

## “Going To Chekhov”: Cultural Studies and Theatre Studies

### John Tulloch

To describe how the theatre subjects texts and performers to its process . . . we need to locate its claims as criticism. The first move . . . would be to displace the enervating polarization of “criticism against performance” . . . in that our access to the text is always through its performance, a performance continually taking place offstage—as reading, education, advertising, criticism, and so on—before any stage performance is conceived. (W. Worthen, “Deeper Meanings”<sup>455</sup>)<sup>1</sup>

What’s needed in Chekhov scholarship? . . . The answer is theory . . . I think one of the things that will happen is . . . a very strong development towards theorizing the production . . . Chekhov will reappear in that context, as part of an element within cultural studies and communication studies. (Peter Holland)<sup>2</sup>

Watching recently the Royal Shakespeare Company actor, David Troughton, playing parts in plays by Britain’s two most popular canonical playwrights drew to our attention an interesting question of theory. The parts were: Caliban in *The Tempest* and Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard*; and the problem for theatre theory related to the different positionings—the different degrees of confidence with which Troughton positioned—these two some-time drunken characters. In interview, Troughton said:

Caliban drinks and then speaks the most beautiful language that possibly Shakespeare has ever written, the island speech, and he’s drunk, but the two comics, when they’re drunk they get greedy and stupid, and power mad, and Shakespeare’s saying something about drink, what it does to lower classes, and what it does to “an animal.” [He’s saying] drink varies us, so that’s

---

John Tulloch is Professor of Media Communication at Cardiff University, Wales. He is the author of several books on television, film and theatre history and theory, including *Chekhov: A Structuralist Study* and *Science Fiction Audiences* (with Henry Jenkins).

why I decided to be as strong as that [playing Lopakhin], as aggressive with Liuba, because the people you love you always go for in the end, and all the peasant upbringing comes out in that anger of what life he's had and it's a purely "show it to you" speech . . . He should be like an animal who's been suppressed on a lead and suddenly let loose. The drink does it. (Troughton)<sup>3</sup>

Troughton's variation on his use of "animal" is interesting here. In constructing his Caliban part, "animal" is an ironic attribution, contrasted with the far more bestial behavior of the "lower class" Trinculo and Stephano. The "animal" Caliban "speaks the most beautiful language that possibly Shakespeare has ever written," and yet Troughton clearly felt quite comfortable with the coherence of this part. However, as Troughton said, Lopakhin too has beautiful lines and aesthetic thoughts. Beginning with his lines in Act I when I say "at the moment they just like to sit on their verandahs, drinking tea, but I can see a time when they'll start cultivating their land, and your cherry orchard will have to make way for rich, prosperous, active lives",<sup>4</sup> and continuing with his Act II lines,

God—you've given us vast forests, immense lands, endless horizons; we ought to be giants, living in a country like this,<sup>5</sup>

Troughton began to build up a Lopakhin who "feels beauty—I can actually *feel* it."<sup>6</sup> Yet the "animal" who gets aggressively drunk in Act III of *The Cherry Orchard*, unlike Caliban seems to contain none of this "aesthetic" Lopakhin. Rather, it is the "lower class," "peasant upbringing," "show it to you" anger that is being played for.

We would argue that this dichotomy (as Troughton himself calls it) between "I *feel* beauty" and the "animal . . . suppressed on a lead" is an unreconciled one for many actors of Lopakhin; and this to a degree that simply does not happen for actors who play Caliban. Troughton told us that he (and many other actors he knows) "had a terrible time rehearsing this . . . All Lopakhins have trouble, until the actor . . . realizes that he's not the same as anyone else on stage . . . Lopakhin, above all, is common, he's a peasant, he's a beaten child, and he loves one person only, and that's Liuba."<sup>7</sup> It is this through line—the former serf in love with his much higher class mistress—which then embeds Troughton's initial "animal" response to Liuba Ranevskaya when, drunk, he first speaks to her as the new owner of the cherry orchard. This "sociological" explanation of the "animal" in Lopakhin ("above all he's a peasant") is nearly always in performance much stronger than (and quite separated from) the "I *feel* beauty"

Lopakhin—which is why Troughton speaks of Lopakhin's (but not Caliban's) "dichotomy."

Our question for theatre theory then is, how to explain this sense of dichotomy—in comparison with the much more comfortable (yet ostensibly more difficult) "coherence" in performances of Caliban? We will begin with a preliminary sortie into the "industry" of literary theory, before moving to our main theoretical discussion which is to argue for the value of a "cultural studies" approach to issues of theatre production and performance.

### **The Shakespeare Theory Industry**

In recent years we have seen an explosion of theoretical debate in Shakespeare studies. Post-structuralist, new historicist, cultural materialist, feminist and other interpretive communities have swept into the gap exposed by the death of the author and the critique of the canonical text. In particular, recent Shakespeare studies have embedded the canonical text in concepts which are also familiar building blocks of cultural studies, such as critical concepts of history, ideology, power, gender, race and ethnicity.

In contrast, no theory industry has formed around Chekhov. Our own survey of Chekhov analysis in English-language books and refereed journals between 1980 and 1995 (the period of maximum growth in anti-canonical Shakespeare studies) reveals that (very) few significant structuralist, post-structuralist, cultural materialist, and rhetorical analytical pieces have been written.<sup>8</sup> And these (with the possible exception of Raymond Williams's work) have so far been by and large marginal to mainstream Chekhov scholarship, which remains predominantly historical-empiricist and conventionally authorial. Whether our measure is course handouts in Britain and the USA, or student surveys in these two countries, or discussion with leading Chekhov scholars, this marginality has been confirmed—and this is by and large true of both Russian and Theatre studies in Britain, Australia and the U.S.A.<sup>9</sup>

The relatively few Chekhov scholars who *are* interested in current theoretical debate, argue that the reasons for this marginality of theory are fairly clear: the baneful example of Soviet theory, with its reductionist "class" positioning of Chekhov; the influence of the "alternative" Russian and East European semiotic and linguistic schools where (as one American Chekhov scholar emphasized to us) the Bakhtin in use is not the "carnival" (power-reversing) Bakhtin of cultural studies; the influence of Russian emigres in Western Russian departments; the general conservatism of Russian and Slavonic in comparison with English literary studies. Most Chekhov scholars we have encountered who are interested in current literary theoretical debate have been trained first in comparative literature or cultural studies. But even here one finds virtually nothing of either new

historicism's parallel reading of contemporary literary and non-literary texts (say, reading *The Cherry Orchard* within the frame of the numerous evolutionist/environmentalist texts which Chekhov read at Moscow University), or cultural materialism's sense of "men and women making their own history but not in conditions of their own choosing"<sup>10</sup>—either of which approach (we will argue) would enable a more focused reading of Lopakhin's "animal" but "aesthetic" characterization.

So when Caliban in his "the Isle is full of noises, Sounds and sweet Airs" lines, speaks (as David Troughton puts it), beyond his own "monstrous" body, race and stratification, there are simply more circulating rhetorics that the actor can draw on than he can for Lopakhin. Theatre practitioners as well as theorists now conventionally interpret Caliban as repositioning with his "most beautiful language" a natural environment otherwise locked into imperial, class and patriarchal ownership. As A.T. and V.M. Vaughan show in *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, in recent years Caliban-as-colonial-victim has dominated interpretive paradigms—whether these have been on stage, on film, in school and university classrooms, in poetry or in art—and this has been true of both Anglo-American and emergent post-colonial contexts<sup>11</sup> Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins note that

In the so-called New World, Caliban has frequently become the quintessential figure of resistance in the local struggle for political and cultural decolonisation, while even in the imperial centre some emphasis on colonialism has been expected since Jonathan Miller's influential London revival of the play in 1970.<sup>12</sup>

Even earlier than this, in *Neo-African Literature* Janheinz Jahn speaks of Caliban possessing a culture Prospero did not create and cannot control, which he, Caliban, has recognized as his own. But in the process the language is transformed, acquiring different meanings which Prospero never expected. Caliban becomes "bilingual"<sup>13</sup>

Thus the "dichotomy" of "animal" and "most beautiful language" is explained; and Caliban played by a black actor has been standard fare on the international stage since Jonathan Miller's 1970 production cast black actors as both Caliban and Ariel to represent differing native responses to white imperialism. In contrast, Lopakhin played as a Scot (representing in Richard Eyre's BBC television *Cherry Orchard* the colonized underclass of English control and ownership) still comes as a shock to academics, reviewers and audiences. Here the Raymond Williams-influenced "cultural materialist" emphases of Trevor

Griffiths's adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* (which we will explore later in this paper) still give considerable offence to the Chekhov orthodoxies.<sup>14</sup> As we will see, Griffiths's interpretation of Lopakhin is specifically (as Dollimore and Sinfield would wish) on "men and women making their own history."

Alternatively to Griffiths' particular cultural materialist reading, our own "new historicist" methodology would be to frame Lopakhin's own "most beautiful lines" about trees, the vast potential of Russia, and "growing things" with other non-literary texts of the same historical period—for example with Russian microbiologist (and future Nobel Prize winner) Il'ya Mechnikov's comparison of inner and outer "flora:"

Just as a gardener . . . is not content with the existing nature of the plants . . . he is occupied with, but modifies them to suit his purposes, so the scientific philosopher must not think of existing human nature as immutable but must try to modify it for the advantage of mankind.<sup>15</sup>

Mechnikov's continuing lines about the vast size and potential of Russia are close indeed to Lopakhin's "land fit for giants" speech in Act II of *The Cherry Orchard*. As we know, Chekhov—a doctor whose education at Moscow University was deeply embedded in environmentalist medicine<sup>16</sup>—saw Lopakhin's part as a very central one. He was to be neither a kulak nor a vulgar merchant. With "fine and gentle fingers, like an artist's," he should look (as Chekhov insisted to the actor Leonidov) like "a professor of medicine at Moscow University." And the professors of medicine whom Chekhov says in his letters he most admires—Zakharin, Erismann, Ossipov—were (together with the scientists he also particularly admired, Mechnikov and Timiryazev) all evolutionist/environmentalists.

Yet while Chekhov may have been, as Donald Rayfield argues, "Europe's first ecological writer," with "Trees [as] the heroes and victims of his stories and plays,"<sup>17</sup> that particular "beautiful language" has not circulated noticeably in page or stage interpretations of Lopakhin. It is a feature of the *anti*-new historicist privileging of the literary text over its non-literary co-text that is so familiar in canonical Chekhov readings (in academia and in the theatre). So that whereas what Chekhov said about his plays (e.g. as comedies rather than tragedies) should have had such an influence in recent Chekhov interpretation, at the same time what he said about non-literary texts (such as the lectures of his professors of medicine at Moscow University) has gone ignored.

Very occasionally the "active/environmental" Lopakhin does reach out to actors, theatre directors and audiences—and the main part of this article will

attempt an analysis of just what happens within the institution of theatre when this occurs. Thus Peter Holland argued in an on-stage interview with *The Cherry Orchard* director Adrian Noble (for whom David Troughton performed Lopakhin):

When we hear Lopakhin in the play talking about dividing it up for lots for summer cottages . . . Chekhov surely saw that as a very positive thing. He had his little dacha in the country, and many Russians do.<sup>18</sup>

But this was a rare example of what Worthen calls “off-stage performance” which actually engaged on-stage (in front of *The Cherry Orchard* audience) with its director. Moreover, it took place on the penultimate night of performance at Stratford-upon-Avon, well after Troughton had composed his part. The disparity between Troughton’s Lopakhin and Troughton’s Caliban undoubtedly does relate to W.B. Worthen’s point in our opening quotation about performance continually taking place offstage—as reading, education, advertising and criticism. The postcolonial Caliban has simply “taken place offstage” much more often, and in many more places, than either the colonized or the environmentalized Lopakhin.

So our comparison of Shakespeare and Chekhov in terms of academic theory only begins to clear the ground of our theoretical question. The reading formations of refereed journals and new historicist books don’t directly have much to do with David Troughton’s construction of his parts of Caliban and Lopakhin. Theoretically, in this part of our argument we are still at that point of “polarisation” of “criticism against performance” that Worthen rejects. Our main question then is, what kind of theory will engage more closely with this conjoint question of criticism and performance, and their relationship both “off stage” and on? To begin to answer that we will go further into emerging approaches within cultural studies.

### Theorizing the Production

Peter Holland argues that the lack of a *theorized production/performance analysis* is not only apparent in Chekhov scholarship, but among recent critical Shakespeare theorists too.

This theoretical work is not actually concerned with Jacobean theatrical performance, and it is certainly not concerned with modern theatrical performance. Most of the theory people that I know do not go to the theatre . . . The text exists as a reading text and not as a performance text.<sup>19</sup>

The colonized Caliban has been “read,” by new historicists for example, via “congruities” and “mutually reinforcing discourses” in contemporaneous Renaissance historical texts, not via a theorized relationship between discourses off- and on-stage.

There are, on the other hand, many performance readings of Shakespeare. But most are not the theoretical work that Holland has in mind. Much performance criticism, as Worthen has persuasively argued, colludes with earlier traditions of formalist criticism, while reversing its simple reduction of performance to the verbal order of the text. Thus, “‘performance’ is marked out as a special zone of individual expression, a kind of wild semiology set apart from the institutional practices that govern criticism and that inform signifying practices in the culture at large.”<sup>20</sup>

Instead of this “wild semiology,” Worthen calls for a performance criticism emphasizing “the interests and affiliations of its initial production . . . ; the practices of the interpretive communities that have transmitted it throughout history; the technologies that have reproduced it materially; the metaphysics of which it is a part, the pressures of politics, ideology, gender and so on.”<sup>21</sup>

These kinds of focus—on production studies and “active audience,” on reading formations and interpretive communities, and on the surveillant technologies that represent gender, politics and power—have been very much the province of cultural studies over the last two decades. But cultural studies has also had its own exclusionary agendas—and “high cultural” analysis has (for reasons central to the formation of the discipline itself<sup>22</sup>) been one of them.

In our view, Peter Holland is right to point to the need for “theorising the production . . . [so that] Chekhov will reappear . . . within cultural studies.” And we can begin by agreeing with Worthen about the need to “displace the enervating *polarisation* of ‘criticism against performance;’” to recognize analytically that performance is “continually taking place offstage . . . before any stage performance is conceived,” via a range of reading formations<sup>23</sup>—in schools and universities, in marketing offices, in newspaper reviews, and so on. As Worthen says, “To understand the drama, we need to understand all the ways that we make it perform.”<sup>24</sup> If our new historicist suggestion is to read Lopakhin within the frame of non-literary co-texts, then our cultural materialist suggestion is to read him within the functioning of the Royal Shakespeare Company as high cultural institution. To do this we need to examine Adrian Noble’s Chekhov communication to David Troughton and the other actors via his Stanislavskian exercises, to his audiences via the RSC program notes, to other high cultural texts via the intertextuality of his stage and set design, and so on.

In this context, Worthen's intervention is useful to cultural theorists for two reasons.

- i) His broadening of the definition of performance as "continually taking place offstage" at the discursive sites of advertising, criticism and education potentially inserts "performance criticism" into the context of the conjoint reproduction/commoditization of a high cultural habitus.
- ii) His rejection of the polarization of "criticism against performance" opens the way to a reflexive ethnography of production.

These two points together insist on the undeniable embedding of stage performance in the various interpretive communities (including those of both "mass" commoditization and "high cultural" criticism) which "perform" the theatre text. So how then can cultural studies begin to unpack Peter Holland's "off-stage/on-stage" intervention at the RSC about Lopakhin?

### **Dialogic Theory and Methodology**

Inevitably our own analytic strategies must be part of this same "on-stage/off-stage" relationship that Worthen is pointing to. So it is important to be reflexive here about our position as cultural theorists. Specifically, we share the current move beyond an audience- (or reading-) centered definition of cultural studies to "consider the entire communication circuit from production to consumption within a wider theoretical framework"<sup>25</sup> (Curran, Morley and Walkerdine, 1996). We agree with Moores (1990<sup>26</sup>) and Alasuutari (forthcoming<sup>27</sup>) that cultural studies needs a new synergy between "first generation" (textualist and/or encoding/decoding) and "second generation" ('ethnographic') studies of "reading the text." As Moores puts it, this will require a new methodological mix of "ethnographic studies with textual analysis"<sup>28</sup> which goes beyond the "active audience" thrust of the 1980s.

In adopting this currently emerging cultural studies position, we place Worthen's emphasis on accessing the "performance continually taking place offstage" in the context of Holland's "ethnographic" call for theorists to "go to the theatre"—but also to the classroom, to the marketing office and to the newspaper column where the "offstage performances" of the text systemically take place. We need also, of course, to go to the "actual audience"; *and* to be at the same time reflexive about our own "offstage" performance as critics. We need to displace the polarization of "criticism against performance" with an understanding of the



discursive frames used by critics (including ourselves as analysts) *and* performers (*and* advertisers, audiences et al) to account for and justify their interpretive moves in the realm of “high cultural” theatre. In other words, neither do we simply accept the “literary authority” of the author (director, etc) as conscious originary source, nor of the “objective” critic/observer/interviewer as neutral analyst in ethnographic/performance studies.

“Going to the theatre” in this reading becomes a way of engaging critically and dialogically (in Bakhtin’s sense) with the discursive frames that “make theatre perform.” As researchers we “go to the theatre” to get access to the on- and off-stage practices of articulation *as* high culture—to the formalized techniques, conventions and dispositions of criticism, advertising, producing and watching Chekhov in the moment when these become framing devices for “performers” to “conceive the text as *telling* them to *do* anything in particular”<sup>29</sup>—Peter Holland, for example, “telling” Adrian Noble about alternative frames for playing Lopakhin. It is this articulation *as* high culture that we need to consider in answering our first question: why would Cambridge University critic Peter Holland *be* there on-stage at the Swan Theatre “telling” director and actors anything? What institutionalized frames within high cultural theatre promoted this interview?

### **i) Reproducing/Commoditizing High Cultural Performance**

John Frow rightly points out that

High culture is now fully absorbed within commodity production. The relation to the market can therefore not be used as a general principle of differentiation between high-cultural and low-cultural products, nor is it any longer possible to employ the traditional value-laden opposition between the disinterested, organic, original, self-governing work of art and the interested, mechanical, formulaic, and commercial mass cultural text.<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, Worthen’s enlargement of “performance” to off-stage institutions will inevitably engage us in the conjoint “authorisation” and commoditization of high cultural texts.

In the Holland/Noble interview-event Worthen’s “critic against performer” polarization was publically staged. This interview was part of a *sales campaign* by the RSC marketing office, and was conducted in front of a paying audience—“high culture fully absorbed within commodity production.” In fact, this “In Conversation” event was the last of a series of *Cherry Orchard* marketing

strategies in Stratford, which began with the pre-booking publicity brochure circulated nationally and internationally to 57,000 RSC mailing-list members. This brochure had a significant impact in creating a sell-out audience; whereas the later “In Conversation” interview and other pre-performance talks for school students were primarily aimed at reproducing the high cultural market. So as well as examining the actual critic/director *negotiation* (in the main part of this article), it is important also to examine this adjacent *institutional context*, which at one and the same time worked as commodity and high cultural production.

The RSC marketing officer, Sian Sterling told us:

It always surprised me that as a text based company we actually never talked publically in any sort of forum or workshop of the work that we do on classic texts . . . Our new “In Conversation” events . . . were . . . therefore trying to find ways in which the audience can take part in the way we work with texts . . . Our pre-performance talks are absolutely ideal for young people not used to coming to the theatre regularly . . . And I just thought that maybe there were other levels of talks that we could be offering as well . . . There was probably a market for people, adults, who have a good knowledge of Shakespeare or a new play or whatever . . . to engage in some sort of communication with the creator of that production . . . I don’t believe the marketing department is just about selling tickets, sure that’s one of our functions. But I do believe that we’re also there to communicate and relate better . . . with our audience at different levels. It’s a relationship as opposed to just somebody coming in and buying a ticket.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, Sterling and the RSC were in the comfortable position that the ticket sales for Noble’s *Cherry Orchard* had been “phenomenal from the start” of pre-bookings with RSC mailing-list members, so that it was virtually impossible to just “come in and buy a ticket” anyway. Once this material exchange had taken place, it was the audience’s cultural capital that RSC marketing was interested in.

The marketing orientation of the RSC here was symptomatically high cultural: Sterling’s references were to classic texts, to audiences that “have a good knowledge of Shakespeare or a new play,” to school students who can be encouraged “to return as adults” to the RSC via “different levels” of educational event, to “communicating with creators,” and to other high cultural institutions like “the National Theatre, the Royal Court and lots of other Arts organizations in

England” who are also establishing “a relationship as opposed to just somebody coming in and buying a ticket.”<sup>32</sup>

In fact, in this particular “In Conversation” event, there was little space for the public to engage “in conversation with the creator of that production,” since no time for questions from the audience was allowed. However, in the context of this as a high cultural promotional exercise, the choice of *Peter Holland to interview Adrian Noble* was more important than audience interaction. The choice of Holland was a precise one on the part of the marketing office. He was both a governor of the Royal Shakespeare Company, a senior academic at Cambridge University “who was very well thought of on that whole period,”<sup>33</sup> and indeed was soon to be appointed as Director of the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford. So he had cultural prestige. But in this particular case—and in marked contrast to its pre-performance brochures which promoted the familiar/“inevitable” history of “the axes ready to swing through the cherry orchards of Russia”—the marketing office was making Chekhov’s “history” overtly dialogic because Holland would implicitly challenge both Noble’s history and his form. A public dialogue (for which you bought tickets) would take place on the stage of the Swan Theatre.

High culture may, as Frow says, be absorbed within commodity production, but it must also reproduce itself to sell *as* high culture. Consequently, the stage of the Swan was momentarily emptied for two high cultural interpretive communities (of academic criticism and theatrical practice—the future director of the Shakespeare Institute and the Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company) to engage and negotiate “Chekhov.”

## ii) “Criticism against Performance”: Subjectivities “In Conversation”

Theatrical production writes the drama into stage practice. Performance criticism should reveal the affiliations between this writing and the very different acts of inscription that make the theatre readable. (Worthen)<sup>34</sup>

The Swan interview was, indeed, dialogic. To an unusually public degree, Worthen’s “criticism against performance” interface was being debated on-stage, in front of an audience. Holland and Noble *negotiated* Chekhov and history; and Holland’s questions made Noble negotiate his *own* voice—or voices:

- as Artistic Director of the RSC,
- as Stanislavskian director of actors rehearsing *The Cherry Orchard*,

- as “Chekhov” director negotiating with the marketing and education offices; and
- as program compiler.

Each of these professional theatre subjectivities potentially held its own construction of “Chekhov” and history.

Holland, too, voiced various subjectivities as critic. His questions to Noble drew on a number of critical readings of Chekhov: his own published work, Trevor Griffiths’s “political” productions of *The Cherry Orchard* with Richard Eyre, and our own reading of Chekhov’s Lopakhin within a grand narrative of symbiotic evolutionism.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, an important aspect of this “performance” for us as researchers and academics was reflexive: concerning a recognition of the “paradigm” engagement of criticism and theatrical production.

What the “In Conversation” interview between Holland and Noble did was to embody *on-stage* that affiliation that Worthen seeks between the “writing” of theatrical production and the “writing” of theatre criticism which is generally offstage (and frequently effaced as negotiation at all). It is for this foregrounded reason (but as nevertheless symptomatic of the theoretical project of “affiliation” that Worthen refers to—understanding all the ways in which we make the theatre perform, “how the text is traced and transgressed both by theatrical and by critical strategies for producing it as drama”<sup>36</sup>) that we are focusing on this particular interview in this article. Worthen is right to call for an analysis of the “affiliation” rather than “polarization” of performance criticism and theatrical production. However, by his own definition, this also requires an emphasis on the particular institutional context of that affiliation. The Holland/Noble negotiation of Chekhov was, we have argued, symptomatic of Worthen’s “affiliation,” but it was also quite specifically *sited*—which is why we started with its positioning as an RSC marketing strategy.

Within this particular site, as we will go on to suggest in this paper, the public negotiation of voice (in particular for Noble as director of *The Cherry Orchard*) then worked through a number of communication technologies and reading formations: for example, via the public interview with Holland, via rehearsal negotiation with actors, via the earlier marketing brochures, via the program notes and so on. We will try to trace some of these technologies for performing “Chekhov” meaning by way of our interview analysis, and so bring our more “literary” (new historicist/cultural materialist) earlier suggestions into the context of “going to the theatre.”

### iii) Negotiating voice: “preparing his interview in advance”

As well as being situated in a marketing sequence, the “In Conversation” interview was also positioned within academic interpretive communities. The RSC marketing officer, Sian Sterling, commented on the interpersonal as well as cultural advantages of choosing Peter Holland to do the Noble interview: he already knew Adrian Noble and he prepared his interview in advance. “Adrian sometimes takes a bit of time to warm up, and Peter was very good at preparing all that and getting him going.”<sup>37</sup> Necessarily, though, in “preparing his interview in advance,” Holland chose his own “Chekhov” question-texts, thus bringing his own cultural competence and his own selection of interpretive communities to the marketing officer’s preferred “dynamic event.”

In terms of “negotiation of voice”<sup>38</sup> with Noble, Holland’s interview preparation in fact constructed its own theoretical and political agenda. It included choosing in advance three quotations: one from a 1911 *Times* reviewer, and two from Chekhov. So that although Holland did respond openly and “dynamically” to Noble’s agendas (as the marketing officer wanted), the interview was nevertheless significantly structured by the practices of an interpretive community of critics.

Peter Holland’s own work on Chekhov is epistemologically realist. Like his former Cambridge colleague Raymond Williams, Holland distinguishes between on the one hand the naturalism which Chekhov disliked in Stanislavski’s frogs, trains and corncrakes, and on the other situating the play historically in a real history of social movements, theatre conventions and intertexts. Like the dramatist Trevor Griffiths, whose work on Chekhov he admires, Holland (again like Raymond Williams) sometimes adopts the Lukacian distinction between “materialism of detail” (empiricist naturalism) and “materialism of forces” (“deep structural” realism). For example, Holland’s article, “The Director and the Playwright: Control over the means of production” uses typically realist contrasts of surface and deep structure to argue that Stanislavski’s Moscow Arts Theatre produced the “surface of historicism,” and a reading of *The Seagull* that was “a presentation of observable reality . . . exactly at odds with the production’s complete failure to present any inner structure behind the surface, a reality that might be comprehended rather than simply presented.”<sup>39</sup> As we will see, this critical engagement with Stanislavski was to become a running theme of his interview with Noble.

Holland liked the work of Trevor Griffiths’s on *The Cherry Orchard*: particularly for his positioning of Lopakhin at the center of the play, and for his challenge (from within Griffiths’s own Lukacian/critical realist position) to the tragic melancholy of conventional English productions of Chekhov. Holland agrees strongly with Griffiths that the play’s specific historicity and precise

sociological imagination had been bleached of all meanings beyond those required to convey the necessary “natural” sense that the fine will always be undermined by the crude and that the “human condition” can for all essential purposes be equated with “the plight of the middle classes.” (Griffiths)<sup>40</sup>

For Holland, as for Griffiths, the traditional “tragedy of the lost cherry orchard” reading has been significantly embedded in this English middle-class metaphysics.

Holland’s choice of quotations in preparation for his interview with Noble was closely related to this realist agenda: a 1911 review which spoke about the difficulties an English audience had with the “queer,” and “alien” Russian characters; a Chekhov quotation that emphasized the centrality of Lopakhin to the play; and anti-naturalist comments from Chekhov to Stanislavski. We can follow this agenda through Holland’s questions to Noble in the section of the interview we have excerpted below, in particular:

- i) his comparing of the English audience’s “National Trust” reading of the play with the centrality of Lopakhin as an “environmentally” positive character, close in his “summer cottages” scheme to Chekhov himself; these points together generating the initial negotiation of class and history in the interview;
- ii) his querying of Noble’s translation of “history” and “class” to audiences on the one hand and to actors on the other, which prompts Noble to negotiate his different voices as program compiler and director of rehearsals;
- iii) his questioning of Noble’s choice of the Stanislavskian Method, which further probes the director’s “hesitation” (according to his different institutional subjectivities) between personal and socio-historical determinations of agency; and,
- iv) his questioning of stage naturalism, which leads Noble to negotiate (via a different interpretive community and set of intertexts) the staging of Chekhov’s “poetry” and his history-as-modernity.

In what follows, beginning with Holland’s positioning of Lopakhin, we will use a sequential part of the Holland/Noble discussion to examine the way in which their different constructions of “Chekhov and history” negotiate across this

dialogic interview text. To focus the on-stage/off-stage negotiation (rather than the analytical “polarization”) of director and critic, we will follow the dialogic of the interview rather than sequence the chronological semiotics of the production itself (rehearsal, set design, staging, programming, etc). Nevertheless, those aspects will be emphasized as they appear relevant in the interview.

We will also loosely structure the analysis of the interview via Worthen’s request for a performance criticism emphasizing “the interests . . . of its initial production . . . ; the practices of the interpretive communities that have transmitted it . . . ; the technologies that have reproduced it materially; the metaphysics of which it is a part.” This aspect of our analysis can only be indicative of the project Worthen sets us, and is not intended to be systematic.

### 1. “The interests and affiliations of its initial production”: a realist history of Lopakhin

#### Text 1

P.H: I’ve always thought that one of the big problems for English audiences in watching Chekhov is that we know exactly what should happen to the cherry orchard. It should be given to the National Trust! [audience laughter] . . . That’s an English sensibility of what happens to a great estate. And when we hear Lopakhin in the play talking about dividing it up for lots for summer cottages, it always sounds a bit odd to us and not really what you’re supposed to do . . . But Chekhov surely saw that as a very positive thing. He had his little dacha in the country, and many Russians do. [We need] that consciousness of how *different* this world is—its values are different—that even the middle class is not the same middle class.<sup>41</sup>

A.D: That’s absolutely right, and also one realizes that they’re much closer to serfdom than any Western nation is . . . The freedom of the serfs came in 1862, while the zemstvas and parliaments were just after that time. This is the beginning of democracy, before that it was slavery . . . And if you look at Gorki’s autobiography, there’s [still] brutality to children and each other, reducing human beings to cattle . . . That’s just under the surface of life at that time and therefore this play . . . So there’s a . . . juxtaposition of the two great forces that were going on in society—this *huge* intellectual dash for freedom on the one hand and an anger that would quite literally rip that country and much of the world in half on the other, sitting on the stage at the same time.

Throughout what Sterling described as a “dynamic” interview, Holland returned to the themes evident in this extract. For instance, Noble failed to

negotiate (despite his immediate comment “That’s absolutely right”) Holland’s offer in the extract quoted above of a “positive/dacha in the country/like Chekhov” Lopakhin. Accordingly, Holland revisited later in the interview the issue of the central importance of Lopakhin, this time drawing on a direct quotation from Chekhov to Ol’ga Knipper: “the part of Lopakhin is the central one . . . If it doesn’t come off, the whole play will be a flop.” In the case of this second “Lopakhin” move by Holland, Noble initially responded with a consensualizing “diplomatic” move, followed by his “actual” theatrical preoccupation:

Yes, that is definitely true, we are blessed in a fantastic performance from David Troughton here. But I suppose for me the central character is the house, actually.

In “Text 1” Holland begins with an (“initial production”) emphasis on the specific historical difference between English and Russian middle classes (relating to their perception of “country houses” and to Chekhov’s “positive” view of Lopakhin’s scheme for middle-class country dachas). But Noble shifts this particular opposition between Russian and English middle-classes to an historical contrast of his own: between Russian barbarism (responsible for the Revolution which “ripped” Russia “and half of the world in half”) and the “huge intellectual dash for freedom” (represented by Chekhov and, presumably, the democratic West which is staging his plays). This was Adrian Noble’s “Cherry Orchard” of the Stratford theatre program cover, where the title—in black—is begun with a red (“Soviet”) toppling-sickle “C.”

If Noble’s comparison was between “barbarism” and “freedom,” Holland’s “middle-class audience” contrast led to a different emphasis, following the agenda set by Griffiths in his *Cherry Orchard* “Introduction.” As Holland told us in interview, he particularly liked the Trevor Griffiths/Richard Eyre focus on Lopakhin in the 1981 BBC *The Cherry Orchard*.

I thought it was marvellous . . . The first thing is straightforwardly the politics of it. That is, the performance that then and now seems central to the production is Bill Patterson’s Lopakhin . . . That shifted the centre of the play away from Ranevskaya . . . and towards him. The crucial moment now seems his . . . “I’ve bought the house where my father and grandfather couldn’t get into the kitchen,” with his accent and the drive of the Glaswegian “Can ye hear me, faither?” stuff really controlling it.<sup>42</sup>



Holland's "crucial moment" is articulated as a moment of class change and possession by a new and creative middle class which is "growing things." However, this "moment" was only partially matched by the local-historical perception of his part by Lopakhin's actor in rehearsing the Eyre/Griffiths BBC production. Bill Patterson played this Lopakhin (in 1981) very consciously in the *Thatcherite* context of new conservatism, of "the entrepreneurial class rising above the landed aristocracy, the old Tory class."<sup>43</sup> The Scottish accents used by Patterson and other servants in this production also deliberately foregrounded contemporary class/colonialist aspects of the British context.

But as well as these contemporary contexts, there was also in *Griffiths's* Lopakhin, with his talk of spreading natural growth and beauty beyond the gentry classes, an agentive, 1904-style Russian "environmentalist." Holland strongly favored an interpretation of Lopakhin which positioned him in the context of Chekhov's own grand narrative of environmentalist medicine<sup>44</sup>—an evolutionist positioning of nature which emphasized *working* the land so that (in Griffiths's adaptation) "the orchards will . . . live again, will be alive again with growing things." The emphasis here is close to Mechnikov's one of the gardener/doctor scientifically modifying both external and internal "flora . . . for the advantage of mankind." Holland thus approved of Griffiths's reading of Lopakhin.

Lopakhin begins to talk about the poppy fields in bloom. Now, there's two things going on here. He talks about the poppy field and he talks about how much it's worth. And in *my* version of that play both things have got to be very strong; both the natural, organic dimension of a poppy field, and the accountancy. At Nottingham, Dave Hill got that on the stage, though he leaned towards the natural dimension of the poppy field. (Trevor Griffiths)<sup>45</sup>

Shortly before playing Lopakhin in the 1977 Eyre/Griffiths production of *The Cherry Orchard* at Nottingham Playhouse, Dave Hill had been to Eastern Europe and seen their "very serious dream" of "getting away and being at one with yourself" by growing things in small country dachas.<sup>46</sup> He felt as a result that he better understood the positivity of Lopakhin's plan of subdividing the cherry orchard estate, and certainly Griffiths particularly liked this aspect of his performance (compared with Patterson's).

Peter Holland's positive emphasis in the staged interview with Noble of Lopakhin's/Chekhov's "little dacha in the country" drew on all of these "Griffiths" interpretive resonances. In addition, Holland's own analysis of *The Cherry Orchard*

in his article “Chekhov and the resistant symbol” had also focused on the historical materiality of Lopakhin’s class-based action.

In fact, Mrs Ranevsky does not care about the cherry orchard at all. It is not the physical concreteness of the forest that appeals—for it has been neglected—but a romantic aura of childhood . . . Mrs Ranevsky’s continual yearning for the symbolic value of the orchard fails to take account of the trees as trees at all . . . Lopakhin sees the trees as wood . . . and if his materialism in action seems brutal, it is conscious of a process of history . . . “I’ve bought the estate where my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren’t even allowed inside the kitchen.”<sup>47</sup>

Holland’s “materialism in action” relates closely to Trevor Griffiths’s distinction between “materialism of forces” (realism) and “materialism of detail” (naturalism).<sup>48</sup> And when Peter Holland interviewed Adrian Noble, it was this particular realist/cultural materialist history of Lopakhin that he was activating. In an important sense two productions of *The Cherry Orchard*—Noble’s and Eyre/Griffiths’s—were being negotiated on the stage of the Swan Theatre that day. Noble, however, first displaced (by way of his own barbarism/freedom contrast) and then later “diplomatically” parried this offer of “Lopakhin,” responding to Holland that it was not Lopakhin but “the house itself” which was the centre of his own production.

## 2. “The practices and interpretive communities that have transmitted it through history”: Noble, Stanislavski and “uncluttering the house”

Adrian Noble’s production quite *overtly* distanced itself from Trevor Griffiths’s reading of the play. In his onstage interview with Holland, Noble spoke of his process of rejecting the Griffiths adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*. So whereas Holland’s interview voice quietly incorporated this earlier production, Noble’s attention to Griffiths was more overt. Preferring Peter Gill’s “uncluttered” translation, Noble remarked: “get off my shoulder Trevor, stop *leaning* on me.”

Noble’s preference for an “uncluttered” over a politically “leaning on” interpretation is an example of the kind of traditional high cultural “performance criticism” that Worthen critiques.<sup>49</sup> This performance criticism, as Worthen notes, subverts the text’s (and the performance’s) claims “as signifying practice by insisting on the ‘freedom’ of performance from the signifying formalities that make ‘meaning’ possible and determinable.”<sup>50</sup> As Worthen would certainly insist, Noble’s “uncluttering” of Chekhov clearly *must* signify. A case in point is Gill’s

and Noble's decision to drop the use of "serf" in this production for the more "pertinent" word "slave," whose meaning, Noble argued, was not "distorted with Russian history."<sup>51</sup> Yet in Noble's view, it was this "freedom" ("uncluttering" of writing, acting, directing, staging) from "politics" that allowed "the skeleton of the play to reveal itself." In this way, Noble believed, "Chekhov the man, Chekhov the playwright remains at the center of the play, the most important element about the play, more important than the translator" (another interview shot at Griffiths's adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*).

Noble's belief in "uncluttering" and therefore "realising" Chekhov was worked through to the situating and staging of the play at the Swan Theatre—in what Noble called "one of the most site-specific productions I think I've ever done." The use of the Swan was "one of the absolutely central reasons that we wanted to do the play. Because I think what this theatre does wonderfully is it enables the inner architecture, the skeleton of the play to reveal itself." Thus Noble resisted Peter Holland's interview pressure (which amounted to three separate questions) that Lopakhin is at the center of Chekhov's play. Instead, for Noble:

The play . . . is about the house . . . For me the centre of the play is the house and the emblem that the house develops into during the course of the evening.

Yet if Noble preferred language and staging that was "uncluttered by Russian history," inevitably his use of the Swan stage signified its own history. The opening of Act I was marked emphatically by the lifting of a gauze box, accompanied by the sound of a train. In his interview response to Holland, Noble spoke of the "tragic" and "frightening" history of the train. The production's assistant director, Andrew Cooper noted that for Noble the train was "the Twentieth century conveyer of events,"<sup>52</sup> and was especially prevalent for him as the tragic vehicle of the First and Second World War. In Noble there is a strong sense of Twentieth century modernity as a determining "technology that takes everything with it at various times."<sup>53</sup> Hence, the master image that Noble suggested for his frenetic Act III ball scene was another twentieth century "latest technology" that tragically took 'everything with it': the sinking of the Titanic. Adrian Cooper commented: "Adrian articulated Act III repeatedly with the image of the Titanic going down and the dance band on the Titanic playing as the ship was holed and began to sink."<sup>54</sup> Movement designer Sue Lefton was also encouraged by Noble to design a "manic" dance that made the stage seem as though a Titanic in crisis: "tipping and everyone slipping down one side, and then tipping and everyone slipping down the other way,"<sup>55</sup> thus signifying this technologically determined fate of the gilded rich. The clear analogy was between the cherry orchard owners and

the Titanic elite dancing while history swept them into oblivion. Clearly, in Noble's framing of modernity, none of these men and women "made their own history."

Lopakhin is, Noble argues, not the center of this production; the house is. And the house represents the nostalgia of a technologically *fated* past—embodied during rehearsal in the actors's use of "Stanislavskian" exercises to play out of childhood memory. All of the actors we spoke to emphasized the significance to them of this initial part of the rehearsal. Alec McCowen (who played Gayev in Noble's production), for instance, emphasized the "huge, huge nostalgic element" for him: "it stirred memories for me of my own childhood home and growing up and when we left it . . . To me the play is really about *my* childhood which was in the 1930s and 1940s and thinking about the values of that time when we had a live-in-maid . . . Life is so different now."<sup>56</sup>

McCowen's negotiation of his part indicates very clearly the process that Worthen describes of an actor's "trained approach to translating the text into embodied action."<sup>57</sup> As Worthen says, rather than draw on the disparity between the character/"past" traced in the text and the performance/"present" in order to *occupy* postmodern theory's familiar "decentered" position of subjective fragmentation, actors's Stanislavskian training inclines them to "understand their interpretive practice less as a mode of self-authorized creation than as a mode of fidelity" to "Shakespeare" or to "Chekhov."

The actors' use of history to open and sustain their readings of Shakespearian "character" dramatizes these interpretive priorities and situates them in a clear contrast to recent critical practice . . . The actors' principal mode of engagement with the past concerns the need to develop a biography for the role, a "past" to motivate the character's present actions. This act of biographical invention serves the same function as it does for Stanislavski: it enables the actor to produce the illusion of a single whole, coherent "character" whose behavior flows from a concrete past into a determined present.<sup>58</sup>

The key "Chekhovian" belief which ties these two histories together for Alec McCowen is the notion that "one has to love the home and the cherry orchard." Thus Noble's "home as the central character" reading—and his rehearsal exercises that focused on childhood memories (of both the actors and characters) of rooms in that home—tied McCowen's performance of the text to that of his director, and at the same time tied his own childhood history to that of Gayev and Ranevskaya in constructing the illusion of a single, coherent character. David

Troughton, who was less influenced by personalized memories of “home,” achieved his own coherence for Lopakhin in the standardly Stanislavskian way of emphasizing a “past” to motivate the character’s present actions—thus his interpretation of the drunken Act III scene via his personal past (love for Liuba) and his social past (as the son of a peasant). The “home” of the cherry orchard was central to both of these Lopakhin pasts, and his drunkenness was symptomatic of his triumphalism as new owner of this “home.” In contrast to this past/present construction of his part, Lopakhin’s *future* (“growing things”) discourse was literally effaced in Noble’s Stanislavskian preparation of his actors, which is why Troughton told us that *this* aspect of his character preparation was “all very personal, I don’t know who else you’re talking to, but they’ll probably all say that it’s crap.”

Noble, via “uncluttered” rehearsal method, choice of translation, staging, and mise-en-scene constructed a humanist continuity, “a ‘past’ to motivate the character’s present actions”<sup>59</sup>—hence strongly authorizing Troughton’s own “sociological” reading of Lopakhin as past peasant. Importantly, though, far from being “free” and “uncluttered,” these humanist positions were also signifying practices, as Noble’s use of lighting in Act I to “reveal” the truth of “the house” indicated. The lighting cue for Ranevskaya’s entrance in Act I was the most marked in the entire production: as Adrian Cooper put it, at that moment she lit up the house internally with her “love” (“Liuba = love”) just as the dawning sun lit up the house externally. As Noble said in interview with Holland, “The *house* is reinhabited with light, this spirit that Liuba . . . has and brings in to the house, and takes it over. And things are *revealed*.”<sup>60</sup>

Holland’s “question” to Noble in “Text 1” tries to focus the director on Griffiths’s “precise historicity” of the “organic, natural dimension” of Lopakhin (and Chekhov). Noble counters by speaking of a slave past which was also the time of Liuba’s reinhabiting of this Russian house with “love, light, spirit.” In Noble’s history both Gorki’s and Ranevskaya’s past are subject to the *fate* of technology and change—that is the play’s necessary (i.e. “technologically inevitable”) tragedy. Hence it is the house that is “reinhabited by light” which is the central character of a “frightening” and “tragic” history. There is no place here—either in Noble’s negotiation with Holland, or in his directing of *The Cherry Orchard*—for the agency of the environment-changing Lopakhin whom Richard Eyre spoke about in his production with Trevor Griffiths.

It’s so often you see the audience being invited to take the side of Gayev and Ranevskaya, and think “the vulgarity of . . . Lopakhin’s ruining this beautiful cherry orchard” . . . It is a magnificent work of nature—but of course a work of nature

that has been appropriated and is owned by people who regard nature as their property. And there is this man who is taking over this piece of property, but at least he is using it to give happiness to a lot more people . . . Actually it's giving happiness—it's spreading it around a bit.<sup>61</sup>

### 3. “Technologies that have reproduced it materially”: programming Chekhov’s history

#### Text 2

P.H: In *this Cherry Orchard* when the audience come in and they read their program, the program gives us a lot of information about life in Russia and statistics and the position of these different layers of class . . . and so on . . . You've obviously done your reading, how does that get into the work with actors?

A.N: We probably didn't do as much as you would imagine we would do.

P.H: So the audience does more work than the actors?

A.N: [laughs] Probably that's unfortunately the case . . . I think there's an anthropological way into drama. Step 1 buy your train ticket to Russia; step 2 find the most run-down inn in the most down-and-out village; step 3 find your peasant . . . And indeed many fine directors and actors work that way . . . which I can't fully do myself . . . We in fact tried to approach the heart of the play through the actors' actual experiences, and quite contrary to my own style we did quite a lot of improvisatory work . . . actually investigating us in our childhood . . . We did a lot of work on rooms, and the connection between the two things . . . walking into a room that we were frightened of [in childhood] . . . The actors had very strong sense memories of their childhoods . . . We did a lot of work like that trying to identify with the text.

“Text 2” immediately followed “Text 1” (all four “texts” we quote here sequentially followed in the interview). Thus we can see that Holland, having failed to engage Noble vis his Lopakhin-focused appeal to Chekhov’s “initial production,” now inflects his “audiences” discourse via a different technology of performance discourse. His appeal to the “real history” of Chekhov is now worked through the theatre program, which he draws on to counter the much more dominant stage technology of Stanislavskian naturalism.

The theatre program, like the marketing brochures, constructed its own history. *The Cherry Orchard* program compiler, Kathy Elgin said that Adrian

Noble's "track led to a socio-historical choice of notes," so when she went looking for "found texts, the decline of the gentry leaped off the page."<sup>62</sup> Elgin commented that "Adrian wanted the program to be historical so that the audience would bring history to a production which *does not formally position it historically*" [our italics].<sup>63</sup> As Noble admits to Holland in the interview extract, while he emphasized the importance of class and history in his program notes (and he made the same emphasis in his interview on-stage at the Swan), he in fact did not prepare his *actors* by way of much historical background. Holland's negotiation with Noble in "Text 2" thus engaged different directorial subjectivities: with Noble as director of actors, and as program compiler. Yet for Holland there was a clear continuity of focus in his own interview questions: the program was little more than an alibi for his underlying concern with Noble's Stanislavskian Method in rehearsal.

The way in which Noble's "uncluttering" of the rehearsal process also led to a specific effacing of history for the actors was clearly articulated by Peter Copley, who played Firs both in Adrian Noble's *The Cherry Orchard* at Stratford, and, prior to that, in Paul Unwin's Bristol Old Vic production (which used Trevor Griffiths's adaptation). Copley in fact contrasted the Noble rehearsal process with Unwin's. Whereas Noble used basic Stanislavskian exercises that related the actors to both their characters' and their own childhoods, Unwin's rehearsals required actors to research the particular historical period of serf reforms.

Paul Unwin took the line that we were going to be very serious about this, and we were all given research tasks . . . My research task was the distribution of land among the peasants after the emancipation of the serfs . . . I discovered . . . why Firs kept clear of it, because he hadn't any money to buy, so there was this great bank got up, which lent money for them to buy land and then they were in debt because they couldn't pay the interest, and then they only bought little strips so it was very uneconomical, like medieval times. Miserable times, I mean they were worse off in many ways. Anyhow, we had a . . . lot of research, and we had to write it all down, and in fact, sort of read a paper on it, or do something with graphs and so on. That was another way of doing it and we didn't have any of that with Adrian.<sup>64</sup>

Trevor Griffiths's *Cherry Orchard* positioned Chekhov's characters quite precisely in the cultural materialist sense of the scope for *productivity* and agentic change of the environment: former serfs who were impoverished in the new rural order, gentry who owned but did not produce from the land, Lopakhin who owned

land and wanted a “whole new world growing up here.”<sup>65</sup> This history of agency on the land was important in working with actors in rehearsal, as Dave Hill and other actors emphasized. In contrast, Noble sought to inscribe his *audience* (via the program) but not his actors historically. Indeed for the actors Noble was happy to efface the notion of “serf” altogether from his process. This is not to say that the actors did not discuss “history” at all. The first two days of rehearsal were filled with what Adrian Cooper called “each actor’s own love and understanding of the play” in a “free-ranging discussion through history and politics.”<sup>66</sup> But these, as in the case of the childhood memory exercises, were fragmented and personalized histories, and they were in response to Adrian Noble’s own historical anecdote about the “farcical nature of the obsolete power of the ruling class in the Russia that Chekhov was writing about.”<sup>67</sup> In early rehearsal, Noble told the actors the following story.

About fifty years before *The Cherry Orchard* was written the Trans-Siberian railway was being planned to open up the whole of eastern Russia. The Tsar was asked to plan the route. So he drew a line and the line was straight across Russia between two points, through hills, across valleys, goodness knows what geographical features were driven through and this was adhered to in exactly the detail the Tsar ordered. And to this very day there are still a couple of crooked bits just where he jugged the ruler.<sup>68</sup>

The natural environment in *this* story (in contrast to the environmental narratives Chekhov heard as a medical student from Zakharin and Erismann) is simply a signifier of an outmoded autocratic will. *Again*, in these rehearsal words of director to actors, the train, as extra-textual technology, systematically reproduced Chekhov’s text as a fated history. Trains in this anecdote demonstrated Noble’s contrast between twentieth century determinism and the “obsolete power” of the nineteenth century rulers. In this construction of history, Liuba’s class *must* go, but there was no beauty, no aesthetic agency with which to replace it—only the mute and inevitable technology of the train and the Titanic.

#### 4. “The pressures of politics, ideology, gender”: intertexts of “owned” and “infantilised” space

##### Text 3

P.H: It’s interesting that you should say this is not the way that you usually work. What is it that made it seem right for this?



A.N: Because, one, Chekhov was writing it for a theatre company that was developing that very methodology; and secondly because it seemed to me that the inner life of the characters was enormously important, whereas the inner life of the Duke of Salisbury in *Henry VI Part I* is not that important. As you will see [laughs], this is not a terribly anthropological production. In fact, the design is much more based on Swedish rooms than Russian rooms of the time.

The persistence of Holland's discursive objective—Noble's Stanislavskian Method—is maintained, as the Cambridge critic shifts his interview focus (but not his position) yet again, choosing this time to emphasize Noble's words in "Text 2," "contrary to my own style." Noble's comment that this is not the way he usually works (as Shakespearian director at the RSC) is itself, of course, founded on the Stanislavskian distinction between the "contemporary" (Chekhovian) theatre of "subtext," where actors must establish their "need" (or "super-objective") via internal states of being, and the "classic" (Shakespearian) theatre where there is supposedly no psychological dimension "underneath" the text.

Noble's disavowal of "anthropological" naturalism is interesting in this context; as is the intertextual use by his set designer Richard Hudson of the Scandinavian painter Hammershoi for his design of the rooms that were so important to Noble in this production. It contrasts markedly with the Griffiths/Eyre set design for their television *Cherry Orchard*, where they drew for Act II on John Berger's television analysis of Gainsborough's "Mr. and Mrs. Andrews." In his British television series on the history of painting, *Ways of Seeing*, Berger had critiqued Sir Kenneth Clark's reading of "Mr and Mrs Andrews" in his book *Landscape Into Art*. Berger saw the Gainsborough painting as a celebration of landed property; and Richard Eyre consciously drew on this reading in positioning Gayev and Ranevskaya on their bench in Act II, as Lopakhin tries to convince them once again about his scheme for "growing things" in summer dachas. This "materialism of forces" (which Eyre called "land ownership") theme, positioning the gentry in front of the *possessed* space of the countryside, is common to the readings of Berger, Eyre/Griffiths and Holland.

In contrast, Adrian Noble's own intertextual use of painting to depict space is not of exterior *ownership* but (via Hammershoi) of an interior *domesticity* that focuses not on class but on gender. But, symptomatically, it is a *mise-en-scene* that does not position gender in an agentive sense, but rather as an accretion of "the house." Hammershoi's austere, hieratic grey-green interiors (the color Noble used for the sets) are of women isolated, vulnerable, *inactivated* in what the painter Ola Billgren has called the "elevated melancholy" of Hammershoi's "quiet rooms."<sup>69</sup> Neither in Hammershoi's paintings nor in Noble's use of them is there a gendered statement. Women are simply positioned, fated, in some insecure causality that is

not of their own making. Billgren speaks, on the one hand, of Hammershoi's universalizing "tragic stories of human suffering . . . set in perspectives relativizing the illusion of space, so that everything can take place in the sitting room"<sup>70</sup>); but on the other of his "das Unheimliche" quality: "It is a strange reversal which means that the habitual and secure in its ideal contained form is filled with the insecurity of the unknown *Other*."<sup>71</sup> In Noble's *Cherry Orchard* that "Other" is conveyed by the "tragic" and "frightening" sound of the train.

Another contemporary Scandinavian painter, Paul Osipow writes: "some kind of transcendence ensues when Hammershoi accepts weariness, gloom and loss without hope."<sup>72</sup> The terms are familiar enough in traditional accounts of Hammershoi's Russian contemporary, Chekhov; but in particular there is that sense also in Noble's Chekhov of what Osipow calls a play between the "transcendence" of "habitual ideal" and a "demonic visitation" of the "*Other*."<sup>73</sup> While apparently eschewing naturalism by "uncluttering" his mise-en-scene, Noble re-emphasized it via "character" through the isolation of personalized human figures in green-hued domestic interiors, as in Hammershoi. Thus his mise-en-scene foregrounded the internal "transcendent yet fated" state of mind of his characters.

The program designer Sue Rudd remembered, in their first discussion about the program, that Noble's "key words" to her were "life—changes in people's life—you have to let your past go if you are to move on."<sup>74</sup> Several months into the play's performance, in interview with Holland, Noble was still emphasizing the personal, internalized and infantilized aspect of his characters' inability to "move on."

There's this curious "we cling to the past," that's Liuba's and Gayev's great sin, they cannot let go, they cling, they hang on to the wreckage and they will not take responsibility . . . They just will not face up to reality. They dance while the house is being sold, they won't look at it. And that is to do with an inability to grow up . . . And the children they breed . . . then can't do that either. Anya has fantasies, as does Trofimov. His form of politics is unreal—there's actually a pamphlet that Lenin wrote called "Leftwing Communism—an infantile disorder . . . ;" and you could say that's what Trofimov falls into, it's an infantile disorder. It's ultimately sentimental . . . It's not real.<sup>75</sup>

Revolution is thus an internal (infantile) state of mind, rather than an effect of "materialism of forces," as in Griffiths and Holland. There is in fact a curiously shifting play in Noble's off-stage/on-stage "performances" between an emphasis on historical/sociological time (carried most strongly, though not

unambiguously, by the program) and infantilized/internalized/transcendentalized domestic space—carried more strongly by rehearsal and production. Here the emphasis, via rehearsal method, production *mise-en-scene* and the director's overall concept, was to think of characters as “kids,” right across classes, genders and generations—from Ranevskaya to her servant Yasha. Hence the reason that the *Cherry Orchard* women are not positioned as an active gender is that they—along with everyone else in the “home”—are infantilized.

Holland made this same criticism of the production to us after the interview; and during it he probed this apparent inconsistency between Noble's fatalism and historicism, drawing on his own analysis of *The Cherry Orchard*. He had, in fact, ended his article “Chekhov and the resistant symbol” with Chekhov's letter to Stanislavski about over-cluttering his play with the sounds of corncrakes, frogs and trains; after which Holland concluded:

The clarity of presentation that he sought was designed to make the audience understand, simply and directly . . . Even if the characters succumb, the audience is allowed, indeed enabled, to see that resistance of the real.<sup>76</sup>

Holland continues his interview dialogue with Noble with this same letter from Chekhov to Stanislavski; but because he does not fully elaborate in the interview his own distinction between the “cluttered” detail of naturalism and the reality of social-historical forces, Holland enables Noble (who has already articulated his own two “forces” of Russian history in barbarism/Revolution and intellectual dash/freedom) to inflect the “real” quite differently. Holland's “resistance of the real” is displaced by Noble's “poetry” of futility in the face of modernity.

#### **Text 4.**

P.H: You say that Chekhov is writing the play for a particular company . . . but it is also a company with which he had a terrible time and a great deal of tension—all the arguments whether *The Cherry Orchard* is a comedy or a tragedy begin with Chekhov saying it's a comedy and Stanislavski saying you're wrong . . . And indeed the same thing was going on with performance style. Famously, Stanislavski loved littering any production with sound, and Chekhov writes this letter to Stanislavski . . .

Haymaking usually takes place between 20 and 25th of June at which time I think the corncrake no longer cries. And frogs also are silent at this time of year. If you can show a train without

any noise, without a single sound, then carry on. I haven't anything against a single set for Acts III and IV as long as the entrances and exits are convenient.

And I think it's very striking that Chekhov's concern is about convenience, not about "realism."

A.N: That's right, yes. I mean, we were very keen not to create a set of rooms, not just because of the nature of this theatre but also because it seemed to me that there is a way to the heart of Chekhov that isn't the realistic or naturalistic way in . . . It's very abstract, actually, what we eventually came up with and indeed the way it's played. In terms of what you just read out I would be of Chekhov's camp. He had this great skill to offer to an audience just a *few* objects or a *few* effects or images that, like a drip in water . . . will reverberate through the play. So the trains were, to me, terribly important, the thing of arriving, traveling—"oh, the old master used to go by coach, now they travel by train"—they arrive back on the train, and they leave on the train. Most of the great and usually tragic moments in Twentieth century European history involve trains. I've always found that a rather frightening matter.

Holland's continuing critique here (via Chekhov's letter to Stanislavski) is against stage naturalism. However, because of his use of the phrase "about convenience, not about 'realism,'" and especially because this is introduced via Chekhov's comment about combining sets for Acts III and IV, Noble is able to say that he too cut down on the sets in *The Cherry Orchard* in order to get to the "heart of Chekhov," which is an "abstract" rather than "realistic or naturalistic way in." For Holland, an uncluttered Chekhov set means stripping away the sensory sights and sounds with which Stanislavski "littered" it in order to see "that resistance of the real." An uncluttered Chekhov set for Noble was "to really allow the poetic qualities of the language and the play to blossom unhindered."

Despite the slippage between Holland's and Noble's utterances on the "real," the "trains" reference makes their differences especially clear. For Holland, "train noises" represent to Chekhov the "clutter" of surface naturalism, and so he didn't want them. For Noble, his use of the train sound, on an "uncluttered" stage at the Swan, represented a central way of tying his performance in to what he calls the "mighty tides" of history (Hammershoi's "unknown Other") "running underneath the play that you can't show very often, you have to *know* they're there." What *can* be shown, in Noble's view, are the "secret grief or joy"—those conventionally "Chekhovian" inner states of being—which the particular stage of the Swan Theatre is supposedly "sympathetic" to, and which can be played, via his

Hammershoi set, over the reverberating sound of modernity, the train. In the end this *technological* “other,” this “mighty tide” of history, is completely different from Caliban as *colonized* “other,” because it has no “beautiful language” of its own, and so cannot engage, discourse and be changed.

### Conclusion

In this article we have “gone to the theatre” (and in other parts of our Chekhov research have “gone to the audience” as the more “ethnographically” inclined “second generation” cultural studies theorists have been advocating over the last decade or so). But we have “gone to the theatre” with a particular focus (the staged “criticism against performance” event) and in a particular way (as part of cultural studies’s current attempt to synthesize production, textual and reading theory). Our main focus here has consequently been theoretical and methodological: recognizing recent critiques of the objectivism and lack of reflexivity in traditional ethnographic theory by foregrounding here the critic’s own intervention in constructing Lopakhin “growing things.” Our argument has been that if we are to avoid the “criticism against performance” polarization that Worthen rejects, our focus needs to be dialogic. We have tried to trace the academic/theatre research relationship *as* a dialogic, one in which different intertexts and embodiments of history “bid and counterbid” as “reading formations.” For that reason we have allowed different aspects of the production—set design, sound, lighting etc—to “bid” where it seemed appropriate to the dialogic of the Holland/Noble interview-event.

We have examined interview talk (including academic talk) as contextually and institutionally situated narrative, i.e. as “text” mobilized within interpretive communities and reading formations—and it should be clear from our *privileging* of the intertexts of Holland, Griffiths and Worthen in our analysis that our own interpretive “bid” is from within a broadly cultural materialist and poststructuralist (new historicist) reading formation. In that sense, the choice of the Holland/Noble interview as the dialogic site for this article is at one and the same time agentive (privileging our own interpretive community), reflexive (foregrounding the critic/theatre relationship), and pragmatic (as our only opportunity thus far of “going to” Adrian Noble). Our political strategy is thus no different from the general tendency within cultural studies in engaging critically with high cultural discourse. Our difference is in trying to reveal high cultural discourse as text/ performance/audience *event*, since our view is that much postmodernist writing about “slippage” and “bricolage” (between high and popular cultural forms) either effaces these processes or, worse, contents itself with celebration of the high cultural forms it describes.

Rather than reading these interview narratives as the prior, unitary and originating “truths” of self-consciousness, we have examined them as context-bound and co-textually framed utterances through which different voices, subjectivities and technologies of discourse are negotiated—which is why the narrative we have followed is that of the interview. At the same time we have tried to allow those frames to seep through the interview text to establish our reading—not only of the “In Conversation” text, but also of the Noble *Cherry Orchard* itself. In that way, both via an analysis of “text” and via “going to the theatre,” we have tried to respond to recent theorists’s call for a “third generation” cultural (reception) studies that combines textual/encoding with ethnographic analysis.

Of course, we are not suggesting that Noble’s “encoded” readings (we have discussed in passing here marketing, set design, movement design, lighting and sound, program notes, rehearsal exercises etc) are simply read transparently, without resistance or negotiation by other “performers,” any more than they are by Holland. Even within this article, we have pointed to differently inscribed readings of “history” for actors and for audiences by Noble. And in current work we are looking at “resistances” in the performance of the actors who played Lopakhin and Trofimov to the Noble construction of history (which is where David Troughton “all very personally” engaged with the “aesthetic” Lopakhin). We are also looking at the ways in which these minor acting interventions (amounting to little more than cross-stage eyeline matches) were noticed or not, and “read” or not, by newspaper reviewers and audiences.

But the point is not really whether these resistances were minor or not, or read or not. Rather, the point is to work within what Alasuutari is currently calling “third generation” reception studies to insist that high cultural performance is a continuous *process of reading* (off- and on-stage) and also to think through ways in which Chekhov’s “history” can be analyzed reflexively, and thus liberated from those dominant interpretive (canonical) communities that fetishize and “own” it. In doing that, we might learn more about David Troughton’s performance of “ambivalence” as Caliban and as Lopakhin.

## Notes

1. W.B. Worthen, “Deeper Meanings and Theatrical Technique: The Rhetoric of Performance Criticism,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989) 455.
2. Peter Holland, personal interview, Cambridge, July 1993.
3. David Troughton, personal interview, Stratford-on-Avon, January 1996.
4. Ibid.
5. A. Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* in a version by Peter Gill (1995): 45.
6. David Troughton, personal interview, January 1996.

7. Ibid.

8. J. Tulloch, and T. Burvill, "Chekhov: In Criticism, Performance and Reading," Australian Research Council Large Grant: 1994-6.

9. University students and Chekhov academics in Australia, Britain and the U.S.A. were surveyed and interviewed. Universities included the Australian National, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Charles Sturt, Columbia, Durham, Florida State, Harvard, Hull, Loughborough, Macquarie, Melbourne, Middlesex, Royal Holloway - London, Sussex, University of Wales - Bangor, leading Chekhov scholars at these and many other universities in Britain, Canada, the U.S.A., Australia, France and Israel were interviewed: 1994 and 1996.

10. J. Dollimore, and A. Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester UP eds., 1985) 3.

11. A.T. Vaughan, and V.M. Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

12. H. Gilbert, and J. Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996) 26.

13. J. Jahn, *Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing* (New York: Grove, 1968) 242.

14. See for example Laurence Senelick on the "cannibalizing" of Chekhov by Griffiths in J. Douglas Clayton, *Chekhov Then and Now: The Reception of Chekhov in World Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) 14. In interview with us Senelick said "I object to the Griffith approach because it is really a rape of Chekhov, in a way. It's an attempt to place Chekhov in an ideological camp, and Chekhov of all authors spent his career avoiding that . . . With the rewriting of the language to make it much more squalid and much more brutal than it is in Chekhov, it is actually rewriting Chekhov in his own image." May, 1994.

15. I. Mechnikov (Metchnikoff), *The Prolongation of Life*, trans. P. Chalmers Mitchell Heinemann, (1910) 323.

16. J. Tulloch, *Chekhov: A Structuralist Study* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980).

17. D. Rayfield, *The Cherry Orchard: Catastrophe and Comedy* (New York: Twayne, 1994)

9.

18. Peter Holland, "In Conversation" with Adrian Noble, the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, January 1996.

19. Peter Holland, personal interview, Trinity Hall, Cambridge, July 1993.

20. Worthen, 1989: 446.

21. Ibid. 443.

22. See J. Frow, "Regimes of Value," in P. Mead and M. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Books: Contemporary Cultural Politics and the Persistence of Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Department of English, 1993) 207-18.

23. Our definition of reading formation is from T. Bennett, and M. Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (Macmillan, 1987) 64-5: "reading formation . . . is a product of definite social and ideological relations of reading, composed, in the main, of those apparatuses—schools, the press, critical reviews, fanzines—within and between which the socially dominant forms for the superintendence of reading are both constructed and contested." We use "reading formation" and Fish's "interpretive community" in an overlapping sense in this article—interpretive community refers (as in Fish) to university literary paradigms; reading formation includes these, but also institutionalized reception frames established more widely within other interpretive formations that relate to Chekhov "meanings", such as theatre marketing departments, "friends" of the RSC, schools, etc. The use of "reading formation" then becomes productive in contrasting "audience" readings across high and popular cultural forms: one of us, for example, is working on "fandom" both in science fiction and among Royal Shakespeare Company members.

24. Worthen, 1989: 455.

25. J. Curran, D. Morley, and V. Walkerdine, *Cultural Studies and Communications* (London: Arnold, back cover, 1996).
26. S. Moores, *Media, Culture and Society* (1990) 24.
27. P. Alasuutari, (forthcoming) *The Inscribed Audience: The New Agenda of Media Reception and Audience Ethnography* (London: Sage).
28. Moores, 1990.
29. Worthen, 1989: 447.
30. Frow, 1993: 208.
31. S. Sterling, personal interview Stratford, January 1996.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Worthen, 1989: 455.
35. Tulloch, 1980.
36. Worthen, 1989: 445.
37. S. Sterling, personal interview, January 1996.
38. For an analysis of Bakhtin and negotiation of voice, see J. Hassin, "Living a Responsible Life," *Social Sciences and Medicine* 39 (3) (1994) 391-400.
39. P. Holland, "The Director and the Playwright: Control Over the Means of Production," *New Theatre Quarterly* 11 (1987) 211.
40. A. Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* in a new English version by Trevor Griffiths (London: Pluto, 1978)
41. Peter Holland "In Conversation" with Adrian Noble, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1996.
42. Peter Holland, personal interview, Trinity Hall, Cambridge, July 1993.
43. Bill Patterson, personal interview, London, June 1994.
44. Tulloch, 1980, see Holland's comments on this book in Holland 1987: 215.
45. Trevor Griffiths, personal interview, Boston Spa, July 1993.
46. Dave Hill, personal interview, London, June 1994.
47. Holland, P. "Chekhov and the Resistant Symbol," in D. Redmond, *Drama and Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 239.
48. See M. Poole, and J. Wyver, *Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1984); and J. Tulloch, *Television Drama: Agency, Audience and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1990) 98ff.
49. Worthen, 1989.
50. Ibid. 448ff.
51. A. Cooper, Lecture at the Shakespeare Institute, 9 August, 1995.
52. Andrew Cooper, personal interview, Stratford, January 1996.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Sue Lefton, personal interview, London, January 1996.
56. Alec McCowen, personal interview, Stratford, January 1996.
57. W.B. Worthen, "Invisible Bullets, Violet Beards: Reading actors reading," in *Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare: Questions of Evidence* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1996) 213.
58. Ibid: 213-4.
59. Ibid.
60. Peter Holland "In Conversation" with Adrian Noble, January, 1996.
61. Richard Eyre, personal interview, London, July 1993.
62. Kathy Elgin, personal interview, July 1995.
63. Ibid.
64. Peter Copley, personal interview, Stratford, January 1996.



- 
62. Kathy Elgin, personal interview, July 1995.
  63. Ibid.
  64. Peter Copley, personal interview, Stratford, January 1996.
  65. Dave Hill, personal interview, London, 1994.
  66. Cooper, 9 August 1995.
  67. Ibid.
  68. Ibid.
  69. O. Billgren, and P. Osipow, *Hammershoi*, trans. W. Glyn Jones (Stockholm: Edition Blondal, 1995) 9.
  70. Ibid. 57.
  71. Ibid. 94.
  72. Ibid. 16.
  73. Ibid. 94.
  74. Interview with Sue Rudd, Stratford, July 1995.
  75. Peter Holland "In Conversation" with Adrian Noble, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1996.
  76. P. Holland, 1982: 241.

