



Plays in Performance

THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS. Conceived and directed by Martha Clarke. World Theatre, St. Paul, Minnesota. 10 December 1987.

The Garden of Earthly Delights, painted by the Flemish painter, Hieronymus Bosch, between 1505-1510, has fascinated and frightened art lovers with its surrealistic view of paradise, life and hell. Certainly anyone who sees the triptych will be touched; perhaps even moved to create their own work which echoes the spiritual contrasts depicted by Bosch. That in fact is what led choreographer and dancer Martha Clarke to create her dance/theatre version of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

In 1978 while performing in Madrid with the dance group, Pilobolus, Clarke toured the Prado. There she encountered Bosch's work which made an indelible impression upon her. Though she set about working on a Bosch inspired piece when she returned to her Connecticut studio, it was not until 1983 that she committed herself to develop a full work that shared the painting's title.¹

Her decision to create the piece was spontaneous and somewhat unplanned.² Lyn Austin, the Producing Director at the Music Theatre Group/Lenox Arts Center (MTG), had worked with Clarke on her 1982 Obie award winning Kafka adaptation, *A Metamorphosis in Miniature*. Calling Clarke in the fall of 1983, she wanted to know what her performance plans for the spring would include. It took Clarke twenty minutes to return Austin's phone call and tell her, "Bosch."

The following April Clarke's incarnation of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* previewed in New York's St. Clement's Church under the auspices of the MTG. After revising the work for seven months, the piece premiered 20 November 1984 in the same location winning wide interest. In 1987 Clarke's production toured Jerusalem, Seattle and Minneapolis/St. Paul. This review is based on the Twin Cities presentation.

It would have been impossible for Clarke to make a literal depiction of the Bosch work. The triptych is dense with hundreds of humans, animals, monsters and incredible objects. Summarizing human existence from creation to eternity in the three panels, Eden, The

Garden of Earthly Delights and Hell, Bosch is absolute in his theme: the fate of enjoying worldly pleasure is a horrid eternity of punishment.

Clarke's adaptation captured the spiritual dogma prevalent in "Garden" and other Bosch creations. If one views other Bosch works like *The Hay Wain*, *The World Before the Flood* and *The World After the Flood*, and, especially, *The Last Judgement*, it is easy to see similar images and themes of human frailty and punishment that recur in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

Clark's "Garden" is an amalgamation of such recurring Bosch images. Though she has labeled three of her work's four divisions as Bosch did in his triptych; she includes "The Deadly Sins" based upon *The Seven Deadly Sins* a separate ceiling painting which is realistic in its figures and settings. This inclusion demonstrates Clarke's mixture that distills a number of particular ideas to a few general ones.

The performance of "Garden" utilizes movement, theatrical role playing and music that evolved from a collaborative creative process. Clarke invited composer Richard Peaslee, writer Peter Beagle, musicians and dancers to improvise vignettes that would represent Bosch images and themes. She collected the better ideas into a book the artists called "the Bible." It was from "the Bible" that Clarke edited the best music, dance and theatre events to complete *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.³

Clarke's "Garden" aroused an aesthetic proximity to Bosch's theme that was remarkable. It began upon entering the theatre. The stage and the house were both filled with grey smoke, joining the two spaces into a single environment. Though the stage was bare, musical instruments could be seen along the back wall through light beams that bore down through the haze.

"Eden," the first section, showed primordial beings walking on all fours and followed their growth into upright humans. All the performers wore body stockings that discreetly suggested nudity. The innocent creatures were curious and fascinated with each other and their surroundings.

"Eden" displayed two untraditional performance techniques. The musicians were not just accompanists but active performers who interacted with the dancers. The second technique occurred when one of the musicians and a dancer displayed short wings and, like angels, calmly and slowly ascended above the stage action as benign observers. Eliminating the separation of performers and musicians and extending the performance space into the vertical plane disallowed audience familiarity with either traditional dance or theatre.

The transition to the second section, "The Garden," was subtle, marked by Adam and Eve's fall from grace. Entwined around the body

of another dancer, a serpent seductively offered the forbidden apple between the legs of her bearer; a graphic and fitting gesture for the "earthly" pleasure and knowledge the fruit represented.

Much of "The Garden" served as a bridge between the ethereal existence found in "Eden" and that which would be depicted in "The Deadly Sins." The difference between the two bordered on the extreme as the "The Garden" was abstract in portraying pleasures of the flesh and "The Deadly Sins" was literal in imitating them. It seemed that Clarke wanted some very clear indication of the decadence that would deserve the nightmarish vision concluding the production.

In "The Deadly Sins" the performers wore costume parts to appear as peasants. They portrayed pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and laziness in brief, overlapping scenes. Some of these were bawdy and overdone. In demonstrating gluttony the imitation of vomiting, defecation and flatulence drew unnecessary attention. Still these "sins" were the appropriate connection between the more serene beginning to what was a cataclysmic end, hell itself.

The final segment "Hell" built in crescendo with grotesque music and action. The musicians played discordant sounds and actually used their instruments as torture devices. The cellist approached a reclining woman who erotically urged him with her body until he took the cellos extended metal leg and thrust it into her abdomen. She accepted it as brief fulfillment of her desire before twisting in agony. A chimes player trying to complete a short piece was tormented by dancing demons who hammered wrong notes. From out of the darkened rear of the stage a woman was catapulted forward climbing in height and speed as she flew above seven rows of the audience. Other bodies tumbled out of control silently screaming as all order was lost. The images that Clarke included in her "Hell" suggested the same brutish, awful and fearsome ones that Bosch painted.

Clarke's success in capturing the essence of Bosch's piece was largely due to the reliance on primary aural and visual elements. The entire piece was accompanied by music and sounds played upon an odd collection of medieval and contemporary instruments. During the "Eden" and "Garden" segments the effect was lyrical and even humorous as woodwinds and strings were used. But during the "The Deadly Sins" an antiquated instrument, the serpent, gave an appropriately unfamiliar and indulgent sound to much of the action. In "Hell" only short moments of melody were included as structure deteriorated into cacophonous percussive sounds.

Performers' movements were untraditional for dance and for theatre. Unlike dance, movement was not consistently expressive nor rhythmic but often purposeful and imitative. The fact that the

movement was imitative and progressed linearly suggested a theatrical plot but this was not consummated with character nor distinct actions. Rather movement that suggested the emotional condition of one part of the triptych would be combined with movement that was just literal enough to introduce another part of the Bosch theme to the audience. It was a pastiche in technique and in subject that had the unusual effect of miniaturizing Bosch's theme but with no loss of spiritual impact. Relying upon a complex creative technique, the result was utterly simple in effect: a delicate balance between the literal and the abstract, the particular and the general.

Indeed it is Clarke's creative process and performance style that constitute her real contribution. Clarke's distillation of differing particular performance techniques, were carefully edited and organized to make an economical gesture with broad general impact. The process was one perfectly suited to a theme dealing with the grand scope of human existence.

The specificity connected to conflict between individuals within a setting is lost. The dissolution of character, setting, and plot destroys time as well. No singular events, people or places are introduced which would allow chronological markers. The change from "Eden" to "Hell" is not one of history but one of spiritual condition. Thus all periods of human existence were suggested as well as no particular time at all.

Clarke joins other theatrical artists who are searching for both a form of expression and an idea that transcend the particular bounds of culture, time and personality to make statements generalized to all humanity. For example, she is similar to two Oriental artists who have gained national interest in the last four years. Ushio Amagatsu of Sankai Juku and Ping Chong.

Sankai Juku is the best known Japanese butoh group in the United States. Their work was been described as dance and theatre since it combines expressive movement and subtle elements of plot with its linear construction. Their performances *Kinkan Shonen* ("The Cumquat Seed") and *Jomon Sho* ("Homage to Prehistory") occur in a timeless and nondescript setting and touch on conditions of the spirit, not of the psyche.⁴

Ping Chong sets his works with contemporary people and place but his interest is spiritual. His *Angels of Swedenborg* was an optimistic view of the transcendence of a bored computer processor into an angelic spiritual state. *Nosferatu* conversely depicted the terrifyingly easy descent modern people make into spiritual void as they chase monetary and material wealth.⁵

Amagatsu, Chong and Clarke are similar in using the stage as a place for what Clarke termed "moving paintings." They take small

particular moments of life to make generalizations about existence. They present startling images that glide into other images; images pregnant with spiritual portent without being burdened by individualistic application.

It then is fitting that *The Garden of Earthly Delights* be called postmodern theatre. It forgoes the modern tradition of introspection. It opts for communal absolution. The individual's singular pursuit is destined for futility. The past generations' arrogance of individual consumption and acquisition now accounts to a global village where resources are diminished and where elastic cultural boundaries are clashing with those that are concrete. The particular desires of one are weighed against the general needs of the community.

Clarke seemed to be searching for spiritual relevancy with *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Though her haunting piece presents no answers, the awareness that it brings is similar to that aroused by other contemporary artists like Amagatsu and Chong. Clarke joins these artists in pursuing a form which is not bound to any particular medium nor any particular message other than the most widely accessible and the most widely pertinent.

With *The Garden of Earthly Delights* Clarke touches on a seminal part of theatre. She has forsaken introspective quests, escaped the bounds of self and entered the realm of myth.

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Notes

1. Jennifer Dunning. "Bosch's 'Garden' Is Brought to Life." *New York Times* 18 Nov. 1984, sec. 2: 4+.
2. John Yohalem. "Bosch Is Alive in Martha Clarke's 'Garden'." *American Theatre*. Nov. 1984: 16-18.
3. Dunning 29.
4. Ushio Amagatsu, prod. and chor. *Kinkan Shonen (The Cumquat Seed)*, Sankai Juku, Northrup Memorial Auditorium, Minneapolis, 23 May 1986; Ushio Amagatsu, dir. and chor. *Jomon Sho (Homage to Prehistory)*, Sankai Juku, Northrup Memorial Auditorium, Minneapolis, 16 October 1987.
5. Ping Chong, dir. and chor. *The Angels of Swedenborg*. Illusion Theatre in association with Walker Art Center. The Southern Theatre. Minneapolis, 20 Oct. 1985; Ping Chong, dir. and chor. *Nosferatu*. Illusion Theatre. Hennepin Center for the Arts. Minneapolis, 28 February 1987.

THE TALE OF LEAR. Tadashi Suzuki's Version of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Feb. 25-April 3, 1988.

Four regional theatres in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Washington, D.C., Berkeley, California, and Springfield, Massachusetts have cooperated in a history making co-production of international dimensions with a version of *King Lear* conceived and directed by Tadashi Suzuki and acted by an American company specially trained at Suzuki's home base in Toga, Japan. Thirteen American actors from the four regional theatres were given intensive training in Suzuki's unique acting methods, and rehearsed in the revised Elizabethan text. When melded with Suzuki's stunning costume creations, music by Tchaikovsky and Handel, and minimal twentieth century production elements, the result is a theatre piece of extraordinary depth and intensity.

A single low throne-like gold chair on a bare thrust stage greets the arriving audience. A folded blanket and open book lie on the floor next to the chair. Hanging overhead and across the back are three large screens made of angle iron and expanded metal mesh. Spotlights on low floor stands ring the acting area. The hanging grid and the polished floor are a dark red-lead color, worn and grimy. The rest, cyclorama, returns, runways downstage, are dull black.

Before the house lights dim, a twisted figure dressed in heavy robes sidles across the stage from stage right to sit awkwardly on the edge of the chair center. He stares front, his body tense, his neck and head tilted and strained. Next, a figure in a white nurse's uniform moves across from upstage left to upstage center with slow deliberate steps, and then side steps carefully to the blanket, picks up the book, sits on the blanket pad, leaning against the chair, and reads. The house lights dim. The stately music of the Largo from Handel's *Xerxes* swells to full volume. The nurse laughs, almost sardonically. Across the back of the stage eight figures appear out of the void. They are all bearded young men, dressed in splendid oriental brocades, some with turban-like headdresses, some with obilike sashes, others with braid fringe, lace, or scarves; traditional, but not historical or distinctly Japanese. Sleeves do not match, sashes are askew, head-dresses have an Indian or middle-eastern quality.

The figures glide forward and form a line behind the seated figure. The central figure rises, speaks with great intensity, calling for the maps. It is Lear, or one who thinks he is Lear, about to divide his kingdom. As he calls for responses from his daughters, he does not turn to them, but speaks vehemently directly front. As the other characters speak, they too look directly forward, orating their

lines vigorously. The daughters, Goneril and Regan, played by bearded young men, exude strength and gile. There is no trace of stereotypical femininity. Even Cordelia, standing in her wedding veil, speaks with "masculine" resolve as she refuses to give her father the deference he demands. Lear's wrath is projected in the tension of his fixed body position, the powerful modulations of his voice, and the sweat that pours off his face. Gesture and movement seem to be pared down to the absolutely essential. Hands and arms are held fixed until the situation or the emotion of the character calls for them to contribute in a significant way. Body movement is limited. A turn or a step is reserved for a moment demanding attention.

The opening scene comes to a close as Lear swearing by the sun, Hecate, and the night disclaims his paternal relationship with Cordelia, and declares her a stranger to his heart forever. Handel's Largo swells to deafening volume as Lear sinks into his chair, and simultaneously all other characters in the court turn and exit upstage into blackness. The scene of protestation and banishment of Kent, and the rejection of Cordelia by Burgundy and her betrothal to France are absent from this version.

Lear and the Nurse remain onstage as Edmund and Gloucester play the next scene down center. The false letter is folded white paper with black boards. Edmund averts his head ever so slightly as he is persuaded to show it to his father. He leans towards his father as he asks him to suspend his indignation, striking a pose as an actor and as a character. Gloucester takes two large steps down and to the right and speaks of the portents of discord in nature and in men. "We have seen the best of our time," he warns us, "machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorder, follow us disquietly to our graves." He leaves after inviting Edmund to pursue the alleged villainy of Edgar.

The evil laughter of Goneril and Regan rings out of the blackness and rather than a Goneril sending her views to her sister by way of her steward Oswald, Suzuki gives us the two sisters sharing the conviction that "Old fools are babes again." The nurse laughs aloud as she silently reads along. This character is the Fool, dressed as a female nurse, but played by another male actor, unbearded. What we are to make of the juxtaposition of barren set, modern nurse, and robed Lear, we are told in the printed program notes, is that we are seeing the delusions of a dying old man in his last few hours.

After the treacherous sisters leave, Edmund manipulates his brother into taking the key to his lodgings and going armed. Next in very brief scenes Lear is seen being deprived of his knights, and Goneril and Cornwall are shown to be harsh in contrast to the milky Albany. Lear's extravagant outbursts against Goneril are reduced in

Suzuki's script to the point that we are left with a picture of a man surrounded by villains. The elimination of Kent deletes the most telling evidence of Lear's culpability in his own downfall. Also without Kent, the Gloucester plot is closer to the center of things, and Edmund's villainy blends seamlessly with the villainy of Goneril, Regan and Cornwall. The scene in which he cuts his own arm and presents it as a wound received from Edgar is moved forward, and the alliance of Edmund and the sisters is highlighted.

The Fool/Nurse is silent except for her periodic laughing at the most malevolent actions and for a single scene in which she reads aloud haltingly the passages about growing old before growing wise and the jokes about crabs, noses, and snails. Lear by this time is beset with his daughter's indignities and pleads in despair "Let me not be mad!" Lear's pleas are left unanswered. Little give and take is retained in Suzuki's truncated script. Regan leads the characters in mass exit with the lines, "Shut up your doors."

This version of Lear gives us an old man confronted with a world of unrelieved villainy and treachery. The Fool/Nurse's sardonic laughs confirm her perception of a (modern) world devoid of compassion. The frame of the play is so loosely tied into the production that it sometimes seems irrelevant and unnecessary, but it provides the basis for the selection of scenes and the departure from the chronicle structure of the Shakespearean original. Since the old man of the frame is hallucinating, Suzuki can dispense with all the bridging, scenes which Shakespeare uses to clarify the linear narrative, and the scenes which might lead an objective observer to lose sympathy for the old man. This Lear and his counter part, Gloucester, are abused victims who do very little to bring their fate onto themselves. In this play the younger generation is shown at its worst; this is a vision of life in which disillusioned old age is beset with compassionless rejection by its offspring.

The play's frame gives us an intense rarified experience, but its use by Suzuki creates problems of comprehension for many members of the audience. Those with limited cultural backgrounds are at sea during the performance. Suzuki depends on the audience to bring some knowledge of literature with them, and challenges them to interact with the theatrical stimuli he provides. Not understanding or accepting this, many viewers of the early performances in Milwaukee went for the exits in the middle of the show.

Some of the visual elements of the production presented problems of comprehension as well. All the major characters wear similar beards, and the costume differentiation is so subtle that when the action jumps quickly between scenes, keeping the characters straight is a real challenge. Edgar's move in and out of the Ole Tom disguise

is one case in point. Another is the return of Cordelia without her wedding veil or any other headdress which initial scenes have established as the convention for marking the female characters. These are minor flaws in a major artistic work.

The production powerfully focuses the poetry and imagery of the Shakespearean text on the central aspect of parent/child relationship. This focus is heightened in the overwhelming intensity of the concentration of every actor. Physically and vocally each actor dredges up the essence of his character and projects it into the theatrical space. We in the audience need not sort through the details of contemporary body language and vocal nuance. The actor and director have made the selections for us and given us only what is essential for our understanding. We are swept along in the beauty of the poetry, the grace of the choreography, and power of the situation.

The performance is punctuated with poignant images of unrelenting agony. Some are Shakespeare's; the blinding of Gloucester, the storm on the heath, Old Tom, the leap from the cliffs of Dover. Others are Suzuki's; Lear trundled in by the Fool/Nurse in a four wheeled wooden hopper, an erotic gestural dance of the nobles to Tchaikovsky ballet music, barking dog sounds supplied by the cast to accompany Lear's mad hallucinatory trial scene, and the miming of the dissection of Regan's heart. Such moments are highlighted in the extreme economy of Suzuki's staging, and through them we are jarred into recognition of the power of the Shakespeare's dramatic metaphor.

The overall effect is not, as it so often is in "concept productions" of the classics, one of distortion of a great play to fit the restrictions imposed by a concept conceived by a narrow mind; rather we feel engaged in an exploration of the depth of the Shakespearean text. We feel that we are being taken into the confidence of an artist pursuing his own visions with a fully developed artistic approach that does not demean its source in the selection of only parts of the original.

The text is almost entirely Shakespeare, but cut to one hour and a half without intermission. Lear sitting tensely in his chair center throughout attends to every treacherous move made against himself, and his generational counterpart, Gloucester. The deliberateness of the acting style reflects the venality of the his tormentors. Periodic bursts of laughter by the Fool/Nurse punctuate the proceedings, and highlight the brashness of the self-serving younger generation.

One stunning example of the Suzuki visual imagery occurs following a virtuoso reading by Tom Hewitt as Lear in the storm on the heath. As Lear sinks in exhaustion into his chair, the music of Tchaikovsky's "Spanish Dance" with pounding castanets fills the theatre. All eight principal characters are arrayed across the stage in

their oriental finery. They turn simultaneously in an invitation to the dance, and then each, lost in his own world, begins to move his arms in an erotic gestural dance. It is totally voluptuous and self indulgent; a stunning metaphor for the atmosphere that places the older generation in a dispossessed vacuum. As the music concludes, the characters kneel, and Lear collapses on the floor at the end of this scene, the castanet driven music swells again, all characters rise, turn, and leave the rejected figure alone.

The Tale of Lear is a work which demands and gets much from the performers. It is a work which demands and gives much to the audience which is willing to become involved in the cooperative act of artistic creation. This production sets a standard for the regional theatres of America not by inviting direct imitation of Suzuki techniques, but in its demonstration that it is possible to build true ensemble acting companies, and in its challenge to the audience to enter into the creative equation. The empty seats at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre performances may indicate the risks associated with this formidable challenge, but the measure of this kind of work is not in the box office, but in the contribution it makes to the maturation of the art of theatre. The company of artists who have given us *The Tale of Lear* has joined a small band of international theatre ensembles like Le Theatre du Soleil, Teatr Cricot 2, Grupo de Teatro Macunaima, and Piccolo Teatro di Milano, who have learned the value of artistic commitment and have found a way to bring individuals in the audience into contact with powerful theatrical metaphors of the basic human condition.

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A scene from *Serious Money* by Caryl Churchill directed by Max Stafford-Clark and produced by Joseph Papp for the New York Shakespeare Festival as part of its cultural exchange with the Royal Court Theatre. Photo Credit: Martha Swope.

SERIOUS MONEY at the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theater.

Serious Money, Caryl Churchill's City comedy on London's financial district, had a wild success in London after its March 1987 opening at the Royal Court and a sell-out run, with most of the original cast, at Joseph Papp's Public Theater in New York in December. In Brechtian fashion, the production was deliberately distanced by rhymed dialogue, direct address, caricatures, label names, and overt doubling, but it remained fundamentally seductive rather than alienating. The delightful ensemble acting and the pace set by Director Max Stafford-Clark made the manipulations of brokers, bankers, and jobbers in London and New York look like a high-spirited romp that audiences might wish to join rather than to change, despite Wall Street's then recent October 1987 crash. In her earlier plays on property and politics, Caryl Churchill wrote as a socialist and a feminist but, although this text often indicates that *Serious Money* is also social criticism, the production is ambiguous. Since the victims of these high flyers--workers who lose jobs when plants are closed by hostile takeovers, for example--never appear on stage, the speculative game seems as harmless to most of the audience as it does to the traders themselves. As Brecht suggested, the actors remain somewhat detached from their characters and invite criticism, the laws of cause and effect are exposed, but there is no appalling suffering, little conviction that these people are capable of acting differently, and no conclusion, like that Brecht hoped for, that "It's got to stop."¹ In *Serious Money*, the characters are all prosperous opportunists, differing only in charm, so that the pleasure of watching them is like that of watching Doonesbury's Uncle Duke escape the Mob, Horner outwit the husbands in *The Country Wife*, or the Vice torment the burghers in a medieval morality play. One chooses sides on the basis of style from a cast of Vices, all playing Greed. Envy and Anger take a scene or two, and Greed is conflated with Avarice, but Lust can barely lift its head, and Sloth doesn't enter it. Everyone works two phones and three computers while the market is open and deals in information and cocaine through the night. The courage to take risks is a minor virtue since losers are bought out with golden parachutes and no act of greed goes unrewarded.

Serious Money is lively theatre but, as social criticism, it offers its audience neither a victim, nor a representative protagonist like Mankind who learns in a struggle between Virtues and Vices, nor a character like Knowledge in *Everyman* who can tell us what we must

do to be saved. Rather, the vices occupy the center, as they do in T. Lupton's late English morality play *All for Money* (1577). There, Sin, Pleasure, and a magistrate called All-for-Money explain their actions in direct address to the audience as they corrupt a variety of men and women who are never tempted by virtue. As a clergyman, Lupton could treat his audience as if it were the Mankind character, and could counter the temptation to identify with his amusing pleasure and money-seekers by ending his morality with treacherous Judas and wealthy Dives, who refused to help the poor, in hellfire.² Since Churchill cannot threaten damnation, she risks the possibility that her frenetic but attractive traders may seem to play the only game in town. The game metaphor dominates the play.

Greed for money is an ancient vice, but Churchill's curtain raiser, a scene from Thomas Shadwell's *The Volunteers, or The Stock-jobbers* (1692) reminds us that money-making through speculation in shares began in the seventeenth century. Wearing period costumes, two jobbers and Mr. and Mrs. Hackwell decide that shares in genuinely better mousetraps or in hypothetical schemes to walk under water will equally serve "to turn the penny in the way of stock jobbing."³ Puritanical Hackwell thinks that amusing himself by watching Chinese Rope-Dancers would be wicked, but he is quite willing to profit by seducing others to watch if shares in their company will sell. As Shadwell's jobbers seek other profitable investments, they are sure that every family in England will need to rid itself of fleas as well as of rats and mice. The evocation of vermin makes it unlikely that Churchill chose the scene to show, as one reviewer suggested, that "high finance once had charm."⁴ Rather, the period piece seems intended to make the audience conscious (as Brecht's historicizing does) that what had a beginning may have an end, or, at least, that change may continue. Since Shadwell's time, we have largely rid ourselves of fleas, if not of profiteers.

Characteristically, in *Vinegar Tom*, about witch-hunts and their present-day parallels, in *Fen*, about rural despair and ghosts from the time when Cromwell drained the East Anglian marshes, and particularly in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Caryl Churchill sees the seventeenth century as the time when everything began to go wrong. In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, she includes the historical Putney Debates (1647) in which the right-wing officers insisted that their concern for property rights must take precedence over the left-wing Levelers' revolutionary goals of land for the poor and universal male suffrage. Oliver Cromwell took power and distracted his disappointed army by invading Ireland. In Shadwell's play, a connection to the Cromwell period (not mentioned in the scene Churchill uses) is that Hackwell had been a campaigner against Ireland.⁵ The hurry, the open

concern with profit, the trading of inside information, the connections with exotic (to the English) lands in the curtain-raiser are echoed in *Serious Money*. Whatever Churchill's intentions, Shadwell's brash opportunists do have charm even if one imagines, historically, that they oppress the Irish and that their elaborate wigs are infested with fleas.

As the periwigged jobbers exit, the curtain opens on a frenetically active contemporary City of London, linked by computers to New York, Chicago, and Tokyo. A program insert informs financial novices that, after what is called the Big Bang in October 1986, the London market was deregulated and opened to foreigners. Peter Hartwell's high-tech set, with eight computer screens and forty-nine phones, initially represents three dealing rooms where members of the upper-class Todd family are separately trading. Greville Todd, the father, pushes England's frontiers into Europe with his Unicorn hotels. His daughter, Scilla, trades in Futures on the whirlpool floor of LIFFE (pronounced Life), the London International Financial Futures Exchange. Her brother, Jake Todd, soon to be found dead, buys and sells short-term commercial loans all over the world. Behind and (significantly) above them, framed by a neo-classical arch like a Wall Street sibyl, is Marylou Baines, a girl from the plains, visible in her American office, where, through inside information from Jake and the drug trade with Latin America, she is now "second only to Boesky" (35). Every major deal has to go through Marylou. After hours, dealing continues at a champagne bar to one side, rear. The pit of LIFFE can rise to floor level as footing for the human horses in the hunt scene, or higher to become a bench or table. On this set, nature is absent. Human relations between Scilla and her father or brother, for example, even when the dialogue indicates that they take place in the ancestral halls, are subsumed by their base on the always visible trading floor with its always visible tape of market prices. Frequent and rapid changes in locale are indicated by lighting, or by the fast-paced dialogue, but wherever we are, everything is for sale. That much is clear.

Trading is the basic *Gestus*. In the opening scene, the noise, the pace, the gaudy jackets, the confusion of over-lapping raucous bids, recall what we saw on the evening news after the October crash, but as celebration, as a game. Scilla, played by Joanne Pearce, with a posh accent and a dancer's body, tells us later that she likes the gamble of Futures trading, which "looks tricky if you don't understand it/But if you're good at market timing you can make out like a bandit" (54). Since the real market is in money--Scilla and her friends are buying and selling contracts to purchase commodities or bonds at a particular price on a particular future date--one needn't take delivery

on anything at all and will never end up "with ten tons of pork bellies in the hall" (54). For the traders, there are only paper profits, neither pork bellies nor real pigs, but Scilla and Grimes play a gambling game after hours "where you throw little pigs like dice" (84) to unwind.

In the two later trading scenes, as African princes, Peruvian heiresses, American bankers, and rising East End men explain their dealings to each other, and directly to the audience, *Serious Money* educates us in finance to make us all insiders in this fast new game. An actual trading floor with 600 men and women shouting in a pit 35 feet across looks like a circle in Dante's hell, even to financial reporters,⁶ but Churchill's version, sometimes backed by rock music, looks more like a disco. Not surprisingly, London bankers and brokers have been delighted to book blocks of seats for their employees, who, Churchill says, "enjoy seeing the world they know depicted."⁷

The action ties a take-over battle to the suicide, or the murder, of Scilla's brother Jake. Scilla is sure that Jake wasn't a suicide, because he wouldn't kill himself for shame since "he treated it all as a game," (32) even though an inspector from the Department of Trade and Industry, the DTI, was checking him. (The dialogue rhymes sparkle but the rhythms often limp as irritatingly as they do in prose paraphrase.) In a series of flashbacks, an American banker, Zac Zackerman, explains that he, Jake, and Marylou Baines were involved in a big take-over scheme with Billy Corman, a new money trader trying to buy out Albion, a traditional drinks firm. The scheme, which resembles an actual 1986 deal involving Boesky and Guinness, illustrates the multinational, sometimes criminal, always political nature of corporate capitalism. The action lasts twenty-four hours, from the morning when Jake is found dead, through an evening at the National Theatre when Corman gives up his hostile take-over in return for a peerage, to the following morning in New York when Scilla trades her curiosity about her brother's death for a job with Marylou Baines. In that time the characters trade all for money: friendship, family loyalty, hospitality, reputation, even romance.

Jake's troubles start when Frosby, his father's friend, calls in the DTI inspector because he hates seeing an old Etonian colluding with Americans and with the lower class new men who took over his City. Frosby says,

Since Big Bang the floor is bare,
They deal in offices on screens.
But if the chap's not really there,
You can't be certain what he means. (29)

Pushed out by Big Bang and by the new men, Frosby regrets the good old days when (to supply a line that Churchill might have written) people with accents that were horrid or funny never could hope to make serious money. Frosby appeals to patricians but plebians will side with the cheeky East Ender Grimes who tells Frosby and Daddy Greville, "All your lives you've been in clover, /Fucking everybody over,/You just don't like to see us at it" (89). Motivated by nostalgia for the old regime or by envy rather than by greed, Frosby is the Judas character who betrays a master of the new game. Like Judas, he regrets his betrayal, notes "My word is my junk bond" (105), and kills himself.

Churchill satirizes the way of life that Frosby valued in a visually witty sequence when the City traders and their County hosts at a hunt become stiff-legged horses, skittish, truculent, even noisily flatulent. The transformation works through movement, without hoofs or masks, making each player a kind of centaur, both mount and rider. Paul Moriarty, boyish and handsome as the American banker Zackerman, is particularly funny when his top half seems unable to rein in his own long legs. His patrician hosts carelessly call him Zimmerman, patronize him with repeated elementary instructions: "So don't step on hounds and don't override master" (27, 28), and give him a killer horse, but Zackerman survives. Zackerman is at the hunt because Jake thought the invitation a suitable trade for a Lamborghini.

To help with funding the Albion take-over, Zackerman and Jake bring in people like Nigel Ajibala of Ghana and Jacinta Condor, a copper heiress from Peru. As Jacinta, appealing Meera Syal makes ideology explicit when she explains the connections between third world poverty, the International Monetary Fund, the frozen exchange rate, and her decision to close her copper mines. To bring in cash, she produces cocaine, with her government's collusion:

To keep Reagan our friend
We have to pretend,
But the US pretends and we know it.
Who likes a coke buzz?
America does.
They stop using it, we won't grow it. (69)

Jacinta, following Marylou's advice, placates the CIA with donations to the Nicaraguan Contras for the privilege of smuggling her cocaine onto Wall Street (79). Some of her money stays in Latin America but she puts as much as she can into safe banks and Eurobonds, pouting "why should my money stay in Peru and suffer?" (63). Elegant Burt Caesar as Prince Nigel Ajibala also expects his African subjects to accept

restricted diets since paying interest to the Western banks where he keeps his own money is his priority. Everyone neglects the invisible poor.

In direct address to the audience, the American Zackerman explains his view of the third world, Churchill's satirical version of Reagan-Thatcher foreign policy:

Anyone who can buy oranges for ten and sell at eleven in a souk or bazaar
 Has the same human nature and can go equally far.
 The so-called third world doesn't want our charity or aid.
 All they need is the chance to sit down in front of some green screens and trade.
 (They don't have the money, sure, but just so long as they have freedom from communism so they can do it when they do have the money.)
 Pictures of starving babies are misleading and patronising.
 Because there's plenty of rich people in those countries, it's just the masses that's poor. (63-64)

In print, Zackerman's monologue looks self-serving and crass since he is only interested in the rich people from poor countries. However, in the mouth of a boyish, handsome actor, speaking to a prosperous audience, it fails as satire. It supports, rather than subverting, the evident belief of the majority of the electorate in England and in the United States, that the only third-world problem is the threat of communism.

If we forget the masses, we may pity the frantic traders. Nearly everyone on stage seems to be under thirty but lust can barely lift its head. Scilla explains to Joanne, a new trader, that "they're all too knackered by the end of the day" (55). On the trading floor, sexual interest is expressed in misogynist jokes as each new woman is sent from man to man to say "I'm looking for Mike Hunt," (60) until she hears the aural pun. Since, "The more you don't do it, the more it's fun to read about" (92), Corman fakes an affair with a model to improve his public image. The principals, Jacinta and Zackerman, order birds and trees for each other by telephone (nature is absent but Harrod's has samples) but they can't make a date because of their overlapping appointments with Japanese magnates and Eurobond dealers. Jacinta states the case, "I can't do bad business just because I feel romantic" (104) and, pleased by her cleverness, Zac replies "You're more of a thrill than a changing interest rate" (104). When Corman's take-over fails, Jacinta and Zac, each charmed by the way the other connives, plan to go up to her suite but, literally, to sleep together.

Making money is not a means to pleasure but a pleasure (the only one) in itself.

Eight actors in twenty roles make political connections by their instant transformations. Scott Cherry, for example, triples as Jake, the victim, Frosby, the informer, and Grevett, the DTI inspector. Linda Bassett, with the cheery aggression and clarion diction of Margaret Thatcher, plays powerful Marylou Baines as well as the public relations expert who can change ugly greedy to sexy greedy, and an ostensibly ethical broker. Allan Corduner multiplies his worried horse face as Greville Todd, and as a trader, as the chairman of Albion, as Gleason, a Cabinet Minister, who insists that shady trading must be postponed until after the Tory election, and, finally as Soat, the homespun President of Missouri Gumballs. Burt Caesar makes Ajibala more Etonian than Jake, and contrasts T.K., Marylou's climbing assistant, with Merrison, a cultivated banker. Daniel Webb gives both Grimes, the Gilts dealer, and Corman, the raider, his lively East End locutions. The players can be traded but the game goes on. The Cabinet Minister explains to Corman that his deal must be postponed because:

... the game must be protected
 You can go on playing after we're elected.
 Five more glorious years free enterprise,
 And your services to industry will be recognized. (103)

The most serious political criticism is Zackerman's suggestion that the CIA or British intelligence might have silenced Jake to cover cocaine and trading scandals (109)--Jake died to save the rich--but the tangled murder plot is never resolved because Scilla, no Antigone, becomes more interested in finding Jake's bankroll than his murderer. When Scilla says, "Daddy, you're trading like a cunt," (89) her lady's voice foregrounds the habitual misogyny in commercial language, and she also complains, "They left me out because I'm a girl," (108) but she is never a victim. She goes to work for Marylou and becomes Wall Street's rising star.

Powerful women are rather over-represented here, at least in relation to their actual control of serious money. There are women traders but there is no Vanna Boesky to rival Ivan on Wall Street, or in prison. Churchill explains that she wrote some of the roles as men but changed them to make parts for women in the company.⁸ Another possibility would have been to let women play roles defined as male in order not to misrepresent the access of women to the financial game. That may not be important since socialist feminists want fundamental changes, not just more room at the top for women in the old system.

Churchill has cast a cold eye on economically ambitious women since Marion began to buy rowhouses and the odd infant in *Owners* (1972). In *Top Girls*, climbing Marlene praised, but her working-class sister blamed, the tippy top girl, Margaret Thatcher, whose third election is celebrated in the ironic finale of *Serious Money*.

Winding up the plot elements in the manner of a Dickens novel, each character steps forward to tell his or her fate. Reaching into the future, we learn that "Marylou Baines ran for president in 1996" while her assistant TK "ended up in jail because of some funny tricks" (110). Scilla's father, Greville Todd, also goes to jail while Grimes, the trade-school drop-out, gets rich enough to buy the Todd estate. Soat, from exotic Missouri, brought in originally because Corman needed junk bonds, takes over Corman Enterprise. Although some of these characters seem be underdogs--women, provincials, ethnic minorities, working-class--there is no real change, even in fantasy. It has always been possible to rise *out* of an under class; the socialist goal is to rise with it, or to minimize hierarchy.

As a finale, to music by Chaz Jankel, Ian Dury's scabrous lyrics promise England "Five More Glorious Years." The eight principals and many extra traders sing "the money's ridiculous/send her victorious for five fucking morious/five more glorious years" (112) to celebrate Thatcher's victory. The satire is clever and the production is lively enough to persuade us that, as Boesky said, "You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself."

Churchill recognized the seductive quality of the show's energy by saying, "people confuse attractiveness and goodness. They think that if you show something [fast deals and fast money] as attractive it must mean you think it's good."⁹ She went on to point out that Christianity recognized that evil is often attractive, which is true, but Christian morality plays could threaten hell and promise heaven. Here, the most serious threat is a few years in a country-club jail, an added fillip of danger in the game of making serious money. Nothing in the play suggests any promise of "heaven," that is, some political or moral alternative to "five more glorious years." Brecht also recognized that, "Even the wholly anti-social can be source of enjoyment to society so long as it is presented forcefully,"¹⁰ and, presumably, with the goal of destruction. Churchill only promises more of Peachum, not even questioned by an Azdak or a Shen-Te.

After the Public Theater production, *Serious Money* opened and closed quickly on Broadway, to mixed reviews, in early 1988. In London, it brought Caryl Churchill the tenth Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for a woman who has written a work of outstanding quality. As she accepted, she emphasized the importance of writing "subversive plays,"¹¹ like *Serious Money*, though, in my view it is not subversive

enough. Finally, greed is an easy target, not as interesting as the complex questions Churchill raised about gender, class, and power in *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, or *Fen*.

Mary R. Davidson
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Notes

1. "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction," *Brecht on Theatre* tr. John Willett. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 71.
2. *English Morality Plays and Moral Interludes*, ed. Edgar T. Schell and J. D. Shuchter. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) 419-474, and editorial material.
3. As quoted in Churchill's *Serious Money*. (London: Methuen, 1987) 13. All subsequent references to *Serious Money* are to this edition.
4. Kramer, Mimi. "Business as Usual," *New Yorker*, 63 (Dec. 14, 1987) 119-120.
5. Thomas Shadwell, *Epsom Wells and the Volunteers or the Stock-Jobbers*, ed. D. M. Walmsley (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1930). Although Shadwell mocks the middle-class speculators from an aristocratic point of view, the liberal historian Thomas Macaulay praised the scene in which "the hypocrisy and knavery of these speculators was, for the first time, exposed to public ridicule" in his *History of England*, 1855. (Quoted in Walmsley's Introduction, lvii.)
6. Martin Mayer, "Suddenly It's Chicago," *New York Times Magazine*, Part 2, The Business World, (March 27, 1988) 23.
7. Caryl Churchill, interviewed by Geraldine Cousin, "The Common Imagination and the Individual Voice." *New Theatre Quarterly* 4 (February 1988) 16.
8. Churchill interview, *NTQ*, 4 (Feb. 1988) 14.
9. Churchill interview, *NTQ*, 4 (Feb. 1988) 16.
10. "A Short Organum for the Theatre," *Brecht on Theatre*, tr. John Willett. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 187.
11. Herbert Mitgang, "Playwriting Prize to Caryl Churchill." *New York Times Arts/Entertainment* (Feb. 23, 1988) 20. Churchill won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *Fen* in 1983, was a finalist for *Cloud Nine* in 1979, and runner-up for *Top Girls* in 1982.

Théâtre et postmodernité.
Avatars d'une belgitude.

Carrefour de l'Europe, enfant bâtard de cultures latine et germanique, la Belgique déploie une activité théâtrale originale qu'interroge le présent dossier.

Il ne s'agit pas cependant de dresser le seul portrait d'une recherche ponctuelle propre à un pays: les contributions ici rassemblées tentent au contraire de suivre un itinéraire universel menant droit aux figures de la postmodernité.

Au travers d'une problématique tournée vers l'adaptation, le statut du texte, le rôle du comédien, le pouvoir de la dramaturgie, nous espérons apporter notre pierre au débat sur les langages du spectacle.

Le travail ici présenté constitue les Actes du séminaire international organisé par le Centre de sémiologie du théâtre de l'Université de Bruxelles; le corpus sur lequel il porte englobe les saisons théâtrales de 1984 à 1986.

Paul Delseemme.

André Helbo.