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STAGES OF COLOR:
AN EXPLORATION OF DRAMA THROUGH A CHROMATIC LENS

by

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B.A. Marist College, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

The human eye can see approximately seven million different colors and within this vastly wide spectrum of refracting and reflecting light waves, an almost equal number of connotations have been attached to these various shades and tones. Whether originating from cultural histories, religious traditions, or a myriad of other sources, these associations succeed at quite literally coloring one's view of what is illuminated in front of them, especially when it comes to any and all attached emotional implications. This knowledge raises the question of how does an artist navigate not only the utilization of color in their work, but the awareness that their audience's perception of their final product will, in one way or another, be affected by the colors utilized within it? This thesis will not only research the societal histories, but the very psychology of color and its various effects on mankind. From the formulation of theories centering around conclusions drawn by this investigation, hypothetical theatrical productions will be used as case studies, directed through the lens of color theory, taking into consideration not only the utilized colors' effect on the story being told, but on the audience's overall experience. With a greater understanding of color theory, specifically in relation to the psychological effects it can have on people, an artist can utilize this knowledge to aid themselves in crafting an incredibly deep, enriching piece of theatre. The proper use of color, or even the intentional lack-there-of, working alongside the many other facets of modern-day stage shows, can transform a classic work into something entirely new just as an exploration into any facet of the human condition can yield wondrous results having a very poignant, tactile effect on the end product that one is seeking to produce, be it on the stage or anywhere else in life.

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CHAPTER ONE: A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY – TAKING A NEW LOOK AT COLOR THEORY

A New World Calls Across the Ocean

Werner's Nomenclature of Colours, the book that aided Charles Darwin in the description of many discoveries during his famed HMS *Beagle* voyage, states “In describing any object, to specify its colours is always useful; but where colour forms a character, it becomes absolutely necessary.” (Syme) Werner, a mineralogist by trade, not only had an eye for differentiating one shade from another but understood the importance of doing so as well as the power color can have over human beings, hence his need to explore it deeper than had ever been done before. Here, “character” truly is Werner’s operative word and accurately so. Few would contest that colors do seem to have their own character associated with them, but the question is how did this come to be? Is there something inherent in the various tones and hues that occupy our world that convey their specific feelings and emotions or is this nothing more than a manifestation of external forces, resulting from millennia of learned behavior that now disguises itself to modern-day man as something more?

Color theory, the science and application of using color, in and of itself is nothing new when it comes to the realm of the artistic and even the theatrical. In his appropriately titled *Theory of Colours*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe posited a great deal about the emotional ramifications of color and its uses, but perhaps more pointedly, argued about the active nature of color, as opposed to the accepted notion regarding its inherent passivity. Responding directly to Sir Isaac Newton’s writings on the subject, Goethe expounds, “Light and darkness, brightness and

obscurity, or if a more general expression is preferred, light and its absence, are necessary to the production of color... Color itself is a degree of darkness.” (archive.org) Here, Goethe reminds those seeking a deeper understanding of color theory that what human beings so often perceive as the lack of something can, in so many ways, be just as powerful and poignant as what is perceived to be the excess of it.

When pointing these studies toward applications within the arts, initial opportunities immediately begin to arise, if for no other reason because artists have advantages that no one else does. Artists can try. More than that, they must try. It is an artist’s duty to attempt things that have never been done before, whether in the form of an overall work, or simply in eliciting a reaction that no one else would dare to attempt to conjure. So often, these reactions come from the challenge of normalcy; the questioning of what is accepted; what is right before our eyes. Color theory ties into artistic work in a way that goes beyond the naturalistic. The use of color and its effect on an audience makes it an invaluable tool for any artist to not only utilize to their advantage, but to play with, perhaps even and especially in a destructive way. Not every audience member will have a strong feeling when it comes to certain opinions that characters may express during the course of a show or in the arrangement of diminished chords at work in an avant-garde musical. However, every able-sighted patron occupying a seat in a theater will have incredibly forceful feelings about color, though they just may not realize it until it is challenged. This is when the magic can truly happen. This is when those in attendance will get jilted out of their comfort zone and will be that much more of an active participant on the journey that is currently being taken. This, for everyone who wishes to affect the status quo, in one way or another, must be the goal that is pursued. It does not matter what the outcome is deemed to

be. It might be a fascinating footnote to an experience, worth more investigation of its own, but the end result does not change the fact that someone's world was shaken. In one way or another, they will never be the same from that point on. All of this, simply due to the fact that an effort was made, a question was asked, a norm was thrown into disarray. After all, the wonderful nature of those who find themselves in this position is that artists do not have to be right, wrong, or anything in between, they simply have to try. This also begs the question how many of the choices regarding color theory do artists themselves actively and knowingly make and how many were made for them; an automatic occurrence triggered by simply deciding to begin to traverse a path illustrated by an illustrious color palate that garnishes every aspect of one's day-to-day life in vivid, unmistakable, and perhaps more often than not, subconscious brushstrokes? This is where our exploration truly begins.

Case Study: *Red*

As we start to play-test how color-centric theories and concepts can be manifested and utilized in concrete, practical ways, it is difficult to find a theatrical work that serves as a better starting point than John Logan's *Red*. A simple, but powerful play, *Red* tells the story of Mark Rothko, a noted painter, who eventually finds himself sparring with his assistant Ken because of Ken's continual and passionate challenges to Rothko's artistic integrity due primarily to Rothko's agreement to accept a commission from the Four Seasons restaurant. We will refer to *Red* and the other works being case studied in this chapter as plays that have anchor colors, which is to say there is at least one dominant color that exists in a very surface level way throughout the piece. The color red is all over this script. It is not only the title of the show, but one of the first lines of dialogue, the very last line of dialogue, and the action of the play takes

place solely in Rothko's New York City apartment with his latest work, a predominately red mural, front and center for the audience to see for the duration of the piece. All this is to say that the color red is appropriately inescapable when tackling this show and even if a director and their designers approached conceptualizing this piece with little to no thought of even the most basic color theory concepts at play, there is a high probability that the color red would dominate both the look and feel of their production.

The first question that arises here is how should one begin to tackle a piece that has an anchor color such as *Red*? There is always the option of choosing the path that is least expected, which in this case would most likely be to do everything in one's power to steer a production in the opposite direction by either ignoring the color utilized in the script (as well as any and all associations commonly made with that color) or perhaps to contrast it with a dominant palate of a different hue all together. While undoubtedly there could be arguments made for the benefits of traversing a path such as this, to take such a drastic approach to a piece could tread dangerously close to ignoring a writer's intention for the purposeful utilization of their color choices. Therefore, instead of fighting against what is presented in the text in order to make one's own artistic point, use the text as a roadmap to guide a production in the active and effective use of the anchor colors present and how they themselves can support the other choices made throughout the staging of the piece.

Almost everyone has heard the famous Lao Tzu quote that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, which is to say so often in life it is difficult to not only start a challenging expedition, but sometimes to find that starting point itself. This can be just as true when it comes to beginning to work on the pre-production of a show. It is here that the

playwright's words can be an asset like no other and an anchor color can be a lifeline for those potentially struggling with conceptualizing a piece. In the case of John Logan's play, you must not fight against red, but embrace it with mindful choices that both compliment and contrast the various crimson hues that production designers will inevitably work into the look of the piece. From here, the question becomes how to best honor the playwright's text and the choices made within it while still making an individual production stand out from previous stagings? *Red* is a play about passion. Not the romantic or sexual kind, but the passion of creation as well as the purpose behind it and the ramifications that will come from it. The anchor color choice here is obvious as red has long been thought of as the color of passion, so when determining how best to consider this throughout the piece, it is this connotation that must be front and center, rather than simply the color itself.

Knowing the color red will be a large part of the final product, less time needs to be spent here considering what colors to visually utilize and more time can be spent analyzing the effects that the color choices will have not only on the world occupying the stage, but on those in the audience. With the color red figuratively and literally anchoring this piece, the designers working on this show will be able to more easily identify what tones to use when aspects throughout the set or costumes want to compliment the themes present, as well as how best to contrast them, thus providing them with their own roadmap to aid in their own discoveries of this piece. All this is to say nothing of how this point of passion can help anchor one's actors as well. The themes and feelings that colors convey will aid those rehearsing and eventually performing the piece to better identifying not simply the greater aspects at play in the script, but how their

own characters individualize them and can hopefully provide something of a safe haven to return to if they ever feel lost in the work.

Just because a play has an anchor color does not mean in the slightest that there is less work ahead of someone looking to stage it or that there cannot be deeper depths to explore. It simply means that the playwright was already beginning to traverse this very path that we find ourselves on and rather than fight against this, any artist who seeks to stage a work such as this one will have the pleasure of joining them on this chromatic journey. As we continue to consider the utilization of color in various theatrical pieces, moving from these more surface-level examples to ones where color will manifest itself in less obvious ways, it is imperative that the lessons learned here not be forgotten. Although the exact form that these concepts are enacted in moving forward may very well morph slightly to more appropriately fit whatever text is being staged, the concepts themselves will only prove to be just as prescient the further we go on this endeavor.

In a Spin, Lovin' the Spin I'm In

English painter Charles Hayter writes, “All that can convey the evidence of colour to the sight, is producible by three materials, which are most properly termed the three primitive colours: they are – Yellow, Red, and Blue. This absolute triumvirate, appointed by the Supreme Power of Light, extends its dominions throughout the utmost boundaries of visible matter, each separately governing its own integral province with positive ascendancy, while each to each communicate their influence in perfect concord and harmony, filling their whole region with a succession of beautiful variety conformable to the varying dictates of light.” (Hayter) Here, in his 1826 work, *A New Practical Treatise on the Three Primitive Colours Assumed as a Perfect*

System of Rudimentary Information, Hayter focuses on not necessarily reinventing the color wheel, initially put forward by Newton and then redefined by Goethe, but honing its concept to concentrate on what we consider today to be the primary colors, writing at length how all other colors may be formed from the proper manipulation of these three. In what he called *The Painter's Compass*, Hayter sought to solidify the yellow, red, and blue color base, thus giving other artists a more concrete starting point for their own chromatic explorations and then providing instructions on how to combine these hues to produce any and all desired effects. He went on to write, "Practice is one of the great means of perfection: for when we find ourselves earnestly engaged in the performance of a work, the faculties are awakened to all that appertains to it, thought and conclusions arise, which perhaps would never have occurred, some of which may lead on to others of infinite value to the arts and sciences." (Hayter) Although not speaking directly regarding the theatrical arts, one might struggle to think of words that ring truer, especially as we begin to explore the application of new concepts that, much like Hayter provided his readers, we now are beginning to develop a practical base to work from now, allowing the experimental mixing to soon commence.

Case Study: *The Civil War*

In our first case study, *Red*, we dealt with a play whose anchor color was as evident as it could possibly be. In Gregory Boyd and Frank Wildhorn's historical musical *The Civil War*, anchor colors are painted throughout the piece just as vividly, they just happen to not literally be spelled out on the title page. Here, we continue to explore the knee-jerk connotations that humans have with colors. In *Red*, it was all about how certain colors, or rather, one in particular, makes us feel. In *The Civil War*, it is about what colors we have learned to associate with a

certain period of history and therefore, what those connections mean to a modern-day audience. If one was to ask someone what colors they think of when the U.S. Civil War is mentioned, there are several obvious answers that are likely to come up: the juxtaposition of blue and grey, the predominant colors worn by the union and confederate troops, respectively. Another example perhaps would be red, white, and blue, the colors representing a country that was at odds with itself in the most destructive way possible. Black and white may even be a response given, as so much of the conflict stemmed from the issue of slavery and the racial dynamic of this country which was, then and now, impossible to ignore. All of these answers are valid and all of them will clearly be found in the text of this musical.

Telling its story from the perspectives of both northerners, southerners, as well as from slaves, *The Civil War*, along with its loose plot structure that focuses much more heavily on the show's musical numbers, provides opportunities for a more pointed direction. This openness lends itself to a director selecting an appropriate color story to focus on, gravitating toward a certain palate more specifically than others and then beginning to make creative choices to subvert it. Due to this show's simpler structure, slightly broader strokes can be painted here and appropriately so. The U.S. Civil War was a large, bloody conflict that took more American lives than in any other wars combined. This fact alone lends itself to a dramatic re-telling, using bold colors which could be the show's palate in its entirety, but limiting it to that may very well be missing other opportunities. At the top of the show, the colors shown either in the costumes or the limited sets can be vibrant and strong, perhaps by the end they may even return to such a state in the aspiration of a newfound peace and reunification of the country. However, as the story progresses, these colors will fade and perhaps without even realizing that it is occurring, soon

enough the audience will only see various shades of grey, not simply in the confederate soldiers' uniforms, but everywhere. Both sides felt like they were fighting for the soul of America in this war, but with each and every drop of blood, the lifeforce of the United States was being drained from itself and here our color use will reflect that in a powerful visual way.

As *The Civil War* is a simple enough show from a staging perspective, the direction for it should complement that to a degree, as it is not necessary to fill every director's book with as many bells and whistles as is creatively possible, especially when factoring in the many considerations discussed during our case study of *Red* when it came to honoring the work's text. However, sometimes one simple concept is all a piece needs to be effective and when helming a work like this, not only a history play, but one written about a time whose ramifications many would argue are still being felt to this day, a director as well as the creative team has a duty to tell this story well and correctly, not to revel in their cleverness when staging it. Every audience member here will arrive at the theater with a color palate in their minds. This is an incredible advantage, not a hindrance and this staging will take those colors, utilize them boldly, and then drain them all in front of our attendees' eyes. Whether it be blue and grey, red, white, and blue, black and white, or any and all combinations in between, as we learned from *Red*, sometimes all it takes is a simple start to provide countless opportunities to create an evening of theatre which ends up being that much more powerful.

Together You and I Can Stop the Rain and Make the Sun Shine

We all know that certain colors complement one another and that others seem to clash, but why is this? "Color harmony (has) a wide range of meanings because of any or all of several conditional attributes. Color harmony is learned, which has been known for many years, yet

despite important evidence for this, no acceptable model exists for explaining the concept of color harmony. When two or more colors are brought together to produce a satisfying affective response, they are said to be harmonized. But very little is known about why such an effect occurs. Many artists declare harmony to be unimportant. Yet almost anyone who has ever taken up the study of color in art sooner or later turns to the aesthetics of color and to color harmony.” (Burchett) This seems to say that so many of the basic tenets of color theory are apparently inherent in human beings and yet despite many studies being done on the subject, it remains difficult to conclude exactly why this is.

Knowing that there is something of an automatic connection within all of us when it comes to the many chromatic relationships that exist, it becomes all the more necessary to default back to the work begun by Newton. His color wheel and the subsequent versions that have emerged since his time provide the best blueprint one can ask for when beginning to investigate a deeper use of color into one’s work. Here, Newton based his findings on light’s interaction with hues, taking into account what amount of saturation or mixture would yield degrees of whites and greys, with every other color existing somewhere in between these two. Mapping this spectrum provided a clearer picture of what colors existed directly opposite from one another and what colors together could occupy a closer spectral location, along with also creating what could be considered an initial divide between “warm” and “cool” color families. Although it is easy to view knowledge like this as commonplace by today’s standards, as one would be hard-pressed not to find even the most basic color wheel diagram in any art classroom across America, it is crucial that this be a starting point for any artist as an understanding of these concepts will serve as a foundation for any work that is attempted from this point on. As we continue to explore and

begin to take the next steps of our discoveries regarding not only why certain color stories seem to work a certain way and others function differently, but also how these color stories make us feel and why. Is it simply coded into mankind's many strands of DNA or is it due to what we have learned, consciously or subconsciously? No matter the answers we may uncover, we must never forget the base from which we began working. It all begins and ends with light; the excess of it as well as the absence of it. Both tell a powerful story and will have an indelible effect when put into use theatrically.

Case Study: *Finian's Rainbow*

As this journey has begun, we have dealt with case studies where color was very much on the surface of a play in every way possible, as well as where color connotations associated with the story being told will be held in one way or another by assumedly every audience member in attendance. Now it is time to ask the question how best to navigate a work that deals with a combination of both, as well as how to best learn lessons from past productions where bold choices of their own were made with a variety of end results. *Finian's Rainbow*, like many classic musicals, has undergone various professional revivals since its Broadway debut in 1947 and with a variety of new stagings often times comes brave new, significant choices made to the direction of a show. Telling the story of Finian and his daughter Sharon, two Irish immigrants who journey to an only slightly fictionalized version of the American south, *Finian's Rainbow* contains many of the hallmarks one would expect from a musical of its era. However, it also deals quite pointedly with racism as throughout the piece, African American sharecroppers are often antagonized by multiple white characters, but specifically that of Senator Rawkins, who mid-way through the play, is magically transformed into a black man.

Certainly treading on sensitive subject matter, especially in this day and age, it started to become common for specific changes to manifest themselves in productions of *Finian's Rainbow*, especially when dealing with the many racial elements at play. One strategy that became utilized was to embrace the name of the musical (as well as the setting of the piece, Rainbow Valley) and create a literal rainbow on stage with the denizens of the fictionalized state of Missitucky. Instead of white characters and black characters, productions began springing up containing blue characters, red characters, yellow characters, and every permutation in between. This approach not only clearly made casting easier for regional productions in predominately Caucasian communities, but it seemed to give the show a bit more universal appeal while still aiming to make the points about racism that the story of *Finian's Rainbow* is clearly attempting to convey.

Although this was a decision one can most likely assume was not spurred on by any aspects of color theory, the related effects of it can still be felt and analyzed through that lens. Here, we have a production that has bathed itself in color and not just one or two, but literally every one found in the rainbow. We have beautiful blue southern skies, pots of gold, and now a multi-colored cast, usually depicted as sporting color-coordinated hair and costumes. It is difficult to imagine any more color being added and the new additions can certainly create vibrant stage pictures, especially in a classic musical where everything and everyone is supposed to be happy or at least end up that way. However, whenever looking critically at what has been gained, it is just as important to consider what might have been lost.

Even in our limited case studies thus far, the theme of honoring the text, both at a surface level and deeper, has been a recurring one. While perhaps it could be argued that these newer

stagings were done with the best of intentions, truly attempting to adhere to the messages of this work, when viewing the final product, it is difficult to not come away from it feeling as though one had just witnessed an elementary school version of the show. If one considers things such as Kindergarten classrooms and children's toys, how many are colored with as many different, vibrant tones as possible? Here, even color theory on a very limited level enters the picture due to so many people's traditional associations with color and the instinctive way they make us feel. With this newer version of *Finian's Rainbow*, everything was certainly bright and colorful, but perhaps so much so that it made the show feel safe, or at least safer than it should have felt. After all, the different colored tribes on stage arguing over which colors can and cannot be trusted still make the salient points regarding the ridiculousness of racism. However at the end of the day, when the purple people are yelling over how untrustworthy the red ones are, it is nearly impossible to not feel like some venom has been removed from aspects of the show that should have appropriately contained a large amount of poison, stemming from the, at times, brutal racial history of the American south.

The question this leaves us with is, outside of an official re-write, should a show like *Finian's Rainbow* even be staged today and if so, can it be done with a fresh, effective take on the material? Looking at what we have learned about the basics of color theory up until this point, we understand that there is always a base palate to begin working off of and then the appropriate shades that, considering their locations on the color spectrum, properly compliment or contrast others. When staging a show like *Finian's Rainbow*, one that many could argue does not simply contain an anchor color, but every anchor color, this can provide us with a guide to make wise and appropriate chromatic choices. Earlier iterations of the show's script specifically reference

when things should be portrayed as black and white only and when color should appear, so clearly, E.Y. Harburg and Fred Saisy, its playwrights, had not only color, but its applications on their minds when penning this. Returning to a vision of the show that contains only black and white (or rather, African American and Caucasian) characters, instead of utilizing a color palette that is essentially unrestrained, showcasing every hue that the human eye can see, we will instead hone in on the themes and subsequent manifestations of black and white. These two colors will serve as the base for the design of this show and we will save the pops of incredibly vibrant color for special moments, much like was first referenced in the script itself. Here, the themes of racism and racial separation can be better expressed visually including by seemingly being at odds with the town's colorful name. Why is Rainbow Valley, this place that these two Irish immigrants are placing their hope of the American dream in so un-rainbow like and how do we get it to finally live up to its name by the end of our story? As Goethe reminds us, the absence of color can be just as powerful as the boldest hues and here, the color will only fully stream through Rainbow Valley when all is finally made right in the lives of not only the magical creatures of this play and our charming Irish father and daughter duo, but the poor, perpetually disenfranchised sharecroppers as well.

CHAPTER TWO: BLUE BLOODS AND WHITEWASHING – THE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS HISTORIES OF COLOR

These Modern Boys and Girls Are in It with Us

Any artist who seeks a firmer grasp as to the effect that their choices will have on anyone associated with their productions, especially regarding their utilized color palate, must endeavor to dive deeper into how we as humans subconsciously process color, from not only psychological perspectives, but cultural ones as well. One of the first assignments of color in one's life often is tied to gender roles and related dynamics. Expectant parents' choices regarding what hues they should decorate their baby's room, as well as the color of clothing and other gifts received at baby showers, will usually be somewhat reflective of the gender of their fetus if not perhaps more reflective of what is sold and marketed by manufacturers. Even new parental trends such as gender reveal parties design their gathering's climax around an infusion of pink or blue, excitedly celebrating and in some way setting a specific tone for the newborn's arrival.

Everywhere around us, we are told that color choice matters, however we are not always told why. How much of a color assignment is genetically inherent and how much of it is simply culturally agreed upon for simplicity sake? Historian Jo Paoletti writes that the readily accepted blue equals boy and pink equals girl dynamic at play in today's society is in fact a much more modern creation than one might think and that the gender-specific color conventions that we now see as universally accepted did not truly come into play until after the second world war. "There was a 1927 chart in Time Magazine where department stores in various cities were contacted and

asked what colors they used for boys and girls... It was all over the map... There was no gender-color symbolism that held true everywhere.” (livescience.com) In fact, there is even a 1918 article from trade publication *Earnshaw’s Infants’ Department* which seems to reverse what has become commonplace today saying, “Pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl.” (smithsonianmag.com) This, coming from the history of how red, almost universally viewed as a color of power, was traditionally associated with masculinity, so therefore pink, its close relative, was paired with boys. All this, only further supporting Paoletti’s nurture, not nature argument. This is to say nothing of taking a step further from gender identity to sexual identity. Although not having as wildly recognized chromatic markers as gender assignments seem to, sexual orientation has its own colored history of the past one hundred years, going back to the badges the Nazis assigned to concentration camp prisoners. Gay men (or those deemed to be) were specified with pink triangles attached to their uniforms, a symbol since re-appropriated by many in the homosexual community, and lesbian women were assigned black ones, technically putting them into what the Nazi’s considered to be an asexual category more so than anything else. However, what we know as the traditional gender color choices continue to make their presence felt throughout the topic of sexuality, whether implied, inferred, or otherwise. Often, young men deemed to be “too feminine” are mockingly associated with colors such as pink and likewise, are assumed to be less masculine if they choose to wear colors stemming from what we think of as more of a traditional female palate.

From a historical point of view, the knowledge that certain degrees of color assignment clearly did not exist from eras before recorded history, to say nothing of some seemingly only

prominently appearing during the last century, is indeed fascinating and certainly opens up a greater conversation about what still has room to be adjusted when it comes to knee-jerk responses to color and its uses. However, it does not succeed at altering the issues at hand in any concrete way regarding an audience's response to color, whether or not this response is coded to DNA strands or is simply a learned reaction. We, as theatre practitioners, cannot simply use a director's note in the show's program to inform our audience that some of their pre-conceived notions about color are simply "wrong" and expect whatever work has been created on stage that might challenge these previously understood ideas to be received in the ways we would like them to be. Instead, the question becomes how do we both continue to learn more about the histories of color and its applications while still properly navigating the life-long amount of baggage (accurate or otherwise) that creates the lens which those exposed to our work will be viewing it under?

Case Study: *The Wolves*

Something that has become abundantly clear, even throughout our early steps in this journey is that so much of color theory and its effects on human beings is inherent. We react to it instinctively and have a giant number of connotations associated with it for a variety of reasons. The same can certainly be said for gender, which makes the combination of these two constructs a fascinating realm to explore. Sarah DeLappe's play, *The Wolves*, allows for such an analysis on both of these fronts. Telling a story centering around the members of a high school girls soccer team, *The Wolves* serves as a snapshot into the everyday lives of teenage girls, but also delves into deeper topics such as violence, anxiety disorders, and abortion, so much so that even an initial pass at the text provides any director with a lot to mine from.

From the start of the most basic form of pre-production, color immediately comes into play. Not in the way of our previous chapter, whose selected works hinged on their anchor colors present in the text, but in another, equally powerful way. *The Wolves* takes place entirely on the turf of an indoor soccer field with our characters always at the beginning of a new day of practice. The text specifies that there should be no goals or bleachers present on stage and it should instead feel as though the artificial grass the girls occupy goes on forever. Therefore, from a chromatic point of view, the floor of whatever stage this show is being performed on will be prominently covered by a bright, solid green, accentuated only with perhaps a few lines and markings appropriate for a soccer field. Although still not an anchor color itself, from a visual point of view, this is just as powerful and certainly should not be ignored, but rather worked into the greater design of the piece, especially when seeking to tackle elements of color theory within this staging.

Knowing immediately that this mass of green is going to be ever-present throughout this piece will begin to inform the next set of choices to be made. On the one hand, we can default back to the basics of color theory from chapter one, returning to Newtown and Goethe's work regarding complementary and contrasting hues to play opposite to the green turf. However, rather than letting this completely dictate the next series of choices made, it can serve as a guide as we begin to consider the other aspects of this piece, specifically in terms of the choices centering around gender. Here, we have an all-girls soccer team made up of high school students. Immediately, there is something of an implied juxtaposition that all female athletes must deal with in terms of being thought of as feminine, but still appropriately tough and aggressive when called for during the course of a typical game. Throughout *The Wolves*, as

more time is spent with these characters, the more three-dimensional they become and the audience sees them more as fully-formed people with their own personal struggles and vulnerabilities as opposed to whatever stereotypes may initially be in play when considering teenage girls. Because of this, it would be fascinating to approach the design of this show by leaning more into color choices that are traditionally deemed masculine, thus setting up more of this kind of expectation at the top of the play, only to have deeper discoveries by the end of it. The team's uniforms can be predominately blue, offset only by blacks and whites (the colors of traditional soccer balls) and the stylings of the cast's hair and other elements can be thought of as harder-edged, once again pitting our usual concepts of traditional masculinity and femininity at odds with one another. In this way, the audience can be introduced to not only a world, but characters inside of it who seem tough and certainly can be when the occasion calls for it, but in reality, are dealing with the hardships that every teenage girl must navigate while on top of all of that, facing the pressure to not only show up for gameday, but to perform at their best when they get there. The *pièce de résistance*, if technologically possible, would be to actually achieve an effect where the color of the turf itself could change. Either done through lighting or through the material that makes up the turf itself, having the ability to change the largest solid color, on stage through the entire piece, could yield some incredible opportunities. As the color green itself is not an anchor piece, by the fact that it is not representing something more than itself within the text, this could be done, still honoring the work, but providing a powerful, inescapable color change, either from one solid to another or patterns (and other visuals) projected on to it. Here, we have what others might see as a confine of a piece providing us with endless potential opportunities, depending on the abilities of the performance space. By considering these options, along with achieving a greater understanding of tactile concepts like color theory and its

applications, *The Wolves*, like many other works can be potentially taken to an entirely new level of audience affectation.

All the Old Paintings on the Tombs

We know that there are a great deal of chromatic associations that stem from cultural traditions way before our time, but where did they come from and why do they still persist? From cave drawings made by Paleolithic man primarily using white calcite to the various colored minerals recorded by ancient Egyptians, human use of color can be tracked through dedicated studies and by doing so, many patterns begin to emerge. In some cases, explanations for why certain colors gained the status they once held and still contain the echoes of today can be easily identified. Artist and writer Emma Taggart states, “There’s a long list of things we can thank the ancient Egyptians for inventing, and one of them is the color blue. Considered to be the first ever synthetically produced color pigment, Egyptian blue was created around 2,200 B.C. It was made from ground limestone mixed with sand and a copper-containing mineral, such as azurite or malachite. The Egyptians held the hue in very high regard and used it to paint ceramics, statues, and even to decorate the tombs of the pharaohs.” (mymodernmet.com) The popularity of the color blue continued once it made its way to Medieval Europe and its highly sought-after nature, along with the initial difficulty in attaining the desired deeper tones meant that only the wealthy could afford it, thus blues and purples soon became the colors of upper class and beyond, represented today in the specific hue of royal blue, a constant reminder of the shade’s history.

Certain colors have histories that are readily recorded, as is the case for blue, or can be easily assumed such as green, which always seems to be rooted in it being considered the color of

nature, across all cultures. However, for other colors, it is not quite as simple. Yellow, for instance, has one of the most complicated histories. Although its most basic roots are easy enough to trace, its color symbolism itself seems to take on vastly different meanings across a multitude of cultures. “Deriving the pigment from clay, yellow is thought to be one of the first colors ever used as a paint in prehistoric cave art, with the first application thought to be over 17,300 years old. Thanks to its close association with gold, the color was considered eternal and indestructible (and) can symbolize happiness, sunshine, good energy and joy. However, it can also represent cowardice, betrayal, terror, and illness... the latter of these associations thought to be due to the fact that yellow pigments are often found in toxic materials.” (canva.com) It is with examples such as these where the specific cultural histories become not only more prominent but much more crucial in which to develop an understanding.

The cultural mile markers of color have been present since the dawn of recorded human history. From the backstory of a single Carthaginian ship waving a swath of white wool in order to get the attention of Roman soldiers so that it could communicate its wish to surrender all the way to twentieth century network news deciding to code states’ presidential voting preferences in either red or blue, it is clear that so often it is difficult to identify in the moment what might become a cultural chromatic touchstone. However, the greater the knowledge that can be garnered about certain colors place in specific moments in history, the greater the opportunities to deftly use this understanding to punctuate a piece of theatre, ideally in a way that not only gives a knowing historical nod to the previously initiated, but adds an extra layer to what is being created on stage as well.

Case Study: *The Crucible*

In our first chapter, we dealt with plays and musicals that contained anchor colors in one way or another. As we continue through this next part of our journey into the theatrical applications of color theory, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* serves as a bridge for us, connecting previous themes explored and identifying new ones. *The Crucible* itself does not contain an anchor color by our previously established definition of one or more colors being directly contained and referenced within the text of the work such as with *Red* and *Finian's Rainbow* or having a reasonably assumed connotation to certain hues that most to all audience members will enter a production with as is the case with *The Civil War*. However, *The Crucible* gets as close as a work can get to that space without actually crossing over into it due primarily to the show's subtext.

A four-act allegory for McCarthyism and the "Red Scare" in America, *The Crucible* tells the story of an even earlier dark mark on the inhabitants of what would later become the United States, the Salem witch trials. This, in essence, necessitates the simultaneous telling of two stories that happen to share many of the tragic beats found in Miller's text. It is here that a director can use elements such as color to not only guide a piece throughout this taller order than many other shows come with, but to accentuate choices that not only complement the work, but connect the audience to the historical connotations present as well.

Here, we will utilize a technique that will be subsequently referred to as a color marker. A color marker is a certain color (or colors) that the director wants to be present in some form in the design of their production. This color marker can appear in various ways throughout more concrete avenues such as set pieces and costumes as well as in temporary moments, brought into

existence with lighting choices and other technical elements of a production. This will not be done in a way that dominates the look of an entire play as could be easily done with *Red* or would stand out so greatly as could be done with the artificial turf in *The Wolves*, but instead is characterized by carefully chosen opportunities to infuse it throughout the piece, subtlety connecting many different strands of the story being woven together on stage.

Historically speaking, the color that is going to be most identified with the subtext of *The Crucible* is red. In modern society, one of the primary associations of the color red, especially from a global and certainly political standpoint, is with socialism and communism, primarily because of the Soviet Union and China, both of whose flags were predominantly red, however this chromatic relationship actually has persisted longer than most may realize. “Red was associated with left-wing movements in Europe long before the Russian Revolution. The flags associated with the European revolts in 1848 as well as the flag of the Italian nationalist Garibaldi were red – indeed his troops were called “camicie rosse” (redshirts).” (ibtimes.com) Therefore, knowing that the color red serves as powerful identifying visual when it comes to the socialist/communist association, along with having an understanding of the deeper themes Miller was writing about when penning this work, it only makes sense that this be our color marker for the staging of this piece.

From this point, communication regarding the show’s vision and its subsequent execution between a director and their production team is imperative as a great many of the opportunities to utilize this color marker may very well come from one’s designers as much as from the director themselves. Here, having a production team in place that one can trust and depend on is invaluable as it allows the director to not have to deal with as many specifics as they might be

forced to otherwise and instead can simply instruct their designers to be on the lookout for these opportunities regarding the show's color marker. From that point, these individuals can focus on their work under this mandate and now the costume designers can develop their own ways of working various shades of red into their designs as much as the lighting designers can look to accentuate moments within their designs by adding crimson hues.

By approaching the staging of a piece such as *The Crucible* in this way, we return to what always must be a director's default position of making sure the text is honored. The association of this play with the color red is not going to be anything new and undoubtedly there have been multiple productions of this piece that have bathed its actors, set, and audience in a barrage of red. However, would taking an approach such as this be true to the author's text? Matter-of-factly, this is still 1600s America and despite what is very clearly boiling beneath the surface of Miller's words, every choice that is made for this staging must not ignore what our given circumstances are, rather than allow ourselves to get caught up in how clever our particular iteration happens to be. As a director, not only is it crucial to honor the text, but also to respect our audience. Every show must be staged with the assumption that there will be at least one member in attendance who has never heard of this particular play and therefore knows nothing about it. If a show like *The Crucible* was in fact done in the previously explained manner of dousing everything in eyeshot in some form of red, it would inevitably be not only distracting, but confusing for people in attendance, if not completely alienating. Here, there may have been honest, good intentions in the choices that were made, but the end result only served those who were already in the know at the expense of those who were not. Even with everything we learn

and discover throughout this journey, this must be something we continually remind ourselves to fight against.

Stained Glass Windows Keep the Cold Outside

The cultural elements of color can provide a fascinating window into who primitive people were as well as many of the elements and values of their respective societies. The similarities of chromatic meanings between cultures separated by vast oceans can better inform us of perhaps what aspects truly are inherent in humans and the differences that exist between them may likewise provide examples and instances of regional specification that speak to the whys and wherefores of certain cultural color connotations. However, other elements of the human experience transcend constructs that too often serve as barriers between people, such as language and continental boundaries; the greatest example which, without a doubt, is religion.

All of the world's major religions truly exist outside of the usual causes human beings so often find for separation and because their messages and traditions are so powerful and ever-present in so many people's day to day lives, anything associated with them will hold that much stronger an effect over the faithful. When looking for elements that add to this worldwide color story that we are tracing, religion must come second only to our previously considered cultural-specific touchstones, some going all the way back to when man's sole artistic outlet was literally in the making of cave drawings. Here, our investigation must turn to what major religions, in direct or indirect ways, have influenced the greatest amounts of people throughout history and what if any colors were predominantly utilized within them; their uses and meanings undoubtedly carried over into a multitude of traditions and services that are still celebrated by people today.

When ranking the world's religions by number of members, Christianity is far and away the largest with slightly over two billion members, followed by Islam at one and a half billion, and skipping over the portion of humans who consider themselves secular/nonreligious (registering at just over a billion), Hinduism rounds out the top three with approximately nine hundred million members. (adherents.com) However, if we instead change our metric to analyzing the oldest still-active religions, Hinduism beats everyone else out with its founding traced back to between the fifteen and fifth centuries BCE. The closest runner-up would be Judaism between the ninth and fifth centuries BCE. (theculturetrip.com) Both of these metrics are useful for our exploration as both the popularity and the longevity of a religion will have indelible effects on mankind's association with innumerable factors contained within, including elements such as color.

Just as with so many other elements we have touched upon previously, colors associated with one form of religious significance or another can exist in several forms. There are the more surface level associations that appear cross-culturally for a mainstream audience akin to seeing red and green juxtaposed and immediately thinking of all things Christmas, a connection that one can assume persists even for the staunchest of non-believers. However, there are also the more subtle chromatic relations that still affect a great deal of people because of how long these connotations have been around. Most individuals though, especially those outside the specific religion, have never been aware of their histories, instead only knowing them to have always existed as an everyday part of life. When considering the color blue and its place within Christianity, many representations begin to emerge such as blue's connection with water and the many symbolisms attached to the sacrament of baptism, such as purification and rebirth.

Additionally, many religions attach certain hues to prominent figures within the faith. As A.C. Lura writes, “In 431, the Catholic Church assigned color to its various saints, with Mary the mother of Jesus receiving the color of blue. Over time, Mary’s blue became what we’d recognize today as navy blue, and it’s association with Mary meant blue took on a meaning of trustworthiness and innocence.” (listverse.com) When these chromatic associations such as these persist for a long enough time, on display in one way or another for so many people across the entire world, it is nearly unavoidable that they will somehow begin to seep into the collective global consciousness, bringing us that much closer to understanding why certain colors can affect people, even when they themselves are unaware of it.

Case Study: *Doubt*

John Patrick Shanley calls his Tony award-winning play, *Doubt*, a parable. Set in a fictional church and its parish school in the 1960s Bronx, *Doubt* deals with the sexual abuse epidemic within the Catholic Church by telling the story of the school’s principal, a strict, conservative nun, who suspects the parish priest of abusing a young boy, the school’s first ever African American student. Along with its stellar writing, *Doubt* enjoyed a considerable amount of success upon its debut in 2004, undoubtedly due to it addressing such a wide-reaching scandal that was only recently seeing the light of day across the mainstream population. Therefore, even though this is technically a period piece, set decades before its premiere, the subject matter was and unfortunately still is as timely as it has ever been.

Because of the loftier themes this play deals with, alongside of the fact that with a cast of only four, the scale of the piece is much smaller than most, the opportunities are great when it comes to the desire to infuse various elements to this production. With the setting and subject matter

centering around a church, this first brings into question what kind of an effect does a church have on a person and thus, one's audience? For some people a church represents comfort, for others, the exact opposite, and for some, it does not hold any personal significance at all. While it would be difficult to design a piece seeking to have a universal effect on an audience when it came to this, it is first necessary to make a choice as to which of these options this particular production will lean more toward. Will this setting be one that is supposed to bring comfort and then that sense of comfort is threatened or is this a place that one cannot trust from the get-go? Either choice makes for an interesting dynamic to be played off of and can inform the decisions made from this point forward.

Bringing color into the equation, since we are dealing so specifically with one particular religion in this piece, then the more exact our choices can be in terms of what colors are naturally going to be present and what others can be used alongside them for greater dramatic effect. Knowing that we are dealing with a traditional Catholic church as well as nuns and a priest, we are automatically given a basic template for the look of the piece spelled out within the text of the play itself. However, on top of the usual black and white wardrobe pieces these characters will predominately wear, Catholicism itself allows for other specific color possibilities. Not only do various liturgical seasons all have representative colors such as purple for lent and green for ordinary time, but so much of religious art plays off a palate of specific colors choices. It is here we return to the first question in terms of how does a director wish for religion and the church itself to come across in their production? The answer to this will dictate so much of the rest of this piece, but already several options for color utilization have presented themselves. A more basic palate of black and white could be utilized with obvious symbolism for good and evil,

appropriate not only for the history of all major religions themselves, but for the struggle currently presented in the story of *Doubt*. However, if the director wanted a more dynamic palate, the church and its natural regiments provide that as well, to say nothing of going a step farther and taking advantages of other religious art within the set design itself. From paintings to stained glass windows depicting saints, scenes from the bible, and Jesus Christ himself, there are a great many places where a director and their production team could dig into the themes of this work and how they could visually be represented, no matter the color palate that was decided upon. This, perhaps, is another indication as to just how phenomenal a play truly is; when immediately multiple different directions, even just from a visual standpoint, begin to present themselves. All of them equally effective, powerful, and appropriately malleable to suit the needs and vision that a particular production has.

CHAPTER THREE: FROM PURPLE PROSE TO THE SILVER SCREEN – ANALYZING COLOR IN THE VISUAL ARTS

Pictures Came and Broke Your Heart

When reflecting back on her long, eventful life and career, ninety-three year old BBC radio veteran and the voice of children's stories on the program *Listen With Mother*, Daphne Oxenford commented how she always treasured the quote of a young man who, when comparing her medium to that of the newly invented television, said "I like the stories on the (radio) because the pictures are better." (theguardian.com) It might be thought of that all any artist is attempting to do in any medium is to exactly emulate the pictures that exist in their mind, a task we all will most likely always fall short of successfully accomplishing, but as technology continued to evolve and brought the visual arts that much closer to the masses, this newfound accessibility changed everything for storytellers seeking to achieve not only a more powerful, but a more deeply intimate connection with their audience.

Since color has always been a strong part of the human experience, artists have not only been using it, but making specific choices with it in their work since the dawn of time. From Hawthorne's sinfully lustful scarlet letter to Poe's forebodingly obsidian raven, even the most casual literary consumer's brain is undoubtedly overflowing with images such as these, culturally seared into their temporal lobe. When reflecting back on our own experiences with stories we read or were told to us, the young boy's words only seem to ring truer as we ourselves could fill in any gaps that may have existed from a non-visual medium, succeeding at both exciting and terrifying ourselves. While the argument could certainly be made that these mental

images will always be the purest manifestation of the stories we are exposed to, it is undeniable that once the proliferation of film and television began, a new era was forever ushered in. We finally had entered a time where artists could not only properly show, alongside being able to tell, and soon thereafter be able to utilize color within their work directed at a much larger, more mainstream audience, but simultaneously, in a great many ways, celebrate doing so.

Case Study: *Trixie True, Teen Detective*

Trixie True, Teen Detective is an incredibly fun show. It is light-hearted, campy (in a very self-aware way), and succeeds at both adding to and commenting on the many stories (in all forms of media) of its kind. The work of writer, composer, and lyricist Kelly Hamilton, *Trixie* was both a love letter to and a commentary on the serialized pulp fiction novels (and the dynamics presented within their flimsy covers) of the mid-twentieth century. During its all too short run at what was then the Theater de Lys on St. Christopher Street (now the Lucille Lortel Theater), local media outlets praised the originality of what they saw, even going so far as to give *Trixie* its place in theatrical history as the first stage show to utilize a post-modern comedic style which until that time had only been seen on late-night television programs such as Saturday Night Live and SCTV. Yet, for whatever reason, *Trixie True, Teen Detective* not unlike its very own Joe Sneed, the gun-for-hire writer toiling away in front of his typewriter, only to make the non-existent “Helen Hathaway” more and more famous, seems to bear a name that has been lost to history. This upbeat, campy musical both follows and subverts a tried-and-true young adult storytelling formula that anyone who grew up watching and reading everything from Nancy Drew to Scooby-Doo will be able to relate to and relish in. This begs the question of why this show, one containing such universal appeal and eliciting enthusiastic praise by the few lucky

enough to have seen it performed, never rose to the level of so many of its contemporaries. The answer to this may be as simple as a case of tragically bad timing, having premiered during an extremely rough economic period in this country as well as being bookended by the much-ballyhooed openings of *42nd Street* and *Dreamgirls*.

The world of *Trixie* is divided between the “real” NYC offices of Snood publishing and their most prized work, the comic book-esque locale of Cherry Hill, NJ. The majority of the action takes place throughout various locations in the latter, but we do jump back to the Snood offices enough that they cannot be ignored or be given less thought than the more colorful lands of Cherry Hill. The potential color palate here offers some incredible opportunities. Since *Trixie* is divided between a “real” and “fake” world, color choices would be used to punctuate this. Our world of Snood publishing will represent an accurate albeit still stylized 1940s New York City with muted tones of whites, grays, browns, and blacks. The world of Cherry Hill, which is also set in the same time period, will be stylized to another level by taking the celebrated color tones of that era (teals, reds, etc.) and infusing them with a bold, modern take. This dynamic will not only look beautiful on stage but will create a stark contrast between the two worlds. However, the main difference that would be utilized when it comes to colors and appearances would be in our character and make-up design. Inspired by the more modern trend of “realistic comic book make-up” seen in convention circles and creative online beauty tutorials, my vision would be to have all the residents of Cherry Hill have this design for their face and possibly their hair. Not unlike other more dramatic stage make-up, this would be a very effective look in general and should be doable, as long as everything is coordinated with the lighting team to make sure we are complimenting, not fighting against one another’s work.

Even for a light-hearted, campy comedy piece as *Trixie* is, there is always something beneath the surface. It is here that color use could be taken a step further to help explore the concepts of patriotism vs. jingoism (a conversation this country would do well to have with itself at this moment) which can be explored throughout *Trixie* and the gang's big radio broadcast for the troops and all the rigmarole leading up to it. Additionally, the concept of gender dynamics and the cultural shifts thereof easily lends itself to conversation within this work that is punctuated by color choices. Both lovingly set in (and constantly making fun of) mid-twentieth century America, these themes run rampant throughout. Everything from *Trixie* being a straight-A student and famous amateur detective, but her aptly-named boyfriend wanted nothing more than for her to essentially stay in the kitchen to Miss Snood haphazardly giving control of her giant company to Joe because she is just too overwhelmed and needs a man to take over, *Trixie* gives us a lot of gold to mine from here. At the end of the day, *Trixie True, Teen Detective* is a big, bright, fun celebration of a show and similarly to how so much of early color use in the visual mediums of the big and small screens celebrated its newfound chromatic possibilities, *Trixie* is a musical that can be lovingly bathed in color, washing the audience in a rainbow of innocent joy. Though loftier themes and darker tones, both literally and figuratively, seem to be difficult to get away from these days, a show like this may just be exactly what theatregoers need from time to time, whether or not they themselves even realize it.

New Car, Caviar, Four Star Daydream

Gregg Toland, the cinematographer for *Citizen Kane* and staunch supporter of classic noir films, once opined "Color will continue to be improved but will never be a hundred percent successful. Nor will it ever entirely replace black and white film because of the inflexibility of

light in color photography and the consequent sacrifice of dramatic contrasts... the low-key, more dramatic use of light seems to me automatically to rule color out in pictures of (non-musical or non-comedic) type.” (provideocalition.com) Although it may be true that there was a time where the full and constant use of color was not seen by all as an inevitable, once the realistic possibilities of color loomed on the horizon, it was as if a magical genie had appeared and upon its arrival, it was impossible to put back in the bottle ever again. Artists knew this was the future and could not help themselves from beginning to imagine the opportunities that this vivid future could bring and soon enough, audiences throughout the world began to have shared cinematic and televised experiences filled with color from Dorothy’s wonderous arrival into Oz to the weekly magical exploration through *Walt Disney’s Wonderful World of Color*. Just as had been done with the proper manipulation of light and shadows during the multiple decades that had come before, storytellers now could start making specific choices with their use of color, in both bold and muted ways to achieve what before had only been possible navigating various shades of gray. Alongside these tremendous opportunities, numerous questions now had to be asked by directors and production teams alike. What would an audience make of a certain color choice? What do certain tones convey? What is expected and what is not? These are both questions and answers every sighted person has considered (even if perhaps unknowingly) throughout their lives but must now be asked again in a more official capacity as the choices made here could very well impact the success or failure of a piece when, in the professional world, art meets commerce. Just as so much of early color use was a celebration of this new glorious technological feat, this new phase was very much a reevaluation of ideas and concepts thought to be known and even commonplace, but quickly realized that when put through the lens

of a new medium, everything must be looked at with fresh eyes. Here, artists knew the time had come once again to take these initial discoveries and then begin to dig a little deeper.

Case Study: *The Pillowman*

Theatre and film seem to have something of a symbiotic relationship, as the two mediums constantly influence one other, especially while new trends and technologies continue to emerge. Modern plays are often a hybrid of both their on-stage predecessors and their contemporaries shown on the big and small screens, with many even going so far as to utilize more traditionally filmic elements such as background music and projected text. While this, in and of itself, is not inherently problematic, as any director being exposed and open to new artistic considerations will never be a bad thing, different mediums will always have different strengths and it is important to not lose what makes seeing a play unique and arguably more powerful than watching a film, even if the lines between the two continue to blur.

The Pillowman, Martin McDonagh's 2003 Tony Award nominated play, represents a culmination of not only modern theatre and film, but so many art forms. Itself a dark, twisted dystopian fairytale, *The Pillowman* introduces us to Katurian, a tortured writer known for penning fable-like tales that often involve violence against children, stemming from abuse he witnessed as a young boy. Its three acts are all set within a fairly non-descript police interrogation room, however a great deal of action within the piece comes from the reading and subsequent acting out of Katurian's writings. These stories, which become more involved and bizarre as *The Pillowman* continues, are clearly meant to be portrayed in a highly contrasting manner to the action within the interrogation room and provide us with great opportunities to do color theory-based exploration.

Considering this chromatic realm, McDonagh does a lot of the groundwork here for us. With the initial action taking place in this dark, generic room within a police station, Katurian's tales immediately transport us to many new, disturbing, and at times borderline psychedelic worlds. Regarding color use, McDonagh starts us down this path as stories such as "The Little Green Pig" already contain strong, specific color and every one has such powerful, unique visuals. It becomes the director's job to decide how best to highlight these, serving the overall message of *The Pillowman*. It is here that this play's echoes of its silver screen relatives can be our guide.

Just as the camera can emphasize directorial choices for what the audience should be focused on, our color choices can accomplish the same task, especially within the dream-like (or perhaps nightmare-like) state that Katurian's tales transport us to. In our production of *The Pillowman*, our colors will be vibrant to a point that defies nature. Whether utilizing specific types of paint, black lights, or anything else that will uniquely add to the colors, the intensity displayed will be at its most severe. This will be especially the case for the most dramatic properties of these anti-parables, such as the cross in "The Little Jesus" or the pink pillows in "The Pillowman." Here we can create this heightened, exciting, and at times scary reality for the audience that will contrast with a simple palate of blacks and greys that will make up not only the police interrogation room itself, but the costumes and additional set dressings.

The Pillowman is a work that stays with everyone who has ever been a part of it, including simply attending a performance. It is a work that pushed boundaries in every way when it made its professional debut and one could therefore make the argument that it is the director and production team's duty to continue to push boundaries in any subsequent stagings of it. By heightening the colors at play within this piece, drawing the audience's attention in a way that is

not always easy to do within a stage play, the stories told within *The Pillowman* will stand out to all who experience them in a literal way that separates them from not only the other elements of this piece, but likely most other theatrical stagings as well. If done successfully, this will make all who witness this production that much more invested, surprised, and undoubtedly disturbed; with Katurian's stories staying alive within those who see and hear them for a long time to come, just as Martin McDonagh would have wanted.

I See a Red Door and I Want It Painted Black

When viewing the more practical applications of color theory as an artist, we are now starting to see the many different opportunities for utilization arise to enhance a story and make whatever statement is deemed necessary and appropriate. With the proliferation of film, the world began to receive auteur storytellers and directors taking the helm with distinct styles and specific messages ready to convey to their audiences. Very often, color became a staple of these individuals' work, either through a specific, recognizable palate in the case of someone like Wes Anderson, as with their identifiable, pointed pops of color in the vein of Stanley Kubrick and M. Night Shyamalan, or often as a combination of both. Perhaps the film *Schindler's List* demonstrates the execution of some of these concepts better than many other works of its kind. Here, director Steven Spielberg and his perennial cinematographer, Janusz Kamiński made a purposeful, direct choice when it came to color theory and its application which becomes immediately evident upon seeing even one monochromatic frame of the final film. This, in no small part, aided the film in its overall cultural impact upon release and undoubtedly contributed to both of their eventual Oscar wins as well. Although, *Schindler's List* was based off a pre-existing text, the creative team had essentially carte blanche to adapt *Schindler's Ark*, Thomas

Keneally's 1982 novel, in whatever manner they saw fit. Perhaps the reason *Schindler's List* tackles many of these issues so deftly is because, by the end of the film, the viewer is almost automatically asked the question regarding which of Spielberg's artistic choices was more effective, the decision to shoot the film in black and white or the decision to break this rule singularly personified in one of the Nazi's millions of innocent victims, the girl with the red coat? However, what perhaps is most compelling about these two examples is not the ruling on the effect of one more so than the other, but in fact the combination of the two, thus creating a final product with a polychromatic interplay that cannot be ignored and therefore, is all the more powerful.

One question that remains is does color theory begin to manifest itself in a more controlling manner when the canvass an artist is working from is not nearly as blank as others? Even analyzing modern theatrical mega-hits, spear-headed by seasoned professionals in their own right, one has to wonder how much of the direction and design of certain shows was purposefully spearheaded by these clearly very talented artists and how much of their final composition was going to have been a given from the moment it was announced that these titles were Broadway bound? After all, does such a world exist where a production like *Wicked* could prosper without designer Eugene Lee bathing its set, costumes, and lights in a seemingly endless emerald hue? Or, had Mr. Lee been so bold to make such unexpected color choices (perhaps aside from his lime-skinned lead character's makeup) how would the average theatregoer have reacted? Would the denizens of the Great White Way have applauded his daring take on this acuminate adaptation of arguably the most famous film of all time or would they have left the Gershwin Theatre scratching their heads in confusion as to how it was possible to be assigned the creation

of a nouveau Emerald City and then do so without the proper (and obvious) infusion of copious tones of viridian? It is through examples such as this that the question of how much has color and all of its deeper uses and meanings truly invaded the subconscious of the average-sighted human and from that point, like with a great many other reflexes in modern-day life, how much is someone truly in control of their choices and actions or to what degree is the tinted tale actually wagging the dog?

Case Study: *Mack and Mabel*

It is difficult to imagine a work that could serve as a better summation to these concepts than one that brings the audience directly into the underbelly of the film industry itself. Set during the late 1930s, just as the movie business was somewhat haphazardly transitioning from the silent film era to the new wave of talkies, *Mack and Mabel* tells the story of real-life director Mack Sennett and Mabel Normand, a recurring star in his films and his eventual love interest. Far from being a tale that ends with everyone living happily after, *Mack and Mabel* itself drew a tumultuous reception, closing only eight weeks into its initial Broadway run. However, many theatre scholars have since formed the opinion that 1970s audiences simply were not accustomed to a story like this and that this piece was, in many ways, simply a little too ahead of its time. What separates it from other works that famously also baffled audiences the first time around, only to receive rave reviews in the future, such as Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, is that *Mack and Mabel* has yet to ever truly get a second chance. Although it has been staged in London's West End multiple times, *Mack and Mabel* has yet to receive a proper, revitalized North American run and one cannot help but imagine that perhaps with all the recent headlines having come out of Hollywood, specifically in terms of the untoward treatment women were forced to shoulder for

so long, this work would be a perfect fit for a revival considering not only the setting, but its darker themes within.

When eyeing the application of color to this work, a great many opportunities instantly arise. Since this is a piece that one could argue played with expectations itself in just the story it told, any subsequent staging should take that concept and run with it. Beginning with the silent film era, the utilization of blacks and whites could be visually quite striking as well as fascinating to see essentially a colorless film be imagined on stage with real players, perhaps juxtaposed with the bright infusion of color as aspects of new Hollywood creep in. However, the real moments that would come from this work will enviably take any and all expectations the audience has and painfully crush them, just as the world of show business has done to far too many. Outside of the fun, stylized choices along the lines of painting a silent film on stage, the colors from the “real” world of *Mack and Mabel* should always be slightly off. Not so much so that we begin to usher in a feeling of the surreal, but enough to convey a feeling to those who watch that something is just not quite right.

The movie business is supposed to be glamorous and often times, as many are finally starting to realize more and more each day, in reality, it is the furthest thing from it. Playing in that world should be bright and beautiful, but it will not be. Not for Mack and Mabel and not for our audience. With this show, not only can a unique, stylized color palate be created and effectively utilized, but every expectation an audience may enter the theater with, from plot points to overall tone can be lovingly subverted with mindful color choices, culminating with Mack ending the show by singing to a deceased Mabel, “I Promise You a Happy Ending.” Here, we can set our color palate back to how one would expect a musical about show business to look, even for just

the final musical number. It will be happy, playful and everyone in the audience will know that it is nothing more than a lie. A beautiful, well-intentioned lie that Mack and our audience may very well be happy to share with one another until the final few bars end, but a lie, nonetheless.

CHAPTER FOUR: FEELING GREEN AND SEEING RED – A STUDY OF SYNESTHESIA AND COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

I Can See Right Through You

As human beings, our senses are as inherent to us as anything will ever be and the elements that we can interact with via our sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing will always be some of the most domineering factors of our lives. Synesthesia, meaning “to perceive together”, is a condition that forms a predisposition to changes in primary sensory and cognitive functions, represents the (as of right now) ultimate destination when it comes to sensory interaction, manifested by examples such as people having the ability to hear shapes and taste colors. From a philosophical point of view, the scientific studies that have been done on this remarkable condition only serve to validate what many eastern religions have taught for centuries, specifically in terms of the concepts of Chakras and auras, all represented by colors with pinpointed specificity regarding their individual and combined meanings and uses.

While the knowledge of such fascinating elements has arrived at the point that it is generally no longer questioned, there still is a great deal of information yet to be gleaned and many argue that this concept’s quasi-relationship to eastern philosophies is the primary reason those in the west have been hesitant to embrace it as fully. Writing on this very issue, Avinoam B. Safran and Nicolae Sanda state that “Over the last few years, substantial advances have been made in the understanding of synesthesia, and hence more globally in the comprehension of perception and consciousness. Fortunately, awareness of this condition in the societal environment also significantly improved, finally allowing synesthetes to feel relieved by the so badly needed

recognition of their particular situation. In a near future, in addition to the expected deepening of the explorations undertaken, elaborating a more comprehensive definition of synesthesia would be welcomed. Currently used criteria are rather restrictive for a condition that is quite polymorphic in nature. This process, however, is customary in the history of medicine, which consists of initially establishing a restricted definition to encapsulate the core of the condition and then broadening it, taking into account the numerous subtle presentations encountered.”
(ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

Even if all of this knowledge does not, in and of itself, change the fact that those who receive one’s art will, at least in part, receive it affected by the uses of color within, it does open an optimistic window that even as steeped in tradition as a great deal of these forces seem to be, there is still room for alteration and guided contemplation in regard to an audience and its reaction to color. In fact, this knowledge can aid creators by using something of an anti-road map, designed solely to challenge audience expectations and by doing so, trek across uncharted and fascinating new territory.

Similar to our reflection regarding color relations to certain religious and historical elements and the public’s pre-existing knowledge of them, a director can in no way assume that they will have synesthetes present in their audience or even if they did, that these individuals would respond to a production’s use of color in the desired way as synesthesia can manifest itself in a multitude of different ways. Therefore, aside from having the opportunity to stage a show knowing ahead of time that it will be performed in front of a particular group of synesthetes who will all react identically, it rarely would be the correct approach to take a specific synesthesia affectation and design a production around it. Instead, directors can learn from the studies of this

unique condition, particularly in regard to how the brain of a synesthete processes color and how that may better inform us in terms of how the general population responds to various chromatic stimuli as well.

“Research suggests that one in two thousand people are synesthetes, and some experts suspect that as many as one in three hundred people have some variation of the condition. In 1975, Yale University psychologist Larry Marks, PhD, authored a review of the early history of synesthesia research in the journal *Psychological Bulletin* (Vol. 82, No. 3), the first major psychological treatment of the subject after a thirty-year drought. Then, in the early 1980s, neurologist Richard E. Cytowic, MD, published several case reports of synesthesia. He proposed, provocatively, that the condition’s cause rests in the limbic system, a more emotional and “primitive” part of the brain than the neocortex, where higher order thinking occurs. In 1987, a team led by Baron-Cohen found the first hard evidence that synesthetes’ experiences are consistent across time. The researchers asked a synesthete to describe the color that each of one hundred words triggered. A year later, they repeated the test without warning and found that the associations between words and colors that their subject described were consistent with her initial responses more than ninety percent of the time.” (apa.org)

With an increased amount of study finally being given to this condition, there is little to no doubt remaining that not only is synesthesia very real and present, but it allows for the forming of a very deep connection between the synesthete and whatever their particular condition ties itself to. Dr. Mike Dixon of the University of Waterloo states, “We tend to think of our experiences, and especially the visual system, as being bottom-up. But there are many instances

where meaning goes back down and influences our lower-order perception of the world.

Synesthesia is just one very rare and exceptional example of that.” (apa.org)

Returning to the realm of cinema, in the horror franchise *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, the neighborhood children are terrified in their sleep by Freddy Kruger, a child molester who was killed by the local townspeople and now inhabits the dream world, seeking revenge on his killers’ offspring. Aside from the pronounced facial scars and clawed gloves, Freddy’s most famous feature is often cited as his choice of clothing, specifically his iconic sweater. Featuring wide green and red horizontal stripes, this piece has often spurred a great deal of discussion from horror fans as to its curious design and only recently was it revealed that, director Wes Craven and his costume designer, chose this specific pattern as, much to the dismay of Christmastime aficionados the world over, the human eye naturally dislikes the juxtaposition of the colors red and green and they wanted a pattern that would convey to the viewing audience, even subconsciously, that something was not right about the individual wearing this particular pattern.

What does this tell us about the human brain from a basic level? That, without a doubt, color can and often times does create a deeper connection to whatever is associated with it, so much so that for some people, these powerful images, feelings, and other abstract concepts have colors instinctively attached to them. It is with this knowledge that, even for a wider audience, with synesthetes in it or not, we can feel even more confident in any bolder color choices made throughout a theatrical piece, knowing that in one way or another, a much deeper connection can be made within it, especially in the service of the story we are attempting to tell.

Case Study: *Our Town*

As elaborate and complicated as modern plays can get, the ones that truly stand the test of time tend to do so because they tackle the simple, ever-lasting themes that every generation finds themselves dealing with. In Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, we have two people in love, their family and friends, and of course, our town of Grover's Corners, which really could be (and is meant to represent) everyone's hometown. Life, death, and love fill the stage over this piece's three acts, telling a familiar, but beyond poignant and universally relatable tale. When staging a work such as this, one that has very few bells and whistles attached to it, distinct color choices will be that much more apparent and, if utilized well, effective.

Since we are dealing with a play that tells a wider story that spans a large portion of time, painting with broader strokes may very well be needed, contrary to a piece such as *Red* whose focus was much more specific. However, that in no way means that these wider brush strokes should at all come across as expected or applied in a haphazardly fashion. Here, we are dealing with a small town in New England and the expected denizens that populate it, but we are also dealing with the character of the Stage Manager which takes this piece to a place many others do not go. Regularly breaking the fourth wall, speaking directly to the audience, the Stage Manager serves as something of an omnipotent presence who, although seemingly not able to wield supernatural powers, exists somewhere both outside of time and actively within every instance throughout the action of the play simultaneously. This allows for the staging of this work to be taken slightly outside of the norm, however this seems to be rarely done despite that the text very much seems to justify it.

Life and death, two of the most prominent themes in *Our Town*, will be our springboard for the utilization of color theory in this piece and we will base our decisions off of the spectrum introduced much earlier in our journey concerning warm and cool color palates. In this production, warmer tones will equal life and cooler tones will signify death. Using red and blue as our baseline, everything that shows life will be colored within the spectrum of reds and oranges. The majority of act one will show off these hues. Everything should feel inviting and comfortable, the way a small town does and its residents usually do. However, death is looming. With this in mind, color markers can be worked into the designs of the characters who will eventually pass to the other side, such as Mrs. Gibbs, Wally Webb, and of course, Emily. Here, blueish tones can be introduced in subtle ways, beginning to contrast the warmth felt throughout the rest of the early part of the play.

Act two will continue this theme with the cool tones increasing not only in amount, but in their vibrance, leading us into act three where the specter of death is hanging over the entire town. This will provide a poignant contrast from the start of the play where everything was familiar and warm. Now, those same locations and many of the characters who occupy them are literally and figuratively cast in a very different light. This can be exemplified when Emily returns to the day of her twelfth birthday, initially bathed in our warm palate, but slowly cools as her realization sets in that she can never be happy experiencing memories this way again. Here, our color scheme will serve as an ever-shifting, visual representation of the spirit of the town and more importantly, the characters within it. A spirit that will penetrate the audience with the goal of matching their feelings with those of simple, yet so very real men and women of Grover's Corners.

I Can Hear the Purple Callin'

Up until this point, our focus on synesthesia has appropriately been confined to the aspects of it that deal with people's perceptions of color and the effects that has on their psyche. However, as was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the condition of synesthesia itself is not limited to chromatic elements. Certain synesthetes experience aural sensations that only exist in their mind, such as being able to hear sound from a silent film. Psychologist Chris Fasnidge calls this phenomenon "visually evoked auditory response." "Some people describe it as a buzzing sound in their head," Fasnidge states. "For other people, it's kind of like a white noise. And then other people say it varies depending on what it is they are looking at." (mnn.com) Although investigating this particular condition requires a much more specific lens than exploring the effects that colors have on those who view them, it raises its own interesting questions, especially within the mindset of combining any research in these outliers along with what is already being considered in terms of our chromatic properties.

Just as the visuals of any theatrical production are crucial to the overall experience of those who attend it, arguably the audio, both in terms of the sound design as well as the lines and perhaps songs that are spoken and sung by the actors, is just as paramount. On the one hand, getting the opportunity to direct a show, knowing from the onset of pre-production that all audience members in attendance would all share a common form of synesthesia would be an incredible challenge to undertake; the chances of ever getting to have that specific an occasion are assumedly quite rare. However, not unlike our previous conversations regarding color's universal effects, these similar studies on sound can also provide us with fascinating new ground to explore, especially when combined with directing and design philosophies established that stem from color theory. Identifying a play that so specifically caters to a sense such as sound,

and does so in a unique way, that we combine with our ongoing mission mapping out directing approaches from this now established chromatic starting point can not only continue to reinvigorate the productions that we tackle, but can now possibly provide the audience with a truly spectacular multi-sensory theatrical experience.

Case Study: *Machinal*

Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* is a very human play told through the lens of machines. Not only the machines we use in our everyday lives (even back in the 1920s, when the work was penned), but the figurative machine of life itself. Here, Treadwell tells a story of the machinations of human existence, both in terms of a normal day-to-day routine, as well as from a larger point of view, looking at the major beats of a typical American life. What makes this play so fascinating is that it also serves as something of its own dissertation on a form of mental illness as our main character, only referred to as Young Woman (and occasionally, Woman), although not specifically stated, in today's terminology would absolutely be labeled as having an anxiety disorder.

Because this machine-like concept runs rampant throughout the play, especially in its opening and closing scenes, sound design is crucial and typically focused on heavily during most productions of *Machinal*. The sounds emanating from the adding machines and other devices utilized throughout the piece are very distinct and allows the production team to create a fascinating soundscape for their audience. Our goal would be to combine the work done in this regard with specific color choices made to punctuate the aural sensations of the show, thus adding to the audience's experience by creating a subconscious link in their minds regarding color and sound.

When describing color use throughout the majority of publicized stagings of *Machinal*, various shades of grey are often utilized, taking the machine concept and representing that visually. While an understandable and appropriate choice to honor and complement the text, there still may be opportunities to insert more vibrant hues within this monochromatic world. Knowing that this will not be a production that will contain copious amounts of color, one shade will first be chosen to be the go-to tone used to create a contrast against the metallic palate. Returning to our study of the historic background of color, green, considered nearly universally as the color of nature and life, will be our chosen hue to stand opposite to the mass of grey on stage.

Our concept here will be to represent the desire of life peeking through, even when the world around it is trying desperately to keep it down. Our main character of the Young Woman is portrayed throughout the majority of *Machinal* as rarely being in control of herself. She has a domineering mother, is forced into a marriage with a man she does not love, and has her freedom and eventually her life completely taken away from her when she is executed for the crime of murder. The one moment in the play where she is happy (and where she is called Woman) is the moment where she chose something for herself. She took control and actually lived her life. Her journey here will be represented with our chosen shade of green. Green will follow our Young Woman throughout her life, showing up when life is trying to open itself up to her, put on display in full during the one scene in the play where she chooses to have an affair and ultimately leaves her lover's residence having taken a flower with her, and then disappears before our eyes as the play's final machine, an electric chair, is turned on.

With our goal to sync our color use with the sound design of this work, any time green appears, it will be in step with a sound (or multiple sounds) and essentially will be cued by it. Here, the visual and aural stimuli will be presented to the audience simultaneously, thus forming a connection. This will be the heartbeat of the show, this rhythmic pop of color, signifying life being constantly forced down by these artificial creations of man itself. By identifying the moments with all the scenes of the show where this can be done, a through line can be created, mirroring the journey that the Young Woman herself goes on, only here, what so often is presented as a play about sounds can be taken to another level, adding the visual component which can then be processed by all who see this production, hopefully adding further stimuli within their brains, synesthetes or otherwise.

Now You're Coming to Your Senses

As theatre practitioners, we live and work in a world that exists in part because of its ability to challenge its patron in a way that film, sculpture, and many other art forms simply cannot, at least in a similar way. The action occurring before the audience's eyes is inescapable and thus, allows artists to craft an experience that pointedly confronts whatever expectations may have existed prior to the literal or figurative curtain rising. This post-modern tribute to the likes of Filippo Marinetti may be exactly what color theorists need in order to break down any and all societal walls that are automatically constructed by patrons at the start of their shows. Within this Futurist approach to disrupting an average theatregoer's comfort, how would it be to see a production that confronts and challenges what we know as sexual and gender-defined tropes designed and directed utilizing the "wrong" color palate at every turn, akin to our staging of *The Wolves*?

The fact of the matter is, it may very well take the action of a bold director to utilize an atypical color strategy where one would never be anticipating it for it to truly do its intended work. How would the average audience react if Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* was set to a color palate that simply seemed off? What if *The Sound of Music*'s color scheme seemed to not be in step with who our "good guys" and "bad guys" were? Maybe then an audience might really start to contemplate what messages color is sending to us both then and at all times during our lives. Perhaps there is a strong chance people may not be pleased with what they are seeing and more so, feeling.

As Marinetti proudly proclaims in his *Futurist Manifesto*, "Let the good incendiaries with charred fingers come! Here they are! Heap up the fire to the shelves of the libraries! Divert the canals to flood the cellars of the museums! Let the glorious canvases swim ashore! Take the picks and hammers! Undermine the foundation of venerable towns!" (genius.com) One cannot help but think that Marinetti would most likely agree that, without a doubt, for there to truly be creation, there must first be destruction. It is only then when the work can truly begin. How as artists can we successfully break down these barriers that we run into every day, not only with color, but with so much of learned behavior? How do we do it in a way that still leaves room for growth? There may be logic to flooding the museums from time to time, however there is also wisdom in the notion of building them back up again.

Case Study: *Brigadoon*

Brigadoon is a story told between two worlds, various locales of the very real and sometimes rough present and a magical town in the Scottish Highlands happily lodged two hundred years in the past. The town of Brigadoon exemplifies Scottish folklore, culture, and tradition. War and

combat were seen as virtues, but so were honor and comradeship among those one surrounds themselves with. These concepts were strongly on the mind of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Lowe as they collaborated on *Brigadoon*, their fourth musical together. While their earlier works, *Life of the Party*, *What's Up?*, and *The Day Before Spring* garnered them respect in the world of musical theatre, it was *Brigadoon* that took them to new heights as a team and gave them the professional success that most other writers and composers could only dream of.

Inspired heavily by fellow theatrical pair Richard Rodgers' and Oscar Hammerstein's work on *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, Lerner and Lowe set out to tell a timeless story in a magical land filled with songs and dance that could make *Brigadoon* itself continue to thrive on stage for centuries on its own. Debuting on Broadway in 1947, *Brigadoon*, like so many other shows of its time, is a crucial part of the post-World War II arts boom populated by those who just witnessed the Axis powers being defeated at long last and understood that the average American was more than ready for a much-needed injection of some magic into their everyday life once again.

However, *Brigadoon* is not without its darker moments. Along with lively Scottish dancing and songs about picking flowers with someone you love, this work is filled with images and suggestions of grief and loss. Not unlike our study of *Our Town*, many productions gloss over these aspects, instead seeking here to continue any and all forward motion into the next upbeat music number, but this will not be the case in our production. Daily life will always contain its own highs and lows and only after experiencing both can a person truly consider themselves to be a citizen of the world. Likewise, the people of *Brigadoon* too must face what lurks in the

darkness, for it is only after doing so that the townsfolk and their two unexpected visitors can truly appreciate what radiates in the light.

Without a doubt, *Brigadoon* falls into the category of classic American musicals alongside contemporary works such as *Guys and Dolls*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, and *Annie Get Your Gun*.

However, what sets *Brigadoon* apart from so many of these other shows is the darker undertones that its story possesses. This production would explore the themes of death and loss that one does not have to dig very far beneath the surface to unearth when tackling this piece. The starting point for this process would be to examine the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It does not take much time to immediately see the parallels at play here in how well the plot of *Brigadoon* lines up with these steps.

- Denial (or Confusion): New Yorkers Tommy and Jeff find themselves lost in the Scottish Highlands while on a hunting trip. They discover a town called *Brigadoon* that does not appear on their map and is populated with denizens who, although are welcoming, seem to be keeping secrets. Eventually, they are told a tale recounting a time when two hundred years ago, the town's minister prayed to have *Brigadoon* disappear from the rest of the world and only reappear for one day every one hundred years.

- Anger (or Violence): The residents prepare for the wedding of Jean, one of the town's young women, but everything is ruined when Harry, who has always pined for Jean, announces that he's leaving *Brigadoon* out of despair, which would end the miracle of the disappearance. The men of the town try to find Harry before he can leave, but Jeff trips him while in pursuit, accidentally killing him. The townspeople perform a funeral ceremony for Harry and then bring him to be buried.

- Bargaining: Meanwhile, Tommy has fallen in love with Fiona, Jean's older sister and decides that he will remain in Brigadoon to be with her and not return to the outside world. Jeff, concerned for Tommy, plants the seed of doubt in his mind that Brigadoon may simply be some strange dream, argues that he should not forget his other life, and admits to him that he was the one who killed Harry. Shaken by this revelation and now doubting everything, Tommy agrees to leave with Jeff.

- Depression: Four months later, Jeff has turned to heavy drinking in order to forget everything that happened, and Tommy has unhappily returned to his fiancé Jane, a woman he was never all that eager to marry. Tommy eventually ends things with Jane and tells Jeff that all he wants to do is return to where they found Brigadoon, even though they both know that they will never see it again in their lifetimes.

- Acceptance: Tommy and Jeff return to the Scottish Highlands and as expected, find no trace of Brigadoon. However, just as they are about to leave once and for all, they hear the same music playing that first drew them to the town and Mr. Lundie, the schoolmaster who told them the tale of Brigadoon, appears out of the mist and guides Tommy back with him to finally be reunited with Fiona and remain in Brigadoon until the end of time.

Along these lines, the instances (or inferences) of death and/or loss run rampant through *Brigadoon*. Tommy and Jeff starting on a hunting trip, Brigadoon's departure from the world, Mr. Forsyth's sacrifice for the miracle, Sword dancers' wedding performance, Harry's death, funeral and burial, Jeff and Tommy deciding to leave Brigadoon, Tommy breaking his engagement, and Mr. Lundie guiding Tommy out of the world. As unexpected as this take might be, *Brigadoon* suffers from something that a lot of musicals of this era deal with in terms of

generally being produced in almost identical ways simply because the people helming them have normally seen them done in one particular style, so therefore, that is how they imagine these shows must be continually staged. Now the question becomes how to realize a practical vision of this show through this lens of death and loss alongside our continued work with the poignant utilization of color to support our vision?

We begin with Tommy and Jeff who are on a hunting trip, often shown by the two of them wearing very gentlemanly hunting attire, such as sport coats and the like. Today, hunters are almost indistinguishable from soldiers, wearing camouflage and carrying automatic weapons. Knowing we will be dealing with these darker concepts and would need to weave them through the narrative of the piece, Tommy and Jeff can be given the backstory of literally being soldiers. The two of them have recently returned from active duty where they were Army buddies and at least one of them to one degree or another is suffering from PTSD. These men are indeed close friends and care for one another, but are also quite tortured, unsure of a great deal of things, and are very much already living in two different worlds in their minds. Perhaps one of them already is dead, having died in combat, and is only still living in the other's mind. This concept actually justifies a lot of the action of this play. After all, even Brigadoon's hard-set rules are not always followed, as the town reappears at the end of the show only four months after its last disappearance. There is a great deal of magic and mystery at play here. Nothing is as it seems. Half-way through act two, when Tommy and Jeff comment that perhaps none of this is even happening; maybe this is all just a strange dream, are Learner and Lowe hanging a lantern on this very concept for the audience?

Color-wise, a very muted base pallet of blacks and whites would be used with pops of brightness, the contrast of which would be very powerful. The goal would be to make everything almost hyper-realistic, as if everyone's senses are heightened beyond anything considered remotely normal. Tommy and Jeff would wear black and white camouflage, with one of them in a colored camo shirt. This would not only work with the concept, but it also serves as something of a modern version of the Scottish tartan to compliment the Brigadoon townspeople, who, especially when in a formal setting such as a wedding or a funeral, would wear traditional Scottish clothing in the same dark pallet with splashes of vibrant color when called for. The set design will continue this theme. Ancient Scottish tradition was to bury their dead in large, stone tombs and that will serve as the inspiration for the set, as if this production is being done in an old tomb on the Scottish Highlands.

Utilizing as many traditional Scottish elements, including nods to certain aspects of local folklore, not only is in keeping with the theme of this show, but will help the darker tones of this show flow seamlessly throughout the narrative. By creating these dramatic shades present in the tartan, camouflage, and other elements that tie-in one way or another to this overarching concept of death, we will utilize color to highlight these more supernatural properties. This take on a classic musical can not only be an interesting departure from the expected for an audience, but hopefully will allow people to look at this "old" show in a new light and truly reflect on the more serious themes that have always been there. The songs are still classics, the Scottish dancing is still fun, the charm of *Brigadoon* will always be there. However, maybe for the first time, our theatregoers might also find some added depth that they did not even know was there.

CHAPTER FIVE: WITH FLYING COLORS – CREATING A CHROMATIC MASTERPIECE IN CONCLUSION

Case Study: *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*

At the beginning of this exploration, we found ourselves at a place of knowing that color and its pointed uses were incredibly impactful, especially when utilized artistically. However, we did not always understand why. Researching everything from cultural backgrounds of millennia past to modern-day scientific studies on how the human brain interprets and translates color, answers to the questions we initially had as well as the ones developed during this quest started to emerge one piece at a time. Now, the time has come to put them all together. While not every play will allow for the utilization of each and every one of the many elements we have covered on this journey, any time a director and their production team can forge opportunities for multiple of these elements to work in tandem with one another will aid in the creation of a truly memorable theatrical experience, as will be the case as we consider *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*.

One of the many religious-themed works of playwright Stephen Adly Guirgis, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* introduces the audience to “Hope,” a less than ideal neighborhood in Purgatory where the souls of the departed face their final appeal in a supernatural court room, determined by the powers on-high to be the way all modern problems seemed to be solved by those still in the mortal realm. It is here that the most famous betrayer in history is finally given a trial where he must answer for his crime with witnesses ranging from Satan to Sigmund Freud called to the stand to offer their expert opinions on the subject. Though the main court room setting and the typical machinations of most high-profile trials dominate the majority of the show, occasional

detours are taken to investigate Judas' childhood, speak to numerous saints, allowing us to get accustomed to many of their unexpected personalities, and hear from the jury, composed of people on life-support and others in some form of mortal limbo. It is through these moments that we not only begin to understand the deeper issues at play throughout this piece, but that the stereotypical good versus evil constructs are not always as straight forward as we might think.

Reviewing the facts and histories that we have studied and the conclusions drawn from them, with certain dynamics having already been hypothetically play-tested, something of a checklist can now be created to serve as a guide as show selection and pre-production on a new theatrical endeavor begins. Having already identified the play that will be staged with the desire to consider color theory throughout this incarnation of it, we can retrace our footsteps from this trek and see how well this piece fits into the categories we have previously carved out of our research. Does this play contain an anchor color represented by either a specific color worked into the text itself or with one or more surface-level chromatic connotations attached to the script? Although there are some specific color uses mentioned within the text, such as the first tear Judas cried being red, there is no color that looms over the entire script in one way or another and due to the play's primary setting, a court room in a Purgatory-like state of existence, the design of the show as a whole can be very much open to interpretation. Are there domineering cultural considerations at play here such as historic or religious elements? There are very few aspects of this work that do not fall into this category. Not only is this play populated by characters that have great religious significance to billions of people in this world, but even non-believers would be hard-pressed not to consider the place people like Caiaphas, the high priest who presided over the Jewish tribunal that damned Christ, undoubtedly holds in

history's tomes. Is this play going to have an outside influence held over it in some form akin to it having representations of or from another medium? Here, this work stands very much on its own. There is no other version of it, as its Off-Broadway run in 2005 is, as of right now, the only professional staging and there has been no translation into film, television, or other mediums. Additionally, this play does not feature or comment on these other forms of media and/or the technological progression that our modern storytelling history has brought. Finally, does this piece and the content within it reasonably lend itself to any psychological elements worth exploring? While our first three queries are important to consider in order to ensure that we do not dismiss crucial aspects to a piece which would cause us to fail in our mission to always properly honor the text of a work, it is this last question that will drive our next set of choices and the work that begins from this point forward.

Whenever a director is presented with the possibility of staging a piece, the immediate and most important question they should ask themselves is why they would want to helm it. Why do that exact show? Why do it at that time, in that location, for that audience? While not every theatrical endeavor is required to be done with a deep, ingrained purpose behind it, the more often a meaning can be found for doing a specific show in a particular location at a precise time, the greater the amount of opportunities to mine within the piece will inevitably begin to emerge, making that production that much more unique and special. Being familiar with the basics of color theory will certainly be a useful addition to a director's toolbox to aid them in any and all considerations within a piece's staging, however to take color theory to the next level as we are seeking to do here, it is this final question regarding the psychological elements of color and their application that will go hand-in-hand with the overarching consideration of why a certain

show is even being chosen in the first place. Now our question more accurately becomes why are we choosing to mount a production of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* and what themes present within this story do we wish to explore in as many ways possible through the lens of color theory?

This is a play that succeeds at tackling incredibly lofty concepts. The major tenets of good and evil are given their literal and figurative day in court, as are the notions of redemption, nature versus nurture, and so very many metaphysical notions that all of mankind regularly grapples with. However, at its core, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* is a very intimate piece that, even with its more over-the-top moments, always poignantly returns to its characters whose larger-than-life reputations thankfully never fully overshadow their humanity. These themes now having been identified regarding the desire for exploration within our particular staging, a more specific directorial plan can begin to be formulated.

As an audience's experience with a piece can begin from the moment they enter a performance space, any opportunity to commence telling one's story before the first act even starts is one that should be taken. Dealing with a court room in essentially the bad part of Purgatory, we can immediately take what is traditionally a polished, respectable setting and turn it on its head. From the judge's bench to the jury box, everything will look to be in some form of disarray. Corners of the prosecutor and defense tables might be missing while statues of blind justice can be broken, perhaps even beheaded. Color will tie into this as well. Instead of the beautifully finished wood and marble that anyone who has ever been called for jury duty or has watched an episode of *Law & Order* is used to seeing, our palate here will instead be lifeless. Greys and blacks will dominate here as we are in the absence of God's love and this will have an

all-too tangible effect on not only the look and feel of this place. As the audience finds their seats, it will be clear to everyone in attendance that something is not right here. The color scheme alone is enough to paint this court room as unnatural and therefore slightly unnerving.

Our first main theme, good versus evil and the figurative shades of grey that come with these concepts, will factor in heavily to a great many color considerations. Simply a consideration of the names that occupy the character list, such as Jesus, Satan, and of course our titular Judas, begins to point toward the incredible opportunities present themselves alongside the responsibility to make wise choices. While our more “normal” characters such as Judge Littlefield and our lawyers Cunningham and El-Fayoumy will wear more expected clothing for their occupations, the colors utilized in their fabrics will echo our court room setting in that every hue will be muted as they will one day return to vibrance when their time in Purgatory is finally over, but for now, their personal saturation will remain noticeably low. This will allow us to contrast their wardrobe pieces with those of some of our other characters who are summoned from other realms such as Mother Theresa, Saint Monica, and especially Satan.

The Prince of Darkness himself will not be clad in blacks and reds (though perhaps a color marker or two could be utilized here), instead he will shine the brightest of all our characters. Lucifer, after all does mean “bearer of light.” Following our theme of playing with our audience’s expectations in color use, Satan’s bright clothing and even more colorful personality will fill the stage whenever he is called to the witness stand in stark contrast to Jesus Christ who does not actually occupy that much stage time and a great deal of it is portrayed in silence. While not dressing the Son of God in all black or something decidedly opposite to the traditional depictions of him for the sheer purpose of doing the opposite of what may be expected, his

garments should not be a pure white either. Jesus was a man of the poor and the forgotten and his appearance should honor that. Nothing too fancy or clean will be worn by the Good Shepherd in this production, especially when considering that so many of his actions are that of a comforting nature such as comforting the forlorn and washing their feet.

In terms of other considerations for sets and costumes, since we are dealing with a show steeped in religious and cultural histories, the design of so much of it can default back to traditional interpretations, but done so with enough of a twist that honors the text of this piece and is in keeping with our overall vision. Saint Monica's look, for instance, can be infused with elements of the more famous depictions of her, but with added gold hoop earrings that one might find in the jewelry box of any fifteen-year-old Latina from Staten Island. Perhaps our court room itself even has a large stained glass window as its backdrop. This one, however, is cracked down the middle and not even partially illuminated, showing our absence of color and light once again.

Judas Iscariot, similar to the man he betrayed, has a surprisingly small amount of stage time in this piece, but appropriately to the title of this work, everything, in one way or another, goes back to him. The audience hears from him via short flashbacks from time to time, usually spurred on by testimony about his younger years, however it is not until the very end of the play that Judas comes out of the quasi-catatonic state that he appears in. It is Jesus himself who finally breaks through to Judas, allowing him to eventually confess his grief mixed with a very complicated anger toward Christ, considering all that the two of them went through together. It is in this final scene that we truly understand what has been going on before our eyes. Judas

Iscariot, without a doubt, has been in a deep depression since his suicide and subsequent arrival in Purgatory.

It is considering Judas' emotional state that brings our concept to its next level. Everything about the direction of this show should reflect the fact that this story, its setting, and its main (although often silent) character is all a metaphor for depression, personified by Judas. Everything about this piece should convey to the audience a feeling of sadness. Not simply a temporary one, but a deep, unsolvable sense of utter loss with this trial ultimately giving a verdict on not just the man in question's soul, but everyone's and it is only at the very end, when we truly begin to understand, that we can perhaps start to see a way out. This is Purgatory. It is colorless, broken, and devoid of the light of God's love. However, perhaps not all is completely lost. This particular neighborhood is called "Hope" after all.

It is here that our research into synesthesia and color psychology will be a useful guide. Going all the way back to identifying and understanding everything from warm and cool colors to considering our studies as to how and why certain people's brains process certain hues and translate them into feelings, we can reverse engineer a color palate that is in step with the brain functions of clinical depression. From this mission, the designers can formulate a plan of attack that investigates the specific data they need to begin to do their work and the director can work with the cast from an acting point-of-view regarding how all of this can be appropriately internalized for the characters it will be primarily represented in. In doing so, the text will be honored, a unique, purposeful approach to this work will be chosen, and with proper execution, an impactful, memorable evening of theatre will be created. This should always be the goal for a director.

One aspect that differentiates theatre from the many other art forms in today's world is that plays can be and are often staged over and over again, each time a little differently based on the people involved. A great piece of theatre is strong enough that several interpretations can be realized from it, especially taking into account the passage of time and new, topical elements that any particular work might be ripe to tackle. While color theory is just one of many lenses to view an artistic work through, what is so exciting about it is that this is still very much on the forefront of science and such a great deal of the facts and understanding behind it are continually being uncovered. Along with this, a small bit of mystery still lives within it and perhaps it is the combination of this sense of the unknown mixed with cutting edge scientific exploration that makes this such a fascinating realm to play in.

While not every theatrical piece will be a success, commercially or critically, especially if attempting to juggle elements within that are only now beginning to come to light in terms of our greater understanding of them, as was stated at the very beginning of this journey, artists not only can try, but they must try. It is only by standing at this precipice and making the choice to leap off of it, while not knowing what awaits in the valley below, that progress can truly be made. From both a scientific and an artistic standpoint, it is only then when discoveries truly are made. Failure may occur, but even if it does, ideally it will bring with it a better understanding going forward and hopefully a renewed desire to keep trying. We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the scientists out there will keep pushing their boundaries, bringing all of us with them, and we as artists must double every effort our contemporaries make. It is only then that we will not only fully see, but better understand the entire spectrum that is in front of us at all times; the extreme lights, the darks, and every shade and hue in between.

When conceptualizing the staging of a work, seasoned directors will have something of a box of tools from which to select both abstract theories as well as practical applications that they wish to consider the utilization of, all in service of how to best honor the text. Despite the range of opportunities for the use of color theory to be infused within a work, it cannot be forgotten that, just like anything else, its active use in a production must always be due to its organic synergy with the directorial concept. Although the prospect to do so may be quite tempting, a director must never first decide to work a specific aspect of color theory into a show, attempting to mold it into whatever form will best gel with the rest of the work being done. It is the overall concept that must come first, and any and all tools subsequently chosen in support of this concept.

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot is a show that, in this iteration, focuses on clinical depression, *The Pillowman* serves as a study of the effects of abuse, and *Brigadoon* can be viewed as a meditation on loss and the grief that all too often follows. These are a director's starting points and everything else that comes with the conceptualization of a staging will follow. This must always be paramount in a director's mind. A study of color theory's theatrical applications can indeed open up a great many avenues that were previously unknown or less understood, resulting in an influx of production possibilities perhaps unlike anything before. However, considering everything researched and uncovered on this chromatic journey, the default positions that every conceptual staging always returned to are the crucial notions of both honoring the text and respecting the audience. Using color theory as an excuse to show off newfound knowledge, even with the best of intentions, will inevitably backfire, most likely leaving theatregoers with an inferior experience than they might otherwise have had. However, using it in service of the

greater questions that every director should return to when it comes to show selection such as why a particular play is the right choice to be staged at a certain time, in a certain place, and in front of a certain audience, as well as what themes they wish to explore within it, the potential to end a theatrical run having created a production that was elevated to both new and very unexpected heights is very much in a director's grasp.

This is how an audience should respond to and remember experiencing a work that has been influenced by color theory; not how it looked, but how it made them feel. Just like why anyone, synesthete or not, reacts a certain way when they encounter a particular hue, it is not about what they have seen, but rather what they have felt. It is in this pursuit, that color theory attaches itself to theatre as well as any other modern theatrical construct. After all, the best performances, across any artistic medium, will rightfully be judged in both the short and long term based on how they made their attendees feel. This is why certain works penned hundreds of years ago are still regularly performed and why theatre has the advantage of regularly re-imagining classic works for new generations. Within them, there is an undeniable truth that speaks to those who are fortunate enough to experience them. They feel a connection to it. Perhaps they feel profoundly affected by the words spoken, the music played, or the themes tackled. Minimally, they feel; though they may not always know why. Just as is the case with color. Though individuals may respond differently to certain hues and shades, it would be a difficult, if not impossible task to uncover an able-sighted person who does not feel anything from color. If a director can inject even the smallest percentage of that chromatic magic into their work, always in support of the greater story there to be told, not unlike the color spectrum itself, the possibilities that emerge as a result will seemingly be endless.

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