narratives of his life, and some primary sources.



Both of the plays are informed by my research into archival material. This was furthered by an exploration of the existing historiography of those materials; a contextual reading about the forms, expression and prevalence of intermale sexuality in this period and allied ones using Brady (2009), Cocks (2003), Cook (2007), Houlbrook (2005), Kramer (2015), McCormick (1997), Robb (2003), Norton (2019), Walkowitz (1994), and Weeks (1989, 2016); and a review of relevant biographies such as Schmidgall (1997) on Whitman and MacCarthy (2002) on Byron.

A script development process was used with each play receiving a “table read” (writer and actors only) of a first/early draft of the play and a “rehearsed reading” (writer, actors and a small, invited audience) of a second draft of the play, both of which were filmed. The table reads were a way to test early forms of characterisation and dialogue. The rehearsed readings additionally tested narrative and dramaturgical devices. The audiences were largely made up of explicitly targeted individuals. I invited a director I have worked with a number of times, fellow academics in the field of drama and performance and some writers from a local, gay writing group. They were people I judged, from experience, would be willing to offer constructive, critical feedback. In addition, some of the actors who were reading invited a small number of guests. The rehearsed readings took place in the New Adelphi Studio at the University of Salford, *The Adhesion of Love* on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and *The First Vampyre* on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019. I led a discussion after the table reads with the actors and they were also offered the chance to complete an on-line anonymous questionnaire within seven days to enable them to voice anything that either the discussion did not facilitate, or occurred to them on reflection, or that they felt more comfortable voicing anonymously. I led a

discussion after the rehearsed readings with the audience and they were asked to complete an anonymous written questionnaire before leaving for the same reasons. I chose not to ask the audience to complete an on-line questionnaire in the same way, as my experience of running both on-line and after show questionnaire exercises is that the return rate is much higher if the questionnaire is done immediately after the show.



Actors performing the rehearsed reading for *The Adhesion of Love*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018

The data collected from the table reads and rehearsed readings came in two forms. Firstly, the discussions themselves, all of which will were recorded and reviewed, and secondly the completed questionnaires. The aim was to capture the immediate responses in a systematic but open way, making clear that negative and critical comments were welcome. The focus of the questions was on the dramatic treatment of historical material and the degree to which the pieces demonstrated how absences and distortions in the historical record around sexuality have been responded to in historically literate terms (see Appendices 1 and 2). The audiences and cast sizes were small, but the full range of their responses was analysed, seeking to group the

feedback into any themes where these emerged, but also allowing for contradictions and one-off responses. This accumulated feedback informed the writing of the final draft of each play.

My project plan for the plays can be broken down into the steps outlined below. Although these steps are presented as if they were in a sequential and dependent order, in reality, the creative process meant that these steps sometimes happened in a slightly different order, or several simultaneously, or even in a loop when re/writing specific scenes. With that qualification, the broad process of writing each play could be thus described:

1. Selection of all of the people and events (or series of events) for exploration that are or may be subject to historical records;
2. Identification and selection of the archive/s to be explored in relation to the subjects and events;
3. Exploration of the ALMS records in relation to the subjects and events in each archive;
4. Review of the historical evidence gathered, considering the issues of archival absence and coding in relation to intermale sexuality;
5. Filtering down of the historical and archival material to what will be used specifically in the development of the play;
6. Supplementing the ALMS records with any additional relevant literature such as biographies, historiographies or theories of past knowledge making that may assist with context, absences and coding;

7. Creating a treatment (a document that outlines the story of the play, the main characters and dramatic style);
8. Creating characterisations (a summary of the historical record of each character outlining their biography, along with my creative speculations, inventions and interpretations);
9. Writing a first draft of the play;
10. Under-taking a table read of an early/first version of the play with post-read discussion and collection of feedback;
11. Consideration of the feedback.
12. Revisions to the play following the table read;
12. Rehearsing the next version of the play;
14. Rehearsed reading of the play with an invited audience with post-read discussion and collection of written feedback;
15. Consideration of the feedback;
16. Revisions of the play following the rehearsed reading.

### **Practitioner Interviews**

During a period from 4<sup>th</sup> October to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019, I interviewed six writers who had produced work that engages with the record of the past in different ways. The interviews were conducted after *The Adhesion of Love* had been written and during the completion of the second draft of *The First Vampyre*. In addition to providing an opportunity to document different approaches to the use of historical evidence and techniques for addressing absence in dramatic writing, the interviews also acted as a testing ground for some of my nascent ideas and as a way to evolve them further through conversation, confirmation and challenge.

The selection of writers was based on a number of imperfectly balanced criteria, not least of which were availability and willingness. They were:

- Had written work that engages significantly with the past;
- Had written work about real people;
- Had to research the past as part of their creative practice;
- Had written work that features same sex expressions of intimacy and sexuality (preferably intermale);
- Openness to discussion involving documenting the details of their methodology.

Whilst there are obvious differences in writing for the allied but dissimilar forms of stage and screen, my judgement was that the processes of research and application of historical evidence to create characters and narrative were quintessentially the same, regardless of form. So, the discussion covers screenplays as well as stageplays. I created a semi-structured interview template (see Appendix 3) with the freedom to tailor this significantly to each interviewee and to my knowledge of their creative output. The interviews were audio recorded and then selectively transcribed, focusing on the material that best addressed the research questions. The transcripts were then compared with each other for patterns in dramaturgical process, and points of convergence and divergence. The results are presented as a separate set of findings in Chapter Eight.

Throughout the process of working with archives, writing and developing the plays, and conducting the interviews, I kept a journal, recording the mechanics of the work,

the development of different methodological approaches and my reflections on the processes as I undertook them. This account of my emerging thinking has been compared against the state of knowledge about such writing from the literature review in order to address my research questions to form the basis of Chapters Five and Seven. Completing the journal in tandem with the creative work provided an evolving account through time and, so to reflect this, each play and the accompanying exegesis are presented separately, in sequence, as a process of iterative theorising.

### **Justification of Research Methods**

My overall methodological approach is to use what Candy (2006) terms “practice led research”. The general field of Practice as Research (PaR) is an evolving one in which precise terminology is sometimes contested amongst competing neologisms. Smith and Dean (2009) note that there is a basic bifurcation between justifications for PaR in terms of the creative work process in and of itself being a form of research with its own definable research outputs, what Candy calls “practice-based”, and creative practice leading to insights upon reflection which can be subsequently written up as research, what Candy calls “practice-led”. Hasemen (2006) originates the terms “performative research”, offering a definition which centres practice as the principle research activity. This allows for both the art produced and the surrounding practice to be considered research. Bolt (2007) places the emphasis on the writing-up of the practice as the key thing that generates praxical knowledge, in the absence of which there is just practice. Smith and Dean (p.9) offer a definition of “practice-led research” that allows for both the work created and the process of creating the work to be considered as research, with the caveat that, “...we would normally see the

documentation, writing, theorisation surrounding the artwork as crucial in fulfilling the function of research.”

So, to be clear, my adopted methodology of “practice-led research” is where the researcher produces something creative and writes up and reflects upon both their creative output and process. They theorise after the experience of creating, and position both elements of this work (the creative output and the reflective, critical consideration of that creative output) as new knowledge. This does not preclude the creative process itself from being capable of also generating separate additional insights. But it is not dependent upon that in the way that *practice-based* research is.

Chapman and Ferrier (2015) note the suitability of PaR as a method in general terms for what is broadly termed “queer” work, and how potentially it “exceeds binary thinking, upsets unitary subjects and presents identities expressed in non-normative sexualities” (p.84). This is an expansive definition of queer to include research that breaks down taxonomies, categories of knowing, genres or labelling. Chapman and Ferrier believe this kind of research, often involving embodiment by the researcher, offers the potential for new insights. They assert that the somatic is itself a methodology creating a kind of “messy knowledge”. There is nothing intrinsic in what they have written that would limit that form of knowledge creation just to the performer in the moment of performance. It could potentially extend to the playwright in the moment of writing.

The queerly embodied performance as research methodology is also championed by other critics, such as Marra (2015) who offers an account of creating an

autobiographical performance lecture about her relationship with horses and history and the process of theorising both for an audience. “The self-reflexivity of ‘showing doing’ - the doing of riding, the doing of history - and, along the way, of explaining ‘showing doing’ has been critical in these negotiations, as it has been for other scholars using embodied practice in queer historiography” (p.491). Marra also insists that ideas and theories emerge from the practice and not the other way round. Accordingly, I did not have a specific contention about playwriting from archive that I was testing by writing the first play, simply an idea of some of the terrain that I wanted to cover formulated into three research questions. However, subsequent to writing *The Adhesion of Love*, there were some emerging hypotheses that I was testing in writing the second play, whilst also allowing space for fresh insights to emerge. But Marra’s three level formulation also raised the issue of what I am proposing my “practice” actually was.

The essence of my applied creative practice was not publicly performative. It was an act of writing in solitude. But my methodology does explicitly include both a table read with actors and a rehearsed reading with a small invited audience. Both of these are performative in different ways and to different extents. Implicit in them is the assumption that there is another level of knowledge that such acts can create - that the “doing” of the play is contained in the actors creating performances out of it and that this “doing” is an essential part of the practice that I am researching. It is an element of practice as research perhaps, more than of practice *led* research. The rehearsed reading is the best example of this since it literally makes the script and the act of reading the script visible. It is explicitly the showing of the playwriting, printed words on pages of script being turned repeatedly in front of the audience, and actors



connecting with each other whilst also connecting with the printed page, performing the act of reading the play. The script, the record of my playwriting, is uniquely present and constantly embodied, and I, as the playwright, am constantly present, verbal and orchestrating in the opening and closing moments, silent, observing and self-critical in between. Writing the play enables me to theorise about the writing of the play, but the rehearsed readings enable a form of “showing, doing”, and to extend the application of Marra’s terminology further, the Q&A’s immediately after the plays are the “*explaining, ‘showing, doing’*” part of the methodology, designed to yield immediate insights outside of later reflection and theorisation in terms of practice-led research. Freeman (2000, 2010) offers similar methodological accounts and justifications for how her insights have emerged from the process she calls “erotohistoriography”, an erotic embodiment of and with the past.

I am not proposing that I used myself as a performer to publicly embody any of my work, beyond perhaps reading out some stage directions, but I still lay claim to some forms of personal embodiment, at least cognitively. One creative element of the playwriting process, as I experienced it, involved me imagining myself as the people I was writing about, developing the voice of a character clearly, usually silently in my head. Sometimes, they pressed themselves to my lips, and I found myself speaking out the lines I had written for them in an accent or with a very specific intonation, experiencing their actual voice. It is as if some element of spiritualism were a part of the process, conflating the past and present, the dead and the living, the real and the imagined. It was not a consistent form of embodiment and it was not publicly available, but, none the less, I contend that it did involve the body as the site of research, generating spontaneous insight into the characters I was creating, based on the

historical record of real people. In that sense, the notion of queerly embodied practice generating “messy knowledge” was a part of my playwriting process and a small but distinct part of the methodology that I used in this research.

Given that an element of this project was about working with archive, it is necessary to spell out some historical methodology. Whilst avoiding making the claims of being anything other than an incidental historian, I was not simply wandering randomly through archival material, waiting to be inspired. Both *TAOL* and *TFV* have, amongst the materials I worked through, a diary written by the lead protagonist of each play. Wallace’s detailed travelogue of his visit to Walt Whitman is written with a mind to publication and its reception by the ESC and subsequently the wider public. Polidori’s diary of his time with Lord Byron was later redacted by his sister. Approaching these diaries as works that have been censored, either by others or potentially self-censored by the authors themselves at the point of recording, or both, is something that requires some underpinning methodology of approach if the work I produce is going to make any claims to historicity.

Wilkinson (1996) spells out the essential difference firstly between “the past” (everything that ever happened) and “history” (what historians selectively represent of the past) and also between “remains” (everything that has survived) and “evidence” (those parts of the remains that historians select to validate their history), “In the absence of remains, there can be no evidence and in the absence of evidence, there can be no history” (p.80). The logic of this is that if, for example, my archival research does not find a record of intermale sexuality, then there can be no historiographically valid claim to having been any, whatever the reality of the presence or absence was

in the past. However, Wilkinson also offers the possibility of an enlargement of the conception of evidence, which he acknowledges is often driven by a passionate need “to know” in the face of the absence or scarcity of remains, especially for stigmatised groups. He talks about the value and conundrums of “negative evidence”, i.e. how the apparatus of oppression may involve something surviving. An example is a Court record of a persecution for sodomy, but this record has the taint of being the record of the enemy of the recorded, of being an inevitably hostile view of the person for whom there is no counter-balancing record. It is none the less some form of remains from which evidence may be drawn. Even if those remains do not relate to the person in question, that person may be reconstituted as a kind of historical corollary of what can be proved for similar people in similar circumstances. They are a proxy that helps to illustrate the shape of what isn't there.

Wilkinson considers the reluctance of some historians to value the account that first person testimony offers, especially in terms of the person's own actions. Intriguingly, he then asserts, “Evidence is more reliable, however, when the author's intent is not to inform at all. And historians can force witnesses to speak ‘against their will’ by subjecting evidence to a searching ‘cross-examination’” (p.84). He develops this into a loose methodology for “unintended testimony” which provides an ideal rationale for my historicising of the diary of Wallace and of Polidori to a lesser extent. Wilkinson says, “The gap between the witness's initial intent and the historian's final discovery lies in the historian's ability to detect distortions, assumptions, discrepancies, and misperceptions through a critical reading of the evidence” (p.84). This relies upon setting the testimony against the wider context. For me, this also involves explicitly inverting the heteronormative assumptions from which many historians work and

starting from a place that centres the possibility of intermale sexuality. If the people who wrote the two diaries are assumed to be heterosexual, then the record they have left behind is a puzzling one. If this is replaced by a set of assumptions that these men have sexual and emotional interests in each other, then their testimony makes better sense, once it is contextualised by a wider historical reading of the position of the intermale sexuality in those two periods. Insights can then be provided by reading the diaries critically with the assumption that there is something they are occluding, against the context of the wider historical account of intermale sexuality in the period, and against any pieces of surrounding circumstantial evidence. Examples are the rumours surrounding Byron's sexuality or the connection of Edward Carpenter (a man whose intermale sexuality is well historicised) to the ESC.

Outside of consideration of the unintended testimony in the diaries, a cautious form of hermeneutical historicisation seems the most appropriate historical methodology. Creating my own provisional reading of the history of the lives of the men I am writing about which centres intermale sexuality enables me to form the clearest possible picture of them. My aim is to find a position of knowledge that I am terming "historical literacy", from which to begin the wider creative process. My "historical literacy" may involve a purposeful distortion of that reading in order to serve wider demands of engaging an audience. But that may, in turn, create other kinds of historical knowledge that a more faithful dramatisation based on the limited record of facts, or rather the fact of a limited record, could not.

I am attempting also to make a clear distinction between notions of literacy and accuracy. "Historical accuracy" is largely a redundant notion in historiography. Miller

(1986) alone, in his reworking of the concept of “afterlife” in relation to the re-staging of Shakespeare, demonstrates amply that the past is irretrievable. Similarly, it is impossible to use an archive to reconstitute someone with “accuracy”, to create a docudrama out of the record that would impart the “true facts” of someone’s life. Even when there are remains to work from, all one has are the fact of the remains, which may, especially in the case of intermale sexuality, be lies or distortions. “Literacy”, on the other hand, requires a knowledge of the archival remains, of others’ attempts to historicise them, and a self-consciousness about the ideological, cultural and temporal lens through which one is attempting one’s own act of historicisation. Writing from a position of “historical literacy” requires no intrinsic claim to accuracy from the writer, and in that sense is a freeing claim and not a limiting one.

There is a wider methodological point about the deliberate use and deployment of authenticating devices in history plays, and also, importantly, of de-authenticating devices. The purpose of researching the primary and secondary materials to create a new intermale sexuality centred historicising of them is not merely to narrativise that reading and then validate it. That would simply amount to an act of uncensoring, which may be valid in and of itself, but would limit itself to a dramatic realist re-telling of the archive, with the bits about known and inferred intermale sexuality prominently added back in. My aim is to make present not just the act of playwriting within the plays but also the act of historicising itself, by deploying de-authenticating devices, metatheatrical moments of scriptural self-awareness, and by embedding a consideration of some of the archival materials themselves into the diegesis of the plays.

Sanders (2006, p.141) considers the appropriation of historical facts in adaptations into what she terms an “authenticating strategy”. She notes that “as readers we are trained to trust the historical evidence of archival material.” In terms of performing heritage, Smith (2011) articulates the notion of an Authorising Heritage Discourse (AHD), a form of meaning creation provided by the performances’ association with and validation by the site of its performance. Sanders is outlining how a selected use of facts within a text acts to embellish the whole text with facticity and how we are hardwired to receive and accept this, and Smith is saying the same process can be moved beyond the text itself to the venue of performance, if that is a heritage site of some kind. I recognise both forms of authentication but would add other forms that come into play with my work. Being the Playwright in Residence to LGBT History Month, performing a play as part of a history festival, performing it during a history month, having a biography in the programmes that states I am researching a PhD in playwriting from archive, and posting archive pictures of the people I am researching on Inkbrew’s social media all also act as “authenticating devices” to the play, to differing degrees and with different weights. The external “authenticating devices” mostly happen whether I want them to or not, as they exist within certain other wider frames of meaning production, and even then, they may change. Performing a touring play in a studio theatre to which it has no association is a relatively neutral action historically. Performing the same play at the actual site of the original events is itself a massive Authorising Heritage Discourse in Smith’s terms, beyond the authenticating strength simply provided by a museum in which there is a collection relating to the events depicted. This strongly affects how the piece is received historiographically by the audience.

To balance out the authenticating contexts and devices, I explicitly set out to unsettle the reader/audience by developing and deploying “de-authenticating devices”. The aims of these are to make the historical reading of the play transparent, to question some of the mechanism by which that reading has been created, to jar against any expectations of authenticity in the audience and to make the illusion of the past visible in the present. Specific examples are the use of blatantly anachronistic words, references, objects or costumes; casting actors radically against the demography of the people they represent; using supernatural elements; and allowing the characters to move out of the play’s fictional world to talk about the historical research that the playwright has done and his questionable competence at dramatising it.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE ADHESION OF LOVE

by Stephen M Hornby



*Warren Fritzinger (L) and Walt Whitman (R). Photo Dr John Johnston.*



## **CHARACTERS**

James William Wallace:	37, leader of the Eagle Street College, architect's assistant.
Dr John Johnston:	38, founding member of the Eagle Street College, medical man, practical, diplomatic, Scottish.
Phrenologist:	32, servile and creepy ( <i>double with Warry</i> )
Doctor:	41, pragmatic and severe ( <i>double with Bucke and Stoddart</i> )
Medium:	48, ordinary and sincere ( <i>double with Whitman</i> )
Charles Sixsmith:	20, new recruit to the Eagle Street College, blunt, intelligent, junior mill manager ( <i>double with Traubel</i> )
Fred Wild:	26, founding member of the Eagle Street College, cotton waste manager, humourist ( <i>double with Warry and Phrenologist</i> )
Mill Boy:	16, attractive and smiley ( <i>double with Dalmas</i> )
Dr Richard Maurice Bucke:	54, progressive psychiatrist in Canada, champion of Whitman.
Walt Whitman:	71, retired printer, journalist, a great American poet of 19th century.
Horace Traubel:	33, American, magazine publisher, essayist and poet, Whitman's literary executor.
Warrington Fitzgerald (Warry):	28, American, ex-sailor, Whitman's main carer.
Philip Dalmas:	24, American, poet, mystic, musician and manipulator.
Joseph Stoddart:	62, American editor of Lippincott's Monthly Magazine ( <i>double with Bucke and Doctor</i> )

The play can be performed with seven actors (*doubling up suggested in brackets*). The part of Walt Whitman should be played by a young woman of colour.

## **SETTINGS**

The events take place between 1885 and 1894, though the time in some scenes is blurred or non-specific. Where a location is specified, it is either Wallace's front parlour in his house on Eagle Street, Bolton in the UK, or Walt Whitman's bedroom in his house on Mickle Street, Camden, New Jersey in the USA or Edward Carpenter's parlour at Millthorpe near Sheffield in the UK.

## **NOTATION**

Where a line ends with "/" and the next sentence begins with "/" it indicates that the cue line is spoken almost on top of the line that precedes it.

## **ACT ONE**

### **Prelude:**

*Wallace and Johnston walk on from opposite sides, each carrying a printed manuscript with "The Adhesion of Love" written clearly on the cover. They smile at each other, then WALLACE frowns.*

WALLACE: It's...

JOHNSTON: It is. There are...remnants.

WALLACE: Wreckage more like.

JOHNSTON: Much more of your diary survives than mine.

WALLACE: It's not what we wrote.

JOHNSTON: No.

WALLACE: I'd written all I wanted to say.

JOHNSTON: Then.

WALLACE: Now he's gone and written/

JOHNSTON: /Yes.

WALLACE: Invaded our privacy.

JOHNSTON: Perhaps.

WALLACE: I think it's bloody rotten.

JOHNSTON: I think it's bloody marvellous.

*Pause.*

WALLACE: Why does he begin here?

JOHNSTON: With the death of your mother.

WALLACE: I never saw a spiritualist.

JOHNSTON: I'm surprised that's the full ambit of your objections. Am I to take it that everything else so chronicled did occur?

WALLACE: No.

*JOHNSTON gives WALLACE a knowing look.*

WALLACE: We should start if we're going to.

### **Scene One:**

*Wallace's home. 1885. WALLACE is sat alone on a chair centre stage rocking slightly and crying. He looks up at the audience with a face full of grief. He appears to see something in front of him, the spirit of his mother leaving her dying body. He jumps to his feet, hands in the air.*

WALLACE: Thanks be to God that giveth us victory!

*He watches her spirit leave and is overcome with a moment of breathless spiritual epiphany. Becalmed, he sits and addresses the audience.*

WALLACE: It seemed to my excited fancy that as she passed, my mother's spirit nodded assent. For in that moment of her dying, I stood in the very presence of infinite love, and felt it throughout my being. I didn't have words for it then, didn't know that other men had such experiences, or what they meant. I did know that a divining providence was at work in my hour of utmost need, summing up the long, groping processes of the past and, despite all earthly darkness and sin, illuminating all my future course with Infinite hope. *(Beat)* In all my life, it was the only moment of real connection that I had ever felt.

### **Scene Two:**

*JOHNSTON enters and pulls up a chair to sit to one side of WALLACE and looks him over. JOHNSTON holds hands with WALLACE with one hand, intertwining fingers slowly one by one with him, like a child playing cat's cradle.*

WALLACE: You've not done that in a while. Sat outside Mrs Bullen's office.

JOHNSTON: Not sure if it was the carbolic or the cane.

WALLACE: I said I'd done it, hoping to spare you.

JOHNSTON: Then I confessed, to save you.

WALLACE: Ended up both getting a belting.

*JOHNSTON smiles.*

WALLACE *(looking at their intertwined hands)*: Saved for private moments of impending crisis.

JOHNSTON: Well, we could hardly walk down the street like this.

WALLACE: But she's already gone John. The crisis is weeks past. I should be set to recovering.

JOHNSTON: And yet instead, you have set yourself on this curious course.

WALLACE: I have been opened up.

JOHNSTON: To what though?

WALLACE: I saw her leave her body. More than that, I saw....I saw her enter eternity, take off this flesh and become something else. She endured and transformed. I saw it John.

JOHNSTON: Yes, yes. Hysterical hallucinations at moments such as these are, well, not common, but not entirely rare either. You were close to Margaret. It will have seemed very real to you.

WALLACE: But more than that, it wasn't just something I saw. Something happened. To all of me. It changed me.

JOHNSTON: And so every Tuesday evening since, with your father safely out at the Clarion Choir, there's been a stream of strangers dissembling their dubious practices in your parlour. You risk, well, not bringing yourself into disrepute exactly, but perhaps entertaining more experimental guests than is fully seemly at a time of great grief. And at goodness knows what expense.

WALLACE: I must try to understand it and find a path, any path towards it.

*Enter PHRENOLOGIST on the other side of WALLACE. WALLACE is simultaneously in the scene with JOHNSTON and in a separate scene and at another time with PHRENOLOGIST and the other experts that follow. JOHNSTON and the experts are unaware of each other.*

PHRENOLOGIST: Is this a general consultation Mr Wallace, or is there something specific you wish to test for? Its 3/6 either way.

JOHNSTON: Towards what?

WALLACE: Spiritual enlightenment. The capacity of the mind to perceive the divine, the universal.

PHRENOLOGIST: All character, capacities and emotions are located in the brain. And just as it follows that the size and shape of a woman's ankle determines the fecundity of her womb, so the size and shape of the brain determines the capacities of the mind. It a separate but allied science that/

JOHNSTON: /But some of this is debunked quackery. I'm worried that it/

WALLACE: /Does not accord with the conventions of physiological medicine.

PHRENOLOGIST: The brain is made up of 27 organs, each governing a specific trait. The brain fits in the skull like a tight calf glove over a maiden's fingers, retaining the outline of each delicate knuckle, as it were, each ridge.

*PHRENOLOGIST stands behind WALLACE and starts feeling his skull through his hair, feeling the bumps and registering each one on his face with interest.*

JOHNSTON: I am progressive on many things Wallace, but some of this is just made for, well, at best to offer some false comfort, and at worst for the gullible to be flattered then fleeced.

PHRENOLOGIST: You have a most exceptional, a most excellent skull Mr Wallace.

WALLACE: I perhaps flatter myself that I am not prone to the lure of flattery.

PHRENOLOGIST: Oh no, Mr Wallace. I do not seek to offer obsequies. A skull such as this is genuinely indicative of many remarkable traits and qualities.

JOHNSTON: But you are vulnerable in a different way.

PHRENOLOGIST: I've never felt anything like it. Your propensities, I mean. Almost a perfect 10. Your philoprogenitiveness is of barely known proportions.

WALLACE: What do you mean?

JOHNSTON: You're still in mourning man, but more importantly in deep grief for/

PHRENOLOGIST: It's one's capacity to love one's own children. Something you get from/

WALLACE: /My mother.

PHRENOLOGIST: Your amateness is somewhat unconventional (*continuing to feel WALLACE'S head*), and your adhesiveness is bulbous. Bulbous, I say.

JOHNSTON: You're highly suggestible at the moment, is all I'm meaning to say.

PHRENOLOGIST: Your capacity for amateness, for love, for congress with a fortunate lady, or ladies, is not quite the largest I have known, and yet your capacity for adhesive love, for shall we say, for male friendship, is much enlarged. Whilst such women who are possessed of this adhesive love bulbosity may engage in passionate friendships with other women, in men it's normally expressed as a love of animals. Do you have many pets Mr Wallace?

WALLACE: I just want to focus in on discovering more about my spiritual capacity.

PHRENOLOGIST: The best approximated reading I can offer is for "Wonder". That's just on this side.

*Silence as PHRENOLOGIST pulls a face as if performing a tricky manoeuvre, then smiles.*

PHRENOLOGIST: Massive.

*PHRENOLOGIST exits.*

JOHNSTON: At least let me examine you, so we can stop worrying about your physical health.

*Enter DOCTOR.*

WALLACE: Here?

DOCTOR: I've no need for my laboratory. I can tell all I need initially from the stool's smell and texture.

*WALLACE takes a bed pan covered with a cloth out from under his chair.*

JOHNSTON: Or you could come to my practice. Or I could arrange for a colleague to see you.

WALLACE: Do you think that what I experienced could be due to some physical condition?

*DOCTOR lifts the cover from the bed pan and inhales deeply and elaborately several times. He then takes a metal rod out of a small metal box and pokes at the stool with the metal rod; takes out a hanky from his pocket and wipes the rod; puts the hanky back in his pocket and places the metal rod back in the box and the box back in his jacket pocket.*

DOCTOR: All perfectly normal.

*DOCTOR exits.*

JOHNSTON: It's better to be safe than sorry.

WALLACE: But I feel physically well.

JOHNSTON: And your appetite is strong?

WALLACE: Yes.

JOHNSTON: Excellent.

WALLACE: I just need to find a bridge between the two different planes of existence.

JOHNSTON: Yes. I see. You believe that such a bridge exists?

WALLACE: My study of spiritualism would suggest....

*WALLACE moves out of the scene.*

JOHNSTON: Suggest?

WALLACE: I'm not continuing with this.

*JOHNSTON moves out of the scene.*

JOHNSTON: But it's the next step in your "supernatural narrative arch".

WALLACE: My growing spiritual insight did not follow "a supernatural narrative arch".

JOHNSTON: No. But.

WALLACE: But what?

JOHNSTON: But, well, everyone wants a story. Not the mess of things as they happened.

WALLACE: Lie then?

JOHNSTON: Shape. Humour him.

*WALLACE looks askance.*

JOHNSTON: Humour me.

*JOHNSTON steps back into the scene and WALLACE reluctantly follows.*

JOHNSTON: I had somewhat assumed that your study was more about debunking than confirming. But perhaps, with your loss, the, well, the parameters of your enquiry have changed? You have spoken to me many times about the failures of mediumship.

WALLACE: Happen I've chosen to tell you the bits that I thought suited you best.



*Enter MEDIUM who sits next to Wallace takes his hands and looks directly and deeply into his face.*

JOHNSTON: You believe then that some people are possessed of psychical powers?

MEDIUM: And would your mother want to make a link back to you?

WALLACE: I am convinced of it.

JOHNSTON: Convinced?

MEDIUM: Have you consulted a medium or psychical seer before?

WALLACE: Whilst I have encountered some vagueness from people proclaiming to be mediums, sometimes...once in actuality, I have encountered such clear, specific and insightful messages from a stranger that I have to declare myself convinced.

JOHNSTON: It is called "receiving your proof".

MEDIUM: But that wasn't a message for you. You were there supporting a friend. It was witnessing someone else's proof that convinced you.

WALLACE: And how do you know that?

JOHNSTON: I have also been conducting my own form of personal enquiry into spiritualism.

MEDIUM: You spoke in such a way as to give me no leading information, to mislead me even.

WALLACE: To test out any claims.

JOHNSTON: I confess that was my initial motivation. But I too have had such a moment, a proof. The spirit of my grandfather. The medium made reference to such things that only he and I had witnessed and of which I have not spoken to a single soul since childhood.

MEDIUM: Yet you find yourself here with me.

WALLACE: I find we are both believers.

JOHNSTON: You had rather painted me as the sceptic. (*Impersonating Wallace*) "Happen I choose to tell you the bits that suited you best"

MEDIUM: She is here. Not strongly. Let me just... (*MEDIUM closes her eyes and focusses*) She's working with letters. I can't see them. Printing. Loud, mechanical. A printing press. (*MEDIUM stands, eyes still closed having a conversation with her spirit guide*) W. W? That's no use to me. That's him. Wallace. I know his name. No. She's giving it me again, and again. W. W. Then the printing. (*MEDIUM starts to exit*) She's going. She's leaving the image of something for me to give to you.

*MEDIUM completes exit.*

WALLACE: Well, look at us. Two dear friends/

JOHNSTON: /brothers since childhood/

WALLACE: /each painting the other as sceptic whilst secretly believing.

JOHNSTON: How can we know each other so well, and not know each other at all?

WALLACE: Truth will out. She said my future was guided by two letters? W. W.

JOHNSTON: Your parents, Margaret Wallace and James Wallace? But your father's still alive. And why not M W and J W? So, that/

WALLACE: /She left me with the image of a sprig of lilac.

JOHNSTON: Whitman! Walt Whitman.

WALLACE: The bard of the coming age.

JOHNSTON: "Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring, Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west, And thought of him I love." Incredible.

WALLACE: I know what we must do. It's Whitman's birthday next month. We must write to him/

JOHNSTON: /to tell him of our joy at his poetry, our inestimable admiration/

WALLACE: /humbly, expecting nothing back/

JOHNSTON: /and send a gift, something that expresses our affection/

WALLACE: /and demonstrates our knowledge of him and his present circumstances as a writer.

JOHNSTON & WALLACE: Money!

*They both laugh.*

JOHNSTON: And the grief now? A couple of years is nothing with such a deep loss as your mother was to you.

WALLACE: I feel it, and in such dark hours as are inevitable, I turn to him, to Whitman. There I find such illumination and guidance, such turns of phrase and expression of such ideas as I thought only existed in my head and then barely spoken even to myself.

JOHNSTON: We have much to thank him for.

### **Scene Three**

*WALLACE and SIXSMITH are sat next to each other in Wallace's Parlour. WALLACE is reading Whitman's "We Two Boys Together". SIXSMITH is distracted.*

WALLACE: We two boys together, One the other never leaving, Up and down/

SIXSMITH: Is it a long 'un?

WALLACE: Up and down the roads going, North and South excursions making/

SIXSMITH: /Only that other one, what were it, "I Sing About Me"?

WALLACE: "Song of Myself".

SIXSMITH: That were it. I mean, that were bloody long.

WALLACE: It is an epic poem.

SIXSMITH: Aye, epically long. It musta been a hundred bloody pages.

WALLACE (*laughing*): You have a unique perspective Charles.

SIXSMITH: I thought poems were meant to be short. I've read Dickens novels that were shorter than that, and he bloody goes on an' all.

WALLACE: It's not a long poem.

SIXSMITH: Only I'm late.

WALLACE: I've kept you here too long with my enthusiasm.

SIXSMITH: I'd said I'd meet the lads in the Two Sparrows after their match.

WALLACE: Oh.

SIXSMITH: Come. (*Looks at fob watch*). Bugger. It's gone ten. If I don't go now, I'll miss last orders.

WALLACE: Last orders is ten to.

SIXSMITH: I know, but I want to hear about the match an' that. I'm not going just to get one pint and then sod off home.

WALLACE: No.

*SIXSMITH stands.*

SIXSMITH: Come.

WALLACE: Nay. I've no chatter when it comes to football. You go.

*WALLACE extends his hand for a handshake. SIXSMITH brushes the hand aside laughing and gives him a warm hug.*

SIXSMITH: That's for the poetry lesson.

WALLACE: A welcome barter.

*Pause.*

SIXSMITH: Don't look so glum.

*WALLACE smiles weakly.*

SIXSMITH: This is what I do to any of the mill lasses who greet me with a face on 'em like that.

*SIXSMITH suddenly tickles Wallace who pushes him off but can't help laughing.*

WALLACE: Get done, soft lad. What if someone were to see?

SIXSMITH: I'm off now. Ta-ra Smiler.

WALLACE: Come on Monday.

SIXSMITH: Monday?

WALLACE: The Eagle Street College.

SIXSMITH: College now is it?

WALLACE: It's just a reading group. 14 Eagle Street, off Bury Road. 6.45 for 7pm.

SIXSMITH: I'll be there. Just don't be doing no long 'uns now. Nowt over 5 minutes.

#### **Scene Four**

*WALLACE is sat in his parlour with WILD.*

WILD: Must be time for one, while we're waiting.

WALLACE: Only to get it out of your system.

*WILD and WALLACE look at each other. WALLACE nods. WILD grins.*

WILD: Knock. Knock.

WALLACE: Who's there?

WILD: Shelley.

WALLACE: Oh, it's going to be something about *Frankenstein*....I've almost got it.

WILD: Shelly!

WALLACE: Sorry. Shelley who?

WILD: Shelly compare thee to a summer's day?

*Both groan and laugh.*

WILD: Knock, Knock.

WALLACE: Who's there?

WILD: Will Shakespeare.

WALLACE: Will Shakespeare who?

WILD: Will shake spear or just stand there holding one, as long as I get to be on stage.

WALLACE: Very good. Very good. I thought the rain might dampen down our numbers a little but/

WILD: /Knock. Knock.

*There is a knocking at the door.*

WALLACE (*standing*): Come in. The door's open.

WILD: Knock. Knock.

*JOHNSTON and SIXSMITH enter.*

SIXSMITH: Who's there?

WILD: Et.

WALLACE: Et who?

WILD & SIXSMITH: Et tu, Brute?

*Everyone laughs.*

WALLACE: Well done!

JOHNSTON: And welcome to our humble Monday evening gatherings.

SIXSMITH: Was it a test to see if I knew me Shakespeare?

WALLACE: No, no, no, no, no.

WILD: Just my childish sense of humour.

JOHNSTON: Behind which you hide, well, a remarkable intelligence.

WALLACE: Everyone is welcome at this, our Eagle Street College, no matter/

SIXSMITH: Ohhhhh. College is it? Fancy. I thought it was just some upstarts from the backstreets trying to better 'emselves with a few poems.

WILD: So it is. The term "college" is largely whimsical.

JOHNSTON: We are a college; a college of life and Wallace is our master.

SIXSMITH: You a master now an all?

JOHNSTON: That's what he insists we call him. Master Wallace.

WALLACE: Do I heck as like. You must forgive us Charles. You know Dr Johnston/

*JOHNSTON and SIXSMITH shake hands.*

JOHNSTON: John, please.

WALLACE: And this is Mr Fred Wild.

*WILD and SIXSMITH shake hands.*

JOHNSTON: He's in cotton too.



WILD: I'm at the waste end of the business.

SIXSMITH: Where's there's muck, there's brass ay?

WALLACE: The only rule of the college is that we must all bring something to read and read it.

SIXSMITH: You never said owt about a reading. Now, you've made me look daft Wallace.

WALLACE: No, no, no, no, no. I have got something for you to read.

SIXSMITH: But it'll be all fine language and I've no eye for it, not just to read it like that in front of, *(indicating WILD and JOHNSTON)* no offence, strangers.

WALLACE: It's a plain poem in plain language.

*WALLACE takes out his copy of "The Leaves of Grass" and gives it to SIXSMITH, finding a page.*

SIXSMITH: I don't know.

WALLACE: I'm sure you'll read it wonderfully and no one cares if you don't.

SIXSMITH: I'm not so keen.

WALLACE: I've chosen it 'specially for you. It's a short 'un.

WILD: Don't make poor Charles do/

WALLACE: /I'm the best judge of what Charles can and cannot do thank you Fred.

JOHNSTON: I'm sure Fred only meant/

WALLACE: /You're always so sure John. Of everything. Let me be sure of this, won't you?

*FRED and JOHNSTON exchange a look. WALLACE nudges SIXSMITH and nods him on.*

SIXSMITH: I don't know.

WALLACE: Please. *(Whispering in SIXSMITH's ear)* For me.

JOHNSTON: Is it really altogether that important?

WALLACE: It does suddenly seem to be. Yes.

*WALLACE watches SIXSMITH adoringly. JOHNSTON steps out the scene and addresses the audience directly.*

JOHNSTON: It is one of those moments where something forbidden reveals itself unintentionally, just in the way one person looks at another.

SIXSMITH: Whoever you are holding me now in hand, without one thing all will be useless, I give you fair warning before you attempt me further, I am not what you supposed, but far different.

JOHNSTON: We all see it. And cannot see it. We certainly cannot acknowledge it to one another; the implications, not just for Wallace and Sixsmith, but for all us, stood here with them.

SIXSMITH: Who is he that would become my follower? Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections?

JOHNSTON: I only hope that such violent and not entirely appropriate emotional expressiveness will soon subside, lest it be open to, well, if not a totally catastrophic, at least a potentially ruinous misinterpretation.

SIXSMITH: The way is suspicious, the result uncertain, perhaps destructive, you would have to give up all else, I alone would expect to be, your sole and exclusive standard. Your nov...novi...

WALLACE: Novitiate.

SIXSMITH: Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting, the whole past theory of your life and all conformity to the lives around you would have to be abandon'd.

JOHNSTON: Wise or not, welcome or unwelcome, Sixsmith's apprenticeship to the Master has begun.

*WALLACE steps out of the scene.*

WALLACE: "Welcome or unwelcome"? To whom? Sixsmith?

JOHNSTON: Sixsmith?

WALLACE: For whom else could it be unwelcome?

*JOHNSTON looks at him.*

JOHNSTON: They want us to get to Whitman. That's the real story, Wallace and Whitman, but he's written seven more scenes before you meet. I'll deploy a "narrative compression device".

*WALLACE looks puzzled.*

JOHNSTON: It's a form of brevity. So, not something of which you'll be familiar.

*JOHNSTON steps back into the scene and ushers WALLACE back into it too.*

## **Scene Five**

*As JOHNSTON speaks, WALLACE and SIXSMITH move silently through a series of melodramatic tableau vivant.*

JOHNSTON: The letters arrived dated 29 May 1887. They were from Walt Whitman. One to me and one to dear Wallace.

*Tableau 1: WALLACE is proudly showing SIXSMITH a letter and SIXSMITH is looking pleased and surprised, pointing at the signature.*

JOHNSTON: No one expected him to write back personally. But there it was. A most gracious and courteous reply, a connection which seemed to have some quickening effect upon Wallace.

*Tableau 2: WALLACE is sat next to SIXSMITH reading him poetry and SIXSMITH has his arm around WALLACE's shoulder listening with rapt attention.*

JOHNSTON: As if some private discourse within him had been confirmed. He had always led our little College with great kindness but now he gained a kind of humble but distinct confidence as well.

*Tableau 3: The pose is reversed so that SIXSMITH is reading poetry and WALLACE has his arm around SIXSMITH's shoulder listening with rapt attention.*

JOHNSTON: The correspondence between Mr Whitman and us grew in regularity and familiarity. He even sent us his precious canary bird stuffed as a gift after it had expired.

*Tableau 4: WALLACE holds a stuffed canary in a bell jar up for SIXSMITH to look at.*

JOHNSTON: So, by 1890, I felt confident enough to fashion an opportunity to propose a visit to America to see the great man himself. Wallace declined the offer to join me on my adventure. The space a dear friend's absence creates can sometimes be transformative for both parties.

*Tableau 5: WALLACE and SIXSMITH are stood facing out, arm in arm, one leg raised as if about to go on a walk together.*

JOHNSTON: I left for from Liverpool for Philadelphia and from there a short ferry-boat to Camden and Walt Whitman. He greeted me with the words, "I've been expecting you." I'm not sure it was an entirely reciprocated sentiment. A moment so heartily anticipated can never quite be realised in the moment itself. It can only be enjoyed in retrospect, each party to the meeting eulogising it in their own separate narratives, the two having only briefly overlapped. And, in a way, after months of not dissimilarly ardent admiration, dear Wallace was about to find out the same.

**SCENE SIX**

*WALLACE's parlour. WALLACE and SIXSMITH are sat. WALLACE is finishing reading Whitman's poem "A Glimpse" to SIXSMITH who stares ahead.*

WALLACE: "There we two, content, happy in being together, speaking little, perhaps not a word."

*WALLACE puts the book of poems down. Long silence.*

WALLACE: Are you being ironical?

SIXSMITH: What? Nay. Sorry. I were away with the little folk.

WALLACE: Shall we stop. Perhaps some beer?

SIXSMITH: Why do you read us poems like that?

WALLACE: Because I think you enjoy them.

SIXSMITH: Oh, I do. The words like and the sentiments. He's not like other poets. He says things plainly, but what he says is never plain.

WALLACE: Very finely put.

SIXSMITH: But there's the ones you read with the College on Mondays, and then there's the ones you read to me when we're alone.

WALLACE: There is.

SIXSMITH: And the ones you read to me...?

WALLACE: I just pick the ones I think you'll like the most.

SIXSMITH: They're all about comradely love or men looking at other men all noble like.

WALLACE: I save my favourites just for you.

SIXSMITH: Me. What understands. Perfectly. In this private place. With our private thoughts.

WALLACE: Yes.

SIXSMITH: So, I'm to understand through the poems like, recognise something and talk to you about that as poetry, but not through my own plain speaking?

WALLACE: The poems helps us to manage...to..to...to make sense of who and what we are.

SIXSMITH: It's not enough.

WALLACE: Oh?

SIXSMITH: I tossed off the coalman last week.

*Pause.*

WALLACE: I won't listen to this.

SIXSMITH: It's the truth.

*WALLACE picks up the book of poems and begins reading aloud again, trying to block out what SIXSMITH is saying but also finding it incredibly erotic. SIXSMITH goads him, trying to force his attention from the poem.*

WALLACE: "I cannot answer the question of appearances or that of identity beyond the grave."

SIXSMITH: Played with his prick in the coal shed till he spent, all down the front of me jacket.

WALLACE: "But I walk or sit indifferent. I am satisfied."

SIXSMITH: It were a bugger to get off. The more you rubbed it, the more it clung to the cloth.

WALLACE: "He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me."

SIXSMITH: Like bloody glue it were. Had a little lick when he'd gone. Made me/ gag

WALLACE: I/ said no.

SIXSMITH: He's not the first. There's one of the lads at the mill.

WALLACE: I'm not listening.

SIXSMITH: He tugs me off every Friday after work in the Gents on Bradshawgate.

WALLACE: That's nowt to do with us.

SIXSMITH (*Moving his hand in an undulating motion*): Bloody marvellous corkscrew thing he does/

WALLACE: Stop it Charlie!

SIXSMITH: I've a fancy to try some back scuttling. Mill lad's keen.

WALLACE: We have found something else, something rarer.

SIXSMITH: Reckon you'd faint if I took off me cufflinks. Never mind try a bit of brown.

WALLACE: Ours is a pure friendship.

SIXSMITH: That's your choice.

WALLACE: Because of it, I know I can say something to you and that you will know what I mean, and what I do not.

SIXSMITH: You love me.

WALLACE: Yes.

SIXSMITH: But just like in them poems.

WALLACE: You see. A perfect understanding.

SIXSMITH: That's all very grand. But it's not going to put me cock in clover now, is it?

*Pause.*

WALLACE: And do you love me?

SIXSMITH: Like in them poems?

WALLACE: Yes.

SIXSMITH: No. Even Walt Whitman does nay loves men like in them poems.

WALLACE: I don't follow.

SIXSMITH: Happen you follow a lot better than you let on.

WALLACE: He's describing something noble and wonderful, selfless and eternal.

SIXSMITH: Oh aye. He is that.... amongst other things.

WALLACE: Not licentiousness for certain.

SIXSMITH: Master of the college, yet you can't see something cause it's not writ plain.

WALLACE: Well then, make it plain for me.



SIXSMITH: I've tried telling you, but you just over talk me out with the very words that are proof of what I'm saying.

WALLACE: The truth of Whitman's/

SIXSMITH: /The truth?! I've a mind now to tell you the truth Master Wallace, for telling you why I like them poems. For telling you what I think, no, what I know they're all about.

WALLACE: I thought you understood their higher sentiment.

SIXSMITH: Oh, is my sentiment too lowly for you now?

WALLACE: When you snigger and sneer like a navy.

SIXSMITH: Oh, that's it now!

WALLACE: It was you that reduced Whitman to some filthy story of animal lusts.

SIXSMITH: That's how you see me, is it? An animal?

WALLACE: No lad, no, not at all.

SIXSMITH: Nowt but a dog being trained.

WALLACE: Why are you so angry Charlie?

SIXSMITH: Because of you. Because you can't see, won't see what's under your own bloody nose. Because if you had, if you had but let go, everything would've been different.

*SIXSMITH exits leaving WALLACE alone. JOHNSTON enters and sees WALLACE alone and sad.*

*WALLACE exits.*

## **Scene Seven**

JOHNSTON: I'd best take over. My visit to Mr Whitman whilst most interesting, was not, well, illuminating, not transformative in the way dear Wallace thinks of the term. I keep a diary of all that transpired but it was a great disappointment to our playwright. Even with his propensity for salacious implication, I emerge as, well, a sphinx without a secret. I had no spiritual epiphany, though I did long for one. Perhaps I did not have need of it in the same way that Wallace did.

*WALLACE walks on stage with a simple flower in his hand. Sits and stares at it in wonder, turning it occasionally in his hand.*

JOHNSTON: He is slightly remote when I first return. Not unfriendly, but just far enough away to prohibit any intimate questions. And he seems to be adopting more Whitman life motifs. If not quite listening to the grass grow, he certainly meditates upon nature more freely.

*MILL BOY walks on stage, followed by SIXSMITH a little behind. SIXSMITH catches him up. During the next part of the scene, MILL BOY puts his hand down Sixsmith's trousers and tosses him off until SIXSMITH comes.*

JOHNSTON: Some disagreement has come between him and Charles. Wallace is withdrawing further into himself, more into the role of Master of the College.

*WILD walks on composing aloud with a notebook.*

JOHNSTON: Fred provides us his usual distracting humour.

WILD: Back to the Chorus....(*coarse Lancashire accent*) Och Bhoys! We're the Pheelosiphers, We are the wans for the Knowldige; Av've ye're wanting Theology, Or Anthropology; Come an jine the Aigle Strate Collidge.

JOHNSTON: I throw myself into the Bolton Lads Club. The College still meets, but the central emotional knot loosens. We need something to tie us back together. The College is to welcome its first overseas Whitmanite. A Canadian. And a psychiatrist. No one is quite sure which is the more alarming.

*Enter BUCKE. He picks up a chair and places it centre stage, summoning the others round him, as if for a photograph. As each person speaks, they move over to BUCKE to join him.*

BUCKE: Dr Bucke.

JOHNSTON: I am delighted to have the opportunity to return, well, at least some measure of the hospitality you were kind enough to show me in Ontario.

BUCKE: Always a pleasure to have another mind that is both medical and poetical under the roof. I find it's an increasingly rare combination.

WALLACE: It is a real honour to have you as a part of our humble Monday evening this week Doctor.

BUCKE: The honour is mine.

WALLACE: I wonder if you might care to start with some insights about Mr Whitman from your esteemed biography.

BUCKE: I might, but I think I'll start with some questions first.

SIXSMITH: How do?

BUCKE: Very fine thank you. Are you Mr Fred Wild?

SIXSMITH: Nay. Sorry. Charlie Sixsmith.

WILD: I'm Fred Wild.

BUCKE: You're the versifier?

WILD: After a fashion.

BUCKE: Now come in round me for the photograph. That's it.

*SIXSMITH, WALLACE, JOHNSTON AND WILD all move in behind him, all facing out to audience.*

BUCKE: So, here's my question.

WALLACE: We'll be delighted to answer anything at all.

BUCKE: You all believe in the equality of man and the emancipation of the future, right?

WALLACE: Indeed.

BUCKE: So, then, where are they?

*Pause.*

WALLACE: I'm not sure...

BUCKE: Where are all the women? Umm? Where are they?

*SIXSMITH, WALLACE, JOHNSTON AND WILD are silent and look uncomfortable. BUCKE stands.*

BUCKE: The workplace may be a place of sex segregation, but this is unhealthy, to also mix only amongst your own sex away from work. Wouldn't you like a few women around the place? Might brighten things up a bit? *(Laughs)* Might do all sorts of things? What do you say? What about the first Eagle Street College marriage? The first Eagle Street College baby? Gotta happen someday.

SIXSMITH: I'm all for free love meself.

WALLACE *(weakly)*: Yes.

BUCKE: You're all depressed. A room full of men sat reading poems to each other every Monday night. It's a waste. You could be using Whitman's words to court with. No woman I know can resist a man reciting poetry. So, choose your best verses and let's get you fellas ready for some courting.

*BUCKE takes WALLACE aside, as the others look in poetry books a little bemused.*

BUCKE: Whitman is fading. Some days he's better than others, but the overall trajectory is down.

WALLACE: It is a great sadness to hear that.

BUCKE: So, I am determined that you should return with me to America, meet Whitman and a good number of single, handsome women besides. You'll have the most wonderful time. I may even assess you for cosmic consciousness. I detect glimmerings.

WALLACE: I don't think I can just leave for America. I'll need to agree an absence at work and then there's the money for the crossing, and father to see to. I can't just leave him with no/

BUCKE: /Nonsense, nonsense. There are people who will house and feed you.

WALLACE: I couldn't impose myself on/

BUCKE: You're coming.

*WALLACE goes to speak.*

BUCKE: You're coming!

## **Scene Eight**

*WALLACE and SIXSMITH in Wallace's parlour.*

WALLACE: You left a note saying you'd call in at six.

SIXSMITH: And here I am.

WALLACE: It's been awhile since we were alone, like we were. I've missed it.

SIXSMITH: Thought it best. Didn't want to fall out any worse than we already had.

WALLACE: I didn't know what to think.

SIXSMITH: Still came to't College every week.

WALLACE: And now, as I'm all but set to leave, you finally ask to see me.

*SIXSMITH hands him a wrapped parcel.*

WALLACE: Oh Charlie. You'd no need for gifts as apologies for/

SIXSMITH: /It's not for you. It's for Whitman.

WALLACE: Oh.

SIXSMITH: Just give it him from me, with thanks, is all.

WALLACE: What is it?

SIXSMITH: You'll find out. It's made of cotton and it'll make you laugh.

*WALLACE looks glum.*

SIXSMITH: I thought you'd be pleased. Me offering gifts for't boss.

WALLACE (*sadder still*): I am.

SIXSMITH: Just tell him to keep 'em short mind. (*Beat*) Right then. I'm off.

*SIXSMITH exits. WALLACE steps out of the scene. JOHNSTON enters but stays in the background looking at WALLACE with concern, then slowly moves forward.*

WALLACE: Well, if I wasn't quite set on going, that made me. I keep a meticulous diary of every meeting, every moment with Walt Whitman, even writing down what he says as if its dialogue in a play. I've done half this writer's job for him. I'm careful mind. No lies, a few omissions, but then

only them that are forced on me by the nature of the times, nothing out of vanity. That's how I'd like it to stay really.

*JOHNSTON takes WALLACE'S hand and intertwines his fingers with his own, smiling at him.*

JOHNSTON: You can't control what will come to be said of you.

WALLACE: No. But/

JOHNSTON: /It's not your story anymore.

WALLACE: No. *(Beat)* Now, Mr Hornby is determined to tell you what he thinks I didn't. If that's to be told, then at least it's going to be told my way. Dr Johnston's all for brevity, all about the story when he's in charge, galloping through years in a single scene, but I think the real meaning's somewhere in the detail. And when Walt Whitman starts to speak, his words are something you savour.

*JOHNSTON exits.*

WALLACE: I will show you it all, my way, and beggar the consequences.

*BLACKOUT.*

## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene One**

*WALT's voice in the blackout reciting from "With Antecedents".*

WALT:

As for me, (torn, stormy, amid these vehement days),  
I have the idea of all, and am all and believe in all,  
I believe materialism is true and spiritualism is true, I reject no part.

I know that the past was great and the future will be great,  
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time,

And that where I am or you are this present day, there is the centre of all days, all races,  
And there is the meaning to us all, of all that has ever come of races and days, or ever will come.

## **Scene Two**

*WALT's bedroom. WALT is sat in his chair, a mess of papers, letters, open books, pencils and envelopes are scattered around him on the floor. Next to him is a table with an earthenware jug and simple glasses on. To the other side of the chair is a single bed. BUCKE enters with WALLACE behind him. WALT offers an outstretched arm to BUCKE. BUCKE takes his hand and shakes it. WALLACE is taking in every detail of the room. WALT and BUCKE watch WALLACE. WALLACE notices them watching him, stops, coughs involuntarily, splutters, then smiles awkwardly.*

WALT: So, you've come to be disillusioned, have you?

*Beat. WALLACE goes to speak, coughs instead. BUCKE and WALT laugh.*

WALLACE: I've come as a humble representative of...(coughs)...I mean I am here firstly as a devotee of your poetry to...(coughs)...Oh dear me....

BUCKE: Take a breath.

WALLACE: I bring felicitous greetings from the Bolton fellows to...(coughs repeatedly).

WALT (*through WALLACE's coughing*): I do hope the sea air hasn't been unkind to his lungs.

BUCKE (*winking at WALT*): I think he's just a little overcome by the majesty of your presence.

*WALLACE stops coughing. WALT and BUCKE look at him expectedly.*

WALLACE: I've come to...to...

BUCKE: Find a wife?

WALLACE: ...to find myself.



*Pause as WALLACE and the other take in the implications of what's been said.*

WALT: Well, we have many weeks. Let us begin at the source. What a splendid lot of fellows you have in Bolton!

WALLACE: We are only commonplace fellows who happen to be good friends and have organised ourselves into a club, a fellowship of sorts.

WALT: Oh, we size you up pretty well. We all swear by your little college here, and the friendship of its members, and its special qualities.

BUCKE: Traubel... *(to WALLACE)* Dr Horace Traubel, you'll meet him soon, poet, publisher/

WALT: /Traubel is a marvellous man to speak to *(to WALLACE)* and equally marvellous to behold.

*WALT looks to WALLACE to exchange knowing glances, but WALLACE is blank-faced.*

BUCKE: Traubel has had a letter from Symonds this morning and will let you have it tonight.

WALT: Have you read it?

BUCKE: Traubel read it to me. I guess Symonds is in a bad way – of course, he's been ill a long time. Men of such ilk rarely live long.

WALT: Yes. Symonds is a fallen angel.

BUCKE: There can't be any immediate danger. Someone had asked him to write a life of Michelangelo, and he has some thought of doing it.

WALT: Michelangelo is a man with whom he should find more than a few resonances on *l'amour de l'impossible*.

BUCKE: And he wants to finish his biography on you.

WALLACE: I have read your own biography of Mr Whitman Dr Bucke and would surely say it is definitive.

BUCKE: Symonds begs to differ and has certain letters and a florid interpretation of some of the poems that, were these elements to be brought together, might create a detrimental and false impression.

WALT: We must all live with such total candour that we become hidden.

BUCKE: Do you have the last letters Symonds sent you in this mass of flotsam and jetsam?

WALT: Somewhere. You may laugh at my want of order, but the exertion of tidiness is too much for me, and when I have read a paper, I just let it find its home on the floor.

BUCKE: To Mrs Davis' undoubted delight.

*BUCKE sifts through some of the papers and finds two letters that he pockets.*

WALT: Mrs Davis is a wonderful woman and has quite the charge of this house. The only influence I can have is that I forbid her to touch or move anything I'm reading or anything I'm writing, an injunction she regularly ignores. This small kingdom of words set around me is our perpetual domestic battleground.

BUCKE: Walt, I'm going to take Wallace to Fairmont Park tomorrow. Will you come?

WALT: No, I think I must not do so. I should like to come.

BUCKE: I will not urge you as it involves three or four miles of rough, jolting road in the town.

WALT: My bladder trouble must be remembered too; I soon fill up. Once full, I am prone to a little over-spilling, especially if my pot is jolted.

WALLACE: I'm sure we'll have the honour of you joining us on another occasion.

*WALLACE and WALT smile at each other. WALT lifts a volume of poems by Sir Walter Scott.*

WALT: Wallace, here is a book I have had for the last fifty years. It is an inexhaustible mine of interest. What a talker Scott was!

WALLACE: Have you read Scott's diary?

WALT: No. Do you think I should?

WALLACE: Without question.

WALT: Oh, I think there's every reason to question.

WALLACE: It adds so many layers to appreciating his writing.

WALT: I enjoy his poetry. It doesn't follow that I would enjoy his life. A lesson that you may be learning Wallace. And one that you, Dr Bucke, have most definitely learnt.

BUCKE: Nothing Wallace will come to find out about your life will change how he values your poetry.

WALT: I'm quite certain that every single thing he finds out about my life will change forever how he values my poetry. But the choice is his.

BUCKE: Indeed. Are you ready to have your view forever changed Wallace?

WALLACE: It has been already.

WALT (*laughing to BUCKE*): You see? You see? I am already less than I was, less than yesterday, more than tomorrow, an ever diminishing spiral.

WALLACE: Quite the reverse.

WALT (*to WALLACE*): Your judgement will come at the end, when you've spoken to everyone whose words I've borrowed and visited all the sites whose beauty I have stolen. When you've heard everything I haven't said. Then we'll see Wallace, then we'll see.

### **Scene Three**

*WALT's bedroom. WALT is dressed, sat upright on his bed with a shawl round him. WALLACE is standing with a paper carrier bag. BUCKE is stood in the doorway ushering in WARRY.*

WALT: I believe Wallace has a token of his appreciation.

WALLACE: I wanted you to have this (*hands WARRY a small wrapped gift*) on behalf of the Bolton fellows.

*WARRY opens the box and smiles.*

WARRY: A compass.

BUCKE: I thought it was you that was on a journey Wallace.

*WARRY warmly embraces WALLACE, who stiffens, then relaxes.*

WALT: Our American tactility may be a little uncommon to our friend from Lancashire.

WARRY: But I ain't got nothin' to give you back.

WALLACE: No, no, no, no, no. It is the guest who brings gifts. The way you and Mrs Davis have extended your generous hospitality is already exceptional. The gifting is not quite over, I'm afraid.

*WALLACE pulls out a rectangular box from the paper bag he's been carrying and hands it to WALT.*

BUCKE: Some exotic, indigenous luxury from Bolton perhaps?

WALLACE (*mildly withering look*): You have been to Bolton, Dr Bucke, haven't you?

BUCKE (*chuckles*): I remember the tripe, but I am assuming sheep's stomach would not have travelled well.

WARRY: I tasted tripe in Brooklyn once. Kinda liked it.

WALLACE: There's not much indigenous to most mill towns save for rain, soot and toil. But there is cotton.

*WALT opens the box and pulls out a set of underwear (long johns and a vest).*

WALLACE: The finest in the North of England.

WALT: I shall now be better dressed on the inside than the out! Want me to try them on? Or shall we get Warry to give us a little parade?

*WALT throws the long johns to WARRY who holds them against his hips and does a short, effeminate walk, twirls round and flounces back. WALT and WALLACE laugh. BUCKE gives a forced smile.*

WALT: Ain't she pretty? Look at her wiggle.

*WALT claps loudly. WALLACE joins in a little. BUCKE does not.*

WALT: Warry is such a naughty sailor boy sometimes.

*WALT nods at WARRY. WARRY folds the underwear neatly and puts it back in its box.*

WALLACE: I hope you don't think it too...too presumptuous.

WALT: Its presumption is welcome and well judged.

WARRY (*feeling fabric*): I should declare the cotton fine and...and a great luxury.

WALLACE: I must admonish myself and be clear. The gift is not from me. I am presenting the gift. It was in turn presented to me and I knew nothing of the contents save that they were cotton.

BUCKE: From the fellows?

WALLACE: From Mr Charles Sixsmith, being in the business as he is.

WALT: You bring the greatest gift. Yourself.

WALLACE: He asked me to offer it to you on his behalf with his love and gratitude for every word you have written and all the words still to come.

BUCKE: A fine sentiment.

WARRY: Are you lookin' for settin' off tomorrow Dr Bucke?

BUCKE: Day after. The asylum calls.

WALT: Dr Bucke brings cures, comfort and compassion to the mad of all Ontario.

BUCKE: Show Walt your photographs.

*WALLACE reaches into the bag and brings out a smaller white envelope with a set of pictures in.*

WALLACE: I was able to have two plates developed this morning. From the journey over.

*WARRY lifts a board on small legs on to WALT's bed. WALLACE spreads the pictures out. WARRY looks at WALT, who nods and WARRY exits.*

WALLACE: Those are some Armenians who came on board at New York.

BUCKE: What do you think Walt? Very expressive faces.

WALT: The human critter is pretty much the same everywhere. *(Focusing in on a specific picture)*  
Who is that poor boy? The terror in his expression.

WALLACE: That was a stowaway. He was uncovered the night before we docked here. He does look miserable and desperate.

BUCKE: And resigned.

WALLACE: Yes, all at once.

WALT: It is a child's face, but it already knows the whip hand of power.

*WALT puts the pictures down and looks to BUCKE.*

WALT: And have you? With him?

*WALLACE looks puzzledly from BUCKE to WALT as they talk about him.*

BUCKE: I promised I would in England. Part of the lure.

WALT: Did you detect the signs?

BUCKE: Many of them.

WALLACE: Gentlemen, you've quite lost me.

BUCKE: *(To WALLACE)* Our interview this morning! *(To WALT)* You were right; the death of his mother in 1885 seems to have precipitated some form of crisis and that is when it happened.

WALLACE: Cosmic consciousness! I see.

*BUCKE steps out of the scene and addresses the audience directly in lecture mode, in which he is unaware of WALT and WALLACE, whilst they watch him.*

BUCKE: My research suggests that human consciousness is on the cusp of a momentous evolutionary step, that only a precious few of us can glimpse, and then only momentarily. It is a new form of consciousness which I have termed "Cosmic Consciousness." I offer an account of my own brief moment of awakening to this miraculous state.

I was 36 years old at the time. After an evening spent with friends sharing poetry, notably that of Walt Whitman, I was on my way home in a hansom cab, alone. All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped around by a flame coloured cloud. The next I knew, that the light was within myself. Directly afterwards came upon me a sense of immense joyousness accompanied by an intellectual illumination. I saw and knew that the Cosmos is not dead matter but a living presence, that the soul of man is immortal, that the universe is so built and ordered that, without any peradventure, all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love, and that the happiness of everyone is in the long run absolutely certain. A state of mental elation set in, which he could only describe by comparing it to intoxication by champagne, or an immense sense of achievement and largesse.

*BUCKE returns to the scene.*

BUCKE: I have assessed Wallace, himself quite ignorant of my theory, and he has independently experienced cosmic consciousness and thus adds further proof to my hypothesis.

WALLACE: But my own experience of that awakening was so fleeting.

WALT: You have had it none the less. You were able to begin your true work with your true self from that moment onward, founding the College.

BUCKE: Spreading the news of Whitman's poetry as a path to a deeper knowledge.

WALT: Wallace are you planning on a visit to West Hills?

BUCKE: I have provided him with a map and route.



WALT: I can give you the address of a keen man I know who will drive you round and show you many things not described on a map. I knew him well. And I can give you the names of one of two other "*Leaves of Grass*" men.

BUCKE: Am I missing something?

WALT: You are missing nothing at all, but I fear dear Wallace may.

WALLACE: I plan to see Mr Herbert Gilchrist in Centrepool Cove.

WALT: Herb wrote a most moving memoir of the life of his mother. My mother passed in '73. How much I owe her! *Leaves of Grass* is the flower of her temperament active in me. And how much I look like her. Do you think it is a temperamental thing in men like us that we should be so hued of and bonded to our mothers?

WALLACE: It is something common to many men.

WALT: To "*Leaves of Grass*" men.

*WALT smiles at WALLACE who is disconcerted. Beat.*

WALLACE: More tea anyone?

*BUCKE offers his cup, which WALLACE fills. WALT declines.*

WALT: No. No. I must limit my liquids. Too many could prove fatal.

BUCKE: You will outlive us all.

WALT: I would not care to.

BUCKE: We could always arrange for you to be stuffed like your canary.

*WALT laughs. BUCKE whistles imitating the canary.*

WALT (*to WALLACE*): Did it arrive in one piece? It was Warry's idea. I understood that the glass shade got broken?

WALLACE: Cracked. We purchased a replacement locally and the canary is resplendent within, as if caught mid-warble, the effect is uncanny. I'm quite sure I've heard it sing on more than one occasion.

*BUCKE whistles again. WALLACE laughs.*

WALT: But it is only skin, a gutless thing, with eyes of glass. Its song has left the air and nothing but the gesture of the song remains. It is merely an outline.

WALLACE: A very cheerful outline though.

WALT: And in time, someone will look at that strangely preserved canary on a mantelpiece somewhere and wonder why on Earth it was ever stuffed, a bird so ordinary. No one will know of the beauty of the yellow canary that sang to me each morning and soothed my lonely heart.

WALLACE: I do sometimes feel like that. Like, well, an outline, a cheerful outline, waiting to be coloured in, waiting to recognise something that will connect me up. The only thing that ever has is your poetry and that one moment of consciousness predicated upon it.

*WALT puts his hand on WALLACE's arm.*

WALT: You cannot become the ghost of something you have never been Wallace. Make sure you sing your song. You must take the canary not just as a remembrance, but as a warning.

### **Scene Four**

*WALT'S bedroom. WALT is reading a book and making some notes in a notebook on his knee, papers on the floor around him. WALLACE is stood having just entered.*

WALLACE: How are you?

WALT: No worse than before, which is always an achievement in itself now. How was your morning?

WALLACE: I've been writing most of it.

WALT: Letters to the Bolton fellows?

WALLACE: My diary. I'm trying to capture every day of my visit as fully and accurately as I can. I've a mind to pair it with Dr Johnston's record from his visit last year and make something of them.

WALT: And will you record everything?

WALLACE: Everything that the fellows, and perhaps even a wider reading audience, would be minded to hear.

WALT: You may be able to be...fuller if you limit it to the dear fellows. And even then.

WALLACE: Yes, but I had hoped....Of course.

WALT: Wallace, I wonder if there are things that you have not voiced to me yet. Things, all considered, you might have.

WALLACE: I hope you don't think I have not been open with you?

WALT: Perhaps you fear the implications of the words and dare not voice them? Perhaps you do not even know the words.

WALLACE: It is better for a man such as I, in the company of a man such as you, to listen.

WALT: There is a tone, a note within my poems that only some men hear. All may admire the verse, or not, but only some hear the song within. I think Charlie Sixsmith hears it. (*Beat*) When you first arrived, I presumed something about you. That was wrong of me. But I do know there is something you have come here to face.

WALLACE: I should like to see Peter Doyle while I'm here. Do you have his address?

WALT (*sighing*): No one has spoken that name to me for a long while. 16 4.

WALLACE: I'm sorry?

WALT: When I write freely in my diary about Peter, I call him "16 4". It's a simple code.

WALLACE: 16 4? A date? The sixteenth of April, Mr Doyle's birthday?

WALT: No. But you're right to think like a cryptographer.

WALLACE: Doyle. D. Fourth letter of the alphabet. Of course, and P is the...sixteenth. 16 4.

WALT: I don't know where he is. I have not known for two years.

WALLACE: But why should you codify your references to Mr Doyle?

WALT: He used to be the baggage master on the freight trains between Washington and New York.

WALLACE: Traubel thought he was living in Baltimore.

WALT: Did he? I must ask why he thought Baltimore. I hope Traubel has not been keeping anything from me?

WALLACE: I'm certain not.

WALT: I am rather uneasy about where Pete is. The cars used to come to Philadelphia, and he came here every week. Then nothing.

WALLACE: It is strange that he does not write to you.

WALT: It's devastating.

WALLACE: Devastating?

WALT: I sat on the streetcar all the way to the end of the line, ten stops passed where I lived. He was the conductor. I looked at him and he at me. We each saw something, then saw everything. He placed his hand upon my knee, and we became joined from that moment. That was 1866.

WALLACE: I have something of that connection with Dr Johnston.

WALT: You do. You do have something of that connection with Dr Johnston. But you do not have all of that connection. Pete and I have all of it. I love him and he loves me.

WALLACE: Without too much fear of sentiment or presumption, I believe that Johnston and I could say the same.

*WALT looks at WALLACE waiting for the penny to drop.*

WALT: Wallace. We were lovers.

*WALLACE gradually, almost reluctantly, gets it.*

WALLACE: You mean you and Mr Doyle....you make....you are intimate in a....you....you...you...

WALT *(slowly)*: Yes.

*WALLACE almost gasps, heart racing.*

WALT: Yes, Wallace. It is said.

WALLACE: It's just so....I mean....I wouldn't....I couldn't even begin to...it degrades everything.

WALT: Breathe.

WALLACE (*hyperventilating*): Yes. Breathe. Breathing. Still breathing. It's just not something...something I....I expected you to say, to voice it to me. It would be impossible...in England. Even to.....no. The fear and shame of it....No.

WALT: My trusting you should not, I hope, be the cause of your asphyxiation.

WALLACE: Sorry. I should respond better. It's overwhelming is all.

WALT: And it is not.

WALLACE: Do Bucke and Traubel know?

WALT: They can see my life as plainly as you can.

WALLACE: Yet you thought Traubel might've known where Mr Doyle was and not told you?

WALT: Perception and approval are not the same thing.

WALLACE: Now I know that Mr Doyle is your....It is even stranger then that he should not have been in touch.

WALT: I fear something must have happened to him.

WALLACE: Perhaps the railroad people could help at his old depot?

WALT: Yes – I think they might. I must know what's happened, even if it's bad news.

WALLACE: Of course.

WALT: It seems there are things we must both face Wallace.

*WALLACE goes to shake hands with WALT. WALT take WALLACE'S hand but uses it to bring him in closer and kisses him on the cheek. WALLACE pulls back slightly. The two men look at each other. WALT smiles. WALLACE is flustered and leaves.*

**Scene Five**

*WALT's bedroom. WALT is dressed but is in bed under the covers asleep. His jacket and necktie and shoes are on the chair. BUCKE is sat in the chair reading. TRAUBEL enters.*

BUCKE: Mid-morning nap. Sound asleep.

TRAUBEL: You're headed back today?

BUCKE: I am. I thought something of a handover might be called for.

TRAUBEL: What have you gleaned about Wallace? He seems a sound fellow.

BUCKE: Yes. But he has shown little more than basic civility to all three of the young women I have introduced him to.

TRAUBEL: A "Leaves of Grass" fellow then?

BUCKE: If he is, he seems barely to know that he is. Walt has a way of....of taking such men under his wing though.

TRAUBEL: Repeatedly. One almost feels jealous sometimes.

BUCKE: I'm the same at the asylum. I cannot help them enough. I have brought over forty such men to highly successful marriages and been to many christenings as a result.

TRAUBEL: Not much we can do to stop Walt without/

BUCKE: /Walt's home can't continue to be a sanctuary for every perplexed sodomite.

TRAUBEL: I agree, but I cannot apply that description lightly to Wallace.

BUCKE: I have the facilities for such men, to address their arrested development and cure them. But Walt? He ends up doing the very opposite, however well intentioned.

TRAUBEL: The prospect of Symonds publishing his biography fills me with a deep trepidation. Do you think he would say...would make the case that/

BUCKE: /God knows what conversations they've had that we've not been privy to.

TRAUBEL: We must protect him from the inferences and implications that others would make. Without the spiritual and intellectual context of his life and work, so much could be misinterpreted.

BUCKE: And wilful, vocal buggers like Symonds are always waiting to co-opt, to corrupt every ambiguity and turn it into a declaration of inversion.

TRAUBEL: Your biography of Walt was published, what, twelve, fifteen years ago?

BUCKE: Eight.

TRAUBEL: Well, that is more than enough of a defence from the need of any further studies.

BUCKE: Symonds may wish to cover the intervening years.

TRAUBEL: He may. But I have been gathering that material for my own piece. It will be a comprehensive account of my time with him. I'm calling it "Walt Whitman In Camden". There may be several volumes.

BUCKE: Then we have a valid riposte to any possible line of enquiry.

TRAUBEL: If Symonds were to... If he did and had letters or certain drafts of some of the poems as some sort of misplaced proof, it could ruin Walt.

BUCKE: Symonds doesn't just advocate male-to-male love; he supports pederastic as well as egalitarian lusts. He's a pariah.



TRAUBEL: The more others cast him out, the more Walt will welcome him in.

BUCKE: And if his taint were to spread to Walt/

TRAUBE: /through some misinterpretation/

BUCKE: /of something Walt has innocently written/

TRAUBEL: /then it would spread to those associated closely with him.

BUCKE: Symonds's biography would stain mine.

TRAUBEL: And my work would become unpublishable.

TRAUBEL & BUCKE: We'd be ruined.

*TRAUBEL and BUCKE stare at each other for a moment in horror.*

BUCKE: We must be vigilant and discourage all connection.

TRAUBEL: Yes, but on the basis of the lack of quality in Symonds's writing. Bad writing is the one thing Walt will exclude from his world.

BUCKE: Agreed. And Doyle?

TRAUBEL: Still nothing. I've not acted on any request from Walt to find him.

BUCKE: Don't.

TRAUBEL: No. A thorough review of that relationship could be equally problematic.

*BUCKE looks at TRAUBEL with a raised eyebrow of surprise.*

BUCKE: And that boy from the tramline making those ridiculous accusations.

TRAUBEL: Paid off.

BUCKE: Then I wouldn't say we were safe, but I would say the ground is covered.

TRAUBEL: He is protected from the conclusions an uneducated mind might make.

BUCKE: Then I will be on my way. Good day Mr Traubel.

TRAUBEL: Have a good journey Dr Bucke. Give Mrs Bucke and all the children my regards.

### **Scene Six**

*WALT's bedroom. WALT is lying face down on the bed on a towel with his shirt off. WARRY is topless and massaging WALT's back with long, sensual strokes. WARRY stops.*

WARRY: They're here. Should we stop?

WALT: Not for a moment. Shoulders one last time.

WARRY: They're already all fixed up.

WALT: Shhh.

*WALLACE and TRAUBEL enter with candies in paper bags. WALLACE watches WARRY with intensity.*

TRAUBEL: We come bearing gifts.

WALT: Twice in one day. Wallace brought me sickle pears at luncheon.

WALLACE: These are all sugar and fancy. But we've disturbed you.

TRAUBEL: We can wait downstairs.

WALT: We are finishing now.

*WARRY continues to massage WALT for a few moments, then stops. WARRY helps WALT to put his shirt on, buttons it up for him and helps him find a comfortable sitting position on the bed.*

WALT: Warry's fingers seem to re-elasticise my whole body. I never sleep properly unless he administers to me every night.

*WALLACE offers WALT a sweet which he takes and sucks nosily. WARRY picks up his own shirt and puts it back on.*

WARRY: The energy knottin' the muscles, it comes out in heat; always makes me sweat.

WALLACE: I expect so.

WALT: Mint humbug. The smallest things bring such great pleasure to me now. How is Anne?

*WARRY exits.*

TRAUBEL: My darling Anne is as beautiful as always. Have you been keeping busy?

WALT: I've been writing a postal to Dr Johnston. I've stupidly got the date wrong.

*WALT shows them the small postcard.*

WALT: There isn't really space to cross it out and re-write it.

TRAUBEL: I'm sure it won't matter.

WALLACE: Dr Johnston is a stickler for ordering everything. He is most precise about dates.

WALT: Every letter, every postal card is more than just ink upon the page, it is a way into a precise moment in the consciousness of the writer, his hand smudging across the page, the words in the moment of becoming. Few things can occupy the mind so completely with a thought as the act of

writing it down. It is that intensity which impregnates itself into the card and makes it so special to receiver sometime later.

WALLACE: I am finishing a letter to Dr Johnston when I get home tonight. I shall add a postscript explaining the correct date of your postal card. Will that suffice?

WALT: Marvellous. What a marvellous solution, from a marvellous man. Do you have any equally marvellous news for me about Pete?

WALLACE: I'm afraid that there I have failed you. The depot only had the same address as you already have and also no report of him working for nigh on two years.

TRAUBEL: I think the trail to Mr Doyle has run cold.

WALT: And yet Wallace was saying only yesterday that you thought he was in Baltimore?

TRAUBEL: I was mistaken. I couldn't remember what you'd last said to me.

WALT: I did not say Baltimore.

TRAUBEL: I'm sorry. I don't think you should pursue it any further Walt.

WALT: And why is that?

TRAUBEL: In these two years, however many times Doyle has moved, you have not. I don't wish to be hurtful, but the plain truth is that he could've been in contact with you at any point.

WALLACE: That is why Walt fears that Mr Doyle may have been incapacitated in some way.

WALT: Or worse.

TRAUBEL: What would worse be? It wouldn't be his death. It would be that he lived but didn't care enough to even write to you.

WALT: Whatever the outcome, I should like to know.

WALLACE: I wanted to see Doyle originally as I thought that, perhaps, he represents the average American class.

WALT: Well, no. Pete hardly does. For years past, Pete has been whirled amongst the sophistications. Tell us of your plans Wallace? Which part of my history are you travelling to next?

WALLACE: Timber Creek.

WALT: Sunday is a good day for going there. *(To TRAUBEL)* Are you going with him?

TRAUBEL: I must spend the day being extravagantly romantic with Anne.

WALLACE: I was thinking of the start of next week.

WALT: I think Warry should go with you. He'd make excellent company. You may even persuade him to give you a massage.

WALLACE *(flustered)*: I can't! I mean, I can't decide...can't decide anything now. I'll need to sort things out tomorrow with my diary and make a plan.

WALT: No, my suggestions are only candidates for your consideration.

TRAUBEL: Tell me it isn't on the floor!

*TRAUBEL swops to the ground and pulls out a letter from the jumble of papers.*

TRAUBEL: I only found this for you less than a week ago, and already it's about to be lost again.

WALT: It was lost for some years. I do not wish for it to go missing again.

WALLACE: What is it?

WALT: Show him.

*TRAUBEL hands WALLACE the envelope with a letter in.*

WALLACE: The letter from Mr Emerson. (*Opens it reverently and reads aloud.*) "Dear Sirs--I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of *Leaves of Grass*. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed." (*Scanning down*) Wait...here it is! "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start." Remarkable.

*WALLACE hands the letter to WALT, who sniffs it.*

WALT: You see? The smell of that ink and I am next to Emerson composing this letter.

TRAUBEL: You promised the letter to me.

WALT: Did I? Well, I'll not go back on my promise, though it seems almost too precious to part with. But you must leave it here for now. It is not a letter. It is a moment in 1855, and the means to travel there.

WALLACE: I managed to find a copy of the '55 edition of *Leaves*.

WALT: Oh I should like to see it.

WALLACE: I brought it here for you to inscribe for Charlie.

*WALLACE hands him the book. WALT opens it at the title page.*

WALT: What shall I write?

WALLACE: He asked for your name and the date only.

*DALMAS begins entering the room without knocking.*

WALT (*writing*): "21 October 1891. To Charles Sixsmith."

DALMAS: "With love, if he wants it. Walt Whitman."

*WALLACE stiffens and looks at TRAUBEL.*

WALT: Philip! How wonderful.

*DALMAS goes over to Whitman and kisses him extravagantly on the lips.*

WALT: Wallace, this is Philip, the latest to join us. Philip this is Wallace, the master of a college in England.

DALMAS: Cambridge or Oxford?

WALLACE: Bolton.

*DALMAS sneers at this and jumps on to WALT's knee.*

DALMAS: I've been working on your body.

WALT: Oh, yes?

DALMAS: I've been drawing down cosmic energy for you all morning.

WALT: I have felt brighter today.

DALMAS: Voilà!

*DALMAS jumps up and circles round the room sniffing. He zones in on WALLACE.*

DALMAS: You're thinking of him. Charlie Sixsmith. I can see it. Finish the inscription Walt. It's vital.

WALT (*writing*): In addition to being a gifted composer, Dalmás is something of a seer, a mystic, able to use cosmic consciousness in rather unique ways of which Dr Bucke would be unlikely to approve.

*DALMAS then zones in on TRAUBEL and get uncomfortably close to him.*

DALMAS: You're thinking of him, Bucke. And the last conversation you had with him. (*Placing his index finger on TRAUBEL's forehead*) I can almost hear it.

*TRAUBEL pulls away and looks uncomfortable.*

TRAUBEL: You will respect the privacy of me and Dr Bucke, I'm sure. I will bid you all good-bye and see you at home later Wallace.

*TRAUBEL exits.*

DALMAS: I must be gone too. I just came to say I've changed my mind about the recital date. I must have more time. Your words are so splendid, it is my constant challenge to compose for them with equal splendour. I cannot do another thing until the full moon is here.

WALT: You must take the time you find you need.

DALMAS: Excellent. Thank you. (*Bows*) Good-day Gentlemen. I will see you when it is right for us to meet again.

*DALMAS exits.*

WALLACE: Extraordinary man. I can't think what to make of that.

WALT: You must make if it all you can. His manner, his way with me unnerved you?

WALLACE: No. No. No.

WALT (*laughing to himself*): It did Traubel. Wallace, we are alone and can speak plainly.



WALLACE: My plain speaking does have its limitations.

WALT (*taking hold of his hands*): My dear Wallace. You have found me. You are away from everything you grew up with, from your father, from religious stricture and from every legal restraint. Do you think that you are the only one who feels this way?

WALLACE *stares at WALT*.

WALT: The only one that wants a man?

WALLACE *nods*.

WALT: Darling Wallace. Here are men like you. This little space I have created, this precious space, is where men can finally speak, where they can love.

WALLACE: I know. I do know. I just can't find what I'm meant to say. I feel like a small boy who can't swim, stood on the edge of a sea cliff being told to jump.

WALT: Then let me find the words. Have you loved a man like I have loved my darling Peter?

WALLACE *sighs then nods his head*.

WALT: And did he love you back?

WALLACE *shakes his head and begins to well up*.

WALT: Philip was right. It's Charles.

WALLACE *nods and tears roll*.

WALT: Is he not a "Leaves of Grass" man?

WALLACE: I did not know that there was even such a thing.

WALT: Some part of you did. That's why you came. But is Charlie such as we?

WALLACE: He is very much a "Leaves of Grass Man". That what makes it so pitiful. I had such...such...romantic notions in my head. And there he was spending his seed with any boy that'd have him. And with his wife an' all.

WALT: The College may yet provide you with a new source of affection.

WALLACE: It may, or it mayn't. And maybe all of this is just for Charlie and not for any such man.

WALT: Have you never? With no man?

*WALLACE shakes his head.*

WALT: There are other sources of affection. Warry could/

*WALLACE sits up.*

WALLACE: Warry could what?

WALT: Could provide some comfort to you. He has spoken of you in very tender terms.

WALLACE (*pulling back*): Oh no. I couldn't....you shouldn't. Oh no. That's like you.....no.

*WALLACE exits leaving WALT alone.*

## **Scene Seven**

*WALT is lightly sleeping on his bed. There are architect's drawings of his proposed tomb on the table.*

*A knock at the door which wakes WALT with a start as TRAUBEL enters*

WALT: Is Wallace not with you?

TRAUBEL: He is still downstairs with Warry and Mrs D.

WALT: Does he seem quite himself?

TRAUBEL: In as much as I know him to be.

WALT: He's not visited.

TRAUBEL: He's been to Timber Creek and West Hills.

WALT: West Hills? To see my resting place?

TRAUBEL: Quite so.

WALT: But he has been back a couple of days.

TRAUBEL: Letter-writing, diary writing and buying some final gifts for everyone back home.

WALT: I sent Warry to see him last night....to see if everything was alright.

TRAUBEL: And was it?

WALT: Warry said he only saw him briefly and that Wallace was complaining of sore eyes.

TRAUBEL: Well, he's fine this morning. I think Wallace even means to take some photographs. He's taken one of Mrs Davis already.

*WALLACE appears at the doorway.*

WALLACE: May I come in?

WALT: Of course, of course. It is wonderful to see you.

*WALT puts out both arms to greet WALLACE. WALLACE allows a brief hug.*

WALLACE: Now, I have some things for you and I must warn you that I will not leave today without at least three more photographic plates being exposed.

WALT: And I have some things for you too. *(Indicating two wrapped boxes)* There is a copy of the '76 edition of *Leaves* for Dr Johnston.

WALLACE: He will be thrilled.

WALT: And that is fourteen copies of the pocket version of the final edition. All of my best work for 50 cents. Free to anyone from Bolton.

TRAUBEL: And what else have you brought with you?

*WALLACE pulls a paper bag out of his jacket pocket.*

WALLACE: Some leaves and a twig from West Hills.

WALT: After all this time journeying through my past, you have taken a visit to my future and brought the smell of it back with you.

TRAUBEL: Not for a very long time yet.

WALT: Whenever it is time to be placed there, I shall go gladly. The tomb contractor came this morning. He brought the final designs. You must proffer your professional assessment Wallace.

*WALT indicates some papers on the table, which WALLACE reviews with admiration whilst speaking.*

WALT: How did you find the place?

WALLACE: I found it to be a resolutely humble place, unlike any graveyard that I have ever seen before. There were wonderful oaks, chestnuts growing nearby.

WALT: I shall be one of them soon enough.

WALLACE: And these plans seemed perfect for realisation. As clear as anything I've seen.

WALT: And Timber Creek?

WALLACE: Both were gorgeous in such different ways. And everyone was so helpful and kind. I have been wonderfully favoured all through – in weather and in everything else.

WALT: I was a little apprehensive about your coming, that they might not turn out favourably. And I thought that you were frailer than you are.

TRAUBEL: You're sounding like Dr Bucke offering a medical summary.

WALT: His time with us is nearly over. As mine is with all of you. A certain taking stock is appropriate to the moment.

TRAUBEL: I pray I never have reason to leave.

WALT (*to WALLACE*): You are not robust or formidable in appearance, but I think you are like some of the Southern soldiers in the war. They were stubborn and held their own position to the end. You have a streak of steel in you Wallace and that is a good thing, as long as it does not make you unbending or unopen to new things.

WALLACE: Yes.

WALT: Traubel, will you go and fetch Warry, if we are to be photographed.

TRAUBEL: Of course.

*TRAUBEL exits.*

WALT: I sent Warry for you last night.

WALLACE: Yes. Thank you. I'd been writing too long and the eye strain had given me a headache.

WALT: You didn't want to invite him in?

WALLACE: No.

WALT: But I expect you'd like a picture of Warry all by himself?

WALLACE: Yes.

WALT: Is it seemingly easier to feel something for a picture back in Bolton than it is for the flesh here in Camden?

*Pause.*

WALLACE: Perhaps the outline of love is all I want, all I can manage.

*WALT sighs, then smiles mischievously.*

WALT: You must make sure you get him to take his jacket off. The cut of his trousers with his waistcoat makes for the best outline in the whole a Camden.

*WARRY enters. WALLACE jumps.*

WALT: Wallace has been telling us how lucky he feels he has been and how finely you and Mrs Davis have treated him.

WARRY: The pleasure has been ours...mine. *(Beat)*. Mr Traubel said to tell you that he is departing before your lens can be focussed on him and that he'll see you for dinner.

WALLACE: Of course.

WALT: Now Wallace is for training his camera upon you Warry, and maybe even upon this old man.

WARRY: Sure.

WALT: Once Wallace has taken his pictures, you must walk Wallace home Warry.

WARRY: Pleased to.

WALT: Take the longer route, the picturesque one. Go by the Hotel. I think there's some things you need to show Wallace and you know the way better than anyone.

*WARRY smiles. WALLACE gets out his camera and looks through it at WARRY. WARRY poses. Pause. WALLACE looks up from the camera. WARRY advances on WALLACE and kisses him on the mouth. WALT smells the leaves from the burial site as the two other men continue to kiss.*

WALT: There are some things we can only do in departing.

### **Scene Eight**

*WALT'S bedroom. WARRY is kissing DALMAS passionately. WALLACE enters and freezes, uncertain of how to respond. DALMAS and WARRY stop.*

DALMAS (*exiting*): I'll find Walt.

WALLACE: Where is he?

WARRY: He asked to sit in the garden. He'll be at staring at a dandelion.

WALLACE: Mrs Davis told me to come up.

WARRY: Yes.

WALLACE: You wanted me to see that.

WARRY: I want you to understand what happened last night.

WALLACE: I don't. (*Beat*) Oh my God. You only did it because Walt asked you to.

WARRY: Yeah. But I wanted it too.

WALLACE: No. You didn't.

WARRY: I sure did.

WALLACE: Is this... this what happens? Is Philip next? How many others before me?

WARRY: Some.

WALLACE: Who?

WARRY: And Philip's different.

WALLACE (*gasping with realisation*): Did you do this to Dr Johnston?

WARRY: Many years ago, Walt showed me. Now I showed you.

WALLACE: Walt holds you in such high regard.

WARRY: I know that whatever Walt says about admirin' my strength of character is on account of people thinkin' I have a handsome face. But I ain't always been so. At school, I was as fat as butter and no one saw me. No one ever picked me for their football teams or nothin'. Now I ain't that way no more. And I can offer somethin' to people, to choose them.

WALLACE: Am I, what, an ugly duckling then?

WARRY: No. You are beautiful. But that ain't how you see yourself, how you been told to think of yourself. And what you like for your sex.

WALLACE: And you're the swan-maker?

WARRY: It is part of Walt's life that he ain't able to do for himself no more.



WALLACE: Am I to be grateful?

WARRY: No. Changed. No. Confirmed.

WALLACE: And what if I don't care to be?

WARRY: You can't not know what you know. You enjoyed it, right?

WALLACE: That's not at issue.

WARRY: Then take it for what it is. Did you imagine it somethin' else?

*WALLACE is silent. Beat.*

WARRY: Philip gotcha all jealous? Was there to be wedding bells for us in Bolton?

WALLACE: Don't mock me.

WARRY: Don't turn sex into a thing it ain't then. Don't wrap it up in a whole bundle of hokum. It is beautiful and natural. You've had that now.

WALLACE: Is that your gift back to me?

WARRY: It is a compass of sorts.

WALLACE: A....a lineage. Walt, to you, to me.

WARRY: And you must pass it on some. God knows Walt has!

WALLACE: I can't begin to imagine.

WARRY: Ain't no more to it than that.

## **Scene Nine**

*WALT's bedroom. WALT is stood at the table mixing Sangaree (white wine, lemonade and sugar).*

*WALLACE and TRAUBEL are stood awaiting their drinks.*

WALLACE: Shall I fetch some glasses.

WALT: Please do not. *(Moving double-handled mug on the table forward)* This is the Loving Cup.

We will share the Sangaree from it. One day I may send it to Bolton and the good fellows, and you will drink with them from it, long after I am gone. Perhaps on my birthday and read a poem or two?

WALLACE: That's a grand idea, though may the Lord keep you with us yet.

*TRAUBEL picks up the Loving Cup and drinks.*

TRAUBEL: To Wallace and a safe journey home.

*TRAUBEL passes the cup to WALT.*

WALT: To Wallace and a safe journey home.

*WALT passes the cup to WALLACE.*

WALLACE: A safe journey home.

TRAUBEL: So, Wallace, do you feel you have come to know America?

WALT: You have dipped into everything nearly.

WALLACE: Yes, dipped.

WALT: We who have lived here all our lives feel that we have done little more than that. America is a "becoming", a process. And though we have made good progress in a hundred years or so, we are only beginners.

WALLACE: I know exactly how that feels.

*WALLACE and WALT smile at each other for a moment. WARRY appears at the doorway with a wooden book box.*

WARRY: I thought you might be needin' this.

*WARRY comes into the room and sets the box on the bed.*

TRAUBEL: You made that in a fine hurry.

*WARRY opens the box and packs all the books.*

WARRY: Plenty of room for more. Now the books will arrive in Bolton as they left Camden.

WALT: You are a marvel Warry. You have secured their safety for our fellows across the sea.

WALLACE: This is really very kind of you.

*TRAUBEL hands WARRY the Loving Cup.*

TRAUBEL: Come, drink our toast to Wallace and his safe journey home.

WARRY: To Wallace and a safe journey home.

*WALLACE kisses WARRY on both cheeks. WARRY leaves.*

TRAUBEL: You've overcome your English reserve, I see.

WALLACE: Perhaps, a little.

TRAUBEL: Shame. I always think it's an underrated quality.

WALT: Warry has the quality which I put before all others – that of good nature.

TRAUBEL: I will leave you to make your final good-byes and be downstairs with Mrs Davis and the exalted Warry.

*TRAUBEL leaves.*

WALLACE: Warry is the very best man you could have to attend you.

WALT: Was he also the best man that you could've had to attend you?

WALLACE: Yes. I am changed. But into what?

WALT: You have perhaps found here a certain culture, a little of which may return with you, a seed to plant in the fertile soil of the college you have built.

WALLACE: Perhaps.

WALT: But you must also take a history too. We "Leaves of Grass" men are not fresh born, not some Darwinian mutation, nor a new form of consciousness even. We have always been here. Even when we have not known ourselves who we are. You must read Symonds. He knows. Ancient Greeks. Romans. As long as there has been history, we have been a part of it. And now you are too.

WALLACE: I don't know how to thank you.

WALT: You sang. I just helped the canary out of the cage.

WALLACE: Who must now migrate across the Atlantic?

WALT: "But now from thee to me, caged bird, to feel thy joyous warble" (*Laughs*). No better words to part on than my own.

WALLACE: I may convey your respects to the fellows when I return to Bolton mayn't I?

WALT: No.

WALLACE: Oh.

WALT: Give them my love. I am quite proud to have such a cluster of friends over there. It is, in one sense, all I have worked for.

WALLACE: They are better friends and better fellows than their words express. They have a love of you which is a growing one, and which, with some of them, is the deepest love of all.

WALT: I feel it.

WALLACE: As it is with me. You have become a father to me.

WALT: There is so much truth in this goodbye. And so, I must say this. I am failing. I feel the ebb, but it is welcome. We will not meet again.

*WALT is telling him he will die soon. WALLACE is suddenly overcome with emotion, tries to fight it, but lets out a gasp and the tears flow down his face.*

WALT: Goodbye Wallace. I am so pleased we met.

WALLACE: You have given me myself.

*WALLACE embraces WALT. They look at each other, WALLACE cradled in WALT's arms, crying freely.*

WALT: You return with the most precious gift.

WALLACE: And with your poetry.

WALT: Then you will never be alone. I will be with you in those words more than I am here now in this brittle body. But they are just words Wallace. They are not a life.

*WALT strokes WALLACE's hair and he composes himself. WALLACE kisses WALT on the lips, picks up the box from WARRY, goes to leave and stops.*

WALLACE: I was not disillusioned. I leave in awe.

*WALLACE exits, WALT smiles looking at him departing.*

## **Scene Ten**

*WALLACE and TRAUBEL on stage. STODDART starts to enter behind them.*

TRAUBEL: I have the liveliest send-off planned for you Wallace. Champagne and oysters at the Penn Club. There's someone I must introduce you to/

STODDART: /Joseph Stoddart. Editor "Lippincott's Monthly Magazine", a gazette of the finest writing you'll find on either side of the Atlantic.

WALLACE: I'm embarrassed to confess I am not a regular subscriber.

STODDART: You will be. You will be.

WALLACE: I do remember reading an edition last year.

STODDART: Which?

WALLACE: A friend at the College lent it to me. It was for a particular story, "The Picture of Dorian Someone" by Oscar Winter.

STODDART: Wilde. It created something of a sensation. I like sensational.

WALLACE: And I am sure you are a great success at it.

TRAUBEL: Mr Stoddart is looking at publishing something new on Walt. There is the issue of Symonds's biography still looming over us.

STODDART: I won't publish a damn word that lying catamite writes.

TRAUBEL: But Mr Stoddart might even be interested in your own account of this visitation Wallace. A new take on Walt from the English perspective.

STODDART: Walt Whitman! All white beard and wrinkles, but damn if he isn't more popular with the ladies than any man I know. I swear to you, there is a place upon his cheek kept clean solely by the kisses beautiful women place there.

TRAUBEL: White as his whiskers are, he has a twinkle in his eye still for every lady that visits him.

*TRAUBEL and STODDART look at WALLACE menacingly. They both take a step closer. Beat.*

WALLACE: I...I...

TRAUBEL and STODDART *(both taking another step closer)*: Yes?

WALLACE: I have seen....

TRAUBEL and STODDART *(both taking another step closer)*: Go on.

WALLACE: I have seen it too....with much envy. Walt could still be married many times over yet.

*TRAUBEL and STODDART smile, pat him on back*

TRAUBEL: As you could Wallace, as you could.

*TRAUBEL and STODDART exit.*

WALLACE *(to audience)*: A letter from Dr Johnston awaits me as I board the ship home stating that the vexing Symonds has written to us both. He talks of a local man in Bolton being arrested for sodomitical practices. Huge outcry. Crimes so serious the men have been sent to the Manchester Assizes for sentencing. Symonds asks what we're going to do about the case. I feel faint. I see myself in Court answering for what I've done here with Warry. I want to scream across the Atlantic, "Nothing Johnston! Do nothing! Say nothing Johnston! Johnston? Johnston?!"

*JOHNSTON enters promptly.*

JOHNSTON: I'm here. You have been admirably candid with them.

WALLACE: I can't face the next part.

JOHNSTON: I will face it for you. We needn't go for the pain of autobiographical naturalism. I can extemporise an illustrative montage.

*WALLACE nods.*

WALLACE: I haven't even left the shore and I already feel defeated, hemmed in. The canary caged once more for transit. Then the man who freed me begins to fail and I am lost.

## **ACT THREE**

### **Scene One**

*WALT is dying with TRAUBEL and DALMAS in attendance stage left. WALLACE sits upstage right reading "Leaves of Grass" fretfully. Enter JOHNSTON stage right.*

JOHNSTON: Wallace and I both keep regular, often daily, correspondence with Walt. I think we hope that the sentiment in our good wishes will fortify him somehow.

TRAUBEL (*reading*): Know that the deepest respect of the whole College is with you and that your recovery is always in our thoughts. Love and all affectionate respects Dr J Johnson.

*WALLACE gets out a letter and reads it.*

WALT (*writing in bed*): I must send you all dear fellows a word in my own hand, propped up in bed, deady weak, yet the spark still seems to glimmer.

JOHNSTON: Given the severity of his condition, the responses were naturally often short.



WALT: I continue about the same.

*WALLACE clasps his hands in prayer.*

JOHNSTON: Varied in content.

WALT: I had an excellent bowel movement this morning that has brightened my entire day.

JOHNSTON: And in the case of the last one from his own hand/

WALT: /More and more it comes to me that the only theory worthy of our modern times must be a combining of literature, politics and sociology with spirituality, then you will find the one simple, eternal truth that I have yet to tell - but the mustard plaster on my side is stinging and I must stop/

*WALLACE get on his knees and prays, get up and looks up to heaven as if awaiting a response.*

JOHNSTON: /deeply frustrating

WALT: Good-bye to all. W.W.

TRAUBEL: The remaining messages from Walt to the College are dictated to me.

DALMAS: I'm composing a song.

JOHNSTON: Walt finally passed from us on the evening of 26 March 1892.

*TRAUBEL holds WALT's hand weeping. DALMAS stands with arms outstretched to heaven. WALLACE is back on his knees praying even more intensely.*

JOHNSTON: Traubel has promised to publish a volume/

TRAUBEL: /Several volumes/

JOHNSTON: /that will offer the definitive account/

TRAUBEL: /Account-SSS.

DALMAS: Still composing.

JOHNSTON: Wallace takes Whitman's death the hardest. In an effort to relieve some of the loss, I increase the regularity of my correspondence with Edward Carpenter, hoping to draw him closer into our circle. Though he cannot replace Whitman in our estimations, Carpenter, himself an ardent Whitmanite, provides us with new inspiration about everything from Engels to sandals. Slowly Wallace improves. We get the news that Symonds has published his, well, if not wretched, then certainly highly contentious, biography of Walt. It is published on the day he dies. We hold our collective breaths, but there is no onslaught. Our fears had taken their toll though, and I propose a restorative sojourn to Carpenter's home, Millthorpe. It became a place of regular retreat for me where a special, precious space could be created far from prying, well, far from any eyes. Carpenter shared Millthorpe, with his homogenic lover, George Merrill, and for one memorable weekend with three members of the College.

DALMAS: And me. Still composing.

## **Scene Two**

*Millthorpe. WALLACE sits at the upstage end of a small table reading "Cosmic Consciousness" by Bucke, facing the audience. JOHNSTON and SIXSMITH stand upstage left and upstage right respectively, invisible to DALMAS and WALLACE. DALMAS enters, circles the room, as if checking for something, for a couple of moments almost aware of WALLACE and SIXSMITH. DALMAS stops satisfied and gets a chair and places it a little too close to WALLACE. WALLACE smiles at him.*

DALMAS: You should've gone with them.

WALLACE: I'll walk after supper. Though the air is a tonic, the early afternoon sun is a little too much for me. *(Indicating book)* Besides, I'm once again in the embrace of Dr Bucke.

DALMAS: I was hoping to have the place to myself. I want to riffle through everything and absorb.

WALLACE: Absorb?

DALMAS: The energies. The connections. I'm surprised you'd want to be alone with me after Worry.

WALLACE: All in the past.

DALMAS: Is it?

*DALMAS looks at the book in WALLACE's hand, and starts riffling through it to a specific page.*

WALLACE: He interviewed me, you know. I have had some experience with cosmic consciousness myself.

DALMAS: You?!

WALLACE: Have you embraced Dr Bucke too?

DALMAS: *(Pushing his shoulder against WALLACE's and staring intently at the page)* Fully. Though Bucke lacks any expertise in how to apply what he's discovered at a personal level.

WALLACE: I won't stop you. If you want to go around the place...absorbing. Carpenter won't mind. Higher purpose and all.

DALMAS: I can't when other people are present. It disrupts the energies.

WALLACE: Oh.

DALMAS: There's a timelessness here. Something connected to something wider, further off.

WALLACE: Everything is connected.

DALMAS: Of course. But some of the things here...most of the things here, I can see them in other people's hands... it's a window to another/

WALLACE: /plane of existence.

DALMAS: No. Time. Another time.

WALLACE: A window to the past? They say the house is built on the site of/

DALMAS: /The future.

*DALMAS suddenly grips the book and runs his hands over it, stares out into the middle distance, loses himself seeing something, then returns, letting the book go, which plops on to the table.*

WALLACE (*Picking the book up*): What did you see?

DALMAS: If there's another person present, I can't absorb, I can't build the picture. It's just twitching there, like an itch in a missing limb.

WALLACE: I can go into the garden.

DALMAS: Stay. I can reverse my polarities.

WALLACE: So Worry said.

DALMAS: Become more of an emitter, as it were.

*DALMAS stares at the page of the book that WALLACE is on, reading intently.*

DALMAS: He's so verbose.

WALLACE: I like the colour and context that he places around his reasoning; the confidence that arriving at each new insight fully briefed can bring; the joy of a journey towards an unfamiliar place with a map one recognises and trusts placed squarely in one's palm, secure in the adventuring but open to amazement in the simplest of overlooked eternal truths; the beauty/

DALMAS: /verbose. *(Placing two fingers on Wallace's lips)* Shhh.

*DALMAS jumps up, stands behind WALLACE, raises both hands open-palmed above WALLACE's head where they hover as if sensing an invisible aura.*

DALMAS: We are the universe. Each and every one of us. The universe is us. Outwards one. One inwards. One short life. One eternal life. One.

*DALMAS places his hands on WALLACE's head. He feels his skull and finds two specific bumps above his ears, either side of his head. WALLACE reacts with a suppressed quiver.*

DALMAS: One?

WALLACE: One.

DALMAS & WALLACE: One.

*DALMAS massages the spot on WALLACE's scalp rhythmically.*

DALMAS: Look straight ahead. Let your eyes drift out of focus. See with your mind. See with my mind. One mind.

WALLACE: One.

DALMAS: Let's try to emit a message, an image of this moment to the future. Let us make this moment and that moment one. One. Say it.

WALLACE: One.

DALMAS: One.

WALLACE: One. One. One.

DALMAS: One.

WALLACE: One. One. One. One.

DALMAS: (*Recoiling*) NO!

WALLACE: What?

DALMAS: That was four. You're meant to do three or five. No even numbers.

WALLACE: I'm sorry. I didn't know.

DALMAS: You've spoilt it. It's ruined. No one will ever share this moment now.

*DALMAS paces round the room, then suddenly rounds on WALLACE and kisses him on the mouth.*

*BLACKOUT.*

*Lights up on JOHNSTON sat at the table reading "Cosmic Consciousness" in the same position as WALLACE was. SIXSMITH is stood upstage left and WALLACE is stood upstage right, again invisible to JOHNSTON and DALMAS.*

DALMAS: You should've gone with them.

JOHNSTON: Alas, I am indisposed by not one, but two rather irritating blisters. Like all good doctors, I fail to heed my own advice, and hence my chafed predicament.

DALMAS: I was hoping to have the place to myself. I want to riffle through everything/

JOHNSTON: /Riffle? Riffing sounds a little, well, intrusive.

DALMAS: I want to absorb.

JOHNSTON: Absorb?

DALMAS: The energies. The connections. I can smell them, tingling in the air, like the moment before a sneeze.

JOHNSTON: Ahh. Dr Bucke's eternal energies?

*DALMAS nods and takes up the seat next to JOHNSTON.*

DALMAS: *(Looking at JOHNSTON)* Stronger here than anywhere.

JOHNSTON: But are we not all endowed with an equal amount of this eternal energy? You or I? Or this book? Or this table? An energistic equality, a kind of atomic socialism?

DALMAS: You've misunderstood....completely.

*DALMAS stands and paces round the room sniffing occasionally, almost sensing WALLACE and SIXSMITH as he moves.*

JOHNSTON: Forgive me. The scientist's mind. My Dora says I can't eat a piece of toast without theorising an equation for the production of charcoal.

DALMAS: Is he bored of me?

*DALMAS suddenly crouches down where WALLACE is stood and rises slowly, repeatedly sniffing the air near WALLACE's body, especially his arm pits and crotch.*

JOHNSTON: Who? Wallace?

*DALMAS sneezes.*

JOHNSTON: Bless you.

DALMAS: The dust of the future.

JOHNSTON: Wallace adores you.

DALMAS: I meant Carpenter.

JOHNSTON: It is hard to imagine how any man could respond to you with boredom.

DALMAS: Are you not bored of me then, Dr Johnston?

JOHNSTON: We are all delighted that you're here with us.

DALMAS: I am doing my best to be "delightful" to all of you.

JOHNSTON: And you are succeeding.

DALMAS: I am?

JOHNSTON: Utterly.

*DALMAS sits again next to JOHNSTON.*

DALMAS: I like your wife.

JOHNSTON: Mrs Dora Johnston is a woman of remarkable character.

DALMAS: I hate her character. It's her energy I'm drawn too. It's mesmeric.

JOHNSTON: Well, she was rather unsettled when you sat staring at her for over an hour and refused to speak.

DALMAS: I was mesmerised. Mes-merrrr-ised.

JOHNSTON: We must not let social convention stand in the way of a deeper understanding.

DALMAS: We must not let social convention stand in the way of anything.



JOHNSTON (*clearing his throat*): No.

DALMAS (*sniffing*): You smell of carbolic soap.

JOHNSTON: Professional hazard.

*DALMAS clasps JOHNSTON's hands, raises them and sniffs them.*

DALMAS: I like it.

*DALMAS starts licking the palms of JOHNSTON's hand repeatedly.*

JOHNSTON (*Suppressing excitement*): Goodness.

DALMAS: The pressure points in the palms are just as able to elicit a response as any phrenological bump.

*DALMAS lightly applies his teeth to the fleshy part of JOHNSTON's palm behind his thumb.*

DALMAS: And to connect one to the energistic truth of the universe.

*JOHNSTON moves on DALMAS and kisses him passionately on the lips, then sits back in his chair.*

JOHNSTON: Well I never.

DALMAS: I don't suppose you have.

*BLACKOUT.*

*Lights up on SIXSMITH sat at the table reading "Cosmic Consciousness" with a dubious expression, in the same position as WALLACE and JOHNSTON were. WALLACE is stood upstage left and JOHNSTON is stood upstage right, again invisible to SIXSMITH and DALMAS. SIXSMITH closes the book and drops it heavily on to the table.*

DALMAS: You should've gone with them.

SIXSMITH: I fancied to stay.

DALMAS: I was hoping to have the place to myself. I want to riffle thorough everything and absorb.

SIXSMITH: Absorb?

DALMAS: The energies. The connections.

SIXSMITH (*Indicating "Cosmic Consciousness"*): This tripe you mean?

DALMAS: You're not finding any resonances?

SIXSMITH: It's like the language of science, but without any actual science.

*DALMAS and SIXSMITH look each other in the eyes. Beat. DALMAS sits, closes his eyes and listens very intently, moving his head very slightly as if tuning in to something.*

SIXSMITH: You look like Max.

*DALMAS continues to tune in.*

SIXSMITH: He used to be a hunting dog, retired now. I took him in. Sits bolt upright sometimes listening for his old master's whistle that never comes. Just like you now.

*DALMAS opens his eyes.*

DALMAS: You knew.

SIXSMITH: Knew what?

DALMAS: Knew that I was listening/

SIXSMITH: /It were pretty bloody obvious/

DALMAS: /to the future.

SIXSMITH: Nay. Nay. Nay. I didn't know you were listening "to the future".

DALMAS: Listen with me. Close your eyes and let yourself just move away from the here and now.

SIXSMITH: I think/

DALMAS: /Close your eyes.

*SIXSMITH does so reluctantly.*

DALMAS: Relax your hearing. Follow the sound of my voice as you start to drift.

*SIXSMITH opens his eyes. Beat.*

SIXSMITH: You couldn't just give me prick a quick nosh could you? We don't know how long we've got until the others are back.

*DALMAS is wrong-footed for a moment. SIXSMITH unbuttons his flies*

SIXSMITH: Come on and get on this Philip. I've got a nice mouthful for you. Stop you talking shite for a couple of minutes.

*DALMAS goes under the table and starts to suck off SIXSMITH*

SIXSMITH (*reacting with pleasure*): Or maybe 10.

*SIXSMITH stays at the table being sucked off by DALMAS, who is still under the table, hidden by a tablecloth. SIXSMITH reacts, sometimes groaning throughout the next sequence. As WALLACE and JOHNSTON speak, they step downstage.*

WALLACE *(to audience)*: His effect on me was particular and unique. It was like the moment you read something that someone else has written decades ago that perfectly describes how you feel today; /a recognition and a naming and a connection of something incredible, that you thought only existed within you. The most private thing in you suddenly a part of someone else.

JOHNSTON *(overlapping with WALLACE)*: /a recognition and a naming and a connection of something incredible, that you thought only existed within you. The most private thing in you suddenly a part of someone else. That one kiss contained the universe.

SIXSMITH: I just wanted to get me prick in his pretty *(climaxing)* moooooouth.

*JOHNSTON and WALLACE both become aware of SIXSMITH and what has just happened. SIXSMITH becomes aware of them too. SIXSMITH grins and scampers off with DALMAS.*

### **Scene Three**

*WALLACE and JOHNSTON in same positions as last scene, but both with "The Adhesion of Love" scripts in their hands again.*

WALLACE: That's not how it happened.

JOHNSTON: No.

WALLACE: It feels like it though.

JOHNSTON: It is how I remember it, how I've imagined it perhaps?

WALLACE: Yes.

JOHNSTON: It's almost as if our dialogue here is constructed as an apologia for the coarse sexual speculation that the writer has just made. It's no more than him anticipating criticism; a calculated metatheatrical moment of pseudo-fictocritical self-referentiality.

*WALLACE looks at JOHNSTON bemused. WALLACE takes out a letter from the archive.*

JOHNSTON: You said that you wanted to show everything and beggar the consequences. I thought you meant it.

WALLACE: It's... *(sighs)*...it's painful is all. "Wallace is such an unbearable prig, a Pickwickian prig. He should be blown up! Much love to you Charlie. Ever your true/

JOHNSTON: /Philip Dalmas."

WALLACE *(leafing through the script)*: But that can't be the ending. Just me being rejected by both of them, and them getting with each other.

JOHNSTON: It seems to me that our writer has chosen to end thematically somewhere like where we began. You'd best tell it your way. I think you enjoy, well, without implying that you're long-winded in any way, the details. And this is a moment for detail.

WALLACE: 24th of August 1894. My father's funeral. Can't be any doubts about that, the date at least.

JOHNSTON: There's no record of the wake as such. So, Mr Hornby's made it up, but I think you'll agree you fit your part perfectly.

WALLACE: I'm relieved that I'm able to play meself.

JOHNSTON: I don't think I come off quite so well, but there it is, best show willing.

*WALLACE takes a seat. JOHNSTON composes himself and then enters the scene within a scene.*

JOHNSTON: That's everyone seen off. I can stay, or go, whatever suits you best.

WALLACE: First night alone in this house ever.

*JOHNSTON sits next to WALLACE.*

JOHNSTON: I'll stay.

WALLACE: No. Thank you. The first night alone must come one night, might as well be this one.

JOHNSTON: As you say.

WALLACE: I loved him. Respected him, but I never felt for him what I did for my mother.

JOHNSTON: No.

WALLACE: Yet it's worse, like a chasm opening up, a void. I read Whitman all day. I pray on it every night, trying to find comfort in God. I stare at the leaves on a tree for hours, willing a moment of cosmic consciousness, but nothing comes.

JOHNSTON: You feel orphaned.

WALLACE: More than that. I have no parents and no children and no one to love. No more Wallaces. I am the end of history.

JOHNSTON: My, my. You have turned poetical.

WALLACE: I feel...adrift. Empty. Pointless.

JOHNSTON: You have the College and the love of all its members.

WALLACE: It's not enough. I'm going to sell the house. It was a comfort after Mum died. It's not now. I need to leave Eagle Street.

JOHNSTON: The College must find a new home.

WALLACE: Who'll be there to do this for me John, ay? Not Philip Dalmas nor Charlie Sixsmith, that's for sure.

*JOHNSTON stands and walks a little away from WALLACE.*

JOHNSTON: I want to speak freely Wallace, out of love for you, but I fear today is not a day for such talk.

WALLACE: Today is exactly such a day. When you have faced death, you can face a few home truths.

JOHNSTON: Very well. I don't think you really wanted Charlie.

WALLACE: You knew about Charlie?

JOHNSTON: Of course I did. Our moments of "cosmic consciousness" with Dalmas were not the first time I've been so illuminated. While you were away with Whitman that summer, I was in Morocco with Carpenter and Merrill and, well, we expanded our consciousness there. Repeatedly.

WALLACE: And what of Mrs Johnson? Does Dora know?

JOHNSTON: It is not something I could countenance happening anywhere near Dora.

WALLACE: You do think it's some sort of betrayal of her then.

JOHNSTON: It is nothing more than an experiment and any actions are involuntary ones.

WALLACE: Involuntary?

JOHNSTON: Somewhere between Bucke and Whitman's work, I see that the higher spiritual state that we seek, is a fusion of male and female traits, the bridge between the sexes that the new age will require. It is simply that as one attains this, well, if not sexless, then at least sexually balanced state, the evolving inner feminine traits take hold briefly in the moment of rapture. Some spontaneous homogenic actions may result. As a scientist, I find it quite fascinating.

WALLACE (*standing*): What a load of bloody rot.

JOHNSTON: Wallace!

WALLACE: I'm sorry John. But today is about truth. You might call it cosmic consciousness now, to remove the taint from what you're doing, but what about then, before you knew of such things?

JOHNSTON: When?

WALLACE: I was 12. You'd just turned 13. You took me down to Beck's Meadow, the straw barn.

JOHNSTON: I don't recall.

WALLACE: Said you'd show me how to pull me pud. But then you did it for me. That time and many others. Expert pud pullers we became, and it were never our own puds we pulled.

JOHNSTON: I haven't thought about that in years. I'd completely forgotten it.

WALLACE: Aye, well I hadn't. I wanted him John. I wanted Charlie. It wasn't owt to do with the cosmos. I wanted to be with him like you are with Dora.

JOHNSTON: I know.

WALLACE: Well, you never said. It might've helped, you know, being able to talk about it with someone. I thought I was the only one in the world thought such things, wanted such things. It was Whitman that showed me.

JOHNSTON: I'm sorry. I didn't think you wanted to speak about it. I did try.

WALLACE: You should've tried bloody harder!

JOHNSTON: I tried to help in other ways.

WALLACE: Oh, aye?

JOHNSTON: I pushed you to go to see Whitman. I knew it would help.



WALLACE: How did you know that?

JOHNSTON: Worry.

WALLACE: You set Worry up to/

JOHNSTON: /I simply had the discussion with Whitman about what I thought you needed.

WALLACE: But you never said owt to me. All these years not speaking about it, talking about heightening consciousness when really/

JOHNSTONE: /I'm not saying I don't believe in cosmic....

*WALLACE casts him a silencing, withering look.*

JOHNSTON: It seems to have taken a day like this to enable me to speak freely.

WALLACE: What a state of affairs.

*WALLACE sits again.*

WALLACE: Happen you're right though. I don't want Charlie. Not really. I had a romance in me head about him. But the flesh and the sweat of it, with anyone like, I'm just not sure it's for me.

JOHNSTON: Even after you and Worry?

WALLACE: Even then. I mean I enjoyed it, what we did an all, but it's...it's not an easy business, not for the body nor the soul; not an easy business at all.

JOHNSTON: That it is not.

WALLACE: I think I want love the way that Walt defines it. The dear love of a comrade who delights in the love I give him, a bond that can be special, set apart from what we understand either friendship or marriage to be. I want to feel that bond, the adhesion of love.

*JOHNSTON is laughing.*

WALLACE: What?

JOHNSTON: You had it all along. You damn fool. You had it all along.

*JOHNSTON sits back down next to WALLACE and slowly entwines his fingers one by one with WALLACE's, then kisses his hand. WALLACE leans his head on JOHNSTON's shoulder.*

WALLACE: Well, look at us. Two dear friends/

JOHNSTON: /brothers since childhood/

WALLACE: Bonded for Life even/

JOHNSTON: /unto the grave.

### **Scene Four**

*WALLACE alone. As he speaks the other members of the college join him in reciting Whitman's poem flowing as if with one voice.*

WALLACE:

Recorders ages hence,

Come, I will take you down underneath this impassive exterior,

I will tell you what to say of me,

Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover,

The friend the lover's portrait, of whom his friend his lover was fondest/

WILD:

/Who was not proud of his songs,

but of the measureless ocean of love within him and freely pour'd it forth/

DALMAS:

/Who often walk'd lonesome walks thinking of his dear friends, his lovers,  
Who pensive away from one he lov'd often lay sleepless and dissatisfied at night/

SIXMSMITH:

/Who knew too well the sick, sick dread lest the one he lov'd might secretly be indifferent to him/

JOHNSTON:

/Whose happiest days were far away through fields, in woods, on hills,  
he and another wandering hand in hand, they twain apart from other men/

WALLACE:

/Who oft as he saunter'd the streets curv'd with his arm the shoulder of his friend/

JOHNSTON & WALLACE:

/while the arm of his friend rested upon him also."

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **Findings: Writing *The Adhesion of Love***

This chapter is a reflection on the research and writing process of the first play. It provides an overview of my archival engagement and makes some initial hypotheses about the relationship between archive, playwriting and historicity in relation to the absent but implied record of intermale sexuality. It also catalogues some specific emerging playwriting concepts and techniques. These are returned to, reconsidered and expanded on after writing the second play, in Chapter Seven.



*J. W. Wallace: John Rylands Library. Photographer unknown*

There are two UK-based collections containing the primary materials on the Eagle Street College (ESC): one at the John Rylands Library in Manchester and one at the Bolton Library. These include the original travelogues of Johnston and Wallace, with accounts of their separate visits to Whitman in 1890 and 1891. There are also a number of other collections that contain references to them, collections focussed around Edward Carpenter and Walt Whitman.

The existence of the primary materials to which a playwright can have access demands a response from me as an incidental historian. It offers the opportunity of finding something new, of seeing something that someone else did not, of identifying and cracking a code, especially a code in relation to hidden sexuality. All of this makes the prospect a compelling one. In this sense, the primary materials have what I am terming an “ontological weight”, a gravitational attraction given to them by the passage of time, that draws the writer in and requires that they must be consulted as if they offered a gateway to the past itself. There are secondary accounts of the ESC, primarily Salveson (2016), Rowbotham (2008) and Cocks (2003), and reliable, researched material available on both the Bolton Library & Museum Service and John Rylands Library websites. All of it is useful. But, as with any historical account, it is a selection of evidence to make an argument, and so will have left things out, and may have been partial or incorrect in its analysis. Significantly, nothing is said in relation to intermale sexuality. So, the draw to the primary sources remains.

There were a number of options as to how I could structure the research and writing of the piece which fell into three main types:

1. Complete all the research in one block and then start the playwriting.
2. Alternate between blocks of research and blocks of creative writing.
3. Write the play and then research highly selectively only to fill in historical details.

I decided the first option best suited my creative practice and completed all the main archival research on the ESC members, followed by the contextual research on intermale sexuality in the period, followed by additional biographical research on Whitman and Bucke. This is what I would term a “Single Block Approach”. The second option above could be characterised as an “Alternating Block Approach”, where research informs writing and writing suggests the next field of archival engagement. And third option I am terming a “Historical Thesaurus Approach”, where the writing is not inspired by the archive and uses it retrospectively in a limited way to find synonyms for language, actions and values in the present.

Within the Single Block Approach that I took, there is still the question of ordering the different forms of material: primary and secondary, narrative histories of the period, and sexuality and biographies. Would it have mattered if this had been completed in a different order? Would it have been better to do the contextual research first, and then I might have found more clues to coding and absence in the archival record? Would it have been better to do the research by theme, i.e. to work across the archives, existing historical accounts and contextual reading, looking, for example, at all of the mentions of spiritualism, or chronologically by year? Since I am unable to undo the research, I am unable to answer those questions. But I can acknowledge that there were other choices and in Chapter Seven I offer an account of the slightly different ones I made in the research for *The First Vampyre*.



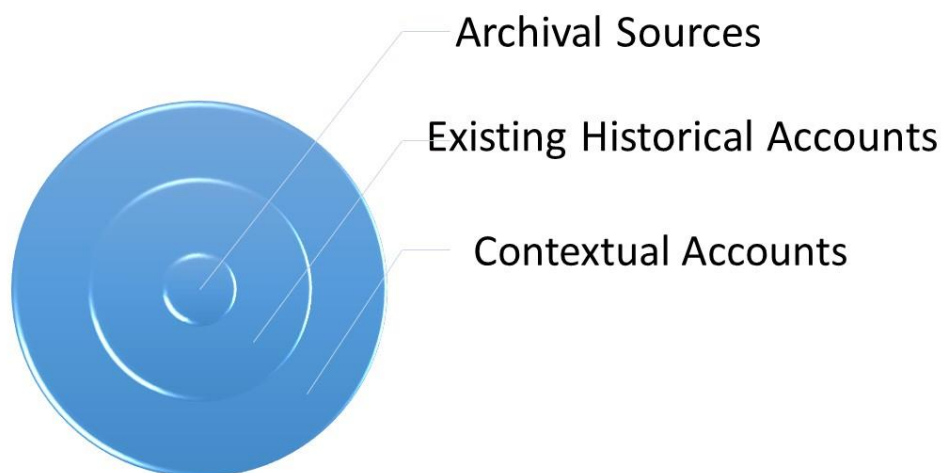
*Hornby examining photographic materials of the ESC in the John Rylands Library. Photo by Salveson.*

The decision of how to structure the research was then followed by a decision about how to conduct it. Some of my research into the materials held at the John Rylands Library was conducted jointly with Paul Salveson, who was separately researching the twentieth century history of the ESC. Jackson (2011) notes the “narrowing tendency” of a performance in a museum or historical site. By this he refers in part to the process by which a performance piece becomes imbued with the dominant historical discourse of the venue. Much as I valued Salveson’s accumulated expertise and ability to provide short-cuts for me through the archival material, this

joint archival exploration, literally working next to each other, did end up extending the field of Jackson's "narrowing tendency". Salveson was careful not to impose his interpretations upon me, but his historicising of these materials none the less hung heavy in the room, making it feel harder to approach the archive without his readings and assumptions redolent in my mind. I conducted my subsequent research visits alone to ensure I felt the maximum freedom to navigate the archive in any way my emerging historicisation of it required.

As important as deciding how to order my research was the decision about what *not* to research. I thought of it as a series of concentric circles moving outwards with less and relevance, which was helpful in terms of prioritisation. The records and historicisations of the College itself, and its members, are limited and navigable. Moving from those to the larger contextual record of intermale sexuality, and on to the immense amount of material available in relation to Whitman, relied on a kind of systematised ignoring of things. The graphic below provides a visual representation of my prioritisation:

## Research Prioritisation





Working outwards:

- “Archival Sources” is specifically just the primary documents and photos in the Bolton and John Rylands Libraries;
- “Existing Historical Accounts” includes not just accounts of the ESC itself but also of this period in the life of Whitman. Even that is such an expansive category that it needs to be narrowed down considerably to Whitman and his later sexual relationships with men, poems that express this and accounts of the end of his life and relationship with the ESC;
- “Contextual Accounts” starts with the accounts of intermale sexuality in the period, but also includes accounts of spiritualism, socialism, Victorian Bolton and the wider context of Victorian England in the 1880s and 1890s (again an expansive category that was prioritised loosely in that order).

Sticking to this form of limitation, I chose not to research either J. A. Symonds or Edward Carpenter beyond their most immediate connections to the College. I had already made a decision not to include either of them as characters, as they were so tangential to the lives of the college men in the period that I was dramatising. I also knew that to do either any justice in terms of characterisation, I would have to engage in another vast horizon of research, which wasn't possible in the available timeframe. Beyond the constraints of time, Whitman was already a colossus in terms of the weight of his dramatic presence. He was in danger of crowding Wallace out of the play. Adding in more characters of whom there was a significant historical record, would have left less and less space for the existing characters to be shown meaningfully.

However, it was also important not to be too doctrinaire about the application of this system of prioritisation. For example, I only found Dalmas in a moment of research despair when I looked to sources that I had previously excluded. I had convinced myself that there was no historical or ethical basis for thinking that any of the men had any experience of intermale sexuality beyond Sixsmith's brief affair with Dalmas. I then went to the Rowbotham's (2008) lengthy and meticulous biography on Carpenter, which I had previously discounted by following meticulously my prioritisation. Carpenter had lived one of the most open and recorded lives of intermale sexuality in the period. I looked Dalmas up in the index and found a crucial account of Wallace, Sixsmith and Johnston having all kissed Dalmas during a visit to Millthorpe in 1894. That gave me what became Act Three, Scene Two, the link to cosmic consciousness and sexuality, and the historicised validation of the sexual experimentation of the group's core members. It finally anchored my reading of their sexuality as something more than wishful speculation.

There is one candid piece of extant evidence of a member of the ESG talking about intermale sexual behaviour, a letter from Sixsmith to Carpenter quoted in Salvesson (2016, p.33), "Women attract me, and yet full intercourse has not satisfied me, and I prefer the company of men, and can be attracted to them also." There is also a Christmas letter from Philip Dalmas to Sixsmith dated 25th December 1894, which declares, "I love you very much dear boy". There is, however, no explicit sexual reference in Dalmas's love letter. The correspondence within the ESC members seems to deploy some of Whitman's poetic language of comradely love between men as a way of coding any erotic connection, disguising it in literary licence. This

allowed for highly affective communications, whilst also protecting against the correspondence being used in any legal context as evidence of either sodomy or gross indecency. Salvesson notes how emotionally expressive the correspondence between the men is at a time when it was actively discouraged for men to display emotions, let alone display strong loving emotions to the same sex. But routine, explicit sexual references are not to be found in the archives. Further contextual illumination was provided, however, by studies of Whitman himself.

Adhesiveness, in phrenology, is the delight someone takes in a loving friendship, a trait this pseudo-science expects to find predominantly in women. McGarry (2008) argues that phrenology itself was “a first draft of sexology” (p.168) and enabled phrenologists to identify the degree to which someone possessed the quality, not just of adhesiveness, but also amativeness. This was the propensity for conjugal love or desire to marry, which could be conspicuously absent in some men. Whitman, who himself had transformative experiences with phrenological readings, appropriates adhesiveness and inverts it to create the positive quality in men of “adhesive love”, his new term to describe intermale sexuality. Schmidgall (1997, p.113) notes how Whitman wanted to “celebrate the concealed”, and left adhesiveness and comradesly love as clues for the cognoscenti to decode. This enables it both to be openly expressed and for that expression to have a form of self-denial encoded within it. It legitimates some public forms of emotional and physical intimacy between two men, as long as these are presented as a deep brotherly bond that stops short of sex itself. This enables men who are in intermale sexual relationship to both write lovingly to each other and to be physical in front of others, whilst avoiding legal, religious or moral strictures. It’s an all-in-one validation and disavowal mechanism,

which works to effect intermale sexuality as long as those deploying it are willing to deny that it does. Whitman even does this himself when repeatedly challenged by Symonds for his biography about claims of homosexuality, counter-claiming outrageously to have six illegitimate children. This is a claim for which no historical evidence has ever been found, see Schmidgall (1997). The expression of intermale sexuality using the frame of adhesiveness would leave a record of the affective expression men make to each other in letters and in speeches about the general principle, but its disavowal defence means that no record of the concomitant sexual behaviour would be likely to be recorded. A naïvely literal exploration of such records would therefore be likely to conclude that passionate male friendships were only that.

Wallace makes the links between Whitman's emotional expressiveness and the feelings of the group members, and of himself explicitly. In his letter to the group of 6 January 1893 he states, "Let no man hang back in dread or doubt!...it is for us to do as Walt did – to proclaim that man includes all distinctions and diversities – that brotherhood and comradeship applies to all men...that love binds all and that God lies hid in the hearts of the meanest." Salvesson (2016) notes that, "Wallace is talking about being more than 'just good friends'" (p.31). In another public address, Wallace chooses the Calamus poems, the Whitman poems most expressive of intermale sexuality and states, "It is obvious that the love of comrades is vitally different from the tepid feelings that pass for friendship...It is a vital and enduring bond – deep as life – which unites kindred souls...". A more personally affective example is Wallace's letter to Whitman of 15 March 1892, "Day by day I think of you with tenderest sympathy and love. If only I could come for a moment to your bedside and

imprint upon your lips a long loving kiss. Be it as if I were with you and now upon the paper I send you one as a token of my dearest love. X". It was clear to me that although there is an absence of any direct evidence of Wallace desiring intermale sexuality or acting on that desire, there is considerable evidence of him using Whitman's adhesive love formulation in order to speak about intimacy between men, and that the consistent and repeated presence of one implies the other.

Wilkinson's (1996) historical methodology of "unintended testimony" allows for what is not written in an autobiographical account to be seen as plainly as what is. Extending it to the realm of hidden intermale sexuality proved to be a fruitful way to explore Wallace's diary and the correspondence between group members, Whitman and the American Whitmanites like Traubel and Bucke. The context required for this method is first provided by the general historical accounts of the way intermale sexuality was negotiated in the period: Brady (2005) Cocks (2003,) Cook (2007), Robb (2003) and Walkowitz (1992). A selective reading of these texts demonstrates the degree to which intermale sexuality was hidden and coded; the social, financial and legal risks of discovery; the ways in which religion was interwoven into the discourse; a horror around naming the sexual acts in print; a period of rapid transition in the final part of the 19th century, where a variety of labels for intermale sexuality are experimented with and begin to inform notions of identifiable types; and an overview of how all levels of society were orchestrated not just to suppress and punish intermale sexual behaviour in the present, but also to erase it from the past and deny any history of such behaviour. Given these extraordinary pressures, it is a wonder any record of intermale sexuality has survived at all. As Robb (2003) comments, "To judge by the large number of destructions, at any moment in the 19th

century someone, somewhere, was burning the papers of a homosexual relative” (p.137).

It is hard to get the shape of an absence and judge the significance of it from historical narratives written by hermeneutical historians, who primarily make their arguments from what has survived. So, to avoid endlessly over-inferring that everything that is absent from an archive could theoretically be present, I have elaborated from Wilkinson (1996) the concept of “ripe silence” in relation to intermale sexuality. “Ripe silences” are the places where one would reasonably expect something to be said and yet where it isn’t. Judging what is “reasonable” in this formulation is something I acknowledge is highly subjective. This emerged from my research and early writing process, as I noticed that I was giving more weight to some areas of absence than others. The “ripe silence” is an indicator that self or external censorship is at work. As a playwright, I am used to consciously deploying the dramaturgical device of subtext. Subtext allows for something to be unwritten in a play script as it is played in the moment of performance by an actor. This can include playing the opposite in performance to what the line means literally, if that is the logic of the character’s intentions at that point. But I also have to be confident that the subtext is sufficiently strongly present in the text for a director and actor to subsequently see it and make the correct inference. If I look at the historical evidence of intermale sexuality in a similar way, i.e. for implication and undertone in conjunction with the absence of what otherwise might have been said, then the notion of “ripe silence” emerges. Navigating it, when it is perhaps no more than the shadow of the missing, is something that evolved during the course of writing *The Adhesion Of Love (TAOL)*.

Some specific examples are helpful in adumbrating the concept further. Wallace's travelogue does not make any overt comments about intermale sexuality, or indeed about sexuality at all. It does not make any commentary on having met a single woman he was attracted to, or even mention any woman in detail on a visit that lasted just under two months. There are a couple of passing references to Whitman's housekeeper and Traubel's wife, but nothing that suggests anything other than a polite interest in either. He does make one extraordinary entry, out of nowhere, stating that he asked Whitman for Peter Doyle's address as he wants to write to him. In and of itself, there appears to be nothing unusual about it, until one notes from Schmidgall (1997) and Norton (1998) that Doyle is one of Whitman's lovers. Whitman wrote about Doyle in code in his diaries. He may have been the most significant sexual and emotional relationship in Whitman's life. Knowing that, Wallace's request, seemingly innocuous, takes on a different complexion, as does Whitman's reply that he has lost touch with Doyle for over two years. Wallace's silence around Doyle except for this one request is intriguing, a "ripe silence". This is an indicator that something is missing from the account. There is an absence for which creative speculation might act as a proxy for evidence.

Couple this with the presence of the young, handsome ex-sailor, Warrington Fitzgerald, in Whitman's household as personal carer and masseuse, and I formed the over-riding impression that Wallace's visit to Whitman involved Wallace exploring his sexuality. This gave me the opportunity to work out an internal journey of self-discovery for Wallace that sat alongside his physical journey of Whitman-worship, the latter becoming a metaphor for the former. Wallace became the historian within

the play, gathering evidence about Whitman's past (a notion that Whitman refers to several times), who is then finally able to travel into the future, the site of Whitman's tomb. My detailed examination of the historical evidence that Wallace left enabled another hidden story to emerge, coded in the absences and undeveloped presences in the diary of his visit. But this still left the puzzle as to why more had not been done by Bucke or Traubel to find Doyle for Whitman.



*Whitman (L) and Doyle (R). Photo by M. P. Rice, Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress*

In the Bolton Library Whitman collection, there is a letter dated 8 February 1893 that Traubel writes to Wallace detailing an account of how Daniel G. Brinton wrote to him refuting allegations of Whitman's "homosexuality". Brinton is a prominent American Whitmanite who will subsequently become the President of the Walt Whitman Fellowship: International. The letter from Traubel opens, "This is what Brinton writes to me on the question of homosexuality, 'I do not know that it was Symonds who spoke of WW's homosexuality...Symonds has for years researched Italian poetry



which is deeply impregnated with abnormal sexuality prevalent in the Italian Renaissance. (*There*) Symonds would have been justified in his suspicions. But of WW? No.' ” It struck me in reviewing this letter that Traubel goes to contorted lengths not to comment directly on Whitman’s sexuality himself. He refers to homosexuality neutrally in terms of subject matter and then quotes Brinton’s rejection of Symonds’s claim that Whitman was “homosexual”. He does not himself comment directly on Whitman’s sexuality and remains silent on whether he thinks the possible speculation from Symonds is right or not. I think this is another “ripe silence”. Its ripeness opens up a series of questions which are probably unanswerable in historical terms but are cues to creative responses. Seeing how carefully Traubel had composed the letter, what he had said and what he had avoided saying was intriguing. What if Traubel knew Whitman was homosexual or had homosexual relationships? He appears to be colluding with Brinton in covering something up whilst not actually agreeing with Brinton explicitly. And this is a letter to Wallace. So, what did Traubel think of Wallace’s sexuality?



*Traubel: John Rylands Library. Photographer unknown.*

This led me to a wider reading of the copious correspondence between Traubel and Johnston and Wallace, and into secondary biographical sources. Traubel published three volumes on Whitman whilst he was alive, and another six volumes on him after he had died and was Whitman's Literary Editor. In that sense, he is one of guardians of the public image of Whitman. He himself appears to have had a full emotional and sexual relationship with his wife and there is nothing to suggest otherwise, no ripe silences. Bucke is in a similar position. He published a biography on Whitman in 1883 which avoids any mention of intermale sexuality and seems to have had a fully emotionally and sexually engaged relationship with his wife, with whom he had eight children. From their correspondence, both of them are aware of J. A. Symonds's rival biography which they fear will be more explicit. Linking Traubel's careful sidestepping of Whitman's sexuality with the lack of any serious search for Doyle spoke to me of an orchestrated attempt to create a heterosexual, or at least not explicitly homosexual, legacy for Whitman. Act Two Scenes Five and Ten were written in response to this, where a full "straight-washing" plot is imagined between Traubel and Bucke.

In terms of prioritising researching different forms of record, I especially wanted to see all the extant pictures of the ESC members and I went to some lengths to view all of them in the John Rylands collection. There is a special impact that a photo has in connecting the temporal gap between the moment of it being taken and the moment of its future viewing. The pictures interested me for a variety of reasons: the degree to which they are self-consciously composed and so people are presenting themselves as they would like to be seen; the way in which clues can be found in them (for example, there is one picture where Carpenter has his hand placed

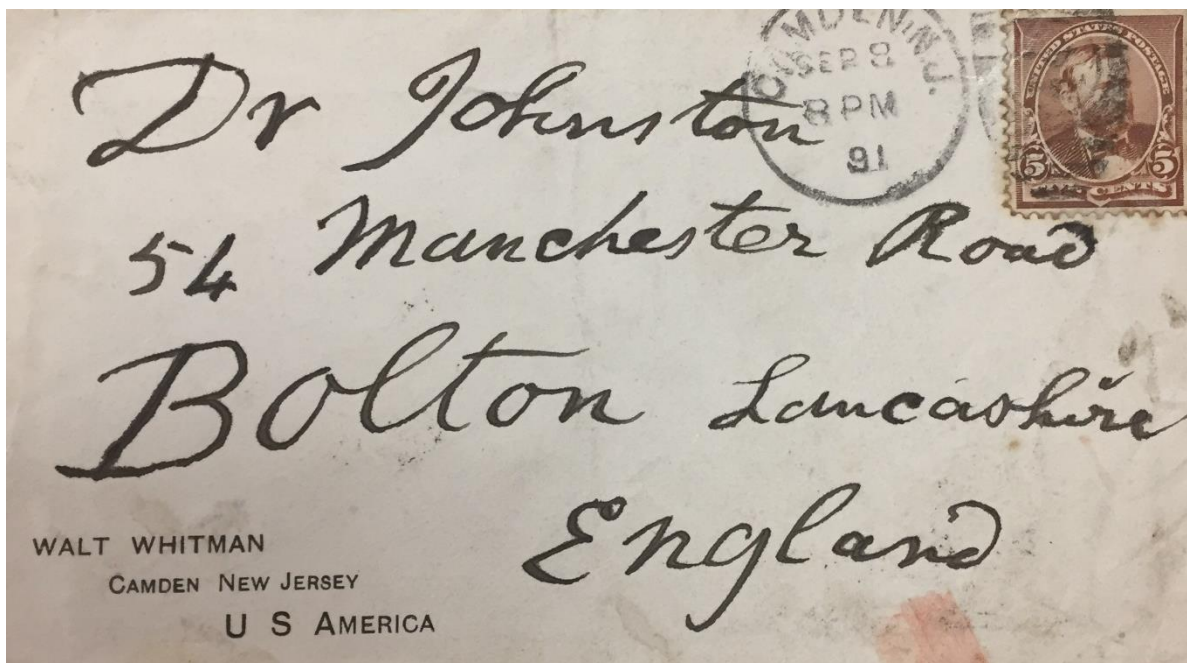
suggestively on Sixsmith's thigh); the extent to which they also can act as a form of Wilkinson's (1996) "unintended testimony" (for example, Johnston's presence in a photo of Morocco with Carpenter and Merrill, a place strongly associated with intermale sexuality – the photo also contains an unknown figure with their face scratched out, adding to its scandalous implication). The embodied element of a play's production is fundamentally and profoundly visual, and so the appeal of photographic research is axiomatic.



*Carpenter (C, seated) places a hand on Sixsmith's knee (R, seated): John Rylands Library. Photographer unknown.*

Beyond the data that the physical archive can present, there is something about the somatic experience of holding things and smelling them and feeling them that creates an emotional connection that I don't find possible with digitised materials. The vivid sense of this embodiment of the past, and of the illusion of the collapse of the object's era into mine, are the direct inspirations for some elements in Act Two,

Scene Six. Whitman is writing a postcard to Dr Johnston and says, “Few things occupy the mind so completely with a thought as the act of writing it down. It is that intensity which impregnates itself into the page” (p.53). That was my experience of handling letters from Wallace and Carpenter and envelopes hand-written by Whitman. The special unity of mind and body that writing requires seems to somehow charge these objects with an added layer of presence. I go further at the end of the same scene in a discussion of Emerson’s famous letter to Whitman where Whitman says, “It is not a letter. It is a moment in 1855, and the means to travel there” (p.55). The original objects bristle with their temporality. However fantastic, that was my experience of touching and smelling some of the evidence in the archives. It did provide a form of time travel, or perhaps the illusion of it, in a moment of olfactory connection.



*An envelope hand-written by Whitman to Johnston: Bolton Library Whitman Collection . Photo by Hornby.*

The existence of specific objects in the archive inspired their use within the play and the creation of new origin myths for them. Retroactive continuity is a literary device

by which something in the fictional present refers to an established fictional past and changes its perception and/or meaning. Perhaps it even contradicts what has previously been established, creating a new line of narrative from the present to the altered past, see Pagnucci and Romagnoli (2013). It is usually abbreviated to “retcon”, and here I am extending the term specifically to “archival retcon”. This describes the process in relation to objects in special collections and documents in archives.

The Bolton Library Whitman Collection has within its collection two unusual but well-known objects: a stuffed canary bird and a large, twin-handled mug. The canary was Whitman’s own and was the inspiration for his poem *My Canary Bird* (Whitman, 2017). Upon its death, it was stuffed and sent with Dr Bucke as a gift on his 1891 visit to the ESC. It is on display in the Bolton Museum’s permanent collection along with the conventional account in Wallace’s travelogue of its origins. As one of the most visible and distinct parts of the archive, I wanted to retcon the canary, to turn it into something else, not a loving memento from Whitman but something darker that got to crux of the hidden intermale sexuality in the group. At the end of Act Two, Scene Three, Whitman reveals to Wallace that the message of the canary was double-edged, “But it is only skin, a gutless thing, with eyes of glass. Its song has left the air and nothing but the gesture of the song remains. It is merely an outline....You cannot become the ghost of something you have never been Wallace. Make sure you sing your song. You must take the canary not just as a remembrance, but as a warning” (p.43). So, the canary, or rather the stuffed feathers, beak and skin that remain, becomes a prescient warning of the sexless life that Wallace will come to lead. And this taxidermal relic on display in the Museum

becomes a metonym for the sexless version of the men's lives that the Museum, circumscribed as it must be by conventional historicising, tells in its permanent display of the canary and the wider Whitman Collection and online.



The Loving Cup and canary: Bolton Museum. Photo: Hornby

The other clearest example of “archival retcon” in the play is lighter and more benign: the large twin-handled mug that is known as the “Loving Cup”. It was in fact given to the group in 1894, some three years after Whitman’s death.

This unusual gift was from a visiting American Whitmanite. Until 2009, the original cup was used in an annual ceremony by the Bolton Socialists’ Club. This involves a walk in the East Lancashire countryside during which stops are made to read out Whitman poems and drink from the Loving Cup at sites associated with members of the ESC. The Bolton Museum no longer allows the original to be used. A copy was commissioned which has been in use since 2009, gradually accruing its own history. Given that the original was central to this annual celebration of Whitman for so long and is also prominent in the museum’s permanent collection, I retconned it. In Act Two, Scene Nine Whitman is mixing Sangaree (a blend of white wine, lemonade and sugar) and says, “One day I may send it to Bolton and the good fellows, and you will drink with them from it, long after I am gone. Perhaps on my birthday and read a poem or two?” (p.67). Connecting the cup literally and metaphorically to the mouth of Whitman is a way to create another link between the rituals of today and an

imaginary moment in Whitman's past, the moment of Wallace parting from him. It contradicts the historical record, deliberately, but is consistent with a line of sentiment that runs from the current Whitmanites back to Wallace and Johnston first writing to their literary hero in 1885. This archival retcon is a way to tidy up history, to offer a version of events that is neater, simpler and creates an enhanced resonance between the object and the person it celebrates. Of course, in so doing, it runs the risk of becoming a historical simulacrum. But envisioning the potential future debates as to the provenance and intended meaning of these gifts simply demonstrates another way in which the play can be historically provocative. The deliberate wrongness appeals to sentiment or evocative imagery to make it *feel* right, when in fact it is a calculated distortion, potentially pointing to wider distortions in any narrative historicising, such as the erasure of intermale sexuality. Archival retcon used in this disruptive manner depends though upon a level of knowledge about the correct provenance of objects in order to be activated. With the play in performance at the Bolton Museum, its dialogue with the objects it is retconning within the same building is apparent. Away from that context, the device risks losing its charge. However, perhaps the notion of archival retcon can be seen more widely to somewhat obviate this.

Could the whole of the play itself be regarded as "archival retcon"? The inventor of the term Tupper (1974) stated that, "...retro-active continuity actually means that history flows fundamentally from the future into the past" (p.100). I, as a gay playwright in the present, am reaching back into the record of the past and challenging the established historiographical narratives of the sites in which the archives are held. The Bolton Library and Museum webpages on their collection

make no mention of the sexuality of any of the men involved, even those for whom there is a historical record of sexual and emotional relationships with men, such as Charles Sixsmith and Edward Carpenter. The play disrupts that record of the past and reconstitutes it. This offers a line of continuity between the way we navigate intermale sexuality in the present and the way I have imagined that some of the men navigated it in the past.

These examples of archival retconning prominent objects in a collection as part of the playwriting process lead into a wider discussion of the application of what I am terming “authenticating” and “de-authenticating devices” in the play. There are a number of ways in which the text uses authenticating strategies: the characters are all named after actual people who lived and for whom there is a record; the three specified settings are all the sites of the main events depicted; lines in the play have been adapted from Wallace’s (1917) account of his journey to Whitman, from Whitman’s (2017) poetry, from Traubel, Whitman and Wallace’s correspondence and from Bucke’s (1901) account of cosmic consciousness; within the play itself, both explicitly in the discussions of recording events (in Act One, Scene Eight) Wallace says, “I kept a meticulous diary of every meeting, every moment with Mr Whitman...” (p.32) and in Act Two, Scene Four, he nods to the eventual publication that happened in 1917; and implicitly through the interweaving of references to extant historical documentation (letters, postcards, diaries, etc.) into scenes; and by the use of biographical information from primary and secondary sources on each of the characters represented.



*TAOL* does have explicit de-authenticating devices in the script designed to draw attention explicitly to the limitations of my own historicising and by implication to other historicisings of the ESC. Already noted is archival retcon as one such device, in relation to Whitman's stuffed canary and the Loving Cup. More significantly, both Wallace and Johnston are able to take metatheatrical positions as critical narrators of the text they are performing. The play opens with each of them holding a script of the play discussing their view of its candour. Wallace is initially reluctant to explore the sexuality of the group, whereas Johnston embraces it. Wallace also points out that elements of the script have been invented, here Wallace consulting a spiritualist following the death of his mother. Periodically, the characters continue to draw attention to both the play's research and writing processes. In Act One, Scene Two, Johnston implores Wallace to perform the scene with the spiritualist as it's the next step in his "supernatural narrative arc" (p.9). At the end of Act One, Scene Four, Johnston references a "narrative compression device" before it is deployed in the succeeding scene. Wallace references his own travelogue at the end of Act One saying, "I've done half this writer's job for him... Now, Mr Hornby is determined to tell you what he thinks I didn't" (p.32). Wallace is careful not to say that Mr Hornby is right, only that what we are about to see is Mr Hornby's version of events. To underline this, Johnston again admonishes Wallace for this resistance to Act Two, most pointedly saying, "It's not your story anymore" (p.32). Johnston demonstrates a knowledge of the dramaturgical devices that are being deployed by me and embraces them. Wallace is unaware of these and more concerned with the historicising of the play. This creates some dramatic conflict in their meta interactions, but it also enables each process of what the play is doing to be clearly presented and problematised, frequently in the moments before it does it. Not only

does this serve to expose how the play is operating in terms of the relationship between dramaturgy and historical record, it also functions in an ethical way to make visible the admittedly speculative historical reading of these characters that I have created. Act Two is written as a coming out story for Wallace, using what Johnston describes as “autobiographical naturalism” (p.72). As the act begins, the fact that it is my version of the story and not Wallace’s is clearly asserted paradoxically by the fact that the character of Wallace lays claim to it.

Metatheatricality only returns to the play as Wallace returns from America at the end of Act Two. Seeing him in distress, Johnston intervenes, offering to “extemporise an illustrative montage” (p.72), which is then the dramatic form of Act Three, Scene One. The play also makes fun of any potential positioning as “accurate”. In Act Three, Scene Two, Dalmas is using mystical energy to connect the moments in 1894 to the future, trying to ensure that it will appear somehow at another time. Of course, the audience is in fact watching this at a future time. Dalmas *ipso facto* succeeded, but in the scene Dalmas concludes, “No one will ever see this scene now.”

The opening of Act Three, Scene Three is an exchange between Johnston and Wallace about the writer’s intention in using them as a metatheatrical device, as a built-in apology for anyone who is offended by the three sex scenes that have proceeded it. It is also a discussion about how the play can feel like truth, conform to an imagined past, but still be factually untrue. Wallace reminds us, “That’s not how it happened” (p.85). The narrative selection that has been used to create the ending, and the degree of invention required to depict the aftermath of Wallace’s father’s death, are also discussed. Johnston comments to Wallace, “There’s no record of the

wake as such. So, Mr Hornby's made it up, but I think you'll agree you fit your part perfectly". Then he disparagingly adds, "I don't think I come off quite so well, but there it is" (p.86). The character who shows the most understanding of the dramaturgy of the play turns critic and disparages it, a final piece of self-effacement by me as the writer, again signalling to the audience that the characterisations are limited in historiographical terms.

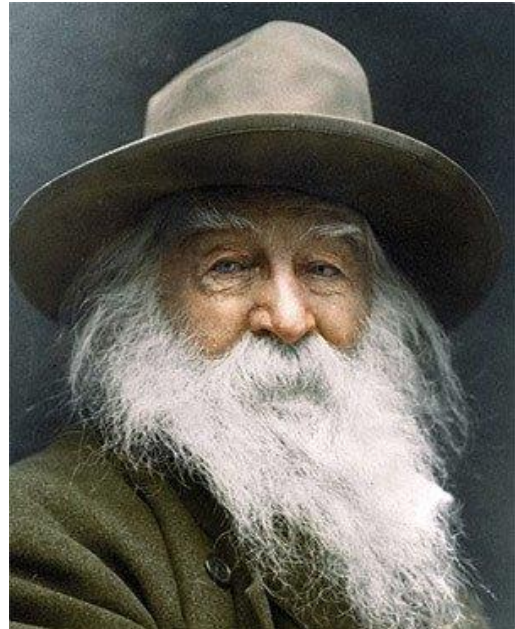
The moments when "Mr Hornby" is mentioned also reveal a triple narrator structure. Johnson and Wallace are the diegetic narrators, both capable of taking control not just of the story, but also of the style of its telling and both taking different views of events, significantly Wallace's relationship with Sixsmith. The two references to "Mr Hornby" are placed at significant points, one at the end of the first act, just before the play changes location and style, and the other immediately prior to the penultimate sequence in the final scene of the play. This creates the presence within the script of three different narrators invested differently in the story, and some degree of tension between them as to what should be represented on the stage and how, an example of Jackson's (2011) "heteroglossia". It also invokes the actual creator of the narrative, the real Mr Hornby, far off-stage somewhere in the past writing the play. Mr Hornby is distinct from "Mr Hornby" the character of the playwright, who is the person writing the joke about how badly "Mr Hornby" has written Johnston's dialogue.

The other way in which I imagined the play being de-authenticated was in the casting. For both the table read and the rehearsed reading, I deliberately used a younger, black woman to play Whitman, the play's most iconic figure, the figure that

people may well picture as an immobile, old, white man with a flowing beard. Demographically, a young, able-bodied, black woman is far removed from this, a constant signifier at another level to the audience that the play is not aiming to create a replica of the original people and events. The idea for this came from some lines of Whitman's (2015) own in the poem *With Antecedents* which universalises race through time and provided an opportunity to turn Whitman into the embodiment of them.



Flo Wilson as Walt Whitman.



Photographers unknown.

Walt Whitman in 1891

I had chosen to open an earlier version of the play with those lines prior to considering the casting, “And that where I am or you are this present day is the centre of all days, all races. And there is the meaning to us all, of all that has ever come of races and days, or ever will come.” Having a black woman as Whitman gave the truth to those lines. It made them universal in a way that casting someone who looked like him would not. It helps move the whole play away from bio-drama and into something more allegorical.

The initial phase of research, which I conducted with archival records of the College, was a challenge, as the anxiety of creating a story was ever-present. It was hard to resist narrativising as I researched. At one level this was a good thing, as my intentions were primarily dramatic, but at another it was a disadvantage as it risked closing down the process too early. I found a technique to avoid this rush to a narrow narrative selection. Rather than assessing the archival material in terms of its ability to populate one single story, I focussed on the idea of a compendium of related stories. As a story occurred to me, I embraced it and wrote it up as a brief outline of no more than a couple of paragraphs. By spending a short time writing these ideas out, each narrativising response to the archive could be expunged. It could be approached again more neutrally and openly as research. This plurality of potential plots had a further advantage. It stopped me getting locked into one narrative too early which would then act as a conscious and subconscious research bias, and it also provided a bank of ideas for when I reached the point of actually wanting to undertake the narrative selection to create the play. Many of those that were inevitably abandoned as the central narrative still ended up informing smaller plot moments or elements of characterisations or lines of dialogue.

Having completed the initial archival research, I was left with about a dozen different potential sets of events that could be organised into causal chains and related to each other to form a narrative. I chose one instinctively, but I can see retrospectively that I was applying some narrative selection criteria. These were: the centrality of intermale sexuality; the extent to which the archival record can be used in different ways; and the degree to which I found the story dramatically compelling. Originally, I

had thought the narrative selection would create a triple protagonist story with Wallace, Johnston and Wild telling the story of their life-long friendship from different perspectives, or a dual protagonist play with Johnston and Wallace's twin accounts of visiting Whitman as the heart of the piece. The story of the ESC needed to be focussed down to one man's story. Given the detail of his travelogue to Whitman and the wider historical record that he offered, there was only really one choice, the leader of the group, Wallace. Thematically, this offered his journey through sexuality, loss and bereavement, friendship and spirituality, across the span of a decade for which a variety of historical records remain. Every scene Wallace is in sees a change and he is the one who has a series of obstacles to overcome. The complexities of the silences in Wallace's account and the way Whitman pushed others off the stage as soon as I dramatised him, meant that it was Wallace's version of Whitman that I wanted to focus on. Wallace's life offered the most immediate dramatic potential.

The first two versions of the play were closely based and centred on the Wallace (1917) travelogue, a detailed account of the eight weeks he spent in America staying with Traubel and Bucke. It is the one document that offers an almost hourly insight into Wallace's actions, and into his recording of those actions, mindful of the future intended audiences. He travelled to all the significant sites of Whitman's life, even his tomb. Wallace appears to have recorded virtually every word Whitman spoke, almost like a playwright would annotate a play, with briefer prose summaries of what he and other people said. The document initially felt like the core of the play for a number of reasons: it provided a map of their conversations and concerns; it gave me Whitman's conversational voice; and it was a record of a physical journey that

Wallace was taking - a journey being one of the most common forms of narrative in archetypal story structure, see Yorke (2013). Its existence provided the inspiration for the plot and the heart of what was to become a three act structure.

As soon as I read in Johnston and Wallace (1917) that Whitman greeted Wallace with the line, "Well, you've come to be disillusioned, have you?" (p.90), I knew that this moment was the moment from which the whole play would grow. It was a very contemporary moment: the meeting of a hero, worshipped from afar, whom new technology (in this case, transatlantic steamers and telegraphs) had enabled a physical connection with. Yet this hero was wise enough to know that after such long-distance pedestal-placing, the reality and limitations of his presence would be disappointing. The travelogue seemed to lay weighty claim to being represented in the play. However, whilst it offered copious detail of Wallace's journey around Whitman, it did not offer a real emotional journey of transformation, a core component of dramatic realism. It offered a character study, a charming and interesting one, but if the diary was taken at face value, there wasn't really a narrative beyond: man visits literary hero, has a nice time, comes home. I initially determined though to start by transcribing the account Wallace offers of his time with Whitman and then see where the detailed consideration of each line of their conversation would take me. I wanted to see what would emerge, to trust that there was a nascent story within this record, and that once all the characters had dialogue, a subtext might emerge, a way to make Wallace's physical journey into a personal and metaphorical one. I anticipated gaps, and that the gaps would themselves evoke questions as to what was missing and why, what other things could've been recorded and what other things the people could've said and done, what might be

happening just off the page and in the mind of Wallace as he decides not to write something down.

Dr. B.: "Horace has had a letter from Symonds this morning, and will let you have it to-night."  
 W.: "Have you read it?"  
 Dr. B.: "Horace read it to me as we were waiting for Wallace. I guess Symonds is in a bad way - dying. I don't mean that he will die in a few days, but in a few months likely. He talks of having his 'warry' with him at Florence - someone to attend to him." (W. listening silently, except for one or two occasional "oh's", evidently affected.)

*Page 5 of the 1901 typescript of Wallace's diary in Bolton Museum. Photo by Hornby.*

The first draft felt something like a verbatim dramatisation exercise. Belfield (2018) outlines his methodology for verbatim theatre, distinguishing it as presenting words to the audience as people said them and therefore as a truth. He allows that the text produced has been through a subjective, judgement based, narrativising edit, which will heighten some things and background others. Whilst I had not interviewed Whitman myself and then transcribed it, the exhaustive detail with which Wallace had done so offered the opportunity for an "at one remove verbatim", or perhaps a kind of "historical verbatim", as a basic dramatic form for the early versions of the script. Accordingly, my first draft amounted to little more than writing out Wallace's account into a play format. Much of Whitman's dialogue was simply lifted with the responses of Wallace and others sometimes having to be unpacked into dialogue by me from the précis that Wallace offers. As I completed the exercise, I did do some editing, but a good deal of what was in Wallace's account survived, even where I could feel that there were dramaturgical problems with what I was writing. Version 1 was a deliberate attempt to create a stage version of Wallace's time with Whitman that was true to his own written testimony, a kind of taking stock, to see if the



process of writing out the travelogue into dramatic scenes offered in itself any insights.

The second version of the play amounted to a prune of the most obviously extraneous material, but the essence of the tone, content and form of the piece remained the same. This left me with a wealth of unused evidence about the ESC. I also knew that for Wallace's journey to have the most impact as a process of change, we needed to see Wallace before and after that change. The crucial tasks for the third version of the script became heavily editing down what I had written to form the middle of three acts, and then writing acts one and three. The first act would cover 1885-90, Wallace's forming of the ESC in the light of his mother's death, and his decision to visit Whitman. Salveson (2016, p.33) identifies one letter from Charles Sixsmith to Edward Carpenter that talks about his sexual attraction to men. Salveson also notes that Sixsmith joins the group a couple of years after its formation. One of the puzzles in the historical record is that Johnston was the first to visit Whitman and that Wallace, the founder and informal leader of the group, did not go with him. If Wallace didn't go in 1890, what would drive him to go in 1891? I decided that my Wallace would be in love with Sixsmith. He would bring him into the ESC as a way to begin to express some of the comradesly element to that love through Whitman's poetry, but be unable to acknowledge that this involved sexual feelings. Sixsmith, in contrast, would be sexually active away from the college. He would grow frustrated with Wallace's chaste declarations and reject him for the want of that additional intimacy, an intimacy that Wallace can barely acknowledge, as Wallace believes in Whitman's adhesive love. This would act as the spur for Wallace to travel to America. Sixsmith's letter had created the unrequited love story

that is the main plot of the first act and which is ultimately the inciting incident that sends Wallace on his journey.

The evidence that inspired what was to become the heart of Act Three comes from Rowbotham's (2008) biography of Edward Carpenter, who has some contact with the college. She uses papers from the Carpenter Collection held at Sheffield Archives to piece together the visit in 1894 of Sixsmith, Johnston and Wallace to Carpenter's home, Millthorpe, where each of them in a moment of "cosmic consciousness" kissed a visiting young American Whitmanite, poet, musician and mystic Philip Dalmas. At the same time as writing the dutiful dramatisation of the Wallace diary that formed the first version of the play, I also experimented with using this other evidence to create a sequence which was completely different - a sex comedy set in 1894 about Dalmas mystically seducing the three men. It was quite separate in style to the main play and so I simply set it to one side and labelled it as "Scene Blue", as a colour nomenclature avoided any sequential connection with the main piece. As I was creating an Act Three, based on the story of what happened to Wallace after his return, I came back to Scene Blue and re-examined it. 1894 is the same year as the letter Sixsmith wrote to Carpenter and also that Wallace's father dies. The records in either of the main archives do not enable a clear date to be established, but somewhere in the mid-1890s Wallace moved out of Eagle Street, thus symbolically also ending the life of the college (though it continued in reality for many decades at other locations). Whitman dies in 1892. Connecting all of these pieces of evidence into a sequential, linear narrative forms Act Three.

In terms of the characterisation process, initially I simply wrote down every biographical detail I could find about each person as I worked in the archive, uncertain yet which characters would and would not be in the play. I was trying to solve the problem of transhistorical identification, of being able to relate to a character and their expression of their sexuality without simply playing what Jones (2009) calls “Hunt the Homo”, i.e. seeking a simple equivalence between the sexuality of now and then. Wallace is not simply gay, but he must be relatable, and this is why we see him as a friend, as a host, as a grieving son to make connections with him in the assumption that grief and good manners and friendship are recognisable, valued, and at their core not so very much changed. Wallace’s actions do not create an identity for him. He can be a *Leaves of Grass* man in America, but he can’t maintain that when he is away from the privileged space that Whitman creates. He can enter the world that Carpenter makes for himself, but he cannot force the ESC into being his own equivalence of it.

By the end of the archival trawl, it was clear which characters were the most significant in terms of the volume of extant records on them. I had not made a definitive narrative selection at this point to create the story, but I did have the sense of who the main characters were. I looked to secondary sources to find out more about them, especially characteristics, from the perspectives of different historians. Then I undertook a creative act and developed my version of them from what I knew, mindful of the potential narrative connections between them, the need for dramatic contrast and how they might function dramaturgically in the script. For example, Wild became a comedy character usually telling bad jokes; Bucke became quite sinister as his work in the asylum is revealed; Traubel a manipulative opportunist. I

had also collected various concepts that I wanted to embody in some of the characters. The characterisation of Dalmas was partially inspired by Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography. Freeman (2010) advances this notion as a way of encountering the past physically, of discovering it already partially in the present, of the body resisting the chrononormative pull of an ordered present ticking through rationally determined units of time. Dalmas' present in the play is the 1890s, however, this is inflected not with the past, but with momentary glimpses of the future, that future being the present of the audience in the moment of performance. He encounters time in bodily terms. He feels the future, sneezes and licks his way towards it, but only manages a fleeting connection, one that he doubts but which the audience is aware is truthful on the mimetic terms within which it is produced. His ability to do this is also linked to his capacity to experience cosmic consciousness, itself a time-disrupting vision of eternal, universal truths.

Once the headline narrative selection was done, i.e. this is a play about Wallace and the impact of his visit to Whitman, and a sense of the characters developed, I needed to structure a story in the dramatic form which Yorke (2013) et al suggest. Wallace is my protagonist. The forces of antagonism are the repressive and internalised strictures of homophobia that not only ban sexual expression between men but also want any record of it to go unrecorded. These are embodied by Bucke, Traubel and Stoddart, mostly obviously in Act One, Scene Seven, and Act Two, Scenes One and Ten. I then structured an inciting incident, which is stalled, then acted upon (Wallace's delayed decision to visit Whitman), a journey of self-discovery and change (Wallace's time with Whitman), a crisis where the protagonist appears defeated (Wallace submitting to Traubel and Stoddart's insistence that Whitman is

heterosexual), a climax (Wallace attempting romance again with Dalmas) and a dénouement (Wallace discovering the adhesive love he and Johnston share). There are turning points at the end of Acts One and Two. Act One is the story of the failed relationship between Wallace and Sixsmith which acts as a trigger to visit Whitman. Act Two is recognisable as what Campbell and Farrier (2016) and Clum (2000) would term a “coming out” narrative, except that it folds back on itself at the end. Act Three is the failed return home, where a new insight cannot be integrated into an existing life. There are a series of losses for Wallace: Whitman’s death, rejection by Dalmas and the death of his father, but this is redeemed by the love of Johnston at the end of the play in a dénouement that validates a form of intermale love and allows for, but is not dependent upon, sexual expression.

Jones (2009) suggests that there are essentially two narrative models for dealing with coming out in texts:

1. Four stage model of coming out: first awareness; testing and exploration; identity acceptance with disclosure to heterosexuals; identity integration.
2. Two stage model of coming out: sexual questioning; disclosure to others.

Wallace’s narrative can be seen as a failed variation on Jones’s four stage model, with “coming out” successfully replaced with adopting the “Leaves of Grass Man” compromise. The play shows Wallace in terms of his awareness-growing with Sixsmith (and in the uncomfortable observations of others), testing and exploration, first with Sixsmith which does not end in sex, and then with Warry, which does. Whitman is the enabler of this identity disclosure, but then the process gets blocked. Although the heterosexuals know, or least suspect (Act Two, Scene Five dramatises

this with Wallace and Traubel), they act not as witnesses to this new affirmative identity, but as agents of its suppression. This throws Wallace's tentative adoption of the identity itself back into confusion as the price of it comes into focus. This regresses Wallace back into an earlier mode of testing and exploration. In the penultimate scene, Wallace reaches back in time and discloses the first expressions of this stage - his sexual experiences with Johnston, which Johnston has suppressed. Johnston's acknowledgment of this does not lead to the "coming out" of either man. Rather it leads to Wallace's rejection of intermale sex altogether but in a way in which intimacy and life-long love with a man is still validated. In terms of Jones's narrative model, there is a failure of identity integration. *TAOL* is a "going in" play. It would be a tragedy were this not softened by the presence, in the ending, of adhesive love between Johnston and Wallace. Wallace is only asexualised after a period of experimentation, possibly because he simply doesn't enjoy the actual mechanics of sex, possibly because the risks in his hometown are too great. But there is no doubt that he possesses a sexuality and the strength to find some space to express it, even if that involves crossing the Atlantic to do so.

It was only in writing the third version of the play that I felt I had attained a position of confidence with the historical records and secondary material. This confidence emerged following the table read of the second draft. I felt fully free to cut, alter, conflate, reconfigure, invent, reassign, fill-in and just generally depart from the record of events in order to serve the dramatic realisation of the piece as playwriting. This state I am terming "historical literacy". Essentially, it is not simply having cognisance of the historical record, nor just of the secondary material, though both are required. The "literacy" arrives when the playwright feels empowered to alter and augment in

their dramatisation because their embedded historicisation is aiming to communicate something about the past to an audience which isn't simply found in a reproduction of historical events. It frees the playwright from the tyranny of accuracy. The meanings of past events cannot be recreated simply by reproducing those events. And so, if the playwright is aiming to discover those meanings and communicate them to a modern audience, they must depart from the reproductive impulse in historical drama.

On starting the first play, I expected that there would be a period of research and that this would lead to my own discrete historicisation of the material, to "historical literacy", the moment when I was confident that I had the history, and that from this moment, the characterisations, scenes and stories would fully form. In fact, it was much messier. One of the things that emerged is a qualification around the notion of "historical literacy" that is perhaps a defining one in contrast to "historical accuracy". I needed to gain the confidence to purposefully alter things, to push any vestigial notions of accuracy aside. I think the ontological gravity of all the archival evidence had held my internal incidental historian engaged for too long. The process of laying a claim to "historical literacy" is, therefore, not just about having completed the research, it also involves a moment of self-permission giving that allows the story of the playwright's historicisation to fully emerge. The story is something that the archive should inform and inspire but not dictate, especially when the record of intermale sexuality within it is so limited.

I would also note that there was at this stage an emerging distinction in my application of historical literacy - broadly between leading and supporting characters.

The gravitational field of the ontological weight of the archival record is not felt equally. With the leading characters of Whitman and Wallace, I definitely experienced this more strongly, and deviations and inventions were deeply considered, with a high degree of self-justification being required. Also, to a secondary degree, with Sixsmith and Johnston. With supporting characters, i.e. those that were there primarily to move the plot along or to illustrate something about the main characters like Traubel and Bucke, I felt a greater degree of latitude to alter things more freely to whatever serviced the other functions of the writing. So, the play makes differentiated claims of historicity depending upon the characters under consideration.

Positioning the third draft of *TAOL* as the point at which I achieved historical literacy can also be read as the distinction between adaptation and appropriation. Sanders (2006) notes that the distinction between the two is overlapping, but in essence an adaptation points out the source whereas an appropriation makes a longer journey away from the material and may not directly reference it. Further she differentiates between two kinds of appropriation: one where the original text is embedded within the new text and one where the original text acts only as a base which is not necessarily reproduced in recognisable form. *TAOL* is neither fully. Acts One and Three are a dramatising of the historical record without a single direct source that they are appropriating or offering an adaptation of. Act Two could be argued to be an adaptation of Wallace's (1917) account with some of Whitman's dialogue, the topics of conversation and most of Whitman's positions and views being derived from Wallace's travelogue. However, the departures it makes from Wallace's originary text are considerable, not just in relation to sexuality, but also in relation



to the venality ascribed to Traubel and Bucke. In that sense, the play overall then is more of an appropriation into which a significant amount of the original text has been embedded within the middle act of the play, which is itself part of a larger story.

The concept of “historical literacy” versus the concept of “historical accuracy” is also important in terms of the process of meaning creation with an audience. Miller (1986) points out how an object preserved unchanged through time attains different meanings, not because it has changed, but because the passing of time has acted as a form of reverse explication, changing the interpretations available. Accuracy in terms of embodying a reproduction of past language and action, even if it were possible, should not be conflated with recreating the original meaning of that language and action. Having written *TAOL*, I have started to think more in terms of the concept of attempting “proximal equivalences of meaning”. Having deployed a limited hermeneutical historical research process to attempt to establish the historical reading of events that I wanted to dramatise, I reflected upon that reading in terms of my subjective view of the possibility of reconstituting the original meaning of events. This can be set out as a tentative minor methodological variation as:

1. Assessing the re-presentation of the events and language in terms of whether it would be likely to create the same or similar meaning to a contemporary audience;
2. Re-presenting them if they would;
3. If they are unlikely to - an assessment which can be tested with feedback from table reads or rehearsed readings with invited audiences - altering what is re-presented in order to attempt a proximal equivalence of meaning.

This involves a deliberation and purposeful alteration to the stage presentation of the historical record. This is not a change made for narrative or characterisation purposes. It is one made explicitly to acknowledge Miller's conception of "afterlife", of the almost inevitable "social reallocation" of a concept, social custom or form of language once it is temporally shifted. This is limited to aiming for a proximal equivalence of meaning, as a precise equivalence may not be available. A consideration of religion is one example that can be used to further illustrate the point. The importance of the development of the Labour Church movement in the 1890s is clearly set out in several of the historical accounts, see Barrow (1986) and Salveson (2016). Some of the College's members, e.g. Rev Sam Thompson, were clearly very involved in religion and the college even met sometimes at the Bank Unitarian Chapel. Beyond a couple of stage pictures where Wallace is praying, I have largely ignored organised religion. Formal church worship in the UK has declined to around 17% of the population, see Rudgard (2017), and yet belief in spirituality, in the broadest sense as something beyond science and the rational, remains high, see BBC (2013), at over three quarters of the population. In terms of the broadly metaphysical as a presence within the play, I have mirrored this to focus on cosmic consciousness and spiritualism, both of which the play affirms to different degrees. These are my attempts at a proximal equivalence of meaning in a largely secular age which still validates more personalised forms of spirituality. It allows the play to contain metaphysical elements, without irrelevant exposition about the beliefs and strictures of the Victorian Labour Church Movement. The moral strictures on intermale sexuality that religion imposed are already internalised in Wallace and have a proxy representation through mentions of the law.

Another example of seeking proximal equivalences in the play is in the coding of the sexuality. I have made some things more literal both in terms of the code and the process of coding, on the assumption that my audience will not all know the significance of specific, esoteric references to intermale sexuality. These are necessarily subtle and easy to miss, for decoding only by the cognoscenti. The phrase “Leaves of Grass man” is given a very heavy underlining whenever mentioned. Additionally in Act Two, Scene Four, Whitman carefully explains his process of codification for writing about his male lover, opening up the possibility of other ciphers within the play. I had to establish a code explicitly and show the process of codification in tandem with the code, rather than simply hint at it from its hidden state and assume the audience would be in on the encryption.

The closest related archival source to Wallace’s account of this visit to Whitman is Johnston’s account. Before reading it, I had wondered whether this material would suggest a similar treatment to the one I had given to Wallace’s diary, and that the dramatic form to emerge might be two parallel accounts of meeting Whitman that could chime off each other in some way, perhaps as two inter-locking monologues. Johnston writes in markedly different style to Wallace. His account is briefer and less redolent with significant absences and, to me therefore, generally less interesting and evocative. It is not something that I could find a dramatic way into, but the notion of using Johnston as a narrator, not of the story of his visit to Whitman, but as a device in Acts One and Three emerged from this. Johnston’s diplomatic, possibly slightly obsequious, tone in his account also provided a rich starting point for his characterisation and dialogue.

I chose naturalism for Wallace's account of this visit as that is very much the mode he writes his travelogue in. Everything is recorded in detail, creating a vividly realistic picture. He notates almost every word that Whitman says in some of their conversations. Johnston has a much greater brevity about him and captures essences rather than the minutiae. He is more episodic and creates less of the linear, real-time narrative than Wallace does. Johnston as narrator suits a Brechtian form using some of the "Verfremdungseffekt" devices (Brecht, 1964): narration to audience, commentary upon the script, tableau, and simplified, indicative characterisations (all used in Acts One and Three). The dramatic style changes between acts are made explicit in the text. Wallace takes control of the play at the end of Act One and is initially critical of the writer's determination to show all the elements of his life. By the end of Act Two, Wallace declares that he is lost, and the narration is surrendered to Johnston, who immediately moves the play out of naturalism with a dramatic montage that compresses time and location.

I avoid adopting the full practices of Epic Theatre, and it is perhaps an uneasy blend, but a deliberate one. The middle act's shift into naturalism is a way to demonstrate that the narrative style of the play itself is simply a loosely agreed set of staging conventions. So, they can be discussed in the same way as the research of the play can be discussed and deployed or not deployed. The adoption of naturalism in Act Two is ironically then itself a form of "making strange" with a play that has, for the previous act, been using a different dramaturgy. Act Two's naturalism is dropped at the end of Act Two, with the play again changing style, and reverting to the dramaturgy of Act One, the contrast making the stage conventions and construction of Act Two's naturalism all the more obvious. The stage conventions are a way of

creating the mimetic world of the play. They act as a metaphor for the world of sexual expression that Wallace is able to make for himself in America and his inability to remake it in Lancashire when he returns to a world that reverts to the rules that were in place before his journey.

In Acts One and Three, I am not really attempting to present a mood of scientific rationalism to the audience, indeed I am deliberately constructing Wallace's journey as an emotional one. I am adopting the techniques then for two main reasons. Firstly, they allow for a brevity of narrative exposition and for temporal compression. For example, Act One, Scene Five moves from 29 May 1887 to 1890 in less than half a page. Secondly, and more significantly, it allows for the historical reading in the play to be shown and made explicit on stage. In the final scene, Johnston even comments that the dialogue he has been given doesn't suit him very well. Johnston has been constructed on two levels: the narrator character who can comment on the dramaturgy of the play, and the Johnston character who is in the closed world of the play and may have deficiencies in the mind of the Johnston narrator. At the end of Act One, Wallace makes direct reference to the fact that he has transcribed the dialogue of Whitman and that I, as the playwright, have used it, perhaps more accurately appropriated it, in the technical sense of Sanders (2006). Twice I am mentioned by name, which is stylistically the biggest incursion into the closed world of the play, letting it bleed more thoroughly into the auditorium and the meta-environment of the writing and staging of the play. I have a kind of fleeting off-stage presence in those moments, invoked to have my writing criticised or rebuked or diminished by the characters I have written. The on-stage implied interaction between character and playwright is, of course, a metaphor for the playwriting

process where the voice of the character has grown in my head as a separate and distinct one.

There is one obvious conclusion from examining the archives that Wallace starting the College after his mother's death is not coincidental. Jones (2009) identifies the reoccurring trope of "chosen family" in gay historical fiction, both as a way to organise affective bonds in the present and to negotiate generational difference and inheritance outside of the reproductive system of heterosexual society. The establishment of the Eagle Street College is Wallace inventing a family and he frequently speaks of the unique bonds between its members. Freeman (2010) explores how notions of inheritance and inheritability can be reconfigured so that generations can be linked by forms of entertainment that exist across time and to a lineage of political activism. I didn't realise until writing Act Three and searching for some symbolism for the last scene that Wallace's father died in 1894. This leaves Wallace isolated, orphaned and alone, unable to genetically move across time. He is the end of his line, as he states in Act Three, Scene Three, "I am the end of history" (p.87). Wallace needs to be offered other forms of inheritance and continuance, alternative ways of placing himself into a relationship with past and future generations. Within the world of the play there is one sort of solution. It is what Warry offers about sex between men in Act Two, Scene Eight being a "compass of sorts" (p.66), but not one that works very well upon Wallace's return to Bolton. What Johnston offers Wallace in the ending is lifelong love, adhesive love, but there is still nothing that will pass it on to the next generation. The answer, of course, is in the fact of the play itself as an act of historicisation as well as drama. In the widest possible sense, I am a child of Wallace's, a non-literal great, great

grandchild. The writing and the placing of the play, and my placing of a production of it in the context of LGBT History Month, is also my own attempt to become inheritable, to be able to leave a point of connection for those that will come after me, to create a form of gay inheritability and to offer my own genes, or at least the product of their creative functioning, in the shape of a history play. The play in turns memorialises someone else who did not biologically reproduce but who is still spoken of by generations to come. I reach back to Wallace and form a chain to the future.

*TAOL* isn't a comedy but there are lines and whole scenes created with the intention that they are funny. There is evidence in the testimonies of Wallace and Johnston to the good nature and humour that was part of the ESC, but little written evidence of it survives in this historical archive bar some dialect poems and the lyrics to some songs. Wallace's written style for his speeches can be quite ponderous and they can sound like leaden homilies. The commentary Whitman makes on his food intake and bowel movements in the correspondence is comical in contrast to the Christ-like character sketches of him that Bucke (1901) and Johnston (1917) write. One early option I was considering was just to have Whitman purely as a comedy character, the man who actually was a great disappointment and have everyone pretending that he wasn't, with less and less conviction. As Wallace's narrative emerged, however, this was abandoned. Whitman's line about his bowels in Act Three, Scene One is the only remaining element of the idea of an aged Whitman as an essentially comic figure.

Performing a sense of time visibly disrupted on stage is something central to my conception of a history play. The staging of any play in the genre already creates a triple-layered sense of time, as Rokem (2000) points out: there is the time of the events, the time of the writing of the play and the time passing of the performance of the play in the ever-moving present. Freeman (2010) examines how chrononormative discourses of temporal logic can be queerly unpicked and reconfigured. I deliberately set out to disrupt the chrononormativity of some scenes, to make time a theme within some sequences and to create a series of devices whereby time on stage registers differently to the passage of time in the room where the play is being read or performed. This is established in first two scenes of the play. In Scene One, Wallace is both in the moment of his mother's death and seamlessly at some later point looking back on it. In Scene Two, time is doubly disrupted. At the start of the scene, Wallace comments that his mother's death is "weeks past" and by the end of a single, flowing conversation Johnston assesses that, "a couple of years is nothing" (p.12). In the scene itself, Wallace is in two times at once. He is both in a conversation with a series of experts and in a conversation with Johnston at a later point about those series of experts. There are a number of other chrono-disruptive elements. Wallace and Johnston as narrators can move out of the timeframe of the play, change the pace of time in what they are presenting and address the audience in the present, cognisant of the playwright and the act of writing the play. Whitman and Dalmas can both move through time in different ways: Whitman through smelling an envelope from 1855 and Dalmas through the deployment of mystical energies. In the visit Wallace makes to America, he metaphorically moves through Whitman's past and into his future. More mystically, the medium in Act One, Scent Two contacts the ghost of Wallace's mother, a voice



from his past. And finally there are the moments that Wallace and Johnston hold hands. The gesture activates a time-shift. They are taken back into their childhoods at the top of the play and long into the future of the longevity of their love at the end. Johnston's final line in Act Three, Scene Two, "Unto the grave" is also a temporally disrupting line as it anticipates their deaths, but uses the arcane version for "until" "unto" to do so. Thus he is both simultaneously reaching forward and reaching backwards.

There is no unity of time in the play, though there is a linear narrative. On reflection, it may have been more resonant to have also created a non-linear narrative, so that all notions of chrononormativity were disrupted. I do think, however, that the play uses time, the recording of time and the cognition of temporal location as points of discussion within scenes, and then structures the actual temporal logic of the scenes themselves to make time visible as a past-making and future-making process. This approach of using a series of devices within the diegesis of scenes and outside of it, I am calling the depiction of "multi-variant time", i.e. presenting time as anything but something which is experienced through an objectively measured universal system. This suggests to an audience that the play has some power to conflate the past into the present, to both do what it obviously does in re-presenting a reading of the past and to do something metaphysically more than that.

In his consideration of specifically gay dramaturgy, Clum (2000) provides both an overview of the main gay representational strategies of the last two decades of the twentieth century: kissing, male nudity and drag. And the first assessment of the major themes of gay historical drama: martyrdom, traitors, war, resistance, and

heroic-making. Finally Clum, the taxonomer-in-chief of gay drama, says that all progressive representations of homosexuality are elaborations or expressions of five things: display, polemic, self-examination, transformation and celebration. *TAOL* only connects to a few of these elements. Wallace is neither a martyr nor a hero. He is not broken by the homophobic system that he exists within; he even manages some acts of defiance, but the space in which these acts are possible is small and foreign. The expression of intermale sexuality is legally, culturally and religiously prohibited in the Bolton of the 1890s and is an obstacle that he cannot overcome. The only other expression of physical love with a man that we see Wallace express is again in another small, alien space: Millthorpe. Wallace's tentative transformation with Warry is over almost as soon as it's begun and the one kiss from Dalmas ends in rejection. The only thing that the play validates, as opposed to celebrates, is a life-long intimacy that is not based on adult sexual expression for its continuation, the relationship between Wallace and Johnston.

The play also has a limited connection with queer dramaturgies. Savran (2003) sets out the theatrical devices typical of queer dramaturgies: shuffle of temporal sequence, use of memory, cinematic intercutting, use of drag, spectacularising the male body, reimagining community or family, and universalising white queer subjectivity. The acts of gender, performance and theatre are all deconstructed and unpacked as a conscious dramaturgical device. Campbell and Farrier (2016) argue that in addition, to be truly queer, a performance must not just feature a "queer" lead but that the *mode of delivery* must be queer too. This is typified as involving meta-theatricality, disrupting hierarchies and expectations, multi-role playing, direct address to audience and any device that draws attention to the performer performing

the performance. Again, the play has a few of these elements. Johnston and Wallace as narrators do draw attention to the performance of the play itself, there is some multi-rolling as it is written for doubling between some of the American characters and some of the Bolton men, but this is about expediency in production as much as anything. There are strong elements of the play that still remain “gay” within the terms that Farrier and Campbell (2016) set: “...’gay theatre’ might focus on recognisably gay stories and characters, but perhaps within a character/plot-based form that asks for empathy from a mainstream audience, and without drawing attention to the theatrical act as construct, or questioning the idea of coherence of ‘character’... In other words, these works largely remain in the (heteronormative) dominant western theatrical mode of psychological realism and attached to the neoliberal focus on the ‘subject’ (and their rights)” (p.13). It is certainly a play about Wallace. It does draw attention to the play as a researched and written thing by the playwright, but this is mainly for the purpose of displaying its historicity, of drawing attention to which part of the play are based on historical record and which parts are invented. It is not about unpacking the whole dramaturgy of the play and not at the expense of coherent characterisation, or of narrative, and nor does it require an investment in the personal history and story of the writer, or performance by a queer auteur. So, it isn’t a queer play.

In the process of this script’s development, I have explored and developed the notion of “historical literacy” as a contingent part of my methodology for writing a history play. It is a position which requires both a targeted engagement with the remains of the lives I am dramatising and a willingness to depart from the evidential implications of those remains. I have started to sketch out a language for some of the

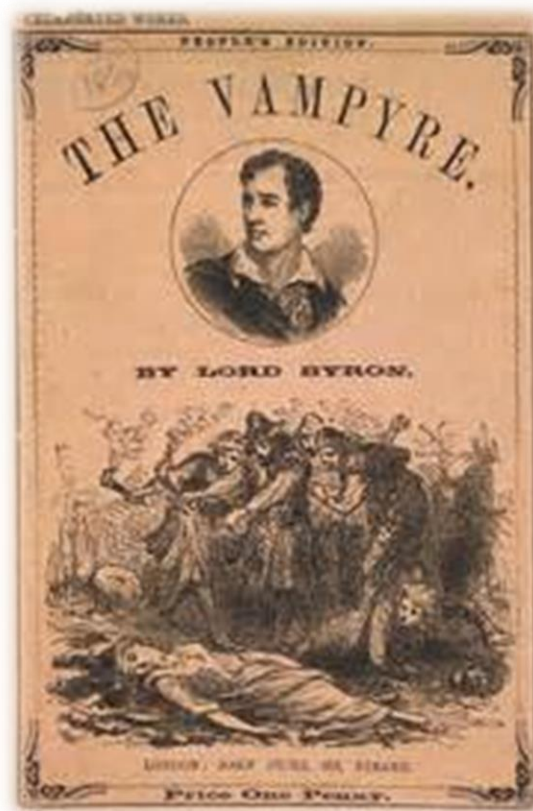
dramaturgical strategies and playwriting devices that I am evolving: archival retcon, authenticating devices, de-authenticating devices, multi-variant time, proximal equivalences and ripe silences. Several of these devices were explored further in writing *The First Vampyre* and are theorised further in Chapter Seven.

*The Adhesion of Love* is a significant attempt to reveal a hidden history, to offer historically literate speculation, to generate new knowledge about the group and to suggest something has been hidden in plain sight. It both allows Wallace to become disinterested in sex whilst not presenting him as intrinsically asexual. It breathes sexual life into adhesive love and demonstrates its effectiveness as a code, as a licence and as a defence. But the play is also constructed to present its own historicising and to offer criticism of it. This is achieved through the intermittent metatheatrical moments of Johnston and Wallace. These perhaps reflect my own uncertainties at the point of writing the play about the ethics and limitations of what I was attempting. Was it fair to retrolabel the sexuality of historical figures like this? Was it too speculative? Would Wallace and Johnston be horrified and object? In the end, I can only resolve this by repeating the line I gave to Johnston in answering Wallace's objections within the play, "It's not your story anymore."

CHAPTER SIX:

# THE FIRST VAMPYRE

by Stephen M Hornby



*Inside cover of "The Vampyre": British Library*

## **CHARACTERS**

### Biographical characters:

- John William Polidori: Early 20s. A physician and writer.
- Frances Polidori: Late teens. An educated woman and translator.
- George Gordon (Lord Byron): Late 20s. World famous poet.
- Cam Hobhouse: Late 20s. Military man with an eye to a career in politics.
- Robert Rushton: 19. Page to Lord Byron since he was 14.
- Dover Bess: Mid-20s. Chambermaid and sex-worker.
- Mary Shelley (nee Godwin): Early 20s. Writer, mother and mistress to Percy Shelley.
- Jarvis: Late teens. Milliner.
- Henry Colburn: Early 30s. Magazine editor and publisher.
- Bram Stoker: 49. Writer and business manager to Sir Henry Irving.

### Characters in *The Vampyre*:

- Lord Ruthven: Late 20s.
- Aubrey: Early 20s.

The play should be performed with the following doubling-ups:

- Lord Byron/Lord Ruthven.
- Dr John William Polidori/Aubrey.

## **SETTINGS**

The scenes in the play take place between 1816 and 1905 in the following locations:

- A fort, Missolonghi: a small town in Greece.
- 13 Piccadilly Terrace: Lord Byron's London residence.
- 38 Great Pulteney Street, Soho, London: the Polidori family home.
- Coach Inns: on the road from London to Geneva via Dover and Ostend.
- Waterloo: the battlefield a year after the eponymous battle.
- Villa Diodati: Lord Byron's summer residence in Geneva.
- Inn, London: off Covent Garden.
- Office, London: of the publisher Henry Colburn.
- The Lyceum Theatre, London: in the wings.

The play is meant to have the quality of a feverish dream. So, each scene should bleed into the last, with the characters from the succeeding scene assembling as the previous scene ends, as fevered memories merge into one continuous stream of thought suggesting a monodrama.

**ACT ONE****SCENE ONE: Polidori Comes To Missolonghi.**

*A fort in Missolonghi, Greece. 19th April 1824. BYRON is lying on a bed, topless and sweating, feverish a dirty sheet covering him. Enter POLIDORI with a basin of cold water, a flannel and a new sheet. POLIDORI mops BYRON's brow. BYRON stirs, sees POLIDORI, sits bolt up, grabs the flannel, throws it across the room and knocks the basin flying. POLIDORI collects both, sits on the edge of BYRON's bed, looks at him, and slowly moves his hand with the flannel towards BYRON again. BYRON pulls back. POLIDORI makes some gentle encouraging noises, as if to a child. BYRON allows POLDORI to mop his brow.*

POLIDORI: Much better, my Lord, much better. This will cool the fever a little.

BYRON: Thank you Francesco.

POLIDORI: It's not Francesco, my Lord. It's John.

BYRON: John?

POLIDORI: Dr Polidori.

BYRON: Polly. Polly? Polly!!

*BYRON pushes POLIDORI off and jumps out of bed, swaying as he stands full of manic energy that surges one minute then collapses the next.*

BYRON: Get away from me, you murdering quack. Come to dose me with your vile potions, have you? Blister me? Bleed me? Too late, you barbarous brisket beater, it's all been done.

POLIDORI: That's not why I'm here. My Lord.

BYRON: And done again. But still I rot and waste under...under....I know. I know that the lancet kills more people than the lance. I know....I know....I have.....I...

*BYRON trails off, confused, suddenly vulnerable and small.*

POLIDORI: A Tertian fever.

BYRON (*energised again*): Aye. Tertian fever. Francesco said so. And bled me, the butcher. Eight leeches on my forehead, whilst I slept. A full pound of blood.

POLDORI: That explains the temperature and delirium, but not the earlier fitting.

BYRON: I have not fitted for weeks. I have...

POLIDORI: The French disease.

BYRON: I have been Frenchified?!

POLIDORI: Syphilis, my Lord. You have syphilis.

*BYRON lunges at POLIDORI starting to throttle him, then faints. POLIDORI lifts him on to the bed, takes off the dirty sheet and replaces it tucking him in.*

BYRON: I'm sorry John. I cannot help myself. Tis the illness.

POLIDORI: Is it, my Lord?

BYRON: I would you did not have to see me like this.

POLIDORI: I have before my Lord.

BYRON: Have you?

POLIDORI: I have. Shhhh now.

*POLIDORI begins to mop BYRON's brow again. BYRON suddenly judders awake, sits bolt upright.*

BYRON: Syphilis?!

POLIDORI: Shhhh. Sleep. Got to sleep. My Lord.

*BYRON closes his eyes and suddenly judders awake again.*

BYRON: But you're dead Polidori. You're dead. You have been. For three years.

POLIDORI: Shhhh. I know, my Lord. I am dead. Quite dead. Now, sleep. I will stay by your side.

*BYRON closes his eyes. POLDORI leans in to BYRON's ear.*

POLIDORI: You are safe now.

*POLIDORI takes a mobile phone out of his jacket pocket and takes a landscape picture of BYRON, then takes a close-up of his face, and begins to post the pictures on social media.*

POLIDORI: #ByronLives. #1824. #Greece. #Missolonghi. #WhatADump. #FirstVampyre.

*The post fails. Polidori tries again. The post fails again.*

POLIDORI: #NoSignal.

## **SCENE TWO: Hobhouse Interviews Dr Polidori**

*BYRON's home in 13 Piccadilly Terrace, London. 12th April 1816, afternoon. HOBHOUSE is in the middle of interviewing POLIDORI in a room with only one chair, on which HOBHOUSE sits, scanning through POLIDORI's letters of recommendation on his phone.*

HOBHOUSE: You studied under Professor Gregory at the Edinburgh.

POLIDORI: I did, Sir.

HOBHOUSE: And were awarded your doctorate in 1815....not quite a year ago. And you are?

POLIDORI: Am what, Sir?



HOBHOUSE: You're age man?

POLIDORI: 20.

HOBHOUSE: Married?

POLIDORI: No, Sir.

HOBHOUSE: Would you be free to travel to Switzerland promptly on notice from Lord Byron?

POLIDORI: I am at his Lordship's convenience. I have spent my time since graduation in further medical study, residing at my family's London home.

HOBHOUSE: Your family's London home? And how many homes does your family have Polidori? Are you seeking paid employ here whilst also hiding a vast estate somewhere in Essex?

POLIDORI: We have a residence in the Chilterns.

HOBHOUSE: Really? What is the name of this residence? We can find it on Google Earth.

POLIDORI: I...It's a cottage.

HOBHOUSE: A fundamental when dealing with me in all matters is plain-speaking. Any pretension as to your background is most unwelcome.

POLIDORI: Forgive me Sir, I was not attempting/

HOBHOUSE: /Any prospects of being so?

POLIDORI: Being so?

HOBHOUSE: Married.

POLIDORI: I am, as you have rightly said, but young yet and though I have prospects with several young ladies, I am not seeking to confirm prospects with any of them yet.

*HOBHOUSE scans down through the final letter of recommendation.*

HOBHOUSE: I'm sorry Polidori, but it does not seem highly likely that, as his Lordship's most trusted friend and guardian, I would hand over his medical care to so callow a youth.

POLIDORI: Sir, in recent years understanding of the physic of the body has been transformed. The youthfulness of my knowledge may be an advantage to his Lordship.

HOBHOUSE: Umm.

*BYRON begins moaning off-stage, becoming more and more loud. POLIDORI notices the off-stage noises, but HOBHOUSE ignores them.*

HOBHOUSE: And what was your final thesis on then?

POLIDORI: "Oneirodynia"

HOBHOUSE: Are you attempting to somehow make me feel ignorant?

POLIDORI: The expression is a composite of the Greek words 'oneiros' and 'duno' and means walking while one is dreaming. I have/

HOBHOUSE: /Lord Byron does not walk in his sleep. So, your area of youthful knowledge, would, I fear, have little to advantage you in his treatment.

*A thud. BYRON moans loudly, then laughs manically off-stage.*

POLIDORI: Has there been a diagnosis?

HOBHOUSE: Lady Byron's physician, diagnosed my Lord as having torpidity of the liver.

*More manic moans from BYRON.*

HOBHOUSE: Which may have spread to the brain and a squint on one eye.

*Sounds off-stage of a glass decanter being smashed and more manic laughter from BYRON.*

HOBHOUSE: And he is quick to anger.

POLIDORI: But you seek another opinion?

HOBHOUSE: More than that.

POLIDORI: A different opinion.

*Beat.*

HOBHOUSE: Absolute discretion is required.

POLIDORI: Then they are separating.

HOBHOUSE: The current state of his Lordship's marriage is not something you need concern yourself to infer from what I have said.

POLIDORI: Of course not.

HOBHOUSE: Lord Byron's name and trust is already much abused.

POLIDORI: I am sorry to hear it.

HOBHOUSE: His standing, his fame, excites the most relentless curiosity and a connection to him becomes a form of currency to any catch-penny imposture looking to add followers on whatever social media platform they choose to malign him on.

POLIDORI: I can assure you that every detail of every private occurrence would remain so.

HOBHOUSE: Servants have sold his bedsheets from under him as he slept. Why would you be any different?

POLIDORI: A modern day Midas. Appalling. I have two things to offer. My oath as a physician, and my word as a man of God.

HOBHOUSE: Those are taken. Intentions and promises are not sufficient when there will be every temptation to sell all that you know, as soon as you know it.

POLIDORI: The letters of recommendation make reference to my/

HOBHOUSE: Evidence!

POLIDORI: Sir, I am just beginning on my/

HOBHOUSE: Whose secrets have you kept Doctor? What have you resisted posting in the wee small drunken hours of the night? Indeed, what contact have you even had with any high-born personages in need of retaining tight-lipped staff?

POLIDORI: Sir, as a gentleman I find this line of questioning somewhat/

*HOBHOUSE claps his hands brusquely.*

HOBHOUSE: /Enough. I have made my decision. Polidori I am sorry/

*BYRON bursts into the room dressed in an open-necked shirt and britches, no shoes, drunk and out of control. POLIDORI bows.*

POLIDORI: My Lord.

*HOBHOUSE attempts to usher POLIDORI out. POLIDORI resists.*

HOBHOUSE: Good-day Dr Polidori. Thank you for your time. You may leave us.

BYRON: It's all gone Hobby. I am bereft.

HOBHOUSE: What has?

BYRON: The wine. All the bloody wine!

*BYRON walks toward them, trips and falls, staying on the floor.*

BYRON: I did smash every decanter in the drawing room though. That's probably the reason. I was imagining I was using them to dash out the brains of Lady Byron.

*HOBHOUSE goes to help BYRON up but BYRON play fights him off and remains on the floor. POLIDORI comes over and BYRON sees him properly for the first time. BYRON stands.*

BYRON: Why, 'tis like to look upon myself but younger.

HOBHOUSE: Dr Polidori is just leaving.

BYRON: You have found me a physician!

POLIDORI: Mr Hobhouse has alas found that I am unsuitable in my candidature to be physician to your Lordship.

BYRON: Is this true Hobhouse?

HOBHOUSE: I wish to select someone with more experience.

BYRON: Of what?

HOBHOUSE: Discretion.

BYRON: Bit late for that now Hobby.

HOBHOUSE: I'm sure we can rely on Dr Polidori to make no posts of this...episode?

POLIDORI: Without question.

BYRON: He is beautiful.

HOBHOUSE: I had not been using that as the basis for my selection.

BYRON: Then you're a damned fool. Polidori, consider yourself appointed. Do you accept?

*BYRON smiles, steps forward, falls again, stays down and begins to howl like a wolf.*

HOBHOUSE: Perhaps you can return to us another day when/

POLIDORI: /I do!

### **SCENE THREE: Teaching Isabella Faro**

*The Polidori family home in Soho, London. 14 April 1816, afternoon. POLIDORI and FRANCES sat on the chaise longue with a pack of playing cards between them.*

FRANCES: Un-noticed? That's your worst fear? That your life will go unmarked? Goodness.

POLIDORI: You asked.

FRANCES: You graduated from Edinburgh University at a surprisingly young age/

POLIDORI: /Being left without purpose since.

FRANCES: You are already a man of letters/

POLIDORI: /For which I have received no payment.

FRANCES: And you are in receipt of an offer from Lord Byron, the most famous poet in the English language, to become his personal physician. To be worried that you will suffer from an insufficiency of progress seems almost indecent.

POLIDORI: To whom?

FRANCES: You only voice these fears that I may counter them with extravagant praise.

*Pause.*

FRANCES: Is it father?

POLIDORI: It is.

FRANCES: You shall have to face him down and make your case John.

POLIDORI: He is determined I should not take the position.

FRANCES: You must be more determined that you will. Now, teach me Faro, as you promised.

POLIDORI: Google it.

FRANCE: I want you to teach me.

POLIDORI: Really Franny, what's the point in learning a game you can never play? No Faro house will countenance a lady at the table. Most gentlemen are there to escape a lady...or because of her.

FRANCES: And what would you know of ladies?

POLIDORI: For you to gamble anywhere else in public would be a declaration of entirely the wrong kind. Even I will only gamble in Brook's, where discretion is mutually assured.

FRANCES: So Father will never know.

POLIDORI: Quite.

*FRANCES picks up a deck of cards and put them in POLIDORI's hand.*

FRANCES: Deal the cards you infuriating old goose!

POLIDORI: You never answered.

FRANCES: My worst fear? To lose control of my life to a man.

POLIDORI: The want of such control is more fittingly something you should be afeared of.

FRANCES: I would rather die a spinster than to become one of those porcelain women who exists simply to please a husband, usually a man that their family had foisted upon them in a loveless union, sold to the highest bidder.

POLIDORI: We're all sold Franny. From the moment we're born. It's just a case of to whom, and for how much.

FRANCES: I won't be.

POLIDORI: All you can do is hope that a good deal is struck.

FRANCES: I'll marry a molly and he'll leave me in peace!

POLIDORI (*laughing*): Miss Frances Polidori, you are scandalous to name such creatures. How do you even know what a molly is?

FRANCES (*laughing*): I have one for a brother!

POLIDORI: You most certainly do not! (*Beat*) Though, I did seem to catch the eye of a somewhat dubious character at the table last night. He asked me to walk with him after the game and told me I was 'uncommon beautiful', whatever that may mean.

FRANCES: You mean you actually did step out with him?

POLIDORI: Only briefly.

FRANCES: Doctor John William Polidori, 'tis you who are scandalous!

POLIDORI: That kind can be devilish if tactlessly rejected. They rear up with every intent of impugning one's honour as publically as possible.

FRANCES: Sounds like you've met more than one.

POLIDORI: A hazard of the young gentleman's life in London.

FRANCES: I thought you were courting with Isabella Montague?

POLIDORI: I am courting with Isabella Montague.

FRANCES: And what vehicle is my brother using to win favour with Miss Montague and test her keenness? Bragging of his imminent appointment to Lord Byron no doubt?

POLIDORI: I am sworn to secrecy. Besides, I fear that might be a mixed blessing in any courtship.

FRANCES: How so?

POLIDORI: Lord Byron's good name is not wholly unencumbered.

FRANCES: Well, that's for your reputation, not mine. Now, darling brother, I intend to have a very adventure tonight. To disport about me the appearance of a man and accompany you to Brook's Faro House.

POLIDORI: You're being preposterous.

FRANCES (*taking on a manly stride*): I'm being Agostino, your distant cousin from Ontrato. Come along, we'll dine at Old Tom's Chop House. There you will teach me how to play.

POLIDORI (*laughing*): No. Never. Never. Never. Well, no pics and no posts, then tis as a good as never.

FRANCES: Agreed. Lead on cousin. I've a fancy for some black britches.

#### **SCENE FOUR: Dr Polidori Meets Lord Byron**

*BYRON's home in Piccadilly, London. 20th April 1816, afternoon. POLIDORI is talking to RUSHTON in the doorway to a room which is very grand but empty of furniture.*

RUSHTON: And is my Lord expecting you?

POLIDORI: He said to call on 20th in the afternoon.

RUSHTON: I'll need more than that.

POLIDORI: I beg your pardon?

RUSHTON: There are only two types who come knocking here now. The bandogs claiming for debts. And, short of the floorboards, there's nought left for them to filch.

POLIDORI: I am no bailiff.

RUSHTON: No. They are strong, upright men.

POLIDORI: Please, just tell his Lordship I am here.

RUSHTON: Then there's unlicked cubs, full of bluster, saying they've an appointment with his Lordship, but in truth they're writers scandal-mongering to earn a guinea from a piffle sheet, or a few thousand likes on Twitter.

POLIDORI: I have come about a position with his Lordship. At his invitation.

*RUSHTON moves in on POLIDORI menacingly as if he might grab him and throw him out at any moment.*

RUSHTON: Now we have it! Come to cuckoo me out have you?

POLIDORI: Not a position as his valet!

RUSHTON: With what? Some tricks from a back-door usher's pushing school?

POLIDORI: As his physician.

RUSHTON: His physician? His physician.

*RUSHTON laughs and back off.*

RUSHTON: Well, as long as the payment of your purse does not take from mine. Phone.

*POLIDORI hands RUSHTON his phone. BYRON enters. He is drunk, but less so than in scene two. POLIDORI and RUSHTON bow their heads.*

RUSHTON: My Lord. I was just on my way/

BYRON: Thank you Rushton. Your assiduous execution of my instructions is most commendable. I see now why I have no callers. Isn't he wonderful?

POLIDORI: As your Lordship says.

BYRON: Thank you Rushton.

*RUSHTON exits.*

BYRON: I'd offer you a seat, but I find myself embarrassed for the want of chair.

POLIDORI: Everything is already packed for transportation?

BYRON: If it is, its destination is not Geneva, but the bailiffs. They come knocking every day, pecking at the house like angry ravens. I'm sure they are for taking the plaster from the very walls on their next visitation.

POLIDORI: I am sorry to have caused any confusion, my Lord.

BYRON: Drunk as I was last week, I had thought you had accepted the offer. Hobhouse berated me somewhat for making it.

POLIDORI: I had.



BYRON: Was it a play for a better fee? Or fear for the want of one?

POLIDORI: Neither, my Lord.

BYRON: Then a letter withdrawing the withdrawal and asking for this audience.

POLIDORI: Yes, my Lord.

BYRON: Well, Dr Polidori I rather think it rests with you to explain to me the vicissitudes of your attitude towards becoming my physician.

POLIDORI: It is a simple matter, my Lord. My father objected.

BYRON: And you have over-ruled the objection?

POLIDORI: I have.

BYRON: I may be accustomed to the fathers of young women seeking me out angrily Polidori, but I hope I am not about to add the fathers of young men to my list of ravens.

POLIDORI: No, no, my Lord. My father has accepted my choice.

BYRON: I could choose any barber with a bag full of quackery in England, you know. But you are special. You're not here just as a physician, but also as a writer.

*BYRON walks a full circle round POLIDORI eyeing him up and down.*

POLIDORI: My Lord?

BYRON: This is part of my confirmation process.

*BYRON holds POLIDORI's arms out to one side and checks his muscles. Similarly for his legs, then checks his eyes and makes him put his tongue out, finally checking his ears and hair.*

BYRON: I do find it so much more encouraging when one's physician is themselves a well man. I've been tended to by barely living corpses that inspired the very opposite of faith. One can only have conviction in a hale and hearty physician.

POLIDORI: You make mischief with me, my Lord.

BYRON: I could not be in more earnest. You are appointed Doctor Polidori. From now on you are physician to Lord Byron.

POLIDORI: Thank you, my Lord.

*POLIDORI bows. BYRON smiles.*

POLIDORI: I am your most grateful servant.

BYRON: I have commissioned a new carriage, modelled on Napoleon's, but slightly grander. It will be delivered at midnight. There will be but one picture of my departure, flipping the finger from the carriage window, posted to all my social media for one hour after my departure and then every account will be deleted. Forever. I will be gone in every sense.

POLIDORI: But my Lord, all your followers?

BYRON: Followers who have failed to crowdfund me out of this bankruptcy? No, if I must accept the whore's embrace of exile, then I will leave smiling in a style so grand of a bankrupt as to scandalise the whole rotten lot of 'em.

POLIDORI: Them?

BYRON (*angry*): Those that scrambled past each other to get near me in the best houses, and who now find me out, just to take a selfie turning their back to me and posting to #TimesUpByron.

POLIDORI: You are still most respected, my Lord.

BYRON: By those who can still profit off me. No. They dig and dig into every private matter, just to be scandalised at the public nature of what they themselves have made public.

POLIDORI: I am sure my Lord's work stands as a shield of merit against any such imputations.

BYRON: They would rather write their own blasphemous fictions than read poems. And all the time they are thrilled inside with every new trending accusation of me, excited to be appalled, thrilled to be outraged.

*BYRON has tired himself. He puts his arm round POLIDORI for support.*

BYRON: But I have not been so strong of late and may need some small assistance to execute this vain, ridiculous hubris. You see Dr Polidori, the only thing I can achieve now is this: never to be forgotten. It will be the one remaining purpose in my life.

POLIDORI: I have read the first canto of 'Childe Harold' seventeen times. I can /remember

BYRON (*suddenly furious again*): /Stop. Stop. Stop. I did not need the platitudes of another fawning ape, and such a thing proffered could only terminate this interview abruptly. (*Softening*) And I would be sad to see you go. I've already grown accustomed to you. I think, like the rest of London, you disapprove of me.

POLIDORI: I admire you with all sincerity my Lord.

BYRON: And what will you be remembered for Dr Polidori?

POLIDORI: I haven't decided yet.

BYRON: Beware Dr Polidori. I already overshadow your own epitaph. My infamy is such that by becoming my physician you may have placed yourself in danger of forever being known only as that. You must now craft all the harder to wrench yourself from out of the shadow I have cast.

*POLIDORI is silent suddenly realising the implications of his appointment.*

BYRON (*Laughing*): Oh, don't look so crestfallen. Help me to dance. I have always shied away from the Cotillon, and must practice. I have an inconvenience with my left foot that makes some of it painful and all of it, I fear, somewhat cluttish.

*BYRON stands and assumes a dance position. POLIDORI hesitates.*

BYRON (*taking hold of POLIDORI*): Come man. As my physician you must acquaint yourself with my body, all that it excels at and all that it grapples with.

*BYRON and POLIDORI begin to dance, falter and then suddenly the movement flows and the two dance wonderfully, accommodating BYRON's slight limp. BYRON stumbles, recovers, stops and bows to POLIDORI as if to a lady. POLIDORI is overcome, slightly shaking, something has been awakened in him. He covers the moment and gently applauds BYRON.*

### **SCENE FIVE: Lord Byron's Stain**

*The Polidori family home in Soho, London. 22nd April 1816, late evening. POLIDORI is sat reading a copy of "Childe Harold" by BYRON. FRANCES has just come in.*

FRANCES: No one asked to dance with me John. No one. No one messaged me and no one liked a single picture I posted.

POLIDORI: I told you to wear the purple damask.

FRANCES: It was not a question of which dress I was wearing, nor the curl in my hair, nor the curve of my arm.

POLIDORI: Well then, it must have been your face, if the disagreeable expression it is wearing now is anything to go by.

FRANCES: You know full well why no one asked me.

POLIDORI: I sure I neither know nor care.

FRANCES: John! I've lost over half my followers on Insta.

POLIDORI: You're being ridiculous if you think it's anything to do with me.

FRANCES: You are such a selfish, over-indulged/

POLIDORI: /It is you that father over-indulges. He has always been particularly demanding of me, as the eldest son. But you know nothing of the demands made of men.

FRANCES: I know of the time spent on them by their fathers. I know of the dreams invested in them by their fathers. I know of the education, aspiration and consideration given to them by their fathers.

POLIDORI: Really?

FRANCES: Really. I know of it in contrast to the painful lack of such things given to their daughters.

POLIDORI: Then why did father ask me to turn down Lord Byron?

FRANCES: Because of this.

POLIDORI: What?

FRANCES: Why do you think no one asked me to dance?

POLIDORI: Don't be ridiculous.

FRANCES: I thought it might only affect you. You are free to squander your own good name, of course, but by doing this it now seems you have squandered the good name of the family.

POLIDORI: Lord Byron is the most successful poet of the age.

FRANCES: Lord Byron, I have found out, is the scandal of the town. You should search #TruthAboutByron.

POLIDORI: Rumours and lies, fermented by low newspapers to sell slander to lower fools.

FRANCES: It is you who are the fool. They....I wouldn't say this but anger spares my blushes...they say he's committed sodomy.

POLIDORI: Frances!

FRANCES: Upon his wife. Tis the reason they are separating.

POLIDORI: All this because no one wanted to dance with little Franny.

FRANCES: There's worse than that even.

POLIDORI: I think this unfeminine worldliness has etched itself all too clearly on your face Franny. Perhaps tis the reason no one will cut a quadrille with you.

FRANCES: Incest. You, my brother, are associated with a man who, when he's not committing sodomitical practices with his wife, is committing incest with his sister. Both housed under the very roof where you have been tagged in photos attending to him.

POLDORI: His half-sister attends upon his wife at her invitation.

FRANCES: By day. And is then invited into her brother's bed by night.

POLIDORI: Fustian nonsense.

FRANCES: And with my brother about to join the household of London's Lord of Incestuous Love, what are people to make of me? (*Beat*) And you. My brother?

POLIDORI: That's appalling. Who would think such things of us?

FRANCES: I am practically shunned.

POLIDORI: I haven't even taken up my position with him.

FRANCES: It is enough to ruin us. Do you know what people say of him?

POLIDORI: There must be some other cause.

FRANCES: Mad!

POLDORI: He's not alone there.

FRANCE: Bad!

POLIDORI: At what?

FRANCES: And dangerous to know!

POLIDORI: Stop shouting Frances!

FRANCES: You've done what suits you best, like you always do. You're away to Geneva and we are left here with his stain.

POLIDORI: You have things quite out of proportion Frances.

FRANCES: I was only just beginning John, only just beginning.

### **SCENE SIX: Recollections of Sisters in Missolonghi**

*A fort in Missolonghi, Greece. 19th April 1824. BYRON is in bed. POLIDORI is holding a dressing gown up that he is encouraging BYRON to don. During the scene Byron gradually recovers until he is at full-strength by the end.*

POLIDORI: Perhaps my Lord is feeling well enough to sit and take something light?

BYRON: Is Augusta come?

POLIDORI: I had not known she had been sent for?

*BYRON gets out of bed and allows POLIDORI to dress him.*

BYRON: I cannot order things in my head. I am a child discovered he is a Lord. I am at my mother's deathbed. I am marrying. You and I are parting. It...it all seems like the same day. Yesterday. And yet decades ago. She must come. I need my sister.

POLIDORI: It would not be an easy journey my Lord.

BYRON: Swynford Paddocks? Cambridge may make an uneasy journey of many things in life, but a coach between there and London is a simple matter.

POLIDORI: You are not in London.

*BYRON looks around him as if seeing his surrounding for the first time and tunes in to them.*

BYRON: Can she not Skype?

POLIDORI: No wi-fi.

*BYRON goes to speak. POLIDORI holds up his mobile phone.*

POLIDORI: And no signal.

*BYRON sits at a table on which is a plate of cold meats.*

BYRON: No. No, of course not. Not in Missolonghi. Misso-longhi. Miss-o-long-hi. MISSOLONGHI! Sweet Augusta Leigh. Oh how I miss thee. Trapped in Missolonghi. Patient to Polidori.

POLIDORI: Very good my Lord.

BYRON: Doggerel, but doggerel amuses me. As you used to.

*BYRON makes eye contact with POLIDORI properly for the first time.*

BYRON: For you produced so much of it!

*POLIDORI cuts up some meat for BYRON and goes to feed him.*

POLIDORI: Open wide.

BYRON: Still trying to make me gotch-gutted.

POLIDORI: You have been bled. Rigorously bled. Red meats are restorative.

*BYRON takes the fork from POLIDORI and eats.*

BYRON: Do you love your sister Polly? Sorry, *did* you love her?

POLIDORI: Frances and I squabbled and bickered, but we laughed more and valued each other above anyone.

BYRON: I asked if you loved her.

POLIDORI: I did.

BYRON: Like I love Augusta?

POLIDORI: No. I did not commit incest with my sister/

BYRON: /Half-sister. See. When I think of Augusta I can order things; feel the time in them; the sequence. And I barely met her until we were adults.

POLIDORI: I did not have a child with my sister.

BYRON: Neither did I.

POLIDORI: What did you write on seeing the child...your niece-daughter? "Oh it is a joy to visit her. I can't tell you why, but tis such as relief she is not an ape."

BYRON: You're remarkably well informed. Death seems to have agreed with you Polly. You should've done it years ago.

POLIDORI: In my altered state, the fullness of things seems apparent to me. At least as far as my Lord is concerned.

BYRON: I hope some mists remain in place, even if the fog is lifting.

POLIDORI: The Initiated.

BYRON: My Cambridge set indeed were all members of The Initiated. Hobhouse a little despite himself, and only very occasionally, but none the less we all practiced with more or less alacrity.

POLIDORI: Some way of you favouring each other, the already greatly favoured?

BYRON: A note of resentment. You are a steely spectre Polly. And you're quite wrong. The Initiated were not in favour with anyone.

POLIDORI: I fear for what my Lord may reveal.

BYRON: What would you that I did?

POLIDORI: Rushton. It's something to do with Rushton.

BYRON: The damned hum of gossip may be used as a sound to cover other worse noises, screams even. The prurient hear the hum and are satiated, imagining that is all there is to hear. But tis not the half of it.

POLIDORI: There is worse to know?

BYRON: Oh, much worse.

*BYRON hands the fork to POLIDORI and indicates that he should feed him. POLIDORI does so with some reluctance to a grinning BYRON.*

BYRON: That's what this is about? Isn't it? Me facing the mob, about to be dewitted.

POLIDORI: I only know that I am here and that things from the past may be conjured simply by thinking of them. We can see who we were.

BYRON: I know who I was.

POLIDORI: You know who you thought yourself to be. I know who you were.



## **INTER-ACT SCENE ONE**

*Projected: a short Snapchat-style animation of bitmoji's (cartoon avatars) of BYRON, POLIDORI, RUSHTON and HOBHOUSE. A grand coach pulls up. RUSHTON opens the door for BYRON. RUSHTON helps BYRON to get into the carriage followed by HOBHOUSE. POLIDORI goes to get in the carriage. RUSHTON stops him. Another ordinary coach pulls up covered in luggage. RUSHTON shows POLIDORI to this coach and then gets in first, leaving POLIDORI to get into the coach by himself. BYRON bitmoji with the caption "I'm over it". Coach bitmoji with the caption "Leavin' London". The two coaches traces a trail over a Georgian map of the South of England, arriving at Dover. RUSHTON bitmoji gets out of his coach with the caption "We're here". A coaching inn with the caption "Dover". RUSHTON bitmoji opens the door to the grand carriage. BYRON bitmoji greets him with the caption "Sup". RUSHTON bitmoji replies with the caption "We're here". Bitmojis of BYRON and HOBHOUSE are helped out of carriage by RUSHTON and enter the inn. RUSHTON bitmoji starts to unpack the luggage from the ordinary coach. POLIDORI bitmoji wakes up and jumps out the carriage. RUSHTON bitmoji throws a suitcase at POLIDORI with the caption "Yo Dawg, help a bro." POLIDORI bitmoji lets the suitcase fall to the floor with the caption "I'm out" and then enters the inn.*

## **ACT TWO**

### **SCENE ONE: Lord Byron & The Chambermaid**

*An Inn on the road to Dover. 24th April 1816, evening. BYRON and HOBHOUSE are drinking at a table in BYRON's room.*

HOBHOUSE: You have quite misremembered everything about Cambridge, and as usual have placed yourself at the centre of all the action and every adventure.

BYRON: I was not *at* the centre. I *was* the centre.

HOBHOUSE: Charles was the centre.

BYRON: My dear Hobby, not tonight.

HOBHOUSE: We have avoided speaking of Charles since he drowned. It is festering.

*Pause.*

BYRON: What is there to speak of? He was the best of us. He is gone. To linger on it is unbearable. Every breath I have taken since feels like a betrayal of him.

HOBHOUSE: I loved him too.

BYRON: You did. But you loved him differently.

HOBHOUSE: Do we not all love differently? We use the same word, but the feeling of love, like the sensation of a smell or the perception of colour, might be....*must* be different for every one of us.

BYRON: I don't believe he drowned by accident.

HOBHOUSE: Neither do I.

BYRON: Him leaving us that way, by his own hand, was a warning.

HOBHOUSE: Yes.

*BYRON raises a glass of wine. HOBHOUSE does too.*

BYRON: To Charles.

HOBHOUSE: To Charles.

*They both drink.*

BYRON: I thought you were jealous.

HOBHOUSE: Of Charles? Or you?

BYRON: Charles and I created our botanical codes, but we included you in them.

HOBHOUSE: Gin to an ale drinker.

BYRON: Not always.

HOBHOUSE: And even then, my appetite for alcohol is most modest compared to your own.

BYRON: I must have a Hyacinth, or be in prospect of one, wherever I go.

HOBHOUSE: Many Continental blossoms await you.

BYRON: And I will write telling you about all of them.

HOBHOUSE: Make sure it is a letter. I don't trust that someone won't hack your inbox.

BYRON: A letter it is, expressed in purely botanical terms.

HOBHOUSE: I wonder what would've happened to Charles had he lived.

BYRON: It was all so much lighter then. I can't bear this country.

HOBHOUSE: Then tis a good job you are poised to leave it.

*BYRON raises his glass again as does HOBHOUSE.*

BYRON: Fuck England.

HOBHOUSE: Fuck England.

BYRON: And all who fuck in her.

HOBHOUSE: And all who fuck in her.

BYRON: Speaking of which, I have an eye for the chambermaid who served us supper. Dover Bess I am told she is called. And anyone's for a crown or two.

HOBHOUSE: Have you housed us for the night in a common pushing school?

BYRON: I do hope so.

HOBHOUSE: Good night George.

*HOBHOUSE stands and kisses BYRON on the forehead.*

BYRON: He loved you too.

HOBHOUSE: Who?

BYRON: Charles.

HOBHOUSE: Do you want me to send up Dover Bess?

BYRON: Are you turned pimp's procurer Mr Hobhouse? Yes. Do. And Polidori.

HOBHOUSE: Polidori? Are you not feeling well?

BYRON: I am, as a consequence of which I am setting about our first test of the Doctor.

HOBHOUSE: You won't win. And no caterwauling. My bed is but next door.

BYRON: I can only say that / will not caterwaul.

*HOBHOUSE exits. BYRON gets out a small hand mirror and check his hair. He dabs himself with some scent, rubs a nosegay under his arm pits and genitals and pinches his cheeks. Enter DOVER BESS who bobs a curtsey.*

DOVER BESS: Your Mr Hobhouse says that I might be of some service to his Lordship.

BYRON: Indeed you might.

*BYRON begins to stand, smiling and eyeing her up and down. DOVER BESS enjoys his gaze and plays up to it.*

BYRON: If you're minded to being rewarded for the pleasuring of a Lord. The pleasure, of course, might be considered reward enough.

DOVER BESS: I ain't no three penny upright or some hedge whore. If you want me, tis a guinea.

BYRON: A guinea? Bess prices herself most highly.

*Enter POLIDORI with a quick bow to BYRON.*

POLIDORI: You sent for me my Lord.

BYRON: Dr Polidori, meet Dover Bess.

DOVER BESS (*to BYRON*): Two guineas if there's two of you.

*POLIDORI smiles and nods his head. BYRON falls upon DOVER BESS and drags her on to the bed. She is laughing and he is rough and demanding.*

DOVER BESS: And no beard spreading. Round the back is all you get for a guinea a piece. Don't want us no Lordy Lordy bastards now, does we?

BYRON: Round the back will do most finely.

*BYRON holds out his hand to POLIDORI, signalling for him to join them.*

BYRON: John.

*POLIDORI hesitates, takes a step towards them, stops.*

POLDORI: If there is nothing that you require from me as your physician my Lord, then I will bid you good-night.

*BYRON is busy positioning DOVER BESS on all fours for anal intercourse.*

DOVER BESS: Will you be wanting me to be making exclamations my Lord or to be silent?

BYRON: Make exclamations Bess. As loud as you can when we are fucking, soft to me before, calling me brother.

DOVER BESS: Tis another guinea for such ungodliness.

BYRON: Have five guineas you bob tail. I will call you Augusta.

DOVER BESS: Makes no odds.

BYRON: I don't suppose Dover Bess is your real name anyway.

DOVER BESS: Don't suppose Lord Byron's yours neither.

BYRON: You are quite right. I am not Byron. He is someone I created.

DOVER BESS: And just so Dover Bess.

BYRON: I needed someone to be the things I could not.

BESS: I needed someone to do the things I could not.

BYRON: What is your real name?

BESS: Do not game in on who I am, when your coin is for who I pretend to be.

BYRON: And tonight you will be Augusta.

BESS: Augusta. *(With exaggerated relish)* Au-gust-a.

*BYRON pulls down DOVER BESS'S underclothes and starts to fuck her from behind. POLIDORI watches for a moment, catches BYRON'S eye who signals to him again to join them. POLIDORI leaves with some outrage. BYRON laughs to himself and continues fucking.*

BYRON: Augusta. My darling sister.

DOVER BESS: Oh brother of mine, whatever is that?

BYRON: Sit back a little further on my prick dear sister.

DOVER BESS: Oh, brother of mine, tis so wrong.

BYRON: Oh, it is.

DOVER BESS: So wrong, my dear, darling brother.

**SCENE TWO: Lord Byron & Dr Polidori In Ostend**

*An Inn in Ostend. 26th April 1816 morning. BYRON and POLIDORI are sat at a table in BYRON's room. POLIDORI has his phone out with a map showing.*

POLIDORI: I have instructed Rushton as to the route you wish to be taken on my Lord. We will avoid any French soil.

BYRON: I have no desire to see a degraded country and an oppressed people.

POLIDORI: Indeed. So, from Ostend we will travel through the Netherlands, the German sate of Cologne and then along the Rhine to Switzerland. We should be at Waterloo in seven or eight days.

BYRON: She was a damned fine fuck Polidori.

POLIDORI: And the Colonel has texted and said he will meet us there to tour the battlefield.

BYRON: She drove up her fee, which always delights me, and by God did she earn it. She didn't just open herself to be entered. She ploughed into me as I ploughed into her.

POLIDORI: I am glad my Lord's last night in England was so memorable.

BYRON: Did you fear she had the clap? Surely you would've known, if anyone would. She didn't, did she?

POLDORI: No my Lord.

BYRON: Then why did you not join us?

POLIDORI: It seemed like you were quite enough company for each other.

BYRON: She had more than one harbour Polidori. And what man would refuse such a fine whore when she is paid for from another man's purse?

*Silence.*

BYRON: Is it your religion?

*Silence.*

BYRON: Every nun I have ever met has been pregnant at least once, and every priest is off a bugging with his choristers. You must learn to sin without suffering. That is the key to all human happiness. Everything else people say is cant and bluster.

POLIDORI: I haven't.

BYRON: Haven't what?

POLIDORI: Taken any happiness. Anywhere. Yet.

*Beat. BYRON laughs and slaps him on the back.*

BYRON: My dear Polly, you have nothing to feel shy of. You might then think of me as an instructor in such matters and yourself as a pupil at my prick.

*POLIDORI laughs.*

BYRON: We must find ourselves another recipient of my knowledge and you can observe and then join in as the appetite takes you. Are you game?

POLIDORI: Yes my Lord.

BYRON: Excellent. We must start your instruction immediately. *(Shouting)* Rushton.

*RUSHTON enters and bows.*

BYRON: Are the chamberMAIDS here in Ostend as available and accommodating as the fine women of Dover are?

RUSHTON: It's hard to know my Lord. I would say I have not seen any enter the guests' bed chamber of a night. The innkeeper is a beau-nasty with a temper to match.

BYRON: Are there no whorehouse locally?

RUSHTON: I know not my Lord. There ain't no app for that.

BYRON: Come here.

*RUSHTON moves to stand next to his BYRON.*

BYRON: Tis no matter. We have all we need here. Now on the bed Robbie.

*RUSHTON gets on the bed and gets on all fours. He starts to undo his britches.*

BYRON: Let me do that.

*RUSHTON stops as ordered. BYRON reaches out his hand to POLIDORI.*

BYRON: This is more lesson number three than lesson number one, but I'm sure you'll cope.

*POLIDORI looks confused, then disgusted and walks out. BYRON laughs. BYRON kisses RUSHTON passionately who allows himself to be kissed, then jumps on the bed behind RUSHTON and starts to undo RUSHTON's britches.*

BYRON: You've been very bad.

*Silence.*

BYRON: Say it.

RUSHTON (*monotone*): I have been very bad. Master.

*BYRON slaps RUSHTON on the arse. RUSHTON's face is blank, staring out.*

### **SCENE THREE: Waterloo**

*The edge of what was the battlefield of Waterloo. 4th May 1816, early evening. BYRON facing out at the audience. BYRON takes out his phone and take a panoramic shot of the battlefield. Enter POLIDORI.*

BYRON: What memento of the Battle of Waterloo has caught your eye Polly?

POLIDORI: A tea-tray, made from the breastplate of the one of the fallen French.

BYRON: It's all so irresistibly macabre.

*BYRON opens up a small package wrapped in brown paper with a black bow and shows the contents to POLIDORI.*

BYRON: A fob watch shot straight through with the bullet that took the soldier's life and the epaulet of its fallen owner.

POLIDORI: I did hear someone letting off shots as we arrived.



BYRON: There's a video on YouTube of people making them. It says that in the 11 months since the battle the souvenirs sold to date would indicate armies fifty times the size of the ones that actually fought here.

POLIDORI: I suspect they are both valueless fakes.

BYRON: On the contrary. They are of great value. Not as what they claim to be, mementoes of the fallen of 1815, but as what they are, a testament to the extreme venality of man, and his ability to bring commerce to the corpses of the brave even as they rot.

POLIDORI: Is this where he fell?

BYRON: In as much as anyone could say. The record of where the men died is just a sop to the grieving. Like all history, it is at best a crude approximation, if not an outright lie.

POLIDORI: Were you close to your cousin?

BYRON: Closer in blood than affection.

POLIDORI: And Hobhouse lost his brother?

BYRON: Hobhouse would be unable to stand here, as we do, in the perversity and corruption of it all. He loved his brother. Only you and I can face this. We witness this *for* him, but will never speak of it *to* him.

POLIDORI: No.

BYRON: I wanted Napoleon to win.

POLIDORI: But that does not make the loss of these two British officers any less poignant my Lord, nor your grief and respect any less heartfelt. If anything, it makes it nobler.

*BYRON looks at POLIDORI and smiles.*

BYRON: They felt the passion to take up arms, to take lives and face death. Any passion I have felt has become but ink on a page or a stain on the sheets.

POLIDORI: Your writing is a compass for all men to navigate the passions of their hearts and find their true souls.

BYRON: You are too generous, my dear Doctor. I hold up a thinly veiled mirror to myself and sketch what I see in words and a little wit. It is nothing compared to the truth of this.

POLIDORI: It is everything my Lord. It is the reason these men fought. It is the reason I am here beside you.

BYRON: I wish I could die like this. In battle, fighting for a great ideal, for liberty, for others. I have the impulse to sacrifice myself but no altar upon which to.

POLIDORI: You will find it, my Lord, for I have never known someone with such true passion as you.

*BYRON reaches across and takes POLIDORI's hand in his.*

BYRON: I am doomed to write. And everything I write on this journey Polly, it will be yours. I will send a copy to Murray for publication, but the originals shall be bound and you shall have them.

POLIDORI: I am much thankful my Lord.

BYRON: Perhaps we shall put them together with what you write and make a volume of them.

POLIDORI: My Lord does me much honour.

BYRON: The honour is mine.

#### **SCENE FOUR: Love at Missolonghi.**

*A fort in Missolonghi, Greece. 19th April 1824. BYRON is sat at the table in his dressing gown. POLDORI is staring out to the audience as if half still in the previous scene.*

POLIDORI: That was the moment. Six years ago. Stood on the edge of the battlefield at Waterloo. That was the moment that I first loved you. *(Absently)*: Have you finished the meat?

BYRON: I have.

POLIDORI: There's some soda water on the table.

BYRON: Yes.

*Pause as BYRON summons himself up.*

BYRON: People don't really fall in love in a moment, other than in novels, novels secretly written by callow young girls who have not so much as seen a prick, never mind fallen in love with one.

POLIDORI: No.

BYRON: You never actually know the moment you fall in love. You only know you are in love when it's too late. And then being in love seems like all there ever was.

POLIDORI: The pathways toward love are different for each of us.

BYRON: You were in love with that moment. Sentiment of the battlefield. Not with me.

POLIDORI: Perhaps. Compared with what was to come when we got to Diodati.

BYRON: Ahhh. Is this what you want from this? A phantasmagorical pillorying for the Lord who never loved you enough.

POLIDORI: It's more than that.

BYRON: The way to love anything is to realise it may be lost. It forces one to treat it as the most precious thing in the world. In so doing, I can make anyone fall in love with me. If not on sight, then by the third meeting at the very latest.

POLIDORI: I'd known you for five weeks.

BYRON: Or at a time and place of my choosing. Like a battlefield at dusk.

POLIDORI: That's ridiculous. You just said people don't fall in love in a moment.

BYRON: They don't. Not real love. Infatuation, however, is easy. It's just a form of elaborated flattery, sometimes laced with the promise of a bit of cock.

*POLIDORI shoots him an angry look.*

BYRON: Or the promise that I'll value their poetry, treat it as equal to my own.

POLIDORI: If I was infatuated, then it was of my choosing.

BYRON: You were abroad for the first time, with the most famous man in Europe.

POLIDORI: Napoleon was the most famous man in Europe.

BYRON: You were desperate for the kind of paternal approval that the very taking up of your appointment with me had denied you. All I needed to do was but show a little kindness.

POLIDORI: It was one of the few occasions that you did.

BYRON: What right had you to love me anyway?

POLIDORI: What right had you to make me?

BYRON: I was melancholic. Anyway, it was only a game.

POLIDORI: A game?!

BYRON: Well, more of a contest. Between me and Hobhouse. Hobby thought I couldn't get you. I thought I could....You do want the truth don't you?

POLIDORI: However unpalatable.

BYRON: I'd offered you me and Dover Bess. I'd offered you me and Rushton. It seemed that lust would not, in itself, bring you to my bed. So, I had to make you love me. To win the bet.

POLIDORI: A bet. For how much?

BYRON: Ten guineas.

POLIDORI: It's not even very much. Did you not feel anything for me?

BYRON: Love is a dangerous game to play.

POLIDORI: Is that yes or no?

BYRON: You were a fool, Polidori, to feel anything like love for me. As soon as you felt it, you should've fled.

POLIDORI: You were the fool Byron, corrupting other's love into a series of bets, games and gambles. You made people love you, squandered it, and then cried for the loss of the very love you'd thrown away.

BYRON: I did. #Sorry...NotSorry.

### **SCENE FIVE: Mary Brings An Invitation**

*Villa Diodati. 26th May 1816, early afternoon. POLIDORI is sat with at a desk writing.*

*BYRON paces as he thinks and dictates.*

BYRON: No, no, no. If you want them to listen, you must first flatter them, reveal their sagacity unto them as natural, their generosity of spirit as boundless. Then make your case.

POLIDORI: "For though, without doubt, England is the nation most fortunate in its domestic government..."

BYRON: Better.

POLIDORI: "...it is now the time to look to our laws of punishment and guilt, in those cases where death is ordained by the criminal code."

BYRON: Mundane but clear.

POLIDORI: "A subject which everyone must perceive requires strong attention and gradual reform."

BYRON: "Gradual" for sure. Any change from either house of Parliament is painfully gradual.

POLIDORI: "The multiplicity of crimes, the great number of those yearly condemned to death certainly points out the existence of some radical error in the very foundation of our criminal laws."

BYRON: Good.

POLIDORI: I hope that ends the first paragraph with something polemical to further draw the reader in.

BYRON: You must have a good hashtag too, a key phrase at the heart of your argument but simple enough to remember.

POLIDORI: #EnlightenedJurisprudence.

BYRON: And spell.

POLIDORI: #ReformHanging?

BYRON: Better. (*Shouting*) Rushton.

POLIDORI: You don't think it's too over-stated, do you?

BYRON: No. But then I am not known for understatement.

*RUSHTON enters.*

RUSHTON: My Lord?

BYRON: I'm going to ask you something and I want you to answer as fully and freely as you can.

RUSHTON: Yes, my lord.

BYRON: Imagine I have dismissed you.

RUSHTON: My Lord?!

BYRON: Don't worry man (*touching RUSHTON's face*), I'm not going to. It's for Dr Polidori. We're working on a piece about the death penalty that he's writing for "The Pamphleteer".

POLIDORI: I doubt Rushton can be of much assistance.

BYRON: Dr Polidori makes certain statements that I would like to test the veracity of with the wisdom of your own insights.

RUSHTON: I've no wish to pull caps with anyone my Lord.

BYRON: Anything you say will be both wise and practical, I'm sure.

RUSHTON: As you wish, my Lord.

BYRON: So, put your case Polidori.

POLIDORI: Very well. Rushton, you are penniless and cannot find employ. You are starving and thirsty and have no means to support yourself and whatever family you may have.

RUSHTON: Why must this see me purse pinched and fair gutfounded. Could I not have food and coin?

BYRON: It's just a hypothetical.

RUSHTON: I'd still rather *have* than have *not*.

BYRON: It's just a game. Come, imagine such unlikely destitution.

POLIDORI: There would come a point, would there not, when you would steal whatever sustenance was needed?

RUSHTON: Suppose.

POLIDORI: And if at that point, you knew you would face the death penalty for this action, would that stop you?

RUSHTON: If the pain in my belly be that tight, I'd chance it. Poach a bird off nearest farm. Make sure I ran spring-heeled like, for there'd be next to no chance of being caught.

POLIDORI: Ahh, then perhaps that's the key.

BYRON: Not the harshness of the penalty/

POLIDORI: /but the likelihood of detection.

BYRON: So, the death penalty per se cannot be a justified or useful response.

POLIDORI: A different point to the one I thought we were making, but a very valuable one.

BYRON: See Rushton, you are, as always, a marvel.

POLDORI: Thank you.

*Sounds off of a bell ringing.*

BYRON: You can go.

*RUSHTON bows and exits. BYRON looks out of the window to see whose calling.*

POLIDORI (*writing*): It is correct to think that fear of the consequences do not feature heavily in the starving man's decision. Thus, the death penalty acts as no deterrent to a man who reckons to run faster than the thief catcher.

BYRON: She's come.

*POLIDORI looks out of the window too.*

POLIDORI: You're sure it's Mary and not Claire?

BYRON: Quite sure.

POLIDORI: And there's no sign of Percy?

BYRON: None. Why would she come alone without either of them to call on me?

POLIDORI: Perhaps she is simply accepting your invitation.

BYRON: Or attempting to illicit one. This arrangement with them as neighbours was arrived at to further me spending time with Percy, not with his half-wife-half-mistress and her half-sister.

POLIDORI: With them next door, it is somewhat harder not to observe certain formalities.

BYRON: "Certain formalities"? You're talking like a dowager duchess man. I will observe whatever I choose. She sent me a friend request on Facebook months ago and I never replied, yet here she is at my door.

*RUSHTON knocks and enters.*

RUSHTON: Miss Godwin my Lord.

POLIDORI: Rumour had it that she was already using Shelley's name.

*MARY enters and bows a courtesy to BYRON. BYRON and POLIDORI both briefly bow.*

MARY: It is so good to see you again my Lord. And you Doctor Polidori.

BYRON: I hadn't been expecting you.

MARY: No, well, we thought we'd best give you a day or two settle in before we came a calling.

BYRON: We are quite settled. Indeed, we were looking to Percy to do some unsettling.

POLIDORI: How is the Maison? It looks charming from here.

MARY: Not as charming as Diodati does from the Maison.

BYRON (*looking Mary up and down*): We all have our views to bear.

*Pause.*

MARY: Why don't you both come for dinner tomorrow night?

POLIDORI: Excellent. I can bring a poem I'm working on for Mr Shelley's consideration.

BYRON: And what of Percy?

MARY: He has a terrible headache today and is resting. He sends his apologies. I think it was the strain of the move from the hotel.



POLIDORI: May I be of assistance?

MARY: Thank you, but no. He has them occasionally. A dark room, no noise and he is fine again within a couple of hours.

BYRON: Forgive us Miss Godwin, but you have caught us mid-flow, as it were. Doctor Polidori and I are writing. And we've just had a small epiphany.

*Pause.*

MARY: I shall bid you good afternoon then. I trust to see you both tomorrow evening at 5?

BYRON: Indeed. Indeed. Rushton will show you out.

*MARY exits. BYRON jumps up.*

BYRON: What an utter bitch!

POLIDORI: Mary?!

BYRON: Inviting us to dinner. She knows I eat but little. And I cannot stand the sight of women eating. Claire's open-mouth mastication is like a wolf chomping on bone. And Mary has spittle that moves round her lips like an imbecile skating on ice. I cannot bear it.

POLIDORI: I am sure Miss Mary was offering the invitation as a kindness.

BYRON: There are many forms of aggression John, good manners is just one of them. You will go dine and text me when all teeth and spit and swallow are over.

POLIDORI: As you wish my Lord. I shall try to time the recitation of my poem for your arrival.

BYRON: Ummm. Well, choose wisely. If there's one man who rivals me, it is Shelley and even I would not want to stand before the pair of us in judgement. Now, back to the gallows.

### **SCENE SIX: Dr Polidori Disappoints Lord Byron**

*Villa Diodati, 28th May 1816, late morning. POLIDORI stood and BYRON sprawled on a chaise longue in a dressing gown, reading.*

POLIDORI: I have never been so ill treated by anyone.

BYRON: That can't be true. For I am certain that anyone who had read that poem must've been compelled to treat just as badly as Shelley did. They'd really have no choice.

POLIDORI: I will have justice.

BYRON: Justice...before breakfast? Really?

POLIDORI: Shelley lives in a dream world of utopian schemes. His verse is infected with a seditious sentiment that renders it deeply unpalatable.

BYRON: Jealousy sharpens any critic's tongue.

POLIDORI: I'm hardly jealous of Shelley's writing.

BYRON: I hardly meant that you were jealous. Of his writing.

POLIDORI: And his mode of living, with two women as his consorts. It speaks to of a moral canker that undermines any philosophical proposition that he may advance.

BYRON: Am I to be served Catholic cant instead of coffee and a biscuit? What a hale and hearty meal this is.

POLIDORI: He is an outrage to all morality, not just my Catholic one. He must see a fee in you somewhere, for the man speaks of money with a vulgar regularity.

BYRON: I am glad that my name is still worth a purse. It's reassuring that one's friends still have the option of betraying one for money.

POLIDORI: You are much changed towards me since he is come.

BYRON: How should one behave towards one's doctor?

POLIDORI: Without the mockery we have previously reserved for others.

BYRON: Ah, well. I know you better now. Freshness has tuned to ripeness. If I am occasionally a little mean toward you, that is a sign of our growing intimacy.

*BYRON stands and moves close to POLIDORI fixing him with his stare*

BYRON: But we must pluck the fruit before it rots.

*POLIDORI moves away and sits.*

POLIDORI: How long will it be before we can leave this wet, miserable place? We fester in here like sores beneath gauze. We must lance them with some sunny distraction.

*Silence as BYRON continues reading.*

POLIDORI: My Lord!

BYRON: It has rained for four days and nights. The ground around us is turned to a treacherous river of mud. Tis not of my doing. Your quarrel is with your Lord.

*POLIDORI swipes through his phone to a weather app.*

POLIDORI: Ahhh. More rain! More mud. It is a year without a summer.

BYRON: Come now. Fix me a fine measure of one of your potions.

POLIDORI: But you have barely eaten, not even a breakfast biscuit.

BYRON: You have barely *seen* me eat. The kitchen, however, may be three complete pies astray on what it was yester evening. I woke early and gorged. I feel...

*BYRON runs his hands over his belly as if it is much larger than it is.*

POLIDORI: No magnesium.

BYRON (*suddenly tense*): No magnesium? No magnesium! I told you to operate your foul pharmacy with a month's advance supply at all times. How can there be no magnesium when you went to the apothecary little over a week ago?

POLIDORI: I underestimated my Lord's... appetite.

*BYRON rises, furious.*

BYRON: Dear God Perfidious Polly! There was one thing, just one thing that you were useful for. If your writings did not have sufficient laxative effect, at least your pills would!

POLIDORI: My Lord, I/

BYRON: /What am I to do? Bloat? Swell? Become a puff guts, a thing gross and corpulent?

POLIDORI: I could see if Deliveroo will/

BYRON: /You will leave now and wade through the mud on foot to the town. I do not want to see your face again until it is smiling at me obsequiously, proffering me a freshly made emetic.

POLIDORI: But the mud must be at half a calf's length!

*BYRON grabs POLIDORI by the collars of his jacket.*

BYRON: You can wade neck deep through a river of mud fresh from Hades for all I care. I must quell this swelling form and evacuate the food that nourishes it!

*BYRON holds him there for a moment too long. His anger is suddenly replaced by a cruel smile and he licks him from chin to nose across he lips. POLIDORI freezes, then wipes away BYRON'S spit with a hand to his mouth, disgusted, but doesn't try to break away.*

BYRON: I was hoping the taste of you would induce vomiting in me as readily as your poetry does in others.

*BYRON lets him go, throwing him on his journey.*

POLIDORI: My Lord, what have I done to deserve such/

BYRON: /Get the magnesium!

### **SCENE SEVEN: Dr Polidori Teaches Mary Italian**

*Villa Diodati, 18th June 1816, late morning. POLIDORI stood and Mary sat with an exercise book in which she has been conjugating Italian verbs.*

POLIDORI: Una collana.

*POLIDORI indicates the necklace that MARY is wearing.*

MARY: Una collana.

POLIDOR (*indicating the necklace, ring and bracelet that MARY wear as he says the words*): Una collana. Un anello. Un bracciale.

*POLIDORI then circles his finger to all the places he has indicated.*

POLIDORI: I gioielli.

MARY: Gold?

POLIDORI: No. I gioelli.

MARY: I gioelli....jewellery!

POLIDORI: Si. Si. On top of conjugating three verbs and practicing conversational phrases for the opera, I think that is as many new words as I should require of you in one lesson Miss Godwin.

MARY: I fear I am keeping you from your writing Dr Polidori.

POLIDORI: No. No. And I think you might venture to call me John now, if I might venture Mary.

MARY: You may....John. Does Lord Byron call you John too?

POLIDORI: He does.

MARY: Like I call my beloved Percy.

POLIDORI: I do not think I would call Lord Byron "my beloved".

MARY: Oh. I had assumed/

POLIDORI: /I am hopeful that once the weather clears, I may visit Madame de Staël. I hear there are many most excellent and refined young women there, and my Lord has agreed to an introduction.

MARY: I see. That rather changes the nature of our acquaintanceship.

POLIDORI: I had not realised it was based on any such assumptions.

MARY: My mistake.

POLIDORI: You should listen to lesson five on Audible tonight on dinner conversation and we'll practice tomorrow. You are making excellent progress.

*MARY stands, walks to a window and looks out.*

MARY: If I am, I am doing better with my Italian than I am with my ghost story. Lord Byron only set us the challenge of writing one so that he could excel at it.

POLIDORI: What have you thus far?

MARY: Nothing. Quite nothing. Scraps: an ancient abbey, wood-panelled corridors, a virgin glimpsed by moonlight, screams from a tower, hair turning white overnight and even something about a devilish parrot. All woeful.

POLIDORI: Oh dear. Well, I have started on something that I think has some promise.

MARY: Do tell.

POLIDORI: I shall share it tonight at dinner.

MARY: I need some inspiration Dr Polidori. Tell me about Edinburgh and your training. Tell me about grave robbers and cadavers and dissections and experiments on the flesh.

POLIDORI: And I had tried to make our lesson so uplifting and feminine.

MARY: And that has given us licence to dwell upon some darker matters.

*POLIDORI moves closer to MARY.*

POLIDORI: I should not wish to bring any woeful expression to so beautiful a face.

MARY: I am pleased to think of you dear Doctor as something of the brother I never had, at least for these weeks. And a brother will surely delight in shocking his sister a little.

POLIDORI: You remind me so much of her.

MARY: Her?

POLIDORI: Frances. My sister.

MARY: I regard that as a most flattering and welcome comparison.

*MARY moves away from POLIDORI and sits.*

MARY: So, tell me, did your training involve dissection?

POLIDORI: It did.

MARY: Of cadavers?

*POLIDORI nods.*

MARY: They say it is the corpses of the hung and that they are reassembled for burial afterwards, but I have read that ten times the corpses are dissected in Edinburgh each year than ever men hanged. And that, as a consequence, no grave in the city is safe.

*POLIDORI nods.*

MARY: You must tell me.

POLIDORI: It was not just the hanged. People who died as prisoners, orphans, foundlings, those who had taken their own lives, all head to the University morgue.

MARY: But how are they found?

POLIDORI: Resurrection Men. It's their living. You buy the corpse or limb from them. You do not ask from whence it came, for fear of being given the answer.

MARY: And did it not trouble you to profit such men?

POLIDORI: It was the custom at Edinburgh. When it came my turn, the only corpse left for me to anatomise was a girl of about nine or ten. There was still a short piece of green ribbon in her hair. I performed the necessary acts and passed the exam in a most exemplary manner and walked home. When I was nearly at my door, I started to shake and shake. I couldn't stop and then I found myself screaming and crying on the floor, quite unable to stand.

MARY: Poor Doctor Polidori.

POLIDORI: The others in the class all had adult cadavers. On that day, the day of our finals, they made a pact amongst themselves. I would take no part. Each one of them kept an agreed body part from their cadaver and then stitched them together to form a whole. They dressed this Godless creation in some clothes, called him Gregory, the name of one of our tutors, and took him with them to the ale house to celebrate.

MARY: A most macabre sense of humour.

POLIDORI: I prayed for the girl and made sure her body was returned to consecrated ground and buried whole.

MARY: And for the others?

POLIDORI: I do not know, but fear the bodies parts were either sold on for further experimentation or disposed of in even less holy ways....but I shouldn't have told you any of this. It will give you nightmares.

MARY: Beyond dissections, did you conduct any other experiments?

POLIDORI: In medicine, botany and materia medica. But none with any such ghoulish outcomes. The worst that occurred was the inevitable accidents that follow in consequence of a badly mixed laxative.

MARY: Do you believe that life has some essential filament or engine of the blood that can be identified?

POLIDORI: Galvani has used an electrical current to make the legs on a frog twitch. There's a video on his Twitter account of him doing it.

MARY: What a bizarre image to conjure with.

POLIDORI: But I do not think that it follows that an electrical contraction of the tissues is life, nor that a larger current would somehow reanimate a man.

MARY: But what if it could Dr Polidori?

POLIDORI: What indeed.

### **SCENE EIGHT: The Skull-Headed Woman.**

*Villa Diodati, 18th June 1816, evening after dinner. BYRON is sat drinking. MARY is pacing the room. RUSHTON is stood in attendance. POLIDORI enters.*

MARY: What of him?

POLIDORI: I have put Percy to bed with some ether. He'll soon sleep.

MARY: I'll go to him.

POLIDORI: Please don't. I fear you might induce another such episode.

MARY: Oh?

BYRON: Why did he scream so?

POLIDORI: He had a most disagreeable vision my Lord, driven by your reading.

BYRON: I was merely attempting to set a mood, not make a man lunatic.

MARY: He is anyway prone to ravings without such vivid stimulation.



BYRON: I would that my writing had such power. What did he babble about Polly?

MARY: We heard him shouting from down here.

BYRON: What vision of terror had I so unwittingly induced in dear Percy?

POLIDORI: I think it is better unspoken.

BYRON: Unspoken? Unspoken?! We are the opposite of unspeakers. We say everything. His fevered response is great testimony of what horrifies. You must tell us.

POLIDORI: It was a vision of Miss Mary.

MARY: Do not spare us dear doctor. I am as curious to know as my Lord.

POLIDORI (*to MARY*): He had a vision of you naked.

BYRON (*smirking*): You must give us every detail Polly. Unspeak nothing.

POLIDORI (*to MARY*): In it, he approached you. Your eyes were closed. You opened your eyelids and there were only wounds where the eyes had been plucked. He looked down and your nipples too had been ripped away, replaced with eyelids, the eyes opened and blinked at him. He heard you call him. He looked down further at your...your area of intimate commodity. It had grown teeth, brown, broken teeth and was talking, spitting, asking to be kissed.

*BYRON looks shocked for a moment. Then erupts in mocking laughter.*

MARY: He is indeed much disturbed.

POLIDORI: He is calm now and will be quite returned to us in the morning.

BYRON: Dare we proceed with the contest?

MARY: I'm sure the rest of us are quite strong enough in temperament to bare whatever ghost story the others might have conjured. My Lord, perhaps you will begin.

BYRON: Sadly, I have but little to offer.

MARY: That is disappointing. But offer what little you have.

BYRON: I find the strictures of prose so tiresome. It limits the imagistic flow. I find I have enjoined myself to paint rich colours with a mere stick of charcoal in my hand.

PODLIDORI: Have you nothing for us my Lord, when twas you that set the challenge?

BYRON: I shall briefly say that in my attempt to horrify you, I was reminded of a Greek superstition common in many villages. If a man commits a mortal sin, then the consecrated earth in its Holiness rejects his body and he's become vampire. The corpse will not rot and each full moon is cursed to claw its way out of the ground filled with an infernal bloodlust, lust that can only be satiated by feeding on the blood of those it loved in life.

MARY: I wonder that we should not all fear becoming vampire?

POLIDORI: Some might have more reason to hold that fear than others.

*BYRON retrieves a single sheet of paper from his pocket, the outline of the ghost story that he has been working on.*

BYRON: I have a notion to link it to the story of two travellers, one older and aristocratic, one younger, some form of companion. In some precipitous circumstances the younger promises the elder that should he die, he will pledge never to reveal the death to anyone. Surely, soon it comes to pass that the elder dies and the younger returns home.

MARY: There is not much to give us fright here.

BYRON: Upon return to England, the younger man finds to his inexplicable horror the elder man alive and well and all about society.

POLIDORI: By what device?

BYRON: That is not central to matter.

MARY: Then what is?

BYRON: The elder man, now diabolically revived by some unspoken device, is now at seducing the younger man's sister.

MARY: His sister?

*MARY and POLIDORI exchange a knowing glance.*

BYRON: Aye. He is trapped by his oath and must watch in dread as the elder man ruins her, unable to speak out. He flees for the continent and dies.

POLIDORI: He flees for the continent?

*MARY and POLIDORI exchange another conspiratorial glance.*

BYRON: I have not found the right ending. I told you, painting with a charcoal stick.

*BYRON drops the sheet of paper with the outline of the ghost story to the floor.*

MARY: And Doctor Polidori. Have you found this form of prose any more fruitful and perhaps less autobiographical?

*BYRON shoots MARY an angry look.*

POLIDORI: I believe so Miss Mary.

BYRON: Do proceed Polly. I cannot wait to be terrified by the *contents* of your writing, accustomed as I am to being terrified merely by its *quality*.

MARY: And how good are your skills as a physician my Lord?

POLIDORI: The heroine of my story is a lady.

BYRON: As heroines usually are.

POLIDORI: She is the Devil's mistress. And is even unfaithful unto him, returning to Earth in mortal form at the price of having no memory of her previous existence.

MARY: Why is she unfaithful to the Devil?

POLIDORI: She tires of his escalating indulgence in ever more vile lusts.

BYRON: That seems unlikely to send any woman fleeing, unless this is a Christian moral.

MARY: Or a Catholic one.

POLIDORI: Her head is turned into a bare, screaming skull, fully animated but without a scrap of skin or muscle or tissue.

MARY: Has she a brain still?

POLIDORI: Yes.

BYRON: Why? Why is her head stripped in such a manner? How?

POLIDORI: Because of what she sees through the keyhole.

MARY: What keyhole? What is it that she sees?

POLIDORI: Something unspeakably shocking.

BYRON: Then it must be the keyhole of a bedroom door.

MARY: What could it be? A murder?

BYRON: A mirror, showing her who she really is.

MARY: Or herself grown old, reclaimed by the Devil.

BYRON: And what narrative have you for this woman, who sees something, we know not what, made skull-headed, we know not how?

MARY: And how does she become human again upon leaving Hell? And why would the Devil not simply come for her?

*Pause.*

POLIDORI: I do have some way to go yet.

*POLIDORI sneezes.*

POLIDORI: And the making of a head cold.

BYRON: You have an *image*. The challenge was to write a *story* Polly, a story. You have two ideas and nothing to link them.

POLIDORI: Then I am in the same position as my Lord.

BYRON: I have a myth and a plot and am simply troubled by a genre not amenable to my style of writing.

POLIDORI: And yet, even as a man who makes his reputation from writing, you have failed still to produce a simple ghost story. You are in the same position as I, when you might reasonably have been expected to do so very much better.

BYRON: Why must you always carp and wheedle away at everything so? If you are being critical, be witty with it. An epigram is so much easier to bear than the tedium of blank complaint.

MARY: Yet, tis I have failed worst of all. You two at least have the beginnings of something. I have nothing of which I feel able to speak.

POLIDORI: Byron thought his comments witty. Others found them less than shitty.

BYRON (*laughing*): Crude but serviceable. You made me laugh at least.

POLIDORI: Why must I always be just a tassel to your gilded purse of merit? Name me one thing, just one thing, which you can actually do better than I.

*BYRON indicates for RUSHTON to fill his glass. He gulps it down.*

BYRON: I can drink four bottles of wine and still recite Plutarch. I can write a poem that sells 14,000 copies in a single day. I can swim Lake Lemman in a morning.

*BYRON jumps to his feet, moving towards POLIDORI.*

BYRON: And I can give you a damned good thrashing.

*MARY gets to her feet.*

MARY: Gentlemen!

BYRON: It is only save for her company that I do not do so now!

*BYRON storms out.*

MARY: I should attend on Percy.

*MARY exits. POLIDORI picks up the scrap of writing containing the outline of his ghost story that BYRON threw down earlier and begins to read it over. RUSHTON comes over to POLIDORI as if to offer him some more to drink from the decanter. POLIDORI shakes his head. RUSHTON puts the decanter down.*

RUSHTON: I shall return that to my Lord to save you any fettle.

POLIDORI: It is no inconvenience.

RUSHTON: None the less.

*POLIDORI reluctantly hands RUSHTON the paper.*

RUSHTON: Wouldn't want you being taken for a common clove now, would we Doctor? Being a burr to his Lordship is one thing, but being boned by a bone picker, I can scarce bare to think on it.

*POLIDORI looks at RUSHTON as if to speak and then storms out. RUSHTON smiles.*

**SCENE NINE: Dr Polidori Fever Worsens**

*Dr Polidori's bedroom, Villa Diodati, 20th June 1816. POLIDORI is in bed, head propped up on the pillow reading. RUSHTON enters with some broth on a tray and sets it on the bed for POLIDORI.*

RUSHTON: My Lord bade me bring you this.

POLIDORI: What is it?

RUSHTON: Broth.

*POLIDORI lifts a spoonful of the broth to his lips.*

POLIDORI: It's cold.

RUSHTON: Long walk from them kitchens.

*POLIDORI pushes the broth aside. BYRON enters.*

BYRON: And what diagnosis has the good Doctor made of his own condition today?

POLIDORI: A little improved my Lord, but still weak.

*BYRON smiles and nods at RUSHTON indicating that RUSHTON should spoon-feed POLIDORI which RUSHTON does with some reluctance, whilst POLIDORI eats with some reluctance.*

BYRON: How is the broth?

POLIDORI: Most nourishing my Lord.

BYRON: Tis your own recipe, from your own website, fortified with sage as you suggest.

*BYRON watches POLIDORI eating for a moment.*

POLIDORI: Odd reversal Polly. Me nursing you thus.

POLIDORI: It is Rushton's hand that feeds me.

BYRON: If it is my broth, made by my cook, served to you in my villa, by my page, then I think it can be said to be me that is feeding you. Like having a dog and barking oneself.

POLIDORI: I am sure I will feel well enough by tomorrow.

BYRON: You had better. It is an ongoing embarrassment to have a sickly physician.

*BYRON nods to RUSHTON that he should stop. RUSHTON exits. BYRON takes out the paper on which his ghost story fragments is written.*

BYRON: Rushton returned this to me.

POLIDORI: I was going to myself my Lord.

BYRON: Were you? After photographing it, no doubt.

*BYRON drops the paper on to POLIDORI's bed.*

BYRON: Have it, if you think you can make anything of it. I wish I'd never suggested this damned ghost-writing contest. The idea came and I spoke it before I thought.

POLIDORI: I have made no progress neither.

BYRON: You seem to have developed some attachment with Mary.

POLIDORI: When you are with Shelley, it leaves me with nights at Madame de Stahl's salon and days with Miss Mary.

*BYRON sits on POLIDORI's bed.*

BYRON: I would you could form a similarly warm attachment with Shelley as with his woman. You attack him at every opportunity with little wit and often more than a measure of cant, then you either storm out of the room or challenge him to a duel, or both. It is becoming more than tiresome.

POLIDORI: He ridicules me at every opportunity, and my Lord is want to join in, or worse.

BYRON: You must think of such conversations as like fencing. You parry back and forth. It is light and agile. You don't walk out of the room, return with a cannon and blast your opponent to pieces.

POLIDORI: No. No. I see. It's just hard to...to...

BYRON: You are in the company of what some may be moved to describe as the two finest poets of their generation.

POLIDORI: Of any generation perhaps.

BYRON: Then stop questioning why we are drawn to each other and stop trying to stand equal ground with us. You cannot.

POLIDORI: You and Shelley are not drawn to each other as poetic souls.

BYRON: Are we not?

POLIDORI: You are drawn to each other as exiles. Both of you cast out of England as your appetites disgusted and enraged the families of the women you pretended to love. Neither of you having the courage to stay for fear, fear that you'd be shamed and rejected. All exiles are ultimately cowards.

BYRON: You must be either kinder or funnier in your judgements dear Doctor, for this sort of sentiment will lead us nowhere.

*BYRON stands.*

POLIDORI: For those brief few weeks

BYRON: Which weeks?

POLIDORI: Writing in your company. Writing with you. It felt like...like flying. Then Shelley arrived, and I realised I was simply falling. And now I am left flailing whenever he comes in the room.

BYRON: You were my only companion and a good one. But that time is past.

POLIDORI: I wish it were not so.

BYRON: I came to tell you something.

POLIDORI: Yes?

BYRON: Hobhouse is arriving tomorrow.

*POLIDORI sighs deeply.*

BYRON: I cannot have you at war at every table with both Shelley and Hobhouse. It will be too much for any of us to bear, including you.

POLIDORI: Yes, my Lord.

BYRON: They will come for you dear Doctor. You must come back at them, but with a droll parry and an amusing counter-attack. Not a cannon ball.



POLIDORI: No cannon my Lord.

BYRON: Good. Good. Be useful Polly. If I am well and in no need of a physician, then ask yourself what it is I *do* need and become that.

*BYRON bends and kisses POLIDORI on the forehead. POLIDORI is moved.*

POLIDORI: I had thought I had lost any right to expect any such kindness from you.

BYRON: You do not have the right to expect anything from me. Remember that, and we may yet prosper.

### **SCENE TEN: Lord Byron Dresses Dr Polidori**

*Lord Byron's Bedroom, Villa Diodati 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2016. POLIDORI is alone. He opens a chest and takes out some of Byron's clothes. For a moment he observes them and then he slowly dresses in the clothes and observes himself in a full-length mirror, taking a selfie. HOBHOUSE and BYRON watch POLIDORI from the edge of the stage for a moment. They enter. POLIDORI jumps.*

POLIDORI: My Lord, I was much taken with these and wondered whether you thought they would suit my own style? I....I meant perhaps to contact your tailor on return to London and/

HOBHOUSE: /and steal a look from 'My Lord', as well as so much else? I hope you've not posted that selfie anywhere. You know the rules.

BYRON: Or did you mean to dress as me in order to pass as me?

POLIDORI: No, no, my Lord.

HOBHOUSE: Ha!

BYRON: But what a brilliant proposition, to have you return to London as I, so rejuvenated by that Dr Polly that I look ten years younger. A wonderful advertisement for both of us.

*POLIDORI begins to take the clothes off.*

HOBHOUSE: You could send him home to lead the good life you failed to.

BYRON: He could attend church three times a day, avoid all vice and venality, make restitution to all I have sinned against.

HOBHOUSE: And repair to all your debtors.

BYRON: How many years do you propose?

HOBHOUSE: From the little I know, I fear decades are required!

*BYRON moves over to POLIDORI. HOBHOUSE sits down.*

BYRON: I'm quite taken with the idea now. But let's do it properly, shall we?

*BYRON starts to take off POLIDORI's jacket. POLIDORI resists, then allows him to do it and again as BYRON removes POLIDORI's shirt.*

BYRON (*undressing as he speaks*): Come now, you should take the very shirt from my back. If it is to be a hair shirt, then it had best be mine.

HOBHOUSE: Why must you always take any notion too far?

BYRON: I simply have the courage to follow a notion without censoring all of the possibilities before I've even begun to explore them.

HOBHOUSE: Well, all the possibilities here leave me cold.

BYRON: Stay. Take a picture of Polly as me. We shall post it and confuse and confound all.

HOBHOUSE: I'm going in search of Rushton and more wine.

*HOBHOUSE exits. BYRON continues to dress POLIDORI now in a more lingering and sensual way.*

POLIDORI: My Lord, I meant no/

BYRON: /What *did* you mean Polly? Did you want this silk because the colour pleased you?

POLIDORI: It's something I did as a child.

BYRON: Or because it has been near my skin?

POLIDORI: I would wait until my father had left the house and then go upstairs and dress in his jacket and place a ring of his upon my hand.

BYRON: Perhaps it smells of my cologne, or has the smear of my sweat upon it?

POLIDORI: It was a small sop at times when I felt agitated and could not elicit the comfort I needed from him in more direct means.

BYRON: It was like he was holding you.

*BYRON embraces POLIDORI from behind and gently rocks him side to side.*

BYRON: Like he saw everything and understood everything and forgave everything.

POLIDORI: Yes.

*BYRON places a soft kiss on POLIDORI's neck.*

BYRON: And you felt whole and completely safe.

POLIDORI: Yes.

*BYRON pulls him in closer, running his hands through POLIDORI's hair.*

POLIDORI: I remember when I was in Norwich, drinking with Taylor one evening and by the time the night came to a close rain had come in, not even very heavy rain, but he stood and proffered his coat, insisting that I take it at his own expense. I was so taken with his kindness that I cried gently all the way home.

BYRON: William Taylor?

POLIDORI: Yes, my Lord.

BYRON: Taylor's the keenest catamite, I know. Always courting harum-scarum boys half his age, seducing them into bugging him. Rather bad at it, though, by certain accounts. All puff and no piston. But then, I expect you know that?

POLIDORI (*stepping out of the embrace*): No, my Lord, I do not.

BYRON: No need to protest. Hobhouse can't hear you.

POLIDORI: That was certainly not part of our association. I attended meetings of the Norwich Philosophical Society with him and became a convinced supporter of his position on suicide.

BYRON: Something's not right.... Ummm...The shoes! You need my boots.

*BYRON makes a big business of taking off POLIDORI's shoes and putting his boots on him.*

BYRON: 'By suicide he lived and died'? Rather Spartan verse, though unlike a lot of bad poetry, to be commended on its brevity. Now, let me see you properly. Come, my peacock, spread your feathers. The Pinkest of the Pinks.

*POLIDORI reluctantly walks up and down.*

BYRON: That won't do. With some gusto man, like you own the place!

*POLIDORI hesitates and then strides up and down the room, looking very like BYRON, but without the limp.*

BYRON: Bravo. Now, give me your phone. Come, come.

*POLIDORI reluctantly does so. BYRON lifts up the collar on POLIDORI's jacket and puts the hat on an angle to slightly obscure POLIDORI's face, takes his picture and starts to post it.*

BYRON: There we are.

POLIDORI: Please my Lord.

BYRON: #SpottedByron.

POLIDORI: Don't post it.

BYRON: #NuLook. But all my accounts are deleted.

POLIDORI: It will only ignite more interest in you my Lord.

BYRON: Let it.

*POLIDORI's phone starts to ping and buzz repeatedly.*

BYRON: Perhaps I miss being outraged at the intrusion. Ha! 321..330...372 retweets already. 127 new followers. Oh, and over a thousand likes. In less than 30 seconds. I've made you a hit Polly.

*BYRON throws the phone back to POLIDORI who catches it and turns it to silent.*

BYRON: I suggest you take yourself off to the nearest brothel and pass yourself off as me to the finest cat there.

POLIDORI: Queen Caroline just followed me!

BYRON: Apparently, they can double their fee after I've had 'em, and then sell-on the tale of my depraved tastes to tourists eager to be appalled. Would that my writing brought such easy coin to me.

POLIDORI: She retweeted your post with #Neighbour.

BYRON: She has the Villa d'Este on Lake Como. Not exactly next door.

*HOBHOUSE returns with a jug of wine, pouring glasses just for himself and BYRON.*

HOBHOUSE: I'm puzzled.

BYRON: How may we unpuzzle you?

HOBHOUSE: You were perfectly well-behaved and modest with Madame de Staël tonight. It was most unlike you.

BYRON: You're priggishness inhibits me. Besides, she tweets every damn thing.

HOBHOUSE: A prig would never have travelled to see and be seen with Lord Byron.

POLIDORI: He calls me Priggy Polly sometimes.

HOBHOUSE: And a good deal more besides, I'll venture.

BYRON: The names I have for Doctor Dori are nothing more than schoolboy smirks. Aren't they Polly....Dolly?

POLIDORI: If you say so, my Lord.

HOBHOUSE: Hoary Ori.

BYRON: Borey Story Ori.

POLIDORI: Is there to be much more of this?

BYRON: I should think so.

HOBHOUSE: Clawy Ori.

BYRON: Glory Dori. Gory Dori. Vainglory Dori. Outlawry Dori.

HOBHOUSE: Hunky-Dori.

BYRON: Amore Dori. Polly Dolly.

BYRON: Jolly Polly Dolly.

HOBHOUSE: Folly Polly Dolly.

BYRON: Molly Polly Dolly.

*BYRON and HOBHOUSE are now in fits of giggles. POLIDORI looks furious.*

HOBHOUSE: You seem so well George. Hearty and lean. Is that *because* of Doctor Ori? Or *in spite* of him?

POLIDORI: My Lord has thrived since my appointment.

HOBHOUSE: So much so, that one wonders why you continue to be engaged.

BYRON: Polly has his uses, don't you Polly?

POLIDORI: One hopes so.

BYRON: Though I sometimes forget what they are. He writes, you know.

HOBHOUSE: Of course he does.

BYRON: Sometimes quite badly...other times less so.

POLIDORI: I'll let you be the judge of that.

BYRON: Give us one Folly. Now! I demand a poem and if anyone has that right, it is I. You must present something for Hobby.

POLIDORI: If you'll allow me to fetch the script of 'The Fall of the Angels'.

BYRON: No. Now. I demand a poem! I demand it now! Now. Now. Now.

BYRON & HOBHOUSE: Po-em. Po-em. Po-em. Poe-em. Po-em! PO-EM!

POLIDORI: I may have it in my head.

HOBHOUSE: Memory as well as meter. What a marvel.

POLDORI:

'Through infinite, eternal space, 'twas night

And darkness: scarcely the blue lightning shone,  
 As, flashing idly thro' its harmless flight,  
 It lit discordant elements of stone...no alone.'  
 Wait.

*POLIDORI gets the poem up on his phone.*

POLIDORI:  
 'It lit discordant elements alone.  
 Oblivion spread its vast long limbs/'

HOBHOUSE: /Oblivion sounds like a welcome release from this.

BYRON: "Shone", "Alone"?! "Shone", "A-lon". There's an unaccounted for "E".

POLIDORI: The half rhyme is intentional. It's/

HOBHOUSE: /Enough gentlemen. Before this night I come to rue, I'm forced to retire, lest  
 being asked to comment true, makes of me a liar.

BYRON: Ha. Very good. Very good. Are you quoting me?

*HOBHOUSE and BYRON embrace.*

HOBHOUSE: No. Good night.

*HOBHOUSE exits.*

BYRON: Now Hobhouse has finally retired, the pills.

POLIDORI: Mr Hobhouse appears not to have warmed to my poetry, or indeed me.

BYRON: Knowing nothing of our emetic compact, he sees I am much improved and thus he  
 wonders why you are remain.

POLIDORI: He is rude and cold.

BYRON: He has protected me from many murky interests, including my own. It has become  
 rather a habit of his to be suspicious is all. Despite everything I'm supposed to have done  
 and everything I have indeed done, he has always been there. My family....Why are you still  
 here?

POLIDORI: To ensure you're wellness.

BYRON: Ummm.

*Pause. POLIDORI smiles nervously.*

BYRON: Your chore, it appears, is complete. If all you are left to be is a churlish pill dispenser, well, I can send to the apothecary myself. Leave a month's laxative supply.

POLIDORI: But I have done as you requested. I did not raise an ill word to Mr Hobhouse, despite being sorely tested.

BYRON: It is not enough. Your emetic pills have, I fear, become more welcome than you. And I can buy those by the handful without the trouble and expense of your presence.

POLIDORI: I have perfected the constituent proportions to precisely suit your Lordship and mitigate against the renal colic that has pained you so with previous pills.

BYRON: If you can perfect it, then just email the requirement to some other clyster pipe who can too.

POLIDORI: You are content to let me go then? The same as when Shelley arrived. Hobhouse now comes and you cast me aside.

BYRON: It's just that having him around has reminded me of what appalling company you are.

POLIDORI (*standing*): My Lord is minded to be cruel tonight.

BYRON: If you'd like to see me cruel, ask for my views on that sow's arse of a poem you so ridiculously blundered you're way through. Have you no sense of audience?

POLIDORI: There are many people who would take a different view.

*BYRON stands and moves towards POLIDORI and follows him round the room goading him.*

BYRON: Pygmies and apes.

POLIDORI: You're wrong.

BYRON (*roughly pulling at POLIDORI's clothes*): Or old men intent on flattering their way into your breeches. That's all you're trading on Dr Whorey: a pretty face. For I'm sure that anything you've ever written without it, would have ended up in one place: the cess pit.

*POLIDORI slaps BYRON across the face.*



BYRON: A curiously feminine gesture.

POLIDORI: What do you want?

BYRON: You know.

POLIDORI: My Lord, I cannot.

BYRON: Oh, you can. You must.

*Pause.*

BYRON: I wonder for your instincts.

POLDORI: How so?

BYRON: You have something I want, and you can give it to me or no.

POLIDORI: That being the case, I also have the duty to protect you from what you want. Too much, too many, too often and you'll become unbalanced again.

BYRON: Ha! If I were you, I'd make me beg.

POLIDORI: Beg?

BYRON: I'd make me grovel and whimper and abase myself, and when I'd prostrated myself more than you'd ever thought I'd would, I'd give me just half what I wanted.

*POLIDORI reaches into his breeches and pulls out a small silver case. He opens it and takes out one pill.*

POLIDORI: Very well. Beg.

*BYRON walks over, kneels and places his hand together.*

BYRON: Please, dear darling doctor may I have one of your pills. I ate heartily tonight and now feel all chuffy.

POLIDORI: No.

BYRON: I'll promise to be kinder.

POLIDORI: How kind?

BYRON: I'll do anything you ask?

POLIDORI: Anything?

BYRON: Whatever you would most enjoy.

POLIDORI: I'd enjoy watching you take your shirt sleeves and polish my boots.

BYRON: My boots.

POLIDORI: Do it.

*BYRON pauses for a moment, smiles and then does it. POLIDORI looks captivated. POLIDORI places a foot up on a chair inspecting the finish.*

POLIDORI: Now kiss them.

*BYRON does so.*

POLIDORI: Now apologise for all the terrible things you said.

BYRON: I'm sorry. I didn't mean them. Your writing shows great promise.

*POLIDORI slaps BYRON hard across the other cheek, pauses to see the effect. Both men stare at each other. POLIDORI takes out a pill. BYRON opens his mouth. POLIDORI places the pill in his mouth. BYRON grabs his hand, holds it and starts to suck on his fingers. POLIDORI is intrigued for a moment and then recoils.*

BYRON: What? Just one! More.

POLIDORI: No.

BYRON: Please. Please!

*POLIDORI shakes his head. BYRON stands, grabs the silver pill case from POLIDORI.*

POLIDORI: Empty.

BYRON: I'll tear your clothes from your body and the walls from your room till I find them.

POLIDORI: The main supply is not in the Villa. You'll never find them and the formula is only in my head.

*BYRON grabs POLIDORI violently and throws him up against a wall.*

BYRON: I'll dash your brains out against this wall to find it!

POLIDORI: I will fetch you three more upon one condition: I stay.

*BYRON releases him and nods.*

BYRON: My, my. Doesn't the good Doctor take to cruelty quickly?

POLIDORI: I have been taught by a master.

BYRON: Well, well, well Polly Slapper! Who'd have thought you had that in you! I can't wait to tell Hobhouse over breakfast.

POLIDORI: Please, my Lord...

BYRON: Oh don't worry, I won't. Well, I probably won't. We'll have to see how good you are at keeping my pills coming in such an entertaining manner. *(Starting to wretch)* I may yet not have need of the others.

*BYRON exits. POLIDORI sits on the chest and stares into the distance mind racing, pleased and appalled at what he's done. Sounds of BYRON vomiting.*

### **SCENE ELEVEN: Byron Discovers Polidori's Betrayal.**

*The Villa Diodati. 14th September, mid-evening. POLIDORI enters furtively. He goes to BYRON's desk, opens a journal, takes out his phone and takes pictures of the journal pages. Swipes through his phone contact list.*

POLIDORI: No. Not that Murray.

*POLIDORI swipes some more. In bursts HOBHOUSE and RUSHTON. RUSHTON runs at POLIDORI. HOBHOUSE grabs his phone.*

HOBHOUSE: Caught in the act!

*RUSHTON struggles with POLIDORI and gets him in an arm-lock.*

POLIDORI: Unhand me!

*BYRON enters.*

RUSHTON: As close as God's curse to a whore's arse.

BYRON: Perfidious Polly!

HOBHOUSE: What were you up to on here then?

*HOBHOUSE is scrolling through the phone, and stops, looking shocked. He hands the phone to BYRON.*

HOBHOUSE: It's Murray, my Lord. John Murray.

BYRON: My own publisher? Let me see.

*HOBHOUSE hands BYRON POLIDORI's phone, who scans the screen for a few moments.*

BYRON: Tis true. £500 for a diary of his travels with me supplying "all the details that the hired binoculars from the far side of the lake might not."

*BYRON hands the phone back to HOBHOUSE.*

RUSHTON: You breast fleet cunt.

BYRON: £500 is £500 more than I have ever earned from Murray.

POLIDORI: My lord, I was replying/

HOBHOUSE: /That you should have the intention of betraying the privacy of any man with whom you have lived on such a confidential and professional footing is altogether incredible.

BYRON: Good to know that I'm worth such a princely sum, at least.

POLIDORI: I was replying to say that whilst I will happily write my travels, they will hardly touch upon my time when with his Lordship.

HOBHOUSE: And such writing deserves a £500 fee?

BYRON: No. But the pictures of the pages from my personal journal might.

POLIDORI: I wasn't meaning to send them to Murray. Those were just out of curiosity.

RUSHTON: Grub Street feak.

BYRON: Let him go Rushton.

POLIDORI: I regret the intrusion into my Lord's privacy. But you did promise me.

BYRON: Promised you what?

POLIDORI: Stood at the corner of the battlefield at Waterloo. You said that you would make a gift of everything you wrote here to me and have it bound with my own writing to form a volume. So, really, it was mine already.

BYRON: Don't be ridiculous.

POLIDORI: You said it. You promised.

BYRON: I meant one page, perhaps one poem, not a licence to assume ownership of everything I wrote from that point to this.

POLIDORI: Perhaps you should've said that.

RUSHTON: If you thought this writing was yours, then why go bilking in here alone to photograph it?

POLIDORI: Because it was clear my Lord had no intention of keeping his promise.

HOBHOUSE: Only someone so ridiculously self-deluded could imagine that as a premise for justifying your actions here tonight.

BYRON: I think you'd best retire Polidori.

POLIDORI: I have never been so un/

BYRON: Go. Damn you Polidori. Get from my sight!

*POLDORI goes to speak, thinks better of it and exits. RUSHTON follows.*

HOBHOUSE: You must throw him out. We should do it now. I'll go through his email and see if I can work out what he'd been doing.

BYRON: Give me the phone.

HOBHOUSE: Let me. You'll be too soft with him.

BYRON: Give me the phone. And do not get Rushton to throw him out. And do not throw him out yourself.

HOBHOUSE: George he has to go.

BYRON: I will see it done.

HOBHOUSE: And I hope this episode will lead you to review the wisdom of keeping this personal journal. Its record is nothing more than a blackmailer's licence to mint money.

BYRON: Please Hobby. Leave me. Let me deal with it in my own way.

*HOBHOUSE hands BYRON the phone.*

HOBHOUSE: You're as big a fool as he is.

### **SCENE TWELVE: Lord Byron's Suppository.**

*Villa Diodati, dining room. 15th September, dinnertime. BYRON is sat alone at the table, the carcass of a whole chicken is on his plate, two wine bottles and half a huge pie is on the table. BYRON reaches for the pie, takes a massive bite out of it, chews and nearly wretches he is so full. He throws the pie down, and spits out the mouthful everywhere over the table. POLIDORI enters.*

POLIDORI: You sent for me my Lord.

BYRON: Pully Polly. Pushy Polly. Pally Polly. Pelly Polly. No. No. Pilly Polly. That's it. Pilly. Polly.

*BYRON throws a chicken bone at POLIDORI.*

BYRON: You are my physician are you not?

POLIDORI: I was uncertain I was still so my Lord.

BYRON: Sit, sit, sit. There's still some pie left. I'll call for Rushton and he'll get you whatever you want.

POLIDORI: I am not hungry my Lord.

BYRON: But you have been holed up in your room since yester evening. No supper. No breakfast. You must be ravenous.

POLIDORI: I am almost as light an eater as is my Lordship.

*BYRON eyes the mass of debris on the table and bursts out laughing, the laughter becoming a little manic and menacing.*

BYRON: I have need of you my Pilly Polly. *(Burps)* Or rather my medications. Come here. Come here. Come here man.

*POLIDORI stands and reluctantly moves towards BYRON. BYRON rips open his shirt.*

BYRON: Give me your hand.

*POLIDORI does so. BYRON massages his stomach with POLIDORI's hand.*

BYRON: Gotch-gutted. It feels like I am bursting. You must save me before I am turned gundiguts.

POLIDORI: My Lord, the laxative should be taken an hour or so after eating. Gorged as you are at the moment, it will not be able to penetrate the block of the food.

BYRON: I cannot wait an hour.

POLIDORI: Or you must vomit it out.

BYRON: I cannot. It rots the teeth and mine are browning by the day. There must be something else, you suggested it to me once, I think.

POLIDORI: You could take the laxative in through the rear my Lord. Then it is ahead of the food and will soon start to work.

BYRON: Up the arse?

POLIDORI: Yes, my Lord.

BYRON: You had better do it for me.

POLIDORI: I can place the pill on your finger in the correct positioning and then I am sure my Lord would rather make the insertion himself.

*BYRON smiles and puts his finger out. POLIDORI places a pill on his finger. BYRON loosens his breeches and starts to reach round. The pill falls from his finger. BYRON picks it up with two fingers, starts to reach round again and jumps up in pain.*

BYRON: Cramp. Cramp. Pull my arm back man.

*POLIDORI pulls BYRON's arm to the opposite side that he was bending from.*

BYRON: I fear the task is yours.

*BYRON loosens his breeches some more. POLIDORI holds the pill in one hand, spits on it, puts his hand down BYRON's breeches and inserts the pill.*

BYRON: Push Pilly Polly. Push! I wonder if this is technically sodomy or must the penis be used to qualify it as a mortal sin?

*BYRON smiles to himself as POLIDORI continues.*

BYRON: Better make it two.

POLIDORI: One deeply applied is the most I would recommend.

*BYRON reaches behind him and grabs POLIDORI's arms with POLIDORI's finger still up his arse. POLIDORI struggles for a moment but then allows BYRON to hold him there.*

BYRON (*suddenly angry*): What are you Polidori?

POLIDORI: My Lord's physician.

*BYRON thrusts POLIDORI's fingers into him with each phrase in his next few lines.*

BYRON: Not quite enough. Not quite gentleman enough; not quite entertaining enough; not quite useful enough.

POLIDORI: Stop. Please. Stop!

BYRON: Not quite pretty enough.

POLIDORI: For what?

BYRON: For anything. What are you?

POLIDORI: A gentleman much put upon.

BYRON: Ha! A catch fart roaming from room to room sniffing the air for something sour to carp on. A usurer. A rancid blunderbuss.

POLIDORI: I have always/

BYRON: /And worst of all, a betrayer. I can forgive anything but disloyalty.

*BYRON releases POLIDORI who pulls away. BYRON refastens his breeches.*

POLIDORI: I know you are angry about last night, but what I said is true.



BYRON: You were so beautiful when I first saw you. How quickly youth can fall from a face.

POLIDORI: Twas but five months ago.

BYRON: Only you Polly, could rotten without ever having been ripe.

POLIDORI: If I am rotten, it is you have made me so.

BYRON: If one mistakes poison for honey, it is not the fault of the glass.

POLIDORI: This time with you, it was meant to elevate me, to attach me to highest-ranking patients, to open doors to the best houses and salons, to set me for life.

BYRON: I promised you nothing.

POLIDORI: And it is the one thing you have given me. No, less than nothing. You have ruined me. I am undone.

BYRON: Then to avoid any further undoing, I must ask you, finally, to leave.

*POLIDORI is about to beg to stay, then stops himself.*

BYRON: Please John, just go.

POLIDORI: I will be gone by the morning.

### **SCENE THIRTEEN: Polidori's Birthday**

*Villa Diodati, Polidori's room. 16th September, early morning. He is packing the last of his things in a small carpet bag and wooden medicine box. MARY enters.*

MARY: Will you come and say goodbye to the children?

POLIDORI: No.

MARY: Have some breakfast with us at the Maison then?

POLIDORI: Thank you, but no.

MARY: I've nearly finished. The book. The modern Prometheus.

POLIDORI: It has felt like that at times. Having my liver pecked out by vultures each day, just for it grow back overnight ready for another day of pecking.

MARY: The curse of Zeus.

POLIDORI: The curse of Byron.

MARY: And what secret did you steal to anger him so?

*Pause as MARY realises what she's said.*

POLIDORI: In lieu of all the good-byes I cannot make, I say good-bye to you Miss Mary.

*POLIDORI has finished packing, takes MARY's hand and kisses it.*

MARY: We spent a summer trying to write stories about monsters. We should've just read our diaries.

*RUSHTON enters without knocking.*

POLIDORI: The coach is here?

RUSHTON: There is no coach, but I am bid to give you this. There's an email waiting.

*RUSHTON hands POLIDORI his phone.*

MARY: Perhaps it is from Byron asking you to stay?

*POLIDORI looks at his email on his phone. RUSHTON begins stripping sheets from the bed.*

POLIDORI: It's from Hobhouse. It's a bill. For the times I have used his Lordship's horses without permission and for the surplus medications from the apothecary that I am taking with me.

MARY: I am sorry. Good-bye dear doctor.

*MARY kisses him on the cheek and exits.*

POLIDORI: I imagine this has all amused you greatly?

*RUSHTON ignores POLIDORI.*

POLIDORI: I said, I imagine this has all amused you greatly?

RUSHTON: You are free now. Ain't no joy in this, other than that.

POLIDORI: Free? Free to walk. Free to be a physician without a patient. Free to roam in the ruins of the good name I have squandered.

RUSHTON: But free none the less.

POLIDORI: You are no slave.

RUSHTON: Ain't I? I have no shackles to fetter me, but who feeds me? Who houses me? Who gives me enough that I may drink lots and whore a bit?

POLIDORI: We're all sold Rushton, from the day we're born. It's just a case of to whom and for how much.

RUSHTON: Yeah. Well, I ain't no backdoor usher. Never have been that way. Always want to be between a woman's thighs, not be acting woman between a man's.

POLIDORI: Nor I.

RUSHTON: You may have sold your time and your physicianing, but me, I sold my arse. Or rather twas sold for me.

POLIDORI: Byron sold you?

RUSHTON: Oh no, no. Whatever fine persons come calling, the Initiated he calls them, if they have an eye for me, then I am expected to offer it up gratis. Might get a tip from them that's half decent, but that is all.

POLIDORI: I didn't know.

RUSHTON: You didn't see. Anyway, tis not so bad now. Some of them like taking me just cause they know I don't like it, but I'm too old for most of them now.

POLIDORI: Too old? How old are you?

RUSHTON: 19.

POLIDORI: And when did you enter his Lordship's service?

RUSHTON: My pa 'prenticed me when I was 14. And my Lord pressed me into service the night I arrived.

POLIDORI: I am sorry for it.

RUSHTON: Don't be. I bite the pillow and for that I have enough chink to keep me happy and a bit to send home. Tis more than anyone else in my family.

POLIDORI: I see how you are chained now.

RUSHTON: There then. And you have freedom.

POLIDORI: But I do not want it. I love him.

RUSHTON: Love him?!

*RUSHTON moves up close to POLIDORI.*

RUSHTON: Well then, Dr Pol-i-dor-i. You are fucked. And you're to come with me, for Mr Hobhouse says I must walk you out.

*POLIDORI picks up his bag and medicine box.*

POLIDORI: It's my birthday today. 21.

RUSHTON: Couldn't give a shit. Let's just get you gone.

*RUSHTON and POLIDORI exit.*

### **Scene Fourteen: The Initiated at Missolonghi**

*A fort in Missolonghi, Greece. 19th April 1824.*

BYRON: Maybe this is my form of penance.

POLIDORI: What is?

BYRON: Having to put up with you, such a grumbletonian, for a biographer.

POLIDORI: Were there others?

BYRON: What did you imagine The Initiated was?

POLIDORI: I imagined that your lusts required coding. Incestuous lusts, marital sodomy, lusts for men even.

BYRON: One sin obscures another.

POLIDORI: And the boy outside? Lukas.

*BYRON nods.*

BYRON: Though you had better check your purse if Lukas has shown you in. He is the best pickpocket I have known, quite shameless with it.

POLIDORI: And Count Pietro Gamba.

BYRON: A most amiable, brave, and excellent young man.

POLIDORI: He must be my age.

BYRON: Not when I met him. Of course, we are many years beyond that now as he has grown, but the bond of it remains. As with Tita.

POLIDORI: Your gondolier from Venice.

*BYRON nods.*

POLIDORI: A pervert's harem. But these boys had different degrees of alacrity for the sin you goaded them in to. Some even courted you. But Rushton didn't. He came to you as your page. His choice was to submit and be rewarded, or resist and be thrown into penury.

*BYRON nods.*

BYRON: The love of a man for a youth is not an easy thing. I would it did not thrill and fire me so. Or that I was in another age where Greece made heroes out of such men, but tis not so. The Initiated are souls from another time. In this one we are reviled, punished and silenced.

POLIDORI: You have never suffered for your tastes.

BYRON: The leader of our Initiated at Cambridge killed himself.

POLIDORI: You've done nothing but indulge yourself.

BYRON: I last saw my father when I was three years old. He spent all my mother's money on gambling, fucked his sister and killed himself. They called him "Mad Jack" and it is not a name I would dispute. His madness is within me and it has driven me to the same precipice.

POLIDORI: You have driven others to it, myself included.

BYRON: You? Your petulant screams for pity were never serious.

POLIDORI: Who were you to judge?

BYRON: You used them to trump any argument you couldn't win. A tantrum from the talentless, angry that better men than you found some celebrity.

POLIDORI: I was expressing anguish. It was all I had.

BYRON: You never had that. You feigned it. You were jealous of me, of the response to me, even in exile.

POLIDORI: It was like being a distant star in the vast halo of a full moon.

BYRON: A fair measure of our comparative talent.

POLIDORI: But like the moon, your light is stolen.

BYRON: I never stole a single line from anyone.

POLIDORI: You stole souls. Their light reflected off your surface, barren and dead.

BYRON: You were always prattling on about prussic acid, oil of amber blowing into veins, suffocating by charcoal and ingesting corrupting poisons.

POLIDORI: Planning more than prattling.

BYRON: Why bore us with the Bolus details? Do it, or don't. There is precious little in life to make us value it. It is a series of losses and pains and declines. And once there is no more joy to be squeezed from living it, go.

POLIDORI: I did.

BYRON: Did what?

POLIDORI: I killed myself.

*Pause.*

BYRON: And you're blaming me?

*Silence.*

## **INTER-ACT SCENE TWO**

*Projected: a short Snapchat-style animation of a bitmoji of POLIDORI, first looking sad with the caption "Happy 21st Birthday", then in new clothes looking neutral with the caption "Happy 22nd", finally in another set of new clothes looking happy with the caption "Happy 23rd Birthday". Swop to cameos (short film snippets using photos of the heads of the actors crafted onto bizarre actions). POLIDORI cameo of him as a walking jelly (or similar) with the caption "Back to London". FRANCES cameo of her as a cat in a swivel chair turning (or similar) with the caption "I'm reading". POLIDORI cameo of him climbing in a window (or similar) with the caption "I'm moving back home". FRANCES cameo of her as a dog in a school room with the caption "I'm writing". POLIDORI cameo of him dressed as a gangsta ringing a hotel reception bell with the caption "I'm here". FRANCES cameo of her bathing in a cup of coffee with the caption "Welcome home bro".*

## **ACT THREE**

### **SCENE ONE: Polidori & "Frankenstein"**

*Drawing room, Polidori family home in Soho, London. 1 February 1819, afternoon. POLIDORI is going through his email on his phone. FRANCES is reading a letter.*

POLIDORI: Nothing still from Murray.

FRANCES: How many days?

POLIDORI: Three. Do you think he'd write and not email? Perhaps I should check my old lodgings at Covent Garden?

FRANCES: Such impatience. Given you never delivered on your Byron manuscript "The Cautionary Tale of a Physician's Travels with the Devil", I wonder you pester him for work.

POLIDORI: I am published now.

FRANCES: Self-published.

POLIDORI: None the less, it has sold. I sent Murray a volume of the poems and some of the notices. I am become an entirely different proposition to him.

FRANCES: One slim volume John and you speak as it you'd conquered Mount Olympus.

POLIDORI: I suggested he commission a history of the papacy from me.

*POLIDORI opens a parcel, a new edition of "Frankenstein".*

FRANCES: Tis a wonder he is not beating down the door.

POLIDORI: It's here. The new edition. Look her name is upon it. Mary Shelley and there's an introduction from her.

*POOLDIORI begins to scan through the introduction over the next few lines and looks more and more concerned.*

FRANCES: Father is due back soon from the printers. To welcome you home.

POLIDORI: Umm.

FRANCES: Not that you've asked, but I have started translating for him. A book of satirical verse. *Del Giorno* by Giuseppe Parini.

POLIDORI: Shhhh.

FRANCES: He imagines himself earnestly teaching a young Milanese patrician all the habits of the aristocracy. Of course, one comes to realise that everything about such a life is utterly absurd. Papa found him on Goodreads and/

POLIDORI: /Ungrateful bitch!

FRANCES: John!

POLIDORI: Mary fucking Shelley. No acknowledgement. No dedication. No thanks. Nothing.

FRANCES: For what?

POLIDORI: I told her my story from Edinburgh about the cadaver called Gregory. I schooled her in Galvani's experiments with electricity. I gave her the bloody nightmare that inspired the book and every image therein of which she wrote.

FRANCES: That is ungracious of her.

POLIDORI: Ungracious?! Now the author is revealed as a woman, she's a sensation. 2.7 million likes on her father's blog about it. 2.7 million!

FRANCES: It has had an extraordinary response.

POLIDORI: This print edition is already sold out. There's talk of an adaptation for the stage. Papa will probably commission you to translate it into Italian, for there are already French and German editions.

FRANCES: A teacher cannot claim the work of their pupil as their own John.



POLIDORI: I gave her those stories, my stories, stories about my life, my education, what happened to *me*. And she has wrapped them up in this fiction, made fame and money for herself and quite erased me. I was there Frances. I was part of it.

FRANCES: She may have her reasons.

PODLIORI: And she offers not even one word backwards to those of us still struggling in the dirt for the want of the good stories we have given to others.

FRANCES: You are not struggling in the dirt.

POLIDORI: Aren't I? I have failed as a physician. I have failed at setting up alone. I have failed to make a living from my writing.

FRANCES: You have your own ghost story from the Villa Diodati.

POLIDORI: A mere trifle, a thing of no merit written at the knee of a woman I was trying to court, in vain. Just a memento of another failure.

FRANCES: I disagree. Besides, you are home again with those that love you.

POLIDORI: Not out of choice.

FRANCES: It might not have been our choice either.

POLIDORI: One night under this roof and I am a child again. I fail Frances. I see those around me, people of no more talent, no more hard-working, no more God-fairing, and they all surpass me in every way. Everything I touch turns to lead.

*FRANCES opens a parcel addressed to her.*

POLIDORI: What have you there?

FRANCES: The proof of *Del Giorno* from the publisher.

POLIDORI: Whatever for?

FRANCES: I was just excited is all. It doesn't mean much on a screen, but to see my name in print thus.

*FRANCES looks at the title page.*

FRANCES: No. Papa has put *his* name down as the translator.

POLIDORI: Well, if it was done under his supervision it bears his name.

FRANCES: John!

POLIDORI: No one will buy a serious translation from a girl. He gave you the task to amuse you, not to start you in a literary career.

FRANCES: No. That's reserved for the first son, of course, and what a success he's made of it. A £500 commission that he has never delivered on, and a tiny, tiny volume of poetry that he was not paid for.

POLIDORI: I've had three emails just this morning from publishers.

FRANCES: Refusing you employment as a reviewer.

POLIDORI: There will be others.

FRANCES: I can write too John. I worked for months on *Del Girono*. I am owed my name.

POLIDORI: Now I am back, I may offer to help father with the translations.

FRANCES: Something else for you to fail at.

POLIDORI: Frances!

FRANCES: Three years since you left with Byron/

POLIDORI: Every ill that befalls you is not my fault for accepting a position with Lord Byron.

FRANCES: Three years and still the stench of his debauchery sticks to me. I did not work for him. I did not bring him into our lives, but tis I that suffers still.

POLIDORI: How? How do you suffer still?

FRANCES: Not one courter John. Not one. So, I throw myself into work, believing I can make something of it, yet even there I have taken away from me what is rightfully mine.

*FRANCES snatches the volume of "Frankenstein" from POLIDORI and holds it up to him.*

FRANCES: Her name, John. See. Her name.

POLIDORI: She is the exception that proves the rule.

FRANCES: If she stole your stories, I am glad of it. She has used them better than you ever would. She is the one thing you will never be: a success. I wish her all the luck in the world.

POLIDORI: Frances!

FRANCES: And I know her father isn't ashamed of her, like Papa is of you.

## **SCENE TWO: Polidori Becomes Byron**

*An inn off Covent Garden. 3rd February 1819, late evening. POLIDORI is dressed in BYRON's clothes from Act Two, Scene Ten, sat drinking. POLIDORI looks at JARVIS and looks away. JARVIS gets his phone out and checks something, then comes over to POLIDORI's table.*

JARVIS: I know who you are.

POLIDORI: I'm afraid I cannot return the familiarity.

JARVIS: It's alright. I won't cry rope on you... *(exaggerated whisper)* My Lordship.

POLIDORI: I am not/

JARVIS: /I work for the Reeves, the milliner on Cork Street. Reckon I made that hat you're wearing. You was most particular about the curve of the brim on your Regent.

*JARVIS takes POLIDORI's hat off and looks at the label.*

JARVIS: See. Reeves. Knew it. Matches the photo. Which means I know you. *(Leans in conspiratorially)* Lord Byron.

*JARVIS puts the hat back on POLIDORI's head, then lifts it, ruffles POLIDORI's hair, and repositions it.*

JARVIS: Expect you've been back and forth a few times "incognito", sticking to low dives like this that you might remain so.

POLIDORI: Indeed. Indeed. *(Putting on his best Byron)* Venice is a dilapidated pleasure, but there is something about the grey, joyless mundanity of London that I miss.

JARVIS: Such an inn as this one is far from mundane. It offers the rarest of birds a chance to bill and coo in it privacy, when they mayn't in public.

POLIDORI: And are you such a rare bird?

JARVIS: I thought you was all about other sinful pleasures.

POLIDORI: My tastes are...catholic.

JARVIS: Hence you sat here at a feak beaters shining everyone else down.

POLIDORI: I am here to meet the like-mined.

JARVIS: Well, Lord Byron. You have.

*JARVIS kisses POLIDORI on the lips.*

POLIDORI: You're a bold one.

JARVIS: Tis fine. All friends in here.

POLIDORI: But, unfortunately, I am short of time.

JARVIS: Come. We can retire to a room upstairs for a crown and have whatever time you have to ourselves. Lord Byron.

*JARVIS kisses POLIDORI again.*

POLIDORI: Call me George. No, Georgy.

JARVIS: Georgy.

*POLIDORI stands and takes JARVIS by the hand.*

POLIDORI: And I shall call you Polly.

JARVIS: I'm your Polly.

POLIDORI: My darling Polly Dolly.

### **SCENE THREE: Frances Passes The Manuscript.**

*Colburn's office in London. 21st February 1819, afternoon. FRANCES and COLBURN are sat on either sides of a desk, each has a journal open, handwritten copies of "The Vampyre".*

COLBURN: It's not at all what I expected.

FRANCES: No?

COLBURN: It's terrifying. I started yester evening and could not finish it at night. I had to wait till the sun at breakfast. Like nothing I've read before.

FRANCES: I am gratified Mr Colburn.

COLBURN: Twas handwritten only?

FRANCES: These are just these two copies.

COLBURN: And the manuscript is based on a fragment from Lord Byron?

FRANCES: Much expanded upon by my brother.

COLBURN (*reading*): "It happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the ton\* a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank: Lord Ruthven."

*The scene starts to merge into the novella as BYRON enters the room as RUTHVEN.*

COLBURN: I think we all know who the inspiration is.

*FRANCES laughs.*

COLBURN (*reading*): "The light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it".

*RUTHVEN stares at FRANCES with hatred. The smile falls from FRANCES's face.*

COLBURN: Those who felt the weight of winter's ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention, a dark sun to provide some novelty if not illumination.

*RUTHVEN looks coldly at each member of the audience with the same malice. POLIDORI as AUBREY enters, smiling.*

FRANCES: About the same time, there came to London a young gentleman of the name of Aubrey. Handsome and rich as he was, many anxious parents surrounded him striving to introduce him to their daughters.

*AUBREY kisses the hands of women in the front row and nods a bow to the men.*

COLBURN: Aubrey was happily seduced by these such calculated attentions when the extraordinary being so described, crossed him in his career.

\*"ton" is an arcane form of "town"

*AUBREY and RUTHVEN meet, a moment of deep recognition. RUTHVEN slowly walks over to him, holds out his hand. AUBREY takes it and RUTHVEN kisses first the top of the hand and then opens it to lingeringly kiss the palm.*

AUBREY: Was it a foreign custom? An accusation? An invitation? He was both utterly alien and compellingly intimate, almost absent in person, but present in a way that filled every room. Self-obsessed and yet shockingly available.

FRANCES: Mad. Bad. And dangerous to know.

COLBURN: Ha! Quite so. The journey they make to the continent together, the ruined lives Ruthven leaves in his wake. Dreadful.

*AUBREY falls to the floor. RUTHVEN lays him out and nurses him, echoing the Act One, Scene One.*

FRANCES: Aubrey's collapse in the wood trying to save the innocent peasant girl from the creature most foul who satiates itself on her.

*RUTHVEN nurses AUBREY.*

FRANCES: Only to awaken being nursed by the man he suspects to be that very creature.

COLBURN: And yet the kindness and intimacy of the Lord's compassion convinces him to believe his lies so Aubrey travels with him again.

*RUTHVEN and AUBREY swap roles as patient and nurse.*

FRANCES: Only for Lord Ruthven to be mortally wounded in an ambush and then suggest the dreadful oath.

RUTHVEN: May I finally call you friend?

*AUBREY takes hold of RUTHVEN's hand.*

AUBREY: What may I do?

RUTHVEN: You may save me. I mean not my life, I heed the death of my existence as little as that of the passing day; but you may save my honour, your friend's honour.

AUBREY: How? Tell me how? I would do anything.

RUTHVEN: I need but little...my life ebbs apace...I cannot explain the whole...but if you would conceal all you know of me; my honour were free from stain in the world's mouth.

AUBREY: I would never speak ill of you.

RUTHVEN: And if my death were unknown for some time in England....I....I....

AUBREY: It shall *not* be known.

RUTHVEN: Swear! Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears.

AUBREY: I swear.

RUTHVEN: Swear that, for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or my death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see.

AUBREY: I swear!

RUTHVEN: A year and one day.

AUBREY: Yes. I swear.

RUTHVEN: Kiss me.

*AUBREY kisses him on the forehead. RUTHVEN dies. AUBREY slowly pulls back and away as RUTHVEN rises and moves toward FRANCES.*

COLBURN: Aubrey's return to London, to find the dead Lord risen and courting his sister.

FRANCES: Poor Aubrey, unable to speak of the monster's approach.

RUTHVEN: Remember your oath.

COLBURN: Driven mad by inaction.

FRANCES: Taken by a seizure on the day of his sister's marriage to the darkly risen Lord.

*AUBREY collapses and dies. RUTHVEN looms behind FRANCES and places his lips just a breath away from her neck.*

FRANCES: For the bride to die, drained of all blood on the night of her wedding.

COLBURN: Lord Ruthven had disappeared and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of/

FRANCES & COLBURN: /a VAMPYRE!

*AUBREY and RUTHVEN exit.*

COLBURN: What a uniquely stimulating tale.

FRANCES: And what will you pay for such a tale?

COLBURN: Why does your brother not bring these manuscripts to me?

FRANCES: He has lost confidence in himself, and I act as agent for him in this. I was unkind about his writing and now do this to right that wrong.

COLBURN: £20.

FRANCES: £40.

COLBURN: I can see you are quite a negotiator Miss Polidori. £30.

FRANCES: 30. Guineas. And your word of silence.

COLBURN: You have my word.

*COLBURN gets to this feet to shake hands with FRANCES who also stands. She takes one of the manuscripts and hands the other to COLBURN.*

#### **SCENE FOUR: Polidori Is Warned By Hobhouse.**

*Drawing room, Polidori family home in Soho, London. 12 April 1819, afternoon. HOBHOUSE and POLIDORI are mid-argument.*

HOBHOUSE: How do you account for it?

POLIDORI: I cannot.

POLIDORI: I had never intended "The Vampyre" to be published. It was a mere bagatelle, a forgotten leftover from a half-forgotten night of ghost-writing.

HOBHOUSE: Yet published it is. Kindle Best Seller. 4.7 stars on Goodreads.

POLIDORI: It has gone down rather well.

HOBHOUSE: All with my Lord's name attached, when I know that it must have been written almost wholly, by yourself.



POLIDORI: I have never stated anywhere this tale be written by his Lordship.

HOBHOUSE: "Inspired by". "Based on". It matters not. The excuse that Lord Byron related the story and that you took it down from recollection is a baffle-headed absurdity. I can attribute it only to you wanting to push a cheat upon the gullible for the sake of a quick sale.

POLIDORI: I never stated that I wrote it down from memory.

HOBHOUSE: I have received information that the site on which it originally appeared added an introduction with these words, "without pledging ourselves positively for its authenticity as the production of Lord Byron" but that the page was taken down.

POLIDORI: Then your argument is with them, not with me.

HOBHOUSE: Colburn refuses to name his source.

POLIDORI: When it appeared, I went to Mr Colburn stating the truth, that it was mine built upon what Lord Byron had in conversations with me stated to be the intended foundation of his story.

HOBHOUSE: Lord Byron had nothing to do with it.

POLIDORI: You weren't there.

HOBHOUSE: No.

POLIDORI: You sound doubtful.

HOBHOUSE: I am in no doubt as to who benefits the most from this.

POLIDORI: It was published on-line and in print without either party's permission. So, still your point of redress is with the publisher.

HOBHOUSE: Lord Byron has given me a sort of power of attorney over his literary concerns, and would certainly think me very negligent of my trust if I did not interfere on a topic so likely to affect his reputation.

POLIDORI: Out of love?

HOBHOUSE: What?

POLIDORI: Do you do all this out of love for him? Or fear of what he knows?

HOBHOUSE: It is necessary that his Lordship should be informed that he has the dubious credit of being connected to the production of this tale.

POLIDORI: If you mean that I should contact Lord Byron upon the subject – I certainly shall not do it, not for any reason connected with this tale, but because I have heard from several quarters that he has written unkindly about me.

HOBHOUSE: He spoke unkindly about you all the time. Why would he not write so? It would be a wonder if these years of absence had changed his view and his wits.

POLIDORI: Always so charming Mr Hobhouse.

HOBHOUSE: Perhaps, upon reconsideration, you will doubt the propriety of Lord Byron's name ever having been made use of at all without his express permission in/

POLIDORI: /I do not need to reconsider, as I did not do it.

HOBHOUSE: There is plainly no progress to be made here.

POLIDORI: There is plainly none that needs to be made.

*HOBHOUSE exits. Beat. FRANCES enters.*

FRANCES: I was listening at the door. I'm sorry John. I was tricked.

POLIDORI: I know you thought of this as a kindness Frances.

FRANCES: I was angry with father, not you.

POLIDORI: You were right to demand your name, as I now somewhat painfully realise.

FRANCES: Now Colburn has taken your name and all the success is Byron's.

POLIDORI: And Byron doesn't want it. T'was you Franny that knew it would be that success.

FRANCES: Was the 30 guineas enough?

POLIDORI: Enough for what?

FRANCES: To clear your debt to Brook's Faro House.

POLIDORI: It made some progress.

FRANCES: Oh John. You mustn't ask Papa for any more money.

POLIDORI: No. No, I mustn't. I must ask Mr Colburn.

**SCENE FIVE: Polidori Meets With Colburn.**

*COLBURN's office in London. 15th April 1819, afternoon. POLIDORI is sat one side of a desk and COLBURN on the other, printed copies of "The Vampyre" out.*

POLIDORI: You have been swerving me for days.

COLBURN: I have just been making additional substantiating enquires.

POLIDORI: Swerving Mr Hobhouse too, no doubt.

COLBURN: You understand why the attribution to Lord Byron has some....some credence. And the vampire, Lord Ruthven, he does share many attributes with Lord Byron, who is known to write characters much based upon himself.

*BYRON as RUTHVEN enters. He slowly surveys the room and the audience.*

COLBURN: And, even by your own account, the work is based on some of his ideas at the very least.

POLIDORI: But the final work is mine. He challenged me once, stating that only he could write a poem that sold 14,000 copies in one day. Well, I estimate "The Vampyre" to be not so very far behind.

COLBURN: We're on a fifth print run of 5,000 copies; e-book downloads of a little over 177,000; #TheVampyre trending everywhere.

POLIDORI: Would that Lord Byron were here to vex himself at the news.

COLBURN: But what is the essential reason for its success? True tis wonderfully expressed and conjures a sense of lingering evil.

*COLBURN opens a copy of "The Vampyre".*

COLBURN: "I now found, that, as many more of Lord Ruthven's actions were exposed to my view, the results offered different conclusions from the apparent motives."

*RUTHVEN moves towards the audience with a purse of coins. He hands out a coin to those he judges to be wrong-doers. POLIDORI opens another copy of "The Vampyre".*

POLIDORI: "Lord Ruthven was profuse in his liberality; the idle, the vagabond, and the prostitute, received from his hand enough/."

COLBURN: "/not just to relieve their wants, but to allow them to wallow in their lust, or to sink still deeper into iniquity."

POLIDORI: "All those upon whom Ruthven's generosity was bestowed, inevitably found that there was a curse upon it."

COLBURN: Chilling, and who amongst us does not doubt the motives of the seemingly generous?

POLIDORI: I want my authorship restored.

COLBURN: You are free to assert publicly what you have to me. But the substance of your claim is unclear when you state freely that Lord Byron was indeed the source.

POLIDORI: But I wrote it. It is a sensational success and it's mine.

COLBURN: Sensation it is. But without Byron's name, there would be no sensation. It wouldn't even have made it on our fan fiction pages.

POLIDORI: But you just praised it highly

COLBURN: It is highly praise-worthy, if Byron wrote it.

POLIDORI: Byron did not write it! I did! My sister returned the original manuscript to me. It is my hand not Byron's.

COLBURN: Your scribing. His words.

POLIDORI: Tis only a matter of time before Hobhouse catches you, as I have, and tells you that his master will lay no claim to the novel you have published bearing his name.

COLBURN: I have evaded him thus far.

POLIDORI: I will post the truth on all my social media.

*COLBURN picks up his phone and swipes through some screens.*

COLBURN: You have...117 followers. 207 friends. 83 followers. I quake.

POLIDORI: I will sue!

COLBURN: Expensive Dr Polidori and I have heard you are much indebted to Mr Brook.

POLIDORI: In the name of fairness man, please! This deception you are enacting is plainly unfair and unworthy of you.

COLBURN: Very well. I do not seek any further confrontation.

POLIDORI: Then you'll give me my name?

COLBURN: An errata appended on the title page of the printed copies acknowledging your authorship.

POLIDORI: Agreed. And on-line?

COLBURN: I will post a correction to say that you are the author on the magazine website.

POLIDORI: Thank you.

COLBURN: It will say that the novella is your work but retain that assertion that it is based on an idea by Lord Byron.

POLIDORI: That seems satisfactory.

COLBURN: But it will not go out tonight.

POLIDORI: Then where?

COLBURN: When the next edition of the "New Monthly Magazine" drops. "The Vampyre" was published their first, so tis only right that that should be the home of the correction.

POLIDORI: Giving you several more weeks to profit from the misattribution.

COLBURN: The increase in on-line subscriptions has been remarkable.

POLIDORI: And in respect of that, a further payment.

COLBURN: I have parted already with 30 gunieas to Miss Polidori.

POLIDORI: And made thrice that in a day.

COLBURN: I will make an honorary payment in full and final settlement of your interest in this matter and with no acknowledgment of any wrong-doing on our part.

POLIDORI: How much?

COLBURN: £40.

POLIDORI: £50.

COLBURN: £35.

POLIDORI: That is a curious way to make an accommodation Mr Colburn.

COLBURN: £30.

POLIDORI: I'll take it.

*POLIDORI jumps up offering COLBURN his hand and they shake.*

POLIDORI: Damn you.

*RUTHVEN moves swiftly towards POLIDORI, places his hands around his face, covers his lips with his own lips, sucking the air out of POLIDORI's lungs. Their bodies press and they rock several times as the air is extracted, RUTHVEN sucking harder and harder. RUTHVEN lets go. POLIDORI collapses to the floor winded, breathless and gasping. POLIDORI dies.*

COLBURN: "Whenever he heard of their fates, Lord Ruthven's eyes sparkled with fire, and to my exalted imagination he began to assume the appearance of something supernatural."

*COLBURN exits. RUTHVEN moves back into being BYRON.*

BYRON: It was Murray who sent me a copy of *The Vampyre*. He confided that Polidori had sold it to a publisher, Colburn, as my work, saying I had dictated it to him which he'd faithfully recorded in his hand. Then, having sold it for too little, for Polly failed at everything, he then crawled back and asked for more money. It's a wretched little book. I have, besides, a personal dislike of vampires and the little acquaintance I have with them would by no means induce me to divulge their secrets.

*BYRON rearranges POLIDORI's fallen body, so his arms are folded neatly over his chest.*

BYRON: Murray wrote to me again on January 2nd 1822, confirming Polly's death the previous August.... I don't know why he delayed so. I anyway had had a presentiment of the news. I was convinced something unpleasant hung over me last night, on the very edge of manifestation. I expected to hear that somebody I knew was dead. Poor Polidori. When life is miserable, death is desirable, suicide justifiable.

BYRON exits. *The scene transforms into POLIDORI's bedroom. FRANCES enters and crosses herself. She goes over to POLIDORI's bed and kisses him on the forehead. She notices a letter that is under the bed, picks it up and begins reading it to herself.*

FRANCES: From Madame de Staël.

*FRANCES reads, turns to the final page of the letter, then stops.*

FRANCES: "I was at the opera last night. A wonderful new work based on Byron's 'The Vampyre'. I cannot tell you how it captivated us all. It is the talk of Society here and all across Europe. Who knew that Byron is as good a novel writer as he is a poet? This will be making of him all over again."

*FRANCES puts the letter down.*

FRANCES: It is enough to break a man's heart.

### **SCENE SIX: The Nature of Fame**

*A fort in Missolonghi, Greece. 19th April 1824. BYRON is sat up in bed. POLIDORI is stood.*

POLIDORI: "He was exactly the kind of person to whom, if he fell overboard, one would hold out a straw to know if the adage be true that drowning men catch at straws."

BYRON: I was being witty in a letter. I did not mean it. I was sad after you left Diodati, unexpectedly so, perhaps. I was sadder still when I heard of your death.

POLIDORI: You did feel something for me.

BYRON: It is in the nature of every good-bye that we are reminded of our own mortality.

POLIDORI: There is a line of causation from one of those departures to the other.

BYRON: I supported your case for authorship of "The Vampyre". I asked Murray if he'd consider you as a reviewer, but the damage to your reputation was already done. And people still believed I wrote the bloody thing.

POLIDORI: It made you famous again.

BYRON: Which was most unwelcome.

POLIDORI: My Lord complains of the inconvenience of being recognised whilst straining on tip-toes to be seen.

BYRON: What is fame to me? The disadvantage of being known by people of whom I know nothing. Stranger's assumed intimacy...It is a most unnatural state, a kind of madness.

POLIDORI: But to be known for doing something, admiration for talents you possess, plaudits for work you have written, isn't that welcome?

BYRON: Perhaps, to be thought of well by those whom I know or those I admire, but that isn't fame. Fame is the uncontrolled intrusion into everything that you are.

POLIDORI: All I craved was due recognition.

BYRON: No. You crave fame. Despite seeing that it isolated me, limited me, exiled me, left me in a constant state of agitated readiness to flee. You. Still. Want it.

POLIDORI: Very well. I do. I want to be famous.

BYRON: Finally!

POLIDORI: I want to be praised. I want every woman wishing for a dance. I want to walk into rooms whereupon they fall silent that all may savour my next words. I want invites to the best salons, the best gaming house, the best clubs in Europe. I want everything that you had and treated as if it were nothing more than a boring inconvenience.

BYRON: Fame is a process of martyrdom. "Byron" isn't real. I invented him. Then they invented him. I lost control many years ago, and tired as I am of the part, I find myself without an understudy.

POLIDORI: Perhaps you don't need one. Perhaps Byron can just fade away.

BYRON: Death laughs at all we do and then devours, worlds like atoms, years like hours.

POLIDORI: "You see Dr Polidori, the only thing I can achieve now is this: never to be forgotten. It will be the one remaining purpose in my life."

*POLIDORI looks into the distance and focusses on something.*

POLIDORI: I can see.

BYRON: What?

POLIDORI: The future.

BYRON: You must show me.



POLIDORI: Why is it that you will never be forgotten?

BYRON: If there is merit in my words, then it is those that I wish to outlive me, to still be spoken in a hundred, two hundred years' time.

POLIDORI: They do. Yet whenever anyone thinks of Byron, they think of sin, sin so unspeakable, so foul that people scarce name it.

BYRON: Yes.

POLIDORI: They do not speak of the beauty in a rhyming couplet. They speak of Byron the drunk. Byron the whore-monger. Byron the sodomist. Byron the syphilitic. Byron the pederast. Byron the despicable. Byron the damned.

BYRON: Yes.

POLIDORI: And those who knew you speak only of the pain you brought into their lives.

BYRON: Yes.

POLIDORI: The scandal of the life you have led eclipses the beauty of the words you have written about it and always will.

BYRON: Yes.

POLIDORI: It's a distant star barely glimpsed for the halo of the moon.

BYRON: I wish to take back all the knowledge the world has of me, to cast off infamy and become simply unfamous, known only for the poems.

POLIDORI: But there will come an age with no use for poetry. Words will be forgotten; images will be all. Optics.

BYRON: Yes.

POLIDORI: That age will value only sensation and scandal. There at least you will thrive for a while, with only the details of your infamy to sustain you, picked over by third rate historians and prurient playwrights. That is your curse Lord Byron.

BYRON: Yes. I accept all of that. I know it to be true.

*BYRON gets up off the bed, suddenly changed and stands confidently.*

BYRON: And now there is something you must accept.

POLIDORI: What?

BYRON: Do you think it is only you may see the shape of the future thus? I can see yours.

POLIDORI (*Trying. Failing*): I...I cannot. Only yours.

BYRON: Frances will marry. Her son, Dante Gabriel Rossetti will become friends with Bram Stoker, a writer. One century will move into another.

*STOKER enters and walks forward, looking out into the audience, enjoying something.*

BYRON: Stoker takes the most famous vampire story of all time and turns it into a play.

POLIDORI: 'The Vampyre'? I still can't see it.

BYRON: Then live it. You must embrace what will come, as I have.

*BYRON exits.*

### **SCENE SEVEN: Dracula**

*Backstage at the Lyceum Theatre, May 18th 1897, lunchtime. STOKER is looking out into the auditorium as if he is stood in the wings looking out on to a stage.*

STOKER: You must be. Shhhh (*he lowers his voice*). I forget I can be heard on stage. He calls me Croaker Stoker if I so much as clear my throat.

POLIDORI: Who?

STOKER: Sir Henry. And you must be Mr Rossetti.

POLIDORI: I must be.

STOKER: Your mother, Frances, is a wonderful woman. Helped me no end with a certain private piece on Roman ethics last winter. She said I should meet you.

*STOKER looks POLIDORI up and down.*

STOKER: You have the Polidori nose.

POLIDORI: How reassuring.

STOKER: It's nearly over.

POLIDORI: What is that we're watching? Some form of rehearsal?

STOKER: Oh this? This is just the copyright reading. Dreadfully dull process. I have to turn my book into a play and stage it once myself in order own the rights going forward.

POLIDORI: This protects your name as the author.

STOKER: Just diced the whole thing up into five acts. Those drop cloths are left over from *Macbeth*. Don't think much of the perspective, and this lot are just company volunteers. Kind but mostly the lesser talents. Still got to be done before publication.

POLIDORI: Of?

STOKER: *The Undead*, old chap. Or I might call it *Dracula*.

POLIDORI: Dracula. Hungarian?

STOKER: Nearly. Transylvanian.

POLIDORI: I think it a most particularly memorable name.

STOKER: Yes? Yes. I know it's a bit vain of me, but I thought we could catch the ending and then head off for luncheon. I want Sir Henry as Dracula, but the character's more *off* stage than *on* and that's never going to appeal to Sir Henry. Still, he'd be a sensation.

POLIDORI: A sensation.

STOKER: It isn't many people who could put such life into a character who is, in point of fact, stone dead.

POLIDORI: A vampire?

STOKER: Quite so, quite so.

POLIDORI: What kind of vampire?

STOKER: What kind?

POLIDORI: Is he a rotting cadaver, pulling himself from his grave every full moon to feed on the blood of those he loved in life?

STOKER (*laughs*): No, no, old chap. Wherever did you get that from?

POLIDORI: Greece, I believe.

STOKER: No, Dracula is an aristocrat. He is a traveller, graceful and full of a dreadful magnetic charm that lures people to their doom as he drains fair maidens of their blood.

POLIDORI: No one can resist him as he moves through society, cruel but uniquely compelling.

STOKER: Did I give your Mama a draft to read? Have you sneaked a peakette?

POLIDORI: A brooding presence at the centre of every place he inhabits.

STOKER: Quite so.

POLIDORI: Something like your Sir Henry perhaps?

STOKER: Oh, no, no, no. Well.... perhaps just a smidge.

POLIDORI: Who was the first vampire?

STOKER: Beg pardon.

POLIDORI: On what did you base your tale?

STOKER: Just my own wild imaginings. I have a copy in the office if you'd like one. Not out till the 26th mind.

POLIDORI: That's very kind of you.

*Pause whilst they both watch what's on stage, both jumping back as some stage blood squirts across the room, almost hitting them.*

STOKER: Bit enthusiastic for a reading. Do you like chops?

### **SCENE EIGHT: Who's Killing Who?**

*A fort in Missolonghi, Greece. 19th April 1824. BYRON and POLIDORI are both stood, POLIDORI still looking out at the audience still.*

BYRON: I wonder how things would've altered if I'd just fucked you?

POLIDORI: He said it was his idea that he was protecting.

BYRON: Or allowed myself to love you back perhaps?

POLIDORI: That the public adore a vampire story.

BYRON: Perhaps they would've been robbed of that.

POLIDORI: Am I to never to be free of people taking credit from me?

BYRON: You have a legacy.

POLIDORI: A legacy for which I am unknown.

BYRON: The point is to leave your mark. You don't have to sign it off and beg for applause.

POLIDORI: No. This isn't right.

BYRON: What isn't right?

POLIDORI: My Lord is turned philosopher.

BYRON: There are four questions of value in life. What is sacred? Of what is the spirit made? What is worth living for? And what is worth dying for? The answer to each is the same. Only love.

POLIDORI: Are you saying that you loved me?

BYRON: I'm saying love is all. It's trite but truthful.

POLIDORI: But tis I who am here to teach you, to show you what you did to me and all the others, to make you accept my pain.

BYRON: You have. I see the pain I caused you. I see how I have shat in the drinking well of my own legacy. But you are not the first to do this.

POLDIDORI: To make a reckoning?

BYRON: There's been quite a queue. You should've been here for Lady Byron. I am dead Polidori.

POLIDORI: Dead? Dead?!

BYRON: I have been for hours, no centuries, no seconds. Time is nothing, like hieroglyphics, a forgotten code. I have to struggle to keep the sense of it. Your phone?

*POLIDORI looks puzzled.*

BYRON: In your pocket man.

*POLIDORI reaches inside his jacket takes out a small paper journal.*

POLDORI: What's a phone?

BYRON: See. We have done this so often. Time. Its jumbling more and more. You won't learn.

POLIDORI: *You have been teaching me?*

BYRON: Repeatedly. And badly it seems.

POLIDORI: No.

BYRON: We have to learn from each other, in the way we could not in life.

POLIDORI: No. No! I will not have you steal this from me, upstage me even in death, turn yourself into a mentor and me your pupil.

BYRON: If you would but learn my lesson, as I have learnt yours.

POLIDORI: I will learn nothing from you.

BYRON: Think of it more as a moment's perfect contrition. You have to *not* want it, fame. You have to be satisfied with being forgotten, happy even.

POLIDORI: No.

BYRON: I have what you need John. I will say the thing that will heal you, enable you to let go of all worldly wants. All you need is the grace to accept it.

POLIDORI: You have nothing that I need. Nothing.

BYRON: I love you.

POLIDORI: No. No! You killed me. I could love you as long as it was my secret, my hidden sin, just in my head and heart. But it was the moments when you loved me back, those were the thing, the great annihilating force that took all sense and purpose from anything else. That is the curse of Lord Byron: his love, only ever given that it might be taken away leaving the desperate hunger for it forever unsatisfied. Your love was the vampire.

BYRON: I love you John.

*Pause.*

POLIDORI: I hate you. It is the only truth I am left with.

BYRON: And if you could change places with me? Would you?

POLIDORI: In a heartbeat. Less.

BYRON: Then you have failed to learn the one thing I had to teach. But...

*BYRON and POLIDORI move back to the positions they had for Act One, Scene One, which starts to repeat exactly as before, except that **the actors playing BYRON and POLIDORI reverse roles**. BYRON is lying on a bed, topless and sweating, feverish a dirty sheet covering him. Enter POLIDORI with a basin of cold water, a flannel and a new sheet. POLIDORI mops BYRON's brow. BYRON stirs, sees POLIDORI, sits bolt up, grabs the flannel, throws it across the room and knocks the basin flying. POLIDORI collects both, sits on the edge of BYRON's bed, looks at him, and slowly moves his hand with the flannel towards BYRON again. BYRON pulls back. POLIDORI makes some gentle encouraging noises, as if to a child. BYRON allows POLDORI to mop his brow.*

POLIDORI: Much better, my Lord, much better. This will cool the fever a little.

BYRON: Thank you Francesco.

POLIDORI: It's not Francesco, my Lord. It's John.

BYRON: John?

POLIDORI: Dr Polidori.

BYRON: Polly. Polly? Polly!!

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Findings: Writing *The First Vampyre***

This chapter is a reflection on the research and writing process of the second play. It provides an overview of my archival engagement and develops my hypotheses about the relationship between archive, dramaturgy and playwriting in relation specifically to a censored record of intermale sexuality. My writing tested the core concepts outlined in Chapter Five, developing some of them further and abandoning others in favour of new techniques. A different archival record, and an elaborate set of existing dramatisations of it, necessitated a modified approach.

*The First Vampyre (TFV)* was distinct from *The Adhesion of Love (TAOL)* in terms of the substantially increased volume of primary, secondary and creative material that was available. The primary printed material in relation to Polidori is readily navigable, through one volume containing his expurgated diary, essays, poems, the novellas *The Vampyre* and *Ernest Berchtold*, and some letters (Polidori, 2005).

Unprinted letters by Polidori appear in various public and private archives, chiefly in the UK in the John Murray Archive, housed in the National Library of Scotland.

Polidori is also mentioned in the letters of, amongst others - Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, Cam Hobhouse, Lord Byron and Mary Shelley, and also in the wider archival material associated with the Rossetti family. In addition to this archival material, there is one detailed biography (Macdonald, 1991) and a small number of mostly wildly inaccurate dramatisations. These cast him as anything from an elderly double amputee (Smight, 1973) to a drooling, repressed, homosexual masochist (Russell, 1986), usually relegating him to a supporting player to Byron and



the Shelleys (Brenton, 1985) or even omitting him altogether (Lochhead, 1985). It is a discrete body of archival record and dramatic representation and it was realistic to attempt to survey all of it in the research period for the writing of a play based on and reacting against it.



*Timothy Spall as Polidori (Russell, 1986) James Mason as Polidori (Smight, 1973) Polidori's Portrait, Painter: F.G. Gainsford*

However, once the research scoping moved away solely from Polidori and on to any of the others present at the Villa Diodati in 1816, there was an exponential increase in archive, interpretations of archive and creative products more or less loosely based on historical evidence. The copious nature of primary material alone in the UK, both reproduced in print, on-line and in archives, required a strong discipline in structuring the research in order to limit it to something that was achievable within the limited archival engagement window. Given the number of academics who have made whole careers out of researching just one of these potential dramatis personae, there was real risk of being overwhelmed by researching the whole potential cast. Perhaps, more specifically, the risk was of spending too much time researching a seemingly relevant biographical detail which might subsequently end up having little impact on the content of a scene. Retaining a primacy of focus on Polidori would be vital, as well as recognising the limitations of any claims to historical literacy that could be made for some of the smaller or supporting roles.

It is also important to acknowledge that I did not approach the archival records with the neutrality that largely unfamiliar subjects may offer, as I did with *TAOL*. Before I began this process, I already had experienced a number of fictionalised versions of the main characters, which I could not now unknow. The infamous ghost-writing competition associated with 16th June 1816 was, in particular, a scene which I had already experienced dramatised in a number of ways (Whale, 1935, Lochhead, 1982, Brenton, 1984, Russell, 1986, Passer 1988, and Al-Mansour, 2017). I purposefully resisted returning to any of these previous creative responses to the historical evidence until my own archival research was completed. Having recognised that returning my imagination to a tabula rasa in relation to these characters was impossible, I aimed instead to recreate it as a palimpsest upon which my research would overwrite the different memories I had of previously authored versions of Polidori. The page would be, if not spotlessly clean, then at least renewed with a stock of archival resources from which to generate a new version of the doctor and of the events surrounding 16th June 1816.

I resisted what Jackson & Kidd (2011) describe as an element of the ‘narrowing tendency’, i.e. engaging with the archive highly selectively only to prove something (pre or early) formulated by myself as the narrative or the characterisation.

However, as the pressures of time and resource still, inevitably, came into focus, the question became one of what *not* to research. This was harder with *TFV* than with *TAOL* as at the time I was undertaking the research for *TFV*, I did not have anything more than rudimentary fragments of what the story might be. With *TAOL*, the detail of Wallace’s travelogue about his time with Whitman in 1891 provided one

immediate option for a linear narrative and suggested a research process that was framed by the lead up to that journey and the aftermath of it, a period from 1885 to 1894. The material in relation to this was comparatively limited. However, with *TFV*, even if I narrowed my frame of research to the Summer of 1816 and those present at the Villa Diodati, the available material was enormous, many times that available for the near decade under consideration for the previous play.

Articulating a specific way of filtering the historical evidence became vital and forced some reflection. With *TAOL*, though I had not articulated it at the time, I realised that I had prioritised my research into Bolton Museum's Walt Whitman Collection broadly as follows:

1. Archival sources written by Johnston and Wallace from 1885-1894.
2. Archival sources giving significant mention of Whitman, Johnston and Wallace.
3. Secondary historical accounts of the group and men who were members of the Bolton Whitman Fellowship.
4. Contextual accounts of society and sexuality in the late Victorian period, with a focus on those that included a perspective on homosexuality in the period.

Anything in the first three categories that mentioned the sexuality of any group member was also prioritised. Attempting to apply to same prioritisation again in relation to scoping the historical evidence on Polidori, Byron, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Rushton, Hobhouse and Clairmont immediately suggested that there was

more available in archival sources alone than could ever be incorporated into my research parameters. The existence of this much material was problematic as any pathway into it or through it would be random and risked missing things that could be vital, even though I had no real sense of where that vitality might lie, as I didn't know what the parameters of the narrative were yet. An explicit pre-archival engagement selection would be required as a strict limiter and in addition, secondary sources would also require prioritisation.

This led to the decision to exclude some characters from the drama *prior* to undertaking the research, something I'd never done before. I excluded Percy Shelley and Claire Clairmont with the rationale that they appeared to be the most peripheral to Polidori's time at the Villa Diodati. Their ontological weight, in terms of primary and secondary materials, meant that I could not validate any claim to characterise them with historical literacy without engaging with those materials, and that was not possible in the timescale available. I would use some secondary sources to create the most basic biography of their lives (a few hundred words covering significant life events) to ensure that any limited mention of them in the play was consistent with the historicity of their lives, but nothing beyond that. My note-taking in the archives would not include either of them, no matter where they occurred in the primary research that I undertook.

Prior to the research commencing, I also decided to limit my engagement with Hobhouse, Mary Shelley and Rushton. Although I wasn't clear as to what the story was that I was going to tell about Polidori, I was convinced, at least, that these three people would all become, at most, supporting characters. So, a principle of what I

am terming “archive proportionality” emerged for them. The record in relation to Rushton, as Byron’s page, a working-class servant, was limited anyway and readily absorbed. However, both Mary Shelley and Hobhouse had extensive literary and public lives. So, with each of them I needed to impose some further constrictions in the form of two filtrating questions:

1. How little did I need to know in order to have a sense of their character, their language, and their publicly and privately expressed traits?
2. How much could I reduce my research on them just to their time with, and views of Polidori?

For example, I needed to know who Mary Shelley was at the Villa Diodati in the summer on 1816 in her interactions with Polidori, recorded and imagined. I didn’t need to know anything else about her, for example, in terms of the complexities of her relationship with Percy Shelley. Similarly, with Hobhouse, I transcribed letters of his to Polidori in the archive, but I did not take notes on other letters that he wrote to other people that I came across. By applying these two questions, I could create characterisations of each that laid some claim to historical literacy whilst also not researching the whole historiography of their life.

Fundamentally, there was, none the less, a tension in staying rigidly research focussed on Polidori as the protagonist, when we know less about him archivally than most of the other potential dramatis personae. Byron was always in my mind as the major antagonist, the crucial figure that Polidori measures himself against and journeys with, as Whitman had been in a very different way for Wallace in *TAOL*. As

the main antagonist, a deeper level of research was required. Byron, like Whitman, is a person who wrote much and upon whom much has been written, some of it contested. A whole life biography seemed crucial to building an accurate characterisation, and in selecting the secondary sources best suited to my purpose, I applied two criteria. Firstly, that the biographies were the most recent, ideally 21<sup>st</sup> century work by historians working with genuine historiographical methods. This seemed to act as a short-cut through the evolution of historical narratives of Byron, as the most recent biographies would address the previous ones, identifying where they differ in interpretation. Secondly, that the researchers were open to a balanced, non-heteronormative interpretation of the record and the absences in the record. These criteria successfully limited the material to a small number of key secondary texts. In terms of direct archival work, when there is such a large archival record of Byron, the obvious limitation to impose was to look at material in relation to Byron's time with Polidori (a relatively short period of around five months), and any subsequent meetings or mentions of Polidori. Additionally, the material needed to be either available in the UK or on-line as international study visits were not an option. Using Polidori as the archival limiter on Byron was successful in terms of the volume of material and acted in a similar way to which Wallace worked as an archival limiter on Whitman - again a period of a few months spent with a writer.

The much larger volumes of material available for *TFV* had thus created some new ways of working with historical evidence in terms of narrative and characterisation and required a new way of dealing with prior creative responses to historical evidence in a structured way. These techniques can be summarised in the following way:

**Creative Disengagement:** an explicit recognition and ownership of exposure to previous dramatic characterisations and narratives by other writers of the people and events that one is researching. Once recognised (and even explicitly recorded), an attempt is made to address this by not re-engaging with those, but by purposefully setting them aside and engaging first with primary historical research, then with secondary material. Subsequent to that, once the research is done, a plot formed and characterisations outlined, then the previous creative versions of the characters and events are re/engaged with.

**Archival Proportionality:** using the likely significance of the character in the unwritten play as a guide to the amount of engagement with historical evidence in relation to the record of their life. So, if a character is likely to be about 5% of the play's dialogue and action, they should be about 5% of the research activity, unless there is a compelling reason to do more or less. The focus of archive work should be on the main protagonist/s and antagonist/s. And even then, the archive work with the antagonist may need to be specifically limited to the record of their time with and mentions of the protagonist.

**Secondary Source Filtering:** this is a selection and prioritisation process for figures where the volume of secondary material outweighs the ability to engage with it within the allocated research period. Two criteria are suggested. Firstly, one of currency, i.e. working with the most recent material as it will almost inevitably address prior material in outline. Secondly, one of sexual politics, i.e. is the biographer open to challenging any prior assumptions of heterosexuality and exploring the possibilities

of intermale sexual and emotional intimacy in their subject, even when the archival record of such behaviours may be limited, inconclusive, coded or even significantly absent.

**Secondary Historical Literacy:** this comes from a significant but deliberately incomplete engagement with the historical evidence. It is about capturing a historiographically uncontentious sketch of someone who will be a supporting character, focussed on their personality traits, use of language and relationship with the main protagonist only. It may involve excluding any primary research and focussing instead on a highly limited engagement with secondary material/s. This limits but does not completely nullify the claim that the characterisation can make to historical literacy and hence the second order of such a claim.

Once these processes had been applied, in terms of preparing for research, I engaged chiefly with two archives: The John Rylands Archive in Manchester and the John Murray Archives in the National Library of Scotland. The historical evidence gathered at each had an impact on the content and dramatic form of *TFV* in direct and indirect ways. After Polidori's death in 1821, his sister Frances married Dante Rossetti in 1826. One of her sons, William Michael Rossetti first published Polidori's diary in 1911 and the John Rylands Library hold a number of letters penned by W.M. Rossetti that mention Polidori. W.M. Rossetti also attended a séance at which he claimed he was contacted by Polidori's spirit in 1869. This is the moment that MacDonald (1991) chooses to end his biography of Polidori on. At the séance, the spirit of Polidori states that he was killed by Byron (Hobbler & Hobbler, 2006). The letters were a lot that appears to have been purchased in 1961 from Sotheby's and



show that W.M. Rossetti had an enduring interest in his Uncle Polidori. A letter from 2 March 1899 makes the first mention, “I have received the type manuscript of my old lecture on Shelley and John Polidori”, and even here the lecture is referred to tellingly as “old”. There are several mentions of his frustrations with being stalled by publishers from January 1901 and May 1909, which may account for why W.M. Rossetti published the diary himself in 1911, nearly a century after it was written.



Dante Rossetti (L) and William Michael Rossetti (R). Photographer: Unknown.

He was a posthumous champion for Polidori’s legacy and possibly had the last form of contact with him in terms of the momentous message from beyond the grave. I wondered whether to include a coda to the play in which this is enacted, and a dramatised version of the séance eventually became one of several later abandoned scenes (see Appendix 4: Scene C: *William Michael Rossetti Meets His Uncle*). Scenes A-C were an attempt to find another dramatic form that could place the

historical documentation of events centre stage, literally. They use a multi-rolling Chorus who WOMAN TWO controls, demarking each scene by throwing a copy of a crucial historical document on to the stage. Each scene is a mixture of story-telling and embodiment based on the document. I thought Scene A might function as prologue based on an early 18th century magazine account of a vampire (Hogg, 2015, Groom, 2018 p. 33-38). Scenes B and C could be two epilogues, one of the Polidori séance and another based on an account of the Byron exhumation in 1938 (Barber, 1939). Whilst I think the scenes individually have some merit, the device did not work so well when I applied it directly to the main Polidori narrative. It immediately felt superfluous. It was taking up narrative space in an already crowded story and so I dropped it. There is a hint of it stylistically in Act Three Scenes Three and Five in the sequences when Aubrey and Ruthven manifest.

Initially, however, I retained the Chorus form and applied it to writing a full stage adaptation of *The Vampyre* itself before I started work on the main play (See Appendix Four, Scene D). This was an exercise in understanding how the narrative worked and in considering what elements could be embodied on stage. It provided a source of stage-ready scenes that could be used at any point in the main play. The style of this adaptation, using a chorus, a physical theatre approach (where the actors multi-role becoming objects as well as multiple characters), and an episodic structure, is completely different to the theatrical style that emerged with *TFV*. It is more of what Sanders (2006) would call a “transpositional” adaptive process, where the source remains mostly intact but is moved from one form to another. On completion, I considered how I could use the same choral form for the main body of the play, but every attempt to do it floundered. The form itself acted as such a

powerful de-authenticating device, that it weakened the anachronistic power of the use of social media, which only has disruptive power when situated amongst contrasting, stable authenticating devices. So, I abandoned both the form and most of the content. The original full adaptation that I wrote could be considered a companion piece to the *TFV*, another play entirely, but related intimately.

Beyond direct dramatisation, the historical account by W.M. Rossetti's of the séance influenced the content of *TFV* indirectly in that I took it as a writing challenge. Given that I did not believe Byron literally murdered Polidori - Byron was in Venice and there is no record of him ever returning to England (Macdonald, 1991) - in what way could the play present this as being true and thus honour not just the life but also the afterlife of Polidori?

The idea of haunting, of course, is already embedded at the crux of Polidori's time at the Villa Diodati through the historicisation and creative accounts of the 1816 ghost-writing competition. Further, W.M. Rossetti provides historical evidence of his experience of one of the ghost writers themselves as a ghost. The proposition that Polidori opens the play in his spiritual form thus seemed doubly compelled. The continued presence of Polidori as an unresolved spirit, who claims to have been killed by Byron and had not to have died by his own hand, as is more widely believed (Macdonald, 1991), inspired all the Missolonghi scenes. The portmanteau structure emerged as a dramatic form to house the haunting in a dual narrative. In it, the living Polidori and the restless spirit Polidori are unable to let go of an eternal fixation with Byron and the terminal impact that Byron made upon their professional and emotional life. I started to explore how some element of ghostliness might be

concealed and come as a surprise to the audience and characters themselves. This became the revelation at the end of the play in Act Three, Scene Eight. Beyond the dual characterisation and dual narrative, the accusation from the séance also influenced Act Three, Scene Five where Ruthven transforms into Byron and tells the audience of Polidori's death, the murder having just been enacted symbolically by Ruthven upon Aubrey who transforms into Polidori at the moment of death. I attempted to dramaturgically deal with Polidori's death in a way that places the blame for it on Byron's by introducing the embodied synonym of Lord Ruthven.



Rehearsed reading: Christy Matthews as Polidori & Adam Jowett as Bryon. Photo: Hornby

In the rehearsed reading version of the script, this is all that there was to suggest Byron's culpability. The audience feedback was that they didn't register either Polidori's death or Byron's hand in it. So, final version sees Ruthven transform back

into Byron and talk about Polidori's death, connecting the two explicitly. Whilst using inspiration from the John Rylands letters, Byron's dialogue is based upon correspondence between Byron and his publisher from the John Murray Archive. In the course of the scene, Byron also suggests that Polidori manifested to him in some form of presence the night before he got the letter, which is taken directly from Byron's account in a letter to Murray from January 1822, responding to the delayed news of Polidori's death. Byron, as well as W.M. Rossetti, had some documented experience of Polidori as a restless ghost.

John Murray was Lord Byron's publisher from 1811, from the publication of *Childe Harold* that first made Byron famous, through to 1822, when they parted company following Murray's refusal to publish cantos IV-IX of *Don Juan*. The John Murray Archive has a correspondingly large collection of Byron related items, around 10,000 (National Library of Scotland, 2021). The various forms of filtering outlined above, reduced the area for review down to 14 collection boxes, each containing between 14 and 67 different items of varying degrees of relevance. Central was the correspondence between Hobhouse and Polidori following the publication of *The Vampyre*, (which amounts to two letters each back and forth in spring 1819). The letters were adapted to become the basis for Act Three, Scene Four, with some of the dialogue lifted directly and the conflict in the letters reflected in the conflict in the scene. The directness of the contempt that Hobhouse expressed to Polidori is plain. For example, in his letter to Polidori of 29 April 1819, Hobhouse says of the contested authorship of *The Vampyre* that "the excuse that Lord Byron related the story and that you took it down from recollection is an absurdity which I can attribute only to the push a cheat (*makes*) upon the gullible for the sake of giving a temporary

sale to the pamphlet in question". This is reproduced as dialogue for Hobhouse in the scene. Hobhouse's language in the letters is sharp and economical and so it was impersonated to enable exposition to be communicated effectively.

The John Murray Archive reveals that Hobhouse was obsessed with Byron's legacy. It contains numerous examples of him, as a literary executor, correcting even minor details of other writers' work on Byron. Within this are also attempts to remove Polidori's name and significance from the historical record. In an undated document titled *Critical defence of a biography of Lord Byron by Hobhouse (detailed quotes and corrections)*, Hobhouse offers unsolicited notes on John Galt's account of Lord Byron meeting a Mr De Beyle at the theatre, La Scala in Milan, and walking with him arm-in-arm for over an hour in his biography of Byron. De Beyle is described by Polidori bluntly in his diary entry of 8 December 1816 as, "A fat lascivious man" (p.220) despite or maybe because of having observed how handsome Polidori was (Macdonald, 1991). Hobhouse denies any implication in Galt's account of intermale sexual intimacy hotly, "Lord Byron did not go to the theatre the next evening and never either on that night or any other evening walked arm-in-arm with De Beyle at the salon of that or any other theatre." More significantly, Hobhouse challenges the account of an incident that night that involved Polidori's arrest in a scuffle commenting that, "Dr Polidori never had been Lord Byron's friend." This helped to create Hobhouse's dismissive attitude to Polidori, confirming the antagonism between the two characters, and fed more widely into the idea that people have repeatedly tried to separate Polidori from the record of his own legacy. This provided material for the conflict in the Missolonghi scenes between him and Byron, and helped to expand the general theme of people getting due credit and seeking

assurance of their own significance in the historical record. In that sense, Hobhouse becomes the embodiment of the minimising and queer erasing impulse in the historicising of Polidori. History emerges it seems as something that Polidori is consistently trying to push his way into against resistant or indifferent forces. This was something I wanted the play to explore and address through its own historicisation and dramatisation of the material.

Hobhouse's obsession with Byron's legacy not only took the form of nudging Polidori out of the record and refuting any hint at homosexuality in biographical work, it extended to erasing work by Byron itself. The John Murray Archive has a rare copy of Hobhouse's (1825) privately published justification for the destruction of Byron's personal journal on account of the severity of the damage it does to Byron's reputation. Hobhouse records the horror of a select few readers' responses as a rationalisation for his actions. This scandalised destruction creates a ripe absence into which much can be inferred. Given that Byron was already infamous and self-exiled for marital sodomy and suspected incest with his half-sister, the list of sexual vices left that could cause such additional ruination to his reputation would be limited. Homosexuality, especially with young men not of an equivalent social station, must be one of the most likely. Crompton (1983) explores the attribution to Lord Byron of the 1842 prose poem *Don Leon* (Cochrane, 2009), known as the first plea for tolerance of male homosexuality. The title page claims that the poem incorporates material from the Byron memoir destroyed by Hobhouse. The efficacy of the claim is doubted by Crompton, but the existence of the claim was a delightful expansion of my theme of attributions, false or otherwise, of work to Byron and specifically here to homosexual work by Byron. The poem certainly contains

biographical information about Byron's male lovers. So, although it may prove to be a false attribution, the likelihood that the ruinous information in the missing memoir spoke of same sex lust seems circumstantially high. This helps to strengthen the case for presenting intermale sexual behaviour with people that would be regarded as Byron's social inferiors in the play.

Polidori's continued cordial contact with Lord Byron by letter after Byron let him go. The John Murray Archive has one such letter from January 1817 asking to be recommended to Murray for some commissions and offering to transport anything Byron wants to London when he returns. Regardless of the quotidian content, the fact that such letters still exist speaks to some value that Byron must have placed upon them. This continued existence might be happenstance, or it might speak to a stronger emotional connection between the two men than Byron could ever speak of in the moment of feeling it. This gets recycled into the play as Byron and Polidori's troubled but strong connection, so significant that it lasts even into the afterlife.

The John Murray Archive also has several examples of Byron's letters to friends sometimes using silly, coarse rhymes. There are even examples about Polidori, though these are in other archives. In May 1816, for example, Byron writes to Hobhouse referring to Polidori as "Dr Pollydolly" (MacDonald, 1991). The effeminising of the nickname is clear and has its own implication. I incorporated these where it fitted the character's intentions in a scene, and made some up in a similar style, creating a carousel of endless puns, rhymes and diminutives of "Polidori" that Byron and Hobhouse could use to belittle and verbally bully him, most acutely in Act Two, Scene Ten. Far from ensuring that his name was recorded in

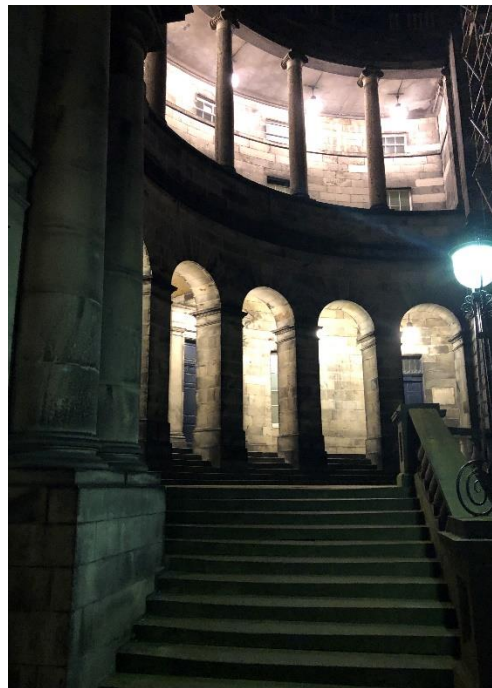


history, Polidori is not even able to rely upon it being used by those closest to him in the present.

The John Murray Archive is housed in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, where Polidori studied to be a physician. The Medical School at the University of Edinburgh is still extant as Polidori would have known it, as is the infamous Greyfriars Kirkyard from which bodies were taken to supply the medical students. I visited both sites. The idea for the genesis story of *Frankenstein* in Act Two, Scene Seven came to me walking back from Greyfriars, proving how creatively stimulating site visits can be. A similar visit to Polidori's home in London also gave me a strong sense of its place in Soho and loosely informed Act One, Scene Three.



A skeleton on a tomb in Greyfriars Kirkyard



Edinburgh University Medical School

Photos: Hornby



Hornby outside 38 Great Pulteney Street, Soho, London. Photos: Hornby.

The other sources of primary material are in the printed works of Polidori and Byron. My focus with Polidori was on the diary of his time with Byron and the subsequent period up until he ceases writing it at the end of 1816. The historical evidence that the diary provides furnished the play with some of the background detail to scenes and occasionally provided more directly for their content. For example, his 8<sup>th</sup> December diary entry (2005, p. 223) where Polidori states, “Lord Byron came to Milan. I saw him there a good deal. He received me kindly and corrected the English of my essay in *The Pamphleteer*.” This was the inspiration for the opening sequence in Act Two, Scene Five, where Byron is developing Polidori’s essay *On The Punishment of Death* (Polidori, 2005). The sometimes mundane elements of the account of the life at the Villa Diodati inform the mentions of Madame de Staël, Polidori’s friendship with Mary Shelley, the presence of Rushton and his attitude to Percy Shelley, as well as the voice of his characterisation in terms of vocabulary, meter and expressive tone. Any more significant insights that Polidori’s diary might have contained have been diminished by the actions of another of Polidori’s sisters, Charlotte (Bishop, 2005). She censored the diary before its first publication by W.M. Rossetti in 1911. Whatever material was removed has not survived.

Although Byron's infamous memoir has been destroyed, his published work survives along with drafts, letters and a range of ephemera. I was familiar with some of Byron's poetry, but in applying my above criteria, limiting my research on Byron to his connection with Polidori, I decided that a full read of this epic narrative poetry and closet dramas was not necessary. I did read some of his more personally expressive work in the hope that this would enhance my understanding of his emotional landscape. *When We Two Are Parted* intrigued me as the lines could be related readily to the relationship that was forming in my head between Byron and Polidori, especially one stanza (2006, p. 781, lines 17-24) :

"They name thee before me,  
 I knell to mine ear;  
 A shadow come o'er me -  
 Why worst though so dear?  
 They know not I know thee,  
 Who knew thee too well: -  
 Long, Long, shall I rue thee  
 Too deeply to tell.

The first two versions of the play incorporated the full *When We Two Parted* as a kind of dialogic exchange between Byron and Polidori in the final scene of the play. I cut this in the final version for two reasons. Firstly, I accepted a piece of feedback from the audience discussion at the rehearsed reading that spirit Polidori would not speak Byron's words at this point of extreme resentment towards him and resistance to learning the lesson that the spirit of Byron is attempting to teach. Secondly, the

absence of any of Byron's verse and the presence in the play of an outline of his amoral sexuality better fits the legacy that Polidori predicts for Byron in Act Three, Scene Six and which Byron accepts, i.e. that his sinful life will overshadow his work and become the main thing that he is remembered for. Thirdly, it was a rerun of the ending I'd already used in *TAOL*. By resisting any use of Byron's poetry, which is judged even by Polidori to be superior to Polidori's, I also created a more egalitarian version of the two characters who can be judged on their actions within the play rather than by their relative literary merit, a judgement that Byron will always win as Polidori's biographer repeatedly notes (MacDonald, 1991).

The secondary historical evidence provided by substantial biographies offered by Macdonald (1991), in respect of Polidori, and MacCarthy (2002), in respect of Byron, provided touchstones for the timelines of their respective lives, the events of 1816 and the many possible explanations surrounding the publication of *The Vampyre*, initially falsely attributed to Byron (to which I have added my own invention as another form of de-authentication). Macdonald (1991) also details how Polidori was secretly commissioned by Murray before his departure for £500 to write an insightful account of his time together with Byron. I absorbed this into the narrative for Act Three, using it to drive Polidori's expulsion from Byron's household. Each biographer has undertaken a conventional historiographical approach, which has some limitations. Reflecting Polidori's expurgated diary, Macdonald says nothing conclusive about Polidori's sexuality, whilst MacCarthy is open to more speculative and non-heteronormative readings of Byron. She concludes that whilst he had sex with women, Byron was primarily attracted to teenage boys, usually of lower social class than him and it was to these that he formed emotional attachments. Polidori was 20 when he entered Byron's employment. Nineteen, the final teenaged year,

might represent the upper age that Byron usually found attractive, placing Polidori in some form of precariousness from the start of their relationship as, despite his youthful appearance, he was heading towards his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Given that I had decided that the sexual dynamic between Byron and Polidori would be tortured rather than requited, the evidence provided by MacCarthy of Byron's sexuality was reflected in the characterisation of Rushton. He is presented as a heterosexual who is abused by Byron into a sexual relationship with him as shown in Act Two, Scene Two. The full picture of Rushton's abuse does not emerge until Act Two, Scene Thirteen, where I have added to the pathos of the scene by moving Polidori's departure to 7<sup>th</sup> September (when his diary entry suggests 16<sup>th</sup> September). This makes it Polidori's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and places maturing central to the brief sequence between him and Rushton.

Aside from biography, other historical writers note the contribution that Polidori makes to evolving Vampire folklore and popularising the myth repeatedly (Belford, 1996, Bishop, 2005, Ellis, 2000, Groom, 2018, Jenkins, 2010, Macdonald, 1991). The multiple innovations are summarised by Ellis, contrasting Polidori's vampire to the established credo thus far, "The vampire remains exotic, oriental, vulgar, folkloric, perverse, supernatural, superstitious, and to the sceptic, faintly ridiculous: but in Polidori's hands, he is now also a seductive rake, resident in the aristocratic culture and at home in the metropolis" (p.183, 2000). Bishop (2005) sets out the astonishing popularity of the tale, running to five English editions in 1819 alone. By 1830, it had been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian and Swedish and there were two stage versions and an opera. As Groom notes, "Polidori, in presenting the vampire as a depraved and amoral English aristocrat, triggered a

cultural sensation” (p.111, 2018). The scale of Polidori’s success across European literary and popular culture is without doubt but having sold the disputed rights for £30 in a final settlement with his publisher, he did not benefit in name or pocket from this success. He remains a marginal figure in the history of horror in contrast to the most obvious comparison, Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula* (1897). Trow (2010) comments on the biographical parallels between the two men, “Both men write of vampires. Both men were overawed by the greatness of others.” The extent to which Polidori was in a state of awe or resentment can be debated, and this notion of greatness needs perhaps to include explicitly fame or at least approbation. More significantly, the sense of sameness can be extended to include repressed homosexual desire, Polidori for Byron and Stoker for Henry Irving, the actor manager to whom he was enthralled (Belford, 1996). This driving mechanism appears to have informed both men’s use of the vampire as a kind of metaphorical closet in which to hide their sense of, and shame at, same sex desire. Beyond this, there is a literal connection between them, as both writers note, in that Stoker knew Polidori’s nephew, another of Frances’s children, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In Act Three, Scene Seven, I imagine their first meeting and transpose it on to the copyright reading of *Dracula*. Both events happened but have been conflated here and Polidori acts as a substitute for his own nephew. This heightens both the parallels and the contrasts. It reinserts Polidori explicitly in the genesis of the vampire myth next to the figure to whom it is more usually ascribed at the beginning of *Dracula*’s dramatisation process.

Above and beyond anything that was invented and the specific deployment of authenticating and de-authenticating devices, there were also a series of major and

minor additional changes made from the evidence of historical record for purely dramaturgical reasons, chiefly:

- Act Two, Scene Thirteen: As mentioned above, Polidori's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday was 7<sup>th</sup> September and he left Byron's employment on 16<sup>th</sup> September. The two dates were conflated to add to the pathos of Polidori's situation and to heighten the sense of his ostracisation and isolation.
- Act Two: the absence of both Percy Shelley and Claire Clairmont is a narrative choice to allow the focus to remain on the characters most central to Polidori. Their absence is sustained against the historical record by a series of devices: the characters are referenced but are not on stage (Act Two, Scene Five where Percy and Clair are both mentioned as not being the person approaching) , the characters have just left as the scene begins (Act Two, Scene Eight which opens with Polidori reporting that he has just put Percy to bed) and temporal location of the scenes (Act Two, Scene Eight is set on 18<sup>th</sup> June and not the 16<sup>th</sup> June as it removes us from the moment of inception of the ghost-writing competition when both Claire and Percy were present and also more accurately reflects the fact that the competition was carried out over a number of days and not over one night).
- Act Three, Scene One: I changed the date that Mary's authorship of *Frankenstein* was acknowledged and the date when she penned an introduction both to 1818, so as to fit in with the theme of being credited with one's work and to act as a foreshadow of what's to come for Polidori.

Shelley's name was not on the original 1818 edition but was added to the 1823 edition, and the introduction in which no mention of Polidori was made, was not added until the 1831 edition.

- Act Three, Scene Four: Hobhouse wrote to Polidori twice about the authorship of *The Vampyre* and received two replies. They never met to discuss it. Some of the content and body of the argumentation from the letters is used to create this duologue scene which is more dramatically effective as two people in embodied conflict.

With *TFV*, unlike *TAOL*, the existence of a host of fictional versions of the main characters did create an additional level of research in terms of watching them or reading them and considering the dramaturgical form, representational strategies, authenticating devices and historical literacy of each. It also changed what I was assuming that the audience would expect in terms of ideological readings that they might bring with them, for example queer readings of Byron and feminist readings of Mary and Claire. This level of existing dramatisation over a sustained period of Mary and Byron (for example in multiple films from Whale, 1935 to Al-Mansour, 2017) suggests that they can both be considered to be famous, at least as far as historical literary fame goes. Their enduring celebrity fed into one of the themes in the play itself: fame, its disadvantages and the degree to which creative work and its influence are correctly attributed. The oft repeated mantra that Byron was the first modern celebrity (Heinzmann, 2008) must also mean that his celebrity is one of the longest lived, even if the nature and intensity has waxed and waned. At its height, it was eclipsing, as some of Polidori's most pithy diarised quotes about Byron relate. For example, on entering a room together Polidori says he feels like "a star in the



halo of the moon” (2005). Such quotes speak of jealousy and resentment of Byron’s fame. Byron seems to have revelled in his fame for a brief period after the publication of *Childe Harold* and then became a victim of it as it turned rapidly into intrusion, infamy and exile (MacCarthy, 2002).

Comparing the two plays beyond the research process, there are some key similarities and distinct differences in my approach to the dramaturgical and playwriting processes. The dramatic form for *TFV*, like *TAOL*, is the conventional three-act play, with a model of narrative consistent with that set out by Yorke (2013) for classical storytelling: a protagonist experiences an inciting incident, undertakes a journey with obstacle/s, transforms at a point of crisis, enters a climatic confrontation with an antagonist/the forces of antagonism which they win or lose and are rewarded or punished in the script’s final denouement. There is nothing intrinsic to working with archival records that dictates this form. However, both of the records I studied had within them the historicity of a life-changing journey and a return home, (Polidori’s journey from family life in London to a form of public life as Byron’s physician to a premature death back at the family home; Wallace’s from a repressed Bolton book club to Whitman’s sexually open literary court to the hybrid of Carpenter’s Millthorpe retreat). The returns home were both defeats in different ways, but the narrative progression that the account of the journeys provided seemed to fit neatly with Yorke’s model for satisfying storytelling. Mindful that I was going to challenge audiences differently with each play, I wanted to work with a structuring template to deliver a compelling narrative, which might give me more latitude for creative experimentation in other areas.

*TAOL* had no third-party censorship of the central travel journals or letters between group members. So, finding the intermale sexuality required an examination of circumstantial evidence and life map absences, and a reading of Wallace's travelogue as a rolling exercise in Wilkinson's (1996) concept of "unintended testimony". With *TAOL* my case for supposing that something unacceptable had been present but had been self-censored at the point of its recording was tenuous and required this further theoretical historiographical underpinning. With *TFV*, there was not only active censorship of the archival records of both the protagonist and antagonist, but detailed historical evidence of that censorship. So, the contention that something unacceptable was present was de facto already proven and the contextual case for that being some form of homosexuality was strong.

In *TFV*, I make use of the supernatural as a device to explore the deeper significance of the conflict between Byron and Polidori and its impact on Polidori's life. Not only is Polidori a ghost in the scenes set in Missolonghi but Byron is revealed to be one too. I discuss the use of the supernatural as a form of magical realism with Hynes (Chapter 8) in relation to her unpublished play *Mister Stokes: The Man-Woman of Manchester*. Hynes suggests that in her play, the supernatural stands in for archival absence, acting simultaneously both as a narrative bridge and as a de-authenticating device for the lack of archival evidence that it's bridging. With *TFV*, however, this is not a supernatural imposition by a playwright, but a matter of archival record (Stauffer, 2015). So, the supernatural element in the play is actually *not* me deploying a form of magical realism as de-authentication but should rather be seen as an extension of the use of historical evidence.

With *TFV*, the historiographical process used to construct the play is not staged within the play. In *TAOL*, I deploy alienating moments where the characters specifically comment on the veracity of the play and their characterisations. They show a metatextual self-awareness of being characters in a history play. This device is not repeated in *TFV*. The nearest there is to commentary on the historiographical processes that created the play is when Polidori remarks on how the record of Byron's life will be used by "prurient playwrights" in Act Three, Scene Six. It is no more than a knowing nod.

The degree to which the characters, narrative and period are known to the audience is assumed to be quite different between the plays. This is fundamental in terms of the dramaturgical approach to an event or sequence of events. The less knowledge I assumed, the greater the need for expositional writing in the play establishing for the audience the basics of place, character, time and backstory. Conversely, if some element of the established historicity of events had already been dramatised multiple times, then its depiction was drawn into question on the basis of avoiding plagiaristic repetition. If included, such events required a fresh approach and not just a re-treading of familiar tropes.

These prior knowledge assumptions for both plays were tested at the table reads with actors and at the rehearsed readings with small audiences. My initial instincts were proved broadly correct. In *TAOL*, the assumption is that none of the characters and narrative are known to the audience beyond possibly knowing that Whitman was an American poet and that Oscar Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In *TFV*, more knowledge is assumed. It is taken that the audience has familiarity with

*Frankenstein*, though not with *The Vampyre*. It is further assumed that they will know of Byron and Mary Shelley and of the ghost-writing competition but not that they have knowledge of any of the other characters or any of the other events depicted in the play. Having the stories of Mary and Byron decentred to Polidori's point of view enabled me to take a fresh approach to familiar scenes. For example, the genesis of Mary's vision of the creature in *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818) has been dramatised extensively (Al-Mansour, 1987, Lochhead, 2009, Russell, 1986, Whale, 1935) but by using Polidori's diary account of his friendship with Mary, I was able to create a fresh origin story for *Frankenstein* in Act Two, Scene Seven .

To consolidate my playwriting methodology, it is necessary to revisit the detail of the dramaturgical techniques and devices that I set out after writing *TAOL* (see Chapter Five) and test them against the experience of writing *TFV*:

**Narrative Selection:** I faced problems in researching the play in terms of finding ways to navigate the huge amounts of material. But having done so, I also found writing *TFV* a difficult process, because of the embarrassment of riches that the central lives have to offer. I felt challenged with dramatising Polidori's fascinating and varied life, the clues to hidden sexuality within it and the puzzle of his spiral into self-destruction. And then I had also the enormous narratives of the lives of Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont. How to choose which story to tell and with what guiding parameters? And how to research all these lives and their historical contexts in order to reach the state of historical literacy that I am suggesting is necessary to make such playwriting successful? At the point at which I

felt most puzzled, I interviewed Russell T Davies (see Chapter 8) on his approach to this.



Russell T Davies and Stephen M Hornby. Photo: Hornby

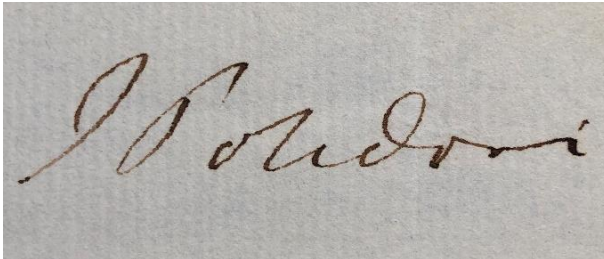
I shared my dilemma with him. It prompted him giving an account of a similar point he reached with his adaptation of Casanova's *A History of My Life* (1960) which ran expansively to 12 volumes, over 3,500 pages. The solution came in a meeting he had with the BBC when the commissioner said to him that a biopic is always about the single most important moment in a person's life. A light came on for me. What was that moment for Polidori? The summer with Byron? The publication of *The Vampyre*? How one led to the other? I chose to place the emphasis on the latter, as that centred Polidori as the protagonist. This immediately revealed to me that I only

needed to know a little part of the lives of the Shelleys, Byron and Clairmont and that the Geneva narrative did not need to centre on the ghost story writing competition per se.

**Narrative Invention:** There are many things in the play that have a firm sense of archival adaptation, e.g. Polidori teaching Mary Italian (from Polidori's diary), the tension between Hobhouse and Polidori (from Polidori's diary and their correspondence). There are things which come from secondary research, e.g. the young age which Rushton was recruited as a page, reflecting Byron's sexuality. But there are also things that are, as far as I know, wholly invented, e.g. Frances translating for her father; Polidori having sex with a man, while dressed as Byron; assigning Frances with the motivation of giving Colburn the script of *The Vampyre*, thus offering a definitive, motivated account in contrast to the vague theories offered by historians (MacDonald, 1991, chapter 17 and McDonell Stott, 2005, chapter 13). The rationale for the fictive elements lies mostly in the dramaturgical demands of the three-act form and the naturalistic genre expectations of character development.

**Ontological Weight:** The security around the John Murray Archive was intense and added to the charged weight of holding draft cantos by Byron and letters by Polidori. Additionally, the records of the visits of previous researchers were attached to some of the papers in the John Murray archive. The most precious items have the name of the person who has requested them on the paper fold that separates them and the date of access. On one of Byron's drafts of a poetic stanza, there was "Fiona MacCarthy. Nov 97" whose 2002 biography of Byron I relied upon heavily. The archive was itself also a record of the previous archival engagement of other writers

whose work I was relying on as secondary source material. My own presence was added to the record of who has accessed these papers, adding further to their weight and complexity and interpolating me into the source materials.



Polidori's signature



Byron's signature.

Photos: Hornby

**Ripe Silences:** *TAOL* has a subtle process of self-censorship. *TFV* may have had that as well in Polidori's diary, but it also suffers blatant and unsubtle censorship by Charlotte Polidori after Polidori's death based on her Christian morality. We additionally have one of the most infamous and carefully recorded acts of censorship in literary history with *The Destruction of Lord Byron's Memoirs* by John C. Hobhouse (1870). Also, there is the tidying up of Percy Shelley's recorded life and work to reflect the strictures of Victorian morality by his surviving widow to expunge any same sex inference, when he may have had an active sexual and emotional life with men (Lauritsen 2007, 2011). Because of the crude censorship that these key autobiographical texts have been through, the ripe silences are more like screaming silences, hysterical with outrage at the things that have been excised from them, butchered elephant remains in the room whose tusks have been hacked off. We do not need to speculate about the impression of an absence, the redaction is there for us to see. This is helpful perhaps in licensing some creative responses to account for Polidori's behaviour, for example his self-harm and suicide attempts.

**Historical Literacy:** At what point did I feel I had achieved this? Everything that survives of Polidori in terms of his writing, archival records, secondary accounts of his writing and life and creative responses to all of these is a discrete body of work that it was possible to read and consider for this play. The same could not readily be said of the lives of the others, especially Mary and Byron. But once I realised that I only really needed to know about the few months of their lives that touched Polidori's, then I felt able to achieve this, something I outline above as "secondary historical literacy". Once accounts started to concur, then I felt like I'd done enough research. I wanted accounts that offered new, disruptive theories, however unlikely, like one that Mary hadn't written *Frankenstein* at all (Lauritsen, 2007), to stimulate me creatively. Once I felt ready to write into the absences, to reconstitute what had been redacted, to blend the fictive, biographical and primary researched materials, I was historically literate.

**De-Authenticating Devices:** The anachronistic use of social media is the prime example of de-authentication. However its use as an example of a purposeful distortion also acts as a form of proximal equivalence. The introduction of it does initially have an alienating effect on an audience. I was inspired by imagery in *Caravaggio* (Jarman, 1986), specifically the scene where a character uses a Royal manual typewriter in the bath in an anachronistic echo of the 1793 painting *Death of Marat* by Jacques-Louis David. Jarman is creating a complex temporal register: a film in 1986, recreating the life of the painter at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century using an item of twentieth century technology in an image whose *mise en scène* is emulating a painting the end of the eighteenth century. Similarly, I wanted to



introduce something totally anachronistic to distort the temporality of the play, to state clearly that the play is a reading of the past that is very much about how I, in the present, see the past. Social media is also the best example of proximal equivalence in the play to explain the nature of how Byron's fame worked, surrounded him and made his life so accessible and at times unbearable to the person experiencing it. It was shortcut through explaining the Georgian expansion of literacy amongst all classes and the increase in readily available, topical printed matter.

The real challenge was when it came to Byron's love of a boy and how to make that intelligible to an audience that might have strong responses to the issue. I was inspired by *Alice and Peter* (Logan, 2013) and the way the issue is dealt with there. I wanted to deal with this element of Byron's sexuality directly, but also to hold back on when it was revealed (essentially as Byron vanishes from the main narrative in Act Two, only to re-appear in Act Three, once we know, transformed into his vampiric simile Ruthven). Additionally, I wanted Rushton's revelation, and the retro-continuity within the text that it creates, to act as a metaphor for us looking back now on Byron's life and trying to understand his poetry and his actions knowing what we know (probably) about his sex life and his use of power over people with many fewer choices.

The notion of proximal equivalence has a direct parallel in the experimental archaeological conception of "analogue" (see Chapter Two), where something in the present is inferred in the past purely by its existence in the now in similar circumstances. Social media was woven into the second draft of the play. Some of

the feedback from that suggested that it felt like an add-on creating comedic throw-away lines at different points, rather than an integrated part of the dramaturgy making a consistent point about celebrity and the flawed historiography of the play. So, I wove it in more carefully into the body of the story in Acts Two and Three, e.g. with Byron posting a photo of Polidori dressed as him in Act Two, Scene Ten enabling Polidori to appear as him convincingly in London later and have sex with Jarvis in Act Three, Scene Two. The audience also fed back that it became invisible as the play progressed. Its repeated use acclimatised the audience, and it stops having the desired alienating effect. So, the deviation from conventional historical account-making moves up a gear as the play enters its third act in terms of “making strange”: characters from *The Vampyre* can be magicked into the room by the spell-like recounting of lines from the novella; the Missolonghi scenes are revealed as being set in a spirit world where Byron is as dead as Polidori; a move forward in time to 1905 and then finally a swop in the lead roles, as the temporal pattern of the play is revealed as being circular, the lead characters nothing more than repeating behavioural patterns.

**Multi-Variant Time:** I intended to explore the invention of time itself as a theme, but there wasn't narrative or thematic space for this. So, I focussed on temporal layering and a non-linear structure. The play happens simultaneously in 1824 and 1816, 1824 and 1818, 1824 and 1821, and 1824 and 1905. The 1824 Polidori is unchanged since his death in 1821. The 1824 Byron is already dead; how long for is unknown, but the fact of Byron's death isn't revealed until the end of the play. And the whole play is taken outside of time when Byron reveals that they are in spirit form in a learning loop and have been repeating the events we have seen several times,

and then the play itself loops back to the beginning, creating a cyclical temporal structure, which has been repeating for an unknown length of time. Indeed, by the final scene, the sense and meaning of time is breaking down, at least for Byron. The social media that we have seen in the play is then disavowed and the whole structuring of time, place and person are fundamentally disrupted, a state that is emphasised by the actors changing roles for the repeat of Act One, Scene One at the end of Act Three, creating a sense of existential instability. Nothing in the play is as it first seemed.

**Erotohistoriography:** Within each of the plays, there has been a character whose relationship with history is not one of scholarly appreciation, but one of somatic encounter. Reacting to Freeman's notions of erotohistoriography and chrononormativity (2010), these characters sensually embody and disrupt elements of time and history. There is Dalmas in *TAOL* (see Chapter Five for a further discussion). In *TFV* there is Byron, the spirit version who has been bled to death. This spirit Byron is more, however, than just a lingering ghost. His presence is conflated into Ruthven's, and in the moment of casting off this dual identity, he reveals his sense of the past of Polidori's death pressing on him in his present. Temporal logic and physical embodiment become further disrupted towards the end of the play. Byron's sense of unitary time breaks down and he feels a deeper awareness of the cyclical nature of the afterlife. This cycle subverts not only the linear alignment of past, present and future, but also, more profoundly, identity itself. Individual character as the point of temporal reference in the play is abandoned as the actors playing Polidori and Byron swap roles and the play restarts from the beginning.

Beyond my attempts to thread elements of erotohistoriography into these characterisations, I wish to also advance the idea that it can be an element of the playwriting process itself, another way of orchestrating the relationships between archive and dramatisation of archive. I have suggested techniques and approaches to managing archival volume, creative responses to materials and the anxiety to jump to character and story. All of these are rational and mechanistic. But my experience of using archives is also a deeply emotional one, sometimes in moments of connection with primary materials and sometime afterwards as records of the materials are utilised dramaturgically and their latent affective power is unlocked. I would observe that my experience of writing *TFV* involved a greater range of empathetic emotions than I have previously experienced playwriting, all for Polidori. I want to extend the idea of erotohistoriography then from the performer experiencing the past somatically, erotically and historiographically to the playwright. Some examples of these moments of connectivity: I felt an enormous sense of despair that seemed to almost overwhelm me when I wrote and re-wrote Polidori's suicide, leaving me with similar feelings and a physical dread so deep that I had to leave the house and walk it out; the joy in the moment of handling the Polidori letters and smelling them, inhaling some atomic element of them into my body; the decoding of Polidori's handwriting by tracing my fingers across his inked letters, holding and moving my hand in the way his handwriting suggests that he wrote and feeling it as an intimate, sensual, associative act. These moments of emotional and physical experiencing of the past, triggered by archival engagement, drove different elements of the playwriting directly in terms of characterisation, narrative selection and the dramaturgical devices and emotive cues that I deployed at different points in the

script. This may not qualify fully as what Freeman means by erotohistoriography, but it allows for emotions and sensual responses to archives in the present that conjure the past to be recognised and articulated as a valid part of the playwriting process.

**Visible Historicising:** In *TAOL*, Johnson and Wallace both act as narrators, exchanging the role at key story points in the text. As Wallace becomes distracted by falling in love with Sixsmith in Act One or overwhelmed with grief at the beginning of Act Three, so Johnson takes over the narrator role. This dramaturgical position privileges their voices over those of the other characters, a position they earn as they each separately visited Whitman, and each wrote accounts of their visits (Johnson & Wallace, 1917). Since their source material forms the spine on which the play was supported, it was fitting they could speak directly to the audience about its use in the play, their characterisation and the efficacy of their rendering by the playwright. In that sense, their metatheatrical moments carry more historicity than the distorting voice of the playwright in the play. Polidori is not granted any moments with the audience in this way, none of *TFV* characters are. The use of social media is an obvious and clear anachronism that immediately and repeatedly already draws the audience's attention to the falseness of the narrative and its presentation. So, having the protagonist also do this would've felt like a form of dramaturgical tautology.

**Archival Retcon:** With *TAOL*, I was familiar with a range of collection objects and ephemera that I had seen in museological compositions. Indeed, the whole inspiration for the play began with seeing the inner headband from Whitman's hat in the John Ryland's archive. For *TFV*, I was not exposed in the same way to objects

associated with or owned by Polidori. The letters in the John Murray Archive were the closest I could come to a physical connection with him and so it was to his writing that I was drawn. His essay *On the Punishment of Death* (1816) gets woven into the first part of Act Two, Scene Five where Rushton's immediate instinctive responses create a new insight for Polidori in the case that he is making, despite the personal animosity between them. The scene validates Rushton as the wisest and most self-aware of the group, and also establishes how working-class men's contributions to these great debates are both valid, appropriated and hidden. Although Byron did assist Polidori with some of his writing, there is no evidence that Rushton in reality had any hand in it.

Researching both plays has raised fundamental epistemological questions about the relationship between the sexualities of the past, their relative absence in archives, the likelihood of them being captured by conventional historical research, and the weighting and evidential standards required. Lauritsen in his consideration of the sexual lives of Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and the men around them notes, "Whilst it is true that we lack forensic evidence of Byron's sex acts with other adult males, we should not expect to find such evidence, considering that Byron's very survival depended on discretion that his writings were expurgated during this lifetime, and his letters and *Memoir* burned after his death" (2017, p. 61). He further suggests that there is a double-standard for retro-labelling which even if it claims to have a neutral non-heteronormative starting point, in reality, "evidence suggesting homoerotic desire or activity must be practically sufficient for a criminal conviction" (p. 82). Lauritsen also echoes Edward Carpenter's plea in his biography of Percy Shelley (Barnefield & Carpenter, 1925) by contentiously suggesting that any scrap of

evidence of homosexual acts should be accorded far greater weight than evidence of heterosexual acts as the chances of the evidence surviving are so very much smaller.

Presence, absence and even the comparative weight of presence are clearly all contested areas. So, identifying the basis for asserting the significance of the archival absence is a crucial part of the process. It reveals the shape of what is not allowed to be known. The biographical pattern of everything else around the absence gives that shape and there may still even be hints in the extant material. Sometimes the absence is self-censoring. We have no way of knowing how much of that was true of Byron and Polidori, but in both cases we have a record of active censorship by third parties posthumously with the aim of presenting a sanitised version of the person, whatever they themselves were withholding from their own autobiographical writing. What is left are the joins and the seams at these folds in the historical record so that we can most meaningfully postulate about the sexual content of what has been removed rather than what is extant.

Applying Wilkinson's (1991) concept of "unintended testimony", which I used so effectively with *TAOL*, to Polidori's diary is more tenuous as a methodology. With Wallace's self-penned travelogue, it is likely that it was self-censored, but it was not censored on moral and/or reputational grounds by another person subsequently. So, the subconscious seeps through and gives a voice to the absences. With Polidori, his diary appears to have been more candid and so the same counter-balancing processes would not have been in place. His testimony was intended but then censored. With Byron's it was destroyed, along with, Lauritsen suggests (2017,

chapter one), other incriminating letters and some stanzas to Byron's poem *Don Juan*. So "unintended testimony" does not seem a valuable way to approach absence in the archival records in relation to either Byron's or Polidori's lives. The testimony was intended; it was there but was destroyed. These twin examples of crude, destructive censorship feed more into Robb's (2003) comments about the astonishing levels of destruction of the records and diaries of intermale sexual behaviour amongst those men's relatives. To have two such clear and recorded acts of censorship of the lives of the two central characters in the play is extraordinary and it gives extraordinary licence to infer what was expunged.

There is still some oblique evidence left from Polidori's (2005) diary about his sexuality, even after the excisions made by his sister Charlotte posthumously prior to its first publication in 1911 by his nephew William Michael Rossetti. There is evidence and implication contained in a number of entries:

- Polidori often comments in ridiculous generalisations about the women that he observes during his travels. For example: 28<sup>th</sup> April (p. 172) "It being Sunday, we see all the women of the village – all ugly. Indeed, I have not seen a pretty woman since I left Ostend."
- Polidori mentions examples of where he is attracted to specific women: 26<sup>th</sup> April (p. 167) "Obliged to buy two books I did not want because I let a quarto fall upon a fine girl's head whilst looking at her eyes."
- 8<sup>th</sup> May (p. 186) Whilst at Aix-La-Chapelle, Polidori comments that a German boy, "...led me about on my asking him in broken German about the baths, led me to a very different place. I was astonished to find myself in certain company."



- 8<sup>th</sup> December (p. 221) Polidori comments effusively on Brême, a man he meets in Milan, “His friendship for me was warm: it gratifies me more than any attentions, friendship or any relations I had before with my fellow companions. I cannot express what I feel for him. On parting from him, I wept like a child in his arms.”
- 8<sup>th</sup> December (p. 220), “My residence at Milan lasted till October 30. During that time I had a most happy and pleasant life, Monsignor De Brême taking great friendship for me... De Brême and I became very intimate, and I believe he is really a good friend.”
- There is an incident in the Milan Opera House involving both De Brême and Byron, that leads to Polidori being expelled from the city and on parting from Brême, he is distraught: 30<sup>th</sup> October (p. 227), “I took leave of De Brême, and wept in his arms like a child, for his kindness and friendship had been dear to me.”

I concluded that Polidori had a sense of himself as a gentleman who should be interested in women and comments on them chiefly in relation to their looks. But also, a man who craves intimacy with men of education and social standing. To what extent that is emotional and to what extent it is sexual remains unknowable. His account of his relationship with De Brême is the only person in the whole diary that Polidori speaks of with such infatuated joy. Macdonald (1991, chapter 12) and Stott (chapter 11) note that even Hobhouse recorded in his diary a strong appreciation of Monsignor De Brême, including describing him as, “One of the most attractive men I ever saw.”

Aside from De Brême, in constructing my view of Polidori's sexuality, I also took into account the number of men known for intermale sexual and affective behaviour that Polidori was employed by or had a strong emotional relationship with using Lauritsen (2011, 2017), MacCarthy (2002), MacDonald, (1991) and McConnell Stott (2014).

The list is striking:

- **Lord Byron**, exiled bisexual with an attraction to teenage boys and young men. The spirit of Polidori summoned in a séance says that Byron killed him. If that is not to be taken literally, then it must be understood emotionally, implying an incredibly strong attachment;
- **William Taylor**, a middle-aged homosexual based in Norwich who Polidori visits before his employment with Byron. Taylor has a coterie of young men and an interest in advancing Polidori's career and in getting him to Norwich where other men who are part of Taylor's set draw him and liken him to Apollo. Polidori does move to Norwich for a short period and attempts to make a career there as a physician at Taylor's reckoning;
- **Beyle** (friend of De Brême's in Milan) who Polidori describes as, "a lascivious man, full of sexual anecdotes about Napoleon, having been his Secretary at one point", who thinks that Polidori is very handsome and who Polidori trades gossip with using his anecdotes about Byron (2005, p. 222);
- **Lord Guildford**. Polidori arrives in Venice in 1818 in the entourage of Lord Guildford, an enemy of Byron's who describes him as a "perambulating humbugger" (an open homosexual). (McConnell Stott, 2014, p.203)

There is also the circumstantial evidence in terms of what is absent. For all the commentary on women in Polidori's diary, there is no record of him having had any

significant emotional or sexual relationships with women in this period. He records his interest in doing so, whilst surrounding himself with older men who have emotional and sexual interests in younger men, and so presumably to varying degrees in him. So axiomatic is the question of Polidori's same sex interest that some historians label him incidentally as Byron's lover (Belford, 1996) and other creative responses to the record of his life also cast him as sexually interested in men (for example, Russell, 1986 and Passer, 1987). These are no more than inferences but taken with Polidori's repeated connections to older homosexuals (William Taylor in Norwich and Lord Guildford in Venice), aside from Lord Byron himself, and the absence of any successful intimate relationships with women, a strong, if circumstantial picture of Polidori's sexuality emerges. This informed the sexuality of my dramatisation of him. In terms of deepening his characterisation, placing his intermale sexual and affective urges in conflict with his observance of the Catholic Faith created an anguish within my version of him, an internalised homophobia that could colour his relationship with Byron with the depths of erotic torment.

After surveying the wider historical context of sexuality in this period (Cocks, 2003 and Cook, 2007), I developed the view that Polidori's sexuality was what we might now term "fluid". He was aware of the conventional expectations of a marriage with a woman and was keen to seek the maximum social advantage that it might offer. He clearly expresses a sexual interest in women. However, at an emotional level, he repeatedly attaches himself to older men who have some level of sexual interest in him. To what extent he acted on whatever he desired or any of them desired is irrelevant, as the crucial relationship in the play is with Byron. Byron's charm,

intelligence and attractiveness are chronicled by his every biographer. His presence at such close quarters seems likely to have been emotionally and sexually overwhelming.

Dramatically, the most interesting conflict then comes from Polidori's internal battle between wanting Byron to love and admire him, but not necessarily wanting to make love to him. Polidori is aware of Georgian mollies but rejects that identity for himself (Act One, Scene Three). He is open to sexualised power play with Byron (Act Two, Scene Ten) but not to the actual act of sodomy (Act One, Scene One), which he can only experience bodily by becoming Byron and creating a proxy of himself (Act Three, Scene Two). Whilst for Byron, Polidori is part of a wider pattern of attractive young men that he surrounds himself with (Lauritsen, 2011) and in that sense is just one option amongst many. Creating that relationship and giving it a full emotional and sexual journey was the biggest challenge of the play, and addresses the largest absence in the account of the life of Polidori that is offered by narrative biography using the historical records.

Whilst a full literary analysis of Polidori's novella *The Vampyre* isn't necessary, it is pertinent in the consideration of Polidori's sexuality and his view of Byron to analyse the vampire as a subconscious metaphor. Benshoff (1997) looks at the many ways in which monsters in films (usually based on novels or legends) and notions of their monstrosity relate to terror of same sex desire, rooting this in cultural trends much earlier than American movie production. In summary, "homosexuality is a monstrous condition" (p.1). Others have noted the power of *The Vampyre* as Gothic code for same sex desire, with Fincher going as far as ascribing the genesis of this

to Polidori, stating that his novella, “initiates a long tradition of vampirism’s association with queer sexual desires” (p.21, 2007). Several have invited parallels between the antagonist of the novel, Ruthven, and Byron (Bishop, 2005, Fincher, 2007, Macdonald, 1991, MacCarthy, 2002), also noting that Ruthven was the name given by Lady Caroline Lamb, one of Byron’s ex-lovers, to her thinly veiled parody of Byron in her novel *Glenarvon*. Similarly, in *The Vampyre* there is a parallel between the younger protagonist Aubrey, who is in the thrall of the destructive but supernaturally compelling Ruthven, and Polidori. The impotent, mesmerised dread that Aubrey associates with Ruthven and the focus of Ruthven’s sexual interest onto Aubrey’s sister, invites a reading of the text as a sublimated and repressed testimony of intermale sexual desire and its many disastrous consequences. Fincher (2007) summarises the progression of the relationship between the two, “Aubrey’s unconscious erotic motives for Ruthven strengthen as he becomes more repressed which results in his hysteria. His exacerbated fear of Ruthven’s gaze re-acts the paranoia of homophobia that constructs the gaze of another male to sexualize its object” (p. 139).

A play offers the opportunity to embody and literalise the sexual metaphor as one way to address absence. The actors who play Polidori and Byron can double as Aubrey and Ruthven. This is explored in several scenes in Act Three and climatically in Scene Five where Byron/Ruthven vampirises Polidori/Aubrey by placing his lips over his victims and literally sucks the life out of him, pulling the air from his lungs. This version of the vampire’s bite eroticises it further, conflating the blood lust of Ruthven with the sexual lust of Byron, exterminating Polidori/Aubrey at the point of sexual surrender and giving a poetic truth to the séanced Polidori’s claim

that Byron killed him. The conflation of Byron/Ruthven and Aubrey/Polidori into the moment of the fatal kiss works on several different levels. It brings to the surface the repressed sexuality of the vampire. It acts as a metaphor for the annihilating love that Byron offers to people. And it enables us to move through time from 1819 to 1821/2, through the moment of Polidori's death to Byron's delayed notification of it, at which he emitted the famous titular response "Poor Polidori." (Macdonald, 1991). Additionally, it makes Polidori's death a poetic image and avoids the controversy of whether or not it was a suicide. Stott (2014, p.287) points out that no trace of prussic acid was found in the glass beside Polidori's deceased body, though Macdonald's analysis (1991, chapter 20) favours some form of self-poisoning as consistent with the symptoms of depression that he was arguably exhibiting. This sexualised image of Byron/Ruthven creates an intense stage picture which kills Polidori through both his relationship with Byron and in response to the loss of the credit and money associated with the global success of *The Vampyre*. It embodies Stott's view of the novella as, "a parable of resentful male intimacy" (2014, p.250).

## **CHAPTER EIGHT:**

### **Findings: Interviews**

#### **Introduction**

During a period from 4<sup>th</sup> October to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019, I interviewed six writers who have written work that engages with the record of the past in different ways (see Chapter 3 for the methodological rationale). At this point, I had completed writing *The Adhesion of Love (TAOL)* and a draft of the exegesis on that play (material that now sits in Chapter Five). I was also in the process of finalising the second draft of *The First Vampyre (TFV)*, a version without most of the material that comprises Act Three. Indeed, the rehearsed reading of the second draft took place on 16<sup>th</sup> December, just before the final interview. So, there was a constant interplay between these two elements throughout this period.

I was aware that the research process for writing the second play had been quite distinct from the first. The dramaturgical devices I was deploying to order the relationship between the archive, its staged representation and historical absence were also quite self-consciously different. However, I had not started any formal analysis of these. I had made some loose journal notes adumbrating concepts and had some nascent ideas, but nothing as developed as Chapter Five. The process of preparing for, conducting and reflecting on the interviews undoubtedly advanced my thinking not just on writing *TFV* but across the whole field of my research.

The interviews themselves were peppered over an eleven week period, interspersed with my own playwriting. Each one required a review of the interviewee's pertinent work, the development of some tailored questions and some on-the-spot thinking in the moment of conducting the interviews and responding to my interviewees answers. Thus they were also an opportunity to review my own thinking about some of the key issues behind my research questions, always returning to three core elements: engaging archive, representing archive dramatically and creatively addressing absence in archive. This enabled me to use the interviews not only as a valuable way to document the approaches taken by a series of leading writers to these areas, but also as a kind of validation, challenge and development exercise. I could test out the concepts that came out of the first play, such as historical literacy, with creative practitioners to see if any confirming resonances could be found. I could use the notes of my emerging ideas about writing *TFV*, such as the importance of place, and develop these in dialogue with a fellow practitioner, enabling their responses to further develop my own. Sometimes these were simple recognitions and affirmations, sometimes elaborations developed in conversation and sometimes rejections of or limitations on what I had been advancing. I wrote Chapter Seven with the benefit of this process, a kind of limited practice review, and my subsequent reflection on what had emerged in the interviews.

I have ordered material from the discussions into three main sections (evidence, dramaturgy, absence) that correspond to my research questions. The questioning was focussed on specific creative texts, which are briefly outlined below by writer to help make the practice commentary more meaningful.



### **Abi Hynes: 4<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

Hynes is a stage and screenwriter who I have commissioned several times for heritage pieces. Works discussed:

- *Harry Stokes: The Man-Woman of Manchester* (2016): a LGBT+ History Month heritage premiere detailing the life of a Victorian trans man;
- *Burnley's Lesbian Liberator* (2017): a LGBT+ History Month heritage premiere detailing Mary Winter's struggle to get reinstated as a bus driver after she was sacked for wearing a Lesbian Liberation badge at work in 1978;
- *Jolly Good Luck To The Friends of Vesta Tilley* (2019): a monologue about the Victorian Musical Hall cross-dressing woman and a fan she meets in Bolton.

### **Brian Fillis: 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2019**

Brian is a stage and screenwriter. Works discussed:

- *An Englishman in New York* (2009): the film sequel to *The Naked Civil Servant* (1975) which details the final decades of the life of Quentin Crisp;
- *Queers: More Anger* (2017): a stage monologue and then a screenplay commissioned as part of the BBC's marking of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 set in the 1980s;
- *Against the Law* (2017): a docudrama for television about Peter Wildeblood whose book of the same title was a seminal plea in the 1950s for the decriminalisation of male homosexuality.

### **Ian Kelly: 16<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

Ian is a historical biographer, actor, stage and screenwriter. Works discussed:

- *Mr Foote's Other Leg* (2013): a historical biography of the eighteenth century, cross-dressing actor manager Samuel Foote whose career was ruined by a claim of sodomitical assault.
- *Mr Foote's Other Leg* (2015): a stage adaptation by Kelly of his own historical biography.

### **Seiriol Davies: 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

Seiriol Davies is a writer, composer and performer. Works discussed:

- *How To Win Against History* (2016): a musical for stage about Henry Cyril Paget, 5th Marquis of Anglesey who was extravagantly camp and lived at Plas Newydd which is now a National Trust property.

### **Neil Bartlett: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019**

Neil Bartlett is a playwright, director, novelist and translator. Works discussed:

- *A Vision Of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1987): a monologue and then a three person stageplay on remembering the life of Victorian homosexual painter Simeon Solomon in the midst of the AIDS pandemic;
- *Stella* (2016): a stageplay about Ernest Boulton, a cross-dressing Victorian man who had relationships with other men and was known as Stella when cross-dressed.

### **Russell T Davies: 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2019**

Davies is a multi-award winning screenwriter. Works discussed:

- *The Grand* (1997-8): a drama series for television that Davies was the lead writer on, set in a hotel in Manchester in the 1920s which featured a homosexual character in the lead cast;
- *Cucumber* (2015): a contemporary drama series for television about the lives of a group of gay men in Manchester which featured the ghost of a character from a previous, seminal Davies series *Queer As Folk* (1999-2000);
- *A Very English Scandal* (2018): a limited series historical drama for television about the relationship between Jeremy Thorpe and Norman Scott in the 1960s and 1970s;
- *It's A Sin* (Titled *Boys* at the time of interview) (2021): a drama series for television about the lives of a group of imaginary gay men who are affected by HIV and AIDS in the 1980s.

## **Results**

### **1. Research & Evidence**

My first research question is: How does the existence and use of historical evidence influence the content and dramatic form of a play featuring intermale sexuality? With the writers, I typically broke the purview of the question down into a series of smaller, more specific questions. Before they begin writing, what research do they undertake? Is there any methodological rigour to their research or it is more subjective and sporadic? What kinds of sources do they use? Does their process generate any original historical evidence (such as new interviews)? And how do they know when to stop researching and start writing?

Hynes works with primary sources when she can and feels a strong fidelity to representing the picture that a historicisation of those sources can offer. Her approach to her research is clear and perhaps reflects the limited volume of historical material that is available on some of her subjects to date:

I really wanted to find everything that there was to find about them...I feel that there is some kind of both moral and just creative integrity at play in terms of not wanting to lie and not wanting to misrepresent through laziness.

The absences in conventional historical account also emboldens her and drives her desire to engage with primary sources "...because what you learn very quickly is that all the proper history stuff is bollocks..."

She attempts a neutral engagement with primary and secondary sources, one that eschews the specifics of the commission that has have driven here there:

I try and go really open minded into that block of research. I really don't ever go, 'Oh, I've been told they want me to write something about Vesta Tilley. I reckon it will be this and I'll do the research to kind of back that up.' I don't ever do it that way. I go, 'OK, Vesta Tilley. Let's pretend I don't know who she is and read as much as possible.'

Hynes set out how her research process is often fragmented, with different pieces of evidence becoming available at different points in script development with different implications as she outlines in relation to *Burnley's Lesbian Liberator*:

So, in the case of Mary Winter (*titular protagonist*), it was brilliant because we found loads of her letters and her poetry in an archive and at that point I had just started to draft. And I started again because her voice was wrong. My voice wasn't remotely like what I ended up reading as the person that I imagined once I had started reading bits of her journals.

In terms of when Hynes feels that her research is complete, she relies on external factors to curtail her: "Just time on a project is the only thing that stops me."

In contrast to Hynes's attempted neutrality, Fillis approaches research with a nascent view of the narrative he wants to construct and uses that to direct him:

I'm beginning to think about how do I assemble a drama here, how do I assemble a story that works, that I'm at my least respectful, in the that sense? I'm discovering a lot of facts, but they're all filtered through, 'Is that useful to me? Is that useful to what I think is emerging? Is that useful to the story that I think my instincts are already telling me that I think I want to put across?'

Fillis' starts with the person he's dramatising themselves: "The point of entry would be, well, 'Did that person write anything?' "

His research is then narrowed more by specific psychologically motivated questions than by a sense of character or narrative emerging organically from the research:

I suppose it comes down to really basic stuff, 'What was that person attempting to achieve? What was their plan? What was the thing that they actually wanted out of life? What was it that they were dreading might happen?' If can nail those two, I've got something.

This leads him onto to the consideration of generating new historical materials through taking oral testimonies:

Who is the closest person that we know to that person that we can speak to, if that person is willing, is interested? What is their take? Can I get countervailing points of view?

Fillis researched the original court transcripts of the Wildeblood trial for *Against the Law*, an experience that involved a kind of archival frisson:

You know, you get a very great sense of it happening, a very great sense of, although it goes down quite dry on the page, there's an awful lot of emotion swilling around in this and it does feel, even if it had been, even if those transcripts had been published in a book and you were reading them there, it wouldn't have the same impact.

Kelly is both a literary biographer and a playwright and as a result takes one of the most structured approaches to research, seemingly grounded in hermeneutical historicisation:

My duty is to go to primary sources, if they exist of course, and secondary sources yes necessarily, but very rarely am I looking at fictive constructs ...the process is very scholarly, I hope. It is tracing first of all the archives if one knows where they are. I suppose an element of overview reading, in that if there are, you know, a couple of biographies to read beforehand or generic views of the period, or something, then you start with that.

For Kelly, there is clear distinction between the two modes of writing, and he approaches the act of dramatisation explicitly granting himself licence to move away from the historiography that he carefully adhered to for a biography:

I felt enormously freed in the process of writing a book and then writing a play or screenplay...I knew the material. I knew the facts, so far as I could find them, and therefore I was allowed to speculate and move it elsewhere...The

plays become very different beasts because I am freed from all the duties of a historical biographer to bind myself constantly in verifiable sources and the agenda of biography and can go on all sorts of fictive journeys.

Sometimes Kelly researches just to write a play, but in the play under discussion here, *Mr Foote's Other Leg*, he researched first to write a literary biography and then subsequently adapted his own work for the stage. Either way, he likes to create reference tools that he can return to:

I try to start sorting early. I do rather tedious stuff like creating a timeline, more or less as a spreadsheet as it begins to come together, the what happened when and what's going on in the rest of the world at the time.

All through his research process, Kelly gathered material that he used as the starting point for parts of the play that required comedic writing:

I had a sort of gag file essentially, or little snippets of conversation, little things I knew that I was sure I was going to use somewhere and not quite sure how. And yes, I start with a little series of grab bags like that.

Beyond what can be found in archives or libraries are the extant buildings or just the sites where the events happened. Kelly sees these as another research option:

I do love the romance of the primary source, the places that people have actually been....I'm a great believer in, as it were, 'physical research' walking



in the footsteps of, trying to go where they have been. All of that has proved to be incredibly fruitful, not just imaginatively but also historically.

Place emerged for Kelly as an uncurated archive of the past, with him visiting extant sites where people had lived or where key events had taken place. *Mr Foote's Other Leg* started its production life in September 2015 with a month's run at the Hampstead Theatre. Then, remarkably, it became a kind of site-specific piece as it transferred to the Haymarket Theatre, which is the main location in the play itself and incorporates the small extant part of Foote's own house. This raised issues around the connections between past and present:

It's a piece about theatre ghosts. It's a piece partly about what we leave behind as artists in the live arts. It's always struck me as rather a moving issue...I mean the theatre is about liveness. It's very evanescence is some of the poetry of it all because it's a metaphor for life, obviously...I'm a romantic about ghosted lives, and about the magic and the honour of trying to find a way to breathe life back into lost histories and forgotten voices.

In addressing the point of when he stops researching, Kelly struggles with not falling back into what he calls the cliché of "you just know". He thinks it's important that a playwright should be "...finding your literacy first. All I'm saying is that I aspired to have found that before I start writing."

Davies, S. outlines a whole series of interviews that informed his research on Henry Paget for *How To Win Against History*, touching on how the process of questioning

as a gay man can begin to alter the perception of the heritage industry gatekeepers that one questions, showing that the act of dramatisation itself can begin to alter the public historical discourse at heritage sites:

[I] interviewed Christopher Sykes who is the great, great, some number of great grandsons...Then newspaper archives and things I went to....I interviewed the on-site historian at Plas Newydd, who at that time was really interesting and said things like about the tin mine investments of Henry's successor and who then said things like, 'You know what, I think he may have been homosexual.' And I was like, 'Do you know, I think he might've been'...a mix of things really but as I've said very ad hoc, and I've said based on no particular methodology. And then I brought Viv in to check.

"Viv" being Viv Gardiner, an expert writing a historical biography of Henry Paget.

Davies is the only writer to speak about explicitly using a historical adviser and how he saw the role, which he described as a "thing knower":

I think what I wanted to do was be like, in a number of more granular questions ask, 'Is what we're doing OK?' Because, I didn't want us to be all exuberant and losing any sense of connection to any history or any projection of the person, but I also didn't want to be slavishly avoiding saying anything because we were too afraid of making any claims. So, I think there was a little bit of an ethics component in what she was, in retrospect, I think the conversations had an ethical element to them...

Having gained the things known about Paget, there was the desire to include them all in the text:

I definitely had an instinct to be like, 'Oh, how will they know that I've really, really tried here if it all seems like I haven't got any facts in'...Basically, I just love telling people all of the mad shit that he did. Essentially. I just wanted more of those facts in there.

Davies, S.'s director wanted to cut a number of them out, raising fears for Davies of replicating the queer erasure that the show was partly attempting to address. One solution was to try to integrate the "factiness" into comedy in the piece:

...the gag is doing two things. It's doing something human and ideally there needs to be some information in it, and its keeping people entertained.

Whereas a fact mightn't do that...I'm much happier to lose a fact than a gag, and my ideal is to synthesise them, so that I can present the fact in a gaggy way, which normally they were.

Another solution for salvaging the factual evidence that still had to be removed from the script was for it to be allocated to the printed version of the script:

The show is this clown character who goes through this journey and tells us something about human nature, while on the way you get some flavour of a lot of specific, but I wanted the footnote to be this sort of gift box compendium

of everything else... Because at least then, I can present the histories to people who wouldn't otherwise see them.

Davies, S. feels, perhaps somewhat solipsistically, that his moral compass on the overall relationship between the show's Henry Paget and the historicity of Henry Paget's life was an imagined conversation between him and his imagined version of the real Henry Paget: "If I didn't feel like I could justify it to him, if Henry were still alive, I think that's where the line is."

Far from sharing Davies, S.'s concerns about the limits of fidelity, Bartlett is dismissive of any claims that his research creating a show about someone's life should follow any historiographical methodology, and instead positions it as an element of his creative methodology:

I'm a completely rubbish researcher. In the academic sense. For me research is absolutely part of the creative process and is intuitive and responsive. I know that my historical work is riddled with errors and supposition. That's not my job. I'm an artist. I'm not an academic.

Like Kelly and Fillis, Bartlett's research on *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* began with the creative output of Simeon Solomon: "I read it...I think it was the prose poem first, and then I began to track down the pictures and then I began to try and find out about the life."

Having found Solomon's pictures, Bartlett then immersed himself in them:

I call the process 'composting', where its amassing...I have the visual composting process where I'm gathering photocopies, quotations, pictures, sources and characteristically I'll keep all of those up on the wall, a pinboard, or Sellotaped if I'm in a rehearsal room...I had a big collection of his artworks turned into slides and I would have them projected on the walls of my rehearsal studio while I was working on them because I would superimpose the images on my own body while I was working.

Bartlett vividly expresses the added pleasure of handling original documents as opposed to researching them online: "For me it's the difference between porn and sex. You're that close."

Similarly to Kelly, a consideration of place was also important to Bartlett, but the record of it rather the extant reality:

Well, the St Giles Workhouse, that was the worst address in Europe when Solomon was living there. It was, in terms of Mayhew's famous poverty map, it was off the map. So, that was a key artefact.

For *Stella*, Bartlett set himself extraordinary research goals in an attempt to find the voice of a person whose voice was never recorded:

I went to the Lord Chamberlain's collection and I read every play of which we have records of Ernest Boulton appearing in...I copied out in pencil...all the

lines that we know she spoke. I didn't use any of them in the performance ...So, it was finding Ernest's voice by literally filling my head with words that we know that he once spoke. And then, as I say, not using any of that material in the actual script, but the script being deeply informed by that.

A final form of research for Bartlett is the body as a site of somatic queer history. For *Stella* this involved working with Onnagata for a brief period and for *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*, it involved liberating the bodily memories of company members that he was developing the show with; his rationale:

The characteristic gestures and device and intonations particularly of the effeminate or queenly or dragged or intersexed gay body...They're moving in that way because they are part of a tradition that goes back and back. So, you know, through Francois Testory I'm in the same room as Lindsay Kemp. Through Bette Bourne I'm through a whole heritage of amazing radical drag from the late 1960s and the early 70s, and so on. That's a completely unquantifiable and unrecordable form of research...I want to get as physically close as I can to the person in history, because I have so often in my daily queer life, experienced physical contact as a route of succession, as a route of lineage, as a passing on of our great traditions.

For Bartlett, that route of succession and lineage includes sex. In this sense, he himself claims to be only "...three fucks away from Oscar Wilde."

The crucial transition point from research into writing is completely personal for Bartlett and in that subjectivity not particularly illuminating: "...when I had the critical mass of material, I could then start the work. I suppose...And that sense was completely intuitive."

For *A Very English Scandal*, Davies, R.T. began his research away from archives, relying on the filter of the work that a historical biographer had already done:

No, I was more secondary based, with some extra primary stuff. He didn't actually hand his documents over to us. We took his book (*John Preston's biography of the same name*) as the text."

However, Davies, R.T. also wanted to augment this (like Davies, S. and Fillis) with an interview with one of the surviving people he dramatised (Norman Scott) and outlined the specific insight that he was able to bring to this encounter as a gay writer of a gay character based on a gay man:

Meeting him made the whole thing make sense. All the books about the story are written by straight men and journalists. And Norman and Jeremy do quite mysterious things in the established narrative. I very much felt, as a gay man, I was coming to understand the gayness of it and literally when I walked into that room and met Norman Scott, it just clicked. Oh, I've met you 100 times. You're like my friend Peter. You're like my friend Frank. My friend David. A 70-year-old very sexualised gay man. It all went, click, click, click, into place.

Having met Thorpe, the duty of fidelity to Thorpe's account of his life, which of course may contain inaccuracies, is another ethical issue to contend with. Davies, R.T. says that he knew that Scott would complain about his representation no matter how he was written, and that he did. So, he relies ultimately upon his own judgment for what is acceptable levels of fictionalising:

It's my own barometer. It's fairness. It's...If we had lunch with Jeremy Thorpe's son after transmission, I have to believe I can go to that lunch and be proud of what I've done and defend it.

The point to stop researching and start writing is defined for Davies, R.T. in very pragmatic terms, like for Hynes: "...the deadline helps...we need episode one by the end of January...That makes you crack on with it. But I've just got a good nose for that."

All the writers who had created work about the past felt an obligation to engage with the historical record of the people of events that there were dramatising to some extent. The degree to which their reading of that record influenced the content and form of the drama they were writing varied. This variation began with how they engaged with research itself. The writers seemed to have different levels of purposefulness about methodology and approach. Some hoped they researched as an academic historian might, whilst others explicitly disavowed that, asserting that their approach was instinctive and subjective, and their creative practice should be necessarily different from a historians. Some used focussing devices, such as a



small number of research questions, which were reflections of their own interests in the person or period that they were researching.

The sources the writers used as evidence varied from engagement with primary sources such as letters, objects, court records, maps and newspapers from the period through to secondary sources, mostly recent biographies and narrative histories. Those who did engage with archival documentation spoke somewhat metaphysically about energies or feelings that they believed were inscribed into such documents. Beyond the existing historical record, some of the writers created fresh historical evidence by interviewing people about the pasts they were dramatising. These writers were cautious about single oral testimonies, questioning the perspective, intention and veracity of what one person might tell them and seeking counter-balancing additional voices. They all saw living testimony as providing the writer with access to the nearest possible connection to the dead person they were writing about.

## **2. Writing and Dramaturgical Strategies**

My second question is: Are there distinct approaches to writing a history play about intermale sexuality that can be grouped by different relationships between the research, dramaturgical and playwriting processes? Essentially, this question is about the basic strategies that the writer uses in dramatising the record of a life that they have researched. As soon as the playwright begins to contemplate narrative, characterisation and whose viewpoint is privileged, notions of accuracy and fidelity inevitably get raised. How do writers know where to start? What process do they use? What dramaturgical devices will best serve the story-telling and what happens

when the impulse to historical fidelity that some playwrights possess comes into conflict with the demands of good story-telling? How can an audience know what is real and what is invented? Why do past-based work at all?

Hynes feels that one of the prime duties of her story-telling is to the historical record of events:

I don't think I've ever knowingly then written a scene that contradicts what seems to be the most likely scenario that has emerged from research...I think if you're writing a true story, then I don't think I would ever mix making something up with telling a true story, apart from filling in gaps.

When she is moving away from the historical record, Hynes signals this to the audience with a theatrical device of some kind: "I've usually stuck a kind of meta layer on top and used that to give me my story."

With *Harry Stokes: The Man-Woman of Manchester*, the meta layer was supernatural and this enabled a story to be told where one had not existed before because the known facts of Stokes's life were not easy to order into linear cause and effect plotting:

When you bring a ghost onto the stage, you can be fairly sure that everyone in the audience knows that that didn't really happen...There isn't really a story to Harry Stokes. His life: he does stuff and he makes decisions and it ends tragically but it is not like one thing leads to another in a very clear way. So,

the story of that show became about the building of the relationship between Harry the ghost and Ada, the fictional woman who was laying out his body, and became about persuading her to kind of care about him and believe him and consider him for the gender he presented as despite her traditional values.

In terms of narrative selection from her research base, Hynes has a writing technique to help focus her:

'What do I actually want to say? What bits of this interest me?' and I usually end up with a few sort of almost log lines. So, for us over the Vesta Tilley piece that we just did in the museum monologues my log lines were things like, 'What is it about fandom and queer culture that feels so connected?' and 'What is particular about queer identities and why we need our idols so much?'

In contrast to Hynes's duty to the facts of life, Fillis started writing his screenplay of *An Englishman in New York* with a single ordering premise which from the start was fictional and to some extent consciously autobiographical:

A lot of the things he wrote in the 1980s about gay men was problematic then and still is. And I wanted to confront that. I thought, 'Well, okay. This is my opportunity to catch-up with myself on the subject of Quentin Crisp, as much as is to catch up with him'...I thought the thing that would knock this person off his perch, in a way that didn't actually happen I don't think in real life, is not

someone who disagrees with him, but the person who agrees with him too much.

The person who Fillis has agreeing too much with Crisp is the painter Patrick Angus, someone who he did in reality know but whose fictive relationship with Crisp remained in contention in terms of the degree of intimacy and emotion they shared:

There was quite a lot of pressure, particularly from the production company. 'Can't he do more for Patrick. I mean didn't they fall in love or something?'. No. No. But they wanted a lot more embracing. No. No. No. The thing he will do, he (*Crisp*) will arrange a show so that he (*Angus*) gets to sell his work. That's it. He won't do anything. He won't say anything. You know, he can say the line, 'You are beautiful Mr Angus'. And a lot of his did not occur. He didn't say these things... from people I've spoken to, it was true to how Patrick felt about himself and why he was drawn to Quentin and it's less true that Quentin engaged with the experience than he does in the piece.

Fillis's heightening of their relationship and depiction of Crisp moving in and out of critical favour creates a kind of hybrid Crisp, part research part deliberate fantasy:

I don't think he ever really experienced the crisis that we depict him experiencing, but I don't think it's untrue either...So, whether he was ever as self-confronting as he was in that piece, I don't know. But I thought, 'Well, we've got to go there anyway. I'm presenting the Quentin that I would have liked to have happened'.

Fillis also deployed character conflation to allow a through-line for one companion with Crisp across several decades who is the everyman character through which the viewer sees him:

...he had two key friendships. One was with Tom Steel, the editor of the *Christopher Street Magazine* and then later on in his life Philip Ward, who's now his executor... Tom looked after Quentin from more or less his arrival... until the early 90s, late 80s and then Philip took over, Philip Ward, took over and then I realised that I've got to conflate these two... So, we get Philip Steel.

Fillis's stage and screen monologue *More Anger* for the *Queers* season, commissioned specifically to represent the 1980s, offered different creative opportunities based on traversing other AIDS dramas set in the same period, wanting to capture the truth of the period with a fictional character whilst also being original and innovative.

...how do I dramatise the impact of HIV/AIDS experience, in a way that will land with an audience, that will also, and this might be the author's ego, can I do it in a way that's different rather than the tropes of, 'Oh. I've discovered I've got it' or, 'Oh, I've discovered my lover's got it.' These things that are immensely meaningful and emotional, but that we've seen, as it were.

Fillis's script for *Against the Law* had both the fame of the source autobiography, the weight of being commissioned to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality and the precise demands of the docudrama

form as distinct challenges. Fillis' dramatisation of the titular book is interpolated with filmed oral testimonies from people who lived through the 1950s, providing a kind of built-in authenticating test for Fillis's work, though Fillis did not have full sight of the documentary elements in advance of writing. It required some thought as to form as well as content:

They can talk about the experiences of being gay at that time...but what they can't say (*is*) what happens when it gets inside you. In other words, what happens when the prejudice that you constantly experience through society and the Establishment and also through all sorts of horrible things that actually happen to Peter (*Wildeblood*), becomes a part of him...his outlook on being gay. So, that the man (*Wildeblood*) we meet at the start of the piece is actually quite excited about being a homosexual and likes to meet Fanny, the young, camper gay man at the beginning, and is very open about, 'I'm here in a gay club and it's great'. But the end of it, his mind, his heart is closed to his fellow gay men and he's much more, 'No. It's us and not them.' I thought, 'If I can dramatise that'.

Originally, *Wildeblood*'s story also took the same form as the testimonials that intercut with it:

'OK. We're going to see people talking to the camera...we'll set up the convention using Peter.' Now, obviously, that didn't happen, and we get a lot of voiceover instead that didn't actually feature in the script...Soon as you open the voiceover door, particularly when they've got a book that's the

source....I have a problem with fourth wall (*breaking*) stuff, particularly if it's a drama piece because you're suddenly empowering a character. What are the rest of people in the room doing? ...what I prefer to try to get going is a situation in which, as an audience, we've begun to recognise what that person is experiencing that they're not telling everyone else. That privileges us.

The book and the transcripts of the evidence that Wildeblood gave to the Wolfenden Committee left Fillis quite conflicted about his protagonist:

I think he had a sense that, 'If they look at those camp ones, it'll spoil it. They won't give us our legalisation. So, I've got to make sure they realise that, it's not just you who don't like the camp ones, we don't like them either.' In terms of process, its persuading the director and commissioners that we can tell that story...The guy said some fucking horrible things...What changed in the 1950s was that...in the move towards legalisation, a whole aspect, a whole area of men's experience, gay men's experience is condemned, is ruled out as unacceptable...I always felt that notion of subversive frivolity, which I think camp is when it's at its best, I thought, 'We've got to capture that'.

Wildeblood's volume of transcribed testimony from Wildeblood's trial, three days' worth, provided him with another conflation and narrativising challenge:

This brazening it out, 'I'm a homosexual. I didn't actually have sex with him', is going to fall. It's going to die on its arse, and I've got to find a way of dramatising that, that you see this person fall, his testimony, fall apart before

the Court's eyes, which isn't quite what happens, but it does...It was about saying, 'Well, actually I'm going to give a shape to this. So, he's going to start confident, but it's going to go wrong.' And it kind of did when the prosecuting counsel really went at him, it kind of did, but an awful lot of it was cherry-picked.

Having written historical biographies for some of the lead protagonists of his stage work, Kelly is in a unique position to survey the creative similarities between the two forms...:

I've always argued that the business of being a historical biographer is very akin to the imaginative agenda of being an actor anyway, thinking your way into other people's skins, if you will. For whatever reasons, everything I've written as non-fiction has been adapted as drama, one way or another. So, I suppose when I am writing as a historian, as a non-fiction writer, I do slightly have a dramatist's head on now one at the same time.

...and the differences of content that the two forms demand:

...there is an assumption with a biography, obviously, that you'll go more or less from cradle to grave with some sort of thesis of the argument for the life broadly...Whereas biographical drama largely, you're not going to do that, you're going to find a key moment which illustrates a life and is worthy of two hours traffic of the stage or screen.



...and the tension between dramatic form and the simple chronology of events:

You can't tell history as it actually was in most dramatic forms. Your choices are about the drama and about the structure of things and telling a story. And then immediately, we're going to be doing it in the wrong language. It'll look right but immediately all sort of things get changed. And yet, I always tell them, the producers I mean, 'Look, if in doubt, tell the truth as best we can'...So, shall we not have to obey the rule of the plot point turning device on page 20, because actually, the Battle of Waterloo didn't happen for another..." You know, those kinds of mad conversations where you kinda think, 'Well, I hear the theory, but you might be on safer ground being historically accurate'.

Kelly thus both recognises the impossibility of any drama accurately representing the past and makes an appeal specifically for its accurate representation over the demands of historically distorting dramaturgical devices. Perhaps the apparent contradiction can be resolved in considering the internal world of the dramatic characters as open to change, whilst the external world of verifiable historical events that provides the context for those characters is not.

Having written the biography of Samuel Foote, Kelly had been so close to his research that he focussed more on developing the narrative form for his play *Mr Foote's Other Leg* rather than the characterisation:

I suppose I think of it structurally as a challenge primarily, and then the characters, the characters, I don't know, I don't want to give you that old

cliché that they wrote themselves, but gosh, I did know Foote well by then and also had so many of his lines that I knew I wanted to use somewhere. So, that began to happen.

...and he narrativised from an over-arching premise, not dissimilar to Hynes's notion of working to loglines. He saw the play as:

...probably a sort of restorative act or a paeon to an idea of heroism around him as the first example of the broken and destroyed celebrity, because he is destroyed by the British press, essentially. And that struck me as a story worth telling within the context of the theatre.

In considering his overall approach further, Kelly welcomed the restrictions that were imposed from the outside and their implications, in this case the casting of Simon Russell Beale in the title role and the commission coming from Sir Michael Codron:

So, very clearly, I know what the material is, but I'm given the blinkers. It's really useful. And it happened to an extent even with the *Mr Foote's Other Leg*... Anyway, but he (*Sir Michael*) said, 'Well, dear boy no more than eight characters, ideally six and even better four. As few locations as you can imagine. You're allowed two characters who don't speak because then we can get them as some acting ASMs (*Acting Stage Managers*).' So, that's why there are two characters who do not speak ....I like to think, oh I don't know, Moliere, Pinter, Shakespeare have all dealt with the, 'Oh shit. We've got to give something to Burbage next season. What have you got?' There's always

that, you're given some blinkers, but they are useful....I know the cadences of Simon's wit, and I know, the gags became much more about the Shakespearean canon than were really relevant for Foote.

Moving between forms and taking account of the "blinkers" led Kelly to a more definitive position on Foote's sexuality than his biography had taken:

It became different with the play because you're making decisions: as an actor, Simon Russell Beale, as a writer, writing the part for Simon Russell Beale and then the particular trajectory I wanted to go on, in terms of, in brief, trying to posit him as some sort of Oscar Wilde of the eighteenth century. There wasn't time to be equivocal with the evidence, the way that one would do in a historical biography. So, it becomes a more stated issue that it was in the book... I try to just put the evidence out there and let an audience make up their own mind, or readership deduce from their own experience, I suppose, but I wanted to more tell the story of somebody who was sexually and comedically daring.

For Kelly, the act of embodiment that mimesis requires within dramatic naturalism also seems to require the body to have a clear set of sexual and emotional interests. He is knowledgeable about the different ways in which sexuality and especially intermale sexuality is constructed in eighteenth century, but eschews some of those complexities, mindful that a contemporary audience is likely to retro-label Foote with minimal cues to do so:

But I couldn't go into all that in the course of something meant to be funny at the Haymarket and people will get that element of this fast, which I do believe is likely the truth of the matter, that Samuel Foote was gay.

The depiction of Foote's sexual behaviour is a complicated issue in terms of Kelly's playwriting process. In reality, after Foote's leg was amputated following a riding accident, he was accused of sexual assault by his footman John Sangster and was acquitted following a trial. Kelly makes a significant change to the historicity. His motives appear to be multiple, to de-authenticate the play, to solve a relatability problem and to draw attention to the forgotten history of another figure:

...the one thing which is madly different and ahistorical in the play is the inclusion of a character called Frank Barber...He worked for Dr Johnson. But anyway, he was not historically Samuel Foote's dresser. He is not the footman who accused him of assault...as I recall, Francis Barber ended up in it as, at one stage, Dr Johnson was going to be as well. It was just a way to link that together. I will keep him there as a fictionalised character cause it's one of the things that immediately says to me and the world, 'This is a play about the 18th century. This is not, this is not historical biography' because I've done that. That is another document...there was the amputation...but necessarily to take an audience to the pain of the man in the moment was going to take a love affair and not a sexual assault. So, that was a very deliberate choice...truth be told, I nearly changed it back to being John Sangster at the last minute. I might still do that in future productions, because now Frank Barber, rightly, he's having his own life, a play and TV series

potentially. To that extent, I have to say, what I did has proved fruitful because it was a very deliberate.

Seiriol Davies's approach to creating *How To Win Against History* was not to make a history play about its protagonist Henry Paget (who he also played) but:

...to deliberately and consciously not try to make a history play but make a play that was sort of about the lack of history. So, not try and make it be accurate but make it be truthful...we just had to totally free ourselves from the idea of, 'What was he actually like?' because we will never know. It's impossible that we will ever know. One of aspects of having a fractured heritage is that it encourages you to make myths, I guess. We wanted to create a self-reflexive myth based on certain facts, I guess, based on his own relationship to his past.

The epistemological claims to and tests for "truth" may be just as problematic as the claims to "accuracy", depending upon whose truth is being tested, but Davies, S. is weary of any attempts at or claims to accuracy and de-authenticates in the play to resist this:

Accuracy is such an elephant trap because once you take too many steps towards it you have to take all the steps towards it, or you use devices like that to signpost, 'Don't take this as a history lesson because it's a story'...I wanted to make this story be about me stepping on stage, and there's various lines slipped in there, as you say like *Downton Abbey* (an early reference at

*the start*), but also there's a bit about being in my mid-thirties. He (*Paget*) died when he was 29. So, that couldn't be about him. So that is deliberately underlining that I'm telling both stories at the same time.

That claim would seem to depend upon the audience knowing some of the biography of Paget's and Davies, S.'s life and recognising the disjunction between the claim in the play and the fact of Paget's death.

Davies, S. started his dramatisation process not alone writing after a period of intense research, but in a rehearsal room, which was a purposeful reflection of the limited record of Paget's life:

The one big thing we don't have is any diaries, and so we don't know really what his intentions at any given point were. I think we started out in the room digesting all the stuff that there was, looking at the pictures, and then we just started to improv. And I think the very first things that Alex (*the director*) made me do, had me do, invited me to do, was to say some "I am" statements and that's how the show starts. We just kept those as they were.

The development process involved cutting and narrative shaping to conform to a sense of structure that Davies, S. claims is something he instinctively knows:

A lot of the early process involved me writing a scene that was a massive info dump of all the research that I'd done, which wasn't particularly a lot as there wasn't that much available to me. Then Alex, the director, essentially was

like, 'Just lose that. Lose that. Lose that. Just do a scene'... I sort of understood that you needed a darkest hour, I understood that you needed something like a reversal at the end. I sort of understood naturally that you needed some sort of boost to take him out on a journey. You sort of understand those tropes naturally.

...including the need to change elements in the story to make the play more dramatically effective towards the end:

...we just needed to raise the stakes for him, so that by the time he does the interview he's a pariah. So, he has to win it all back with this one act of butchering up. That's the only bit I remember going, 'OK. We need something new for this bit.'

Davies, S. testifies to the transformative power of dramatising history on the history itself and its presentation in the context of the heritage industry:

...the act of putting this show on has changed the Paget family, the Paget family homestead now has, the National Trust property there, now has a permanent room dedicated to Henry. Whereas before, it was a pamphlet above the toilet. That's incredibly gratifying to me...It feels like there are manifold ways we can change history, but we can change our conception of history and we can also use modes of entertainment and modes of things like the National Trust, to change general conceptions of history.

Bartlett often starts his process with the public work of his subject. If working from a text that the person being dramatised produced, he suggests:

Go through with a highlighter pen and every time there's a bit that you really love, highlight it. And then type out all those bits in consequential or inconsequential order and that's essentially your script...What are the bits that really speak to me? What are the things that set my artistic pulse racing? And then I will dwell on those and return obsessively to those.

The above process appears to be evidenced in his account of writing his seminal piece on Simeon Solomon:

*A Vision Of Love Revealed In Sleep* is basically my re-working of *A Vision Of love Revealed In Sleep*. I mean I quote from it at great length in the show. I go through it. I construct rifts upon it, which use its journey, which is from, 'In the middle of my life I wake up and find myself in a dark wood.' I mean it's a rift on Dante to that extent its original. Or in my case, it's 1987 and I'm in the middle of the AIDS crisis.

However, Bartlett cautions about the need to remain conscious of one's own atemporal perspective:

We have to remain specific. You know, it wasn't me, 'Oh my God. I'm in touch with Simeon Solomon. Full stop.' No, I'm in touch with Simeon Solomon in the context of it being 1987 in central London and everything else



that is happening at that time, and if you don't have that context then you're in a very dangerous position where the conversation between the present and the past becomes a free for all...

*A Vision Of Love Revealed in Sleep* was originally a one man show, performed by the author. In opening the piece out, he worked with carefully chosen collaborators:

I cast people and then I invited them to come with me on a process of re-writing and devising...You'll see that lots of the Chorus contributions, so the stuff from Bette or Reg or Ivan, is autobiographical. I would get them to speak it and then I would write down what they had spoken and then that became the script...the research, the harvesting of anecdote continued during the rehearsal process and material from conversations with them, not formal interviews, but while we were rehearsing someone would say something and I would say, 'Oh, keep it in'.

With *Stella*, Bartlett expresses his way into the material more in terms of the logline formed as a question, echoing Hynes's approach:

What is courage? What is queer courage? When you're in your 20s, I know what queer courage is; courage is dancing, going on marches, getting fucked. When your 60 and you've been living with the man you love for 30 years and you've both survived the AIDS crisis and you've seen the incredible changes in daily life for gay people that we've all seen in this country, particularly over the last fifteen years, what is, what is our resource? With *Stella*, I wanted to

ask her that question and the play is me asking her that question. And she tells you in the play, she tells you.

Bartlett also uses de-authentication. He talks of a wider queer disruption of naturalistic illusion in his work, but also specifically in his work using the past of the acknowledgment that there can never be anything other than the actor in the present in the moment of performance:

*Stella* opens with Stella saying to the audience, 'We are here. I am here, and I am talking to you.' My favourite line in *Stella* is when she says, 'Wouldn't it be awful if this was all actually happening'... So, that's always built in to all my performance pieces but particularly in these pieces its foregrounded.

Bartlett also spoke of the need to remain specific to the person being dramatised and the personal motivation for such work:

I think the most important part of this is that our reclamation must never be general. It must never be, 'Oh, isn't it wonderful that there were queers in the past'. I think that's very dangerous and softening...It's very particular things about them, about their bodies, about their voices, about their stories, about certain key instances that they can provide, can become triggers, enablers for us...I think it's important that it comes from a place of very personal enthusiasm and personal need. I think you have to need the past.

Bartlett was distinctive in his rejection of any duty to history, and also in how he viewed the body as a legitimate vehicle for the transmission of historic knowledge. He saw the body as history, the place where history was re-activated and sex between men as a mode of historical lineage through time. Bartlett, correspondingly had alternative methodologies for researching a life e.g. speaking all the words that a person had ever spoken on stage to seek out an inflection or an intonation that could inform his dramatisation of them. Bartlett is being queerly disruptive in his formulation of what constitutes history and truth.

Davies, R.T. does not create detailed, carefully researched character studies as several of the other writers do:

I don't work out their backgrounds because I know their backgrounds immediately. The moment I think of them, it's all there...My characters are always just half a beat away from turning to the camera. There always very aware that they're in a drama. They comment on what's going on. I like that.

His narratives also emerge in similar moments of fully-formed spontaneity. In contrast, when adapting an expansive autobiography for *Casanova (2005)*, he spoke of his difficulty of finding the story in the source material:

Nick Elliott was the Head of Drama, and he said, 'I think a biopic, a biography on screen, should be about the one crucial moment in a person's life and you haven't got that in the script'.

*It's a Sin (Boys)*, as a self-proclaimed AIDS drama, uses fictional characters to tell a real story. In negotiating the existing body of similar work, Fillis spoke of the challenge of remaining original within such an oeuvre, whereas Davies, R.T. sees its potential advantages in terms of narrative selection:

I do see it as a body of work and so if our alien overlords takeover the planet and survey what the human race was like, 'How do they tackle this AIDS thing?' You can look you at *Normal Heart*, you can look at *London Spy*, you could look at the soaps with their HIV scenes, and there's a different version of Richie discovering his diagnosis in *Boys* that together all constitute the experience. It's an unusual feeling that. There are times when I think, 'Oh I haven't covered this. I haven't covered that.' I can think, 'Well, *The Normal Heart* does that, or that play or whatever, does that'... I deliberately slalom round stuff where I thought, 'You could see that here. You can see that there. I'm bringing this to the table.' There are some scenes that are absolutely mine, that I haven't seen done before. There are some scenes that I have seen done before and I thought, 'Right. I'm going to do this now. I'm gonna do my version of that scene'.

Embedded in this is the implication that Davies, R.T. felt a pressure to be comprehensive when approaching a historical pandemic, but then freed himself of that pressure by focussing on what has already been articulated by previous writers.

Like Hynes and Fillis, Davies, R.T. does have some clear intentions in approaching a historical piece. Here, for *A Very English Scandal*:

But I was single-handedly going in there to elevate Norman Scot. That was absolutely my intention...Normally, you're trying to balance things but the viciousness towards him, he needs restoring...To a whole generation that's Norman Scott. A man who was strong and stood up for himself and defended himself and kind of won. And I'm really proud of that. I think that is changing history to an extent...But it's also true. It's not changing. It not rewriting. It's true. That is true.

In order to elevate Scott, he had to take a note from an Amazon executive that there was, "no moment in episode three where Ben Whishaw wins a Bafta". In response, Davies choose to privilege the demands of the drama over the claims of historicity:

It's where I'd been a little bit more faithful to the history and had him a little bit rubbish in Court and it was a great note saying, 'Fuck the history. This is a drama'....That's a change being actualised by the whole production process from Amazon to the BBC to Blueprint Pictures to me. A great big mechanism saying change history, which I love, which I wouldn't have done if I thought it was wrong, but I loved it...I know that moment with Norman Scott wasn't originally there, but his whole victory, his whole stepping out front in Court, being the winner as such and not being sad at the end.

In Davies, R.T.'s 2015 fictional series *Cucumber*, a lead character about to be murdered by a man he goes home with sees Hazel, a character from his earlier seminal *Queer As Folk* (1999/2000) drama, appearing to him as a ghostly warning.

The ghost makes a coded reference to an even earlier drama series he wrote about a hotel in the 1920 called *The Grand* (1997/8):

I'm probably playing to an audience; I mean a large part of the audience are aware of the significance of Hazel going into a Canal Street drama. So, she's a television ghost as well. At no point is it ever really me ever really me thinking there's really a ghost here, really warning him. It's very, very meta-textual...That's the historian, that's me being a historian if you want. Sort of saying that. And she says, "Boys been falling in here since the 20's." Look at me connecting that to *The Grand* when they went down the canal. It's partly a comment on my whole work. I'm unashamedly doing it.

Davies, R.T. is using the supernatural briefly to explore the historicity of his own career, though the ghostliness is invoked only to be denied. This is quite distinct from the Hynes's use of ghostliness to give Harry Stokes an afterlife that acts as a de-authenticating mechanism for the whole piece.

Different forms of engagement between the archive and the narrative intention of the writers were described. Hynes wants a story to emerge from what she has researched and attempts an open engagement with historical records. Fillis already has a story in mind and selects what he engages with archivally to serve the parameters of that narrative, demonstrating a kind of confirmation bias. Kelly and Davies, R.T. both spoke of a focus on the most important moment in the record of a person's life and using this as the organising principle their research efforts.

Approaches to notions of veracity altered not just by writer but also by project within the work of one writer. Hynes felt there was a duty to dramatise in a way that is consistent with the known historical record and not to distort, or rather to make it apparent when she is by the use of a metatheatrical device or the incorporation of the supernatural. Hynes is describing a “de-authenticating device”. Beyond the use of the supernatural, the writers offered a range of other de-authenticating devices. These included using anachronisms, minor but significant factual inaccuracies, introducing real people who weren't part of the story, and direct audience address where the historical character is positioned in the same moment in the present as the audience. All the writers who used de-authenticating devices spoke of their intention being to make visible their own historical speculations and to remind the audience of the present, as much as the play presented an illusion of the past.

In terms of characterisation, some writers had deliberately moved away from the historical record. This was not in the rupturing way of de-authentication. Rather it was a change that sat coherently within the illusion of the past that the dramatisation was presenting and in fact seeking to authenticate. Fillis summarised the changes he made to his characterisation of Quentin Crisp in terms of making him into a better version of himself, the queer that Fillis had wanted him to be when he was younger and not the queer he was, which Fillis had found problematic. Davies, R.T. also made changes to lionise Norman Scott who he personally remembered had been homophobically castigated. Both writers had autobiographical memories of these gay men being attacked and wanted to address this as part of their basic balancing between their creative impulse and the limitations of the historical record. Their work

took on a restorative impulse that required it to depart from this historical record in order to redress a past wrong.

The inevitable embodiment that drama requires forces decisions upon the writer that other forms can remain ambivalent about. Kelly spoke of this in relation to Foote where he felt the hesitancy of his biography, bound by a duty to evidence, could be resolved into a form of intermale sexuality on stage. Kelly also asserted that it is his conviction that the play represents Foote's sexuality accurately and it is the dramatic form that licences him to say so. In contrast, Davies, S. was at pains not to ascribe intermale sexuality where he did not feel there was any evidence for it.

Several writers articulated their broad sense of the relationship between dramaturgy and this historical record. They found that unorchestrated facts do not make a story but were also concerned about maintaining a relationship between what they'd written and the historical record. Where the limit was to the fictive elements seemed entirely subjective. Several writers made claims to external limiters. Typically this was worded something like, "If they were sat next to me now, I'd have to be able to look them in the eye and defend it." But of course, the imagined biographical subject is ultimately just a mirror of the writer, reflecting their own existing decisions.

### **3. Addressing Absences**

My third research question is: How can historical playwriting respond to any absences and possible distortions in the public and private records of intermale sexuality? The writers all came across different forms of such absence in dramatising the record of the past. There was self-censorship, external censorship,



a lack of access to the means of memorialisation, a heteronormative bias in how the past has been recorded and interpreted and the wider problem that people tend not to keep a record of their sexual lives, with some notable exceptions. What does the writer use to address the absences? And can absence itself be used? And is there a duty to signal to the audience what is explicitly invented?

Hynes notes that her work changes in style when she is filling-in for absence, suggesting that de-authentication is a way to indicate to an audience that you are speculating as a writer: "I reckon you move further away from realism as you get more into territory that you think is guesswork, imagination."

More widely, she observes a distinction essentially between a treatment and dramatising a scene. A treatment outlining the story might be able to claim a high degree of verifiable verisimilitude, but as a writer approaches a scene involving dialogue, then invention is almost inevitable:

It's all gaps really, because you're writing conversations between people that didn't happen maybe or you're filling in words that, unless you're literally writing a play that is a transcript, you're filling in a lot of gaps.

And she relies on different sources to address this:

I make it up based on what sort of person would have done these things and led this sort of life. Sometimes, I pick bits about the way people you know, for example, the way someone I know talks or the way someone I met once

held a meeting. I steal useful things if it helps you get a character in your head...in the case of *Vesta Tilley*, I stole the tone of bits and pieces from some of the newspaper cuttings about her because it helped me get into this kind of heightened fin de siècle.

Several of the writers echoed Hynes on the need for invention and specifically commented on the heightened need for it when representing sexuality. For *Against the Law*, Fillis invented the details of Wildeblood's romance, noting that he inverts the relationship between Wildeblood and his lover from the earlier film version *A Very British Sex Scandal* (2007):

He (Wildeblood) lets his guard down a bit and Eddy has to say, 'We can't kiss in public, that's not going to work.' That's all licence to some extent. The Channel Four piece does it the other way round.

Davies, R.T. similarly invents the sexual scenes between Thorpe and Scott in *A Very English Scandal*, but with some careful balancing of his fictive impulse, limited by the adumbrations of what happened in limited historical accounts:

...you've got the historical version. You've got the reported version. I feel completely joyous in filling in, stepping inside. I mean I could have written 15 hours of Norman Scott and Jeremy Thorpe in that bedroom. I just loved that. I've rarely enjoyed writing anything so much. So, I feel completely free but again as long as I'm being fair, and I am being fair. He doesn't come in as a rapist in that scene. And you could argue that.

*A Very English Scandal* also features a flashback montage where Thorpe has sexual encounters with a number of men that end badly:

My biggest decision is in that last episode, where Jeremy Thorpe remembers all the rough nights he's had and he thinks that Norman Scott is the best, that's completely invented. Of course, he was having sex with other men. And, they do say that had he taken the stand, they say that the Prosecution was ready with men from bars and clubs that he slept with, but not necessarily with stories of violence like that. But very simply, you know this Stephen, I literally had to, well, no one even dared fight me on it, because I simply had to say to the lawyers, 'Every gay man I know in 2019 has had nights like that. So, don't tell me that you didn't have nights like that out in the 60s. You had more of them because you were closeted. And he was powerful, he was more of a victim.' And no one dared ever challenge me on it.

Rather than resisting dramatising the detail of Thorpe's sex life with other men because of a lack of direct evidence, Davies, R.T. is content to use an analogy of what he feels is a common experience in the present to infer similar or worse sexual experiences for Thorpe in the past. This methodology for addressing absence is also expressed by him with a real vehemence and self-belief.

Similarly to Hynes, Kelly used a couple of sources to fill out the sexual dynamics between Frank Barber and his master in *Mr Foote's Other Leg*:

I have a very good friend who is black, African and gay and particularly troubled by the aspects of that within modern black culture and we talked about that quite early on. So, it was as much about him as it was about the historic Frank Barber...Frank was drawn of a number of affairs I'd seen over the years, star actors, in particular, and beautiful young man, where you think, "OK, well, that may or may not work out. There is beauty and poignancy in real love, potentially there, but that's not an easy place to start." So, Frank was sketching in all of that.

Absences around the records of someone's sexual life is not something that every writer wanted to address. Indeed for *How To Win Against History*, Davies, S. felt that being explicit about Paget's sexuality was off limits in ethical terms:

There was one thing I didn't want to do which was clearly ascribe him with any clearly identifiable sexuality as we understand them, because there's been a lot of people who say he's gay. There's no evidence of that...I can make absolutely the same assumptions as anyone else based on various characteristics of his, but...there was never a point where I was going to give him even the inkling of a male lover, because I just don't, there is no evidence of that and that would seem like a violence to make assumptions. That was one red light that I had. But it also didn't seem necessary...If there was something clearly redacted that had the silhouette of something that we could read as a relationship, I wouldn't hesitate to put that in, but given that there is nothing, like, I think in the way that he acts and in certain reactions he has to

things there is no question that he is being portrayed in the show as someone who is not heterosexual.

The piece's avoidance of naturalism allows for this ambiguity to be maintained.

Paget is able to float above the representations of him, comment on them and avoid the fully formed body of embodiment that naturalism might demand. A distinction can also be made between inventing the details in a scene of intermale sex featuring a person whose sexuality has been reliably historicised at least in the general sense of establishing same sex attraction, such as Thorpe's, and a person whose sexuality hasn't, such as Paget's.

With *How To Win Against History* there are much wider absences in the record of Paget's life and the absences themselves were something that Davies wanted to address by leaning into them and making them metaphorical:

...what we decided to go for was a protagonist whose story is somewhat unclear to him, because he exists on the plane of the level of knowledge that we have. That's why the reframe 'apparently' happens all the way through. 'Apparently this happened' and 'Apparently this was terrible.' The fact that there are so few facts means that you have to draw lines between quite disparate dots. We didn't want to be speculating, well obviously we did speculate as there are ghosts in it, but we didn't want to be trying to build a totally three-dimensional character hung on the skeleton that was, that we had. We wanted to create a character who occupied the space of trying to work out what he was like, in a way...he's a clown whose encountering what it

means to have lost so much of queer history really. And he's encountering it on a personal level because he's like, 'I don't really know what happened next, but apparently the next thing that happened was I got married'.

Davies, S. thinks that the limited record of intermale sexuality and intimacy in the past leads to a particular form of aesthetic:

...the thing about queer culture is that it reacts to its own erasure by being playful about its own truth, about its own accuracy. It's keeping those mirrors, keeping that system of smoke and mirrors.

Davies, S. saw the relative absence in the record of intermale sexuality in the archives as evidence of queer erasure and was very conscious of not replicating that when making a drama based on the sanitised archive. There appears to be only two options, either to invent to address the absence, or to use the specific absence as a metaphor for a wider queer absence and even wider absences amongst other communities for the historical record. This later strategy is carefully deployed by Davies, S. to avoid both speculation and collusion.

Beyond the absence in the record of intermale intimacy, there is also, as Hynes pointed out, a wider absence in the record of lots of elements of people's private lives. At that level, a lot of history plays are making a lot of their dialogue up. As the drama moves more into the field of sexual and emotional intimacy, so several writers acknowledge the need for invention becomes greater and greater. Fillis even spoke of how he deliberately wrote the emotional and sexual behaviour of Peter Wildeblood

not to conform to his best reading of the limited historical record per se, but to be specifically different to a previous dramatisation of Wildeblood's life. The licence to invent in the representation of specifics of sexual behaviour is so great that both versions can lay equal claim to the historicity of the Wildeblood's actual relationship. In the invention of intimacy, writers spoke of using some current day templates and retro-fitting them to their historical characterisations. Hynes and Kelly both took elements of people they knew or dynamics from relationships that they have observed to help them to fill-in the intimacy of the past.

All the writers acknowledged that the historical record of intermale sexual and emotional behaviours was limited to non-existent. This was due both to the repressive cultural and sociological context in which the person had lived which made any recording of illegal or illicit desire risky and due to poor historicisations of people's lives that demonstrated a heteronormative bias. Some writers wanted to address that bias and it was central to their motivation. Davies, R.T. also felt that being a gay man enabled him to offer an insight into the pasts of the other men who experienced intermale sexuality that was distinct and involved disrupting previous biases and absences.

## **CHAPTER NINE:**

### **Conclusion**

My exploration of the relationship between historical evidence, research, playwriting, dramaturgical processes and archival absence has involved writing two full-length plays. These are each based on extensive archival engagement, as well as research involving a range secondary materials, as detailed in Chapter Five and Seven. The forms of absence in and distortion of the record of intermale sexuality was quite distinct between the two plays. *The Adhesion of Love (TAOL)* involved records which has been self-censored and coded, either literally in a cryptological sense or more subtly through the deployment of Whitman's poetic notions of comradely bonds. *The First Vampyre (TFV)*, however, was centred on two texts that had been posthumously censored by a third party, one partially redacted and the other completely destroyed. These two different forms of absence required different research practices and dramaturgical methods to address them. This created a different relationship between what could be known, inferred and guessed at in terms of each dramatisation.

Perhaps the most significant finding to emerge from the first play was the notion of "historical literacy" in contrast to "historical accuracy". The claims of a history play to accuracy can always be defeated. The ability for the language, costume, light, site and dialogue of the past all to be faithfully reproduced in the present is highly questionable. Even if it could be, the meaning of all those in combination to a twenty-first century spectator is inevitably different to the observer of the original



events. Claims to “accuracy” creates a debate about “facts”, “truths”, “what really happened”. All of these are endlessly contestable either within their own limited paradigms, or by the constantly provisional and revised claims of hermeneutical history, or through the wider conceptual lens of post-modernity. “Literacy” changes that debate. “Historical Literacy” depends upon an engagement with archival remains, contextual research and what Bush-Bailey (2012) terms “best guess methodology” to create a fresh historicisation of absent intermale sexual behaviours, or other forms of absence. The playwright can then consider how best to communicate that to a contemporary audience. This involves the selection and deployment of proximal equivalences, things that work in similar ways in the present culturally to create meaning but are different to what is historically accurate. Making the temporal translation that proximal equivalences require helps to suggest the meaning of the past to an audience and not simply to reproduce the past, which may not convey the same meaning as it did (see Miller, 1986).

“Historical Literacy” requires a significant engagement with historical processes, but it does not require the reproduction of what has been discovered through them in a play. It allows for departure, inevitably by applying the *craft* of playwriting with its narrativising and characterising demands, but also through purposeful and intended distortions to serve the personal and/or political intentions of the writer. It both requires work and gives licence. It invites a debate about why things have been changed and what form of truth the writer is trying to constitute about the past.

Compliance with conventional stage dramaturgies involves departing from simply reproducing past events. However, “Historical Literacy” is more than that. It is a state of readiness to write which is deeply informed about the topic on which one is writing to the extent that one is licensed to change things, not due to the demands of creating narrative satisfaction, but in order to better convey the meaning of the past. It is paradoxical in that the move from mimetic reproduction may better reproduce the past meaning of events. Additionally, it can also involve playful and purposeful distortion designed to make the historicising within and around the play visible, and to engage an audience in debates about the wider cultural representation of the past rather than just the “accuracy” of what they have seen or read. I have termed these purposeful distortions “de-authentication”.

I am proposing using “Authenticating Strategies” and “De-authenticating Strategies” as terms that enable us to talk about different organisations of the relationship between the research, dramaturgical and playwriting processes is to group them as Like “Historical Literacy”, this sidesteps the historiographical debates about the facticity of *what* is presented and focusses instead on *how* it is presented, the claims the play is making and the way it positions itself in relation to the archival records. This draws on Smith’s (2011) conception of the “Authorised Heritage Discourses” in a site and extends it to the dramaturgical strategies of the playwright to authenticate in a play. The notion of “de-authentication” is also related to two archaeological conceptions of performance, Pearson’s (2001) “purposefully unauthentic” and Narmo and Petersson’s (2011) suggestions of using anachronism. The history play written from a position of historical literacy in performance is perhaps an example of their “action-mediated knowledge” which also includes notions of soma and different ways

of communicating experimentation to the public. Historically literate playwriting using de/authentication might itself also qualify as an example of their “methodology of the probable” in terms of its ability to address absence, specifically the absence in the record of intermale sexuality. This would infer that the knowledge such a play creates is more than speculation but less than certainty. It offers, as Pearson claims Brith Gof’s work does, a suggestion of the past without a monopolisation of the past as “this is exactly as it was” (p.68). It invokes and denies, creates an illusion and then suspends it, offers the past but always reminds an audience that is it the present looking at the past.

The notions of “authentication” and “de-authentication” not only move the critical debate away from fidelity criticism, of accounting for history plays in terms of suspect notions of “accuracy” but also away from the veracity, or not, of “deeper truth”. It focusses instead on the intentionality of the playwright in terms of the ways in which they are attempting to suggest authenticity or deliberately disrupt it, de-authenticating it for some other purpose. Bush-Bailey’s (2012) solution to “presentism” (the seduction of the dramatised illusion of the past which is actually just the present) was to suggest an onstage historian. *TAOL* almost places the playwright, in proxy for the historian, on the stage. It certainly places its own attempts at reconciling historicisation and dramatisation on the stage through the metacommentary of the two lead characters. De-authentication, however, is another solution to presentism. It reminds the audience through a range of devices that the past is irretrievable and that the ever unfolding moment of the present of the play is all that can be presented. *TFV* does this through the use of social media in a Georgian setting, but it is just one way of de-authenticating, one strategy for

organising the relationship between research, playwriting and dramaturgy. De-authentication involves rupturing the illusion of the past that naturalism can suggest. A play can deploy wholly authenticating strategies or wholly de-authenticating strategies, or, more usually, a mixture of both as each of my plays do.

Writing the second play confirmed and extended my claims about “Historical Literacy” so that it can also incorporate the notion of historically embodied playwriting, of somatically experiencing the past as part of writing it from this position. This draws together and builds on at least two notions in the literature. Firstly, Rokem’s (2000) notion of the hyper-historian, the actor in the present reaching back to and performing the past to an audience. I am extending this to the playwright in some of their writing process, for example taking two archival letters and interpolating them to create dialogue in a scene. As the playwright, I am both communing with the documentation of past in the present moment of writing about it and also have in prospect a future moment when the play will be read and performed. I am creating the same connections as the actor as hyper-historian in Rokem’s formulation. Secondly, Freeman’s (2010) notion of erotohistoriography in queer performance . Extending this allows for the playwright to use the archive to feel the past, to experience it somatically and for that to inform the organisation of dramaturgical devices as much as colder, purely intellectual considerations. As the playwright, I create distinct characterisations with vocabularies that I speak out loud in the room as I type at the laptop. Reviewing these lines may involve researching the etymology of a term to check that it is not unintentionally anachronistic. But it can also involve the feel of the phrase in your mouth, the more instinctive, embodied sensing of how someone would and would not speak. The gateway to this form of

embodiment has been demystified. It is not that the characters just start speaking to me. Or that I just knew when to start writing. Or that they arrived in my head fully formed like long-lost relatives. It is through a systematic engagement with the record of past lives, a consideration of the absences in the record, a contextualisation of the wider period and the development of a dramaturgical strategy that can both address absence and distortion and create proximal equivalences between the past and the present. In short, by becoming historically literate through the detailed processes that I have set out in Chapters Five and Seven and discussed with other writers in Chapter Eight.

The range of dramatisations discussed in Chapter Eight suggest that writers freely mix and match from devices that I have grouped under Authenticating and De-Authenticating Strategies, have different levels of Historical Literacy and experience different levels of embodiment when researching and writing. In the interviews I conducted, I found confirmations of the concepts I had been developing, some fresh ideas and some challenges. There were many examples of how writers used authentication and de-authentication devices, the later used consistently to remind the audience that the dramatisation wasn't the past. Those that worked with primary sources all recognised my description of the "ontological weight" that such materials have. The concept of "Historical Literacy" as opposed to "historical accuracy" is also one that the writers welcomed as a liberation from debates about facts. However, some were still more reticent than I am about ascribing intermale sexuality into absences. Each writer that I interviewed has their own distinct approach to research, the playwriting process and the dramaturgical strictures or freedoms that they deploy in their work. All of them could be viewed through the lens of authentication or de-

authentication. Indeed the twin notions can be taken beyond the writing process and into the production of the play itself. The choice of venue can de/authenticate, for example *Mr Foote's Other Leg* (Kelly, 2015) being performed at the Haymarket Theatre where the play is set. The casting can de/authenticate, for example Seiriol Davies working his own biography into a play about Henry Paget presenting his age instead of Henry's whilst claiming to embody Henry. The theatre programme can de/authenticate for example with either copious notes on all the research that the playwright has undertaken or with the cautionary words of Bartlett introducing *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1990), "It is always better to tell your own story by telling someone else's." Even the production partners and time of performance can act de/authenticate, for example with Hynes' *Harry Stokes: The Man-Woman of Manchester* (2016) being presented in LGBT History Month with LGBT History Month as a partner.

The writers took different approaches to the relationship between dramaturgy, history and the archive. They all recognised that dramatisation involved narrative selection, focus and compression and that all characterisations are partial. However, views on additionally departing from the historical record beyond that were divided. Some writers felt a fidelity to it, others wanted to make minor changes, more of emphasis and interpretation perhaps, whilst some wanted to make blatant changes, or eschew any notions of fidelity from the outset. Most talked like historians. They had an authority about their version of the past, a specific narrative read of the events and a degree of proselytising about the version that they have arrived at. Even as they offered an account of the factual distortions that they have made, they invoked the

notion of a deeper “truth” which is beyond a truth that validates against the record of events. This “truth” is autobiographical as much as it is biographical.

How do we measure whether “truth” has been created in a dramatisation? Whose truth? The truth of the writer, the person being written about, the period, the emotional context of events? How do we know when the truth is achieved? It is possible to record where the writer has been deliberately inaccurate in terms of measuring this against the findings of hermeneutical historicising and to note the dramaturgical device that this serves, but that is a negative measure. It does not measure truth, just factual deviation. Perhaps notions of “truth”, in terms of anything external to the writer being true to their own creative vision, should be abandoned as much as notions of “accuracy”. All we can establish, once again, is writing from a position of “historical literacy”, i.e. from an engagement with the historicising of others and creating one’s own; an absorption of the period and of the details of someone’s life and of finding proximal equivalences to better connect the past to the present. This is not something that is scalable, but something as simple as a writer’s bibliography might suggest that it is provable in the broadest terms.

What also emerged repeatedly was how personally involved some of the writers felt with the people they were writing about; how they imagined them as guardians of their own legacies keeping a critical eye on the scale of deviations from facticity; how the writers longed for their subjects to have been better than they were; how they wished they could’ve rescued them from the hostile environments in which they sometimes failed to thrive; how in the act of rewriting them the writer was also

somehow rewriting their own history and association with the person they were writing about. Davies, R.T. turned Normal Scott into a hero. Kelly makes Samuel Foote into a gay martyr foreshadowing Oscar Wilde. Hynes found a way for Harry Stokes' gender identity to be accepted and not reviled. Fillis made Quentin Crisp regret the impact of his pithy words. Bartlett rescued Simeon from obscurity. Davies, S. remade the privileged Paget's extraordinary extravagance into queer resistance and strength. Rewriting the past as acts of rescue, restoration and reconstitution. This chimed with why I had chosen Wallace and Polidori as my protagonists. I wanted to reclaim Wallace from his asexual wasteland and purge the Eagle Street College of its sexual shame. I wanted to move Polidori centre stage, repositioned from centuries as a supporting character in the story of the writing of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), forever the faint light of a distant star dwarfed by the vast halo of the moon, to paraphrase Polidori himself.

At the end, I must return to the beginning. The archivist at the John Rylands Library who in 2015 first showed me a picture of a group of men in a garden in Bolton sat round a small shrine to Walt Whitman in their Sunday best. "These look like what we'd now call gay men", I said. "I think so. But there's not much evidence. And I don't think there ever will be", came the reply. Maybe the dramatisation of *TAOL* provides that evidence. It is a historically literate reading of absences in the historical record. Making an assumption of intermale sexuality and playing it out through characterisation and narrative provides the simplest, clearest explanation of the lives, actions and obsessions of the men. Attempts to historicise the men's lives from a heterosexual starting point creates a vast web of unnecessary problems.



Similarly, with *TFV*, an intermale sexuality assumptive approach to the record of Polidori and Byron's lives offers explanations for what is otherwise inexplicable.

What I've created in these plays is new knowledge about the past. It isn't definitive new knowledge, but even hermeneutical history makes no such claim. It is as much about the present and me as it is about the past. It places them in dialogue with each other and says, "What if we think of it like this?" It is a highly provisional, speculative form of knowledge but it is, at least to my mind, also likely.

More profoundly, I hope I have also contributed to a validation of the history play as history. To allow "history" to be sanctioned as sole provider of knowledge about the past is an act of erasure. If intermale sexuality is disproportionately absent from the records that history depends upon, then it will always be disproportionately absent from history. The behaviour was never recorded. Or if it was, it was coded, or destroyed. Some codes may be decipherable. But destruction isn't undoable. So much is irretrievable. It is crucial for playwriting that can address that absence to be validated as more than drama, and for history to demonopolise the past, if our knowledge about intermale sexuality in the past is ever to be extended. Historically literate playwriting can act as a way to licence that, not just for the LGBT+ community in the present wanting to connect with its past, but any community who are non-existent or under recorded in the archive. The power and significance of a record of the past has often been remarked upon, perhaps here most fittingly here by Larry Kramer in the documentary of life *In Anger and Love*: "I don't think you can be a people until you have a history" (Carlomusto, 2015). I hope this is one contribution

to building it and enables others to apply and further develop the devices and techniques I have outlined to continue the work.

# **LIST OF APPENDICES**

## **1. Question for Actors**

- (a) Questions asked of the actors after the table reads of each script.

## **2. Questions for Audiences**

- (a) Questions asked of the invited audience after the rehearsed readings.

## **3. Questions for Playwrights**

- (a) Semi-structured interview schedule for the six playwrights.

## **4. Abandoned Scenes**

- (a) *The Last Vampyre.*
- (b) *Lord Byron's Exhumation.*
- (c) *William Michael Rossetti Meets His Uncle.*
- (d) *The Vampyre.*

# **APPENDIX ONE:** **Questions for Actors**

## **Introduction**

Thank you very much for your work today. It's been really helpful to hear the play read for the first time. I'm now going to invite responses and ask some questions. Please do not feel under any pressure to say anything if you don't want to, but anything you do feel comfortable saying will be very welcome.

Just to be clear, as you know the reading was recorded and this discussion will also be recorded. I'll make a transcript of the discussion in which what you say will be anonymised. So, you'll just be listed as "ACTOR ONE", etc. The recording of our discussion will remain private as you could be identified from it. Anything I use publicly will be from the transcript and will only be in the anonymised form.

In the next 24 hours, you'll also be sent a link by email to complete a short anonymous on-line questionnaire. There's two reasons for also doing the on-line questionnaire. Firstly, some things may occur to you after you've had some time to reflect on the reading. Secondly, you may feel that you can be freer in your feedback when it's anonymous and on-line than when it's with me face-to-face in a group.

All of that said, I welcome all comments, especially critical ones. This is a first draft of the play and it's normal for some or all of it not to work and for a lot of re-writing to take place. So, the more feedback you can give me about things that need to change, the better.

Any questions? (*Give answers to clarify as required*).

### **Open Questions**

So, firstly, an open floor for any initial comments. Please tell me what comes first into your mind about the play we've just read. I will then ask a similarly open question about each scene and each character: e.g. Comments on Scene One? Reactions to Walt Whitman's characterisation and actions overall? This will systematise the feedback and give equal weight to all parts of the draft. I will attempt to draw out general comments like "Scene Two didn't work" with follow-up questions like "Can you tell me what about Scene Two you felt didn't work?", etc.

### **Specific Questions**

1. Before reading the play, how much did you know about the person you were playing and the period in which the play is set?
2. Again, before reading the play, how much did you know about the history of same sex male relationships in the period of the play?
3. Does your character seem to act and talk in a way that you think is correct for the period?
4. What do you think of the language used more generally in the play in terms of period?
5. What do you think about the representation of the sexuality of your character in the play?
6. What do you think of the representation of sexuality in the play more generally?
7. Which characters or events were made up?

8. Would it help you as a performer to know what was invented and what was replicated?
9. Do you think there are any ethical issues about writing and performing in plays based on people or events?

## **Ending**

I want to thank you again for both the reading and the great discussion we've just had. Both have been really helpful. I'm going to stop recording now and just finish with a reminder that you will be getting the link to complete the on-line questionnaire in the next 24 hours. It should only take around 8-10 minutes to complete. If you could do it in the next 7 days, that would be much appreciated. Thank you.

## **APPENDIX TWO:**

### **Question for Audiences**

#### **Introduction**

Thank you very much for coming today. It's been really helpful to hear the play read for the first time in front of an audience. Please do not feel under any pressure to say anything if you don't want to, but anything you do feel comfortable saying will be very welcome.

Just to be clear, as you know the reading was recorded and this discussion will also be recorded. I'll make a transcript of the discussion in which what you say will be anonymised. So, you'll just be listed as "AUDIENCE ONE", etc. The recording of our discussion will remain private as you could be identified from it. Anything I use publicly will be from the transcript and will only be in the anonymised form.

After our discussion, you'll also be asked to complete a short anonymous written questionnaire. The reasons for also doing this is that you may feel that you can be freer in your feedback when it's given anonymously than when it's with me face-to-face in a group like this.

All of that said, I welcome all comments, especially critical ones. This is an early draft of the play and it's normal for some or all of it not to work and for a lot of re-writing to take place. So, the more feedback you can give me about things that need to change, the better.

Any questions? *(Give answers to clarify as required).*

### **Open feedback**

So, firstly, an open floor for any initial comments. Please tell me what comes first into your mind about the play you've just heard. I will then ask a similarly open question about each scene and each character: Comments on Scene One? Reactions to Walt Whitman's characterisation and actions overall? This will systematise the feedback and give equal weight to all parts of the draft. I will attempt to draw out general comments like "Scene Two didn't work" with follow-up questions like "Can you tell me what about Scene Two you felt didn't work?", etc.

### **Specific Questions**

*(These were tailored each time to the play and responsivity of the audience).*

1. Did anyone know anything already about the people in the play? *(If applicable)*  
What did you know?
2. What did people know already about the history of same sex male relationships in the period in which the play is set?
3. Did the characters seem to act and talk in a way that you think is right for the period?
4. Did anything in particular strike you as being out of period?
5. What do you think of the representation of sexuality in the play?
6. Could you tell where the writer was working from archive sources and where they were making events and dialogue up?
7. Does it matter to you to know what was invented and what was replicated?



8. Do you think there are any additional ethical issues thrown up by plays which have representations of real people and events?

## **Ending**

I want to thank you again for attending this reading and being such a thoughtful and responsive audience. I'm going to stop recording now and finish with an invitation to complete the anonymous questionnaire that has just been handed out. If you could post it in the box by the exit on your way out, that would be great. I'll be staying around if there are any further questions you want to ask, please come up to me. My email address is also on the Information Sheet you have been given, if you'd like to contact me that way. Thank you.

## **APPENDIX THREE:** **Questions for Playwrights**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. It should last somewhere around 90 minutes. I'm recording the interview as I explained in the Information Sheet and I've got your Consent Form, so your permissions from that will all be followed. This is a semi-structured interview. I've got some standard questions that I will be asking everyone that I'm interviewing, but we're free to build from them and explore your response as we go. I'll also be asking some questions that are specific to your work alone.

If at any time you want to stop or want a break during the interview, please just say so. Is there anything you want to ask me before we start? (*Answer questions as required*).

*I tailored the precise interview schedule each time to match the playwright I was interviewing and the play/s they have written that I wanted to discuss*

### **General Playwriting Questions**

*I selected a couple of these to open the discussion and establish rapport. I also used them as builds to other answers from the Historical Playwriting Questions, as appropriate.*

1. When did you start playwriting?
2. How do you decide what to write about?
3. Once you've decided what to write about, is there a standard process of playwriting that you follow? (*If there is*) What is that process?
4. How many drafts do you normally go through?
5. What feedback mechanisms do you use through the drafting process?

6. As you're writing, to what extent do you anticipate an audience's reaction?
7. What the most valuable lesson you've learnt through experience about playwriting?

### **Historical Playwriting Questions**

1. How is your research and writing process different when approaching historical material?
2. What level and detail of research do you undertake in relation to the biographies of people, or the accounts of real events or the language and values of a period you're dramatising?
3. Have you used historical advisers either in terms of the whole script or for specific advice in an area/s of the script? *(If applicable)* How do you bring them into the research and/or writing process?
4. Where you have a choice, how do you decide which people or events to focus on?
5. How do you set about a characterisation of a real person?
6. How to select from the sometimes conflicting accounts of an event to create one narrative?
7. How much do you consciously deviate from historical accounts in how you have presented a person or a series of events? *(If applicable)* Why?
8. Is it important for an audience to know what elements in a historical play are purely from the writer's imagination?
9. *(If applicable)* How influential are prior dramatisations of the person or facts in terms of your choices as a playwright when approaching the material?
10. Does a playwright have any moral obligations to the document based historical accounts of a person's life or a series of events?
11. Is there more of a pressure with historical content to use a naturalistic style of stage representation?

12. What issues does writing about what we'd now call gay or bisexual men in a historical setting create in terms of characterisation, language or narrative?
13. How do past stereotypes of gay men influence you in writing a historical piece?
14. How do you use the past consciously as a metaphor for issues in the present?
15. Do you make assumptions about an audience's knowledge of the past?
16. (*If applicable*) Does an assumed absence in their knowledge ever force more didactic elements into your play (for example having a character read out a newspaper report or give a speech)?

### **Play Specific Questions**

*These were substitutes for other Historical Playwriting Questions rather than additions.*

1. How did you come to write "*Play Title*"? Was it your idea or was it a commission from somewhere?
2. Further questions were tailored to the play/s with a focus on:
  - Choice of characters and any details of them that deviate from historical accounts.
  - Choice of events to create a narrative structure, especially any events that have been invented, or dealing with real events that are counter-dramatic.
  - Use of archive materials.
  - Use of a historical adviser.
  - Evidence of the character's sexualities and choice made by the writer in how this is represented on stage within their understanding of any historical constraints upon their characters.

## **APPENDIX FOUR:** **Abandoned Scenes**

### **Scene A: *The Last Vampyre***

*The cast forms a CHORUS of five, two women and three men. They act as narrator, foreshadow, provide context, occasionally lie and squabble, and can step into specific roles.*

WOMAN TWO: Vroucolocha.

MAN ONE: Vardoulacha.

MAN TWO: Ghoul.

MAN THREE: Izcacus.

WOMAN ONE: Broucoloka.

WOMAN TWO: Vampyre. *(Looking at the others insistently)* Vampyre!

WOMAN ONE: Vampyre.

WOMAN ONE, MAN ONE & MAN TWO *(Weakly and out of unison, then stronger and with one voice):* Vampyre. Vampyre. Vampyre. Vampyre. Vampyre. Vampyre.

MAN THREE: To even speak the word is to...

*WOMAN TWO looks angrily at MAN THREE. MAN THREE looks defiantly at WOMAN ONE and goes to speak, as if about to argue with her. MAN THREE lowers his head and sighs.*

MAN THREE: Vampyre.

*They form a half-circle, facing the audience which is their default positioning when they are in CHORUS mode. WOMAN TWO throws an early Georgian magazine into the centre of the circle.*

WOMAN TWO: "The London Journal". 11th March 1732. The report of a vampyre.

WOMAN ONE: There have been many well-documented cases of vampirism, but this case is curious not only in the particulars of the accounts offered/

MAN ONE: /but also by the number of sworn victims/

WOMAN ONE: /the concordance of their accounts/

MAN ONE: /and the seniority and good name of the witnesses/

WOMAN ONE: /each providing affidavits for every link in the curious chain of events.

MAN ONE: The report in the magazine is of/

MAN ONE: /Madreyga, Hungary. 1727.

MAN TWO: An infantryman named Arnold Paul is posted to Cassovia, on the frontiers of the Turkish Servia.

MAN THREE: Nothing so exceptional or curious in that.

MAN TWO: Except that he subsequently claimed not only to have been tormented by a vampyre, but also to have found a new way to rid himself of the evil.

MAN ONE: He ate some of the earth out of the vampyre's grave and rubbed himself with a few small drops of the vampyre's blood.

WOMAN ONE: Whilst this procedure was very successful at driving away the accursed vampyre/

MAN ONE: /it did not, in itself, prevent Arnold Paul from becoming one, a vampyre.

*WOMAN TWO twitches and grimaces baring her teeth a little.*

MAN THREE: To even speak the word...

*She repeats the gesture and the others all join in together, then return to their normal expressions.*

WOMAN ONE: Arnold Paul was taken by a fever that left him remarkably breathless.

MAN THREE: He had not taken a breath for two days, but his heart still beat. And then it did not.

MAN TWO: For the period between twenty to thirty days after Arnold Paul's burial, many persons complained of having been tormented by him.

WOMAN ONE: A deposition was made, that four persons had been deprived of life by his preternatural, posthumous attacks.

MAN ONE: To prevent further mischief, the inhabitants, having received permission from their Hadagni/

MAN THREE: /the Chief Bailiff/

MAN ONE: /took up the body, and found it to be fresh and entirely free from corruption, emitting at the mouth, nose, and ears, pure and florid blood.

*WOMAN TWO places her closed fists under her chin and flicks them forward opening up, suggesting a jet of blood coming from the neck. She repeats the gesture and the others all join in together, then return to their normal expressions.*

WOMAN ONE: Proof having been thus obtained, they resorted to the accustomed remedy that their forebears had taught them.

MAN ONE: A stake was driven entirely through the heart and body of Arnold Paul, so deeply it skewered the body into the ground.

*WOMAN TWO grabs hold of WOMAN ONE who falls to her knees screaming.*

WOMAN ONE: At which he is reported to have cried out as dreadfully as if he had been alive.

MAN TWO: This done, they cut off his head, burned his body, and threw the ashes into his grave. The same measures were adopted with the corpses of those persons who had previously died from Arnold Paul's vampirism, lest they should, in their turn, become agents upon others who survived them.

WOMAN TWO. The account in "The London Journal" is sworn to as a full and accurate record fit for the eyes of God by all of the nine magistrates of Madreyga. It is the last such verified account of a vampyre.

MAN THREE: To even speak his....

*WOMAN TWO almost snarls at MAN THREE, who fall silent. A moment of tension between them.*

WOMAN TWO: The last vampire.

### **SCENE B: Lord Byron's Exhumation**

*The cast form a half-circle facing the audience in CHORUS mode. WOMAN TWO throws an Exhumation Licence dated 1938 into the circle.*

WOMAN TWO: Hucknall, Nottinghamshire, 15th June 1938. The Rev Canon T.G. Barber is curious about/

WOMAN ONE: /the body of/

WOMAN Two: /Lord Byron.

MAN THREE (*licking his lips*): Who wouldn't be?

*The CHORUS whisper to each other, gossiping about BYRON's body animatedly, all speaking on top of each other but still audible.*

MAN ONE: I heard his body was stolen by mad Lady Lamb. She had him stuffed, including his....

WOMAN ONE: It was never buried here at all. It was stolen by grave-robbers back in Greece.

MAN ONE: It was there in 1852. The tomb was opened for his daughter to be laid to rest. There are records of that and witnesses.

MAN TWO: He's buried in Missolonghi, where he fell.

MAN THREE: The devil came for his body, like he did for his soul, and all that remains in the coffin is the laughter of Old Nick himself.

WOMAN ONE: The ship bearing him sank off the Greek coast. They took the body of a hanged man and buried that as Byron.

MAN TWO: Lord Iron!

MAN TWO and MAN THREE: Lord Iron. Lord Iron. He rusts but does not rest. Lord Iron. Lord Iron. His morals never best!

WOMAN TWO: The licence was granted by the Home Office and permission given by the family for the exhumation of the coffin but not/

WOMAN ONE: /the body of/

WOMAN Two: /Lord Byron.

*MAN THREE licks his lips and rubs his hands in anticipation.*

MAN THREE: But who could resist?

*MAN TWO (as BYRON) begins to grow faint through fever and stagger around. MAN ONE and THREE and WOMAN TWO get in his way, help him, carry him, and bleed him, as he struggles and fades.*

WOMAN TWO: The good Canon Barber claimed he sought only confirmation that his coffin was in the tomb and intact. It would not to be opened.

MAN ONE: Byron's wishes had already been ignored in bringing him here at all.

MAN TWO (as BYRON): "I am sure my Bones would not rest in an English grave—or my Clay mix with the Earth of that Country ... I would not even feed your worms—if I could help it."

WOMAN ONE: The day before he died in Missolonghi, he declared/

MAN TWO (as BYRON): /"Let not my body be hacked or be sent to England."

*MAN TWO (as BYRON) allows a fever to overcome him and he falls to the ground dead. MAN ONE, MAN THREE and WOMAN ONE act out the autopsy, dismemberment and barrelling up of MAN TWO as BYRON over the next 15 or so lines. WOMAN TWO controls their actions.*

WOMAN TWO: Both requests were denied.



MAN ONE: The doctors who “hacked” Byron’s body with an autopsy found a congested brain/

MAN THREE: /a flabby heart/

WOMAN ONE: /and a diseased liver.

MAN ONE: Before stitching him back up, the doctors removed his/

MAN THREE: /heart/

WOMAN ONE: /brain/

MAN ONE: /and other internal organs, placing them in four Copian urns.

MAN THREE: Two parts of Byron’s body stayed in Greece.

WOMAN ONE: Pietro Capsali, the man in whose house Byron died.

MAN THREE (*as CAPSALI*): We wished to have his lungs and larynx because he had used his breath and voice for Greece. He is a son of my country and part of him must stay here forever.

WOMAN ONE: But the urn with Byron’s lungs within disappeared when Missolonghi fell in a Turkish siege two years after the poet’s death.

MAN THREE: Never to be seen again.

MAN ONE: And what remained of Byron was stripped/

WOMAN ONE: /bent double/

MAN THREE: /trussed up/

MAN ONE: /sealed in a barrel, and pickled with 180 gallons of spirits to preserve it for the long, journey home/

*WOMAN ONE, MAN THREE and MAN ONE are now carrying MAN TWO (as BYRON) above their heads like they are bearing a coffin.*

WOMAN ONE: /to an England suddenly in love again with the dead Byron.

MAN THREE: Incapable as he was now of any further sin.

WOMAN ONE: Though not so in love that they couldn’t refuse him a burial in Westminster Abbey.

MAN THREE: On account of all the prior sodomitical fucking.

*MAN TWO (as BYRON) is laid peacefully to rest in the centre of the stage.*

WOMAN ONE: Byron's executors buried the poet at his family vault in Hucknall, Nottinghamshire on 16th July 1824, 89 days after his death.

MAN ONE: Where it remained/

MAN THREE: /until/

WOMAN TWO: /Dig.

*WOMAN TWO grabs the exhumation licence and shoves it in the face of each of them.*

WOMAN TWO: Dig!

*MAN ONE and WOMAN ONE begin to dig.*

MAN THREE: To relieve the dead of their rest...it's...

*WOMAN TWO squares up to MAN THREE.*

WOMAN TWO: Dig!

MAN THREE: Sacrilegious.

*WOMAN TWO throws a book into the circle "Byron And Where He Is Buried" by the Rev Canon Thomas Gerrard Barber.*

*MAN THREE relents and also begins to dig. MAN ONE, WOMAN ONE and MAN THREE hit stone at the same point. They join forces with pickaxes lifting a heavy set of stones covering the tomb where BYRON rests. He is revealed.*

WOMAN TWO: 15th June 1938 and Canon Barber's moment has arrived.

MAN ONE (*as BARBER*): I hope to clear up all doubts as to the poet's burial place and compile a record of the contents of the vault, which I intend to publish in an economical volume.

MAN ONE: There were 40 witnesses on hand for the secret vault opening.

MAN THREE: Not much of a bloody secret.

WOMAN ONE: But only the men descended into the vault itself. Of these, three remained, and a fourth appeared later, for the only glimpse of Lord Byron in the 20th century.

MAN ONE: The fourth man was Canon Barber who happened to be absent at the moment that the other three men decided to open the actual coffin.

WOMAN ONE: Without a licence. Without the permission of the family.

MAN ONE: Desecrating his resting place.

MAN THREE: Who could resist?

MAN ONE (*as BARBER*): I found myself suddenly called away on...on...on urgent Church business.

*WOMAN TWO laughs mockingly.*

MAN THREE: We had the wooden lid off easy. Inside that: another lid. This one lead. We had it off soon enough and then still a third lid, made of wood. This offered some resistance and had to be splintered. And there he was. Lord Byron himself. Stark. Bollock. Naked.

MAN ONE (*as BARBER*): When I attended...after the sudden and terribly important and most unexpected Church business, I very, very reverently, raised the lid, and before my eyes there lay the embalmed body of Lord Byron. It was in as perfect condition as when it was placed in the coffin one hundred and fourteen years before. He looked as if he might just open his eyes and still be with us.

MAN THREE: There was a single drop of blood on bad Byron's forehead.

WOMAN ONE: All testified as to the unknown, almost uncanny preservation of the body. One remarked that his sexual organ showed quite abnormal development.

MAN THREE: Look, I'm a happily married man, five little 'uns, but I've been in the Army. I've been in bathhouses, shower blocks and that. I've seen men. Other men's cocks. But I never saw nothing like him.

*MAN THREE slowly lowers a hand from his crotch to his knee level. Then nods.*

MAN THREE: Hung like a donkey. Like a navy's fucking donkey.

*MAN THREE then moves his hand up from his knee until it's poking out in front of him, erect.*

MAN THREE: And it was at full mast, up, erect, hard, like a fucking tent pole.

*MAN ONE and WOMAN ONE go to the edge of the semi-circle, joining WOMAN TWO, leaving MAN THREE alone with MAN TWO (as BYRON). MAN THREE looks at MAN TWO (as BYRON). He gets closer to the body, staring at his crotch. He reaches out, hand shaking a little and touches MAN TWO's Byronic cock with a finger. He holds the shaft with his hand, mesmerised, strokes it as it caught in some phallic spell, then shudders and pulls back.*

MAN THREE: Who could resist?

### **Scene C: William Michael Rossetti Meets His Uncle**

*The cast form a half-circle facing the audience in CHORUS mode. WOMAN TWO throws "The Séance Journal of William Michael Rossetti" into the circle.*

WOMAN TWO: William Michael Rossetti's Journal. Kept between 1865 and 1868.

MAN THREE: That's not just a journal. No. It's forbidden knowledge, a/

WOMAN TWO: /detailed account of every séance and spiritualist gathering that Rossetti ever went to.

*The rest of the CHORUS look at each other unnerved, sensing what is to come.*

WOMAN TWO: Rossetti started out as a non-believer, more than that even, a debunker.

*WOMAN TWO pulls a shocked face with a dropped jaw. She repeats "debunker" to WOMAN ONE, who joins in, then MAN ONE, MAN TWO and finally MAN THREE.*

WOMAN TWO: But within a few months, he had seen enough to convince him that Earthly communication with the dead was possible. Then, on 25 November 1865, William Michael Rossetti went to visit Mrs Marshall.

*WOMAN TWO becomes MRS MARSHALL and takes up a space centre stage. She welcomes in WOMAN ONE, holding her hand to start forming a circle.*

WOMAN ONE: Mrs Marshall is a medium holding private séances in a discrete house in Maida Vale.

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL) welcomes in MAN ONE, also holding his hand.*

MAN ONE: Mrs Marshall's method involved a sort of primitive Ouija board.

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL) welcomes in MAN TWO, also holding his hand.*

MAN TWO: Questions were asked, and then her husband went slowly down a printed alphabet with a pencil, stopping whenever a rap was heard.

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL) welcomes in MAN THREE, also holding his hand. The circle is now complete with her at the head.*

MAN THREE: One rap for "Yes". Two raps for "No".

*WOMAN TWO pulls tightly on the hands of those she is holding. They resist and a pull and push struggle ensues. WOMAN TWO makes some primitive noises.*

MAN THREE (as ROSSETTI): He came through, the uncle I had never met, Uncle John, Dr John William Polidori.

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL) stops pulling. MAN ONE breaks hands with the others and becomes POLIDORI in the centre of the circle, now unseen by the others.*

MAN ONE (as POLIDORI): I fear that having never known me in life, you might not know me now in death, but I am your uncle. Uncle John.

*MAN TWO holds up a chart with the letters of the alphabet in ascending order. One rap from MAN ONE (as POLIDORI) after the letters J, O, H and N. MAN THREE (as ROSSETTI) whispers to WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL).*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL): Is it a foreign surname?*

*MAN ONE (as POLIDORI): Polidori. It's Polidori.*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL): Knock once for yes and twice for no.*

*MAN ONE (as POLIDORI) looks exasperated.*

*MAN ONE (as POLIDORI): Polidori!*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL) winces and looks confused. MAN ONE (as POLIDORI) knocks once on the floor.*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL): Yes.*

*MAN THREE (as ROSSETTI) whispers to WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL). She nods.*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL): Is it an Italian surname?*

*MAN ONE (as POLIDORI) rolls his eyes and knocks on the floor once again.*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL): Yes.*

*MAN THREE (as ROSSETTI) whispers to WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL). She nods.*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL): Is it Polidori?*

*MAN ONE (AS POLIDORI) is so relieved that he knocks on the floor with both hands several times. WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL) is almost overwhelmed by POLIDORI's knocking. MAN ONE (AS POLIDORI) stops suddenly realising what he's done and miming "Shit" to himself several times.*

*WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL): Please! Just knock once for yes and twice for no.*

*MAN ONE (as POLIDORI) knocks on the floor once.*

*MAN THREE (as ROSSETTI) whispers to WOMAN TWO (as MRS MARSHALL). She nods.*

*MAN THREE (as ROSSETTI): Uncle John. Uncle John. I am almost overcome.*

*MAN ONE (as POLIDORI) places his hands on his heart, then knocks once.*

*MAN THREE (as ROSSETTI): You are too?*

*MAN ONE (as POLIDORI) knocks once.*

MAN THREE (*as ROSSETTI*): Forgive me, but I must ask you some questions that I would we had more time to embellish with decency. May I though?

MAN ONE (*as POLIDORI*) knocks once. MAN THREE (*as ROSSETTI*) looks to MAN TWO and WOMAN ONE for strength and encouragement. They nod.

MAN THREE (*as ROSSETTI*): Are you happy?

MAN ONE (*as POLIDORI*) knocks twice. MAN THREE (*as ROSSETTI*) looks concerned and seeks encouragement again from MAN TWO and WOMAN ONE.

MAN THREE (*as ROSSETTI*): As to the manner of your death. Were you killed?

MAN ONE (*as POLIDORI*) knocks once. Gasps from MAN TWO and WOMAN ONE.

MAN THREE (*as ROSSETTI*): Can you spell out for us who it was that killed you?

MAN TWO holds up the alphabet letters and his pencil again. MAN ONE (*as POLIDORI*) knocks once at B. An energy hits the circle. WOMAN TWO become rigid and starts to moan. MAN ONE (*as POLIDORI*) knocks once at Y.

WOMAN TWO, WOMAN ONE and MAN TWO: Byron!

MAN THREE (*as ROSSETTI*): Byron?

WOMAN TWO, WOMAN ONE, MAN TWO AND MAN THREE are all open-jawed, the shocked face the same as WOMAN TWO made them pull at the top of the scene.

MAN ONE (*as POLIDORI, sobbing*): Yes. Byron. Byron! Byron killed me.

## **Scene D: The Vampyre**

### **CHARACTERS**

WOMAN ONE/Ianthe/Clara/Frances: young  
 WOMAN TWO/Guardian/Mother: middle-aged  
 MAN ONE/Aubrey/Polidori: young  
 MAN TWO/Ruthven/Byron: youngish  
 MAN THREE/Guardian/Gaetano: middle-aged/old

### **SCRIPT**

The cast forms a CHORUS of five, two women and three men. They act as narrator, foreshadow, provide context, occasionally lie and squabble, and can step into specific roles. There are a series of strong boxes that form a circle behind them and which they can use to make basic set shapes with. WOMAN TWO stands at the mid-point of the CHORUS. She takes one step forward.

WOMAN TWO: It happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the ton a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank: Lord Ruthven.

*WOMAN TWO indicates that MAN TWO should move forward. MAN TWO becomes RUTHVEN. WOMAN TWO circles around him as she speaks, touching his cheeks and moving his head as if he were a mannequin to look at the others.*

WOMAN TWO: He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein.

*WOMAN ONE and MAN THREE move into the circle, gossiping and laughing. WOMAN TWO moves RUTHVEN's head to place his gaze upon them. They fall silent.*

WOMAN TWO: The light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it, and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned.

WOMAN ONE: Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose: some attributed it to the dead grey eye, which, fixing upon the object's face, did not seem to penetrate to the inward workings of the heart/

MAN THREE: /but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin it could not pass.

WOMAN TWO: His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him. Those who had been accustomed to the violent excitement of summer, and now felt the weight of winter's ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention, a dark sun to provide some novelty, if not illumination.

*MAN THREE attempts to ingratiate himself to RUTHVEN and fails.*

MAN THREE: In spite of the deadly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion, though its form and outline were beautiful/

*WOMAN ONE attempts to ingratiate herself to RUTHVEN and fails.*

WOMAN ONE: /many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection. He had the reputation of a winning tongue which overcame the dread of his singular character, and an apparent hatred of vice, which saw him mostly among those females who form the boast of their sex from their domestic virtues, not those who sully it by their vices.

*WOMAN TWO indicates that MAN TWO should move forward. MAN TWO becomes AUBREY.*

WOMAN TWO: About the same time, there came to London a young gentleman of the name of Aubrey: orphaned in childhood and left with only with a sister, Clara, and two guardians to protect the sibling's great wealth. Aubrey's education had been erratic, cultivating his imagination more than his judgement. He thought, in fine, that the dreams of poets were the realities of life.

*MAN THREE takes AUBREY formally by the hand and leads him into the circle.*

MAN THREE: He was handsome, frank, and rich. for these reasons, upon his entering into the gay circles, many anxious parents surrounded him striving to introduce/

*MAN THREE takes WOMAN ONE formally by the hand and leads her into the circle.*

WOMAN ONE: /their daughters. By their brightening countenances when he approached, and by their sparkling eyes, when he opened his lips, Aubrey was soon led him into exaggerated notions of his talents and his merit.

*WOMAN ONE and AUBREY smile at each other and flirt.*

MAN THREE: Aubrey was happily seduced by these such calculated attentions until the extraordinary being we have so described crossed his path.

*RUTHVEN enters the space, drawing AUBREY's attention from WOMAN ONE. WOMAN ONE offers her hand to be kissed by RUTHVEN in greeting. RUTHVEN takes hold of AUBREY's hand and lightly and tenderly kisses it. AUBREY is mesmerised. RUTHVEN then kisses the hand of WOMAN ONE.*

AUBREY: I was unnerved. Was it a foreign custom? An accusation? An invitation? He was both utterly alien and compellingly intimate, almost absent in person, but present with an emotional weight that filled every room. Self-obsessed yet shockingly available.

*RUTHVEN introduces himself to members of the audience, shaking hands with the men and kissing the hands of the women. AUBREY follows watching him.*

AUBREY: I became acquainted with his path through society, paid him attentions, and so far advanced upon his notice, that my presence was always recognised. I gradually learnt that Lord Ruthven's affairs were embarrassed/

*RUTHVEN shoots AUBREY a fiercely angry look. AUBREY backs away.*

AUBREY: /and that he was about to travel to the Continent.

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE) and MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO) enter the space.*

AUBREY: Desirous of gaining more information respecting this singular character, who, till now, had only whetted my curiosity, I hinted to my guardians, that it was time for me to perform the tour.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): It is time for you perform the tour.

MAN THREE as (GUARDIAN TWO): For many generations it has been thought necessary to undertake a grand tour of the Continent to enable the young to take some rapid steps in the career of vice towards putting themselves upon an equality with the aged.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): France. And Belgium.



AUBREY: Yes.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): Italy?

AUBREY: Yes. And/

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): And?

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): Greece.

AUBREY: Absolutely!

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): Without Greece, he would appear as if fallen from the skies, whenever scandalous intrigues are mentioned as the subjects of censure, or of praise, and be quite unable to carry himself off.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*) *weighs up all this information looking them both up and down with a stern, judicious expression.*

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): Agreed.

*WOMAN TWO and MAN THREE step back. RUTHVEN steps forward. AUBREY and RUTHVEN turn their heads slowly and look at each other. AUBREY beams. RUTHVEN accepts the smile but does not smile back. RUTHVEN turns to face the audience. AUBREY stays staring at RUTHVEN and walks over to him staring at every detail of his clothes and face, picking up his hands and examining them, staring directly into his face. All the time RUTHVEN shows no expression, just staring outwards.*

AUBREY: Hitherto, I had had no opportunity of studying Lord Ruthven's character. I now found that, as many more of his actions were exposed to my view, the results offered different conclusions from the apparent motives to his conduct. Lord Ruthven is profuse in his liberality;—the idle, the vagabond, and the...gentleman's paid companion, received from his hand more than enough to relieve their immediate wants.

*WOMAN ONE (as a PROSTITUE) and MAN THREE (as a VAGABOND), advance on RUTHVEN who gives them each a purse of coins. WOMAN TWO (as a CROPIER) places one of the boxes in the middle of the space and lays out a set of Spades for a game of Faro. WOMAN ONE (as a PROSTITUE) and MAN THREE (as a VAGABOND) then place bets and loose the money that RUTHVEN has given them.*

AUBREY: The virtuous were sent from the door with hardly suppressed sneers; but when the profligate came to ask something, he was sent away with rich charity not to relieve his wants, but to allow him to wallow in his lust, or to sink him still deeper in his iniquity.

*WOMAN ONE (as a PROSTITUE) starts to sob and exits. MAN THREE (as a VAGABOND) tries to steal back some money and WOMAN TWO (as CROUPIER) manhandles him out of the space.*

AUBREY: All those upon whom Ruthven's generosity was bestowed, inevitably found that there was a curse upon it, for they were all either led to the scaffold, or sunk to the lowest and the most abject misery.

*RUTHVEN remains on stage slowly smiling to himself.*

AUBREY: Whenever he heard of their fates, Lord Ruthven's eyes sparkled with more fire than that of the cat whilst dallying with the half-dead mouse. The effect was all the more remarkable springing forth as it did from the dead grey pools that normally surrounded his pupils.

*RUTHVEN's smile drops and he slowly turns his expressionless face towards AUBREY.*

AUBREY: Finally, I determined to speak to him frankly, but I found I could not.

*AUBREY is frozen to the spot whilst RUTHVEN moves slowly around AUBREY examining him in detail.*

AUBREY: His eye spoke less than his lip; and though I was near the object of my curiosity, I obtained no greater gratification from it than the constant excitement of vainly wishing to break that mystery, which to my exalted imagination began to assume the appearance of something supernatural.

*RUTHVEN twitches and bares his teeth. RUTHVEN and the CHORUS twitch and bare their teeth in unison.*

AUBREY: Rome. A letter awaits me. From my Guardians.

*RUTHVEN regally courts WOMAN ONE and walks with her. AUBREY is shown round the site of a ruin by MAN THREE. WOMAN TWO hands him a letter. AUBREY reads it, with MAN THREE reading it also over his shoulder.*

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): Since he has left us, it is as if some heavy spell has been broken. Firstly in hushed confidences; then in small conversations and now in open discourse, the full lubriciousness of Lord Ruthven is exposed.

AUBREY: If it had before entered into my imagination that there was an evil power resident in my companion, this letter gives me sufficient reason for the belief.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): As your guardians, we must insist upon your immediately leaving this friendship. His character is dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, renders his licentious habits most dangerous to society.

MAN THREE (*excited*): Go on. Go on. Licentious habits.

*AUBREY casts MAN THREE a disapproving look.*

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): It has been discovered, that his contempt for his adulteresses has not originated in hatred of their character; but that he had required, to enhance his sickening gratification, that his victim, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation.

MAN THREE: Turn over. Turn over!

*AUBREY turns the letter over.*

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): All those females whom he had sought, apparently on account of their virtue, had, since his departure, thrown the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze.

*MAN THREE pulls the letter out of Aubrey's hands in a highly excited state.*

MAN THREE: Exposed vices!

*AUBREY snatches the letter back and sends MAN THREE on this way. RUTHVEN is courting WOMAN ONE again. He sits on a box and attempts to get WOMAN ONE to sit on his knee. She is playfully reluctant. RUTHVEN kisses her hand, saying he will return for her later. WOMAN ONE exits.*

AUBREY: I determined to leave Lord Ruthven's company, but realised I had no idea as to the horrors that he might now be working in Rome. I entered into the same circle as him, and soon perceived, that his Lordship was endeavouring to work upon the inexperience of the daughter of the lady whose house he chiefly frequented. I followed him one night and soon discovered that an assignation had been appointed, which would most likely end in the ruin of an innocent, though thoughtless, girl. I entered his apartment.

*AUBREY and RUTHVEN face each other in the centre of the circle.*

RUTHVEN: I've been expecting you.

AUBREY: I now know you, my Lord, for who you really are.

*RUTHVEN smiles to himself.*

RUTHVEN: Indeed? The letter from your guardians.

AUBREY: How do you know/

RUTHVEN: /Will you not do me the courtesy, out of natural justice at least, of a reply to such accusations as I know have been made by certain ladies whose...company I scorned in London.

AUBREY: Who are you meeting tonight?

RUTHVEN: You know who. You followed me earlier and observed us.

AUBREY: And what are you intentions when you meet with her?

RUTHVEN: The same, I imagine, as any man's.

AUBREY: I presume then, my Lord, that you must have proposed marriage or be about to?

*RUTHVEN laughs dismissively.*

RUTHVEN: Is that all you have to say?

AUBREY: I...I....Answer me Sir!

*RUTHVEN looks at him silently. A beat when AUBREY might attack RUTHVEN but almost instantly decides not to. AUBREY leaves. RUTHVEN twitches and bares his teeth. RUTHVEN and the CHORUS twitch and bare their teeth in unison.*

AUBREY: I did the only things I could. I called at her mother's house and told her everything I knew. The assignation was prevented. I penned a note to Ruthven declining the pleasure of his company any further.

*WOMAN ONE hands AUBREY another letter.*

AUBREY: The next day, Lord Ruthven merely sent his servant to notify his complete assent to a separation but did not make any reference of his plans having been foiled by my interposition.

*AUBREY introduces himself to MAN THREE (as IANTHE'S FATHER) and WOMAN TWO (as IANTHE'S MOTHER), who position some boxes to create a room on one side of the stage. They then introduce WOMAN ONE who takes on the role of IANTHE.*

AUBREY: I determined to immediately make some distance between us and arrived in Athens some nine days later. I found a room and began tracing the faded records of ancient glory upon monuments that had apparently hidden themselves beneath the sheltering soil or many coloured lichen. Under the very same roof I lodged in existed a being, so beautiful and delicate.

WOMAN ONE: Ianthe.

*WOMAN ONE becomes IANTHE and floats along the stage in pursuit of a butterfly and then the movement turns in to the rhythm of an airy dance. AUBREY watches her entranced.*

AUBREY: The light step of Ianthe often accompanied me in my search after antiquities, and often would the unconscious girl, engaged in the pursuit of a Kashmiri butterfly, show the whole beauty of her form, floating as it were upon the wind, I in the contemplation of her sylph-like figure. She danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor imitation of her natural, bounteous, intoxicating beauty. She was in awe of me as chronicler of a past she had not even glimpsed, the magic effects of my pencil enrapturing her...

*WOMAN ONE suddenly stops, looks at AUBREY, rolls her eyes and sits on one of the boxes.*

IANTHE: Come Sweetness, it is time that you heard about the Vroucolocha.

*AUBREY sits on the box next to IANTHE.*

AUBREY: The Vrou-co-lo-what?

IANTHE: Vroucolocha. Vardoulacha. Broucoloka. The beast has many names.

AUBREY: A wolf?

IANTHE: The teeth of a wolf. The hunger of a wolf, but the body of a man.

AUBREY: A wolfman?

IANTHE: No. No. Listen to me. My father told me of the Vroucolocha as a warning when I was a child. I thought it was just a story to keep me from the forest at night, but it is not a story. It is true. The Vroucolocha are the living dead amongst us. They must feed on the blood of the living, on those who they can make love them, in order that they might continue in their Godless existence.

AUBREY: A vampyre.

IANTHE: Yes. You have one word for it. We have many vampires, so many words. There was such a thing in our village. Less than five years ago.

*AUBREY laughs. IANTHE covers his mouth with her hand.*

IANTHE: The curse!

*AUBREY makes to say something but can't be heard beneath IANTHE's hand.*

IANTHE: Those who do not believe, will be given such proof as will make them believe.

*AUBREY goes to object. IANTHE doubles her efforts to stop him speaking. He continues but gradually falls silent.*

IANTHE: For such a creature brings all around it bad fortune. Men and women who are not drained of blood or killed, find themselves ruined, their worst instincts sharpened by contact with the soulless one. His eyes are grey, dead. His face is expressionless save for glee in the ruination of another. He holds whole villages under his spell. Once his intended loves him, he attacks, draining her of blood, killing her and then moves on, the relentless, deadly Vroucolocha.

*AUBREY has realised to his horror that she is describing RUTHVEN. IANTHE takes her hand away.*

*AUBREY (not believing what he's saying):* Superstition and ignorance.

*IANTHE moves the boxes and returns to her parents, MAN THREE (as IANTHE'S FATHER) and WOMAN TWO (as IANTHE'S MOTHER).*

IANTHE: He will not believe me.

MAN THREE: But he must. I was there. I helped.

WOMAN TWO: You told him everything?

IANTHE: Everything.

MAN THREE: We must lock him in his room when he returns until he agrees.

WOMAN TWO: Such a thing! We cannot keep him prisoner.

MAN THREE: We cannot let him die.

*AUBREY comes back to IANTHE'S house. Awkward silence.*

MAN THREE: Master Aubrey, are you still intent upon visiting the Kerameikos site tomorrow?

AUBREY: That is my plan. Some 12th century splendour.

WOMAN TWO: And will you cross through the forest to get there?

AUBREY: There really isn't a way there without doing so. Unless you know better?

WOMAN TWO: Ianthe has told you of the Vroucolocha?

AUBREY: She has explained the folk myth very well.

MAN THREE: It is no myth.

WOMAN TWO: The Vroucolocha. The forest is their place.

AUBREY: Monsters always hide in the heart of the forest. Fairy tales.

*WOMAN TWO steps toward AUBREY, angry and serious.*

WOMAN TWO: You will hear me. If you cross through the forest at night, you will not return.

*AUBREY piles three boxes on top of each other to form an ancient monument. He begins to sketch the monument.*

AUBREY: He isn't here. He isn't. He's in Rome. It's nonsense anyway. Just an elaborate coincidence.

*AUBREY jumps at nothing and looks around him.*

AUBREY: He isn't here. He isn't here. He isn't....That isn't 12th century. That's a ninth century epsilon. That's incredible. If I'm right....

*AUBREY becomes engrossed in the monument. He suddenly becomes aware of the diminishing light and the time that has passed.*

AUBREY: Twilight, in these southern climates, is almost unknown; immediately the sun sets, night begins, and the only way home is through the forest.

*The stage becomes dark very quickly.*

AUBREY: I tried to stay becalmed but within moments I was running wildly through the forest willing the last vestiges of light to guide and protect me. But grey quickly evaporated into black.

*Total darkness. Thunder and the sounds of rain lashing down.*

AUBREY: I fell over as much as found a hovel that hardly lifted itself up from the masses of dead leaves and brushwood which surrounded it. I approached, hoping to obtain shelter from the pelting of the storm.

*Sound of WOMAN ONE shrieking in pain and panic. RUTHVEN laughing mockingly. Thunder. Continued scared sobs from WOMAN ONE.*

AUBREY: I forced open the door of the hut. I found himself in utter darkness. The sound, however, guided me. I was in contact with someone, whom I immediately seized.

RUTHVEN: Again baffled!

*In the darkness, AUBREY acts out his part in the fight.*

AUBREY: Determined to sell my life as dearly as I could, I struggled; but it was in vain. I was lifted from my feet and hurled with enormous force against the ground. My enemy threw himself upon me, and kneeling upon my breast, placed his hands upon his throat. I would surely die.

*MAN THREE (as IANTHE'S FATHER) and WOMAN TWO (as IANTHE'S MOTHER) appear at the extreme side of the stage carrying lit lamps.*

AUBREY: The sudden glare of approaching torches penetrated through the hovel's thin walls. Disturbed, he instantly rose, and rushed through the door, and in a moment the crashing of the branches as he broke through the wood was no longer heard.

*MAN THREE (as IANTHE'S FATHER) and WOMAN TWO (as IANTHE'S MOTHER) find AUBREY. Lights up partially on him. Then lights up fully to reveal the lifeless body of IANTHE, blood soaking her neck and breast.*

WOMAN TWO: No! No! Vroucolocha!

*WOMAN TWO holds WOMAN ONE to her in distress, screams and cries.*

MAN THREE: You have done this to us.

AUBREY: Some fiend was present and did this. Not I. I...I love her.

MAN THREE: You brought the curse to my family.

WOMAN TWO: Do you know what this means? Do you?

*AUBREY shakes his head.*

WOMAN TWO: My daughter's body must be defiled.

AUBREY: No.

MAN THREE: A stake will be driven through her poor heart and her head will be cut from her body.

AUBREY: No!

WOMAN TWO: Yes! Yes! There is no other way. And if it must be done, I will do it.

*WOMAN TWO pulls out a machete. AUBREY dry heaves and then collapses in a faint. The stage is emptied other than for a collapsed AUBREY. RUTHVEN enters and moves several of the boxes together to form a bed. RUTHVEN carefully lifts AUBREY and places him in the bed. He collects a blanket and tucks him in. He gets a flannel and gently mops AUBREY's brow. AUBREY slowly comes to. He recognises RUTHVEN and recoils with a start, still feverish.*

RUTHVEN: Calm yourself, my dear friend. Calm yourself now. I perchance arrived in Athens at your hour of greatest need. You had been returned from the Kerameikos by an old couple with the most extraordinary story.

AUBREY: Ianthe. Ianthe.

RUTHVEN: Their daughter. Their dead daughter.

*AUBREY gasps and begins to become upset and feverish again. RUTHVEN holds AUBREY's hand.*

RUTHVEN: Shhh. Shhh. They seemed to blame you for the terrible misfortune and wanted you out of their home. Naturally, I brought you to my apartment. Where I have been nursing you. Personally.

*RUTHVEN takes the hand of AUBREY'S that he has been holding and kisses it.*

AUBREY: No. No. Ianthe.

*AUBREY passes out. Time passes. RUTHVEN fetches some soup in a bowl. AUBREY comes to. RUTHVEN feeds him the soup.*

RUTHVEN: You are much improved. I think a short walk today.

AUBREY: Yes. A short walk.

RUTHVEN: Excellent.



AUBREY: Then I want to leave.

RUTHVEN: Leave?

AUBREY: I must leave. I see her. In every room in this house. In the street when I look out of the window. In my mind when I close my eyes. I can't bear it. Please, I want us to leave.

RUTHVEN: Us?

AUBREY: Yes. Please. Corinth. Argos. Somewhere undiscovered. Let's go anywhere far from here.

RUTHVEN: Of course.

*RUTHVEN leaves the stage. AUBREY moves the boxes, so they form the edges of a narrow aisle down the middle of the stage.*

AUBREY: We travelled in every direction and sought every spot to which a recollection could be attached. But though we thus hastened from place to place, yet neither of us seemed to heed much what they gazed upon, not much care for where we travelled next. As our journeying become more rugged, so the warnings increased.

*Enter MAN THREE, WOMAN ONE and WOMAN TWO (as ROBBERS).*

Warnings neither of us seemed minded much to heed. We travelled with only a few guards, more to serve as guides than as a defence.

*RUTHVEN joins AUBREY at the upstage end of the aisle.*

AUBREY: Upon entering, however, a narrow defile, at the bottom of which was the bed of a torrent, with large masses of rock brought down from the neighbouring precipices, we had reason to repent our negligence/

*MAN THREE, WOMAN ONE and WOMAN TWO (as ROBBERS) stand behind the downstage boxes and start rocking them noisily with greater and greater violence.*

AUBREY: /for scarcely was our party engaged in the narrow pass, when we were startled by the whistling of bullets close to our heads, and by the echoed report of several guns.

*MAN THREE, WOMAN ONE and WOMAN TWO (as ROBBERS) stop rocking the boxes, and thump sharply with them instead, each thump a bullet which AUBREY and RUTHVEN attempt to dodge.*

AUBREY: Our guards scrambled behind rocks and began to fire in the direction whence the report came. Within a few minutes of unresisting fire, all had surrendered.

*MAN THREE, WOMAN ONE and WOMAN TWO (as ROBBERS) move to the upstage boxes, closer to AUBREY and RUTHVEN and continue to thump out bullets.*

AUBREY: If any of the robbers should climb above and take us in the rear, we would be dead. We determined at once to rush forward in search of the enemy.

*AUBREY and RUTHVEN start to advance down the aisle. Hail of bullets. RUTHVEN is shot in the shoulder and falls to the ground. MAN THREE, WOMAN ONE and WOMAN TWO (as ROBBERS) move from behind the boxes and surround AUBREY and RUTHVEN.*

AUBREY: I have money. Much more money than either of us have here with us now. Enough to save our lives.

*THE WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER) looks unimpressed and mutter amongst themselves.*

AUBREY: Let me send one of my men to collect it for you. If you swear to spare us and set us free on delivery. 300 drachma.

*THE ROBBERS look unimpressed and mutter amongst themselves.*

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): 500 drachma.

AUBREY: 400.

*WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER) leans forward menacingly.*

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): 600.

*THE ROBBERS all laugh.*

*AUBREY goes to speak. WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER) takes AUBREY's face in her hands and squeezes it tightly, distorting his face.*

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): The longer we barter, the closer you friend gets to death.

*WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER) keeps hold of AUBREY's face as if it is a puppet and makes him speak out the words.*

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): 600.

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER) and AUBREY: 600 drachmas.

*WOMAN TWO lets go of AUBREY.*

WOMAN TWO: Good. Good. Good. Now let us see how we can save your friend.

*THE ROBBERS create a bed out of the boxes, lift RUTHVEN up and place him down on the bed, then leave him alone with AUBREY, who nurses RUTHVEN.*

AUBREY: I attempted to nurse him with what comforts I had, but death seemed advancing upon him in hasty steps. Lord Ruthven bore it with an uncanny stoicism. He seemed as unconscious of pain as

he was of the objects about him, but then on the second evening, his eyes cleared, and he fixed them upon me.

RUTHVEN: May I finally call you friend?

*AUBREY takes hold of RUTHVEN's hand.*

AUBREY: Of course. It has been long since our roles were thus reversed. How can I assist you?

RUTHVEN: Assist me! You may do more than that, you may save me. I mean not my life. I heed the death of my existence as little as that of the passing day; but you may save my honour, your friend's honour.

AUBREY: How? Tell me how? I would do anything.

RUTHVEN: I need but little...my life ebbs apace...I cannot explain the whole...but if you would conceal all you know of me, my honour were free from stain in the world's mouth.

AUBREY: I would never speak ill of you.

RUTHVEN: And if my death were unknown for some time in England....I....I....

AUBREY: It shall not be known.

RUTHVEN: Swear! Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears.

AUBREY: I swear.

RUTHVEN: Swear that, for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or my death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see.

AUBREY: I swear!

*RUTHVEN's eyes are ablaze again and he pulls AUBREY in close.*

RUTHVEN: A year and one day.

AUBREY: Yes. I swear.

RUTHVEN: Kiss me.

*AUBREY kisses him on the forehead.*

RUTHVEN: Kiss me.

*AUBREY kisses him on the mouth.*

*RUTHVEN laughs mockingly, sinks back down and dies. Blackout. Pause. Lights slowly up as if dawn is breaking on one side of the stage.*

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER) meets AUBREY.

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): It is done.

AUBREY: You have your money?

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): Yes.

AUBREY: And we are free to go?

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): He is already gone.

*Lights up on rest of the stage. The boxes are still in place as RUTHVEN's bed, but his body is gone.*

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): He told us what to do with his body.

AUBREY: Such a selfless friend. He did not want me to be burdened with the body on the return journey.

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): He paid us. We took the body to that mount (*indicating a pinnacle out of sight*).

AUBREY: To bury him.

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): No. He wanted his body left exposed to capture the moonlight. He made me swear to do it.

AUBREY: Then his body is left for carrion, unburied and unmourned?

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER): He made me swear. You will go now.

WOMAN TWO (as ROBBER) exits.

AUBREY: Nothing in this made sense. I found my newly freed men and determined to go and bury Ruthven's body upon the spot where it lay.

*AUBREY walks toward the empty bed of boxes.*

AUBREY: But when we had mounted to the summit, we found no trace of either the corpse or the clothes, though the robbers swore they pointed out the identical rock on which they had laid the body. I was bewildered in conjectures, but as we returned, I convinced myself that they had buried the corpse elsewhere and stripped it for the sake of selling the clothes. They were robbers after all. Why should I trust in their word?

*AUBREY looks at the empty bed of boxes again and shudders.*

AUBREY: What other explanation was there?

*THE CHORUS all twitch and bear their teeth.*

AUBREY: I returned to Athens to arrange transport for Lord Ruthven's few remaining clothes and personal affects.

*AUBREY gathers some clothes and folds them. He lifts the lid on one of the boxes to pack the clothes and stops, stunned.*

AUBREY: In the battle in the forest with the creature that killed Ianthe, my coat had been torn and a button lost, which I now found hidden in this box of Lord Ruthven's.

*AUBREY takes the missing button out of the chest.*

AUBREY: But worst still.

*AUBREY lifts out a blood-stained shirt. AUBREY dry heaves and starts to faint. He recovers himself.*

AUBREY: I abandoned the task in hand, which now seemed ridiculous. Had Lord Ruthven been....No, it could not be so. I was too much on my own and subsumed by wild imaginings....but the button, the shirt. I fled Athens, desperate to return home to the healing of familiar faces and rooms but felt compelled to stop off in Rome to visit the mother of the woman I had rescued from Ruthven's cruel embrace.

*WOMAN TWO walks towards him, her head down, her face covered in a black veil.*

AUBREY: Her parents were in distress, their fortune ruined, their daughter had not been heard of since the departure of his lordship.

*WOMAN TWO begins to sob. She grabs hold of AUBREY full of emotion. AUBREY is disgusted and pushes her off. She continues to cling to him.*

AUBREY: England. I must get back to England. To home. To Clara.

*AUBREY faints. THE CHORUS lift his body and return it to a bed of boxes. England, several weeks later. WOMAN ONE becomes CLARA and brings a glass of water to AUBREY and gently helps him sip it, each sip reviving him disproportionately as we move through weeks of nursing.*

CLARA: Dearest brother of mine, are you sure you feel recovered enough?

AUBREY: My absence and illness has delayed your coming out for long enough. I have something for you for this special night.

*AUBREY stands, reaches into one of the boxes and fetches out a diamond and emerald brooch.*

AUBREY: It was/

CLARA: /Mothers. I had forgotten all about it.

AUBREY: And now it is yours.

*AUBREY pins the brooch on his sister. He nicks her skin.*

CLARA: Butter fingers.

AUBREY: You're bleeding.

CLARA: It's nothing.

*CLARA rubs her chest with a handkerchief and smiles.*

AUBREY: It is like looking upon mother again.

CLARA: Heavens. You made us late. We must away.

*CLARA takes AUBREY by the hand. WOMAN TWO and MAN THREE join them. Music starts and all four perform a formal dance. CLARA, WOMAN TWO and MAN THREE freeze as the music stops.*

RUTHVEN (*off-stage*): Remember your oath.

*AUBREY looks around, unnerved. RUTHVEN appears at the edge of upstage centre.*

RUTHVEN: Remember your oath.

*AUBREY moves amongst the others, terrified, hiding behind each person as if they were a wall. He makes his way to the exit. As he gets to it, it is blocked by RUTHVEN.*

RUTHVEN: Remember your oath.

*The music recommences. RUTHVEN takes AUBREY'S place in the dance. Soon RUTHVEN is dancing with CLARA. WOMAN TWO and MAN THREE break away, leaving just RUTHVEN and CLARA dancing, becoming intimate. AUBREY suddenly lunges forward, placing himself between RUTHVEN and CLARA and ending their dance. He takes CLARA by the elbow and marches her out. RUTHVEN laughs at them as they leave.*

RUTHVEN: Remember your oath.

*CLARA and AUBREY are alone at their home.*

CLARA: Your humiliation of me entitles me to an explanation, at least.

AUBREY: It is too horrible for words.

CLARA: You are forcing me to insist.

AUBREY: As you wish. The man you were dancing with is...is...is

*Every time AUBREY goes to say something specific about RUTHVEN his mouth locks open and silent.*

AUBREY: I travelled with him. You waved us off. You must remember.

CLARA: I have never seen him before in my life.

AUBREY: The curse of the...of the...of the...

CLARA: Tell me!

AUBREY: I can't. I physically can't. It's him. Lord....Lord...Lord....

CLARA: I won't forgive you Aubrey.

*CLARA storms out. AUBREY paces the space listlessly.*

AUBREY: My oath. But am I then to allow this monster to roam, bearing ruin upon his breath, amidst all I hold dear, and not avert its progress? But even if I were to break my oath, and disclose my suspicions, who would believe me? They all seem under his thrall. To them, he is born again a stranger. Perhaps I should employ my own violent hand to free the world from such a wretch, but he has already mocked death.

*AUBREY continues to pace, deep in obsessive thoughts. WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE) and MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO) enter the space. As they speak, they begin to minister to AUBREY, calming him and getting him to lie down on a bed of boxes and clam himself.*

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* For days he remained in this state; shut up in his room. Clara regretted her harshness and become more and more concerned for her brother.

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* He saw no one, and ate only when his sister came, who, with eyes streaming with tears, besought him, for her sake, to support nature.

*AUBREY rises, leaves the stage area and begins to circle the audience, sometimes in view of them and sometimes not.*

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* At last, no longer capable of bearing stillness and solitude, he left his house, roamed from street to street, anxious to fly that image which haunted him.

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* His dress became neglected, and he wandered, as often exposed to the midnight damps as to the noon-day sun.

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* He was no longer to be recognized.

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* At first, he returned with the evening to the house; but at last he laid him down to rest wherever fatigue overtook him.

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* His conduct, however, suddenly changed.

*LORD RUTHVEN* enters and stands behind *WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE)* and *MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO)*. *AUBREY* jumps on to the stage, first watching *RUTHVEN* and then making as though to attack him.

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* Struck with the idea that he left by his absence the whole of his friends with a fiend amongst them, of whose presence they were unconscious, he determined to enter again into society, and watch him closely, anxious to forewarn, in spite of his oath, all whom Lord Ruthven approached with intimacy.

*CLARA* enters, placing herself between *AUBREY* and *RUTHVEN*. *CLARA* apologises to *RUTHVEN* and leads *AUBREY*, close to collapse, into the arms of behind *WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE)* and *MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO)*.

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* But when he entered into a room, his haggard and suspicious looks were so striking, his inward shuddering so visible, that his sister was at last obliged to beg of him to abstain from seeking, for her sake, the society which affected him so strongly.

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* When, however, remonstrance proved unavailing/

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE)* and *MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* /the guardians thought proper to interpose.

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* Fearing that his mind was becoming alienated/

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* /they thought it high time to resume again that trust which had been before imposed upon them by *Aubrey's* parents.

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE)* and *MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO)* lie *AUBREY* back down on the bed of boxes. They take out leather restraints, and a bleeding bowl and knife. They strap him to the bed, roll-up his shirt sleeve, cut one arm open and bleed it and then cut the other arm open and bleed it.

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* Desirous of saving him from the injuries and sufferings he had daily encountered in his wanderings/

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* /and of preventing him from exposing to the general eye those marks of what they considered folly/

*MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO):* /they engaged a physician to reside in the house and take constant care of him.

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE):* He hardly appeared to notice it, so completely was his mind absorbed by one terrible subject.



MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): His incoherence became at last so great, that he was confined to his chamber.

*Enter CLARA with a bowl of broth. AUBREY recognises her.*

AUBREY: Clara. Clara. I beg you, do not touch him.

CLARA: Who do you mean?

AUBREY: If your love for me is aught, do not go near him!

CLARA: Who Aubrey?

AUBREY: It is true Clara. It is true.

*AUBREY passes out. MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO) takes the bowl from CLARA. WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE) helps CLARA out of the room.*

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): There he would often lie for days.

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): Incapable of being roused.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): He was becoming emaciated.

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): His eyes had attained a glassy lustre.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): This lasted many months.

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): Gradually, however, as the year was passing, his incoherencies became less frequent.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): And his mind threw off a portion of its gloom. Until it was the anniversary of Lord Ruthven's death. We feared he would worsen.

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): But several times that day he would count upon his fingers a definite number.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): And then/

*AUBREY smiles to himself.*

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*) and MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): /smile.

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): What brings a smile to your face Master Aubrey?

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): Tell us whatever it is, and we shall endeavour to bring more of it to you to brighten you further.

AUBREY: It is nought but the passing of time.

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): You must not be so cryptic.

AUBREY. I must. Indeed I must, but only for two days more. For today and tomorrow. Then I will tell you, tell you everything.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*) and MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*) exchange a puzzled look.

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): We have other news that might please you so.

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): Your sister is to be married.

*AUBREY reacts with horror, seizing hold of MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO).*

AUBREY: Who to? Who to?

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): Let him go, Master Aubrey! You're choking him?

AUBREY: Who to?

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): The Earl of Marsden.

*AUBREY lets go of MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO) and relaxes.*

AUBREY (*laughing*): The Earl of Marsden

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): A most excellent choice.

AUBREY: I could not agree more. Are the bans read already? When is the marriage set for?

MAN THREE (*as GUARDIAN TWO*): The wedding is tomorrow. You have not been well enough to tell until recently and we resolved to tell you ourselves.

AUBREY: Tomorrow!

*CLARA enters.*

WOMAN TWO (*as GUARDIAN ONE*): And here is the darling bride to be.

*AUBREY jumps out of bed, grabs his sister in a hug and almost lifts her off the ground.*

AUBREY: Congratulations! I am....Oh, I could jump for joy.

CLARA: Darling brother. I am so pleased to see you this happy.

AUBREY: I will come, of course.

CLARA: Will you be well enough?

AUBREY: I will. I will. This day and one day more, and then I can tell you everything. And by then you shall be safe as the Countess of Marsden.

CLARA: Safe? From what?

AUBREY: Where is the service?

CLARA: At St Bede's, of course.

AUBREY: Of course, of course.

CLARA: Would you care to view my intended?

*CLARA proffers a locket around her neck. AUBREY opens it, takes a moment to focus, and then recoils in horror. He rips the locket from her neck and throws it to the floor, stamping on it.*

CLARA: No. No. What are you doing?

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE) puts her arm around CLARA and leads her out. MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO) looks angrily at AUBREY. AUBREY throws himself on his knees in front of MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO).*

AUBREY: Please. Please. She cannot marry. Not him.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): Master Aubrey. The news have over-taxed you. We must get you to your rest again.

AUBREY: No. Please. Listen. Just delay the wedding by one day.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): Impossible. Everything is in place. People have arrived and are staying in this very house as we speak.

AUBREY: Just one day.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): Will you to your bed, Sir? Now. Master Aubrey. Now. Or must I fetch some assistance.

*AUBREY reluctantly does so. WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE) re-enters carrying leather straps and AUBREY is tied to the bed again.*

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): This will keep you safe. All tucked up again. Safe and sound.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): Like a proper good boy. Are you our good boy? Are you?

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE) and MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): Are you our good boy?

AUBREY: Yes....Yes. I'm your good boy.

*WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE) and MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO) exit. RUTHVEN enters behind the tied down AUBREY so that he cannot see him, but senses him, stiffening with fear. RUTHVEN bends down to AUBREY's ears.*

RUTHVEN: Remember your oath.

*CLARA enters and she and RUTHVEN move downstage in front of AUBREY.*

RUTHVEN: I am so sorry to hear of it my darling.

CLARA: It's set him back months. More. I think he's worse than that dreadful first night after the drawing party.

RUTHVEN: Madness is its own master.

CLARA: I can't bear to go through it all again.

RUTHVEN: And nor should you. Your brother is wonderfully cared for. Your duties as a Countess are about to commence.

*CLARA is purposefully silent.*

RUTHVEN: You cannot mean for us to postpone in the hope of some improvement.

CLARA: I don't think I could be happy tomorrow knowing he is so unwell.

RUTHVEN: My new title is not the only thing I inherited. I have a position at the embassy. Staff are waiting for us. Our passage is booked.

CLARA: A postponement is out of the question. It would be selfish.

RUTHVEN: I would do anything to make you happy, but I cannot do this.

CLARA: I'm sorry to have even suggested it. I understand.

RUTHVEN: My darling.

CLARA: My dearest.

*AUBREY moans and becomes distressed. The next day. Enter MAN THREE (as OLD SERVANT) with bowl of washing water covered with a cloth.*

MAN THREE (as OLD SERVANT): I've been told to come and see to you Master Aubrey.

AUBREY: Thomas. I thought you'd...

MAN THREE (*as OLD SERVANT*): I have Sir. With the rheumatoids an' all. But with the wedding, they hired me back. Just one day. Light duties. I expect you'll be wanting your toilet.

AUBREY: Yes.

*MAN THREE (as OLD SERVANT) undoes the leather straps holing AUBREY to the bed.*

MAN THREE (*as OLD SERVANT*): I'm going to let you lose, but I've locked the door mind. All respect to you Master, but I have orders that you should not leave this room.

AUBREY: I understand.

*As soon as AUBREY is free, he jumps up.*

AUBREY: Give me the key.

MAN THREE (*as OLD SERVANT*): I can't Master.

*AUBREY has a short tussle with MAN THREE (as OLD SERVANT), getting the key to the bedroom door out of his pocket.*

AUBREY: Sorry Thomas.

*AUBREY exits. MAN THREE (as OLD SERVANT) exits. RUTHVEN enters with his hands gripping the back of AUBREY's neck. He throws him into the room.*

RUTHVEN: On your bed.

AUBREY: No.

RUTHVEN: On your bed.

*RUTHVEN pulls out the leather straps.*

AUBREY: I cannot let you have her.

RUTHVEN: She is not yours to withhold.

AUBREY: She's my sister!

RUTHVEN: If your sister is not my bride today, then she is dishonoured. Woman are frail.

AUBREY: No. Don't tell me that.

RUTHVEN: Her first time. The taste of her flesh. The smell of her.

AUBREY: Be silent! I can't let this happen.

RUTHVEN: You have no choice. Remember your oath.

*RUTHVEN grabs hold of AUBREY. He places his mouth over AUBREY and sucks the air from his lungs. AUBREY is winded and falls to the ground. AUBREY struggles back up and RUTHVEN does the same again. AUBREY collapses. MAN THREE and WOMAN TWO build a coffin out of the boxes around AUBREY, placing a lid on top. The lid forms an aisle and RUTHVEN and CLARA walk down it. MAN THREE and WOMAN TWO throw rice. Sound of church bells. RUTHVEN and CLARA freeze.*

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): We felt it most deeply.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): If only we'd understood. Listened.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): Come midnight on the day of his sister's marriage, Master Aubrey demanded to see us.

*RUTHVEN is slowly picking CLARA up and placing her dead body down on the aisle, so she is lying above AUBREY.*

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): Fearful for what he might do should we not attend him, we hastened to his bedside.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): We found him weak but perfectly calm.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): He waited for the clock to strike twelve. Free at last of his oath, he told us the whole horrible truth of it.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): And finally unburdened, he died.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): We rushed to Lord Ruthven's residence.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): He was gone.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): And the Countess was quite dead, drained of all her blood.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): I blame us.

MAN THREE (as GUARDIAN TWO): There remained only one thing we could do.

WOMAN TWO (as GUARDIAN ONE): Write down all these events that they might act as a ghastly warning to those who cross the path of a vampire.

*WOMAN TWO and MAN ONE bear their teeth, twitch and snarl in unison with rest of the CHORUS.*

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