

~*~

Virtuosically Invisible: A Dramaturg's Rehearsal Journal:

Subtitle*

By: Lauren Ashley Whitehead

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Dramaturgy
in the Theatre Arts Program of the
School of the Arts

Columbia University
New York City

15 May 2014

~*~

Contents

Part 1: radical adaptability

notes on re-writing white men

pg. 3

Part 2: an informal interlude

notes on talking revolution with white men

pg. 60

Part 3: radical in visibility

notes on sharing space with white men

pg. 68

Appendix 1: Original text of Zillah's interruptions

pg. 150

Appendix 2: Draft Version I of Zillah's adapted interruptions

pg. 155

Appendix: 3: Production Draft of Zillah's adapted interruptions

pg. 161

~*~

“In what he writes, there are two texts.”

- Roland Barthes

“Art is the imposing of a pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of the pattern.”

-Alfred North Whitehead

“Well when I was a boy some big time negro would die, you know, and they’d have a band see and they’d play [he plays]. Funeral marching. I said that’s beautiful. I don’t like the way they play it, see? But coming back, coming back they’d play [he plays], see? That’s the way I liked it. And I been playin that way ever since. Ragtime. [He plays]. I can’t sing. [he sings].”

-Eubie Blake, at the piano

~*~

~*~

part 1: radical adaptability
[notes on re-writing white men]

~*~

*subtitle

which sets up this text as consciously anecdotal; which has everything to do with the narrator; which raises the question of *does she speak for us*; which makes us wonder *am i us*; which has everything to do with in- or out- grouping; which has everything to do entries; which conjures both barriers and allowances; which are both hard earned and welcomed but; which somehow imply a grantor; which raises again questions of who and whether or not he or she can see me.

which should also set up, then, visibility; which is largely necessary for survival; which then makes invisibility a tool; which implies a kind of: which came first, the mama or the man, situation; which is to say, *did i choose* or *do i use*; which has everything to do with adapt -ation or -ability; which is requiring of practice; which necessitates opportunity; which is perhaps measured by reliability: a notion only tested by opportunity; which brings us back again to visibility and whether or not the grantor of allowance will allow for me.

which also needs, then, to evoke race; which here i place ahead of my womanhood; which here i place in front of my queer; which i hide behind my marriage; which may or may not be working; which is dependent upon how you define work or the ethics with which you approach said work; which my woman teacher taught me is a dichotomy to both recognize and reject: the which is true and which is pessimism; which, neither instance, am i quite willing or ready enough to test; which is likely a fear of failure; which is all a matter of practice; which again is opportunity; which again is to be seen.

which is why this is about teaching; which is the acquisition and imparting of wisdom; which you can only gather from living; which means you might have to make it through a genocide; which my woman teacher taught me; which is everything the she knows about writing and not dying; which is what happened en mass to her Armenian people; which happened almost 100 years ago from this day; which is still a land unsettled; which is still a site that is contested; which is what it feels like to be a black woman sometimes, although not always; which is a mistake i am constantly correcting; which is hard for me to not do; which not doing is sometimes called grace; which, to be sure, is a posture you can use when correcting misidentification; which is to say that grace is rarely given her full due as a verb; which is to be both fluid and in control; which then, again, is reliability;

which then again the narrator; which then again the decision or not to join; which then again the rules; which then again the rule maker; which then again power to see or be seen; which ultimately and always survival; which, perhaps is grace in the face of few allowances and various states of visibility; which then should somehow suggest my grandma's death; which is to say should also harken loss or mourning; of

which there is no replacement; of which there is no place for in academia; which is where dramaturgy lives; which is a cold place for a dark skinned woman, because i too need a place to mourn. i too am a woman of genocide.

abstract

black people matter. because i believe black people matter and because i am black, i believe that i, myself, matter. if i matter then my experiences also matter. alfred north whitehead (no relation) says that reality is only occasions of experience and art is the ability to recognize patterns in said occasions of experience. thus the patterns in my experiences are both reality and art. when applied to my particular experience working on “a bright room called day” there are patterns in the tension between writing and performing (hyper visibilities) and erasures and ignorances (hyper invisibilities) which are tension that run parallel to the work in the field of dramaturgy itself; a field that struggles to maintain its presence given that it functions largely unseen. therefore what is real may also be invisible which makes patterns hard to see. in this way, the field relies on the reflections of those who experience said tensions and while reflection is highly unreliable it is also necessary and useful, particularly in thinking about dramaturgy as it relates to black people working with and in it. so to create a “journal” in this case, is the best possible form in which to bring forth questions about reliability and narrators; political erasures and visibilities; functions and allowances; blackness and dramaturgy. particularly again given this play which is about what is said and what is unsaid, what is done and what is undone in the face of evil which at times cannot be seen.

a place to start

maybe the best place to begin is the end. and when i say the end, i mean the writerly imposed end, the “close of session” wherein examples of the question currently at hand can no longer be entertained: various as they are and endlessly accumulating. in particular the black woman question, right, with its layers and generations and bootstraps and pornographies and first ladies and what have you and what not. and so in order to reflect, first the black woman has to shut off a certain valve, the one that allows new thoughts, that perceives new and ever evolving and adapting slights, that is engaged in this world of pattern and projection. she shuts it off and begins to hope that the pressing, present thoughts will bear themselves without much work and in the meantime that these new thinkings will return to her in *deja vu* or in dreams which she hopes she will be disciplined enough to interpret or write down later.

said hope is not easy to come by. said hope is a different kind of practice all together. and in particular, this question, which i know is about practice and persistence, is also about so many other things i have yet to learn to articulate quite clearly, which i fear cannot be articulated clearly and oh lord, please don't say the word “articulate” so close to the black woman, please, because clearly... but indeed, all clear articulation is, is dramaturgy. and anyway, i have invested my hope in the ability of this articulation to be read and understood and i rely on this hope to inspire me to write the message more. because what else does a writer have, except a desire for audience, a few hopes and thing or two to say about a thing?

this thing, this question of the story of the black woman, which i have not quite articulated yet but which has everything to do with drama and voice, representation and visibility, allowances and erasures (self imposed and otherwise), you know; the question of the black lady performing dramaturgy thing. and in particular wherein she is executor, exhibitor and exhibited, at once allowed and prohibited to *play* the thing but not to *be* the thing that she may or may not be inherently. and so then this is the story of a fight for being seen in a craft noteworthy for its invisibility (imposed or otherwise).

alfred north whitehead (no relation) said many an influential thing and i can't and won't and, really, don't have time to explain all of the things i don't understand about what theories or thought categories this man has written or invented, which i'm sure are numerous (but which couldn't be more numerous than the scores of cousins i have who all come from my great grandfather who gave his wife 12 children all of whom bore and bore a whole legion of us who walk around in black skin and have whitehead for a last name). in any case, whitehead, the white, wrote a lot, i guess, about process and reality. or he wrote a book called process and reality. either way, what he said was something like this: people are not only objects or subjects or substances but big bundles of occasions of experiences, indefinitely. and while i fearfully imagine that there is a definite end, i do also imagine being reborn as an elephant and so this

notion: occasions of experience indefinitely in which to acquire wisdom and if you are so lucky, elegance, grace can also be considered a privilege.

in which case this is the journal of a black woman with privilege. who acknowledges this privilege. a measure of occasions of experience from a woman of considerable privilege, which i am suggesting is of value in that it is mine, yes, and in that i am able to share it with you, clearly articulated, subjective and unreliable as it is or may be.

but really it begins here

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

5/20/13

to me

Hey Lauren,

I'm planning some readings of the plays I'm interested in for my thesis, just so I can hear them. I'm reading Bright Room Called Day by Tony Kushner on 6/2 eve and I was wondering if you might be around to read Zillah?

It will be casual/social/wine/food kind of thing.

x,

s

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

5/23/13

to Scott

Hi Scott!

I would love to.

Send the deets!

L

and even before that, there was this

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

5/1/13

to Lauren, bcc: Eric, bcc: tara, bcc: Scott, bcc: claytie, bcc: Mustafa, bcc: Michael, bcc: Alexandra, bcc: Carl, bcc: Mei, bcc: Rebecca, bcc: Bryan

Dear once and future collaborators,

Somehow we've reached the end of our formal studies and it has dawned on me that while I have watched your work develop and change over the last two years, many of you have never really seen me do what I do! Weird.

So, I'm inviting you to see me do some of that performance poetry, song singing, solo stuff. I know you got an invitation already, but I'm re-inviting. I'm being brave. As a part of our second year showcase Show Me Your Face: A Salon of New Voices and New Ideas I'm gonna present a little incendiary ditty called "A Tribe Called Blessed: Toward the Advancement of (T)history" or somethin like that. The deets are below. I sure hope you can make it.

Share the love. Bring a bottle,

L

When: This Saturday, May, 4 2013

What Time: 7-10pm

Where: Ashley Melone's lovely apartment

all of which illustrates

that scott knew what i could do and what i could do was stand in a room full of mostly people who didn't look like me and by that i mean mostly people who were not black or broad shouldered, although there were a few of each and by that i mean i was performing a 15 minute show about tribes and that performing, i argued, was dramaturgy - the me and the song and the story that didn't follow logically and the naming of it as musical and the epigraph about slavery and reading and writing as a dangerous and subversive and liberating act. and i stood there and i held that space all the while saying a lot of words and offering a lot of critique about what it is to be black in the twenty-teens and from a tribe, an old, old, long historied tribe of blessed individuals who not only have song and dance and rhythm inborn but who also risked to read and laugh and love and who now have fear and failure and history to contend with and who, in that contending, make for themselves the most beautifully bittersweet kind of happy endings that are vulnerable and raw and under studied and real. which i guess makes me no different from other marginalized tribes. which i guess is what, maybe, has drawn me to this marginalized field. which i guess is why it was uncomfortable, too, when the head of the dramaturgy department only said "that was so cool" once my performance of *tribe* was over. and i wanted more but the truth there is no more. and the truth is it was cool. the truth is it was me. it was all me.

and scott saw what i had made and he said it was very good.

listed last

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

5/23/13

to Sara, Julian, Susan, Tracey, Cliff, Daniela, Patrick, Rachel, Eric, me, Martins, Dan, Barry, Colleen
Hello Sara, Julian, Susan, Tracey, Cliff, Daniela, Patrick, Rachel, Eric, Martins, Dan, Barry, Colleen and
Lauren:

I'm very excited to hear Bright Room Called Day on Sunday 6/2 from 5pm - 8pm at my place with all of
you lovely folks. The plan is to read the play, and then hang out and discuss over some wine (or your
drink of choice) and some yummys. Please bring a bottle or a snack.

My address is 117 Christopher Street, Apt. 20, my number is below. We will provide scripts. Please let
Colleen Fischer (our SM) know if you would prefer an electronic copy for an iPad or something and/or if
you already own a copy.

I'm thinking we will read the following roles, if you want to look it over in advance.

Agnes Egging	Sara Thigpen
Gregor Bazwald	Julian Stetkevych
Paulinka Erdnuss	Susan Louise O'Conner
Annabella Gotchling	Tracey Gilbert
Vealtninc Husz	Cliff Miller
Rosa Malek	Daniela Mastropietro
Emil Traum	Patrick Harvey
Die Alte	Rachel Craw
Gottfried Swetts	Eric Miller
Zillah Katz	Lauren Whitehead

Looking forward to it!

Best,
Scott

it's not that

it's not that i didn't read the part well because i did read the part well and there were chuckles from the gallery while i read the part and even though then i was thinning out, i was still on the fatter side of pretty and my belt buckle pressed into my gut and left a mark and i've never been able to cross my legs gracefully and the small space was small but not uncomfortable. but that had nothing to do with my reading of the part which i did well. which i had sort of practiced because i knew as soon as scott saw me hold the space at ashley's place that he was looking at me differently, that he was seeing me as a new woman now, a loud woman now, a woman with more than a penchant for licorice and a willingness to speak up in our classes but rather a woman with a voice. it's not that it was an audition but i knew i was to be on, i was to be there and if this play was to be chosen, i was to be kept.

it's not that i was a kept woman, but i was a secret weapon, a black woman in his back pocket. it's not that he was using me, it's more like he had use for me. which is not the same thing. which at least allows me some agency. and i read the part well. held the space well. was aware of my blackness, yes, and well that was an asset in this case because after the reading, which took over two hours even then, he opened the wine and the gin and the cheese began to disappear and crumbs of crackers in my fat, fat lap and all the questions were not for me or at me but rather at zillah and that's when it started:

it's not that you didn't read it well -i mean you read it brilliantly- it's just that i'm caught of guard by...

or

it's not that it doesn't work -because i think it can work - it's just that the play might work better if...

or

it's not that it's confusing it's just that it takes a long time before i understand why she's...

if she's...

will she...

and she will...

but how will...

and it's not that they were talking about me, or directing these questions at me, or wondering about my ability to write or read or just be, right? it was none of that. it was just that i couldn't help but be so black when i did it, have all my cadence and candor and fervor when i did it and all the other actors were so domestic, so sitting always on the couch, so clearly not black and by that i don't mean not working because it's not that we weren't all working, it's just that my black work is so much more visible against all this other not-black work and if i was going to be *that black* then maybe that would be distracting to all the other not-black, you know? and it's not that what i'm saying now is the only truth of it all, it's not that at all, it's just that this is what i heard through all saying of what it wasn't.

it's just that us black folk know so well, learned too well, how to read this exact kind of posture, this exactitude of negative space. and so the positive space gets so hard to see and even when seen, so hard to accept or trust because i'm sure that someone said:

i love her

or

the play wouldn't work without her

or

there are so many parallels today

or

you should...

you could...

you will....

you will...

because it's not that anything is ever impossible, only conditional and sometimes if the attention is so drawn toward the negative space, the black in the white space, then that can be distracting. and they didn't want for zillah to be distracting. and it's not that i was zillah, it's just that knew i was going to be. because the way scott looked at me. and all the things he didn't say then or didn't know then. and it's not that you

have to believe me, it's just this is what i felt and knew and heard and all the while shoving my face full of crackers and swirling, swirling the ice in my glass, trying to keep my cocktail cool.

and then scott went away to a place where i already was

On Aug 8, 2013, at 11:16 AM, Lauren Whitehead <paperlesspost@paperlesspost.com> wrote:

Scott Ebersold,

Lauren Whitehead sent you a personal message for "Scott's Going Away Party":

Wait! Whaaaaa?! You're going away? When will you be in Chicago?? You know I am here now!
Let's talk. We clearly need to talk. So happy for you. So sad to miss your soiree!

Reply

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

8/8/13

to me

Yep. My first internship is at the Steppenwolf assisting Tina Landau. If you want to visit Chicago, I have a swank apt. :)

We should definitely talk. I have selected Bright Room for my thesis and I REALLY, REALLY, REALLY (really) want to work with you on it. Particularly since there are those Zillah sections that could be tweaked to deal with current politics. and to be totally honest, I want you to play Zillah...

I leave town on Monday morning. Can we meet up before then?

on being married

it may be worth saying that during this time i was preparing a syllabus for a course i would be teaching for 14 first year ivy league students at Columbia, a class on crafting essays at the college level called university writing. i have not always known this about myself, but i am a born teacher. it is a cadence i communicate with, a commitment i carry, a posture of always having told you, always opening these experiences of mine to be examined, offered in service to some one else's understandings. it's why i don't balk when white people ask to touch my hair. it's why i don't balk when my students ask me if i prefer to be called african american or black. why, when they ask what i'm mixed with, i don't say *field slave and house wench*. all this time we black folks have been here and still so many white people who don't get it. still, i teach. make order out of chaos. maybe i just like to feign expert. maybe i just enjoy knowing better, more. maybe i just like the sound of my own voice or all three, but still i teach. and at this time, i was preparing to teach my students readings themed in american studies, which i have no qualms at calling *studies in race and gender and sexuality and class*, which i have no qualms calling *studies in ownership and property and public and private space*; which i have no qualms calling into question, the foundational topics and texts of this nation, the formative principles on which this land was formed.

and so i was reading james baldwin and audre lorde and edward said and peggy mcintosh, teachers all, experts all on their own lives and the teachable moments which surface therein. i was reading about exceptionalism and thinking always about role and rank and place in this body, in this country. i was reading about gentrification, about the coming of the gentry and i was thinking all the while of myself in this school, with these students about whom i assume so many ugly things given their boat shoes and new laptops. i was reading the new colossus, and feeling anew colossus thinking of standing in front of them and imparting, all the while anticipating always being tired and poor and how that is somehow a requirement for us teachers, all. and who the hell am i to impart anything with any kind of righteousness, after all, when i had just married the gentry, when at home, in my bed, was a red headed dutchman, with whom i had recently exchanged vows in front of god and our families descendants of slavers and enslaved respectively. my husband now whose skin is freckled and burns in the spring time. how come i to talk to anyone about the infiltration into unsafe spaces and to question where it starts and with whom when all the while it is me, the black girl artist at the ivy league institution with the white husband and her keys clutched between her knuckles when she gets off of the train in "her neighborhood" after dark.

two unanswered emails to the head of the dramaturgy department

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

8/27/13

to Edward

Hi CP!

Hope you had a good summer and that you're all set to welcome the next batch of dramaturgs! I wanted to ask you quickly about thesis things. My year is about to get started in a real way (teaching, interning, taking classes, etc) and I want to make sure that I have a plan.

I'm thinking of working as a writer/ dramaturg/ performer on Scott's thesis production of A Bright Room Called Day. He's asked me to play Zillah and to help him re-work her monologues to be more presently politically relevant. This is an option left open by Kushner and we figured we'd go for it: update the script a bit and send it to him for approval, which is terrifying and exciting and all that. But I can only do it if it can be my thesis as well. The work would consist of research and writing this semester and then rehearsal and performance next semester. As you know, these are all things I love (writing, monologuing, Scott, etc) and I also think it would be a good practice round for me in the work of adaptation before I launch into something like Shuffle Along, which I wanted to do for my thesis initially but which seems too ambitious at this point.

All of which is to ask: does something like this sound substantial enough for a thesis (paired of course with a process paper about the work of adaptation and narrators and political engagement)? And when will we get some info on how to officially make our thesis proposals?

Thanks!

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

9/9/13

to Christian, Edward

Hi Christian,

I need to follow up with this. The school year is off to a start and soon it'll be overwhelming for me. I would really like to have a plan for my thesis and for the rest of the semester. Any chance you can clue us

in on how to get started on these things? I now have two options and I'd like to be able to confirm with either party sooner rather than later.

Thanks,

L

Thesis Project Proposal:

Before Tony Kushner penned the literal divine intervention for the theater by suggesting it was possible to drop an angel through the ceiling, he was working toward that particular brand of magic in a play called *A Bright Room Called Day*. *Bright Room*, while not supernaturally magic, also includes an interrupting character¹, a force of angst and anger who punches into the play at odd intervals, commenting, in abstract, on the plays events, and railing against her own time and place in a failing political system. This particular brand of interruption or practice at divine intervention in performance and in theater is a magic that I respond to and am, in certain ways, attempting to practice in my own work. However, in the introduction to the play, Kushner admits that this Zillah is perhaps not a character that completely works. He challenges those who pick up the play for production to re-write and re-imagine her character. Scott Ebersold, who will direct this play for his thesis project, has cast me as Zillah and together we hope to answer Kushner's call. How can we make Zillah politically relevant today? What parallels was Kushner drawing between 1930's Germany and 1980's New York and what parallels exist still in 2013?

Process: The project will exist in three phases:

Phase I: Research

There will be comprehensive work to do in the reading of the play and in digging into the relevant history surrounding the play in order to respectfully update Zillah's interruptions. Areas of research include: the body of work from Tony Kushner and his contemporaries in the early 80's, Brecht's *The Private Life of the Master Race*, relevant criticism of *Bright Room*, and investigative work of a relative depth into Regan era politics against which both Zillah and Kushner were railing. Kushner maintains Zillah is not the playwright, but how not? And if not, why?

Phase II: Adaptation and Performance

I am particularly interested in the ways this kind of research can inform the characterization of Zillah. In the fall semester I am enrolled in a Character class with Evangeline Morphos where I hope to gather tools with which to investigate Zillah on a number of levels including: character and place, character and context, character as stand in for historical figure and/or school of political thought. What might this suggest about this play in terms of aesthetic and audience? How will all of this resonate in and through me as writer and performer? What, if any, use does this sort of character serve dramatically and dramaturgically?

Phase III: Reflection and Analysis

The thesis portion of this work can and most likely will take on a variety of questions and dramaturgical concerns, including: How the use of dramaturgy as a tool allows for a reading of authorial intention across texts? What is the process for adaptation of an older work for modern times? What work is required to hold true to authorial intention? What does this suggest about any one texts adaptability? Is adaptability a dramaturgical strength?

Goals:

- To develop a method of adaptation in preparation for future projects that involve writing and performing and/or writing and directing, i.e. *Shuffle Along*.
- To continue thinking about the artist as a public intellectual and the connection between solo work and autobiography
- To investigate, dramaturgically, the ways in which a writer might traverse time and space

¹ see appendix 1

this project articulated in brief

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

9/12/13

to me

Hey Lauren,

I need to write a blurb for Bright Room for CU's website. I was wondering if I could ask for your help in crafting it. Right now, its too much about Tony and I want it to be more about what we discussed and how cool our production will be.

This what I have so far.....

A Bright Room Called Day, by Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Angels in America is a powerful portrayal of individual dissolution and resolution in the face of political tragedy. This new production reimagines the play for our own time asking us to question our own social responsibility in the face of evil.

OR.....

A Bright Room Called Day, by Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Angels in America is a powerful portrayal of individual dissolution and resolution in the face of political tragedy. This production, reimagined with new text, questions our social responsibility the face of pure evil.

In both cases I think it needs to be less of the first sentence and more of the second....

-s

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

9/13/13

to Scott

Hmm, this is harder than I thought it would be.

How about:

A Bright Room Called Day, Tony Kushner's powerful portrayal of individual dissolution and resolution in the presence of political tragedy, will be reimagined in this production offering new text for our current time and begging the question: what is our social responsibility in the face of a new and ever present evil?

or... (this time with at least two sentences...)

Evil isn't finite. And in the face of political tragedy, what is our responsibility? This production of A Bright Room Called Day, Tony Kushner's powerful portrayal of individual dissolution and resolution, will be reimagined for our modern times, using new text to ask the same old question: how do you respond when in the presence of evil?

Closer? Or not...

This is already fun! Also, let's talk yea? I feel the need to get started, one and also, it will help me to write my official proposal to CP, who basically ignored all of my previous emails. Hmph.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

9/14/13

to Martins, me

Thanks so much for these! We're getting there! I've been in tech and previews. I'll have a bit more time early next week to focus on this more.

... I think we might need to contact Tony Kushner.

If these are gonna be publicity blurbs we can't say "new text" unless he's onboard with "new text", right? AND/OR ... how do we say it without saying it?

AND ... what do we want to say to get people excited to buy tickets.

I've cc'd Martins on this as I've raised the Tony K question.

x,s

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

9/16/13

to me, Martins

Hey Mrs. Swier,

Martins is here Chicago and we're working on a grant. We've been retooling the blurb.... What do you think?

Evil isn't finite. It just changes form. Concentrated in one individual or dispersed throughout a culture, it's often easier to ignore and adapt to than to take action. In 2013, it is difficult to identify one source of pure evil, but does that mean it doesn't exist? Scott Ebersold's production of Tony Kushner's A Bright Room Called Day awakens us to the dangers of inaction and complacency.

Lauren Whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

9/16/13

to Scott, Martins

Hi fellas!

Looks good. The only note is that it seems like we're saying it's often easier for evil to adapt rather than for us to adapt. So maybe "it's often easier for us to ignore... "?

I also think this play is about consequences too, right? So maybe "...the consequences of complacency."

Yea?

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

9/16/13

to me, Martins

GREAT! ... so....

Evil isn't finite. It just changes form. Concentrated in one individual or dispersed throughout a culture, it's often easier to ignore than to take action. In 2013, it is difficult to identify one source of pure evil, but

does that mean it doesn't exist? Scott Ebersold's production of Tony Kushner's *A Bright Room Called Day* awakens us to the dangers of inaction and the consequences of complacency.

emphasis added

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

10/18/13

to me, Martins

Begin forwarded message:

From: Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Subject: Tony Kushner - My Thesis

Date: October 18, 2013 11:37:13 AM EDT

To: Anne Bogart, BRIAN KULICK

Hello again Anne and Brian,

As I have discussed already with Anne, I would like to get in contact with Tony Kushner in relation to *my* thesis production of A Bright Room Called Day. He puts forth a challenge or proposal in the introduction to the play that says the character Zillah should ideally be constantly updated to the particular evils of the day. *I have drafted the email* below asking permission to begin this work.

Would it be possible for one of you to either forward *my email* to him or make an introduction so that I may send it to him? Whichever you think is best. The text is below.

I would appreciate it.

Best,

Scott

*****The email*****

Dear Mr. Kushner

My name is Scott Ebersold and I am a third-year MFA directing student at Columbia University where I train with Anne Bogart, Brian Kulick, Robert Woodruff and Tina Landau. This training has helped focus my craft so that I can create theater that is complicated in its dramaturgy and structure but at the same time retains a populist edge. I feel we are living in a landscape of American playwrights, who are

seemingly obsessed with the intimacy of the small domestic drama. However, you are arguably the first major American playwright since the mid-1950s to confront, head-on, the larger questions underlying the fabric of American and Western society, such as social isolation, identity, bigotry and greed and I admire that greatly. And because of this I am so honored that you have agreed to let me direct *A Bright Room Called Day* for *my thesis*.

In the introduction to the printed edition you mentioned that Zillah causes the play to be problematic and it is embracing this problem that most excites me. I feel Zillah's powerful voice speaking directly to my creative soul and would love the opportunity to present her in our production in a way that would make it seem impossible to do the play without her. Because of this, I am interested in your original premise of presenting to an audience a political play both with representational scenes and a presentational voice. I am particularly excited by the challenge you put forth to update Zillah's politics of paranoia to the evil of our current time. And as such, I am writing you today to ask permission to begin developing *our* ideas for updating Zillah.

I am working very closely with performance artist and Columbia Dramaturgy MFA candidate Lauren Whitehead and Columbia MFA Producer Martins Jukna. *We have already* begun looking at Zillah's text independently of the representational scenes to unlock the fundamentals of what Zillah is in her own right. *We are also looking* into what the nature of an "interruption" is, or could be, in context of the whole. There is a deep connection between Zillah, Agnes and Die Alte and we suspect that some of the ways to unlock Zillah's relationship to the whole play is in this connection. We also see a very clear connection between the struggles in this play and the current silences among our peers given our own political climate. All the more reason *we feel the need to* keep Zillah, reinvigorate her ranting all the while "staying true to the particular zeit informing Zillah's particular geist".

With your permission, *we'd like to* have the new text ready for your feedback by late December, in preparation for the full production that will take place at the Connelly Theater in the East Village, April 16 – 19. *We are very excited* about bringing this play to life in our current time and addressing a pervasive and insidious evil that continues to weave itself into the fabric of western society. And *we ask*, very humbly, if you *will give us your permission* to give it a go?

Sincerely,

Scott Ebersold

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

10/18/13

to Scott, Martins

hey!

will you bcc us on the rest of the correspondence? i want tony kushner to be in my inbox too if it happens!

yes!

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

10/18/13

to me, Martins

Of course. Anne and Brian made us swear to not give out their email addresses (although everyone has them) so I thought it would be best to not cc on that one.

Definitely in the future!

“my” rather than “our”/“we” sincerely “me” / “in the future” rather than “always”

“the larger questions underlying the fabric of American and Western society, such as social isolation, identity, bigotry and greed”

“a very clear connection between the struggles in this play and the current silences among our peers”

“a pervasive and insidious evil”

and that’s really all there is to it.

a certain lack

i have come to expect a certain lack of color in the various institutions, universities, centers of considerable art and/or resource to which i attend, apply, visit or perform in. preemptively, or not, i have come to guard against potential micro slights or oversights, certain key phrases and terms i respond to like so many triggers; there is a difference between asking to touch my hair and telling me that you want to. say the latter, i might allow you. there is a difference between the way i look when i am shopping and the way i look when i am at work: in one space i have armfuls of blouses i can't afford but want no one else to have and in the other space i am wearing the blouse i coveted better and bargained for. still, i expect said slights in the world and in the work i choose to do, the places i have chosen to study, the man i have chosen to marry, the students i have agreed to instruct.

i am epitome of american born during a certain time then with a certain measure of privilege, some of it earned, some of it coerced. and though i have chosen an uncertain path, still i have maintained a certain station in life which i often refer to as if it were my own doing though it is mostly of the benefit of others who work or are working harder than i am. yea, i grew up solidly suburban, middle class in high achieving redlined public schools, with two parents and a hand me down jeep cherokee which i didn't get 'til i was a senior, which i thought was too late anyway. and still there were always those who had more: the newer nicer car at 16, their own room at home, spring break vacations, boyfriends the same color as them, options for boyfriends the same color as them, golf courses for backyards. back yards, at all.

i never had a back yard. i have almost always lived in apartments with two rooms (or fewer) in which one i would share with my older brother which made conversations about back yards or rooms of your own isolating and embarrassing. and no i didn't get my hair braided in mexico over spring break. and no you can't touch it. and these are not steve madden shoes and yes i did ask my mom to buy me some and she said no. so.

so i learned a language of have and have not amongst a class so disproportionately having that what i did not have made me trivial in a room full of black folks later, who didn't understand why it was such a big deal when my white friend, amy, almost broke my wrist with the phone from the dream phone game while calling me stupid for talking on the real phone to the boy we both liked for too long and yes the white boys we liked were indeed our biggest concern and yes i had friends with mothers who could afford dream phone and whose mothers never made my friends apologize for saying princesses couldn't be black or for hitting black girls with big hunks of plastic until they couldn't write for a week, because her daughter didn't do anything wrong and what is wrong with me anyway and no i didn't fight back and no my mama didn't teach me better than that. so.

so my chest full of insults were racial and classed, gendered and reductive and doubly isolating and so i gathered up my armor and began to guard against these micro fissures vigilantly, began to stand up for my sensitivities and slights like a hand full of aces to explicate later. all of them burn integral to the making of all that i make. real or imagined. major or not, still i believe that all these micro slights are things people should be aware of, things people should be sorry for. she hit me with all her privilege and it hurt me. hurt me good. almost broke something in me, in fact. and she should have been sorry. she should have been sorry for at least that.

regular

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

11/4/13

to me

Hey L,

I was thinking it might be good for us to set up a regular schedule starting next week thru December. are there days/times that are generally good?

-s

Sent from my iPhone

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

11/4/13

to Scott

Hi.

Yes. Totally. Sorry that last week go derailed. My internship ends this week which means that much of my time opens up. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday's from here on out, I'll be trying to be a writer so you know. Pretty open. What are you thinking? Happy to start this week. Looking forward to making stuff!!

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

11/5/13

to me

Hi. After Orestes opens on Sunday my time frees up and I can shift focus back to Bright Room. I was thinking if we had one like 3 hour meeting scheduled regularly once, a week, it would be good for us. No scheduling. We meet, check in, read stuff, share research etc. And if we don't need the 3 hours, we can just work as long as we want. Both Tuesdays and Thursdays are good for me (as well as Fridays). [I am not a morning person.] Any of those days better for you? Tuesday I am totally free. Thursday I have

therapy in the mid-70s from 3-4, which could be good as I'd be half way to Columbia if we wanted to meet at 4:30.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

11/5/13

to Scott

Thursday is good for me. Wanna lock in Thursdays 4:30-7:30?

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

11/5/13

to me

Sounds great!

white men's consistent lack of response

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

11/20/13

to Martins, me

... T.K.'s lack of response may actually be okay news for us.

I was thinking about this yesterday and I remembered a time when I was trying to get the Brel estate to give me permission to use a Jaques Brel song in one of my shows. I called them, emailed them, mailed them, visited them, dropped a script off to them ... and they never responded. I spoke to a lawyer at Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. They said that since I did my due diligence and in combination with the fact that Brel estate either elected to not respond or forgot to respond in time for the production was enough paper work to prove that I tried and they gave permission by omission. (or whatever they call it in legal land.)

....sooooooooo.....

we still could be good.

BUT.... I am sure he is going to be bowled over by what we present to him and say yes enthusiastically.

-xx,s

unsolicited advice from a lighting designer

FYI. ... some good thoughts below.

-s

Begin forwarded message:

From: Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Subject: Re: Thoughts on Zillah's world...

Date: November 19, 2013 at 11:52:17 AM EST

To: Dan Stearns

Hi Dan,

Thank you for this. I think in many ways you have hit directly upon some of the concerns which we will need to keep in mind as we progress.

If not handled carefully it could indeed make the 1930s scenes seem fake by comparison, but with the right application could also present the opposite results. I always find with theater that tries to ignore the fact that we are watching live performers performing it more difficult to suspend my disbelief (and believe them to be true) than performances that recognize both realities. T.K. was trying to present both a presentational character and representational characters in the same play. I think that acknowledging the "presentness" of the performer's reality could actually enhance the authenticity by acknowledging audience/performer relationship. (Although, I am very mindful of what will happen when the representational characters step out of character, considering that Zillah may never do the same.)

And in that regard, Zillah must remain a character ... just as much as the representational characters are characters, she cannot be Lauren. Also, Zillah Katz is jewish. Her jewishness is important. Our Zillah Katz will either be adopted or half-black/half-jewish, but will identify with a jewish heritage. This is in part because of her connection with Agnes/Die Alte. There is a deep connection between the three woman and I am very interested in that connection. Zillah and Anges have a psychic/spiritual connecting that crosses time and theatrical realities. Zillah calls out to Agnes through time and they both feel each other, this must remain. Also, I believe Die Alte is Agnes after the war. I think in the Public Theater production she could have been a real survivor still living in the building but in the original text she seems to be either real or a ghost, but definitely Agnes after the war.

This is all rather complicated to describe in an email. But at the end when Zillah joins the representational reality, I feel she crosses out of the presentational world (direct address in the Connelly with us) into the representational world of the play and joins the other women, who are dead, who tried ... but couldn't do enough. ...so, each performance is Zillah's last day on earth. In a very anti-meta moment she crosses over to the other side, theatrically.

I have to run, but I'd be happy to discuss this more.

best,
Scott

On Nov 18, 2013, at 5:48 PM, Dan Stearns wrote:

Just some musings I had in the show today, as I was thinking of the rules of Zillah's world versus the rest of the play, thought I'd share.

While the idea of Zillah living in the Connelly in 2014 is exciting and interesting, does that make the 1930's play fake by comparison? Does it mean that Zillah (and by extension the audience) can only relate to the characters as actors, not as real people within the story? What does this mean when Zillah's world and Agnes' world start to come together? Does it kill the magic?

And since the audience knows that Zillah's an actress too, and doesn't REALLY live in the Connelly, and isn't REALLY interrupting the performance, does this add a level of dishonesty to the entire production?

Could Zillah be renamed Lauren, and be a Columbia grad student really passionate about Reagan or AIDS or Obama, invited by her friend to be a part of his thesis production? IE, still interruptions, still real and present day, but without the artifice of pretending to be something it's not?

And/or, can we bring the worlds of the Play and of Zillah closer together, rather than emphasizing their dichotomy? Instead of making one real and one artifice, allow the questions of character vs. actor, story vs. reality, past vs. present to live unanswered in both worlds - that there is a way that Paulinka talking to the audience in a spotlight, and Agnes talking to the audience about her rent, and Die Alte, and the Devil, and Zillah interrupting the play are all linked in a world that is simultaneously real and theatrical and magical and exists at the convergence of past, near past, and present.

In the Public Theater production, Zillah had moved into Agnes' old apartment, and could (as in the current version) feel Agnes' presence. And at that time, Die Alte would have been essentially a present-tense Agnes (Agnes would be around 95 in 1991), so the ghost of Die Alte created a link between the two times, happening in the same space. Of course, in our production the line isn't quite as clean, but I think there's something to be taken away from this stupid story - while, of course, making it immediate for our audience today.

more unsolicited advice from the lighting designer

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

11/25/13

to me

More thoughts from our lighting designer...
thought you should read it before we see each other.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Dan Stearns

Subject: Re: Thoughts on Zillah's world...

Date: November 19, 2013 at 4:31:38 PM EST

To: Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Yes, acknowledging that we're watching live performers creates a sense of honesty that allows the audience to let down their guard and be pulled in. It's about simultaneously seeing the theatricality and seeing the magic that the theatricality is creating. I think the root of my concern was that if we signal to the audience that they should be looking at Zillah only as a real performer (that she's really living in the Connelly, versus all those actors/characters down on stage), then we're both being dishonest about Zillah (the construct we've created for her is sufficiently improbable that the audience knows she's really an actor/character too) and we're simplifying the performer/character dichotomy by creating one real person versus a bunch of characters, and we've lost the tension and magic. All of which I think you're aware of. Just putting it into words.

I really like the idea of Zillah stepping into representational reality; the idea of someone as passionate as Zillah stepping out of the present moment and into history feels like a really potent metaphor. Which on the one hand requires us to accept her as a character (real people can't really step into history), but on the other hand, to have a relationship with that character that feels immediate and present.

What I was trying to get at with stripping Zillah back to a more essential "Lauren" wasn't to say that she's no longer a character (clearly the beliefs Zillah espouses are not those of Lauren), but to remove the trappings of "character" that create implausibility - to remove the sense of "we're being told to pretend there's this crazy woman living in the theater, but we all know she's just another actress" and to work within the given boundaries of the performance - that this is a thesis production, that the Connelly is a

commonly rented off-off-b'way house, that anyone speaking during the show (bar audience members unhappy with my lighting design) is a performer you have engaged.

There's also the option of embracing the fact that there is both the real Lauren and the character of Zillah, acknowledging the fact that it is a Jewish character played by a black performer, and allowing that dichotomy to reflect on the theatricality of the 1930's play.

One image I keep thinking of, riffing on what you said about her creating an art installation in the Connelly, is that when the audience comes in, Zillah is somewhere high up and in the back of the set, working on her installation, and we aren't sure if her installation is part of the set or something separate. Vaguely à la the David Dorfman show we saw, with the art installation backdrop and the artist periodically coming out and adding to it. So that she's clearly a framed part of the experience crafted by you, but existing in a slightly different space, and with an ambiguous relationship to the rest of the action that allows her to step out and be presentational, but to eventually step into and be absorbed by it. I also think there's something interesting in having her art installation be a part of the set for the 1930's play... although I'm not sure yet what that means or if it would be too much.

As you said, these are just concerns to keep in mind as we progress. I started this whole train of thought thinking specifically about the design of Zillah's world vs. the 1930's world, and while of course all these issues are important as your work with Lauren, I think being aware of the really delicate balances at play here are equally important as we start to think about design. I like what you said about Zillah's moment of crossing being "anti-meta," and in some ways I think that's a good way to think about how we handle her and the play in general.

d

a more essential lauren

might just be “lauren” sans “ ” but no one ever has a problem with suggesting we essentialize black.

in fact tony will probably

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

12/10/13

to me, Martins, Paul

Hi Lauren,

Last night we attended the 20th Anniversary book launch of Angels in America at the signature. It was a very successful evening. I met Kyle, Tony's assistant and put a fact to my name. We chatted about what you and I are up to and he said that it was great that we started and that submitting something real, rather than theoretical will be good. And, in fact, Tony will probably be very interested to talk with us once we have submitted our actual ideas. Exciting, but SCARY. :)

Also, I introduced myself to Michael Grief who directed the Public Theater version of Bright Room and asked if I could meet with him sometime to discuss the play and his experiences. He agreed! Anne has put us in contact.

So, in all. A very good night!

Will I see you at the Holiday Party tonight?

-Scott

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

12/10/13

to Scott, Martins, Paul

Yes!

This is great news. Really great (and super scary, anxiety producing) news! Still, I've been really excited about what we've written so far and ideas we're pushing towards. I think the timing is great given how we're struggling with interruption 3 and 6. Awesome. Awesome.

I can't come to the holiday party tonight. I have a 12 page paper due at midnight. WTF, grad school?! I'm supposed to be coasting by now, right?

Soon,
Lauren

Martins Jukna
12/10/13
to me, Scott, Paul

Hand it in by midnight and come out to celebrate! :)

the scary email

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Jan 14

to me

Hi La-la-lauren!

I think we need to finalize a "draft" to send to T-Kush. Did you make any headway editing over the holidays? I sure didn't.

I leave town for a week 1/21-1/27. It would be great to get it together before I head out?

xo,

s

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Jan 15

to Scott

Hey hey!

I certainly did not. Womp. I really meant to though. What happened... ?

I can do it this weekend, though. No problem.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Jan 16

to me

What happened? Ummmm.... eggnog, cookies, beer, weed, cookies, family, family-drama, travel, cookies, wine, etc,...

I've been breaking the script down dramaturgically. And, I've discovered that the 3rd interruption is basically a mirror to the scene preceding it. I don't think we should switch them. The resonance is too

intense. We can discuss in detail but I think when we send it to T-Kush we should send it with the same order as he had ... then if we accidentally switch them later ... who will know!?!

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Jan 17

to Scott

oh... right. i was drunk for a month.

in any case, here she blows. cleaned up, typed up, neatened up and what not. i didn't see this message until it was already done so it is as we discussed previously. i think it would be ok to send this way, no? and we can always switch it back?

you make the call.

in the mean time, boom! progress.

also, where ya goin? let's get together when you get back!

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Jan 17

to me

Right!

I switch the order back to his order. I think it will be easier to switch them later, once he approves them. I've attached them here just in case you might see an error.

I'm going to Mexico, just south of Cancun. I accidentally got invited.

Yes! Let's get together when I get back. I return on Jan 27!

-s

something real rather than theoretical

our first full draft.²

² see appendix two

so now

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Jan 17

to Scott

Bueno.

So now we send it to him?

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Jan 17

to me

I am drafting that email right now. Will cc you!

he didn't.

there comes a time in a black woman's life when she begins to look at promises as intentions and intentions as actions. we do this to keep from being disappointed. cause if he didn't, at least he meant to. and if he meant to, then at least he did that. and meaning to is sometimes enough. sometimes meaning to has to be enough in a life where the pattern of inaction could kill you if you were to keep your hopes up too high.

a nudge

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Jan 28

to Scott

hey you!

i hate to be nit picky on this, but i saw the call for auditions today (!!!) and i noticed i'm still not listed on the creative team. i really need the documents to reflect that i've done more than audition and get cast for a part. is there anyway to fix it? also! any word from t. kushner?

what's taking so long?!

talk soon?

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Jan 28

to me

That was a link to the original post on playbill (the link I put on Facebook today). I just linked to that link as it's the only one I have. It's not new. I can ask playbill to update it, not sure if they will as the date is past. But will try.

Nothing since the last message from Kyle.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Jan 29

to me

retroactively changed.

http://www.playbill.com/jobs/find/job_detail/57568.html

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Jan 29

to Scott

Thank you Scott.

I feel like a psycho, but I also feel a lot better. Like a lot better psycho.

when the head of the dramaturgy department did respond

January 29 - Lauren Whitehead:

just looked at my undergraduate transcript. mistake. also, i think i might be secretly dumb. either that or really, really bad at school. either that or really, really bad at everything except classes with "writing" and/or "black" and/or "arts" in the title. hmph.

Christian Parker: And yet, we overlooked this and you have thrived.

on work

it is an exceptionally long winter. snow. then rain. slush. then filth. cold and wet and unrelentingly long. and everyday there is more. and everyday the to do list grows. and there are holes in my boots and no hood on my jacket and my glove is gone and there is a ticket on our car. and everything in this city costs so much more than it needs to and still my husband goes to work in hard bottom shoes and slacks and a hat he has had for at least 10 years because he doesn't buy what he doesn't need. and he is up in the morning before i am and when he leaves for work i'm on the couch and when he returns from work, i'm on the couch. and whether i have worked or not, my labor doesn't show on my body. my labor is my brain. and it is a long, long winter and snow or not, sleet or not, ice or not, public schools don't close cause when public schools don't open, black babies in new york don't eat and black mothers in new york can't work because their job is to take care of some one else's kids, not their own kids, and there is a line out the door of mothers who need that work, any work, who will leave their children at home to perform said work.

and reed, he teach the babies. reed feed the babies. reed restrain the babies. then reed hug the babies. reed high five the babies. wipe snot off the babies. reed cry with, for, because of the babies. laugh with the babies. reed learn for the babies. hurt for the babies. advocate for the babies. wake up for the babies. lose sleep for the babies and don't complain bout the snow or the stress or the low pay or the newspapers who would have you believe reed don't do shit for these babies. reed live for the babies. reed for the world. reed. reed. reed. reed. reed.

who, after all and all, still remembers to say my name.

a turn

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 18

to me, Sara, Dan, Martin, Martins, Colleen, 21belac

Hi All,

I've just received the initial round of designs for our poster and post cardand ... well, I think we need to do a photo shoot of our own.... I have some ideas. They would involve:

finding a day this weekend or early next week to do the shoot with Sara (Agnes), Lauren (Zillah) and possible Laralu (Die Alte)

finding a photographer friend to do us a favor

putting Sara into hair and make-up and approximating 1930s clothing (at least from the neck up)

putting Lauren into some approximation of a Zillah costume

possibly putting Laralu into an approximation of Die Alte night gown and makeup

shooting a few extreme close ups and stages shots of the ladies

I think we can pull from stuff we have as I anticipate these pictures being very close. Martins - would you be able to help us with hair, make up, and clothing styling? Dan - might you have some lights in your vast theatrical storage area to help light the shoot?

Does any one know a photographer? (I have one lead.) Are people available either Saturday 2/23 during the day or Tuesday 2/25 during the day?

Scott

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 18

to Scott

Hey!

My grandmother (who has been sick for a while) has taken a turn for the worse so I'm headed to Chicago tomorrow and won't be back until Sunday night so this weekend is out for me unfortunately.

a 2/25 photo shoot or the last way i looked when my grandma was still alive



later that afternoon

February 25 - Lauren Whitehead shared Jordan Whitehead's status

My brother said it better than I can...

There are no words to describe the sadness in my heart right now..... No words to describe the feeling of loss....today my grandmother went home to The Lord after 83 years of life. A mother of 5, grandmother to many more, and a loving wife of 63 yrs (64 in April) she was loved by all who had the pleasure of meeting her. I am grateful that she is no longer in pain, yet devastated by the fact that she is gone. She will be missed more than she could ever know. Rest peacefully grandma I will miss and love you always.

lies of attention

February 27 - Lauren Whitehead:

...is looking for a friend today if anyone is looking for an excuse to come to harlem or an excuse to leave work early or an excuse to drink a bottle of wine in the middle of the afternoon or an excuse to send an email or an excuse to experiment with the making of paper planes or the writing of pilot scripts or the out loud reading of poems or anything, anything other than the nothing i have to do today which is the least possible productive thing for a woman in mourning to have to do. — feeling lonely.

black history month be over

if i would have written yesterday, i might have said something too honest. i might have discovered something about my own self and the loneliness that i sit in. i might have had to admit that I need that loneliness. long for that loneliness. that i thrive it it, bask it in it and wallow cause i want to. i might have had to admit that this is where i get my life.

had some one responded to my call, if some one would have showed up with a ream of white printer sheets and a book on how to make paper airplanes, i would have wanted to turn them away, to say, i did not ask so that you would come, i asked so that you could know i was lonely and your knowing was enough, was the point, even. was that which i needed to in order to isolate myself more. i did not really want my company to be kept. i wanted to be the wallow and to hurt and to call myself a saint for having endured.

i have not listened to music in at least three days. it might be too much. i know it is too much. every note will remind me of my deep, long, history of blackness. my grandma gone. grandpa gone and mother and father at home alone with that particular abandonment that everyone will eventually know if they do not know it yet already. if i had written yesterday, i might have realized then that my mother will one day die too and that may have preemptively turned me away from music forever.

my mother told me when she was drunk that m should sing. that i can sing. that i should feel it and let it be felt. that it is in me. it wasn't these words. in fact, i'm not sure it was any words. it was only a look. a knowing look between a daughter and her mother whose mother was about to die.

and then she died. and that was it. there is no song of mourning. there is only an empty aloneness and the crying at the same time everyday and the sigh, the sigh, the endless ever sighing of loss.

my grandfathers name is cy. and after 63 years he is alone without the music of his wife's voice. and on those last days she could not speak. she could not speak. he could not hear her voice because she could not speak. and that is the deepest quiet a man can know. that is the only lonely worth a word.

these days are getting longer and our history month is a short light. all my gone grandparents have fallen to this month as some cruel sport, as some misremembering of their names among the men and women who were known for having done so much more. but what's so wrong with staying married? what's so wrong with aging uneventfully slow? making good with a few long time friends and sending cards or burying a child of your own, or bringing one back from an alcoholic un-death or cutting hair or letting

your hair go white or sitting beside your husband everyday while he reads the paper day in and out because you promised to. what's so wrong with promising? what does becoming have to do with living black?

i'm through with you black history month. for now and at least until you fix your mouth around the rim of my grandmothers name, until you picture too the women and men who lived black and died black with only the small whole of their long and well lived worlds bringing half blooming gladiolus to their wakes.

and then there's the question of when or if one can do too much

i am after all a black woman. i am technically doing enough by just being in the room. never mind all the inconvenient places i store my fat: thighs spread beyond the chair, belly lapping over my belt, under my t-shirt, my back arm fat billowing, billowing like so many angel wings.

this is all about angels and devils anyway and the evil you can't see and who stands at the door because if the devil stands at the door then that doorway is the devil space. and if an angel stands at the door then that doorway is the angel space and how can two warring spirits maintain the same domain?

i want for there to be a reason for everything. a manic woman doesn't have a small stack of books. her books runneth over. she doesn't just read the paper, she is the paper. how convenient this stack of black and white pages to be tossed like so many freed birds into the air. why is there a book about dogs? why is there an almanac for a dictionary? how incomplete these tales of a racist or ruined cultural life. don't you know consistency? don't you know how to stitch it all together?

some white man would argue that it doesn't want to be stitched together. another white man would argue that the unstitching is for some one else to do. a third man might say stitching is women's work and meanwhile, still, the question about whether or not the black woman is to be frayed. and these are questions beyond or ahead of where we are now in this black woman story, questions which i fear i cannot articulate, i fear cannot *be* articulated. and still it is, anyway, the expectation that the black woman start, at the very least, undone.

it is not by choice. it is always only by provocation or projection alone. or maybe not. i have been frayed without audience, but nobody knew so who gives a fuck about that. all of that is so much doubt and anger, insecurity and infirmed faith. and maybe faith is really the place to start. because faith is not hope, is not clear articulation, is not dramaturgy.

inscription:

i can't promise this will come together; the only way to know is when you see it. i have to trust the arrangement. be the broken edge of a mosaic yet unmade.

or:

if you expected a neat reflection, you've picked up the wrong mirror.

really the question is how to talk to you & not, talk for me and not, remember reliably and not, be honest and not and make of it all a one thing, a she said something thing, rather than a *who are you* and *who cares* and *what is this black girl even talking about* thing.

here's the thing: all my life i have advocated for black women to practice radical visibility, even on the days i least wanted or refused to be seen, even then i knew better but was too weak to be better, still, i knew that the goal *is* to be seen so as to get *used to* this kind of being seen.

and so why so meek in the spotlight?

why so tense under the other eye?

why pick dramaturgy, a craft most honored and honorable when it is unseen?

maybe this is really about the small stack of books in my character's room and my desire to pile up, pile up, pile up the books. and my advocacy in support of this piling and the white men who told me all of this was just so distracting.

i may have made that up too.

my grandmother was dying. who knows what anybody was actually talking about. i was all the way immersed in the squeezing from her hand; her reaching for me when i walked through the doorway. it's true, who is in the door is always so important. i was busy about the work of telling my grandmother that she was the best woman i ever knew. and that i had to go. my grandmother who was beautiful. my grandmother who was not shy. i have to go, i told her. back to a room full of white people waiting to see how good, how virtuosically invisible i can be.

~*~

Part 2: a informal interlude

[notes on talking revolution with white men]

~*~

There are lessons learned in upheaval that my body has not yet known. There is memory in a secret muscle, though, that I feel flex from time to time. A big brother spirit from a long ways back whose abdomen and instincts are my own now. Sometimes I think he was a redhead like Malcolm X, but I don't think reincarnation turns over that quickly. Indeed, I am a brown-eyed black girl born in the 80's. The only wisp of red in my life is my husband and even if he is freckled and unafraid, he is also white. So sometimes I wonder, too, if reincarnation has the ability to choose its race. I do not think it does.

I do have all sorts of feelings about the 80's. Conspiracy theories mostly. Or questions, rather, about whether the "war on drugs" started before or after the arrival of crack in black neighborhoods. Questions about gangs and guns; prisons and money. Who drew these lines? And what had to be erased? And why did they make so many bullets in the first place? How came *we* to be this mass of an unfortunate race, this band of blacks who are all so unlike and also not so unlike the thick-knuckled men and women I grew up with? Because I was born as we all were. Just in the 80's. Just a bit of that scattered black residue.

Ever adapting, yes, but always in such a position to be kind of asking, right? Even when in the taking back, right? Always a little bit nappy-headed, after all. And all I'm really saying is that I'm black. And in and of itself, there's nothing exceptionally special about the reality of that; other than my secret muscle flexing, my always having asked. But being black, as I am, and woman, as I seem, and queer as I be - although mostly in theory- I have long lived in the hollow of all the problem questions and since then, have been gathering the gusto to fill up the void with a bit of myth-making of my own.

I find myself more often, then, in rooms full of white men. Maybe because my husband is one and he only has brothers. Or maybe because I work in theater, which seems to be one of many spaces claimed as their domain. One of the many centers for expansive image creation, that which, if it ever at all includes me, has a long history of doing so rather unkindly. Still I often find myself surprised and, yes, inspired by these mostly white men: moving about with ease, practicing a language of hunger, pledging loyalty to the few favored artistic factions (schools, I think they call them when there are no guns involved).

Here ye Aristoteleans, Shakespearians, Chekovians, neo- Brechtians, Albeeians, O'Neillians, some of them even Wilsonian, now, in their unending support of Barack Obama, in their fashioning of a certain kind of liberal colorblindness. And speaking of, I have been, by proxy, in an ideological tiff with one of these great American men. A white 'wright with a school all his own, hedged by the most politically motivated fathers of drama; those who managed narrative *and* theory. Would that this could be my school but for being womanless, all white and over attending to the macro when the woman is taught to be small.

I know the localized pressure of a micro life and still I had been steadfast in my near worship at the altar of Tony Kushner's big plays and big feels and big angels crashing through the big manufactured sky. Because Tony wasn't afraid of exposing the magic. Because Tony was an 80's made politi-geek. Because Tony wanted to kiss boys and make plays about silences. But that was until recently, when he became, to me, a fundamental agent in the exact silences that keep certain communities always the collateral damage while other communities wage war in the very name of mass liberation. An agent, in short, of the empire.

I say empire quite emphatically because empire is what I mean. Not just Obama, or Ronald Reagan, not any president on the good or the bad side of history, but broadly, the idea of "president" in a historical and global context. That being the (always) he who represents the (typically white) face of this largely hate-filled but also (maybe one day could be) great nation of ours. And the empire stands. The empire holds fast. And Tony can't help it. Or maybe he can. Or thinks that he is. And maybe he is. We all want to stand, and still, lately I feel the impulse to offer him a whole row of velvet-lined theater seats in which to sit and listen, for once, and say nothing.

And though I am ahead of myself, this story starts where all stories start: in conversations between white men talking about progress. In '85, Tony published a play called, *A Bright Room Called Day*, which for the most part can be described as "*Angels in America* practice." In all the best ways *Bright Room* already was expressing a need for intervention in theater -in drama- was reaching toward Brecht all the while mastering *The Poetics*. And to do it, he actively drew the parallel line between the barbarity of Hitler & the Holocaust in the '30s and the cruelty of Reagan & the mishandling of HIV/AIDS in the 80s.

None of it done, of course, without forging a new dramatic theory. A question rather, asking if it's possible for a play to be representational -and in so doing obey the unities of space and time- *and* presentational -thereby addressing the audience directly. And to answer, Tony made a play within a play. A 1930's play representationally, wherein during the rise of Weimar Germany's radical right regime and specifically on the eve of Hitler's election to chancellor of the German National People's Party we meet Agnes, poor, sweet, inactive in the face of evil Agnes who can't get herself to move even while all of her friends are leaving.

And at the same time there is a 1980's presentational play wherein Zillah, a radically paranoid young Jewish woman in the East Village delivers a series of didactic interruptions to the action, by railing against Reagan's malevolent administration all the while daring the audience to see the rightful comparison of these two men. Indeed if Reagan who re-launched a war on black men, whose flunkies laughed on record at least 13 times at any mention of a gay-related disease, who never went grey in the

face of the crises he was causing in any number of marginal communities; if this man is not as evil as Hitler who ever can be?

It's worth hearing this from the man himself. Here is Kushner in the intro to the play: "The impulse to interrupt the Weimar-era play with Zillah Katz's editorializing - and she is not the playwright - came from a curiosity about the necessity of metaphORIZING political content in theatre. Why, I wondered, shouldn't audiences hear an unapologetically didactic, presentational voice as well as representation scenes? The result to this question, and the solution that is Zillah, make for the most interesting and problematic aspect of the text."³ And she is not the playwright. And she is not the playwright. And she is not the playwright. And...

Again, later: "The German scenes have remained essentially unchanged throughout the several drafts of *Bright Room*; Zillah's materials have gone through drastic revisions (originally she had a brother-and in the London production she was an anti-Thatcherite Brit). Ideally there should be a continual updating of the specifics of Zillah's politics of paranoia, in the form of references to whatever evildoing is prevalent at the time of the production. Though I think she should stay true to the zeit informing her particular geist, namely the Reagan-era, there might be politically useful emendations made, if *intelligently* done, and never without my approval."⁴ Approval. Approval.

So many slights. Or questions, rather, about content and evildoings; about republics and the 20'teens; about zeitgeists, paranoias, informed and uninformed politics. There are further questions about problematics; about approvals; about control and implicit barriers in the assessments of intelligence; about intention and interpretation and the need for criticism or the predicament of an author with the final say on what can change. Why offer if only to limit? Why open if only to close? What kind of liberal power moves are being made here, and for whom? For the polis or the self? For the play or the 'wright who is not Zillah who is not black.

I'm saying all of this as a reminder that I'm black, so as to make plain the fervor with which I jumped at this opportunity to revise, adapt, innovate and speak unapologetically on that residue we weren't supposed to be able to live on. A dare to write over, invite some parallels of my own. A chance to rail. Rant. How happy to be urged to be didactic; to be overtly concerned, but not crazy. Intuitive but not delusional. Anxious but not angry. To be all the things black girls aren't expected to be (at least

³ Kushner, x

⁴ Kushner, xi

positively); to subvert all the boundaries, the specific languages and silences for black girls in rooms always so full with white men. This, in that light, then, was an allowance.

There are lessons learned in the practice of living in a black girl body that it appears I have always, implicitly known. When to speak up and when to shut up. How to bide time while actively resisting. How to launch with two feet fully while remaining rightfully skeptical, while watching carefully before and after, while always having to ask how do these facts change, how does this answer change, how do the methods change when the question is asked of, on or in the body of a black woman? And in this case, what of the presentation, preparation, problems and parallels to be seen anew in light of her brown eyes, her nappy hair, after all?

What might anger a young, politically, left-leaning black woman? What programs might illicit her paranoia? What Reagan-esque patterns, if any, are present in Obama? What hope could she forgo? What lines connected Hitler and Reagan and our present regime; connected the 30's to the 80's to the two thousand teens? So launching, however skeptically, in, I gathered a list: the roll-back of black voter rights, the war in Chiraq, drone strikes, barbie dolls, the radical right wing; mass incarceration and Florida; immigration detentions and NSA surveillance. Google, student loan debt, Travon & Zimmerman, Jordan & Dunn; Oscar, Amadou and Renisha McBride too.

Always, always my list channeled back to the senseless killing of black boys and/or the systematic problems associated with the locking up of black boys and/or the culture that promotes the death and/or criminality of black boys all of which had everything to do with influx of crack into our communities and/or the lack of employment for black boys and/or the lack of education of black boys and/or the programmatic fear of black boys and/or how could i give birth with the chances so high that my baby would be a black boy. And all of these things in light of our first black president. And so I wondered, what does any of this have to do with standards of evil and how?

I should say now, that I wasn't alone, that my collaborator, a gentle and liberal, shy white gay guy of nearly 40 who, upon seeing a previous performance of mine, ripe as it were -as it always is- with music and rage, asked if I would like to join him in the work of forging this new Zillah for the new age. Whereupon we agreed that there was something both politically relevant and resonant in this nascent work of Kushner's. There was fodder here and potential for highly activated fun, a well fund of material to be drawn upon right now that made all of it so urgent and necessary and timely and wise. I took to the script, then took to him my list.

And with this list I also mentioned my own fear of the program of black exceptionalism, which depends on the success of a few to negate the stagnation of the whole. I mentioned the rising reactionary fear of white men in the face of what is perceived to be reduction of their inherent, inborn, institutional power. I mentioned my concern with the rapid rise of punitive imprisonment in this country, how quickly it approaches Holocaust numbers for black men; how all of this might frighten not just her, but also me, and when we're calculating standards of evil, we might need to include this new Jim Crow or this trans-atlantic residue or the passing down of the long history of the slave or *something*.

Any and all of this, I said, would help us see what it is to be black and gay and woman poor and Zillah living in 2014 under a president who is not Reagan, no, but who is the face, still, of an empire — *an empire* — with a storied past that has not much changed. To which he replied: I feel like bringing in slavery, somehow, overshadows Hitler's evildoing. To which I wanted to say *yes, exactly*. Which my face must have said for me, for he responded, as only a liberal can, that doing that would be distracting. He had lists of his own, of course: AIDS and marriage; the covering up of Catholic pedophilia and other unjustly confounded homosexual perversities.

Needless to say we disagreed. But the depth of our disagreement, my body had not yet known. In a meeting with this director and with the production team all assembled: assistant director (white), costume designer (white), producer (white), stage manager (white), set design (white) lights (white), and myself, he told us, our shy and kind and liberal (white) leader, why he had chosen this play. It was the early 2000's, he said, his hair was curly, he said, he was freshly fallen in love with a sweet, sweet man and he realized, he said, that if he wanted to marry him, he couldn't. He realized, he said, he didn't have the same rights as his parents. He realized, he said, he was a second-class citizen. To which they all awed.

And I thought, how nice, to have lived well into your thirties, at least into a new millennium before having realized the second classness of your lived life. How sad to have to ever realize it. How long I had known this for myself. How many times I was reminded. How, forever, it will be. How hopeless the reaching for relief. How could I have babies in this regime? How could I grow here in these bright, white rooms? What room for me in these bright, white rooms if not for novelty, if not only a cadence of rage to play mouthpiece for a revolution that is not my own but that lives always in and on my body? What is it that they were asking? Is this what *allowance* looks like after all?

None of this I said of course - because there are boundaries for black girls, especially in talking revolution in small rooms full of white men - but all of it I felt acutely encroaching in on the neatly assembled margin I had grown so comfortable in. And suddenly the stirring up of some ancient residue, making my abdomen flex in the presence of this, the largest always evil: a perpetual re-marginalization of the few by

the slighted liberal more in the name of progress for all. And all of this before proving my intelligence and seeking some other approval from another tower of a titan and meanwhile already all this silence, again, in my lap.

Maybe I'm just sensitive to erasures, but when our director left my name off of our official publicity documents, it was me who had to remind him that I was a part of the team. And when Tony read my emendations and thought them too *distracting*, the men had that conversation without me. And when choices were leveled about the changes to be made, a plan was put forth for me. Oversights, he said. Just oversights. To which I wanted to say *exactly*: how easy to be overlooked, to be the unintended casualty despite having been working always, regularly, from the beginning, alongside you. How easy to be both black and invisible no matter how much work you do.

And this is not only a matter of white and/or black. Some of my best friends are white. Every school I ever went to was all white, my education scraped together by my always-working parents. I have been hurt by, loved by, listened to and ignored by all manner of white folks, some with power, some without, some who don't know the difference between having it and not and all of them acutely aware of the micro slights in their macro lives. All talks with white folks don't go in any one way, but there is a pattern. And there is a perpetuation of the pattern that has all kinds of new names: liberal and/or oversight and/or democracy and/or freedom.

Because this is not only a conversation about collateral damage and the sophistication of the evil operations in 2014. This is not just a conspiracy theory or an ever-present paranoia that doesn't exactly translate across the decades. This is also about erasures and oppression in a liberal, liberated time. This is about character and authorship, approval and presentation, silences and schools of thought passed down over the ages. Permission. Parameters. Erasures. Residue. But mostly, it's about the black woman's profound ability to survive and to flex (and not so secretly) in spaces where often nothing else is allowed.

There is a certain kind of mourning that was born into my body. Recently, I was at home holding my grandmother's hand at the edge of her hospice bed. My family is poor and the pending loss of our matriarch made every day more costly. I was driving my grandfather's 20-year-old GM SUV, a clunking, clanking relic of our well-made past, that while almost immobile now, is rolling on still. I was fighting that day with one white man by proxy of another. He could have called me. He could have waited. He could have argued harder for my legitimate rage. I don't want to hear anymore about hope. To fuck with hope. Things are not ok.

And I was angry and lost and the hospice kept on calling because the body was going cold and the pulse could barely be found and the breathing, the breathing is scattered and shallow now. This perpetual panic I have somehow always known deep in my abdomen. And no one taught me to feel that, no one taught me to be attentive to that. It's a position of always having asked and though my mother is nearly blind now, somehow so surely she still sees everything. *Lauren*, she said, while I pushed our hand-me-down vehicle toward the place where my grandmother would die, *go whichever way you want, but just get us there.*

~*~

Part 3: radical in visibility

[notes on sharing space with white men]

~*~

that talk i never had

i find myself at the bar these days with white and black folk alike, casually dropping tony kushner's name as if he were my peer, as if he and i had ever spoken once. i hear myself saying things like:

so after we talked to tony...

or

so then tony called us and was like...

or

in our conversations with tony we...

or

i'm so mad at him right now

him being the author of "angels in america", *him* being the pulitzer prize winner, *him* being the man with that national medal of arts. and that "mad" being only mine and only because of some perceived, personal slight that was mostly imagined and perhaps unreal. because in my mind, it makes me a better, more accomplished, more noteworthy writer now that the man canonized in the norton anthology of drama had read *my* words, *my* interpretation of his themes and had the nerve to disagree. when all of that is only half true. because who knows how much he read. and whose lines are they anyway? and what does his disagreement have to do with me or my worth anyway?

still i find myself in bars, slugging beers and poppin off at the mouth about the philosophical argument we are engaged in, the resistance i am being met with, the persistence with which i am fighting, the distance between me and the titan on top of his tower. i hear myself waxing offense because *tony* didn't understand how important it was that zillah was black and i thought *tony* was radical but apparently not 'cause he can't seem to see or hear or fathom how not ok things are for multiply marginalized me and of course *tony* wouldn't let me criticize obama, what with that medal around his neck and how could *tony* possibly understand, what with how rich and conservative, poor old white *tony* had become. and so what if *tony's* hopeful, to fuck with faith and obama and his whole bullshit hope machine. none of that has done shit for my cousin in prison, my father fired again, my mother who taught my brother how to not talk back to the police. *tony is not zillah and if i am to be zillah then zillah has to be black.*

and oh, how high i had come, standing in these bars name dropping a genius as if i had worked as hard. as if i had lived the reality i am defending. as if i knew anything visceral about genocide in my lifetime, in my country. how noble, not-fair lauren, pushing so gallantly up against wall after wall after wall of white resistance.

but there was a day when i left one group of white men to meet up with another group of white men. and in the second group was my white husband who works every day teaching throw away babies how to read and also there was my white friend who puts his body between rightfully and rationally angry and disenfranchised black boy teens with short tempers and loaded guns. grunt working white men. understanding, allied white men. more sensitive about race and class and gender than i am white men. who taught me words like “entitlement” and “unearned privilege”; explained that “whiteness” was an entire working system to be contended with rather than this or that body in my way at this or that time or place. they, who between them, bought me first book of audre lorde poems and burned me my first lil wayne mix tape; who made me read octavia butler and peggy macintosh; who taught me sometimes white folks need safe space to learn about themselves without fear of a black woman who prides herself on being visible, who is not always so graceful in her being seen.

it was these two: both redheads; both sick often; both runts, as it were, with back hair and gummy smiles, slick talking white boys who are humble with their handling a certain brand of black woman in the bedroom, who know the hierarchy of oppression better than i do, who taught me that no matter the order in which you rank your marginalities, each of them are lower still than the institutions of whiteness and wealth. and because they love me, they cut me little slack; they have no patience for my victimhood; they don't support me shrinking or my little lies or grand gestures or easy wins. and so when i referred to myself as *author*, they told me yes and no. and when i said “what i said i would have said,” they challenged whether or not i would be so brave. and when i tried to magnify my micro slight, to blame the whole of white men for the wide of my frustration, they just listened and nodded, sipped their beers and waited, waited, for me to ask how they managed the wars that were their own long and hard and honest working days.

by proxy

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 21

to me

I think, if I can boil it down a bit. Tony is not saying bad things are not happening now. Rather he feels uncomfortable drawing the parallel between people who are attempting change (Democrats) and the standard of evil. When writing the play, he felt that the 1980s was a direct parallel to the political upheaval of the 1930s of Weimar Germany into the Third Reich (the standard of evil), yet no one was using it.

That standard has occurred in the 1930s/40s ...and then again in the 1980s. And, although there are still terrible things happening in the world today, he feel is a bit irresponsible to direct Zillah's vitriol at Obama because he personally isn't systematically upending years of progress unchecked by society. Because of this difference he thinks that we cannot draw a direct parallel from 1933 and 1984 to today. He does think that the policies that Reagan put in place are still affecting us today and drawing the line back to Reagan, if possible is an option.

But really what I think he is asking us to look more closely at what world Zillah finds herself in today and what parallels can we find with Weimar Germany and from there figure out her relationship to the play and the audience. His suggestion was that early Weimar Germany and today more closely resemble each other than today does with Late Weimar Germany and to use that as a starting point. He did say that it is the hard road and would result in a completely different Zillah.

The question, I think, will become what is Zillah's new relationship to the 1930s play given her political circumstance are not directly parallel to Agnes?

-s

benign grief or bill moyers asks toni morrison

"bill: the master narrative, what is- that's life?

toni: no. it's, uh, white male life (chuckles). the master narrative is whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else. the master fiction. uh, history. it has a certain point of view. "

every black woman with grey hair is a miracle. only one of them was my grandma. and now she is gone.

FYI

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 21

to Martins, me

FYI. Lauren, you are totally welcome to come. I think Brian will be a good resource.

Scott

Begin forwarded message:

From: Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Subject: News and a meeting?

Date: February 21, 2014 at 5:33:44 PM EST

To: BRIAN KULICK

Hi Brian,

I'm happy to report that Tony Kushner called me today to discuss my proposed changes to Zillah in A Bright Room Called Day. He didn't say no and was okay with us continuing our exploration, but in a slightly different direction. I understand what he is saying, but I was wondering if I might be able to talk it all through with you as I feel a little confused in some areas and I thought you, knowing Tony and being the smartest guy I know, might be able to help me sort it out

Would you have some time to meet with me? My schedule is pretty flexible.

Scott

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 21

to Scott, Martins

Ok, Let me know what his schedule is like. I'm pretty flexible too.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 24

to me

FYI. This is what I sent to Brian.

Begin forwarded message:

On Feb 21, 2014, at 11:10 PM, BRIAN KULICK wrote:

Hi Scott,

I'm so happy to hear that Tony was able to get back to you and was open about potential changes. More than happy to get together. My problem is: 1). just getting over a terrible cold (so may need a couple days before we meet) and 2). I am not intimate with this play. I read and saw it almost 20 years ago — so I would not be up on the nuances of the piece. That said, maybe Thurs. of next week in the afternoon.

best,

b

From: Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Date: February 22, 2014 at 2:00:30 PM EST

To: BRIAN KULICK

Hi Brian,

Yes very exciting. I can meet Thursday afternoon. I have a doctor's appointment in the West 70s from 3pm - 3:45pm but other than that, I'm open. What works for you?

By the end of my with Tony conversation he seemed into the idea of adapting her for today and said he wished he had more time to help and would try when he could. Basically he said I have two options, do it as a period piece as written or really explore a whole new Zillah by taking a hard and rigorous look at how our time parallels (or doesn't) the Weimar period of the representational play. I would love to go over what I think he said with you to help clarify my thoughts and ground them in the dramaturgy. You don't need to be intimately familiar with the play for us to talk, it would be just good to have someone who knows him and has a dramaturgical and political mind to go over what he said. I'm sure can lead you through what the play is doing now and also what we tried to do and where we are now.

I know you are a big reader, so if you felt like looking at the script here is a link (no pressure):

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/7acymksbi9i89dm/A%20Bright%20Room%20Called%20Day.pdf>

And attached are our current Zillah proposal that he wants us to change. And for context, this is a summary of what I think Tony was saying:

In the draft we presented Tony we attempted to draw a line from Hitler to Reagan today by making Zillah a hard liberal unhappy with the Obama administration because of their constant roadblocks set in the way by the extreme right. So, update vilified Obama in a way to get to those who were stopping him. Zillah was disappointed that he did not live up to his promise. Tony he feels uncomfortable drawing the parallel between people who are attempting change (Democrats) and the ultimate standard of evil. When writing the play, he felt that the 1980s was a direct parallel to the political upheaval of the 1930s of Weimar Germany into the Third Reich (the standard of evil), yet at the time no one was using it. And now today we do not have that direct parallel, hence the problem with Zillah.

That standard of evil occurred⁵ in the 1930s/40s ...and then again in the 1980s. And, although there are still terrible things happening in the world today, he feels is a bit irresponsible to direct Zillah's vitriol at Obama (even if the underlying anger is at those who block his progress) because he personally isn't systematically upending years of progress unchecked by society (like Reagan and Hitler). Because of this difference he does not feel that we cannot draw a direct parallel from 1933 and 1984 to today. He does think that the policies that Reagan put in place are still affecting us today and drawing the line back to Reagan, if possible, is an option.

But really what I think he is asking us to do is look more closely at what world Zillah finds herself in today and what parallels can we find with Weimar Germany and from there figure out her relationship to the play and the audience. His suggestion was that early Weimar Germany and today more closely resemble each other than today does with Late Weimar Germany and to use that as a starting point. He did say that it is the hard road and would result in a completely different Zillah.

Ultimately the question will become what is Zillah's new relationship to the 1930s play given her (and our) political circumstance are not directly parallel.

.....Okay. Well that's a lot to chew on! I can explain it all more in person, but that's a BIG heads up!

best,
Scott

⁵ (Sic); Note: all typos in the email portions of this essay are as written.

a frustrated translation

and then brian kulick came to a rehearsal:

scott:

in short tony said, either do my play as written, as two pieces of history, or take the hard road and recreate zillah's function with her in relationship to early weimar germany. in which case she has hope that obama can make the change but things can go bad if we don't remain vigilant against the evils of our time, namely the tea party

and i think that the problem here is giving credibility to a movement that is increasingly losing credibility by acknowledging them as powerful at all

brian:

the hard thing is that zillah has to in some way ask the audience to look at this play about a time when things went terribly bad and ask them to think about the things that they're doing and make them think about their level of responsibility and involvement.

scott:

right

brian:

the impulse is to state the obvious via negativa - TK has always been hopeful that things will get better.

but zillah is not tony

brian:

still, the catastrophist doesn't help. hope can put the monolith in perspective. there is no practical good to write obama off as inconsequential, it's doing a disservice; he was able to help maintain this country and it required him to make terrible compromises. he needed to be center.

but zillah is radically left. she's supposed to be further left than the rest of any or all of us. she's supposed to be unreliable.

brian:

she doesn't have anyone to help her prove that she's unreliable. she is in a play of her own. so the analog does not exist. as a polis, she's supposed to help us draw a conclusion. he was using her to help us see the situation clearer.

and do you not think there are people who don't see this present day situation clearly?

brian:

there are people out there who are systematically trying to dismantle all the progress we may have made. go after the people who are really the problem, the tea party, the murdochs, because their idea of what the people are is so exclusive and not tied to the idea of the polis. go against the evil that has dispersed itself maybe she mourns the fact that there is no Reagan, that the evil is faceless, nameless.

scott:

that's what herr swetts says. the devil says, "i become even scarier now that i have become diffuse"

brian:

i think there is an interesting play to be written about obama's failure, but not this play. it gives in to an easy cynicism that is ultimately not helpful. go after those that are unleveling the playing field. discredit those people as much as you possibly can.

scott:

right. this is a world looking for a poster boy for those right-wing extremist ideologies, similar to early Weimar Germany.

unleveling

which is to assume that the playing field is able to be leveled. and that obama is a part of that evening out. which is to assume that we are closer now to a more democratic anything. but for the black woman, there is no leveling. there is only reaching. there is no lamenting there is only surviving. there is no *maybe she's upset that there is no reagan*. because there is still reagan. reagan has never left and won't leave as long as there is the crack baby, the welfare queen, the war on drugs still raging, which are all powerful imaginings turned destructive realities and this is the legacy of reagan and that is a legacy picked up from who knows how far back and this is what the gay white man can hide from that the any black woman can't. this that makes for every move a wrong move, an essential move, a typical move. makes for every day a tense day. makes for this jagged playing field on which i run and on which i have to remind you has never been safe. because welcoming is not inviting, is not allowing, is not recognition, really.

the list once gathered

zillah is worried about:

-the tea party

-koch industries

-foreclosure

-republican operation oxymoron

-the roll back of voting rights

-gerrymandering

-victimization of the majority

-stand your ground

-open attempts to re-segregate

-keep the gays away

-michael dunn

-florida state prosecutor angela corey

-marissa alexander

-disproportionate law enforcement

-mass incarceration

-stop & frisk

-the police state in black neighborhoods

-rising xenophobia

-laws that allow vigilante groups to murder kids or illegals or anyone with impunity

-who is and who isn't "american"

-the 1%

-affluenza

-state sanctioned dictators - emergency manager laws in michigan

-the vast right wing conspiracy

-birthers

or maybe this is just a list of what currently worries me.

on being short

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

In the end, why I chose bright room was because the play makes me question my own civil responsibility.

And I hope it challenges our peers to question their own role as citizens in this society and their relationship to government and civil liberties.

That is what the play does for me and what I hope ultimately it does for our audience.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27

to Scott

Totally.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

And I suspect that Machial and Cabaret do the same thing in different ways.

So, in light of that, Who is Zillah?

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

A woman who supports Obama and applauds his efforts (though also a by critical) and is paranoid of the extreme right and what it could do if you turn away to long

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27

to Scott

she is some one who gets how hard it is to move and moves anyway?

she is some one who has found a method of protest that works?

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27

to Scott

yea. maybe. but i don't think that paranoia has any faith.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

I do. If she has faith in Obama (albeit realistic) but fears that if people are too happy they will become complacent, retreat to the comfort of their room, and then the right will act when no one is looking. But if we keep vigilant in times of progress we can avoid a repeat of 1985 and 1933.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27

to Scott

so zillah 2014 is hopeful?

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

Not exactly. She has faith in governance but is paranoid of the danger of complacency.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27

to Scott

but isn't it governance that has consistently failed her?

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

well if her function, based on my reason for choosing the play, is that it makes me feel it's important to participate more in my government, is to not be Agnes and wake to audience up to participate she has to at some level want to work with and for the republic's betterment.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27

to Scott

ok, as long as we're willing to keep Zillah's original function in tact and to concede that in moving this way (against the extreme right) we are doing what Tony suggested, which is giving credibility to a movement that is currently losing credibility, then it makes sense to move in this direction.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

Yes. Those are concerns. Which we can bring up to Tony and Brian.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27
to Scott

Cool.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27
to me

If we accept T's premise that Z is in a parallel to pre-Weimar I can't think of another position that make sense.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Feb 27
to Scott

i agree. and it's a strong option. we'll have to concede something if we want to do the updates. but...

i would still defend our justifiably paranoid, not hopeful Zillah who can see, in a way that no one else can, a real comparison between this leader of the empire and past leaders of the empire. who is frustrated and pissed and distrustful of these moves toward making us comfortable. whose conspiracy theories stem from her blackness rather than her judaism or gayness and who believes a Holocaust is happening (or soon will) at the hands of this president... just in these subtle ways domestically (mass incarceration, florida, immigration detentions, Chiraq, diabetes, policing of black communities, etc) and/or other places (drone striking, selective international intervention, torture) and her paranoia lives in our inability to recognize these things as evil but rather as facts of life or personal problems or issues that are too overwhelming to change or impossible or whatever. and she wants us to see it, that there are black boys dying en mass in cities across the country but no one cares about these bodies and she has to figure out a way to make this make sense to people, to make them care about these deaths, to make it visible, but she's not hopeful that it's possible because barack is not Reagan and he's black and therefore can't possibly be advancing policies against people of color or because he's making "change." that ultimately her fear is that we could be lulled into a feeling of safety and progress which is not real... which is only a way to distract us while, i don't know, wealth and power are further concentrated into the hands of the few and the NRA lobbies for larger magazines for assault rifles and ... the expansion of the empire. so she's railing

against the Agnes' of the world and lobbying for a broader definition of evil to include these much smaller slights that add up in big ways over time.

in this case, though, we'd have to concede that our current evils don't have a figurehead, that people might think Zillah is crazy or didactic (which I think T is afraid of still) and we'd have to challenge T's notion that progress is happening and that there's reason to be hopeful. both options seem to end in the same place (trying to get people to move) but they ultimately have to deal with Zillah's outlook on the problem and her faith in the system and the people's ability to change the powers that be.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Feb 27

to me

I think that is a totally viable option. And it's reasonable to present both options to Tony as avenues to pursue before we go down another road.

the first road

Interruption One (1/16/14)

Dear Mr. President,

I know you'll never read this message. I am fully aware that messages don't even make it to the White House, much less the Oval Office where I doubt you ever even do any work anyway. All of these messages are piled up, picked through and sent to some civil servant decrypting engineer hauled in from MIT or China to look through them for cyber anthrax or webworms or whatever new virtual viral threat gets sent your way. And, be honest, the sane letters don't get read either. They just get their names put on your email list and every day we get an email, everyday, personally addressed and asking for support or money or support in the form of money... And for a while, I'll admit, I really thought you were writing to me for a minute. All that rigamarole about reading 10 letters a day from your constituents was bullshit after all cause I'm your constituent too Mr. President. And I see right through you Mr. Barack Obama – if that is your real name. I noticed your messages to me never made mention of my messages to you and that, sir, that is how I knew that my messages got sent to whatever place the other crazy and hostile messages go to die, go to get analyzed by the FBI; sent to live in some vast and massive server owned and operated by Google, stored on a rig off the coast of Portland, Oregon or Portland, Maine. I don't even send these messages anymore. I know the NSA knows who I am. You think I'm not privy to your undercover operations? If Amazon can send a drone to my doorstep, I know you can too! I know who you are too! But ask me if I care. I don't care! I pour into these messages all the loathing I can manage anyway. Pour and pour until they are so ripe, they are almost full to bursting with all the malice that I can manage.

And do you want to know why? Because I didn't just imagine that Gitmo is still open! Drone after drone is being dropped on to my dreamscape; Mr. President and nothing from your dreams can be made up, Mr. President. The only images our brains can conjure are things we have seen before and I believe, it is my firm belief, that anyone who puts their eyes on these words will absorb the toxic energy contained herein and it will seep into the deep recesses of their sub unconscious. This venom will be passed psychically upward – because even metaphysical bureaucracies pass things upwards. And in this way, through an informed network of eye contact and furrowed brows, the Under Secretary of Outrageous Falsehoods will blink in the general direction of the Secretary for Pernicious Behavior Under the Cloak of Night who will, on a weekly basis, scrunch his nose around you in cabinet meetings, will tense up in your presence before you drift off to sleep. Through unconscious assimilation Mr. President, wavelengths of contagious are being transmitted into your beautiful freaking face everyday. Every day, in this great country of ours, throngs of us are sending you encrypted messages. We wait for the day when all the bits and bytes of

detestation will crack that façade, will make you accomplish what you promised. We attack from all corners. Our day has come. You can try to stop me. You can raise the cost of WIFI again. I'll continue to blog, to keep record of your mishaps. I'm saving up for a petabyte external hard drive. For me and my cause, money is no object.

Love,
Zillah

another road

Interruption One (3/5/14)

Open Letter to the Would be Leader of the Hard Right,

To the flip flopping father of operation oxymoron: forgive me for interrupting your busy schedule but I thought it pertinent to let you know that I'm on to you. Just this yesterday you sent your minions to wax ineloquent on all your major syndicates, blabbering on about our weak president this and our tyrannical president that. One minute it's "magisterial power," the next minute it's "shocking weakness"? You call this "taking a stand"? You call this "illuminating a path to the original intentions of our founding fathers"? You think I can't read through your highly scripted rhetoric? I know it's no coincidence that three, THREE, of these so called tea party patriots all came up on Fox News spewing the same senseless sentences. Somebody wrote that nonsense and I know it was you, oh faceless master of the free market.

I can see between your tweets. Your movement thrives on our inability to pay attention. But I am not deaf to the rallying call of the indignant ignorant, the rank and file soldiers in the war on women. All these "amen Americans" standing their ground and praying away the gay, waiting for their poster child to show his face. We may not yet know your name but I can see your handiwork everywhere. #googlealerts I am watching you.

You may never read this message but I'm writing it anyway. I'll write one every day. And do you know why? Because someone in your network is tasked with watching me too. And it is my firm belief that anyone reading these words will absorb the toxic energy contained herein and that energy will seep into the deep recesses of their sub unconscious. Venom can be passed psychically upward – even metaphysical bureaucracies pass things upwards – and in this way, through an informed network of eye contact and furrowed brows, the Chief Operating Officer of Outrageous Falsehoods will blink in the vicinity of the Managing Director of Pernicious Behavior Under the Cloak of Night who will, on a weekly basis, scrunch his nose around you in board meetings, will tense up in your presence before you drift off to sleep. Through unconscious assimilation, Mr. *or* Mrs. Traditional Values, wavelengths of contagions are being steamed into your Sunday Best. All this work to keep you at bay.

You think your day is coming but our day is here. I am not alone. Every day in this great country of ours, I get a new Facebook friend who believes in progress. You can try to censor the internet. You can raise the cost of WIFI again. I'll continue to blog, to shed light on your darkness. I'm saving up for an external

hard drive. For me and my cause, effort is no object. You can't stop me. Don't you even try it. #fuckyou
#iamnotafraid #iamzillahkatz

ultimatums from the man who wrote the lincoln screenplay without black folks

write it the way i would write it now or do it the way i did it before. accept my premise that zillah would see it my way but believe me when i tell you she is not the playwright. change the words and keep function of her as a character completely or change the function of the character and keep the words exactly. don't do it without my approval but don't expect me to respond to your requests for approval. do it my way or do it my way. either way i am the gatekeeper. either way i am unimpressed. either way i decide what's intelligent. either way she doesn't work.

what tina can say that i can't or couldn't even though i tried (a hyperlink)

i recommended that zillah sing this song rather than “memories of you” because “memories of you” is sweet and sacred song and tina is a mohawk, is a spike heel, is a goddess, you know. and while the gay white men “yaaasss’ed” and “omg, can she please’d” and generally agreed on the overall fabulous that is a 1990s tina turner, the seriousness with which i made the suggestion was dismissed and the point, therefore, was missed. again, though, there is the question of who the “we” is in her song and who it is that doesn't need a hero because i am sure that i was the “we” but also that i did, certainly, want a hero and i knew barack obama wasn't it and so i would have opted, easily, for a woman with big earrings and strong legs to dance in my stead, to sing in my stead, to scream for me and pull me out from under a fear i could not escape from. i needed a way home and i was not quiet convinced that my day was coming. no one was going to save me. i had no hope. and fuck if it wasn't all or nothin.



We Don't Need Another Hero

Out of the ruins, out from the wreckage
Can't make the same mistake this time
We are the children, the last generation
We are the ones they left behind

And I wonder when we are ever gonna change
Living under the fear till nothing else remains

We don't need another hero
We don't need to know the way home
All we want is life beyond the thunderdome

Looking for something we can rely on

There's got to be something better out there
Love and compassion, their day is coming
All else are castles built in the air

And I wonder when we are ever gonna change
Living under the fear till nothing else remains

All the children say, "We don't need another hero
We don't need to know the way home
All we want is life beyond the thunderdome

So what do we do with our lives?
We leave only a mark
Will our story shine like a life
Or end in the dark? Is it all or nothing?

We don't need another hero, hero
We don't need to know the way home
All we want is life beyond the thunderdome

All the children say, "We don't need another hero
We don't need to know the way home
All we want is life beyond the thunderdome

notes from our first and second official rehearsal

in which i read for the first time the first draft of all the monologues in real time with an audience and the audience was, of course, only the cast all assembled and the production team all assembled and all assembled they were all white and there i was black dramaturg turned writer turned actress all at once, the objective audience and the solo performer all at once, all the eyes all at once and there was no time to talk when it was done and so necessarily there is only my unreliable memory to reflect what happened after or how i felt after and all i remember thinking and feeling first was that this is going to be impossible, impossible to divide myself in three parts, part playwright, part actress, part dramaturg. what is the word for the woman who is all three? and by all three i do not mean, black, gay and working class; i do not mean teacher, student and artist; i do not mean daughter, sister and wife; i mean the person responsible for writing these words, reading these words and investigating the function of these words overall, all at once. this is too many people to be all at once. it is always impossible to be all the me's all at once.

and so the way i remember all this came at me all at once:

she's too eloquent

you're such a good actress

i wish there was some one to direct it to rather than this abstract "would be"

what i'm missing is the venom which is weird because there's so much venom in it

i'm uncomfortable

i keep waiting for the next joke about modern technology

maybe you could try dear mr. koch

you wrote these words right?

in the original it was a woman reading a letter that she was supposed to have written but hadn't actually written

and in this one i was a woman reading a letter that i had actually written but i wasn't supposed to be that woman i was supposed to be the other woman: the not me woman and i don't know which woman that is anymore.

and that, the which woman am i problem, is only the first among the problems, because there are several other problems and namely the one of capacity and how much feedback is too much feedback for the writer, the actor, the dramaturg? how much information is too much information for the daughter, the sister the wife? how do we let these things be fixed but also fluid? flexible but also firm? how much change is too much change and how much change can we allow to happen really? if the actors need to be

off book by the 31st? if the script revisions are due the 31st? am i to be due and off book all at once. if the man who says we can won't say we can and the man who is the go between won't make it happen so he'll speak to me, argue with me, deal with my eloquence and arrogance and blackness all at once.

i'm having the acute anxiety of a woman who is a triple threat. how am i, lauren, to function in this world with all these responsibilities. i felt attacked and still responsible for what these words do or say or how they operate. i feel detached from the message, ultimately, in that it is not mine, in that it is tony's, in that regardless of whatever ownership i might feel over these ideas, my name might not be mentioned, my contribution might be made invisible, my body might be the mouthpiece for a man who says he is not this woman and if he is not this woman and i am not this woman then who is she and how much extra work will the dramaturg have to do to figure it out?

also, i am in mourning and that is alienating and painful too.

rehearsal day 3

started with a panic attack at the sight of the next days rehearsal call. i'm not going to rehearse at 9pm on a friday. i just can't rehearse at 9pm on a friday. i just can't. i just won't. i just don't want to. the week is too long. and especially when i have already been working. and especially when i specifically requested one day for myself. and especially when we are going to be filming a kickstarter video at scott's place from noon to 2 on the lower east side and i live on the west harlem side and to go from here and there and back again is too much. and especially when we could just rehearse from 2-6. because i'm free from 2-6 and he's free from 2-6 and we'll already be together. but the stage manager, colleen, said we're not supposed to rehearse without a stage manager even though we'll be doing the same thing we've done so far and if that's the case then all this time we've been rehearsing without a stage manager. and i told her i was unavailable on fridays because on fridays i need to plan my classes and grade essays and fuck my husband and drink and today is friday and you scheduled me anyway for a rehearsal that starts at 9pm and by 9pm i should be somewhere just after climax and we should be stirring ice into our bourbon. but there's nothing we can do about it she said. the schedule is already set, she said. and what the stage manager says, goes.

asking for money

we shot a video for kickstarter in which scott said, critics called tony and his play immature. scott smiled when he said he got a phone call from tony's assistant asking if he could talk right now. scott said he had been waiting for his phone call. so scott said yes. scott said his phone rang again a minute later. scott said he said hello and on the other end was tony. scott said they talked for 45 minutes about everything. scott said they talked about the presidents from fdr to clinton. scott said tony said that today our country is more like early rather than late weimar germany. scott said tony insisted zillah was not the voice of the playwright. scott said we would take the hard road. scott said he hung up and had the shakes. scott said a year ago he realized that he had different rights from his parents. scott said a year ago he realized he was second class. scott said he was reminded of his civic responsibility. scott said that's why he chose this play. scott said all this is a video asking for money.

scott did not say black. scott did not say poor. scott did not say, *no, i can't talk to tony right now because the woman i'm working with is not here to have this conversation with me.* scott did not say *let me try to call lauren to see if she can talk too.* scott said *yes* and left lauren to the narrative that she has already always known; the one with her marginally; the one with her afterthought; the one with her in a population still struggling to see some of this good fortune, to have some hope of any sort.

in the interim

my grandmother died. we couldn't have her funeral til three weeks later. and three weeks later, i still haven't found the time to process it yet. but i took a week off of rehearsal to go home and lay her to rest and to grieve the loss of my mother's mother and at home there was no time for that either. not between the building of the centerpieces and making of the programs and writing the obituary and scanning of the photos and the going through her closets and the getting my grandfather to eat by sharing his over salted chicken, his toasted bread and butter. there was no time between the crying and the cleaning and the hiding in the bathroom so my mother wouldn't see me weeping and the hugging, the hugging all the family, all those members returned after years and years away and my cousins who i was a kid with once and all that drinking now, drinking and drinking and pretending to be ok.

at some point, i will leave again, go back to my other work, that is not the grieving, that is not the daughtering, that is not the wifing, that is not the teaching, that is not the studenting, that is not paid but is still my work. i will go back to that and who knows when the floodgates will actually open. it will happen. it has to happen. but i am wearing my grandmother's sweater now. so i am ready.

a long year still going

february to february.

one wedding and two funerals.

one year full of taking no love or time with loved ones for granted.

i am answering my calls regularly.

i am wearing my grandmother's sweater.

it has more buttons than you would care to count.

but i count them. i count them all.

over and over.

costuming black

Martin Schnellinger

Mar 28

to Scott, me

Hey Guys,

I've attached a drawing for Zillah. It's a start, and, y'know, since it's a costume that has to be cobbled together from things that exist in the world, it's also very open to discussion. Let me know what you think. (shoes are not white; they are whatever color; black hopefully)

M



Martin Schnellinger

Mar 28

to Scott, me

Also, all the color in the jeans/pants is paint crust. I figured she paints the chairs since she's multimedia. Or maybe it's just all black paint crust, but I'm not sure how to convey that with a drawing.

Scott Ebersold <scottebersold@me.com>

Mar 28

to Martin, me

OMG. Its awesome. I love how she somehow looks black AND jewish in your drawing. LOL.

Love the green hoodie, the hair, the paint.

We were talking yesterday, that she might need a fantasy performance dress for the top of Act 2... The way we are staging it, it could be her dream.

-S

on being guarded

here is my armor
it shines like fresh water
you can't see it
your eyes have gone bad

when i'm in the garden
i feel like the spring time dew
i am the spring time
that you can't feel
because your heart has gone bad

anyway. i think that might be a song or a song might be in there somewhere in the garden & armor & dew parts. but who has time to write songs right now. i need my writing to work toward another thing; the start is the same though:

when he told me that i would sing the song in an angel costume i thought he was joking. it was an email. an email from a frumpy gay man who was a costume designer from yale, who was balding and who loves cheese and who bites his nails and shops exclusively at target for cheap, non-specific clothing; he sent the email. he said,

*when you mentioned fantasy costume,
my gut reaction said cheap angel costume from a halloween store
with wings and halo
a nod both to zillah's multi-media, guerrilla art
but also a nod to The Angel from Angels in America
She was, after all, the ultimate interruption.*

that could be fabulous

said the other gay man, the director man, who i wonder if i need to say is white, whose non specific t-shirts cost \$100 or more.

especially as we might not be able to get the karaoke machine

he said. and that was it. i tried to articulate, after the fact and tactfully, that i didn't like it, that the song that bette midler sang and rosemary clooney sang and judy garland sang, this song, i wanted to say, will be sufficiently ridiculous when i sing it already. i mean i'm black. isn't a non-specific black woman singing a song that people specifically remember as being sung by white folks even though it was written by a black man with long fingers and round glasses who bootstrapped himself into self defined stardom by chain smoking at a piano, whose "shuffle along" musical started all this nagging question about whether or not i could adapt, about what kinds of blacks can, in fact, adapt; isn't that kind of homecoming brechtian enough?

i never said it like that. not out loud, because i couldn't. because i was inarticulate then. how eloquent articulation can be in retrospect or worse, in the moment right after what you did say, the coming litany of "what i shoulda said was..." and really all i did say was:

is this a quick change or no?

but by then, no. it is decided. so. i will wear the white costume with the tinsel halo and the mesh sleeves and the silver belt and the tulle overlay and the fur that felt real but couldn't be because this costume is already beyond our budget. i will wear it. i will sing this magic song that ella fitzgerald sang and sang, so slow that no one could find the time to hear it right or remember. she sang it but she was not happy. i will sing it but i won't be happy. and i won't be funny, because i am seriously black and being happy or satisfied or funny is a choice, a loaded, often unsafe choice, and because my armor. my armor. this armor i have adorned and advocated, all my life, for. for a recognition of my own value; the potential of my own adaptability; the consideration to be emailed before or alongside the fact; to be taken seriously because usually to be the only black woman in the room or the play or the email chain is to provide some sass, to laugh with mouth open and head thrown back; to take care, lest my tone be misunderstood; to be unabashedly reactive and preemptively self-referential so that everyone else can be comfortable with how much space this skin can take up in any given room.

she's probably just overly sensitive.

she's probably just having a bad day.

she's probably just mad

about this or that black thing that happened in the world.

when in fact, i am just exhausted and still having to carry my heavy, heavy armor. which shines like so much polished bronze. a copper tone is so good on me. autumn is my spirit animal. my undertone is on the orange side of yellow. and i practice this. i practice this all the time. can't you see?

on revision

here is my armor
it shines like fresh water
you can't see it
your eyes have gone bad

when i'm in the garden
i feel like the spring time dew
i am the spring time
that you can't feel
because your heart has gone bad

come home, i miss you
i'm tired, can you come home
can't sleep without you, come home
drop what you're doing, come home
i need you please come home

here is my armor shiny as water
you see through me like water
like springtime dew
i'm cold i need you

i see now that before what i was writing was some part zillah, some part lauren and all of it searching still to find a place. it is both inspiring and scary how adept one can become at both being and not being themselves. to sometimes to say: *lauren, you will be behind the scrim with your face hyper magnified, or then lauren, you will say* when all the while it is zillah who will be back there and zillah who will say evil, cracker, all the things lauren wrote for her but can't say candidly. not in real life. and how strange to hear myself, then, say *i don't think i would do that, or it feels like i would roll off the lawn chair and scramble into the darkness*. and even still it's not all the way sane to hear yourself say, *i don't think she would think that or she wouldn't say it like that*. it is both scary and inspiring how your self can leave and come back to you. how many compartmentalized places we are able to divide ourselves into. if this is the acting class i never had to take, then, as far as i can tell, acting classes aren't safe. hoffman died this year. drugs, lots and lots of little empty bags of drugs in the bathroom. and what of it? he was just a man. he was just a man who found so truly the depths of other people inside himself, then let himself be embodied by these people. sad and sick people from whom he could never escape. well i assume. that's what they say happened to ledger too and all those others. so many blacks who i cannot name right now. so may minstrels wheeling about and turning about for largely white audiences, who contorted themselves for white audiences, who laughed and laughed and laughed anyway. all these blacks who could be anybody everybody else wanted them to be but couldn't even name themselves.

i've never been good at keeping a journal

but after all this while, another draft was managed⁶

⁶ see appendix 3

revision revisited:

come home

i miss you, i'm tired

can you come home

can't sleep without you

please bring yourself back home

drop what you're doing, come home

i need you, could you please come home

here is my armor

shining like water

you see through me like water

whatever i'm sorry come home

i won't fight if you just come home

all the small differences that matter so much to me and i imagine are so trivial to you.

on public intellectuals

i ask my students today what makes a public intellectual. it took them a long time before they decided on audience.

i wrote a song today.

i wouldn't call it a song. would you?

a defensive translation

and then anne bogart came to a rehearsal:

we need to fall in love with zillah first and then we can fall in love with agnes. zillah creates the vision and then agnes lives it. because i'm not getting the journey inside it. the beginning i don't believe. i don't understand my relationship to zillah, which is the key. lauren, what are you doing? who are you talking to?

i'm talking to you.

yea but you're not. in general everyone is going for a home run when they need to be going for a line drive. they need to be more threading the needle with each line. they need to act. a little bit more of the basic stuff. as you craft this, it's not just what you put out but what you get back .

you're my first audience so it's kind of hard to imagine what i'll get back

yea but you can imagine that. it's your job to imagine that. the fiction is for you to figure out. you do something to get something back not to get nothing back. all of this is going one way. and what you get back doesn't always do what you want it to do.

i don't understand that.

*exactly. sometimes it understands. sometimes it laughs. sometimes it is seduced. sometimes you have to feel ten and show three. your greatest strength is your greatest weakness. but you're relaxing inside that. you need to use your craft more.
more.
more.
more.*

post anne notes

i cried on my walk home from the connelly to the f train. partly because it was late and i was exhausted. partly because i happened upon the head of the dramaturgy department earlier in the day when i went to pick up my girl scout cookies and he told me that it was, in fact, possible for me to have my pomp and circumstance, my graduation ceremony if i wanted it, that he and i could work something out. and it was earlier, then, that i wanted to cry, because i had made it in my mind impossible and sometimes you don't want to hear what is possible. so i wanted to cry then but i am just getting the chance to now, on my walk to the f train on the lower east side and that's partly because i'm wondering how many girls cry every day on 2nd ave and partly because i had felt the best about this performance of these monologues, because i felt it was coming together and partly because anne was not impressed. was unmoved. was leaned in, but stone faced. was ever wanting more, more, more.

there was a drug addict, she said, a man who used too much acid that lived in the commune with her when she was a young hippie. he used to play with the cabinet door. hitting it closed so hard and it would come flying back at him and he would laugh and do it over and over. it wasn't funny, she said, because it was clear that he had done too many drugs, but it was like what theater is, she said. sometimes they give you what you want. sometimes they don't. and you *can* imagine what that will be. and what i didn't imagine is that she would be so unmoved by me. would be so wanting more of me. and i was crying because i was tired. because i had left my cookies in the dressing room. and the roaches were gonna love me for having done that. and i was crying because scott didn't seem to see me. how long my day had been. how much dramaturgy i had already been. and he should have released me. he should have let me go home. he shouldn't have asked me to switch from 'turg to actor again and back. he should have made me go home and protected me from that feedback. or he should have been thankful or sorry for asking so much. he should have done at least that.

keep it real

i just don't know that she works. unless work is a sort of safe way to put on display the contemporarily embodied acceptable struggle porn of your day, a story which must be both familiar enough and yet explicitly unsaid enough so as not to disrupt the representational play or ostracize the viewer, but still well enough embodied so as to both implicate and placate an audience all at once. all the while keeping them thoroughly entertained. throughly reminded and shown and told and anticipated and imagined. i guess all there really is, is a measure of acceptable distance. cause here it is, this overwrought, overwritten, nascent genius' early stage play in the hands of a younger, blacker playwright (if that is what i am); the first role to allow me all my moving parts as thinker, writer, performer, singer and zillah is so often written out, even *tony* tried to write her out, neaten her up, give her some context, help her to fit, make her work and all this even before she was black, she was already such a problem.

this is not a role that can be played by some one who's being has never been a problem. keep it real. he published both versions because neither version was satisfying. neither version was more than theory. neither version was comfortable enough. and now in these black hands it is maybe too close to implicating him too because he is keeping the door closed to my versions and the gate keepers have always been white and here i am a black girl unafraid to say that that list of gate keeping whites includes gay, jewish, tony too.

self reverend

we black folks love to be self referential don't we? better self referential than reverential. can't nobody stand a preachin' ass black chick. na mean? anyway, as i was saying; i had said it once before; and it had been known; so you already know; i let them know again anyway; dropped knowledge; broke it down; see what i'm sayin; that's what i'm talkin' bout; choppin' it up; flippin' the script; pickin' up what i'm puttin' down; yadidamean; yadida talkin' bout; jaw jappin; smell me; shot callin'; out the side'a ya neck; talkin' all that mess; that woo woo woo; spittin' game; lettin' em know what it is; what it be like; real talk; holla at me; break' em off wit a lil somethin' special; schoolin' these fools; snappin' off; keepin' it thorough; makin' it do what it do; doin' me; nah'mean; cause i'ma do me regardless; say word; word; say word; word. word up; word; word; word; word; word is bond.

first to arrive, last to leave

monday: i think he may be asking too much. rehearse.

tuesday: a ticket to pay. 12 essays to grade. an essay to write. all of it, a blur. rehearse.

wednesday: entitled teens. asking too much. hey, fuck you. fuck you too. rehearse.

thursday: workshop with my woman teacher. my grandma's still dead. that's all that came of that. but thanks anyway. rehearse.

friday: move the car. this work don't pay. can't afford anymore tickets. write. rehearse. write. rehearse. all of it a privilege and a blur. rehearse.

saturday: groceries. laundry. learn the dance. get laughed at. feel fat. all in a day work. rehearse.

sunday: the lords day. blaspheme with my husband. drink in the sun. run my lines. if there is energy left for that.

so when it's 10:45 on the monday after it all and everyone has been released and you're just now getting on stage to work the monologue you wrote and rewrote to the liking of a man you never even e-met, you realize that you've been "on" for at least 14 hours today already and it's just now time to start the work of being watched deliberately, questioned specifically and pointedly so. and your director is on the last bit of his brain too and everybody's temper is on a short leash and your producer isn't even thinking about paying you cause he don't have to. and suddenly all the labor of it all is flooding over you in an unregulated wave of frustration because the play that begins and ends with lines that you have written and rewritten, you realize, is not about you and you know somehow now that to read these words that you have poured over, to play these lines, is to still somehow be second billing to a man who argued at you rather than with you, to a director who calls it all "mine" rather than "ours." which is probably why he didn't ask if you wanted to write something for the program. which is probably why he didn't ask if you wanted to be in the interview for the school paper. which is probably why it's so easy to be over sighted no matter how visible you may be. which is probably why that poor woman from your school, that poor woman student who is missing, was out so late on the day she never came home because she was probably over working to prove herself, she was probably traveling home alone, late at night, from the lower east side, too tired to be vigilant, too caught up in being over sighted to pay attention to her surroundings. she was probably taking some unnatural risk for the benefit of someone who might not even remember to mention her, for the record, by name.

for the record

Columbia Daily Spectator: MFA candidate tackles Kushner's 'A Bright Room Called Day' for thesis

By SARAH ROTH Spectator Senior Staff Writer

April 15, 2014



BRIGHT LIGHTS: Laralu Smith and Sara Thigpen star in "A Bright Room Called Day," by Tony Kushner, CC '78.

Courtesy of Martins Jukna/Talya Chalef Photography⁷

A School of the Arts student's most recent production will explore the notion that history repeats itself with "A Bright Room Called Day" by Tony Kushner, CC '78.

The production, which runs April 16-19 at the Connelley Theater in Alphabet City, is the theater direction thesis project of Scott Ebersold, SoA '14. The play is being put on by Columbia Stages, which produces a series of shows directed and acted in by students in the School of the Arts as well as other actors and playwrights.

⁷ note, this is how the photo appeared in the printed version of the school paper.

“A Bright Room Called Day” brings the audience to Weimar Germany on the eve of Hitler’s ascent to power. On New Year’s Eve 1932, Agnes Egging and her friends gather in her apartment as they attempt to come to terms with the dramatic political changes about to sweep their nation.

Interspersed within this story is that of Zillah Katz, a 21st-century armchair activist deeply concerned about the rise of the far right in our modern political landscape.

The show was originally written by Kushner in response to the Reagan administration’s lack of response to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s.

“He [Kushner] uses it as an analogy to point out that what was happening in Germany then was relatable to what was happening in America then,” said Ebersold. “The characters in this play are completely immersed in their political passions. They are all trying to avoid or confront the political evil.”

While originally written in response to a particular political situation, Kushner purposely wrote the play to be revised to keep pace with the modern political climate. As a result, Reagan-era conservatism is replaced in this production by the rise of Tea Party politics and the far right.

“I feel that it is important to make any play have an immediacy in popular culture,” Ebersold said. “For me, this play asks the audience to question their own involvement in their government.”

“There’s a lot of technology brought in,” Kristopher Dean, who plays Berlin communist Emil Traum, said. “Not only do we use a lot of technology in the play to show how the woman activist is spreading her message but ... how social media and big business and corporate interests pay for political power.”

While the means of activism have certainly changed, Kushner’s play examines the universal desire for stability that permeates political movements.

“In Weimar Germany, people were desperate for an answer to their problems, and that answer came most emphatically in the Nazi Party,” Dean said.

While deeply rooted in familiar debates, at its core Kushner’s play explores the very human nature of politics, focusing on the two women, who, while separated by space and time, share a very similar struggle.

“The characters in this play are completely immersed in their political passions. They are all trying to avoid or confront the political evil,” Ebersold said.

Just like the political landscape it describes, “A Bright Room Called Day” is mutable and ever-changing.

“Every single minute of the play is changing,” Ebersold said. “Something for people who not only want to be entertained but also challenged.”

“A Bright Room Called Day” will run April 16 to 19 at the Connelley Theater on East Fourth Street. Tickets are free with a CUID.

cropped out



backstage notes to self

prologue: krystal cues. desk light, computer goes up - watch slide. light goes out w/ Agnes at the threshold

- I. where is the light? surge protector? learn the fucking words.
 - A. newspaper creepy time
- II. strip down. donald trump - i would believe you! gasp. roll. newspaper? lounge chair? in the wings? bring the sweatshirt too? what is going to happen with all of my clothing?
- III. light switch? german book! projection clicker. look at projections. cage light! projections - keep the shit straight! don't put too much stock. kitchen light, cage off, kale, kitchen off. **KEEP THE CLICKER**
- IV. mic first, then costume, stage right enter and exit! when do i go on stage for V?
- V. reach out arms. she still can't sleep restless like me. bring your glasses!
- VI. boom! this is clearly your favorite one. for some reason the desk gets caught... something to be prepared for. clicker in your pocket? desk light. then look at house lights. take the chair.
- VII. enter from stage right.
- VIII. crawl in. enter from the right.
- IX. creep behind the back. stand in the doorway.

a frustrated translation

and then brian kulich came to rehearsal (and slept through most of it):

*does zillah speak at the top? how soon does she come in with the dear mr. president?
because the story telling of the '91 version, that she was an american
perhaps living in this haunted world, helped me calm down.
i didn't have to figure out what she was doing there.*

do we want people to calm down?

*the whole act feels a bit drifty vis a vis, what is zillah's relationship to this whole world?
in '91 she was working with memory which is more prosaic, which, in that set up was easier
so I could just relax in terms of what her role is and what her relationship is.*

do we want people to relax?

*what I'm not seeing yet is... here she doesn't have any technical support to show me
how she's linked to the world. anything you can do to help me link her
anything to help me understand that... and relive that
"why is she here and what is her relationship" question*

in the '91 version she was too diluted. too many steps removed

*but her being in Germany alleviates the storytelling anxiety.
the public theater version took care of me.
so i could then go "oh!" and in this case, she's doubly distanced*

...

because of the scrim

...

also, i wonder if she changes over time?

...

*she always has the same off centered, manic energy.
she kind of stays in the same zany zip code.
we've already been amused*

...

*but if we think Zillah is changing in the second act,
there is disquietude in that. we have to see her being unnerved
rather than always so buoyant and fun and youthful*

...

*the more that she gets caught up in the triangle of history the better,
except just a little slower so i can follow it
zillah doesn't have to move faster.
because she's something new
because she's coming at an obtuse angle.*

post brian notes

doesn't matter that he was sleeping. doesn't matter that he's tony's friend. doesn't matter that he's biased. doesn't matter that he wishes we would have chosen the other version. doesn't matter that he would have opted for easy. doesn't matter that he didn't listen. doesn't matter that i don't say *mr. president* or that he was the one that said we should mention the president, said we should go for the murdochs and so we did. doesn't matter. doesn't matter that he doesn't know me. doesn't matter that he was sleeping. sleeping. sleeping almost every time i was on stage. doesn't matter that all i heard was that i was uncomfortable; novel; unnerving; too fast; too buoyant; too youthful; too black; all i heard was i had failed at writing, performing, translating again, this black for this the wide, wide, sleeping, white world; that i will always have to explain what i'm doing here; how i work; slow it down so you can understand; that my just being here is not enough; no matter what i'll always be a drifter, unlinked to the central character in this untethered american drama; doesn't matter that it's the plays fault, it'll always feel like my fault; it will always be a problem that is emotionally mine; doesn't matter what you say. doesn't matter what you say. this zip code is where i live. this zip code is my life.

doesn't matter what he wishes, scott said. scott said we solved "the audience engagement issue" and now we have to work on the "her relationship with agnes issue." doesn't matter if they feel the same to me, they are different issues. doesn't matter how many issues she has. scott said don't be discouraged. scott said we're so close. scott said tomorrow is another day.

doesn't matter about tomorrow. i'm too tired for tomorrow. too tired to be close and still not close enough. i still have other jobs to do. production emails to read. essays to grade. an hour on a train, all before this night is over. and morning. morning. morning always comes so unexpectedly soon.

tech, day 1:

all new things. all hurry up and wait. all day in a dark room for a play about a bright room. all day it's been beautiful outside i'm sure. all spring for the first time this long, long winter. all the while my husband finally has a break. all sweet sleeping in and staying up late and still i miss him all the time. all this back and forth on the train from sugar hill to alphabet city. all my life on the trains with all the hip looking youth having their sex and flirting in my face without me. all flaunting their freedom, their spring skirts and worn in t-shirts. all comfort and no stress. and all night i stay awake, wired. too wired. too much time away from home. too much harlem in the dark. too much all these days in dark and windowless rooms.

permission to have fun

Scott Ebersold

Apr 14

to Tracey, Sara, Julian, me, Kristopher, Jason, Beth, Laralu, Casey, David, Martins, Colleen, Krystle, Paul

Dear Actors,

Miss me? I miss you. I miss greeting you all at the top of the day and saying goodbye. Now everyone secretly slips down the scary stairs and re-emerges in amazing costumes. Below are my notes. Please note that I have edited these actor notes less than I normally would. They are a bit closer to how I dictated them. But you are strong people, you can handle it.... and you know I love you.

xo,

Scott

TECH NOTES 4/13/14

ZILLAH - Interruption 3. Hold the german textbook up to your left side a little bit so we can see you face.

ZILLAH - Top of act 2. The more fun you have with it, the more permission you give us to have fun with it. Also, please give Mr. Piano Man a physical location. When you say thanks you can give a nod or look in his direction. I think offstage R or possibly you see him through the window?

ZILLAH - Interruption 5. After "but when she does..."

ZILLAH needs to sense AGNES. This prompts her to continue by calling out to her.

ZILLAH - When you hold up the Bible, make sure to hold it in front of the light so we can see the title.

ZILLAH - I think you should end Interruption 6 saying, "In the Devil, D-E-V-I-L, I do believe."

ZILLAH - I can't hear you in Interruption 8.

ZILLAH - Interruption 8. When you're done, you can close the laptop.

Epiloge

What is Zillah doing? (Lauren let's talk at 6pm when you arrive)

-Scott

tech, day 2

*the more fun you have, the more fun we'll be allowed to have.
i think you have to allow yourself to be silly.*

all of these are notes for the scene where i sing a sweet song that i love by a songwriter i love while wearing an angel costume which i hate, while doing a choreographed dance in which i crawl on a table while a slideshow of hitler is rotating in the background. i'm not sure what else i could do which would or could further allow all of this to be silly.

i am trying to silence the saboteur in my mind. i am trying to let myself go. this is the edge of my comfort zone and upon approach, i don't feel silly. i feel like crying.

so i said aloud *i am afraid*. and once i said it some one heard me. and once he heard me, he reassured me. and, reassured, i learned something about the world that is ultimately reassuring. indeed, though i find jason insufferable most of the time he is also so sweet and so present and so when he told me that i *can* imagine a world that is divorced from this costume, that is apart from this foolish thing, that perhaps instead i could think of wearing an expensive negligee and singing to someone i love or that i'm a clown. just that i'm a clown. and that is what they call acting. because clowns get their power from people laughing at their misfortune. get your power. get your power. be a clown and get your power.

clownin

you know, actin a fool; showin out; bein' a mess girl; makin a mok'rey of the whole situation; you know playin' herself; buggin' out; whylin' out; assed out; rippin' & runnin'; playin' too much; hella outta pocket; hella crackalackin; toe up from the flo up; turnt all the way up'; gettin' buck wild; just bad out here; goin' dumb; gettin' stupid; gettin' weird; straight flith; cashin' in on cheap tricks; is she fa'real; quit lyin'; tell the truth; oh you ain't know; she showin out; so what; so what you sayin';

i'm sayin'; get free; get loose; get bruce bruce; but don't get it twisted; i ain't the one; na'mean; recognize; work it out; girl please; girl bye; you know you see me; stuntin' out here; giggin' out here; saddity out here; don't hate; been puttin' in work; been kept it 100; super gully; killin the game; gettin' it tight; yes, yes y'all; sike ya mind; makin power moves, 24/7; 730 on that ass; killin it; no half steppin'; all the way live; wreckin' shop; throwin' down;

be too easy; puttin' too much on it; nathan but penetration; just stay up; just stay up; stay up my nigga; stay up; just wheel about and turn about and jump just so, every time you wheel about and turn about and jump!

still not over

Scott Ebersold

Apr 15

to Tracey, Sara, Julian, me, Kristopher, Jason, Beth, Laralu, Casey, David, Dan, Martins, Adam, Matt, Paul, Martin, Andrew, Mohammad, Martins, Colleen, Krystle

Acting Notes 4/14 - 1st Dress

General

OMG. We did it! It was so awesome to see the who thing through. What a beats We are gonna take these folks on a wild ride! We spent a great deal of time tightening up cues and traditions after you guys left so tomorrow run might feel like a wild ride (in a good way). Here are some specific notes. Lots of wonderful work out there tonight. As always, please let me know if you have any questions.

Part 1

INTERRUPTION 1 (Pg. 16) - 8:27pm

ZILLAH - Because we can't see your face because of the fixed light. We are going to keep the table for this interruption in the same orientation to your body as it was in the Prologue. You can be on the same angle, but the table will be with the light facing your face.

ZILLAH - "Dear brothers Koch." should come IMMEDIATELY after your light turning on.

INTERRUPTION 2 (Pg. 48) - 9:05pm.

No notes.

INTERRUPTION 3 (Pg. 61)

ZILLAH - When you go to place for top of Interruption 3, hide your book. We could see it through scrim during Gotchling's exit for Scene 12.

ZILLAH - You should turn your light on the button of the transition music leading to your scene.

Part 2

INTERRUPTION 4 (Pg. 73)

This section feels like it needs to be louder and bigger. I've asked for the music to be beefed up but also at our next dress try having Zillah really go for more than Lauren can do. She is making a point, not trying to be honest. So she is keenly aware of the image she is making and totally in on the joke and irony.

INTERRUPTION 5 (Pg. 77)

ZILLAH - This monologue needs to go faster. She is freaked out. She has to piece it together quickly.

INTERRUPTION 6 (Pg. 97) - 10:25pm

ZILLAH - the people who had class "WERE all affected" not "ARE all affected". Cuz they are all dead.

INTERRUPTION 7 (pg. 102)

ZILLAH - When you enter can you be more freaked out that you are entering this room. And when you leave, after you get to the door you need to turn with the chair legs leading the way out of the room to protect you from the ghost if she is out there.

INTERRUPTION 8 (123)

We are going to try it next time without the computer. She should enter on the sound cue and then crawl under the table to talk to us directly.

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Apr 15

to Scott

Hey!

I wonder if you could elaborate a bit more on what you want from the 4th interruption. I have to say that wearing an angel costume, singing a song and performing some choreography is already much more than Lauren can do so it's a little discouraging to hear that it's still not doing enough. Last night I tried to push the performance but I lost the song and before when I tried to focus on the song I lost the performance. It's cool if you want more but something specific would help because at this point I can't really rely on my brain to figure it out... or to do anything at all really.

Thanks,

L

lauren.a.whitehead <lauren.a.whitehead@gmail.com>

Apr 15

to Scott

p.s. I hope this doesn't sound defensive. I could really use the help.

Scott Ebersold

Apr 15

to me

Hi. Sure. No problem. I think you are doing a great job. I think what is really bugging me is that the music track is not full enough to give us the umpf I was hoping for. Since it is what it is, I'm trying to embrace it.

I think the next level that I'm hoping to bring out in your performance, which is totally already there, is her knowledge that she is being ridiculous in order to prove a point. You're doing it, I am just encouraging you to go further with it. Its a bit brechtian; that she is both performing and aware of the effect of her performance. Like, "Yes, that's right grrrrl. I'm wearing this angel costume and singing a sappy ass song to a Hitler montage. I know its ridiculous, but I am fabulous and you can't deny it." Snap-type quality. While still performing the song to the best of her ability. Its the "wink" to the audience part I want to bring out more. ... if that makes any sense.

Please let me know if that helps. And someday you can make me wear an angel costume. ... or something.

xo,

S

ritual magic

to be angry is to be searching. to be joyful is to be present. to be afraid is to be growing. to be gathered is to be warm. to be hopeful is to be practicing. to be is not to be. to be is to know.

before the first show, scott opened a little box. he told it was full of a shit and stardust. stardust to make us shine. shit to keep us humble. we pinched that shit and stardust. and though i wanted to taste it, i threw it over my shoulder like the rest. and then we shuddered among each other and set about our work.



opening night in grandmas green houndstooth shirt

downstairs

the actors, they embraced me. allowed me my debut. hugged me and kissed me. and helped me with my blush. the actors, they embraced me. forgave me my short temper. promised me many returns. encouraged this as my career and didn't care i hadn't studied. the actors, they embraced me. whispered *yes* in my ear. cracked jokes. ignored my fat. told me they were gassy, so i could be gassy too. all these actors, they just embraced me. gave me granola bars. asked me for help with their crosswords. strutted so i could learn to strut. felt so i could learn to feel. rubbed the tension out my shoulders. engaged my core. warmed up my voice. borrowed my face wipes. hugged me hard. made eye contact. and my husband sent flowers down. and a card that said "step into your power." so i tried.

what the stage manager says goes

BRCB Performance Report #1

House Count: 66

We had a wonderful opening night performance! The show was very well received. We had great energy and the cast was clearly having fun right from the top. The tech work we did timing the slides and sound really helped drive the play. The energy of an audience helped the actors a lot and we managed to shave some time off the show. There was a very loud long cell phone ring during Traum and Malek's first scene but it did not distract the actors. I'm still dealing with a few cueing issues, but nothing too terrible.

happy opening

Scott Ebersold

Apr 17

to Tracey, Sara, Julian, me, Kristopher, Jason, Beth, Laralu, Casey, David, Martins, Colleen, Krystle, Paul

Great first night! So excited to see the second one!

xo,

s

PART 1

Happy Opening! I was so thrilled and amazed by you all last night. I don't have a lot of notes, number one because you are awesome and number two because I wanted to watch the play as a whole picture.

Great job.

INTERRUPTION 1 (Pg. 16) - 8:26pm

ZILLAH – great energy, wonderful delivery.

ZILLAH - You can speak a little slower. This is the first time we're meeting ZILLAH. And it takes us a minute to adjust to her.

ZILLAH - Take one final look at the audience before turning your light out.

ZILLAH – At the end of your scene, you need to turn the brightness all the way down on the computer so we don't see the apple on the outside of the computer at the end of your scene.

INTERRUPTION 2 (Pg. 48) - 9:03pm

ZILLAH - Make sure to take off the black covering off the lounge before you sit in the chair and the lights come up on you.

ZILLAH - Lines around Xbox trilateralists.

ZILLAH - Don't say "Just call me paranoid" until you're comfortably seated. It's the button to the scene.

SM – the chair slipped at the end of the scene.

INTERRUPTION 3 (Pg. 61) - 9:21pm

ZILLAH – When you place the work light DS make sure it is on an angle toward the door so we can see the projection better.

ZILLAH - Great work on this scene. Biting. Funny. Great play with the audience.

PART 2

INTERRUPTION 4 (Pg. 73) - 9:54pm

ZILLAH - Absurd. Fun. Bravo.

INTERRUPTION 5 (Pg. 77) - 9:59pm

No notes.

INTERRUPTION 6 (Pg. 92) - 10:15pm

ZILLAH - "You know where I'm going right..." Great.

ZILLAH - You took all the notes for this scene really well. This scene is great.

INTERRUPTION 7 (Pg. 102) - 10:26pm

No notes.

INTERRUPTION 8 (Pg. 123) - 10:52pm

No notes.

EPILOGUE (Pg. 128) - 10:57pm

ZILLAH – When you kneel down you sink out of the hot part of your light, stay in the light until you're done with your line.

what the stage manager says goes

BRCB Performance Report #2

House count: 62

We had a beautiful show this evening and a lively audience. They truly enjoyed the humor of the show and were very responsive. The show was back up timing wise to what it has been previously. Several of the lines dropped in last night's performance were back this evening and I think they can account for so much a variance in timing. The actors also seemed a little more at ease this evening than last and the show has really taken off. The audience was especially enamored of Zillah's song at the top of Act II.

should we like her

Scott Ebersold

Apr 18

to Tracey, Sara, Julian, me, Kristopher, Jason, Beth, Laralu, Casey, David, Martins, Colleen, Krystle, Paul

Hi All,

It's such a thrill to see our hard work come together in such a beautiful show. It's a pleasure to watch you and it is so clear you love this story. It really has been an honor to work with you all on this and I am so thankful for your dedication, time and talent.

In addition to being smart, moving, clever, ever-changing, devastating, illuminating, confounding, complicated and epic ... this play is also super funny. If the audience laughs, it's okay to allow them the space to do it. Now... not too much space, of course... J

Looking forward to tonight. And, as always, I'm available for any questions.

-Scott

PART 1

INTERRUPTION 1 (Pg. 16) - 8:24pm

ZILLAH - This is a good pace and energy for this scene. Is there a place in this scene where you can connect with the audience? Like right after Love, Zillah? See Colleen and me about this tonight as it might effect cuing.

ZILLAH - Put the brightness on the laptop all the way down before you exit.

INTERRUPTION 2 (Pg. 48) - 9:01pm

ZILLAH - That whole sequence with putting down the plastic on the window worked much better tonight.

INTERRUPTION 3 (Pg. 61) - 9:20pm

ZILLAH - When you cross on stage, make a connection with the audience. We need to know that we should like her.

PART 2

INTERRUPTION 4 (Pg. 73) - 9:56pm

ZILLAH - Can your "Music please" be louder? It gets a bit lost and it is the gong that starts the act.

INTERRUPTION 5 (Pg. 77) - 10:00pm

ZILLAH - Take off black cover on lawn chair before you sit.

INTERRUPTION 6 (Pg. 92) - 10:17pm

No notes

INTERRUPTION 7 (Pg. 102) - 10:29pm

ZILLAH – Building the jo-ha-ku of Zillah’s fear; I think on the first hello ZILLAH needs to crouch in fear. Then on the second hello, grab the chair for protection.

INTERRUPTION 8 (Pg. 123) - 10:54pm

No notes

what the stage manager says goes:

BRCB Performance Report #3

House Count: 85

This evening's show was really fabulous, surely the best performance we have had thus far. The actors came in with even more energy than usual and really grabbed the audience from the first moments of the play. We got laughter with Zillah's first moment when she held up the HITLER book and her subsequent take to the camera. Scene 4 when Baz and Gotchling come in from the Nazi Rally was particularly snappy and engaging. The audience was really with it and especially loved Zillah. She even got some scattered applause following Interruption 6.

take a beat

Scott Ebersold

Apr 19

to Tracey, Sara, Julian, me, Kristopher, Jason, Beth, Laralu, Casey, David, Martins, Colleen, Krystle, Paul

Hi All,

What a wonderful show last night! I had a great time. I only have a few notes.

-Scott

Notes from Performance #3

ZILLAH - the page in the hitler book is clearly marked so you can find it quickly? Do you need a post it?

BACKSTAGE - was the rover placed correctly in interruption 1? Light seemed to be spilling on the scrim which made the projection hard to see

ZILLAH - interruption 3. "Millions and millions were dead" To make the chair sculpture make sense, after you turn on the work light take a beat to look at the chairs.

ZiILLAH - you are ON tonight. Really good job connecting with the audience. You're making lots of eye contact, pointing when you hear someone agreeing with you. All really good.

See you soon.

xo,

s

and still no time to celebrate

what the stage manger says goes:

BRCB Performance Report #4

House Count: 74

We had another really fabulous show this afternoon with amazing audience response. Everything was really clicking and the timing was great. The audience was caught up in the show immediately and applauded after Interruption 3. The tech was also really tight and the Devil change happened faster than it has ever happened before.

that moment when i lost the line

panic. panic. and the slip into the dark place. because if i am lost now how am i supposed to do this again today. i am too tired to do this again today. and this moment is forever. 14 seconds at least. and when was the last time you stood still for 14 seconds with more than 50 people waiting for you to move or say something and i am leaned on to this table with my sagging fat bag cleavage all exposed and i have been meaning to get a new bra and my hair is too damn tight and i shouldn't have worn lip gloss because activists don't wear lip gloss and i don't understand how people do this two times a day because this is my longest "run" ever and to these equity folks, this is bullshit, this is barely even previews, not nearly enough time to get to know their characters, they need at least 2 weeks to do that and already i'm exhausted and undertrained and i'm not even trying to conjure up the line i'm supposed to be giving right now, right now, right now this is just panic and i have more respect for beyonce now than i ever did before, that's for sure, it's for sure, now she's a robot, because i am lost in these lines and all these people are just waiting and i can see their faces waiting, 'cause the lights are on and who the fuck is brecht anyway that he should dictate what these lights should do and i don't care who will think this pause is delicious after the fact, or how big they laughed when i finally get it or if this happens to the best of them or not. i am not a robot. i am not a machine. i am in panic mode. and i don't like this panic mode.

and this is nowhere near close to any kind of death or genocide for real.

what the stage manger says goes:

BRCB Performance Report #5

House Count: 83

Beautiful closing night performance! The tech was a little soft, including an extended black out at top of show because one of the projectors was still doused. However, the audience response was very strong and the actors were on top of it all.

scattered applause over the course of a short run

we've gotten lots of good feedback on the re-writes

or

(while laughing hysterically) i really enjoyed your performance, really really loved it

or

you don't wear glasses in real life?

no

girl, cause you pushed those glasses up like such a nerd

or

i also thought well fuck that guy

or

i loved your angel

or

how much of that did you actually re-write

just the ones that had stuff about today...

oh, so all of it

no

(winking) just more than you're willing to say

or

*i'm resisting the urge to go home and do the internet thing now
to research all what you were talkin about*

or

you were the only part i liked

or

i just kept waiting for you to come back

or

bright room called day? more like bright room called zillah

or

(through weeping tears and a too long hug)

*i'm always the narrator,
the magical negro, who comments on the play
but is not a part of the play, really
it didn't feel like that with this though.
the way you did it. this was different.*

technically monday already

lately i have thought about my grandmother at or around 12:34 in the early morning and/or afternoon. i have come to notice this as coincidence or not. i have learned throughout this production process, a lot from bullshit tv. and in particular, the long island medium who helps me see there are no coincidences. that if i am thinking of my grandmother then that is an acknowledgement that she is with me. it's the reason that i wore her green houndstooth skirt to opening, even though our theater was on the deep, deep lower east side and apparently that's a thing, that's as new york as new york theater can be apparently. i may have been overdressed, but my grandmother was with me and i deserved to look fucking fabulous, didn't i? even while the seasoned actors are wearing torn jeans and work boots, simple dresses they can slip in and out of, even while the crew is wearing all black pajamas, the team is wearing t-shirts and no frills, i am serving executive realness, i am serving black star for no reason other than to shine. life. i am giving my life to this right here and right now. even if this is the off-off most of us never get off of. even if the mirror lights don't work and dressing room is hot and ceiling is leaking and the chairs aren't velvet and the cockroaches flip over on their backs and die without ceremony. i am life in this too tight skirt. i am here. i am in honor.

the players and me: an annotated facebook post:

April 20 - Lauren Whitehead shared Scott Ebersold's photo:



I woke up post Bright Room and didn't know if I wanted to laugh or cry and since I felt like doing both, I knew I needed to give thanks. To Scott who saw something in me and who pushed me to be and write and perform at my highest level yet. I knew all along we were making meaningful eye contact. To Paul who supported our vision as it twisted and turned. To Martins who should have said no so many times and instead always said yes, yes, yes.

To the incredibly talented Julian⁸ and Beth Ann⁹, David¹⁰ and Laralu¹¹, Casey¹² and Kristopher¹³, the ever sweet Jason¹⁴, uproariously funny Tracey¹⁵ and awe inspiring Sara¹⁶, you magic makers. You happy band of brilliants! You welcomed me without question and pep talked and cried with and reminded me that there was nothing to it but to do it, that the hard parts are the good parts, and I thank you.

To Colleen and Krystle and the whole damn crew who made the thing so seamless and beautiful, yes. Dan, Martin, Adam, Matt, Mo, I see you! I feel so spoiled. I am so thankful to have made my debut with all of you and I am hopeful that we will meet again.

⁸ **As written:** GREGOR BAZWALD (BAZ): early to mid-30s. Homosexual who works for the Berlin Institute for Human Sexuality.

As function: the one who reminds you that talking a good game doesn't mean you can't still be a coward

As embodied by: Julian Stetkevych

⁹ **As written:** PAULINKA ERDNUSS: mid-30s, but looks a little younger. Actress in the German film industry; a featured player on her way to becoming a minor star.

As function: the one who reminds you how even the high born tend to fall

As embodied by: Beth Ann Hopkins

¹⁰ **As written:** VEALTNINC HUSZ: mid-40s. Cinematographer. Hungarian exile. Missing an eye, he wears spectacles with one lens blackened.

As function: the one who thinks foolishly that art is enough

As embodied by: David Gautschy

¹¹ **As written:** DIE ALTE: a woman, very old but hard to tell how old — somewhere between 70 and dead-for-20-years. White face and rotten teeth. Dressed in a nightgown, once white but now soiled and food-stained.

As function: the one who reminds you that to survive is not easy

As embodied by: Laralu Smith

¹² **As written:** ROSA MALEK: mid- to late 20s. Minor functionary of the KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands).

As function: the one who stands up to her in-group and doesn't live to tell about it

As embodied by: Casey Hayes-Deats

¹³ **As written:** EMIL TRAUM: mid- to late 20s. Slightly higher-ranking functionary of the KPD.

As function: the one who reminds us that even the insiders are confused

As embodied by: Kristopher Dean

¹⁴ **As written:** GOTTFRIED SWETTS: ageless; when he looks good he could be 30, when he looks bad he could be 50 (or more). Distinguished, handsome, blond, Aryan.

As function: the one who reminds you the devil you see is better than the devil you don't

As embodied by: Jason Griffin

¹⁵ **As written:** ANNABELLA GOTCHLING: mid-40s. Communist artist and graphic designer.

As function: the one who thinks in a world full of feelers

As embodied by: Tracey Gilbert

¹⁶ **As written:** AGNES EGGLING: mid- to late 30s; preferably heavysset. Bit player/ character actress in the German film industry.

As function: the one who reminds you that the average among us does very little after all

As embodied by: Sarah Thigpin

But above all, I thank you Zillah Katz¹⁷. You taught me about the power of my own anger, the depths of own fear and the truth about my ability to WAKE THE FUCK UP and get to work. Thank you #thesis. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

¹⁷**As written:** ZILLAH KATZ: contemporary American Jewish woman. 30s. BoHo/Easy Village New Wave with Anarcho-Punk tendencies.

As function: the one who reminds you that safety is relative

As embodied by: me

whats mine is yours

the chair of the theater department at columbia is also the head of the dramaturgy concentration. that makes him the advisor to this project. i use the term advisor, both cautiously and loosely as he is responsible for signing off on this writing but also too not so much a man who advised but rather a man who showed up at certain, albeit convenient times. i read somewhere that in the war of art, showing up is the first battle. when he did show up, he was often late and/or leaving toward something he was late for and yet generally pretty helpful.

right before my meeting with christian (who i wonder if i need to mention is white, or grey haired, or often wearing a shirt haphazardly buttoned and tucked in) i ran into martins in the hallway. *how are you faring*, we look at each other, surprised to see one another without a cigarette or caffeinated beverage in hand

there is at least another month of life left in this beast.

he didn't say that exactly. he is much too effeminate. he probably said baby and not beast. he is latvian. always wearing shades of black and grey. sometimes white denim. sometimes eye liner. he leans on his vowels when he speaks kind of fabulous, theater producer, chain smoking yes in the face of no. *fuck me. a month at least*. i agree, leaning on my own vowels in an effort of absorption. but before he could more than nod his head in return, christian steps out of the elevator and he only has half an hour and he's already late and so in his spacious and largely empty corner office with two huge windows, lots of new york light and a surprising lack of books given the number of shelves on the wall which we both acknowledge awkwardly, after which i launch into this:

what i have learned in my experience of being dramaturg on a bright room called day, comes down to some version of the fact that i am in the habit of advocating for radical visibility of artsy queer, black, women types, by which i mean that i regularly defend the right for them to be and advocate for the acceptance into the canon or not, i don't know but maybe rather acceptance of the variety of perspectives that come from this particular diaspora of womanhood, into the arts and expression and for those of us who are black to be able to literally and literarily express this experience which is both subjective and collective and that this is likely the case for all classes and kinds of people brave enough to identify and to accept identification by but whatever, it still stands but so, also beyond all this advocating for black visibility there is still the fact that for the dramaturg, often the measure of quality in their work is based on their seeming invisibility. because you can't or shouldn't be able to see the work of the dramaturg. and of course there is ever always the sticky mess about authorship in this business, what with the Lynn Thomson debacle given her work on *rent* and how apt given that the titular song (which she likely had a

hand in creating) being *we're not gonna pa-ay* anyway all of it is the tricky, tricky and necessary business of figuring out what the fuck a dramaturg does and how to credit that doing and what, if anything, that doing is worth if you can't see it aside from what role they play, how do you name it especially if and when they are performing more than one role, too. anyway. so authorship and dramaturgical invisibility and of course, there's been plenty written about visibility in black communities. Radical visibility, hyper visibility, invisibility, although maybe never morphing visibilities because how foolish to think that we can have a mutable reality of visibility. it's completely dependent upon the space and the context and who else is in the room and totally there is the possibility of multiple realities of visibility in any one space and time. and damn, don't we black folks love to talk about visibility or if we don't talk about it, at the very least we think about it real hard or experience it real hard a lot don't we? and of course, the question of how to make the invisible a reality, which, man, fuck, form. right?

at which point he says:

i don't think the things your talking about have to exist separately.

exactly.

i mean that it is possible that in inhabiting all these roles,

right, that's what i'm trying to say

*you are to some extent performing
both hyper visibility and invisibility.*

*i'm saying they don't have to be
mutually exclusive.*

right, which i see now because of this thing

*forgive me, i'm not being very articulate
this thought is just coming to me now
i don't think there's a contradiction
between the things you're describing*

right but there is a thing

this is a thing, right

is this a thesis

well it's my thesis

he said

i don't know if it's yours.

even still. there's always more than one way to explain how the cat came up skinned. just sayin.

and now

a full weeks rest after having done five live shows, i see instantly what i would do differently next week. what decisions i could have made differently. what choices could all be handled differently because what if zillah was angry and not just afraid of this and other ghosts? and what if each moment was a present moment rather than a reactive moment? i would have stepped into this present power and instead of wanting to be a star, i would have just been a star. a lonely, lonely star that danced the way she danced but different. because zillah is not tony is not lauren is her own woman, similar and different and accepting difference is a decision i could have made. in all the ways i am privileged to have shared this space with a director who is white but honest, quiet but firm, forgetful but focused on what he sees and has seen in me and otherwise and we agreed. we agreed to make this thing called art work together.

so now i see, had i one week more, i may have relaxed into all of it. graced into all of it. may have had more than one “on” performance out of the five, upped my ratio a bit, eased into it a bit. so now i see the problems with the showcase code and with the union maybe too because the actors want to act and the managers want to manage and the dramaturg is unprotected and always working anyway. and there is no union for all the jobs the black woman must preform. and i know now that i can live it, that i can dance in an angle costume, can dip my finger in the halo of my own heart and find my own sweet, sweet honey in the key of g, that i can sing a black mans song and have an audience and they can laugh and laugh all they want because what they can’t know is the depth of my every day decision, the will of my all the time presence, the full of my own art. they can’t know how long i will live. on and on.

invisible or otherwise. i see what i have made and i say. it is very, very good.



Works Cited

Kushner, Tony. *A Bright Room Called Day*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987.
Print.

Appendix 1: Original text of Zillah's interruptions

First Interruption: The Small Voice (Letter to the President)

(Lights up on Zillah)

Dear Mr. President,

I know you will never read this letter. I'm fully aware of the fact that letters to you don't even make it to the White House, that they're brought to an office building in Maryland where civil-servant types are paid to answer the sane ones. Crazy, hostile letters - like mine - the ones written in crayon on butcher paper, the ones made of letters cut out of magazine - these get sent to the FBI, analyzed, Xeroxed and burned. But I sent them anyway, once a day, and do you know why? Because the loathing I pour into these pages is so ripe, so full-to-bursting, that it is my firm belief that anyone touch them will absorb into their hands some of the toxic energy contains herein. This toxin will be passed upwards - is the nature of bureaucracies to pass things vertically - till eventually, through a network of handshakes, the Under-Secretary of Outrageous Falsehoods will shake hands with the Secretary for Pernicious Behavior under the Cloak of Night, who will, on a weekly basis in Cabinet meetings, shake hands with you before you nod off to sleep. In this way, through osmosis, little droplets of contagion are being rubbed into your leathery flesh every day - in this great country of ours there must be thousands of people who are sending you poised post. We wait for the day when all the grams and drams and dolls of detestation will destroy you. We attack from below. Our day will come. You can try to stop me. You can raise the price of stamps again. I'll continue to write. I'm saving up for a word processor. For me and my cause, money is no object.

Love,
Zillah

(She puts letter in envelope, licks and seals it, smiles)

(End of Interruption)

Second Interruption: The Politics of Paranoia

(Lights up on Zillah.)

I used to be a normal human being. Like most Americans of my class I would fatten and thrive on governmental scandals, as long as they were relatively infrequent and bloody enough when they occurred to alleviate the ennui of begin a citizen in a two-party democracy. Watergate was one of the happiest times of my life, really well-done, dramatic and garish and incredibly funny. Not at all like the bone-naked terror of these days. I've lost my sense of humor. I have become instead a completely convinced, humorless paranoiac. I see elements of profound truth in nearly all the Kennedy assassination theories. If you tell me that Happy Rockefeller, John Paul I and John Lennon were killed by a cabal of lapsed-Catholic anti-Trilateralists, I will believe you. People who don't know that this government survives by the grace of a secured club of trained WASP terrorists are living with their head in pink clouds. I believe, I do believe it. Hannah Arendt says she escaped form Germany before the war by being more paranoid than her friends. She read detective novels. She believe in conspiracies. The say she was crazy then but Hannah died in 1972 in her own bed and lots of the people laughed at her... I believe. I read the histories of German. I read the Book of Revelations. I read the *Times*. I sense parallels. Just call me paranoid.

(End of Interruption.)

Third Interruption: German Lessons

(Lights up on Zillah, who holds up a German-language textbook.)

German lessons. Listen:

“Das Massengrab.” Mass grave.

“Die Zeit war sehr schlimm.” Times were bad.

“Millionen von Menschen waren tot.” Millions of people were dead.

People try to be so fussy and particular when they look at politics, but what I think an understand of the second half of the twentieth century calls for is not caution and circumspection but more exuberance. Overstatement is your friend: use it. Take Evil: The problem is that we have this event - Germany, Hitler, the Holocaust - which we have made into THE standard of absolute Evil - well and good, as standards of Evil go, it's not bad - but then everyone gets frantic as soon as you try to use the standard, *nothing* compares, *nothing* resembles - and the standard becomes unusable and *nothing* qualifies as Evil with a capital E. I mean how much a Nazi do you have to be to qualify for membership? Is a twenty-five percent Nazi a Nazi or not? Ask yourselves this: it's 1942; the Goerings are having an intimate soiree; if he got an invitation, would Pat Buchanan feel out of place? Out of place? Are you *kidding*? Pig *heaven*, dust off the old tuxedo, kisses to Eva and Adolf. I mean jus because a certain ex-actor-turned-President who shall go nameless sat *idly* by and watched tens of thousands die of a plague and he couldn't even bother to say he felt *bad* about it, much less try to *help*, does this mean he merits comparison to a certain fascist-dictator anti-Semitic mass-murdering psychopath who shall also remain nameless? OF COURSE NOT! I mean I ask you - how come the only people who ever say “Evil” anymore are southern cracker televangelists with radioactive blue eyeshadow? None of these bastards *look* like Hitler, they never will, not exactly, but I say as long as they look like they're playing in Mr. Hitler's Neighborhood we got no reason to relax.

I never relax. I can work up a sweat reading the Sunday *Times* I read, I gasp, I hit the streets at three a.m. with my can of spray paint:

REAGAN EQUALS HITLER! RESISTS! DON'T FORGER, WEIMAR HAD A CONSTITUTION TOO!

Moral exuberance. Hallucination, revelation, gut-flutters in the night - the internal intestinal night bats, their panicky leathery wings - that's my common sense. I pay attention to that. Don't put too much stock in a good night's sleep. During times of reactionary backlash, the only people sleeping soundly are the guys who're giving the rest of us bad dreams. So eat something indigestible before you go to bed, and listen to your nightmares.

(End of interruption.)

Fourth Interruption: Memories of You

(Cocktail-loungey lights up on Zillah.)

Music, please.

(Piano intro to “Memories of You.” As Zillah sings, slides of Hitler flash behind her. These should be of the “Beloved Führer” publicity-shot variety.)

Why can't I forget like I should?
Heaven knows I would if I could.
But I cannot get you off my mind.
Though you've gone and love was in vain,

All around me you still remain.
Wonder why fate should be so unkind.
Waking skies at sunrise
Every sunset too,
Seem to be bringing me
Memories of you.
Here and there, everywhere,
Dreams that we once knew,
And they all just recall
Memories of you.
How I wish I could forget
Those happy yesteryears
That have left a rosary
Of tears.
Your face beams in my dreams
'Spite of all I do;
everything seems to bring
Memories of you.

(The music tinkles as slides fade out.)

Thanks Mr. Piano Man

Fifth Interruption: Night Bats

Spooky.

Recently when I have succumbed to sleep, my dreams are invaded by a woman dressed in a frumpy hat and coat – and for a change it's not Mom. This woman – I think she came from a book I read – a photograph of a huge crowd, thousands of people, a rally, everyone, and I mean *everyone* giving the fascist salute. But there she is, right in the middle of all these ecstatic people waving their hands, and she isn't cheering, not even smiling, and both hands are clutching her purse and she isn't saluting. I noticed her right off and I guess out of gratitude she came to pay me visits. She's in trouble: she looks old, but she isn't, she's gotten fat and her feet are giving out and her eyes are bad. She hasn't spoken to me yet, but I know she will and when she does...

She still can't sleep. Restless, like me. I'm calling to her: across a long dead time: to touch a dark place, to scare myself a little, to make contact with what moves in the night, fifty years after, with what's driven, every night, by the panic and the pain...

(End of interruption.)

Sixth Interruption: From the Book

(Lights up on Zillah with a Bible.)

They say that the Book of Revelations is the President's favorite book. This is plausible, once you accept the initial premise, which is that the President knows how to read. It is a great thing, this book. You can try to be reasonable as a clam about evil, but when you get down to La Nitty-Gritty, clams are cold, thick little animals and you just can't find anything more thrilling than this:

(Reading from the Bible) “And He causes all, the rich and the poor, the free and the slave, to receive a mark on their right hand, and non can buy or sell without that mark. The name of the Beats, and the number of that name.”

Did you know that *both* Reagan and Margaret Thatcher are afflicted in their right hands with a disease of the manual ligaments called Dupuytren’s contracture, which causes the hand to shrivel, gradually assuming, and I quote, “a claw-like appearance.” Claw-like.

(Reading again) “Let him who has a mind compute the number of a man, and that number is 666.)

OK. They say that Hitler used to spell his name A-D-O-L-P-H, and he changed the P-H to an F to make it look less Austrian or more German or something, God knows. Anyway, A-D-O-L-P-H gives you six letters, and H-I-T-L-E-R gives you another six. See where I’m heading? You with me? The problem is that he didn’t have a middle name, but not to worry, you can always use F-Ü-H-R-E-R. Et voila! The name of our own little führer works much better, of course, and with no trouble at all you get he winning number.

(She holds up a poster on which this has been spelled out R-O-N-A-L-D W-I-L-S-O-N R-E-A-G-A-N)

You know that when he retires he’s moving to a big fancy Belair house his friends bought for I’m, and the address is 666 Mayfair Road. But he had them chance the address because, well, he reads the book.

I didn’t work all this out myself. I saw it written on a bathroom stall in B-O-S-T-O-N. “Do not,” we are told, “seal up the words of the pages of this Book, for the time is nigh.”

(End of interruption.)

Seventh Interruption: Epitaph

(Lights up on Zillah at her table and Agnes in her room.)

Sometimes at nights now I hear her moving around, sort of shuffling, patching cracks, moving things, looking for some lost object.

(Agnes moves to the cupboard, opens drawers, looks out the window.)

Heavy steps, hardly the heart to move her feet. I ask her what her name was.

(Agnes stops moving, looks around the room, sensing something.)

She stops moving, so I know she hears me. No answer. I asked her how she died.

(Agnes stops moving completely, frightened.)

An air raid? In the camps? Because I know she died then, unhappy. Again, she doesn’t move, and she hasn’t answered me yet but when she does I already know what she’ll say: “Not in the camps, and not in the war, but at home, in front of a cozy fire, I died of a broken heart.”

(Agnes gasps.)

AGNES

Hello? Hello? Who’s...

Oh dear God I need sleep.

(She flees the room)

(End of interruption.)

Eighth Interruption: Lullaby

(Lights up on Zillah.)

There's a terror that skips
over the mind and out the throat
faster than thinking:
Revelation: We
are in danger.
It catches up by surprise,
on sweet evenings
when we are thoroughly
at home,
and says look
for the cracks
where the seams don't meet,
look where the walls
have moved slightly apart,
try to see, stay awake,
there isn't time for sleeping.
Horen? Kannst du mich horen?
Before the sky and the ground
Slam shut... Now.

(End of interruption.)

Epilogue

(The room begins to grow dark.)

Now.
Before the sky and the ground slam shut.
The borders are full of holes.

Appendix 2: First Draft of Zillah's adapted interruptions

First Interruption: The Small Voice (Letter to the President)

(Lights up on Zillah.)

Dear Mr. President,

I know you'll never read this message. I am fully aware that messages don't even make it to the White House, much less the Oval Office where I doubt you ever even do any work anyway. All of these messages are piled up, picked through and sent to some civil servant decrypting engineer hauled in from MIT or China to look through them for cyber anthrax or webworms or whatever new virtual viral threat gets sent your way. And, be honest, the sane letters don't get read either. They just get their names put on your email list and every day we get an email, everyday, personally addressed and asking for support or money or support in the form of money... And for a while, I'll admit, I really thought you were writing to me for a minute. All that rigamarole about reading 10 letters a day from your constituents was bullshit after all cause I'm your constituent too Mr. President. And I see right through you Mr. Barack Obama – if that is your real name. I noticed your messages to me never made mention of my messages to you and that, sir, that is how I knew that my messages got sent to whatever place the other crazy and hostile messages go to die, go to get analyzed by the FBI; sent to live in some vast and massive server owned and operated by Google, stored on a rig off the coast of Portland, Oregon or Portland, Maine. I don't even send these messages anymore. I know the NSA knows who I am. You think I'm not privy to your undercover operations? If Amazon can send a drone to my doorstep, I know you can too! I know who you are too! But ask me if I care. I don't care! I pour into these messages all the loathing I can manage anyway. Pour and pour until they are so ripe, they are almost full to bursting with all the malice that I can manage.

And do you want to know why? Because I didn't just imagine that Gitmo is still open! Drone after drone is being dropped on to my dreamscape; Mr. President and nothing from your dreams can be made up, Mr. President. The only images our brains can conjure are things we have seen before and I believe, it is my firm belief, that anyone who puts their eyes on these words will absorb the toxic energy contained herein and it will seep into the deep recesses of their sub unconscious. This venom will be passed psychically upward – because even metaphysical bureaucracies pass things upwards. And in this way, through an informed network of eye contact and furrowed brows, the Under Secretary of Outrageous Falsehoods will blink in the general direction of the Secretary for Pernicious Behavior Under the Cloak of Night who will, on a weekly basis, scrunch his nose around you in cabinet meetings, will tense up in your presence before you drift off to sleep. Through unconscious assimilation Mr. President, wavelengths of contagious are being transmitted into your beautiful freaking face everyday. Every day, in this great country of ours, throngs of us are sending you encrypted messages. We wait for the day when all the bits and bytes of detestation will crack that façade, will make you accomplish what you promised. We attack from all corners. Our day has come. You can try to stop me. You can raise the cost of WIFI again. I'll continue to blog, to keep record of your mishaps. I'm saving up for a petabyte external hard drive. For me and my cause, money is no object.

Love,
Zillah

(End of interruption.)

Second Interruption: The Politics of Paranoia

(Lights up on Zillah.)

I used to be a normal human being. Like most Americans of my class I would fatten and thrive on governmental scandal, as long as they were relatively infrequent and sleazy enough when they occurred. Monicagate was one of the happiest times of my life. “Even presidents have private lives...” I mean really well done; dramatic and garish and incredibly funny. Not at all like the bone naked terror since 9/11. I’ve lost my sense of humor. I have become instead a completely convinced, humorless paranoiac. I see elements of profound truth in nearly all the Kennedy assassination theories. If you told me that Trayvon Martin, the 20 kids at Sandy Hook elementary and the victims of DC sniper were killed by a cabal of exiled Xbox, “Call of Duty” anti-Trilaterlists (without their avatars) I would believe you. People who don’t know that this government survives by the grace of a secret club of trained corporate terrorists are living with their heads in pink clouds. I believe, I do believe it.

Hannah Arendt says she escaped from Germany before the war by being more paranoid than her friends. She read detective novels. She believed in conspiracies. They said she was crazy then but Hannah died in 1972 in her own bed and lots of people who laughed at her... I believe. I read the histories of Germany. I read the Book of Revelations. I read the Times. I sense parallels. Just call me paranoid.

(End of interruption.)

Third Interruption (Original “Sixth Interruption: From the Book”)

(Lights up on Zillah with a Bible.)

You know we’ve got a problem when the Pope starts talking about trickle down economics. And I appreciate the gesture and one might even accept it if one could ever get over the fact that The Papal Office turned a blind eye to the deaths of thousands of Jews. It’s a great thing, this letter from the Pope.

He was trying to be reasonable. And you can be reasonable as a clam about evil, but once you get down to La Nitty-Gritty, reasonable is bullshit. *(Reading from the Bible)* “And he causes all, the rich and the poor, the free and the slave, to receive a mark on their right hand, and none can buy or sell without that mark.

The name of the beast and the number of that name.” Did you know that Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Bob Dole are afflicted in their right hands with a disease of the manual ligaments called Dupuytren’s contracture, which causes the hand to shrivel, gradually assuming, and I quote, “a claw-like appearance.”

Claw like. *(Reading again)* “Let him who has a mind compute the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and that number is 666.”

Ok. I used to be obsessed with numerology; being able to recognize the mark of the beast, obsessively computing nicknames and middle names. They say Hitler used to spell his name A-D-O-L-P-H but he changed the “PH” to an “F” to make it look more German or less Austrian or whatever. Anyway, A-D-O-L-P-H H-I-T-L-E-R, you see where I’m heading right? But the problem was he didn’t have a middle name so I used his title F-Ü-H-R-E-R. Et voila. You can make anything fit (she holds up signs or projections that read: RONALD WILSON REAGAN, UNITED STATES OF CAPITALISM. Double whammy. I even tried B-A-R-A-C-K H. O-B-A-M-A but the only way to make that work was to abbreviate “Hussein,” arguably probably the most obviously evil part of his name, and at the end of the day I began not to trust my own methods. Evil is as evil does, not as numbers do.

So I went back to Revelation and here. Here: *(Reading)* “I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, *(Pulls her ears forward)* but it spoke like a dragon. It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.”

The tea party is quick to call Obama the anti-Christ, but that can’t be right. First of all he’s left handed, thereby throwing all previous theories out the window, and second of all he’s black. And... well, follow the pattern of opportunistic black politicians: Colin, Condoleeza, could he be that good old Barry, the people’s president, is not the anti Christ himself but is instead the false prophet that does the evil bidding on his behalf.

Deny as you might but do you think the devil bares “the mark” anymore? It’s 2014! The false prophet is all around you. Bachmann, Palin, Limbaugh, Cruz. Carl Rove would have you believe that what they preach is Christianity, but they’re just redefining it for their own purposes. “I can’t be evil look at me all cloaked in my Christianity. It’s not me who’s evil, it’s you. It’s you!” Meanwhile we, the well meaning would be activist is distracted by the false prophet and the belief that somehow profit will make it to our pockets if we stand here waiting patiently. “I-N G-O-D W-E T-R-U-S-T” but in money we believe. U-N-I-T-E-D S-T-A-T-E-S O-F C-A-P-I-T-A-L-I-S-M.

Hey, I didn’t make this shit up. I saw in a bathroom stall in Boston. B-O-S-T-O-N. “Do not,” we are told, “seal up the words of the pages of this book for the time is nigh.”

(End of interruption.)

Fourth Interruption: Memories of You / Night Bats (Original “Fourth” and “Fifth” Interruptions Combined)

(Cocktail-loungey lights up on Zillah.)

Music, please.

(Piano intro to “Memories of You.” As Zillah sings, slides of Hitler flash behind her. These should be of the “Beloved Fuhrer” publicity-shot variety.)

Why can’t I forget like I should?
Heaven knows I would if I could.
But I cannot get you off my mind.
Though you’ve gone and love was in vain,
All around me you still remain.
Wonder why fate should be so unkind.
Waking skies at sunrise
Every sunset too,
Seem to be bringing me
Memories of you.
Here and there, everywhere,
Dreams that we once knew,
And they all just recall
Memories of you.
How I wish I could forget
Those happy yesteryears
That have left a rosary
Of tears.
Your face beams in my dreams
‘Spite of all I do;
everything seems to bring
Memories of you.

(The music tinkles as slides fade out.)

Thanks Mr. Piano Man

Spooky.

Recently when I have succumbed to sleep, my dreams are invaded by a woman dressed in a frumpy hat and coat – and for a change it’s not Mom. This woman – I think she came from a book I read – a photograph of a huge crowd, thousands of people, a rally, everyone, and I mean *everyone* giving the fascist salute. But there she is, right in the middle of all these ecstatic people waving their hands, and she isn’t cheering, not even smiling, and both hands are clutching her purse and she isn’t saluting. I noticed her right off and I guess out of gratitude she came to pay me visits. She’s in trouble: she looks old, but she isn’t, she’s gotten fat and her feet are giving out and her eyes are bad. She hasn’t spoken to me yet, but I know she will and when she does...

She still can’t sleep. Restless, like me. I’m calling to her: across a long dead time: to touch a dark place, to scare myself a little, to make contact with what moves in the night, fifty years after, with what’s driven, every night, by the panic and the pain...

(End of interruption.)

Sixth Interruption (Original “Third Interruption: German Lessons”)

(Lights up on Zillah, who holds up a German-lesson textbook.)

“Das Massengrab.” Mass grave.

“Die Zeit war sehr schlimm.” Times were bad.

“Millionen von Menschen waren tot.” Millions of people were dead.

People try to be so fussy and particular when they look at politics, but what I think and understanding of the second half of the twentieth century calls for is not caution and circumspection, not moral exuberance but a healthy dose of WAKE THE FUCK UP and a little bit of solidarity. I know, I know: we’ve all had our holocausts. Tell it to my black and Jewish grandmothers. Tell it to my girlfriend. The alchemy of the gay black Jew is almost too much history to manage.

Here’s the problem with standards of Evil. We have this event, Hitler, “THE Holocaust” made more memorable because we could take pictures of it. But before Hitler was Willie Lynch and the Slave Codes of the American South and after Hitler was Reagan and the 13 times the administration laughed, laughed, on record, while dismissing the fact that a certain population in this “The Great United States” was dying of a plague. I mean this ex-actor-turned-President sat idly -and I do mean idly- by and watched tens of thousands of people die and he couldn’t even bother to say he felt bad about it, much less try to help. Does this mean he merits comparison to a certain fascist-dictator anti-Semitic mass-murdering psychopath? OF COURSE NOT.

This is not overstatement. This is just a matter of fact. And the fact of the matter is every time you try to use the standard, any of these standards, everyone gets so frantic. Nothing compares, nothing resembles, nothing qualifies as Evil with a capital “E.” I mean how much of Nazi do you have to be to qualify for membership? Is twenty-five percent Nazi a Nazi or not? Let me ask you this: It’s 1942; The Goerings are having an intimate soiree; if they got an invitation, would Carl Rove, Donald Trump, Willy Lynch, or Valdimir Putin feel out of place? Are you kidding? Pig heaven! Dust off the old tuxedos, kisses to Eva and Adolf.

These days, the essences and instances of evil are more veiled. Hidden. The trails are better covered, better encoded and harder to detect. I mean just because you can’t see the bodies doesn’t mean they aren’t there. Do you have to pile up some magic number of bodies before you hit the holocaust jackpot and rate a comparison to you-know-who? Why isn’t one body enough? How many kid bodies equal one whole body? Do you even need to see the body if the evil tactic of your time keeps you so distracted that you might as well be dead? Why isn’t just the likelihood of evil, the intention of evil enough, damn it? I ask you: how come the only people who ever say “Evil” any more are southern cracker televangelist with radioactive blue eye shadow?

No, none of these bastards look like Hitler and they never will, not exactly. But I'll tell you this: Jim Crow is The Final Solution is the Patriot Act and as long as they're livin in Mr. Hitler's Neighborhood, I say we got no reason to relax. I never relax. I can work up a sweat reading the Sunday Times.

Hallucination, vision, revelation, paranoia, gut-flutters in the night -- the internal intestinal night bats, their panicky leathery wings -- that's my common sense. I pay attention to that. Don't put too much stock in a good night's sleep. During time of reactionary backlash, the only people sleeping soundly are the guys who're giving the rest of us bad dreams. So eat something indigestible before you go to bed, and listen to your nightmares.

(End of interruption.)

Seventh Interruption: Epitaph

(Lights up on Zillah at her table and Agnes in her room.)

Sometimes at nights now I hear her moving around, sort of shuffling, patching cracks, moving things, looking for some lost object.

(Agnes moves to the cupboard, opens drawers, looks out the window.)

Heavy steps, hardly the heart to move her feet. I ask her what her name was.

(Agnes stops moving, looks around the room, sensing something.)

She stops moving, so I know she hears me. No answer. I asked her how she died.

(Agnes stops moving completely, frightened.)

An air raid? In the camps? Because I know she died then, unhappy. Again, she doesn't move, and she hasn't answered me yet but when she does I already know what she'll say: "Not in the camps, and not in the war, but at home, in front of a cozy fire, I died of a broken heart."

(Agnes gasps.)

AGNES

Hello? Hello? Who's...

Oh dear God I need sleep.

(She flees the room)

(End of interruption.)

Eighth Interruption: Lullaby

(Lights up on Zillah.)

There's a terror that skips
over the mind and out the throat
faster than thinking:

Revelation: We
are in danger.

It catches up by surprise,
on sweet evenings

when we are thoroughly
at home,
and says look
for the cracks
where the seams don't meet,
look where the walls
have moved slightly apart,
try to see, stay awake,
there isn't time for sleeping.
Horen? Kannst du mich horen?
Before the sky and the ground
Slam shut... Now.

(End of interruption.)

Epilogue

(The room begins to grow dark.)

Now.
Before the sky and the ground slam shut.
The borders are full of holes.

Appendix: 3: Production Draft of Zillah's Adapted Interruptions

First Interruption: The Small Voice (Letter to the President)

(Lights up on Zillah)

Dear Brothers Koch,

I know you'll never receive this message. I'm fully aware of the fact that you're too busy writing checks to pay attention to such trivial things and anyway all the sane emails just get picked up by the NSA, end up fully redacted or destroyed or stored in vast servers off the coast of Portland, Oregon or Portland, Maine. Crazy, hostile posts like mine get lost between BuzzFeed quizzes and grumpy cat memes. Your movement thrives on how easily we are distracted, but I am not deaf to the rallying call of the ignorant ignorant, the rank and file soldiers in the "war on women". All these "amen americans" standing their ground and praying away the gay, waiting for their poster child to show his face. You may not have found your new Ronald Reagan yet, but I can see your master plan unfolding all around me. #googlealerts I'm watching you.

Just this yesterday three of these so called tea party patriots were found waxing ineloquent on all your major syndicates blabbering on about our weak president this and our tyrannical president that. One minute he's flexing "magisterial power," the next minute he's so weak and feeble it's shocking. You call this taking a stand? You think I can't read through your highly scripted rhetoric? I know somebody wrote that back and forth bullshit and it had to be you, oh savage financiers of the extreme right.

But you know what? I don't have A.D.D.! So everyday, once a day, I sit down and write these messages. And do you know why? Because I know that there's a member of Operation Oxymoron who gets paid to watch me too. And it is my firm belief that anyone who reads or sees or hears these words will absorb the toxic energy contained herein and that energy will seep into the deep recesses of their sub unconscious. Venom can be passed psychically upward – even metaphysical bureaucracies pass things upwards - And in this way, through an informed network of eye contact and furrowed brows, the Chief Operating Officer of Outrageous Falsehoods will blink in the vicinity of the Managing Director of Pernicious Behavior Under the Cloak of Night who will, on a weekly basis, scrunch his nose around you in board meetings, will tense up in your presence before you drift off to sleep. Through unconscious assimilation wavelengths of contagions are being transmitted into your sagging flesh. Bit by bit we will destroy the platform on which your charismatic candidate would stand.

You think your day is coming but my day is here. I am not alone. Every day in this great country of ours, I get a new Facebook friend who believes in progress. You can try to censor the internet. You can raise the cost of WIFI again. I'll continue to blog, I'm saving up for a ultra thin iMac with fustian drive and extra storage. For me and my cause, effort is no object. You can't stop me. Don't you even try it. #fuckyou

Love,

Zillah

Projection: #iamzillahkatz

Second Interruption: The Politics of Paranoia

(Lights up on Zillah)

I used to be a normal human being. Like most Americans of my class I would fatten and thrive on governmental scandals, as long as they were relatively infrequent and sleazy enough when they occurred. Monicagate was one of the happiest times of my life. People were seriously willing to oust a sitting president based on his private life, remember that: the Gap Dress, the redefinition of “sexual relations”...? All of it really, really well done; dramatic and garish and incredibly funny. Not at all like the bone naked terror since 9/11. I have lost my sense of humor. I have become instead a completely convinced, humorless paranoiac. That plane went missing from Malaysia and then four days later a building exploded in East Harlem and I was at home calculating how much jet fuel it would take to get from one place to the next.

I see elements of profound truth in nearly all the Kennedy and King assassination theories. And not only that but if you told me that Trayvon Martin, the 20 kids at Sandy Hook elementary and the victims of DC sniper were all killed by a cabal of exiled, X-Box, “Call of Duty”, anti-Trilaterlists funded by Donald Trump, I would believe you. People who don’t know that this country survives by the grace of a secret club of trained corporate terrorists are living with their heads in pink clouds. I believe, I do believe it.

Hannah Arendt says she escaped from Germany *before* the war by being more paranoid than her friends. She read detective novels. She believed in conspiracies. And she didn’t even have to worry about the NSA! They said she was crazy then but Hannah died in 1972 in her own bed and lots of people who laughed at her... I believe. I read the histories of Germany. I read the Book of Revelations. I read the Times. Berlin was beautiful until it was dust. Things are always good until they get bad. And I see all the evils. I sense the parallels. Just call me paranoid.

Third Interruption: German Lessons

(Lights up on Zillah who holds up a German-language textbook)

“Das Massengrab.” Mass grave.

“Die Zeit war sehr schlimm.” Times were bad.

“Millionen von Menschen waren tot.” Millions of people were dead.

People try to be so fussy and particular when they look at politics, but what I think an understanding of the second half of the 20th Century calls for is not caution and circumspection, not moral exuberance but a healthy dose of WAKE THE FUCK UP and just a little bit of solidarity. I know, I know we’ve all had our Holocausts. Tell it to my black and jewish grandmothers. Tell it to my girlfriend. The alchemy of the modern gay black jew is almost too much history to manage.

And here’s the problem with standards of Evil. We have this event: Hitler, “THE Holocaust” made even more memorable because we could take pictures of it. But before Hitler was Lt. General Nathan Bedford Forrest, first Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and after Hitler was Ronald Reagan and his administration and the 13 times they laughed, on record, while dismissing the fact that a certain population in this “The Great United States” was dying of a plague. I mean just because this ex-actor-turned-President sat idly (and I do mean idly) by and watched as tens of thousands of people died and he couldn’t even bother to say he felt bad, much less *do* anything about it, does this mean he warrants comparison to a certain fascist-dictator anti-Semitic mass-murdering psychopath? OF COURSE NOT.

This is not overstatement. This is just a matter of fact. And the fact of the matter is, any time you try to use the standard, any of these standards, people get all frantic. Nothing resembles, nothing compares, nothing qualifies as Evil with a capital “E”. I mean I ask you: how much of Nazi do you have to be to qualify for membership? Is twenty-five percent a Nazi a Nazi or not? And let me ask you this: it’s 1942; the Goerings are having an intimate soiree; if they got an invitation, would Carl Rove, Michelle Bachman or Rush Limbaugh feel out of place? Pig heaven. Dust off the old tuxedos. Kisses to Eva and Adolf.

Listen, instances of evil are far more veiled today, hidden, the trails are better covered, and they're harder to see. But just because you can't see the bodies doesn't mean they aren't there. I mean, do you have to pile up some magic number of bodies before you hit the jackpot and rate a comparison to you-know-who? Why isn't one body enough? Or how many kid bodies equal one adult body? Or do you even need a body if the evil tactic of your time keeps you so distracted that you might as well be dead? Why isn't just the likelihood of evil, the evil intention enough? I mean I ask you -- how come the only people who ever say "Evil" any more are anti gay, southern cracker republicans with hyperactive Manhunt accounts? None of these bastards look like Hitler and they never will, not exactly. But Jim Crow is the final solution is "the gay plague" is Guantanamo and as long as we're playing in Mr. Hitler's Neighborhood we got no reason to relax.

I never relax. I can work up a sweat reading the Sunday Times. I read. I gasp. I hit the internet at 3am. WEIMAR HAD A CONSTITUTION TOO! EVERYBODY WAKE THE FUCK UP! Hallucination, revelation, gut-flutters in the night -- the internal intestinal night bats, their panicky leathery wings -- that's my common sense. I pay attention to that.

Don't put too much stock in a good night's sleep. You may be resting well now but the rise of the reactionary backlash is nigh and soon the only one's sleeping soundly will be the ones giving us bad dreams. So do like I do and eat something indigestible before you go to bed. Be vigilant. Listen to your nightmares.

Fourth Interruption: Memories of You

(Cocktail-loungey lights up on Zillah.)

Music, please.

(Piano intro to "Memories of You." As Zillah sings, slides of Hitler flash behind her. These should be of the "Beloved Fuhrer" publicity-shot variety.)

Why can't I forget like I should?
Heaven knows I would if I could.
But I cannot get you off my mind.
Though you've gone and love was in vain,
All around me you still remain.
Wonder why fate should be so unkind.
Waking skies at sunrise
Every sunset too,
Seem to be bringing me
Memories of you.
Here and there, everywhere,
Dreams that we once knew,
And they all just recall
Memories of you.
How I wish I could forget
Those happy yesteryears
That have left a rosary
Of tears.
Your face beams in my dreams
'Spite of all I do;
everything seems to bring
Memories of you.

(The music tinkles as slides fade out.)

Thanks Mr. Piano Man

Fifth Interruption: Night Bats

Spooky.

Recently when I have succumbed to sleep, my dreams are invaded by a woman dressed in a frumpy hat and coat – and for a change it's not Mom. This woman – I think she came from a book I read – a photograph of a huge crowd, thousands of people, a rally, everyone, and I mean *everyone* giving the fascist salute. But there she is, right in the middle of all these ecstatic people waving their hands, and she isn't cheering, not even smiling, and both hands are clutching her purse and she isn't saluting. I noticed her right off and I guess out of gratitude she came to pay me visits. She's in trouble: she looks old, but she isn't, she's gotten fat and her feet are giving out and her eyes are bad. She hasn't spoken to me yet, but I know she will and when she does...

She still can't sleep. Restless, like me. I'm calling to her: across a long dead time: to touch a dark place, to scare myself a little, to make contact with what moves in the night, 80 years after, with what's driven, every night, by the panic and the pain...

(End of interruption.)

Sixth Interruption: From the Book

(Lights up on Zillah with a Bible)

Did you know that Ronald Reagan's favorite book was the book of Revelations? This is plausible once you accept the initial premise, which is that Ronald Reagan knew how to read. It's a great thing, this book. You can try to be reasonable as a clam about evil, but once you get down to La Nitty-Gritty, clams are cold, thick little animals and you just can't find anything more thrilling than this:

(reading from the Bible) "And he causes all, the rich and the poor, the free and the slave, to receive a mark on their right hand, and none can buy or sell without that mark. The name of the beast and the number of that name."

Did you know that Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Bob Dole were all afflicted in their right hands with a disease of the manual ligaments called Dupuytren's contracture, which causes the hand to shrivel, gradually assuming, and I quote, "a claw-like appearance." Claw like.

(Reading again) "Let him who has a mind compute the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and that number is 666."

Ok. I used to be obsessed with numerology; being able to recognize the mark of the beast, obsessively computing names and nicknames and middle names. They say Hitler used to spell his name A-D-O-L-P-H but he changed the "PH" to an "F" to make it look more German or less Austrian or whatever. Anyway, A-D-O-L-P-H gives you six letters:

(Zillah clicks, a projection appears: A-D-O-L-P-H = 6)

H-I-T-L-E-R gives you another six...

(Zillah clicks, projection: H-I-T-L-E-R = 6)

You see where I'm heading right? You know where this is going? But the problem was he didn't have a middle name, no big deal, I used his title F-Ü-H-R-E-R.

(Zillah clicks, projection: F-Ü-H-R-E-R = 6)

Et voila.

(Projection F-Ü-H-R-E-R + A-D-O-L-P-H + H-I-T-L-E-R = 666)

Now, of course the name of our own former führer worked much better. With no trouble at all you got the winning number.

(Zillah clicks, projection: RONALD WILSON REAGAN)

But I've run all the numbers on all the would be leaders,

(Zillah clicks, projections as she speaks: Christopher James Christie, Michelle Marie Bachman, Addison Mitch McConnell, "Ted" (Rafael Edward) Cruz, Rand (Randall Howard) Paul, Rush Hudson Limbaugh, John Ellis "Jeb" Bush, Marco Antonio Rubio, John Sidney McCain)

All of them, all of them. I've run all of them and no mark. No beast. And how could that be? I mean all the prisons being built and the drones being dropped and the fact that more boys died in Chicago than did while "Enduring Freedom" over there in Iraq. Evil is everywhere. It's all around me. But then I began to think: it's 2014. The Devil's way too smart. He doesn't bear "the mark" anymore. And that's when I started reading about Weimar, Germany.

We are now as Germany was then. After WWI but before Hitler. After Ronald Reagan but before ... who? I didn't make this all up. It's right here in these texts. "Do not," we are told "seal up, the pages of this book." Listen, in god I trust, but in the devil, I do believe.

(End of Interruption)

Seventh Interruption: Epitaph

(Lights up on Zillah at her table and Agnes in her room.)

Sometimes at nights now I hear her moving around, sort of shuffling, patching cracks, moving things, looking for some lost object.

(Agnes moves to the cupboard, opens drawers, looks out the window.)

Heavy steps, hardly the heart to move her feet. I ask her what her name was.

(Agnes stops moving, looks around the room, sensing something.)

She stops moving, so I know she hears me. No answer. I asked her how she died.

(Agnes stops moving completely, frightened.)

An air raid? In the camps? Because I know she died then, unhappy. Again, she doesn't move, and she hasn't answered me yet but when she does I already know what she'll say: "Not in the camps, and not in the war, but at home, in front of a cozy fire, I died of a broken heart."

(Agnes gasps.)

AGNES

Hello? Hello? Who's...
Oh dear God I need sleep.
(She flees the room)

(End of interruption.)

Eighth Interruption: Lullaby

(Lights up on Zillah.)

There's a terror that skips
over the mind and out the throat
faster than thinking:
Revelation: We
are in danger.
It catches up by surprise,
on sweet evenings
when we are thoroughly
at home,
and says look
for the cracks
where the seams don't meet,
look where the walls
have moved slightly apart,
try to see, stay awake,
there isn't time for sleeping.
Horen? Kannst du mich horen?
Before the sky and the ground
Slam shut... Now.

(End of interruption.)s

Epilogue

(The room begins to grow dark.)

Now.
Before the sky and the ground slam shut.
The borders are full of holes.