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In this case, as the Mission hospital is gradually recognized as the cause, not the cure, of a deadly sickness, a scene of utopian peace turns violent. Sunlight is traded for darkness; fraternal love turns to hatred. In the play's indelible final image, as helicopters resound ominously overhead, like 'humming-birds of death'¹⁹ or horsemen of the apocalypse, the Mission is consumed by the flames of a molotov cocktail. The mission, in more than one sense, has failed.

Hansberry's vehicles for this paradigm-shaking wave of recognition are her characters. As Elinor Fuchs once observed, they are 'deliberately non-colloquial,'²⁰ evoking figures from the classical tradition. For example, as Charlie digs into the Mission's corrupted past, he becomes stricken, his open-faced American optimism replaced by the terse heaviness of spiritual suffering. Increasingly, he resembles a modern-day Oedipus, on an archetypal journey from ignorance to knowledge. (Hansberry's original title, *Fungus*, invokes the metaphorical plague spread by this modern-day 'temple,' similar to that of Oedipus's plague-ridden Thebes.) Madame Neilsen even suffers from the same self-inflicted wound of Sophocles' Theban king. 'I am quite glad to be going blind,' she says: 'the less one sees of this world, the better.'²¹

Whereas Charlie begins the play light and loquacious, only to become heavy with tragic knowledge, Tshembe Matoseh is already pathos-laden when he first appears. 'It's an old problem, really,' he tells Charlie cryptically: 'Orestes ... Hamlet ... we have so many other things we'd rather be doing.'²² Like Orestes, Tshembe is a libation bearer, a son come home to mourn his father, the dead elder Abioseh. Like Hamlet, he is an ironic wanderer, the eternal graduate student come home, in this case from a flat in London, after travels in America and Europe. Tshembe is cursed by a Hamlet-like inaction, troubled as he is by the problem of knowledge, even in the face of obvious injustice. A bitter irony lies at the figure's core: he must avenge his father, but to do so will cost him his own humanity.

On either side of Tshembe are his brothers, who embody intractable modern problems with the tragic gravity of Greek masks: Abioseh, a converted Catholic priest who seeks a politics of conciliation for Africa,

and young Eric, alcoholic and biracial (the literal issue of white rape) desperate to prove himself a 'true African,' by any means necessary. Both are pointed contrasts to Tshembe, with his European wife and coffee-shop existentialism. All three brothers possess endlessly divided identities, a testament to three centuries of colonialist plunder of the black body. They suggest the fault-lines of our contemporary identity politics, the schisms that run deeper than blood.

'You've come in time to witness the end of something,' Madame Neilsen tells Charlie. 'Not many men get to see the end of an epoch and the opportunity to know it at the same time.'²³

Whereas *Raisin* had set out to limn the experiences of African-American lives through the specific period lens of the midcentury housing crisis, *Les Blancs* is after bigger game. Writing at a moment when many despairing American blacks were turning away from pacifism and toward an increasingly militant separatism, Hansberry captures and dramatizes this schism. In the idyllic light of the early 60s, Lorraine wrote a late 60s play. She was writing about nothing less than the end of the world. The cultural deprivations of the Middle Passage; the genocidal agonies of colonialism; three centuries of rape and self-acquittal, leading to a war of civilizations. Attention must be paid.

The reckoning Hansberry prophesied never came true in her lifetime. Indeed, it has yet to come true in our own, neither the revolution nor the attendant liberation. The only way to honor her memory, to stage *Les Blancs* properly, was to embrace its utopian expanses, its apocalyptic visions, its proud humanity, its political brilliance. We had to be everything that Lorraine and her writing so manifestly were: so vital, so magnificently alive, so impossible to ignore.



Ghost and Guest: Staging Hospitality in the 2015-16 season

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19. *Les Blancs: The Last Collected Plays* (New York: Samuel French, 1972), p. 120.

20. Fuchs, 'Rethinking Lorraine Hansberry,' *The Village Voice*, March 15, 1988, p. 93.

21. *Les Blancs: The Last Collected Plays* (New York: Samuel French, 1972), p. 71. The line is reproduced, verbatim, from Hansberry's first draft.

22. *Les Blancs: The Last Collected Plays* (New York: Samuel French, 1972), p. 80. This line was a late revision by Hansberry, appearing in the third and final draft before her death.

23. This key exchange between Charlie Morris and the figure of the Reverend (later cut from the play, in a manner similar to Godot), was not included in the 1970 or 1972 published versions, originally appeared toward the conclusion of Hansberry's first draft, the so-called 'Fungus' draft, in 1960. 'Draft 1, Fungus, 10.5.60,' Box 32, Folder 1, Lorraine Hansberry papers. Interpolated into Madame Neilsen's farewell, it was one of the many rediscoveries of the National Theatre process.

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In his 1997 work *Of Hospitality*, Derrida observes that to visit, as either guest or host, is to progress 'from one difficulty to another.'²⁴ Language problems, conflicting histories, and creeping fears all mark a disappointing discrepancy between ideal hospitality – absolute mutual understanding, absolute access – and reality. In Derrida's view, to nevertheless attempt hospitality despite these problems is a radical, transgressive step: 'an act of hospitality,' he writes, 'can only be poetic.'²⁵

As the philosopher notes, hospitality and the dangers that it invokes (usurpation of space, of strength, of sex) have sparked dramatic poetry since Sophocles. And yet, from *Oedipus at Colonus* through *Tartuffe* (1664) and *The Homecoming*, (1965) the poetic dimensions of hospitality in the 'theatre are traditionally contained onstage, within the boundaries of plot. As three recent productions demonstrate, however, a rich poetics of hospitality is also attainable within the event of performance itself.

In large, traditional 'theatre spaces, *A View From the Bridge*; (1955) *Fondly, Collette Richland* (2015); and *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* (2012, first production, revived 2015-2016) each offer their audiences unusual proximity, responsibility, and amenities. These choices attain a poetic resonance between stories of hospitality (granted and denied) and the host-guest relationship connecting performance and audience.

Ivo van Hove's international production of *A View From the Bridge* (revived at the Young Vic in 2014 and brought from the West End to Broadway in November 2015) asks his audience to adjudicate a case of hospitality betrayed. By placing two sections of seating onstage, in raked boxes at either side of the action, van Hove and set designer Jan Versweyeld deftly situate their audience as jurors. Directly addressed by Alfieri, Miller's mournful *consigliere*-as-chorus leader, the whole house becomes a courtroom.

Eddie's guilt (portrayed with wounding force by Mark Strong) is evident from the first scene. Beatrice, his wife (Nicola Walker), assures him that her cousins, arriving illegally from starving Italy, aren't expecting much. 'I told them in the letters,'

she says. 'They're sleepin' on the floor.'²⁶ Eddie, however, is more concerned about his wife's generosity than the guests' comfort. His reply, 'All I'm worried is you got such a heart that I'll end up on the floor with you, and they'll be in our bed' is deadly serious in Mark Strong's delivery.²⁷ Subsequent scenes reveal that, too wary of these guests, Eddie has grown too close to others. Eddie's fear of the cousins collides catastrophically with his affection for Catherine, his orphaned niece.

With prosecutorial flourish, van Hove's minimalist production sweeps away any alibis of time or place for Eddie's double transgression of the essential law of hospitality. Bared of any naturalistic furnishings or ornamentation, the action unfolds in a claustrophobic white basin.

The cousins, when they arrive, intone the broken English of their dialect-heavy lines with total honesty and perfect pronunciation, exchanging the mask of mid-century Italian immigrants for a subtler, archetypal strangeness.

These physical and performative choices re-settle both the natives and visitors of Miller's vanished Brooklyn to a deeper, untamable district of the imagination. The inclusion of rapt jury-spectators in the image of van Hove's climactic *coup de théâtre* – watching as the characters wrestle in a sudden torrent of blood – offers a powerful image of the 'theatre itself. The moment unites Miller, his characters, van Hove, and contemporary Broadway audiences in appreciation of a blood Law deeper than US immigration code.'²⁸

While *A View from the Bridge* dramatizes a host's transgressions, Sibyl Kempson's *Fondly, Collette Richland* – debuted in September 2015 at New York Theatre Workshop by director John Collins and ensemble Elevator Repair Service – plunges its viewers headfirst into the terrors of a helpless guest in a strange house. In Kempson's madly illogical drama, an unexpected visitor catapults a quiet evening at home (for the characters) and at the 'theatre (for audiences) into an absurd romp through continents and genres.

The play begins with a knock at the door: Local Representative Wheatson (Greig Sargeant) has come to call on Mabrel and 'Fritz' Fitzhubert, a seemingly normal middle-aged American couple (Laurena Allan and Vin Knight), and he refuses to go away. Reluctantly (and dishonestly), Mabrel insists, 'We are glad to share our dinner with you,

24. Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), p. 75.

25. Derrida/Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, p. 2.

26. Arthur Miller, *A View From the Bridge* (Oxford: Heinemann 1995), p. 8.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Cf. Derrida/Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, pp. 64-65.

if you are hungry, but we are not seeking any dramatics.²⁹

Mabrel's instant equation of a visitor with 'dramatics' presages the unique poetics of foreignness achieved by *Fondly, Collette Richland*. Through absurdity and destabilizing humor, Kempson inflicts Derrida's difficulties of hospitality directly on her audience, beginning with incomprehension and escalating into eviction.

The play hints with decreasing subtlety that its audiences, like Wheatsun, may have strayed into territory more hostile than the average fiction. Its language – characters enjoy 'chups of choffee' and refer to a 'secret passersway' – oozes a folksiness of uncertain origins. And though the initial, domestic setting evokes the comforts of American naturalism, there are literal cracks in this familiarity. Between and over the walls of the Fitzhuberts' home, Kempson notes, audiences can glimpse preparations for (to quote the stage directions) '*another play, which is – embarrassing truth be told – taking place at exactly the same time on the other side of the same space.*'³⁰

These worlds – the American domestic and the intruding (and, here, Germanic) Absurd – collide in an inhospitably abstract turn of events. Waking up groggy after an abrupt and inexplicable after-dinner psychic ritual involving telepathy, the family Bible, and a tiny door hidden in the living room, Wheatsun complains, 'I can't understand a single thing that is happening.' Kempson mockingly anticipates that her audiences may share his objection: at this point, '*A member of our audience snorts and retorts bitterly: ... 'You and me both, buddy!'*'³¹

In response, characters from yet-unperformed scenes (including 'The Deposed & Dethroned Grand Queen Empress Queen Patrice'; 'Joan Ham Hobhouse, academic pleasure-seeker'; and 'Sailor Boy, a young person') stream from the wings and bodily remove the 'patron.' During this eviction, Mabrel's sister Winnif'd screeches from the stage 'And to THINK! We are in a COMMUNITY!!! And this is the theatre!'³²

This scene, and the descent further into absurdity that follows, reveal through denial and satire the hospitality traditionally taken for granted in 'theatre spaces. Threatening literally to turn on its patrons at any moment, Kempson's characters corral audiences into the narrow borderlands between visitor

and enemy (a closeness, Derrida notes, reflected in the slim difference between the Latin *hospes* and *hostis*).³³ As Kempson's madcap tale careens first from the Fitzhuberts' home to an unhinged 'Alpen Hôtel,' and then onto a *papier-mâché* mountaintop, the playwright denies her audiences the linearity and comprehension usually expected to accompany a 'theatre ticket.

Instead of these rational amenities, Kempson offers a visceral experience of foreignness. In the capable hands of Kempson and Elevator Repair Service, familiar environs – a major Off-Broadway 'theatre, and, onstage, an American domestic scene – both become sites of exceeding strangeness.

While *A View From the Bridge* and *Fondly, Collette Richland* immerse audiences in the anxieties separating hosts from strangers on the doorstep, *Natasha, Pierre, & The Great Comet of 1812* seeks to soothe these fears.³⁴ In its lush 360-degree staging of a sliver from Tolstoy's *War & Peace*, this 'electropop opera' written by Dave Malloy and directed by Rachel Chavkin offers the 'theatre as a site where absolute hospitality might be briefly, radiantly, achieved. In Tolstoy's sprawling epic, Malloy and Chavkin find the inspiration for an all-inclusive theatrical feast.

Demolishing the proscenium arch, set designer Mimi Lien conjures a Russian supper club. (*Great Comet* served vodka and Russian drinking snacks at Ars Nova in 2012 and in the custom-built Kazino in 2013. The show was reimaged for larger houses at the American Repertory Theatre in 2015; that production arrived on Broadway in September 2016.) In a sea of crimson velvet and sparkling cabaret lamps, audience members fill the orchestra, an onstage 'sunken lounge,' and upstage banquettes.

In this exceedingly welcoming environment, *Great Comet* battles the dangers of miscommunication and alienation—lurking at the start of any theatrical event, but looming particularly large for a musical adaptation of *War & Peace*).

Singing and dancing throughout the house, cast members dispel these dangers by catering directly to audience understanding. In 'Prologue,' the characters introduce themselves with a toast and a shrewdly catchy chorus ('Anatole is hot /Varya is old school /Sonya is good /Natasha is young /and Andrey isn't here').³⁵

29. Sibyl Kempson, *Fondly, Collette Richland* (November 12 2015 Draft), p. 13.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Derrida/Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, p. 45.

34. All staging and casting descriptions refer to choices made in the 2015 American Repertory Theatre Production, as this article went to print before the Broadway opening.

35. Dave Malloy, *The Great Comet of 1812 Original Cast Recording* (Sh-K-Boom Records, 2013).

From this first number through the play's end, Chavkin's surround-style staging invites audiences directly into the action. In 'Natasha & Bolkonskys,' Natasha (Denée Benton) and future sister-in-law, Princess Mary (Gelsey Bell), have a tense confrontation at a cabaret table, confiding their opinions of one another to their tablemates. In 'Balaga,' characters distribute Faberge-inspired egg shakers for the audience to help keep time in Anatole's race to elope with Natasha.

Other productions might balk (like Eddie Carbone) at the prospect of its images, and its actors, being always in arm's reach of an audience member. But this proximity is integral to Malloy and Chavkin's radical hospitality. From any seat, a view excluding other audience members is impossible. In fact, more than music, dancing, or even Lien's jaw-dropping set, this inextricable mixing of audience and characters becomes the production's most impressive spectacle.

This combination climaxes in the penultimate number 'Pierre & Natasha,' when Pierre (Scott Stangland)³⁶ struggles to find words to comfort Natasha, ill with poison and shame after her botched elopement. Chavkin places this, the play's most delicate moment, in the narrow alley between orchestra and stage – at the center of the house, in the spot closest to the largest number of audience members. In many performances, Natasha's tears aren't the only ones sparkling in the light, as guests around her are directly visible through the tender scenes. The resonance between the characters' emotions and the surrounding audience members' is too striking (and frequent) to be accidental.

This union – physical, narrative, emotional – between performance and audiences represents a degree of understanding not often attained in the real world. But, carefully achieved through an unusually welcoming staging and score, Chavkin's denouement invites audiences to take part in a demonstration that, despite Derrida's urgings, such access is possible at the rarest occasions.

Escorting audiences across thresholds of period and place, all three productions discussed here utilize the 'theatre as a precisely calibrated space of hospitality both offered and withheld. Through visceral staged experiences of hospitality and xenophobia, these artists provide a reminder that that the fragile tolerance necessary for any live performance is, in its own right, an essential, transgressive achievement.



36. Played by Josh Groban on Broadway (and by Dave Malloy in earlier productions).

Performance and the Maternal

Emily Underwood-Lee and Lena Šimić

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We created our 'Performance and the Maternal' research project in order to investigate the intersections between performance studies and maternal studies. To date we have organised and hosted three research gatherings at the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, Edge Hill University and the University of South Wales. The research gatherings connected 36 scholars and artists and welcomed babies and children.

The 'Performance and the Maternal' project is conceived as both collaborative and pragmatic, enabling us to bring together our research interests derived from our scholarly work and independent performance practices and our everyday lived experience. In this article we explore how to write with and in response to one another, across geographical and temporal spaces and enable the gaps to become generative rather than problematic. The format is designed to enable living and representing our maternal experiences. How to write and think together, and yet apart? How to stay focused? How to find time for research, demanding (yet loving) children and insistencies of family life?

The correspondences that have made it into this final publication have been edited, re-written and written over in order to bring together our thoughts on performance and the maternal after