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## **When the carnival is over : Peter Barnes' Red Noses and the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin**

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**When the carnival is over: Peter Barnes' Red Noses and the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin.**

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**Thesis submitted 31/08/04**

## ABSTRACT

Peter Barnes, acknowledged as one of Britain's most important contemporary playwrights, writes plays that are of an enormous scale, both physically and intellectually. Red Noses is one such play. Like Barnes' other works, Red Noses makes great technical demands on directors, designers, actors and audiences. As with all of Barnes' plays, Red Noses is, moreover, informed by a wide variety of theatrical styles. As Bernard Dukore (1990, p. 65) states, actors may be required to quickly "switch from intellectual discourse, to period argot, to poetry, to modern slang, to rhetoric, to musical comedy, to ritual, to dance, to opera, to slapstick..." Furthermore, all of Barnes' plays operate, as Stephen Weeks (1996, p.46) points out, "as much through the boldness of their visual imagery as through the inventiveness of their language." All plays in performance are polysemic, with the various systems of signs in dialogical relation. Barnes' play Red Noses foregrounds the polysemic process.

The systems of signs that operate within any play in performance may be defined as discrete languages. Some of these languages are non-verbal, such as the use of theatrical space and the movement of bodies within that space, scale of settings and sound and visual effects. This project looks at the verbal and non-verbal polysemic texts in Red Noses in performance.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories are usually applied to verbal and, in particular, printed texts. Indeed, Bakhtin (1981, p.266) himself has stated that the organisation of languages in drama does not allow for the dialogic interpenetration of one language by another. Nevertheless, this project will examine whether the non-verbal language systems of production and performance challenge or extend Bakhtin's theories of language.

Barnes' plays are often referred to as anarchic or carnivalesque, with his theatrical style working as an analogue to his stated aim of seeking to disrupt the social order of contemporary society (Barnes, 1996a, p. viii; Barnes, 1996b, p. x). Some critics have defined Barnes as an iconoclastic writer, but this begs the question as to whether Barnes' iconoclasm is conservative or radical. Is there a reaffirming of the hierarchies of social and political power as a result of the

upside-down world created in *Red Noses*, or is there the promise of a new and ongoing process of change? The object of this project is to explore these questions through the rehearsal and performance processes of a production of Barnes' play *Red Noses*. The play will be reassessed through Bakhtin's theories of carnival, polyphonic discourse and dialogics, taking particular account of rehearsal and performance processes.

In addition to problems of interpretation this project enters the debate about problems of texts in performance. The project can also be expected to generate useful research into performance itself as research.

## DECLARATION

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Duncan Adrian Sharp

31/08/04

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## INTRODUCTION

“In Holy Russia we never hang a man with a moustache, we use a rope”

(Barnes, 1996a, p. 360)

With the possible exception of the quote above, Peter Barnes, contemporary British playwright, and Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian literary theorist who died in 1975, may not appear to have a great deal in common. Bakhtin did not have a lot to say about plays, and what he did say was generally negative. As far as I am aware Peter Barnes has never had anything to say about Mikhail Bakhtin. So how do these two writers come to be linked in this paper?

Bakhtin wrote a lot about the idea of dialogism. The basic thrust of dialogism is that two voices interpenetrate one another to create meaning. This appears, at first glance, to be exactly what happens in a theatre production. Bakhtin, however, is quick to state that in drama there is (with very few exceptions) no dialogism at all. Bakhtin (1984b, p. 34) states that in drama there is only the voice of the author: that drama is in fact monologic. One of the key reasons that Bakhtin (1981, p. 326) applies to suggest that dialogic voices do not exist in drama is that dramatic resolution is fundamentally impossible when discourses are dialogical, and therefore unfinalized. Bakhtin then reverses the argument to suggest that a text that exhibits dramatic resolution and finalization cannot contain dialogical voices. Applying this thought pattern suggests that the reader of a play, or indeed the audience, would have little say in determining the meaning of the text in question. Bakhtin (1984b, p.34), in fact, states that artforms that are monologic present a finalized and unchanging view of the world. According to Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (1990) it was Bakhtin's view that:

The monologic conception of truth prevalent in Western thought of the last few centuries... [reduced] people to the circumstances that produced them, without seeing their genuine freedom to remake themselves and take responsibility for their actions. (p. 92)

This distinctly revolutionary idea seemed to me to have a profound resonance with the theatre of Peter Barnes. Barnes, viewed by commentators as iconoclastic, has repeatedly stated that he wants his plays to encourage his audience to question the fabric of the society in which they live. Far from presenting the audience with a fixed picture of how the world is, Barnes asks his audiences to imagine how the world *could* be. Yes, a play like Red Noses does come to a dramatic conclusion but does that necessarily suggest that meaning is not made through the process of dialogism?

Within Bakhtin's writing there seems to be no mention of theatre production. In Bakhtin's writing drama is only considered as a written text and not as a performed one. Perhaps this was the key to unlock the theories of Bakhtin for use in theatre production. Barnes (1986, p. 114) himself has stated that "in the reproduction of a drama on stage, two moments, of creation and interpretation exist simultaneously". Is it not the case that the two moments Barnes talks of can be viewed as two voices interpenetrating one another to create meaning?

A further key that offers the opportunity to talk of theatre production in Bakhtinian terms may be found in the area of novelisation. Bakhtin (1981, p. 7) states that "genres that are novelised become more flexible/free, [when] language is renewed by incorporation of extra-literary heteroglossia, they [the genres] become dialogised". Perhaps theatre performances should be considered as novelised forms of drama. Certainly the language as written by the playwright is added to in production by languages of staging, and also, as Barnes (1986, p. 114) points out, there are several interpretations of the text available simultaneously. Bakhtin (1981) is even more explicit on the subject of novelisation when he writes:

In a literary form that has been novelised there can be found polyglossia. The language used is drawn from an actively polyglot world in which national languages are no longer isolated. Indeed different languages throw light on each other and new

relationships are forged between language and object. (p. 12)

Surely, when a dramatic text is taken from the page and subject to all the differing languages and interpretations of theatre production, when it is played to an audience who are free to interpret the languages in any way they choose, there is a strong argument to say that the form has been novelised and therefore dialogised? Bakhtin's ideas of the novel, and hence the novelisation of other genres seem to suggest that theatre production may well be approached through his theories that relate to the production of meanings.

Apart from the general concept of novelisation, Bakhtin makes a series of points that in my mind directly link his theories to the plays of Peter Barnes. Bakhtin (1981, p. 20) states that "the novelised form contains a representation of contemporaneity, initially represented through the common peoples' creative culture of laughter ". This statement is descriptive of nearly all of Barnes' plays. Even though the action of Barnes' plays takes place in the past, much of the laughter is generated through the use of contemporary idiom. A good example of this is can be found in The Bewitched, when Barnes has characters living in 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain singing songs from 20<sup>th</sup> century Hollywood musicals. This example from The Bewitched also serves to illustrate how Barnes' theatre complies with Bakhtin's (1981) ideas that "through ambivalent laughter the absolute past is contemporised and brought low"(p. 21) and that "in the novel[,] laughter... in general destroys any hierarchical distance. Laughter lets the object be seen from many different viewpoints. Laughter is uncrowning "(p. 23). Furthermore, as Bakhtin (1981, pp. 29-30) explains "the novel is able to deal with the past, but in a way that is connected to the present to allow the past to be viewed from differing viewpoints." Barnes' plays are almost without exception set in the past. The setting of the play in the past allows Barnes to comment on how society is structured today without being caught up in local contemporary issues. Barnes, in most of his plays, sets out to explore the notion that things don't have to be as they are. The methods by which Barnes does this seem to be in direct agreement with the way that Bakhtin proposes that dialogic languages work.

So there does seem to be a connection between Bakhtin and Barnes, and as an Australian contemporary theatre director I wanted to find out if there was a way that I too could be connected. Searching for a formalization of my praxis in directing for the theatre I embarked on a journey to discover just what impact a dead Russian theorist could have on how I went about the business of directing Peter Barnes' Red Noses.

Biography

Mikhail Bakhtin lived his entire life in Russia. He was born in 1895 and died in 1975. Throughout his eighty years the country in which he lived and worked underwent a series of extraordinary changes. At the time of the Russian revolution he was 22 years old. When Stalin assumed autocratic power Bakhtin was 33 years old. At age 34 he was arrested in Leningrad and sentenced to five years internal exile in Kustanai, now part of Kazakhstan. After his period of exile was over Bakhtin lived in provincial Russia and was not allowed to return to Moscow or Leningrad. At age 43 his right leg was amputated as a result of chronic osteomyelitis that had afflicted him for his entire adult life. The only complete manuscript of one of his major works about the novel was destroyed by a German bomb that struck the publishing house in which it was awaiting publication during World War II. A copy of the same manuscript was incomplete due to the fact that Bakhtin used its pages as cigarette papers. After the war Bakhtin was permitted to return to one of his previous jobs, that of a teacher in Saransk, some 600 kilometres east of Moscow. He remained in this position until his retirement in 1961 (Simon Dentith, 1995; Morson & Emerson, 1990).

Due to continuing suspicions concerning those who had been arrested for political crimes none of Bakhtin's work was published between 1929 and 1965. In the early 1960s a postgraduate group at Moscow's Gorky Institute discovered some of Bakhtin's earlier work and an unpublished dissertation. The group contacted Bakhtin and undertook the somewhat arduous task of publishing more of his work. This action led to the publication of two of his more important books, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics and Rabelais and His World being published in Russia by 1965. With publication it seemed that Bakhtin's rehabilitation was complete, and that his work was to be embraced by the Russian intelligentsia. Since his death in 1975, nearly all of Bakhtin's work has been published in Russian and subsequently translated and published in English. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s Bakhtin's work became the centre

of much attention in the west. Indeed, so popular has Bakhtin become that there are several academic groups dedicated to the study of his work and its application to areas of study other than literature (Dentith, 1995; Morson and Emerson, 1990).

### Bakhtin's Theories

Bakhtin's writing is concentrated around the fields of literary theory and linguistics. The way in which Bakhtin defines language has been one key to the usage of his theories in areas such as cultural and gender studies. The main theories of language that are used when applying Bakhtinian thought to these areas are those dealing with heteroglossia, dialogics and the utterance. A second key lies in the Bakhtinian fields of carnival and the grotesque body, as discussed in Rabelais and his World. The former categories (heteroglossia, dialogics and the utterance) are primarily linguistically oriented, while carnival and the grotesque are more closely related to literary theory. Of course it is inevitable that there will be commonalities across all of these areas and to view any one as a discrete field would be to do a disservice to Bakhtin.

Throughout Bakhtin's writings there are never any concise definitions of the major terms used to discuss literature. This may be due to the long breaks between publications and the inevitable shifting of thought that occurs over a lifetime. Some commentators suggest that the lack of dogmatically expressed theory represents a way of writing that avoided antagonizing the brutal regime to which Bakhtin was subject. Whatever the reason, Bakhtin offers no simple formulae for application to literature, no set rules by which to measure the cultural significance of an artwork. Instead Bakhtin offers a series of concepts and discusses these concepts through examination of particular pieces of literature. There is no dogma, only the Bakhtinian praxis at work. The paradox of Bakhtin is that to confine the major concepts to concise definitions is to reduce their worth as tools for cultural analysis, but to use them in this way one needs concise definitions.

In spite of such definitional difficulties, the particular concepts that will be used in this study are those of, heteroglossia, dialogics and carnival. To

discuss heteroglossia and dialogics will require a working definition of the utterance. To discuss carnival it will be important to understand the concept of the grotesque body as well.

### The Utterance

Perhaps the most fundamental of all Bakhtin's concepts is that of the utterance. Jennifer Harvie and Richard Paul Knowles (1994) describe utterances as "basic units of communication which can range from a single non-verbal sound or gesture to a full-length novel" noting that they:

are made up of a heteroglot polyphony of languages drawn from a variety of "speech genres" - social, professional and cultural communication systems, formal and informal - made unique by the historical / contextual moment of the utterance, which takes place in the historical body of an individual subject in response to and in anticipation of other utterances by other, real or imagined, but in any case specific communicating subjects. (n.p.)

Bakhtin himself never supplies his readers with such a neat definition of the utterance. He describes various aspects of the utterance in Discourse in the Novel, Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel, The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, and The Problem of Speech Genres. In these cases, and indeed throughout his writing Bakhtin refutes the contemporary model of language. This model is succinctly described by the structuralist theorist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure posited that language could be divided into *langue* (the system, including individual units of language) and *parole* (the individual speech act or the way in which *langue* is used) (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 125). He also states in any one language community whilst *langue* is not complete in any one speaker it does exist perfectly in terms of the collective of the community (Saussure, 1974, p. 14). Saussure's position suggests that there is no transcendental signified nor final meaning for each sign/ word.



Nonetheless, Bakhtin viewed the Saussurean position as assumptive of language existing outside of both context and history. In contrast to this Bakhtin viewed language as a dynamic and constantly changing process (Susan Stewart, 1986, pp. 42-3). Bakhtin's idea was that, unlike structuralist theory, there is a diversity of meaning involved in every word/utterance and that context is critical to understanding. Dentith (1995, p. 3) explains that according to Bakhtin "communicative acts only have meaning, only take on their specific force and weight, in particular situations or contexts." Ken Hirschkop (1989, p.11) adds that "language is composed of unrepeatable performances, its entwinement with values wholly conditional on the recognition of the uniqueness of the utterance." The utterance, according to Bakhtin (1986, pp. 119-120), always creates something that had not been before, that is always new and non-reiterative.

The importance Bakhtin conferred upon context foreshadowed areas of post-structuralist, and indeed postmodern thought. Raman Selden (1989, p.80) describes the transferability of signifiers as a fundamental to semiotics adding that "a new context can allow a fresh connection between signifier and signified. The possibilities of interpretation are interminable." Jacques Derrida uses the term *différance* to describe a similar notion. According to Derrida not only is the meaning of a particular word or phrase understood differently depending on the circumstances in which the word or phrase is read or heard, but that meaning is also "permanently deferred, [and] always subject to and produced by its difference from other meanings and thus volatile and unstable" (Jeremy Hawthorn, 2000, p. 82). In a similar context Barnes (1986, p.114) asks, "why is there always a gap between the words and the things they conjure up?" For Bakhtin the process of shifting meaning starts with the context in which the utterance was made. As the exact context in which the utterance is made can never be repeated, so there could be no exact meaning of the actual word or phrase that was uttered.

Every utterance is unique. This short paragraph, for example, can clearly demonstrate the uniqueness of each and every utterance. Every utterance is unique.

In his plays Barnes (1986, p. 113) often makes use of the fact that every utterance is unique, as he explains, "quotations taken out of their original context mean something different placed in a different setting. This is one way to discover the new within the old". Barnes' plays are full of instances of the familiar being made strange through a change in context. By changing the context of a particular utterance in this way, Barnes is creating "intertext" as described by Harvie and Knowles (1994), the basis of the dialogical process.

In terms of theatrical production the uniqueness of each and every utterance is a highly helpful notion. Many commentators have discussed the various aspects of theatrical production that may be read as signs according to semiotic models of communication (Patrice Pavis, 1982; Marvin Carlson, 1990). Martin Esslin (1987) writes that:

All the elements of a dramatic performance – the language of the dialogue, the setting, the gestures, costumes, make-up and voice-inflections of the actors, as well as a multitude of other signs – each in their own way contribute to the "meaning" of the performance...Each element of the performance can be regarded as a sign that stands for an ingredient of the overall meaning of a scene, an incident, a moment of the action. (p. 16)

All of the signs described by Esslin may be regarded as Bakhtinian utterances. Each sign / utterance is delivered from a unique context that is different for every performance. Furthermore, as Jon Whitmore (1994) observes:

At every theater performance, spectators absorb different stimuli generated by the complex sign systems according to where they are seated, and where their sensors are focused from moment to moment. Spectators then sift through, consciously and unconsciously, the mishmash of signs differently because of their unique socioeconomic, educational, ethnic, cultural, geographic and theatre going backgrounds. (p. 25)

Or in Bakhtinian terms, every spectator represents a different context in which the utterances from the stage are received. That is to say that the one utterance delivered by an actor, or by the lighting, or by the scenery, becomes a myriad of differing utterances as it is received by each and every different member of the audience. "They [the audience] each construct different meanings that are consistent with their personal spheres of experience and knowledge and current emotional and psychological states "(Whitmore, 1994, p. 25).

### Heteroglossia

The idea of the utterance, as mentioned earlier is fundamental to understanding Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia. Dentith (1995, p. 35) explains that heteroglossia is translated from the Russian word *raznorecie* which can be literally translated as 'multi-speechedness', and he goes on to explain that:

Bakhtin produces a dynamic account of language which sees it pulled in opposite directions: centripetally, towards the unitary centre provided by a notion of a 'national language'; and centrifugally, towards the various languages which actually constitute the apparent but false unity of a national language. (p. 35)

Dentith (1995, p. 35) also states that heteroglossia is the word coined by Bakhtin to describe "the multiplicity of actual 'languages' which are at any time spoken by the speakers of any [one] 'language'." As with the utterance, Bakhtin himself never offers a concise definition of heteroglossia. His briefest explanation of the workings of heteroglossia is to be found in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) where he states that:

Between these 'languages' of heteroglossia there are the most profound methodological distinctions; at the base of each lies a completely different principle of differentiation and formation (in some cases functional, in others content-thematic, in yet others properly socio-dialectical). Therefore these languages do not exclude one another but intersect in a variety of ways... It may seem that, given this state of affairs, the very word

'language' loses all meaning for there is not, it would appear, a single plane for comparison of all these languages.

In actual fact, this common plane, methodologically justifying our comparison exists: all the languages of heteroglossia, no matter what the principle lying at the base of their specification, are specific points of view on the world, forms for its verbal interpretation, particular referential-semantic and evaluative horizons. (pp. 291-2)

According to Morson and Emerson (1990, p. 232) heteroglossia "describes the diversity of speech styles in a language." What can be seen from these explanations is that heteroglossia and the utterance both have a common reference point. Both concepts take as a starting point the idea that language is not fixed and meanings can only be made with the assistance of context. As parts of a communication model both the utterance and heteroglossia allow for a large diversity of meaning as Dentith (1990) explains:

At one end of the scale heteroglossia can allude to large dialectical differences which can produce mutual unintelligibility and indeed are hard to distinguish from different languages as such; while at the other end of the scale it can allude to the distinguishing slang of one year to the next and even the slogan of the hour. (p. 35)

## Dialogics

The concepts of both the utterance and also heteroglossia help to define what is, for this project, perhaps the most important of Bakhtin's literary theories: The process of dialogism. Without the presence of dialogical discourse, Bakhtin determined that a literary work could present only one point of view, and accept no differing points of view. Any literary work that is monologic (presents a single view point) would therefore be a work in which meaning is finalized as no dialogue with the work could be entered into. Tzvetan Todorov (1984, p. 107) quotes Bakhtin as saying that "ultimately, monologism denies that there exists outside of it another consciousness, with the same rights, and

capable of responding on equal footing, another and equal I “, and that “the monologue is accomplished [finalized] and deaf to the other’s response”.

A literary work which was dialogical would allow for the reader of the work to engage with the text, and therefore create meanings which would be unique to that reader (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 57).

The presence of heteroglossia or use of multiple languages, in any given text is a key to determining whether or not a dialogical discourse is present. If heteroglossia is present in the text then meaning is not fixed. Each particular language within the text will provide each utterance with a different meaning. The overall result of text which contains heteroglossia is that each reader must engage in dialogical discourse with the text to create their own meaning.

Bakhtin (1984b, p. 6) comes closest to a concise definition of dialogics in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics when he states that [A dialogic text consists of] “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices.” Hirschkop (1989, p. 6) is slightly more concise when he states that dialogism can be “defined as the coexistence in a single utterance of two intentionally distinct, identifiable voices.” Bakhtin (1984b) denies the existence of dialogism in drama when he states in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics that:

In drama, of course, this monologic framework does not find direct verbal expression, but precisely in drama is it especially monolithic. The rejoinders in a dramatic dialogue do not rip apart the represented world, do not make it multi-levelled; on the contrary, if they are to be authentically dramatic, these rejoinders necessitate the utmost monolithic unity of that world. In drama the world must be made from a single piece. Any weakening of this monolithic quality leads to a weakening of dramatic effect. The characters come together dialogically in the unified field of vision of the author, director, and audience against the clearly defined background of a single-tiered world. (p. 17)

Harvie and Knowles (1994) expand on this point in relation to some of Bakhtin’s comments about the dialogic novel when they state that:

In Bakhtin's view, the freedom and independence of the authorial voice, the politics of speech reported in indirect discourse, and participation are essential for dialogism, but are excluded from drama, which he sees as "alien to genuine polyphony" primarily because it "is almost always constructed out of represented, objectified discourses" [Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 34]. (n.p.)

The dialogical discourse is seen as languages interpenetrating one another. As well as the structure of the text there are other languages at work during the creation of a play. Tony Nicholls, (personal communication, March 10, 2000) senior lecturer in Performance Studies at Curtin University, describes the process of writing a play as being easy when "the characters begin talking to one another and take on a life of their own." This process, though clearly not measurable, does indicate that the characters of a play may indeed be seen as entities separate from the author. Contemporary commentators may know very little about William Shakespeare, but none would argue that every character in every play that Shakespeare wrote speaks with his voice. I believe that Bakhtin overlooks this aspect when he says that authorial comment is needed to have dialogical discourse. Carlson (1992) also says as much in his article in Critical Theory and Performance:

Although some of Bakhtin's central concepts, such as dialogism, the subject of this study, have distinctly dramatic overtones, Bakhtin's own central interest in the novel and his relatively few and relatively undeveloped comments on drama have discouraged commentators, until very recently, from considering how the concerns of this highly original writer, which have proven so illuminating in the study of the novel, might be applied to other genres. (p. 315)

The overarching voice of the author, commenting on his characters independently may not be written as such in a play, but it still exists. It may be present openly as stage directions, or covertly in ways such as what the

character does or doesn't say. Mark Fortier (1997) argues that the lack of an overarching authorial voice actually allows for many voices to be heard:

Dramatic form, with its lack of narrative overview, is more conducive to decentred authority than many literary forms, but this effect can be heightened or diminished depending on how it is put into play – Shakespeare is more polyvocal than Shaw, for instance. (125)

It is, however, only a small step that allows for the inclusion of dialogism in theatre performance through the agency of the listener. As Hirschkop (1989) goes on to state, dialogism may be further defined:

To accommodate its various manifestations: as the constant mixing of intentions of speaker and listener; as the way an utterance acquires meaning by inflecting past utterances; as the need of each form of speech to position itself stylistically among other existing forms. (p. 6)

Harvie and Knowles (1994), perhaps the most succinct commentators on Bakhtin, state that dialogism:

in its simplest formulation, involves intertext at its most profound – the creation of a textual space in which a variety of voices, styles, languages or speech genres contest with one another on equal terms, with no single voice dominating. (n.p.)

A definition of dialogism based on both speaker/listener, and also on the creation of a textual space in which differing languages come together to create meanings is able to be clearly applied to theatrical production.

Along with the idea that there is no dominant voice within the dialogical process, Harvie and Knowles (1994) go on to suggest that "no voice gains authority by being more articulate, more intelligent, more erudite"(n.p.). This idea that no particular voice is privileged is closely related to the notion of carnival as described by Bakhtin.

## Carnival

According to Bakhtin, Carnival is a literary structure that allows for multiple voices to be heard. Another feature of Carnival is that normally subjugated, repressed and under-privileged voices are able to be heard. It should also be noted that the upside-down nature of Carnival does more than simply swap privileged and non-privileged positions; it actually works to make all voices able to be heard. As Dentith (1995) explains:

“The carnival...suggests not that the carnivalesque has one univocal social or political meaning, but that it provides a malleable space in which activities and symbols can be inflected in different directions.”  
(p. 75)

Despite continual references to Carnival as a ‘world turned upside down’ it is more accurate to describe Bakhtin’s Carnival as a world without reference points. In terms of privileged voices Carnival is a time of ambivalence. Those that are normally ‘bad’ voices are seen as to be as valid as the good. As Dentith (1995, p. 68) points out, Carnival is a time when “all of the official certainties are relativised, inverted or parodied.” Dentith (1995, p, 68) defines the ambivalence of Carnival as “an attitude in which the high, the elevated, the official, even the sacred is debased and degraded but as a condition of popular renewal and regeneration”. The idea of regeneration is of critical importance to Bakhtin. Rather than Carnival being simply destructive, the idea of regeneration lends Carnival a much more creative force. The creative force of Carnival is associated with Carnival’s emphasis on ending and beginning: without death there can be no new life. Dentith (1990, p. 77) draws attention to the fact that Bakhtin’s:

Emphasis on biological life leads to consciousness of historical time... He [Bakhtin] juxtaposes the vertical sense characteristic of the hierarchical world view of the Middle Ages (which at its limit excludes a sense of time) to the horizontal sense of the onwardness of time characteristic of Rabelais’ writing. (p. 77)



The notion of time as vertical, with elements of society remaining unchanged for generations is replaced with the notion that time is horizontal. It is this change from vertical to horizontal that reminds the reader that *all* things have both an ending and a beginning.

The structure of many of Peter Barnes' plays, and of Red Noses in particular, is clearly carnivalesque. In Red Noses all the normal rules that govern society are abandoned as members of the church desperately flee from the Black Death. The resultant world of Red Noses is one in which those who are left are free to behave in any manner they like – clearly a carnivalesque setting. Despite the grim overtones supplied by the Black Death, the survivors in the middle part of Red Noses are enjoying what Bakhtin (1984a, p. 9) described as “a second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance.” The question that remains in Red Noses, and indeed after any form of Bakhtinian carnival, is to what use will the people put their newfound freedoms? For, as Natalie Davis (1975, p. 131) states, “comic and festive inversion could undermine as well as reinforce assent through its connections with everyday circumstances outside the privileged time of carnival and stage play.” Dentith (1995, p. 68) describes Bakhtin's analyses as:

Tend[ing] to decompose the surface unity of the text only to recompose it leaving the reader with an extraordinarily enriched sense of the depths of historic life on which it draws and the range of popular cultural practice to which it alludes (p. 69)

It is through these connections with everyday circumstances (as stated by Davis) and cultural practice (as stated by Dentith) that I believe Barnes means his plays to force the audience to question their own assumptions about how they live their everyday lives. It is in this context that I believe that Barnes' iconoclasm is indeed radical and not at all conservative and that like Bakhtin, Barnes sees carnival as a regenerative tool.

## The Grotesque

The notions of regeneration and of the onwardness of time are also keys to understanding the Bakhtinian concept of the grotesque. Bakhtin develops his theory of the grotesque primarily in Rabelais and His World (1984a). As with his other theories, Bakhtin never provides a concise definition of the grotesque but tends to use examples from Rabelais to explain his point.

The main thrust of Bakhtin's argument sees the grotesque compared to the classic. In the case of the classic, ideas are presented as complete and finalized, with no allowance for further development. In essence, the form that Bakhtin refers to as classic is the same as a text that is monologic. The grotesque form, however, is seen as a form which is incomplete. Bakhtin sees the use of the grotesque as highlighting the unfinalized nature of a text. The highlighting of the unfinalization occurs due to the fact that the grotesque body is seen as always being in the process of becoming. Dentith (1995) explains that "existence [may] be thought of as always in the process of becoming, never as completed" (p. 80) if the body is seen as "unbounded, in transformation, materially linked to its past and its future" (p.80).

Bakhtin (1981, p. 169) explains that the purpose of the grotesque is to aid in "the destruction of the old picture of the world and the positive construction of a new picture." Bakhtin also explains that "the grotesque and laughter are strategies for getting creativity back into time and the body" (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 437). The grotesque then can be seen as highlighting the capacity for change in a way that is similar to Bakhtin's theory of carnival. The use of the grotesque foregrounds the process of becoming through the notion of death and regeneration. This foregrounding of the process of becoming encourages the reader to question why things are as they are.

Nowhere in his writing does Bakhtin link the grotesque to drama. As mentioned above, the majority of Bakhtin's writing about the grotesque is limited to his discussions of Rabelais. There is, however, no reason to assume that (unlike dialogism) Bakhtin expressly denied that the grotesque does exist

in drama. Characters in drama may be viewed as grotesque if they are presented as incomplete, and in the process of becoming.

It may be argued that some characters in drama may be viewed as classic if, for example, they are presented as noble and only act as a noble character would act. How then would a character such as Shakespeare's King Lear be viewed? Throughout the play we see Lear in a constant state of change as he discovers more and more about himself, and his relationship with the other characters and his kingdom. This constant change foregrounds the notion that Lear is not a fixed character. As the play progresses the audience/reader is shown Lear's character in the process of becoming. The audience/reader is encouraged at all times to question what has caused Lear to behave as he does and what might he do next. Lear, as a character, is instrumental in the changing of the world picture as presented within the play. In these terms Lear can only be viewed as an example of a grotesque character.

Whilst it may be possible to isolate grotesque characters within drama, finding a way to use the notion of becoming as a tool for creating meaning within theatrical production is probably of greater importance. In Red Noses the characters are actively undertaking the process of re-shaping the world in which they live. The world of Red Noses is not fixed and can be read as in the process of becoming. Within this context of a world being re-shaped the audience is encouraged to ask questions such as why is that character like that, and why was that particular course of action chosen.

The overall effect of highlighting the process of becoming through the use of the grotesque is to encourage the reader of the text to ask more questions of the world presented within that text. A text that highlights becoming is a text that is not finalized. As with all of Bakhtin's theories, an unfinalized text is one in which the reader is free to create meaning through the uniqueness of that particular reading's context.

### Bakhtin's literary theories – a dramatic conclusion.

None of Bakhtin's writing and few commentators on Bakhtin take into account theatre performance. Bakhtin's views of drama and articles written about Bakhtin's views of drama are almost certainly derived solely from the written text. According to Carlson (1992) though, even if high tragedy is viewed as monologic:

[Which is] by no means as certain as Bakhtin suggests, there is clearly a vast range of drama that falls outside this genre, much of it as disruptive of the represented world as anything in the novelistic tradition. The whole tradition of comedy, from Aristophanes onward, opens itself in this direction, and the drama has been one of the cultural centres of parody, which Bakhtin advances as one of the most ancient forms of dialogism, the representing of the language of another. Not only does parody function as a generic focus in itself, but perhaps even more striking, and more directly relevant to Bakhtin's concern it can even subvert the dramatic world from within by direct challenge to the unity of its dominant voice. (p. 315)

Carlson's point is that contrary to anything Bakhtin has written about drama, the genre has undergone the process of novelization that Bakhtin states is necessary for meaning to be created dialogically.

If drama has not been novelized, then to take Bakhtin's view of drama as encompassing performed texts is to expect a play to present a world as complete, and to expect the audience to have no role in creating that world. The dialogic imagination required to build a picture of the world of the text is not, in Bakhtin's view required when the picture of that world is given to you. What is created here is a binary opposition, something that Bakhtin is at pains to avoid in the rest of his writing, between the written word and the spoken word. There is the assumption that because we see and hear an actor there is no room for any interpretation. This assumption is at odds with the notion of the utterance as discussed above. The basic problem does seem to be that Bakhtin's dismissal of drama can only be as a written text and not as a performed text.

In Bakhtinian terms, Peter Barnes' plays seem to contain all of the elements required to suggest that they have been novelized. Barnes' plays nearly all contain carnivalistic elements. Furthermore, Barnes' plays contain evidence of extra-literary genres, such as songs and lines from films, stated by Bakhtin (1981, p. 33) as being one of the devices that sets the novel apart from other forms. Barnes (1986) himself describes the process by which he hopes meaning is made in performance when he states that he is aiming for:

A drama of extremes, trying to illuminate the truth as contradictory. Instead of eliminating those contradictions as untrue, they are emphasized; melancholy and joy, tragedy and comedy, the bathetic and the sublime are placed side by side. The similarity of such opposites is shown by such juxtapositions. That which we call comic or tragic are, in fact, their opposites, for it is a principle of dialectical logic that what seems on the surface one thing, is essentially its opposite. So incompatible and widely contradictory elements are superimposed on each other till they are transformed into reality, which is itself made up of similar contradictory elements also existing side by side with each other. (p. 113)

All of the juxtapositions that Barnes speaks of can only be viewed as helping to create meaning within a certain context. As a performed text, drama is subject to all the vagaries of context between the playwright, the director, the actor and each and every member of the audience, each and every time it is performed. Just as every utterance is unique, so is every performance. It is my view that when performed, drama can in no way be dismissed as a monologic form.

## DIRECTING, SEMIOTICS AND BAKHTIN

While there is little written about Bakhtin and the process of directing plays there is a lot that has been written about semiotics and theatre production. From a linguistic viewpoint there are elements of post-structuralist views of semiotics that resonate strongly with Bakhtin's ideas. It is through a discussion of these ideas that I hope to link Bakhtin to theatre production.

I think firstly I need to clearly point out that the production of Red Noses that I directed at the Hayman Theatre in June 2002 is not the same text as that which was published by Methuen in 1993. The text of the production of Red Noses existed only when it was before an audience. The written text of Red Noses is available in many places at any time. It is important to this project to understand that the printed text is not a blueprint for performance. Setting aside for the moment Bakhtin's view that due to context every utterance is unique, even if the production of any play is word-for-word identical to the printed text, there is no possible way that a reader of both the production and the script will conclude the same set of meanings from each. As Jonathan Miller (1986) explains:

The text of a play is surprisingly short on the instructions required to bring a performance into existence. Playwrights do not include – and cannot, because of a shortage of notation – all those details of prosody, inflection, stress, tempo and rhythm. A script tells us nothing about the gestures, the stance, the facial expressions, the dress, the weight, or the grouping of the movement. So although the text is a necessary condition for performance it is by no means a sufficient one. It is short of all these accessories which are, in a sense, the essence of performance. The literal act of the reading of the words of a script does not constitute a performance. (p. 34)

A performance then consists of much more than the written script. Whitmore (1994) explains the differences between understanding a script that is performed and one that is read:

Theater performances... include spoken words which produce meanings for all spectators who understand the language of the performance. The same holds true for the reader of a playscript; that is, the reader constructs meanings from a script because of a knowledge of words, the way words are put together to form phrases, clauses or sentences, and how they are punctuated. The difference in perception between reading and listening to words, however, is significant: during a performance words exist only at the moment in time when they are spoken – they cannot be read or listened to again. A performance marches on; more words come forth at each new moment. Because the theater experience exists in real time, communication by means of spoken word is quite different from, and often more difficult than, reading a novel or playscript. (p. 12)

Pavis (1982, p. 150) goes a step further, pointing out that as spectators “we do not have direct access to the text which is being staged” but rather that we “perceive in a *mise-en-scene* the director’s reading of the author’s text”. In Bakhtin’s terms the written text and the director’s reading of that text interpenetrate one another. It is this interpenetration of the author’s voice with the director’s that creates one of the levels of dialogism in performance that Bakhtin claims is missing in drama. Barnes (1986) states in the notes to *The Real Long John Silver and Other Plays* that:

A play has to be translated from the written text into sounds and movements, which means it has to be thought through and interpreted in order to exist. In the reproduction of a drama on stage, two moments of creation and interpretation exist simultaneously. (p. 114)

The process of translation from written text to performed text to can be described as dialogical interpenetration. By engaging in an interpretation of the written text for the stage, any lingering thoughts of drama being monologic are removed. Pavis (1982) describes this dialogical process of the creation of the *mise-en-scene* as:

The establishment of a dialectical opposition between T/P [text/performance] which takes the form of a *stage enunciation* (of a global discourse belonging to *mise-en-scene*) according to a *metatext* 'written' by the director and his team and more or less integrated, that is established in the enunciation, in the concrete work of the stage production and the spectator's reception (p. 146)

Pavis' statement clearly articulates both the existence of multiple voices within the theatrical performance and the way in which they combine interpenetratively. Whitmore (1994) uses semiotic terminology to describe the dialogic process:

The director overcodes the production with her vision of the performance's ultimate meanings. Directors make literally thousands of choices: they select individual signs and blend them into sequences of signs, which lead to large patterns of signs that ultimately produce a performance's meanings through each spectator's unique perception of the performance. (p. 20)

As alluded to by Whitmore there are more voices than just those of the director and the author at work in the production of a performance. Prominent director Peter Sellars states that the vocabulary of stage language includes how each individual technical area such as lighting, sets, and sound actually works to help create a performance. Sellars also adds, "the notion that a piece is made of all those elements is important" (qtd. in Bartow, 1988, pp. 283-4). In Bakhtinian terms Sellars is simply pointing out that meanings are made through the dialogical interpenetration of the many languages of theatre. Whitmore (1994) goes a step further, stating that:

In the theater meanings are generated through the work of many artists and technicians from multiple communication systems. Absolute control of the communication process by a single individual is not possible. Also, the meanings of a



performance change with each new enactment and are constructed differently by individual spectators because of each viewer's discrete physical, psychological, intellectual and emotional constitution. Indeed, the spectators themselves are contributors to the performance's meanings. (pp. 4-5)

Whitmore's semiotics based explanation of the creation of meaning in theatre performance is easily explained in Bakhtinian terms. Whitmore's explanation adds the concept of the utterance and the importance of context to the way that dialogism functions during a performance before an audience. The context in which the utterance is made may be partly controlled by the director of the production but clearly every utterance may be understood differently by every audience member. Directors may attempt to employ foregrounding techniques to bring the spectator's attention to specific signifiers at a given moment in the performance (Whitmore, 1994, p. 23), but as Susan Bennett (1997) points out:

The audience's freedom to select different processes of reading, or even to ignore the play entirely, must not be discounted. Similarly, members of an audience may resist focal points. Instead of accepting the sign cluster which represents the centre of the action, concentration may be diverted to signs other than those foregrounded by the performance or may even move to read unintentional signs against them. (p. 27)

As Bakhtin would point out, every utterance is unique. It is undeniable that every audience member will see every aspect of every performance from their own viewpoint. It follows that every audience member is therefore engaging with the performance on their own terms and in a dialogically interpenetrative manner. Each audience member is in dialogue with the performance, understanding it from their own specific context.

A semiotics based reading of a play, or indeed any text, will resonate strongly with Bakhtin's theories and may be used to help dispel Bakhtin's notion that drama is a monologic form. A semiotic reading of a production will

identify a series of signs that may contain differing meanings depending on how they occur within the text. These signs may be read as utterances which create meaning according to context. The semiotic reading of the play will identify several discrete language systems which interact to create meaning. The existence of the various language systems may be read as heteroglossia and their interaction as dialogic interpenetration. Bakhtin's claims that drama is a monologic (and thus finalized) form are easily refuted when drama is considered as a performed text.

## PETER BARNES AND ME

My introduction to the theatre of Peter Barnes was as the technical stage manager for the Hayman Theatre production of *The Bewitched* in 1988. This was the first time that such a position was required for any production at the Hayman Theatre. The fact that such a position was needed was my first clue as to the astonishing nature of this playwright's work. *The Bewitched* is the extraordinarily spectacular and highly theatrical telling of the story of King Philip IV of Spain. Resources at the Hayman were stretched to their limits and beyond. Many long hours were worked in the pre-production stage and it seemed that there was always more set, more props, more costumes, more lights, more smoke, more everything needed! The demands made of cast; crew and ultimately audience (the performance ran for over three hours not including interval) were extreme. Never before had I encountered writing like this, and I must say that I still have found no writer quite like Barnes. He is unique.

After my work on the leviathan that was *The Bewitched*, my next encounter with Peter Barnes was to read all of the plays in *Barnes: Plays One*. It became apparent that the style of *The Bewitched* was indicative of the style of the bulk of his plays. Whilst his other plays may not be as large physically as *The Bewitched* they are all as astonishingly theatrical. As I found and read more and more of his work, I realised that if I was to continue my career in theatre that Peter Barnes and I would share a lasting relationship.

The next stage in that relationship was to see a production of *Red Noses* at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 1989. The production was in the Acting Studio (now The Enright Studio) and was performed in a sparse setting, with little in the way of effects. This was obviously the polar opposite to the Hayman Theatre production of *The Bewitched*. What grabbed my attention though was the nature of the story telling. Again, Barnes' highly theatrical style was at work. This time, however, the theatricality lay with the way in which language and comedy were used. Through the use of jokes, slapstick and song the audience was involved with characters who, despite

being from 1348, were immediately accessible and incredibly human. The variety of Barnes' writing had surprised me again.

After graduating from Curtin University I joined with Sam Hardcastle in forming Rough Magic Theatre in 1991. It was with Rough Magic Theatre that I began directing Peter Barnes' plays. The first was *The Real Long John Silver*, in 1994. The play was originally written for radio though its characters demanded to be seen by a live theatre audience. All three are on their way to a fancy dress party, and all are dressed as Long John Silver – complete with parrot. These were in fact ordinary people living through an extraordinary event in their lives. Like the people of *Red Noses* dealing with the plague, their world is turned upside down and their challenge is to somehow survive. This incredible set-up for what is little more than a sketch had again reminded me of the theatrical nature of Barnes' writing.

The idea of a world turned upside down is a theme that seems to run through all of Barnes' plays. I next encountered it when directing a double bill of *Leonardo's Last Supper* and *Noonday Demons* for Rough Magic Theatre in 2001. In *Leonardo's Last Supper*, the world of the Lasca family is transformed by the arrival of the body of Leonardo da Vinci in their charnel house. The fame of burying the great man promises to bring them untold riches. Imagine their surprise when Leonardo recovers and promises them nothing but thanks for not entombing him. The family join together to avert this crisis and proceed to make certain that Leonardo dies and stays dead. The play places capitalism and culture as opposites and positions the main character, Angelo Lasca as a kind of anti-hero. In the introduction Barnes states that he can vouch for the historical accuracy of everything in the play except for the resurrection of Leonardo. His use of historical fact to tell a tale with contemporary resonances is yet another aspect of the overt theatricality, which I, as a director, find fascinating.

In *Noonday Demons* Barnes delves even deeper into the past to tell the story of one of the hermit saints who lived in caves in Egypt around 1600 years ago. The play opens with a long monologue during which the central character, Saint Eusebius, fights with the devil who is trying to possess him. The resulting 'dialogue' played by one actor is incredibly engrossing. After Eusebius wins his

fight with the devil another saint, looking exactly the same as Eusebius, enters the cave. As the audience, we ask if this new saint is in fact real, is he a figment of Eusebius' imagination or another apparition sent by the devil. The two saints begin a battle for the right to live in the cave, each asserting that he is more pious than the other. After defeating the interloper by physically killing him, Eusebius is horrified to see a third "Eusebius" arrive to accept the cheers of the angels, and the applause of the audience. Eusebius is left alone in a cold and lonely void. Apart from being a *tour de force* for the actor playing Eusebius, *Noonday Demons* is a superbly crafted exploration in theatricality which plays with notions of character and reality.

My relationship with Peter Barnes up until this point had been a purely practical one based on theatre production. I felt that it was time to seek a deeper commitment. I began a course of postgraduate study that would lead, if successful, to a Master of Arts (Creative Arts). I began to study more formally the ideas that attracted me so strongly to the plays of Peter Barnes. I decided to mount a production of *Red Noses*, the Barnes play that to me was the most overtly theatrical of all. This resulting production will form the basis of the rest of this paper.

Whilst involved in the study of *Red Noses* and the preparation for it, a chance arose to direct a short play at the Hayman Theatre as part of the Upstairs season. I chose to direct *Last Things*, by Peter Barnes. At first glance this play would appear to have little relationship to the other plays in the Barnes *oeuvre*. The play is about two variety artistes reminiscing over their lives whilst in bed. The catch to the whole play is that they are both dead – the gas was left on in the kitchen. Again, the world of the characters is turned upside down. All normal rules are suspended due to the altered circumstances.

The introduction of societal rules and their subsequent destruction is a common element in the majority of Barnes' plays. In *The Ruling Class* Barnes introduces his audience to the world of contemporary British aristocracy. With the death of the 13th Earl of Gurney and the succession of Jack, the 14th Earl, the rules by which the other characters live are swept away and a new set of rules are laid down. The audience are asked to consider which rules are in fact

the most acceptable. Dukore (1990, p. 156) categorises this moment, along with similar moments in other plays, as part of Barnes' search for goodness. In terms of dramatic themes this may be so but I feel that the presentation of alternative societal systems is in line with Barnes' stated objective of seeking to disrupt the social order of contemporary society (1996a, p. viii; 1996b, p. x).

In the introduction to *Plays: 1* Barnes (1996a, p. viii) says that if he returns to the same themes over and over it is because "they are essential". *Sunsets and Glories* revisits a handful of ideas that have cropped up in several previous plays. In particular the question asked by Pope Clement VI in *Red Noses* of "who knows what will result from one wild act of goodness" (Barnes, 1993, p. 49) is given expanded treatment. The play is based around the papacy of Celestine V, the only pope to have retired from the position in the history of the Catholic Church. In the play Celestine is portrayed as an intensely good man whose very piety threatens to tear apart the fabric of the church. Empires are on the verge of toppling, fortunes will be lost and corrupt officials will be reduced to telling the truth. For the safety of the church and the wider world, Cardinal Gaetani locks Celestine away and assumes the papacy under the name of Boniface VIII. More than just a search for goodness, Barnes condemns those who do not question why society functions in the way that it does.

Barnes continues his questioning of society in *Dreaming*, which is set in 1471, at the end of the Wars of the Roses. It is a time when there are few, if any laws and less enforcement. Like the plague time in *Red Noses*, it is a time when humanity is free to make a new set of rules. The central character of the play, Jack Mallory, is attempting to start life anew. He is endeavouring to leave behind his life as a soldier and to start a new community that would live by laws that do not seek to suppress any members of that community. Unfortunately for Jack, as it was also for Flote in *Red Noses*, there are others who see his vision as dangerously subversive. Others who, like Gaetani in *Sunsets and Glories*, have a lot to lose if a community like that proposed by Jack Mallory (or Celestine V, or Flote, or the 14th earl of Gurney) was to become the operating norm for all society.

Barnes encourages his audience to think that they are free to create the society that they want at any time. That the conditions of carnival exist in the here and now and that the way we will live in the future is up for grabs. This is what Barnes (1996a, p. viii) means by stating that he wants to create an anti-boss drama not for the shearers but for the shorn. It is in this sense that Barnes can be viewed as an iconoclast. His plays present a picture in which the structures of power in today's society are almost begging to be smashed if only people can muster the courage and intelligence to do so.

It seemed that through all the Barnes plays that I had been involved with, as well as those that I have read, there was a common thread. In all of the plays the characters' worlds are turned upside down and all semblance of order is removed. Barnes' characters must learn to exist in a lawless world, or to bring about a new order. Eventually the need for order outweighs the attractions of anarchy. The choice for each character is whether they will try to pick up the pieces and reassemble the old world or to start anew with fresh rules. Barnes seems to be most interested in exploring what happens when the carnival is over. It is this carnivalesque element in Barnes' work that led me to begin thinking about Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin promoted carnival as the time when people were free from the usual restrictions that governed their lives. A time when a more satisfactory way of life could be had. Were there more common areas between Bakhtin and Barnes? I began to think differently about Barnes' plays and about the various elements that makes his work so different from that of other playwrights.

## CHALLENGES OF DIRECTING PETER BARNES' PLAYS

To a certain extent the challenges posed by the directing of a Peter Barnes play are similar to those posed by the directing of any play. There are several areas though where directing the work of Peter Barnes steps out of the ordinary.

### Scale

One of the primary areas that is most challenging about the majority of Peter Barnes work is the sheer physical scale of the plays. In recent years there has been a trend towards smaller scale plays. This tendency could be attributed to a variety of reasons. The inability of theatre to compete with film or television to present spectacular entertainment may have encouraged play producers to concentrate on providing the kind of intimacy that only live interaction in a smaller venue can provide.

The economics of play production could also be a feature of the trend towards smaller productions. The audience, and therefore the income, for any play is restricted to the size of the auditorium in which it is played. Unlike a film which may be shown four or five times a day, seven days a week, and on any number of screens across the country or around the world, a play can generally be seen only once a day and definitely in only one theatre at a time. Against this background the director of a Barnes' play is likely to feel pressure from the body responsible for funding the theatre in which she or he works. A Barnes play will generally be more expensive to produce than most other plays.

Apart from cost, the physical complexity of a Barnes play in terms of set, costume, properties, lighting and sound is likely to present particular challenges to the director. With the trend towards smaller scale plays, the departments responsible for these areas within a theatre company may be inadequately staffed to take on such work and the designers may lack the necessary skills. Red Noses, for example requires over fifty costumes. The Bewitched requires the stage to spilt open, characters to be burnt on stage and a multitude of torture implements. Laughter! requires an actor to be impaled on a stake, and a wall of filing cabinets to slide open to reveal a pair of sanitation



men cleaning up the dead bodies at a Nazi concentration camp. Clearly these are big problems that need to be solved.

The move towards smaller scale productions has certain ramifications in terms of acting style that also may prove to be a challenge for the director of a Barnes play. As Dukore (1990, p. 65) states, actors may be required to quickly “switch from intellectual discourse, to period argot, to poetry, to modern slang, to rhetoric, to musical comedy, to ritual, to dance, to opera, to slapstick.” This ever-changing requirement in acting style is not normally asked of actors in the majority of smaller scale productions. It is my belief that the acting required in a Barnes play is so performative that it needs to draw attention to itself *as acting*. What is needed is a style of acting that acknowledges that the audience is in fact present, whilst remaining well and truly in character. It appears to be a curious stylistic mix of both Brechtian and Stanislavskian acting that is needed. Bearing this in mind another challenge set by almost any Barnes play is that of the actual skill of the company involved. Again, owing to the size of most of Barnes plays finding the depth of skill required in any one theatre company in this modern era of low funding will be difficult.

The sheer scale required in a Peter Barnes play will also present the director with the challenge of allowing the audience to fully appreciate the play. Audiences, also, will be more used to seeing smaller scale productions. It would be easy, when watching a Barnes play, to be so totally overwhelmed by the size of the piece that the very real human relationships between characters which actually tell the story could be lost. Balancing these two aspects of the plays is certainly crucial.

### Comedy

All of Barnes’ major plays give an early impression that they are going to be weighty historical dramas dealing with serious issues. The plays, however, are driven by comedy that challenges the social hierarchy and the distribution of power within it. It is for this reason that Peter Barnes has often been linked so closely with Jacobean dramatists. In fact, Barnes has adapted several Jacobean tragedies and has appropriated Jacobean plot structures and forms of

comic/tragic violence for his own plays. Barnes' use of comedy to point out that which is painful and futile is described by many critics not only as reminiscent of Jacobean theatre, but also in terms of farce. Barnes uses farce to expose the machinations of the hierarchies of power even in the topsy-turvy conditions created by carnival. Christopher Innes (1992, p. 301) points out that "in all Barnes' plays, crude physical reality is used to demolish the ideology that supports social inequality".

Dealing with Peter Barnes' particular brand of comedy is one of the major challenges facing the director of Red Noses. Whilst most of Peter Barnes' plays do encompass a number of very serious issues, I firmly believe that he is a writer of very funny plays. The very mixture "where everything is simultaneously tragic and ridiculous" (Barnes, 1996a, p. 122), means that the plays are difficult to categorise and that a director who favours either the serious or the comic may experience more than a modicum of problems.

In a Barnes play, comedy itself is treated as a serious subject, leading to a situation where a serious point is rendered comic to have a serious effect. Innes (1992, p.298) states that Barnes' "plays seek to attack unquestioned assumptions through exposing the relationship between traditional values and repression" and the principal weapon for this attack is comedy. In the introduction to Plays: One, Barnes (1996a, p. viii) tells us that his aim is to create "an anti-boss drama for the shorn not the shearers", his point being that those who believe they are oppressed are in fact as much to blame for the oppressive regime as the obvious oppressors. Peter Barnes uses comedy in his plays to explore the notion that those who suffer are actively compliant in the system that makes them suffer.

To investigate the use of comedy in Barnes' plays I plan to look at the comedic traditions that inform Barnes' work, how those traditions operate in the theatre, and how an audience may be affected by Barnes' deployment of those traditions.

First of all, the director of a Barnes play will have to deal with the difficulty mentioned earlier, of the play being both serious and comic. Nearly all of Barnes' plays give an early impression that they are going to be historical dramas dealing with serious issues. Before long however, the plays acquire a

somewhat comic feel as a sense of anarchy slowly pervades. The problem for the director is to be able to convince the audience that the play is in fact still saying something serious. Throughout the history of dramatic performance, comedy has always been viewed as less important than tragedy. If a play is comic then its content is usually seen as more frivolous. I believe that if the average playgoer was to be questioned he or she would inevitably tell you that Shakespeare's better plays are his tragedies, or that Ibsen is a more important playwright than Coward. This belief in the inferiority of comedy as a dramatic form can be traced back to Aristotle.

Aristotle's work On the Art of Poetry has been perhaps the single most influential work on the relative merits of tragedy and comedy. For Aristotle (1965, p. 33) "the difference that marks the distinction between comedy and tragedy . . . [is that] comedy aims at representing men as worse than they are nowadays, tragedy as better", and he goes on to say that:

Comedy represents the worse types of men; worse, however, not in the sense that it embraces any and every kind of badness, but in the sense that the ridiculous is a species of ugliness or badness. For the ridiculous consists in some form of error or ugliness that is not painful or injurious; the comic mask, for example, is distorted and ugly, but causes no pain. (p. 37)

Aristotle's main point is that the effect of tragedy on an audience should be that of catharsis: "by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation of such emotions" (1965, p. 39). Barnes' plays, however, whilst still engendering similar emotive responses from the audience, do not fit into the Aristotelian model on a number of counts. There is, in fact, a surfeit of pain in all of Barnes' plays. This pain is often both physical and emotional, and nearly always leads to humour. As the prisoner whose torture is accidentally increased by King Carlos in The Bewitched explains "it was a great honour, your majesty" (Barnes, 1996a, p. 262).

As Aristotle would have no pain in comedy, he would also have the characters representing worse types of people so that the audience would feel

happier in that their laughter does not undermine the social order. A glance through the list of characters in any Barnes play shows kings, queens, lords, popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, saints, and so on. As the plays unfold, however, a carnivalesque atmosphere ensures that these figures of authority are the very characters that are the most laughed at. This is the beginning of the attack on unquestioned assumptions as described by Innes (1992, p. 298). In his plays, Barnes deliberately inverts the classicist roles of comedy and tragedy by creating the topsy-turvy conditions of carnival. The result is that the spectators clearly understand that those in charge are there only by their own manipulations, and not by God-given right.

Barnes' use of plot to further expose manipulatory behaviour is one of the reasons that the majority of critics invoke the idiom of Jacobean Revenge drama to discuss his work. Through a historical survey of plays it can be argued that the dominant form of drama in the early Jacobean period was tragicomedy. This genre was codified in an essay published in 1601 by Italian playwright Giambattista Guarini entitled *Compendio della Poesia Tragicomica*, which, according to Hirst (1984, p. 3), "was the first, and remains the most substantial analysis of the tragicomic form". Guarini's argument is that if a writer is to take the best and most beneficial elements from both tragedy and comedy, then success is ensured:

From the former he takes 'noble characters not noble actions, a story which is credible but not historically true, heightened yet tempered effects, delight not sorrow, the danger not the death', from the latter 'laughter which is not dissolute, modest pleasures, a feigned crisis, an unexpected happy ending and - above all - the comic plotting' [from *Compendio*](Hirst, 1984, p. 4)

The overall aim of Guarini's plan is to create "a contrived action which combines all the tragic and comic elements which can believably coexist . . . within a dramatic form whose aim is to purge with delight the sadness of the audience" (Hirst, 1984, pp. 5-6). However, as plays in the Jacobean period began to explore issues of power, and how people maintained their grasp on it,

characters were seen to be openly dissembling and hatching plots that would achieve revenge through murder and deceit. In Hamlet, Horatio's description of how he will explain to Fortinbras the events that have just occurred could easily serve as publicity material for any Jacobean Revenge drama:

So shall you hear  
Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts;  
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;  
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause;  
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook  
Fall'n on the inventors' heads (Shakespeare, 1986,  
p. 713)

This then represents a broadening of Guarini's rules for tragicomedy. Whilst in Jacobean Revenge drama the noble characters don't act nobly (they plot revenge and kill people), and the story is usually credible (due primarily to the plays being set in foreign parts where anything can happen) but not historically true, the rest of Guarini's definition is, in fact, too narrow. Effects are not tempered, there is sorrow not delight (and usually anger) and there is both the danger and the death. Laughter is dissolute, pleasures are extreme and not modest, crises are not feigned but real, there is seldom any happy ending, and the comic plotting is heavily entwined with the revenge plot. After a revenge play the sadness of the audience has not been purged with delight.

The aims of the writer of revenge drama have now drifted into the distinctly revolutionary. The comedic part of a revenge drama does not install in the audience a sense of well being as it does in Guarini's model; rather the comedy becomes a means of exposing that which the author sees as wicked in society. It is this disturbing use of comedy that links Peter Barnes so closely with the Jacobean. Richard Cave (1987, p. 263) suggests that Barnes "is an authority on Renaissance theatre" and that Barnes "with a wit akin to the metaphysical poets can exploit the bizarre to reveal a sudden truth about human experience with peculiar immediacy". Hirst (1984, p. 124) points to the "savage and negative" outlook generated by "those tragedies intercut with flashes of comedy" by writers such as Marlowe, Webster and Middleton, and

argues that Peter Barnes "continues this tradition of satire, which was inherited from the Jacobean".

One of the difficulties, for the director, and ultimately the audience, created by Barnes' affinity with Jacobean style comedy is that of recognition. To be successful this particular brand of comedy must be delivered in a context that also explains how meaning is made, as it must be assumed that a contemporary audience does not have a firm grasp of Jacobean comic conventions.

Barnes takes the sensibilities of the Jacobean, and fuses it with more contemporary concerns to develop a form of comedy that operates on a completely different plane. Farce is an important element in this fusing. The dictionary definition of farce is a "dramatic piece meant merely to excite laughter; this branch of drama; absurdly futile proceeding" (Johnston, 1976, p. 296). Whilst in his book, Farce, A History From Aristophanes to Woody Allen, Albert Bermel (1982, pp. 13-4) states that "farce is by its nature popular: it makes a gut appeal to the entire spectrum of the public, from illiterates to intellectuals" and that "farces date back to men's and women's first attempts to scoff in public at whatever their neighbours cherished in private". The nature of farce, especially when viewed from the last perspective of making a mockery of something that someone else regards as important, is particularly destructive. Barnes uses farce to relentlessly pursue his goal of showing the spectator how the powerful remain in power, and also how the powerless help to perpetuate the same system. Innes (1992, p. 301) points out that "in all Barnes' plays, crude physical reality is used to demolish the ideology that supports social inequality".

A good example of Barnes' use of farce illustrating this point occurs in The Bewitched, when the physically deformed and hopelessly incapacitated King Carlos of Spain is undertaking dancing lessons:

ANTONIO. Today, Sire, we practice the Pavane, again. . . . The dance o' Kings, Queens and noblemen, its natural authority mirroring the natural authority o' its dancers. . . .

*The drum beats out the time. Carlos' left foot skids forwards . . . his right knee buckles . . . [and] he keels over onto the floor with a crash. . .*

TORRES. Your Majesty hath a natural sense o' rhythm. . . .

ANTONIO. 'Tis mani... 'er, magnificent, Your Majesty, but, 'er 't isn't the 'Pavane'.

CARLOS. No, 'tis 'The Carlos'!

*. . . with their Majesties in the lead, [members of the court] wobble, lurch, do the splits, skid and spin with poker faced dignity. . . . The music grows faster, until the climax is reached with the male dancers all simultaneously keeling over onto the floor with a crash.*

(Barnes, 1996a, pp. 214-16)

The scene is clearly ridiculous, and Barnes' purpose is to show how those who are ruled are actively assisting the rulers. Without this type of scene being comic, Barnes would run the risk of appearing to deliver a very strict moral message. With the comedy included however, the risk is very much that the spectator will simply miss the message altogether.

Two of Barnes' major plays, *Laughter!* and *Red Noses* both address directly the question of how comedy can be deployed as either a disruptive or reactive force. The ramifications of Barnes' view of comedy, as seen in these two plays, have a direct influence on the audience. Hirst (1984, p. 125) explains that "like Artaud, Barnes sees the world as mad and it is his intention to drive home to his audience a full awareness of this folly". Part of the awareness is, by necessary extension, that audience members also are willing sufferers in a system of inequality.

In *Laughter!*, the nature of Barnes' deployment of comedy is at its most problematic. The play is made up of two shorter plays. The first part, *Tsar*, is a catalogue of visceral horrors set in the chapel of Tsar Ivan IV of Russia - Ivan the Terrible. The second part, *Auschwitz*, is set in the civil service office of the German bureaucracy that is responsible for the tender process for the building of the concentration camps. Both parts are punctuated by terrible jokes that appear to make a mockery of the situations. The play as a whole is preceded by an introduction that has a character called Author delivering a serious speech about the uselessness of comedy, himself subject to a series of awful gags:

Ladies and gentlemen . . .  
*A hand slaps a large custard pie straight in his face . . .*  
 Comedy itself is the enemy. . . . an excuse to  
 change nothing, for nothing needs changing when  
 it's all a joke. . . .  
*His bow tie whirls round and round. . . . The carnation*  
*in his buttonhole squirts water. . . .*  
 The powerful have no need of [laughter] it. Wit's  
 no answer to a homicidal maniac. . . . in the face of  
 Atilla the Hun, Ivan the Terrible, a Passchendaele or  
 Auschwitz, what good is laughter?!  
*His trousers fall down to reveal spangled underpants.*  
 (Barnes, 1996a, p. 343)

This speech is a way of showing how unless it is properly deployed, comedy will undermine the most serious narrative. Comedy in this case may be viewed as a little demon of anarchy which has, as Richard Glasgow (1995, p. 14) would have it, "a habit of exploding or . . . involuntarily escaping like a fleetfooted fart or unanticipated belch". Once the comedy demon has been released, it is likely to run riot through whatever narrative is currently being told. Unless the audience is glued to the narrative in question, the comedy demon is a far more persuasive force and the audience will simply be waiting for the next joke. In the case of Laughter!, the next joke is very gruesome indeed and Barnes' point here is that audience members need to decide if they had accorded too much attention to laughter. Innes (1992) describes well what is likely to happen next:

[Laughter!] presents two extremes of human brutality [and] exploits the incongruity of laughter and tragic sufferings. By subjecting these to comedy the spectators' horror at the cruelty of tyrants is heightened, and their disgust for those who cooperate in the system intensified . . . . In this context humour ceases to be funny, the comic is no relief. Yet the play implies that farce can still have a subversive function when the form is divorced from conventional comic content. (p. 304)

As the second part of Laughter! proceeds, Barnes delivers characters that the audience may be able to accept as decent people. The clerks of the German



civil service appear as good folk when viewed in opposition to Gottleb, the stereo-typical Nazi. The clerks appear likeable "because of the engaging jokes . . . which help them to bear their miserable lot" (Dukore, 1990, p. 164). However, as Dukore (1990, p. 164) goes on to say, "these civil servants use bureaucratese to hide reality, thereby disengaging their emotions and ethics from what they do. Thus they become as guilty as, if not more guilty than, the Nazi Gottleb". Furthermore, Dukore (1990, pp. 164-5) also points out that "Barnes indicts those, in the audience as well as on stage, who substitute smug self-satisfaction for actions that demonstrate goodness", for "goodness is inseparable from a social context. To be good one must do good". Innes (1992, p. 307) makes a similar claim, but goes a step further, stating that "the spectators, as representatives of the common people, are not only the sole potential for changing the system. They are also guilty".

Even those who would be expected to be absolved of guilt in a play about Nazi concentration camps are not spared. In the epilogue, The Boffo boys of Birkenau are a pair of soon-to-be-dead inmates of a concentration camp. In a reversal of the opening scene, the pair deliver a comic routine that interrupts the serious business of being gassed. The point is that the misplaced comedy robs the audience of the ability to sympathise. It is a joke, so nothing needs changing. The following lines confirm both the Boffo Boys' and the audience's complicity in allowing suffering to continue:

*They cough and stagger.*

BIEBERSTEIN. I could be wrong, but I think this act is dying.

BIMKO. The way to beat hydro-cyanide gas poisoning is by holding your breath for five minutes. It's just a question of mind over matter. They don't mind and we don't matter.

*They fall to their knees.*

BIEBERSTEIN. Those foul, polluted German bastardised. . .

BIMKO. Hymie, Hymie, please; what you want to do – cause trouble?

*They collapse on the floor.* (Barnes, 1996a, p. 411)

In the introduction to Frontiers of Farce, farces by Wedekind and Feydeau adapted by Barnes (1976, p. ii), he states that he locates his drama "on the outer limits of farce where everything is pushed to extremes of pain and cruelty". The challenge for the director then (as suggested earlier) is that Barnes' "plays attack the evils of the existing system" (Innes, 1992, p. 298), and the people who we are led to despise for perpetuating the system are ourselves. This recognition by an audience that they are in some way responsible for the inequalities on show will lead to difficulties for the director in maintaining both laughter and attention to the narrative position. People do not tend to go to the theatre to be offended and abused, so this is a fine line to tread.

In Red Noses, the audience is asked to evaluate not so much their personal responsibilities through comedy, but rather their opinion on what uses to which comedy should be put. Innes (1992, p. 303) explains the uses of comedy in Red Noses by saying that while the Floties [the comedy troupe] work during the plague to divert attention from the suffering, the church is happy with their progress. When the plague is over, however, the Floties change their comedy routines and begin to ridicule "the religious ideals that sanctify the status quo [and] this type of humour is considered so subversive that the pope orders their immediate execution" (Innes, p. 303). Weeks (1996, p. 45) has pointed out that in Red Noses, as in most of Barnes' plays, "the power of goodness is all but overwhelmed by the machinations of authority and even the anodyne of laughter may be another means of collusion". Father Flote and the Floties choose the ultimate penalty for refusing to supply the masses with the anodyne ordered by the church. Through this action the audience members are asked to decide what function they would like comedy to fulfill.

A difficulty that will have to be solved by the director of Laughter! and Red Noses in particular, and of all Barnes' plays in general is alluded to by Glasgow (1995, p. 15) when he states that "a widely held and not completely unjustified prejudice . . . is that people who attempt to theorise about laughter of all things must be pedantic windbags and wearisome party poopers". This problem may manifest itself if the cast of a play does not think a joke is funny. The more that a director explains the joke, the more this attitude may take hold.

Similarly, the spectator may see any play about comedy as an explanation of how comedy works. As Voltaire said, "A joke explained ceases to be a joke: any commentator on quips is a fool" (qtd. in Glasgow, 1995, p. 15).

Of course, I could be mistaken in thinking that Barnes' plays are funny. That comedy of any style is an acquired taste may well be true, and there is no doubt the more that I study Barnes' work, the funnier I find his humour. The problem for me as a theatre director is to make that humour immediately available to the audience.

## Clowns

It is an obvious point that any discussion of comedy in Red Noses would be incomplete without a discussion of clowns. The very title Red Noses conjures up the idea of clowns and clowning. A red nose for a clown is a physical marker that tells the audience that this is no ordinary person. Clowns always fall into the category of 'other'. They are different from us. David Black (1996) explains the process that sets clowns apart:

Clowning is exaggeration and metaphor. You find what is most real about an action and isolate that element. And exaggerate it. And you find a way of acting out, not just what's real but what would be real if what was going on in a person's head suddenly started happening, not just in his imagination but in the physical world. People don't laugh at the silliness of what you are doing but at the trueness of it. (p. 78)

In parallel with Bakhtin's notion of carnival, when clowns are present any rules that would apply in a given situation are to be suspended. As Michael Chekhov (2002, p. 129) points out, clowns' "reactions to surrounding circumstances are completely unjustified, unnatural, and unexpected". When Barnes makes use of the clown's "free license as a buffoon to engage in satirical comments on the affairs of state" (John Towsen, 1976, p. 26), Black's point about the comedy arising from the 'trueness' of the situation is driven home. Furthermore, Barnes not only makes use of this aspect of clowning to help drive the narrative of Red Noses, but to help shape the form of the play. As Towsen (1976, p. 31) points out, a clown is also able to step outside the usual dramatic conventions and to be simultaneously part of both the audience and the play. Far from problematising the role of the clown as 'other', the ability to be both performer and audience separates the clown from the rest of the characters in the performance. The clown is 'other' to both the audience, and the characters. As 'other' the clown also foregrounds the process of becoming in that the audience is forced to evaluate what made the clown take a particular line of action. Bakhtin (1981, p. 159) explains that clowns "see the underside and

falseness of every situation” which enables them to act as agents who expose the constructed nature of society. The different way in which clowns participate in society forces the audience to assess their own participation.

Towsen (1976, p. 87) states that the comedy created by a circus clown arises from actions involving real danger, near misses and well planned falls as part of an inept imitation of his betters. In Red Noses, the clowns are actually inept imitators of inept imitators. None of their actions are well planned or skilfully carried out. The comedy that is present in the routines that the Floties (the troupe of clowns in Red Noses) perform rises from their very ineptitude. In a traditional clowning routine the audience laughs both at the clowns and also with them. The Floties only elicit laughter from the audience at their own expense. The failure of Le Grue to catch even one plate in his juggling act; the sense-defying stutter of Frapper the stand-up comic; and the one-legged dancing of the Boutros Brothers all elicit laughter due to a sheer lack of aptitude for the task in hand, or any other task for that matter. The Floties are representative of, in fact, a parody of clowns and clowning. Barnes’ clowns are operating on yet another level. As an audience we are asked to temporarily shelve our sense of political correctness and to laugh at people who are different from us: people who are other. The wearing of the red nose is the marker signal that allows us to do this.

In the introduction to “Nobody Here But Us Chickens”, Barnes (1993) speaks of the seemingly otherness of the disabled stating that

The disabled are not a different species but, like the rest of us, absurd and ridiculous; only they have it harder. They have so much more to overcome. Cripples are the rest of us, dramatized. (p. 172)

The clowns in Red Noses are all incomplete and in that sense are suffering from a disability. Each member of the Floties is defined as somehow lacking in something. In some characters it is a physical incompleteness and in others it is a mental or emotional incompleteness. As the play progresses the Floties become the heroes of the play despite, or because of, their disabilities

and their will to overcome all odds. Barnes uses the otherness of the clowns to emphasize, or dramatize, what it is that the Floties are forced to overcome.

Along with this notion is the change in the way that comedy is used. In fact, by the end of the play the Floties have actually become relatively highly skilled as performers and use their personal traits to help them deliver comedy with a serious message. It seems that with the serious message that is delivered with the final performance the Floties have, in fact, ceased to be clowns. We are no longer able to laugh at their antics. As Pope Clement points out, "It isn't funny!"(Barnes, 1993, 103). The Floties throw down their clowns' noses. They can no longer be defined as other; they have become part of the 'normal' world again. The carnival is over. With the closure of carnival comes the return of the voice of authority to dominate discourse. There is no place for these clowns and no forum in which we can listen to their voices.

## THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

### Design

Discussions on the design of the production began in earnest in November 2001. I asked Michelle Baginski, a third year Performance Studies student, if she would be interested in designing both set and costumes. Michelle is a talented artist in the fields of drawing and cartoon and had done some design work for previous Hayman Theatre productions. After reading the text of the play Michelle agreed to the task. I gave Michelle only the briefest of outlines on the sort of design I was looking for. The directions that I gave were to design costumes roughly in the period in which the play was set. I took my lead on the lack of costuming accuracy from a comment Barnes (1999, p. ii) makes in the introduction to Dreaming: "It is all imagined...History is not history unless it is imagined. No one I know was present in the distant past". I also asked Michelle to design a setting that was open and non specific in terms of location. It was my intention to work within the parameters defined by the design and not to seek to limit Michelle's interpretation. In other words I sought to engage in a dialogical relationship with the designer. By allowing my understanding of the text to interpenetrate with Michelle's understanding of the text I was hoping that a new and dynamic language of production would be generated. By not restricting the vision of the designer I hoped to generate new approaches to the problems of staging the play. Michelle also took this approach, sketching several possibilities and trying combinations from different ideas before settling on a final design concept.

I had never before directed a play without having a major input into the design of the production. I had also never directed a play for which the designs were completed before rehearsals commenced. The design was the single tangible part of the production at this point in time. Due to this fact Michelle's designs, particularly her costume designs strongly influenced the way I thought about the play. I began to think of the play in terms of the relationships between characters and particularly between those of varying status. The costumes were designed to clearly indicate the level of society which each character

represented. In the face of the chaotic situation of the play's context Michelle had determined that the audience needed to know how each character would have behaved in 'normal' times. This meant that the discrepancies between 'normal time' and 'plague time' could be greatly accentuated.

Concentrating on relationships I began to think about the play's central character. Flote seemed to have the ability to talk to every other character on his own level. It became apparent that this ability was due to his wearing of the red nose. While he is a clown there is no perceived status gap between himself and any other characters from the Pope down to the mother of the driver of the dead cart. It is seemingly impossible to determine the status of a clown due to both the clown's ability to mock each and every subject, and to the fact that "the clowns are ridiculous for us; they are our scapegoats, humiliated ... so we may feel the humiliations we endure ...are not so terrible" (Black, 1996, p. 86). I came to view the relationships between the clowns and the other characters as liminal areas, as stretches of ambiguity that given the extra complication of the carnival conditions would require careful consideration during the rehearsal process.

Through the design Michelle had decided to foreground the carnivalesque nature of life during the plague. To help this foregrounding Michelle had included an anachronistic moment early in the first scene. In the face of the suffering and misery caused by the plague Flote decides to entertain the dying. In the text of the play Barnes has written that Flote sings "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries", a song from the 1931 musical George White's Scandals. To further exaggerate the strangeness of this moment Michelle suggested that a piano be wheeled on with a cross-dressing accompanist and bearded chorus girls, joined by the rather strange spectacle of the recently dead rising to sing the chorus. This was to be a moment when the described world of the play, the style of the writing and the action of the production were all clearly in an uncontrolled moment of carnivalesque abandon. Coming so early in the play, Michelle and I both hoped that this sequence would help set the tone for the rest of the production.

Having the set design so early in the production process allowed me to think clearly about how I would like to use the available space. Michelle's



design afforded a great deal of floor space for deployment of set pieces such as the portable stage, the pope's platform and the Patris family's cart. As a result, in some scenes the stage would be empty except for a few actors. I decided that simply having the space available did not mean that actors necessarily had to occupy it. As much as possible I wanted the actors to be close to the audience. There were going to be plenty of elements of spectacle in the play, but I felt that what was really needed was the intimacy of human interaction. An added benefit of having a large open space seemed to be that I would be able to exaggerate the distance between Flote and the rest of the world by isolating him physically. I began to make a preliminary plot of how the various characters could move through the space to help illustrate their relationships to other characters. The depth of the stage enabled me to think in terms of entrances being made unbeknown to characters already on stage. It also allowed me the luxury of introducing characters from the next scene before the current scene was finished. I was able to toy with the idea of creating a sense of foreshadowing by effectively, even if only slightly, mixing up the narrative time line. On a more practical level we were able to solve a lot of the traffic management difficulties before they actually became problems, and to create a show that flowed smoothly from scene to scene. Again, this was new territory to me as a director and I hoped that the time spent at design meetings would free up more time for the actual business of rehearsal.

Having the set and costumes designed so early in the production process also meant that work could begin on other design elements such as lighting, properties and sound. The lighting designer for Red Noses was Karen Cook, another senior Performance Studies student. Karen had some previous lighting design experience, but nothing of the scale required for this production. As with the set and costume designs I gave Karen only the minimum of direction. The text describes several lighting effects that I did want to use; the appearance and disappearance of Vasques and Bigod in Act 1 scene 5, and the narrow spot on the small pile of red noses in the epilogue. Apart from these particular effects I was happy to work any of Karen's ideas into the production. The lighting that Karen designed for the production tended to be rather minimalist in that it

sought only to support the action of the play. There was no sense of lighting adding to the spectacle. The end product allowed me to still use as much of the stage as I wanted, and it allowed me to attempt to direct audience attention by highlighting various areas on stage.

The process of design for Red Noses was, for me, a highly productive and satisfying part of the overall production. Bakhtin's various theories seemed to be proving of particular use. Certainly there was evidence of dialogics in the decision making process for set, costume and lighting design. Within these areas the notion of both the utterance and of heteroglossia were also present. Simple occurrences such as the use of props and costume that had been used in previous productions demonstrated the idea that every utterance is unique and that the context in which the utterance is made contributing to meaning. The initial discussions between myself and the designers showed heteroglossia at work as it became apparent that though we may have been using the same words our understanding of them was sometimes quite different. Clearly this is the case in virtually every conversation anywhere in any culture, but given Bakhtin's assertion that drama is essentially a monologic form this was, for me, a positive step forward.

### Production

As stated above, the scale of a Barnes play would be challenging for any theatre company. For a student company even more so. The Hayman Theatre Company is made up primarily of undergraduate students from the Department of Communication and Cultural Studies. To be eligible to participate in Hayman productions the students must be enrolled in at least one Performance Studies unit. There are approximately 130 students enrolled in Performance Studies units at any one time. There is no requirement for Performance Studies students to take part in productions and consequently approximately 70 would be active in theatre production. For any one production at the Hayman Theatre there will be a number of students who are committed to activities outside of the theatre which will further reduce the number available. For this production of Red Noses there was a total of 45

students who auditioned for the 30 available roles with a further 20 students taking up production roles.

As it is written, there are 27 roles for men in Red Noses and only 6 for women. The gender balance in the student population of Performance Studies is heavily skewed in favour of females. For Red Noses there were 13 males and 32 females who auditioned for the available parts.

Performance Studies students are, on average, between the age of 18 and 21. Some though by no means all of these students will have been involved in theatre at high school. Some will only have started in theatre at university. The most experienced of the company may only have been involved in 10 – 15 productions in any number of differing roles and there are many who are new to any kind of performance activity.

A further complication for a production of this nature at the Hayman Theatre lies in the fact that the students are not full time students of theatre. Performance Studies will typically represent between 25% – 66% of the normal academic load of a Hayman Theatre student. Topics of study within Performance Studies units are also not necessarily designed to improve performance skills. Additionally, most students take on part time or casual employment to fund their studies.

It would be best to think of the Hayman Theatre Company in terms of an amateur dramatic society rather than a student, or professional company. As the director of this production it fell to me to lead the students on this long and difficult journey which would hopefully include some learning along the way. My task was not just that of directing but actually teaching the actors how to act. To ask these students to engage in meaningful dialogue with such a play as Red Noses may seem to be courting disaster but as they say at NASA, *per ardua ad astra*.

### Auditions

Auditions are announced at the Hayman Theatre by the posting of a notice in the students' common room. For this production of Red Noses the audition notice was posted on March 15, which was some 12 weeks before the

production was scheduled to open. As mentioned above 45 students auditioned for the 30 roles. All thirteen male students who auditioned were cast, leaving 17 roles for the 32 female students who auditioned. On a purely statistical basis this meant that two out of every three people would be cast in the production, including every male and every second female student. For an average production at the Hayman Theatre one would expect a casting ratio of approximately one student per five auditionees. Clearly the factor of sheer scale was going to affect the quality of actors selected to take part in this production.

For the audition students were not required to prepare a speech. They were, however, required to tell a joke. My reasons for choosing this slightly unusual audition technique were several. I believed that the ability to tell a joke directly to an audience was going to be very important for a lot of the characters. In the play Barnes has innumerable jokes that are told in a multitude of situations by many characters. I also needed to know if actors could present jokes in a way that made the content of the joke less important than the way it was told. Could they entertain? By explaining my rationale to the actors at the beginning of the audition I hoped that telling a joke would also help the auditionees to relax, and make them equal participants in the audition process. From the start of the actors' involvement in this production I wanted them to be engaged in a dialogical process that would enable them to be fully involved in the creation of this play. I also hoped that having at least one new joke per audition would break the monotony of 45 auditions in a week for the stage manager and myself.

After hearing their joke I would ask if the student had read the play and was interested in any particular part. If this was the case I then asked them to read for that particular character, and if not then I would choose for them a character or two to read. As the character of Sonnerie is quite peculiar in that he is mute and speaks only with bells I also asked if students would accept such a role.

As each audition progressed I made notes about which characters I felt that particular student could play. Some of the students I had worked with previously, some I had seen working, some I knew from classes and others I

had not set eyes on before. Those with whom I had previously worked were advantaged in the selection process. This was for purely practical reasons. I knew that the four weeks of planned rehearsal proper would not be enough for me to get to know how people worked and then to get good results from working with them. In the main roles I wanted to have people on whom I could rely to solve a lot of their character's problems independently. I knew that most of my time would be taken up with developing the dynamics between characters and within the group as a whole. With this practicality in mind I set about deciding how to best deploy the resources available.

### Casting

As is the case with any production a lot of the casting decisions were based less on the skill and talent of any one performer and more on "hunches" about how certain actors would work together. In an effort to keep all of the characters in mind I found it necessary to draw up a chart listing each character and the various actors who I was considering for the roles. Starting with Flote I listed the four actors I considered suitable for the role. I continued this process for all the characters, not repeating any actor who already was cast in a role. Soon I had a grid of possible permutations that was thirty roles long and up to five actors wide.

So far this was the easy bit of casting; soon I would have to make lasting decisions. The first decision was to discard the possibility that Father Flote would be played by a female actor. I was considering this option as I wanted Flote to appear to be totally different from the rest of the cast. In the end, however, my decision was based on the fact that Flote was once the same as the rest of the characters but that his calling, his affliction, and his misfortunes were the things that made him appear other. Another factor in this decision was that due to the scarcity of male actors at the Hayman Theatre there were going to be a number of male roles that would have to be cross-cast. I was conscious of the fact that unless the role in question is either ambivalent in terms of gender or very obviously cross-cast then the whole production does tend to look a trifle amateur. The larger roles that were cross-cast were Frapper, Sonnerie, Bembo,

Boutros 1 and Boutros 2. On close inspection of the text the role of Frapper appeared to be completely non-gender specific, as did Bembo. The Boutros Brothers I chose to cross-cast specifically as two of the female actors who auditioned bore a striking resemblance to each other. I also decided upon fake beards so as to be deliberately obvious about the fact. The character of Sonnerie is a special case due to the fact that he does not speak, but expresses himself through movement and thus the sound of tiny bells. I was looking for someone with gymnastic ability and a background in dance. None of the male actors who auditioned had these particular skills.

Eventually I settled on a particular combination of actors for the major roles. As is my regular practice I did not post this cast list immediately. I attempted to engage myself in an activity that was not at all theatre related in order that I might come back to the cast list with a fresh mind. When I did this I made only one change and that was in the casting of one of the extras. I then had to satisfy Hayman Theatre protocol by running the list past my academic colleagues. Before posting the list I organised a meeting with the stage manager of the show, and with a third year student who had asked to work as a director's assistant on the show. The main aim of this meeting was less to discuss who might be cast and more to discuss if the cast as planned would cause any difficulties that may be foreseen and hence avoided. Both the stage manager and the assistant pointed out a few of the cast who were known to have punctuality difficulties, but there appeared to be no ongoing feuds. With all of the formalities out of the way the cast list was posted on April 23.

### Rehearsal

To begin the rehearsal process I asked all the actors to meet me on a one-to-one basis to discuss character. My approach to these meetings was to find out how the actors interpreted their characters, what they thought were their characters' key traits, what made them tick. It had the added benefit of ensuring that every actor in the company had actually read the script before the commencement of rehearsals proper. I also used it as an opportunity to explain

my thinking about the production and to discover the actors understanding of what the play was about.

From these meetings I realized that no two actors' views of the play were the same. Most of the actors understanding of the play was based on their characters' point of view. I was continually reminded of the entry under Roles: The lead, in Bluff Your Way In Theatre - "The play may be called Hamlet, but in fact it is the role of Osric that makes or breaks it" (Morgan, 1986, p. 9). Whilst I deliberately offered little argument to the concepts put forward by the actors during the interviews I did question them quite thoroughly on how they came to their various conclusions. Some of the actors clearly required some guidance through this process but all agreed that owing to the sheer size of the play that this was important work. From my perspective I was encouraged by the large number of differing views that were presented. I was reminded quite forcefully of Bakhtin's theory of dialogics and the fact that more and more interpenetrative voices were shouting to be heard. My challenge appeared to be to find a way in which all of these voices could be heard without letting them build into a cacophony of white noise.

The second stage of the rehearsal process was a series of meetings with Andrew Supanz, the actor that I had cast in the role of Flote. Whilst Red Noses is essentially an ensemble piece the character of Flote rises above the rest of the cast. The part is larger by an order of magnitude than any other role in the play, and is also more complex. It is through Flote that the audience receives the most information about the world of the play. This particular point was to prove to be quite problematic in terms of my approach to the play through an understanding of the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. Up until this point I had been happy to consider the play as a forum where many voices were converging interpenetratively with each other. Through this short series of meetings however I was moving away from the view that no particular voice was to be privileged. It seemed that the audience would tend to accord more credence to Flote's view of the world as his is the character that introduces the most information. When I began to discuss this point with Andrew he simply asked, "what has any of that to do with how I play Flote?" Of course I could offer no

satisfactory answer. All explanations about carnival conditions and dialogism gave Andrew no insight into how he might personally interpret the role of Flote.

Our discussion returned to finding the meaning of some of the words in the long speeches, and to working out a plausible background for the character. I told Andrew that I definitely did not want his characterization of Flote to rest on a few key words or phrases. I wanted him to be aware of changes and also of any inconsistencies that he felt were present in Flote. Andrew thought this sounded like good advice but began to look at me a little blankly when I started talking about Bakhtin's ideas of becoming and the grotesque body. I quickly moved on.

We spoke of the background material, in particular the life of various people in medieval France, and the fact that the church was the defining factor in how people lived at the time. We spoke also of the plague and of the sheer number of people who died from its pestilence in Western Europe. We discovered reasons for his seemingly aimless existence at the beginning of the play and also proof of his extremely strong faith, not in the church, but in God. In short, what we achieved over these three short meetings was a common starting point and language with which we could further explore the character.

Over these meetings I also began to sense that there was going to be a fairly insurmountable gap between theory and practice. The ground that I was hoping to explore and the ground that Andrew wanted to explore required two different types of map. The actors' map seemed as if it was going to be one of concrete features whereas the director's map was convoluted and somewhat abstracted. As a director I was reading a chart of fancy, not dissimilar to that used by pioneering seafarers – 'Here be Dragons'. What the actors required was more like a series of directions – 'Turn left at the third crossroads, go straight ahead, stop when you get to big tree'. Clearly my map was not going to be of much use for the actors. My thoughts about the two types of map did, however, move my thinking about Bakhtin's dialogism to a different location. It seemed that to move the production ahead there was a requirement for two views to intersect. My view as director and the view of the actors. There was a form of



dialogism taking place as I translated directions from my map into a form that could be interpreted by the actors. I was forced to find new ways of discussing what I thought the play was about because of the absolute practicality of direction required by the actors.

With this sudden shift in the way that I appraised the text for translation into production I moved a little shakily into rehearsals proper. The first rehearsal was to be a full cast read through. I wanted the company to hear the play read out loud. I believed that to hear the words spoken, to hear the terrible jokes articulated would help the company understand why I had chosen to direct this particular play. I hoped that hearing the whole play would encourage each individual actor to see that they were vital to the overall creation of meaning and that each actor would then take a measure of personal responsibility for this task.

In a somewhat rare occurrence for a large cast production at the Hayman Theatre I was able to have the entire company at the same time for three hours on a Friday morning. This situation did not last, however, as the actor playing Grez tripped over a chair as he was collecting his copy of the rehearsal schedule, fell, and was concussed. I did not consider this to be a good omen. After the actor in question recovered sufficiently to be assisted to the campus medical centre we finally commenced the reading.

During the reading I corrected pronunciation and where necessary explained what was actually being said. Only two of the actors had previously had any contact with scripts by Peter Barnes, the actors playing Pellico and Father Toulon, who had both been in the production of Leonardo's Last Supper that I had directed in the Hayman's Upstairs Theatre. As is pointed out by Dukore (1990, p. 65) the language in a Barnes play is somewhat extreme and as I had anticipated many actors were struggling to make sense of it at this, the first read through.

We moved into rehearsals on the floor on the following Sunday. It was my intention to work chronologically through the text, from start to finish. I had decided that due to the cast's lack of familiarity with the style of writing that the best start would be to give them something concrete to hold on to. This

meant that the first week of rehearsals was simply to be a traffic directing exercise. This was made possible through the early work with Michelle and the set model. I already had a firm idea of how I wanted actors to move through the space, and some specific groupings for particular moments in the play. This approach proved to be beneficial as the actors felt that they were making rapid progress with measurable results and that their director was well placed to be able to help them on their journey. Along the way I was able to assimilate information about why I wanted people to move, and to encourage the actors to ask questions of their characters.

By the Friday of the first week there was in place a basic blocking for the whole play. I asked the actors to consider this as being only pencilled in and temporary. I explained that what we had put in place was a starting point from which we could find our way. If we were to lose our way it would always be possible to go back and start again, or to re-examine such a starting point if needed, but for the time being we at least knew in which direction we were headed.

With the actors beginning to understand their characters, I was keen for them to begin to ask questions about how they were related to other characters in the world of the play. With the idea of carnival in mind I asked the actors to consider what type of life their characters may have led in the time immediately prior to the beginning of the play: a time before the onset of the plague. This exercise asked the actors to think about how their characters lived in relation to the other types of characters in the play. What I was interested in was the world of the play before the topsy-turvy conditions of carnival set in. I wanted to see how the actors regarded the difference.

Several of the actors perceived major differences in their status under the two sets of conditions. The Black Ravens, Scarron and Druce, in particular realized that carnival was their time, their chance to grab the world by the scruff of the neck and to improve their lot. In the time before the plague they were of little consequence, but their embrace of death gave them a level of power that was otherwise denied them. Likewise Grez, master of the flagellants, was a minor religious outsider existing on the periphery of society.

Once the plague overturned the existing social hierarchy, Grez attempted to seize the opportunity to push his particular belief into the mainstream.

I asked the actors to carry out a simple task to help establish where their particular character stood in terms of status as regards to the other characters of the play. I asked the actors simply to arrange themselves in order from highest status to lowest. To help them decide where they stood I asked them to imagine a situation where they could meet each of the other characters and to decide if they would defer to them. Where actors played more than one character I asked them to use their most important character for this exercise. It must be said that this exercise threw up a lot of questions for the actors. Obviously there were differing status relationships at differing points in the play. I asked the actors to 'take an average reading' of their character's status. As the exercise progressed I asked questions as to why a particular actor was in a particular spot. The resulting line, in order of highest status to lowest status, looked like this:

1. Pope Clement
2. Papal Herald
3. Papal Guards
4. Pellico
5. Lefranc
6. Rochfort
7. Brodin
8. Soldiers
9. Camille
10. Marie
11. Monselet
12. Toulon
13. Grez
14. Scarron
15. Druce
16. Le Grue
17. Frapper
18. The Boutros Brothers
19. Bembo
20. The Patris Family

Three actors, those playing Flote, Sonnerie and Marguerite were unable to place themselves in the line with any degree of finality.

We spoke about why characters ended up where they were. Most agreed that the Pope was the logical highest status character though some thought that

Flote should be above Clement. There was discussion that Clement having to resort to killing Flote in order to suppress the truth meant that Flote was in fact of a higher status. Most of the company, however, did agree that Flote, Sonnerie, and Marguerite as the three main Red Noses were outside of this kind of classification. I pointed out that this was in agreement with my view that clowns have the ability to speak to anybody of any position as an equal. The papal herald being so high in status was a surprise result for such a small character and there was debate as to whether deference was being paid to the character's person, the character's position, or the actor. The prevailing view was that the person and the position were inseparable: that in fact the person was defined only by the position. The actor playing the role was also seen as a factor in the status of the character. As a senior and experienced performance studies student, Nisha Rivett was playing the role with similar authority to that with which she conducted herself out of character. There was some small discussion around some of the intermediate positions but most felt that with a movement of one or two places up or down the line would be in fair order.

There was no dispute about the Patris family having the lowest status of any characters. The general consensus (though not expressed in this way by the cast) was that the Patris family was so poor that the carnival conditions passed them by. The cast pointed out that they were crushed by poverty to such an extent that whether there was a plague or not made no difference to them. They were completely unable to do anything to improve their lot. I explained to the cast Peter Barnes' statement of wanting to create an anti-boss drama not for the shearers but the shorn (1996a, p. viii). I suggested that perhaps the Patris family were the shorn of Red Noses. I asked if it might have been the case that Barnes placed the Patris family in the play in such a way that he hoped the audience would eventually see themselves in such a role. I asked if the majority of us were actually like the Patris family; unable to grasp the opportunities that are available to us to make the system work how we want it to work. Was it in fact not the case that the failure of the Patris family to do anything to help themselves in the time of the plague was the reason that Pope Clement was able to regain power? Were not the Patris family the very people being appealed to

by Flote, Grez and Scarron to rise up and change the world? The exercise ended and the company took a break in a very bleak frame of mind.

When the company returned to the rehearsal room I spoke about Peter Hall's comment that the best work was sometimes done in the coffee break. That the release from the pressure of rehearsal allowed time for the actors' minds to make connections and to make more sense of the work that had gone before. I asked them if there were any such connections made in regard to the exercise we had just completed. Almost all of the actors simply stared back blankly at me. I probed a little harder asking if people felt more comfortable with why their characters reacted the way they do, if they felt that their relationship with other characters was clearer and if they understood a little more of how the play operated. After a brief silence the actor playing Father Toulon, Andrew Bifield, stated that he now understood why the Patris family had been included as up until then he had seen scenes with them as something that should probably be cut from the performance. After another silence, one of the actors asked if we were starting work on the scene listed in the rehearsal schedule. I enthusiastically replied yes and in an attempt to cut my losses hurried them into position to run the scene.

At the end of the rehearsal, I sat for some time with the stage manager, pondering the work of the evening. Again, it seemed that an attempt to introduce the actors to the theory that I was investigating had been an abject failure. I had hoped that by engaging the actors through their characters to the idea of how people interacted under carnival conditions that we would discover a little more about how the play would operate. Again, I was to be disappointed. I knew that this was probably not the best time to take such a decision but I felt that any other attempt to investigate the play through the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin with the help of the actors would be bound to fail. There were sixteen days before opening and the actors were effectively telling me that what they needed was not an understanding of the play but rather an understanding of what they personally had to do next. The company, despite my best intentions, were of the view that to make play work they needed to concentrate on their own performances.

I began to lament the fact that we did not have a much longer rehearsal period. I wondered if the Hayman Theatre, with a schedule of seven plays over nine months of each year would ever be able to afford directors and actors the time to explore a play in any way other than simply rehearsing scenes with a final performance version in mind. I began to wonder, in fact, if any theatre company anywhere in the world could operate in such a way. I also wondered if there were any actors who were interested in working in such a way. To me, it was inconceivable that anybody working on a play could have so little interest in how the whole play would operate. When asked about why I work in theatre I have invariably replied that it is a truly collaborative art form that brings groups of people together to achieve great things. That night, after the rehearsal, I began to question this statement. Perhaps I was the only one in this particular company who viewed theatre this way. I began to wonder if the idea of a collaborative art was a construction that maintained the importance of the director. I asked the stage manager, Kim Benware, if any of this made any sense to her. She thought for a while, and then replied that she thought I was right. I asked her which bit she thought I was right about. She answered, "the bit about maintaining the importance of the director. Now let's go for a beer and talk about something sensible like the production schedule."

During the next day and a half I carefully considered my options for the remainder of the rehearsal period. I had planned to spend time talking about how the various languages of the play interpenetrated each other. I was then going to experiment with different ways of foregrounding this use of different languages. My overall aim was to invite the cast to decide on which particular language they wanted to use to emphasise what they were doing. Would they concentrate on the written text, or maybe on non-verbal communication? Would they play directly to the audience as a comedian would, or would they play jokes to other cast members? All of these questions were to help the actors make sense of the play, and to help them take ownership of their decisions. It was while the actors were warming up that I decided to jettison this approach completely. My previous experiences with the company led me to believe that this type of exercise would frustrate the cast and lead to no new breakthroughs.

From now on rehearsals were going to be based around a simple repetition of scenes, and where possible I determined that I would slip in some of the information that I wanted to cover. It was not a decision that I took happily, but I hoped that in the end it would result in a more productive rehearsal process. I too was beginning to feel the pressure of opening night.

As the next few rehearsals took place, there was a distinct change in mood within the cast. My direction had changed from the abstract to the concrete and the actors responded by being more and more creative. This was the complete opposite of what I had expected at the beginning of the project. I had planned to give direction in broad terms and allow the actors to explore where they wanted to go. I wanted the actors to bring their own language to the production. I did not want to be the sole arbiter of what happened on stage. Up until this point, however, it seemed that the actors were taking very little responsibility for creativity. Once I set about being much more precise in my direction it seemed to encourage the actors to go further. I concluded that before this point my talk about the play as a whole was suffocating for the actors. Faced with such an undertaking they felt paralysed, unable to begin. When they were released from the responsibility of making all of the meaning they began to work at creating little pieces of meaning.

As this new period of rehearsal progressed I began to think about how my approach so far had affected the production. My aim had been to encourage the actors to see the whole picture of the play in much the same way as an audience would. This, in fact, was descriptive of my view of directing. To be, in effect, the first audience; to foreground the parts of the production that I thought would help the audience to follow the narrative of the play. I had hoped that the actors would also engage with the play on a similar basis. The overall aim was to create thirty-one different ideas of how to tell the story of Red Noses (my version and the thirty different versions that the cast would come up with). The work of the audience would then be that of listening to the different voices to make sense of the play. It was a view that was consistent with Bakhtin's theories of the utterance, heteroglossia and dialogic

interpenetration. At this point in the production it seemed that I was going to have to abandon these ideas completely.

Having dismissed Bakhtin and his theories from the rehearsal floor, I began to think of the ramifications for this project. I came to the conclusion that to retain the use of Bakhtin's theories I had to think of theatre production as a two-part process. The first part was the rehearsal. In rehearsal the director operates as Bakhtin describes the reader. There are all of Bakhtin's theories present. There is the voice of the writer, present in the text. There are the voices of the actors; of the production elements such as sound, lights and costumes; and of the director who brings their own understanding to the various languages that are brought into dialogic penetration. All of these individual voices are brought together through the process of rehearsal to create some kind of meaning. How the voices come together, however, is determined by the director. The director is now operating both as reader and also as writer. The director determines the set of languages to which the audience will have access. What the director cannot control is how the audience will interpret the languages.

The second part of the performance process, then, involves the audience. The audience makes a different sense of the languages that are present in a production. The same forces of utterance, heteroglossia and dialogic interpenetration are at work, and the audience is free to make sense of these in any fashion they wish.

With this in mind, I was reassured that my decision to free the cast of the responsibility of creating individual meanings of the play was in fact correct. Bakhtin still had a place in theatre production but his place was not necessarily with the actors.

With nine days to go until opening night I discussed the progress of the play with several of the actors outside of rehearsal. Without prompting from me, all three noted how there was a rapid improvement across the whole cast in the last couple of rehearsals. I asked if they thought that this was due to the work we had done earlier in establishing meanings. They replied that of course it was impossible to tell, as there could be no control experiment, but that their



feeling was that it was actually due to the much more concrete direction that I was giving. Individually, also, they commented that direction on how to say a line and when to move was of much more benefit than trying to have an understanding of how their individual choices could affect the meaning of the entire play. I began to feel even better about my decision to keep the theory to myself.

### Production Week

As the play moved towards production week I found myself giving the same direction, or variations of it, over and over again. The direction was “tell the audience, make it bigger, perform”. The actors were beginning to retreat towards a naturalistic style of acting. Most of the actors were heading into new territory in terms of performance style, and were showing signs of anxiety as the opening night approached. Their defence against this anxiety was to go somewhere safe. This was an eventuality that I had been expecting for quite some time. I began to use some simple exercises in an attempt to cut off the retreat. The aim of the exercises was to help the actors realise that the story needed to be told to the audience, and not just shown. We played simple games such as re-telling the story of the entire play in a group of five in just two minutes. We played condensed versions of the scenes with actors playing their characters as animals. We played scenes as if every actor was a stand-up comic, or a rock singer. In short, we used exercises that emphasised performance and that acknowledged the presence of an audience. After these exercises the rehearsals became more energised and the actors had more of an understanding of what I meant with my continual notes of “tell the audience”.

During this final week of rehearsal, I found myself concentrating more and more on the minor characters of the play. I wanted to give these characters an equal chance to be heard by the audience. In Red Noses, Barnes (1993) himself has one of these characters, First Attendant, address the audience about his own importance:

All the fault of writers...always writing stories  
where some characters are important and others

just disposable stock – First Attendant, Second Peasant, Third Guard. Stories're easier when 't isn't possible to care for everyone equal. That's how itty-bitty-bit people like me come to be butchered on battlefields, die in droves on a hoo-hooo-ooooh. But we First Attendants are important too. We've lives...I'm an extraordinary person. I'll tell you a secret...*He dies* (p. 16).

I wanted this particular production of Red Noses to have minor characters who were full of life and of interest for an audience. My cue was taken directly from Bakhtin's idea of carnival. I was looking for a way for all characters to be heard and to do this I needed the audience to pay attention to as many characters as possible. There was always a chance that an audience may find such an approach distracting rather than illuminating but it was a chance I was willing to take.

The scenes that demanded particular attention in this regard were the closing scenes of both acts. The first scene of the first act begins with the Red Noses preparing for their Easter Monday performance of 'Everyman'. As the scene progresses more and more people arrive to witness the performance. Eventually, when the show begins, the only actors not on stage are those playing Pope Clement and Archbishop Monselet. There are twenty-eight actors on the stage watching or performing a carnivalized version of the medieval play 'Everyman'. I wanted all the watching actors to be fully part of the scene. We devised something for every actor watching the play to do. For every actor there was an attitude to be played; were they interested in the play or were they there to try to pick pockets? Above all the scene needed to be filled with a positive energy, which could only be provided by all of the actors demanding the audience's attention.

In contrast to the closing scene of act one, the final scene of the play needed to be filled with a different type of energy. As with the close of act one most of the actors gather on stage to witness a performance by the Red Noses. Unlike the first act, at this performance the Church is present through Pope Clement and Archbishop Monselet. The performance is preceded by a demonstration of the return of the Church to power through the marriage of

the gold merchants to the whores, the hangings of Scarron and Druce, and the burning at the stake of Grez and the Flagellants. Barnes (1993, p. 103) describes the arrival of the general public as they "enter shivering, upstage centre, between the gallows and the stakes". There is little doubt that the carnivalistic conditions that have existed previously are now over, and that once more power has returned to the powerful. The detail that was needed from the minor characters in this scene was that of fear and subjugation. No longer was there room for individual expression. What was required in this instance was a sense of a group of people who knew their place was to be in complicit agreement with the powerful. Pope Clement's order to "stand aside from that man [Flote]. He is anathema! (Barnes, 1993, p. 113)" needed to be redundant in regard to all except the remaining Red Noses.

In direct contrast to the close of act one, the close of act two needed to have all sense of carnival removed. It was important that this contrast be foregrounded through a deliberate increase in the sense of carnival demonstrated in not only the end of act one, but in fact through the entire play. To help this we made sure that whenever possible minor characters' voices could be heard. The way in which we set about this task was simply to ensure that every minor character had an individual life and was not simply First Attendant, Second Peasant or Third Guard.

## Performance Week

The week began with the final dress rehearsal in place of the preview performance that most Hayman Theatre productions employ. I chose to not use a preview performance for several reasons. The first of these was that Hayman Theatre previews are restricted to Performance Studies students only who do not pay to attend any production at any time in the Hayman Theatre. This production was taking place outside of the teaching semester and was (unfortunately) unlikely to draw a large number of students to see it due to both the timing, and also the fact that 50 students were already involved in the show. It seemed a poor move to dilute what was, in all probability, going to be rather low total audience figure. A second reason to avoid a preview was that I felt the show would not benefit from being seen by an audience of less than ten; the average attendance at previews. Such a small audience would be overwhelmed by the size of the show, and the actors would have been tempted to scale down their performances in the retreat to naturalism mentioned earlier.

Avoiding the preview also gave me a chance to have a good look at all the technical aspects of the show that may have slipped by unnoticed if I was watching closely for audience reactions. Most of my notes were to do with fine-tuning both technical and acting business. It was a chance to let the show run and look at what minor changes, if any, could help in the polishing of the performance.

In the transparent manner employed not only by myself but also all other directors in my experience I delivered only positive notes to both the cast and crew after this rehearsal. I often wonder at the usefulness of this approach, but am always surprised that nobody in the company points out this somewhat cynical attitude during the notes. Perhaps it is part of a complicit agreement that if nobody says anything to the contrary that we can all feel confident that the opening night will go fabulously well. Despite these thoughts, however, I was confident that the company had done enough work and were in fact ready to put the results of their labour before an audience.

As the company dispersed and the stage was set back I sat, as had become customary, in the auditorium with Kim Benware, the stage manager.

We had grown accustomed to using this time to articulate any concerns that we had about any aspect of the production. After some brief discussion regarding some procedural matters for the following night a long silence ensued before Kim said to me "I think we've got there." In a simple statement Kim had rekindled my belief in theatre as a collaborative art form. I agreed and added that all we needed now was an audience to take on the next part of the journey.

### The Performance

As the opening night performance of Red Noses began my thoughts returned to Mikhail Bakhtin and to the notion of the utterance in particular. Every utterance is unique. As lines were spoken and stage action unfolded I was aware that new meanings were being created in the dialogue that was taking place between the actors and the audience. I could see in the actors' performances that they were beginning to understand the play in a different way from that which they understood it through the rehearsal process. Indeed, I was acutely aware that I was also beginning to understand the play differently due to the presence of the audience. The audience provided the production with a new dynamic that had only been imagined up to this point. To quote an old and oft used phrase, the play was coming alive.

Despite the fact that the first act of Red Noses ran for an hour and a half, a long time by contemporary standards, when interval arrived I was confident that the audience were well and truly captivated by the production. I decided to break with my usual practice and visit both the cast and crew during the break. Both the control room and the dressing room were full of excitement. The overall impression was the same as that which I was experiencing in the audience: it was like a new play. I asked the actors to continue to be alert to new meanings and understandings. Several of them mentioned that they could now see why I concentrated so much rehearsal time on telling the audience. As I returned to the auditorium for the second act it was clear to me that I was experiencing dialogism in the theatre, the very thing that Bakhtin insisted was not present in drama. Again, I could only conclude that Bakhtin was only interested in drama as a written form. I remained sceptical even on the point

that written drama was not a dialogical form, and mused that Bakhtin may never have enjoyed the excitement of an opening night in the theatre.

Despite the common view that the director's work is finished when the play opens, there was still a lot of fine tuning that I wanted to do. Instead of calling a note session at the end of the opening night, I decided to give notes personally to actors and crew during the warm-up prior to the second performance. When I came in to do this, I found that I was answering as many questions about the performance as I was giving my own notes. The addition of the audience had caused the actors to re-interpret their own performances. I found more suggestions for ways to improve the performance coming from the actors than I had to give. It seems that it took the show to become a tangible reality in front of the audience for my idea for an interpenetrative dialogue with the cast to come to pass.

With the arrival of the performances came the cast's ownership of the creation of meaning. I had no way of finding out, of course, whether the rush to ownership was as a result of the early rehearsal work or simply a reaction to being both free of the rehearsal period, and responsible for how the show looked to the audience.

Whatever the cause, my faith in the collaborative nature of theatre production was being strengthened on a nightly basis. During the day I was receiving phone calls from, and meeting with, actors who had more and more questions about what they were doing on stage and how their actions could help create an overall meaning for the play. The actors seemed to have taken on board the messages from several weeks ago, but were only able to act upon them now that the show was being performed. I asked several of the actors about this and from each one I received more or less the same reply. They all felt that at the time they didn't know enough about their particular character to be able to be concerned with the overall meaning. I clearly had not taken this into account. It was my belief that in this particular production we could start with the big picture and then fill in the details to suit. The actors, with no experience of working this way were completely unable to respond to this particular pattern of work. In retrospect it is easy to see that the same result

could be achieved starting with a myriad of tiny pictures, and assembling a form of collage to create meaning. Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, to start with the big picture and fill in the appropriate details reminded me of a quote from Barnes' play Sisters:

I'd read extracts from Gramsci. "The error of the intellectual consists in believing it is possible to *know* without understanding and especially without feeling and passion...history and politics cannot be made without passion, without this emotional bond between intellectuals and the people" (Barnes, 1986, p. 65).

Barnes (and Gramsci) seemed to have been proven correct. The actors felt that they couldn't know about the meaning of the play without experiencing it first. All the rehearsal in the world cannot match a public performance for experience *of* performance. I failed to take into account that the reality for me may have been to see how Bakhtin's theories could be used in the production and rehearsal processes of Red Noses, but for the actors the reality was the performance itself.

## Conclusion

This project set out to address several issues concurrently. The issues in question were: whether or not Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theories were applicable to theatre production generally and to the directing of Peter Barnes' Red Noses in particular, and; whether Barnes' iconoclasm is conservative or radical.

Through an exploration of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories this paper has demonstrated that a performance of a play represents the novelization of the genre of drama. If any of the signs of novelisation are present it will indicate that the particular work in question is not monologic, and represents an unfinalized discourse which the reader will interpret according to the context in which the work is read.

It has also been demonstrated that drama in production contains discrete language systems that interpenetrate one another dialogically to allow the audience to create meanings, which are unique to that particular audience member. When viewed in this way, the director of a play may choose to emphasise differing aspects of different language systems to guide the audience in certain directions. By making use of the various language systems available within a theatrical production the director is also engaging in dialogical discourse with the written text. It is the director's interpretation, along with the presence of the written text that Barnes (1986, p. 114) speaks of as the two moments of creation that exist simultaneously in a theatre performance.

It is worth remembering, however, as Bennett (1997, p. 27) points out there is no guarantee that the audience will understand exactly the point that the director is trying to make. Every audience member will make sense of every moment in a play differently from every other audience member. The presence of multiple understandings of a theatrical performance may be read in terms of the utterance. According to Bakhtin, every utterance/speech act is unique and can only be understood by means of the context in which the utterance took place. By extension, Bakhtin's theory of the utterance confirms the presence of unfinalized discourse in a theatre performance as every audience member uses



a different context to understand each utterance. From an audience perspective there can be no fixed meanings in theatrical production.

Just as there are no fixed meanings in production, when carnival is present in a play there are no fixed rules. In carnival there is a suspension of societal norms leading to an ambivalent attitude towards authority. In times of carnival no single voice is privileged over any other voice. In Red Noses Barnes employs the device of carnival to expose the rules that normally govern society as constructed simply to help the powerful remain so. The exposure of societal rules, a constant across all of Barnes' plays, is one of the reasons that critics refer to Barnes as iconoclastic.

Through my exploration of both Bakhtin's theories and Barnes' writing, it became clear that Barnes' plays represent an unfinalized discourse. By reading and working on Red Noses in terms of Bakhtin's theories the notion that Barnes sets out to create "a drama glorifying differences, condemning hierarchies... always in the forefront of the struggle for the happiness of all mankind; an anti-boss drama for the shorn not the shearers"(Barnes, 1996a, p, viii) became clearer and clearer. By utilizing Bakhtin's theories I was able to see Barnes as the creator of an unfinalized discourse that encourages the audience to view critically their own role in their own society. Barnes does not want the audience of his plays to simply submit to their designated place in society. As he explains in the introduction to The Real Long John Silver and Other Plays, Barnes (1986) is clear about why he writes the way he does:

I do not write about ordinary men and women. The variety and enormity of the world and its people and their infinite possibilities make belief in the ordinariness of ordinary people a blasphemy. The earth contains a multitude of beings unique in their creative energy for good and evil. So many Trojan Helens called Ada; so many Leonardos called Fred. Genius is not the exception but the rule. But the radiant light lies shuttered by fear, helplessness and the wicked triviality of day to day living. It is plain we have always needed another, better, social system to let it all shine out. (p. iii).

Through his plays, Barnes gives his audience the information that he feels they need to create the better social system that he speaks of. It is up to Barnes' audience to take the next step and to be pro-active in the achieving of that social system. It is my conclusion that Barnes is radical in his iconoclasm.

The question of the usefulness or value of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories to the task of directing Peter Barnes' play Red Noses remains somewhat unresolved. As tools for literary analysis, Bakhtin's theories can be illuminating in terms of who is saying what and how (dialogics and heteroglossia), what happens when societal rules and conventions are removed (carnival), how characters are defined (becoming) and how characters that are other to us make meaning (grotesque). Bakhtin's theories, in other words, provided me with new ways to think about problems that face any director of any play.

Integrating Bakhtin's theories into the rehearsal and performance process of Red Noses was, however, much more problematic than using them as tools for literary analysis. The cast of the Hayman Theatre production of Red Noses were, for the most part, resistant to any rehearsal processes other than those which provided concrete information about the forthcoming performance. The cast of Red Noses felt unable to approach the task of performing in any way other than through straight forward rehearsals that provided details on where to stand and how to deliver lines. The cast members were not able to see that they too were able to provide some of the many voices that interpenetrated dialogically to create meaning. In hindsight it is easy to recognise that the actors' need for concrete information was due to lack of experience. The actors of the Hayman Theatre are students learning their craft and as such were completely unprepared for a rehearsal approach that began not with individuals but with the overall picture of the entire play.

For me as a director, the rehearsal process of Red Noses was a constant battle between my desires to integrate Bakhtin's theories into production and the actors' needs for clear and concise direction. I was aware that by providing the actors with what they needed I would be acting monologically: The actors desperately wanted to be told *the* way to perform the show. The end result of this process was that the main site of dialogical interpenetration was occurring

between me, as the director, and the written text of Red Noses. The creative energy that I had hoped would be generated by the dialogical interpenetration of the script by a cast of thirty actors was almost completely lost.

My experience of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories in the context of directing Peter Barnes' Red Noses has not been entirely negative. As I have stated above, an understanding of Bakhtin's theories allowed me to approach the task of directing Red Noses from a new and different perspective. I would have to state, however, that it is my belief that the literary theories of Mikhail Bakhtin should remain simply that – literary theories. It is my experience that Mikhail Bakhtin's theories have a place in the director's toolkit as aids to analysis but should never be taken out in the rehearsal room.

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