

Drama
Chinchilla
Annotated Bibliography
Advanced Higher

8552

Spring 2001

HIGHER STILL

Drama
Chinchilla
Annotated Bibliography
Unit 3: Special Study
Advanced Higher

Support Materials

θρ

CONTENTS

Introduction: Robert David MacDonald and *Chinichilla*

Getting started

- Published editions of *Chinichilla*
- A select list of published editions of Macdonald's other original plays, adaptations and translations

Contextualising Chinichilla

- Production context
 - The Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow
 - Theatre in Scotland
- Historical and cultural sources
 - The Ballets Russes
 - Death in Venice* – novella, film, opera
 - Music
 - Ideas of modernism

Ideas and interpretations

- Performing gender
- Gay and queer theatre
- Camp

INTRODUCTION FROM THE WRITER

This annotated bibliography lists a large number of books, and other resources, that students may find useful when undertaking the Special Study. It also provides a source of information for staff. It is one writer's view of these texts and is offered on that basis.

'Robert David MacDonald and *Chinchilla: Figures in a classical landscape with ruins*

'I wonder if anyone will ever realise how wonderful it all was.'

– Mimi in Robert David MacDonald, *Chinchilla* act 2, p167.

Robert David MacDonald is one of Scotland's most significant, yet often neglected, living playwrights. He has been associated with the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow since 1970 and has written numerous plays for that company. Of these the 1977 play *Chinchilla* remains his most famous work: arguably the most challenging play to emerge from a Scottish theatre in the 1970s.

Chinchilla is about a ballet company, the Ballets Russes, on retreat and in rehearsals at the Venice Lido. The play is an evocative and descriptive of relations within a creative company, in the context of the play a ballet company. It debates –

- the role and nature of art and the artist,
- revolutions in art,
- processes of creativity, as well as including
- lots of talk about sex.

In fact *Chinchilla* has two key sources –

- the lives and careers of Sergei Diaghilev, Vaslav Nijinsky and experience of the Ballets Russes, and
- the experience and personnel of the Citizens' itself.

By 1977 the Citizens' company, under the artistic directorship of Giles Havergal, Philip Prowse and Robert David MacDonald, had established for itself a reputation for bold aesthetic experimentation.

In the early 1970s the company had set about an audacious and at times radical programme of classic texts, adaptations and translations from the European repertoire. The company had reinvented the very idea of regional repertory theatre in Britain.

Nevertheless, and despite their growing international reputation, some critics were surprised to see the Citizens' dare to make such an explicit parallel with the most important ballet company of the twentieth century. But the paralleling of the two companies, although of great significance, is not a clear and direct mapping; instead it is a metaphorical one that deliberately and wittily layers re-interpretations, side-ways glances and deep respect.

MacDonald's play would be a demanding choice of text for study within the Advanced Higher curriculum, not least because, as this bibliography shows, there is only a limited amount of secondary and critical material available on the Citizens' and Scottish theatre. There is no published essay or article on the play, and but passing reference to it in a handful of books.

However, I think that *Chinchilla* would also be a very rewarding choice, particularly suitable for Unit 3 of the curriculum which, after all, asks that the play be used to elicit creative and practical responses. With this in mind I would suggest that there are ample resources of a different kind that would both contextualise and illuminate the play, as well as challenge students' acting, directing and/or designing skills. If teacher and student are willing to attempt a different kind approach then *Chinchilla* can act as a wonderful case study for dramaturgical investigation, a remarkable starting point for study into the nature of theatre, performance and art.

This bibliography begins with references the published works of MacDonald; also collating the available published critical resources. Then, under the broad heading of **Historical and cultural sources**, I contextualise the play with a selection of other written, visual and musical sources. This includes reference to –

- the Citizens' itself,
- the Ballet Russes and its repertoire, including
- Claude Debussy's *Prélude à L'Après midi d'un faune* (1894; ballet premiered 1912) and *Jeux* (1913),
- Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913) and *Apollon Musagète*(1928), and
- Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912).

The bibliography also references some resources in terms of **Ideas and interpretations** and so includes references to debates around –

- performing gender,
- gay and queer theatre, and
- camp.

An awareness of these references and texts will add to and challenge readings of *Chinchilla*.'

GETTING STARTED

'I hardly know where to begin. Wherever I look. Perhaps the panoramic view would be rewarded.' – Chinchilla in MacDonald, *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 109.

The study of *Chinchilla* and of Robert David MacDonald begins with textual study.

To this end this section lists –

- **Published editions of *Chinchilla***
- **A select list of published editions of Macdonald's other original plays, adaptations and translations**

I stress that the bibliography includes only *published* sources as much of MacDonald's output – including *Camille* (1974), *The De Sade Show* (1975) and the 1999 adaptation of *Death in Venice* – remain unpublished.

Published editions of *Chinchilla*

Robert David MacDonald, **Three Plays: *Chinchilla*, *Webster* and *Summit Conference*** (London: Oberon Books, 1991) ISBN 1 870259 25 4.

This is certainly the preferred edition for any serious study of the play. On the one hand because it remains in print with MacDonald's publisher – the highly accessible and approachable Oberon Books (see below for contact details). On the other, because the volume contains two other examples of MacDonald's original plays – *Summit Conference* (1978) and *Webster* (1983) – as well as a hugely useful introductory essay.

Summit Conference is set in summer 1941 and is a dramatised account of the meeting of Clara Petacci and Eva Braun, the mistresses of Mussolini and Hitler, while *Webster* imagines the career of the Jacobean playwright John Webster in the context of a chaotic and often self-seeking theatre company. Like *Chinchilla* both these plays were written for the Citizens' and, like *Chinchilla*, both deal in challenging and unexpected ways with themes of –

- art and artists,
- ageing and youth,
- sex and desire,
- friendship,
- ensemble and collaboration, and
- classical allusion.

It is also the case that all three plays *seem* to depict real people and are in some sense historical dramas.

MacDonald's 'Introduction' to the volume is also enormously useful: it is filled with wit and irony. It sets all three plays very firmly in the context of the creativity of the Citizens', in particular, highlighting the role of Philip Prowse as director and designer.

The 'Introduction' is full of challenging ideas and useful commentary. It should be enjoyed with a pinch of salt –

'[Chinchilla] was written when the Citizens' Company had been in existence for seven years, that notorious period which makes people restless for change, and is a sort of balance sheet of the aesthetics of running a theatre. I chose a ballet company as the basic metaphor since ballet is an art about which I know little and appreciate less; as a higher form of the gratuitous, it has for me only one rival, cricket. '

– Robert David MacDonald, 'Introduction' to **Three Plays**, p. viii.

Contacting Oberon Books

Address: 521 Caledonian Road, London, N7 9RH. Telephone: 020 7 607 3637

On line: Oberon Books is also on line at <http://www.oberonbooks.com/> and you may order directly from this site.

A Decade's Drama: Six Scottish Plays (Todmorden: Woodhouse, 1980) ISBN 0 906657 06 7.

This anthology of plays also includes *Chinchilla*. Although some teachers may have a copy of this volume from student days, the edition itself is now out of print.

Nevertheless, the volume remains useful because it contextualises *Chinchilla* in relation to other new Scottish work of the 1970s. So the collection also contains –

- Stanley Eveling, *Mister* (1970)
- Hector MacMillan, *The Rising* (1973)
- C P Taylor, *Walter* (1977)
- Stewart Conn, *Play Donkey* (1977)
- John Byrne, *Threads* (aka *The Loveliest Night of the Year*, aka *Cuttin' a Rug* (1976))

The volume was published alongside a series on BBC Radio Scotland that produced thirteen important Scottish plays of the 1970s. Further information might be found in the following –

A Decade's Drama: Thirteen Plays from the 1970s (Glasgow: BBC, 1980) No ISBN.

It is interesting that in the immediate context of 1980 *Chinchilla* was included in a radio series and published edition that celebrated contemporary writing in Scotland. Since then the play has been sadly neglected by critics and commentators and its place within the vibrant context of theatre in Scotland in the 1970s has been ignored.

This points to a question that is implicit in any study of MacDonald's work and *Chinchilla*: if the play is such a challenging and innovative and entertaining play, why is it so marginalised in histories of both Scottish and British drama?... why there are such limited resources available?... why have critics not chosen to engage with it?

Chinchilla was also published in 1977 in two editions of the theatre magazine **Plays and Players** (ISSN 0006 7448) –

- act 1 of *Chinchilla* in **Plays and Players** v 24, n 9 (June 1977), pp. 39-50; and
- act 2 in v 24, n 10 (July 1977), pp. 43-50.

Secondary material on reading plays

Teachers might also find the following of use in preparing to study a play text –

Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis, **Studying Plays** (London: Arnold, 1998) ISBN 0 340 70571 X.

A select list of published editions of Macdonald's other original plays, adaptations and translations

But theatre dates so quickly and so badly....

– Liovka in MacDonald, *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 124.

Original plays

Robert David MacDonald, **The Ice House** (London: Oberon Books, 1998) ISBN 1 84002 030 X.

MacDonald's most recent original play, it is a dangerous chamber piece. Its seemingly conventional setting and characters masks a sexuality and a style that will be familiar from MacDonald's other plays. *The Ice House* makes key thematic links with *Chinchilla* as it deals with ideas of –

- art and artists,
- criticism and the philosophy of art,
- ageing and youth,
- sex and desire,
- friendship and collaboration, and
- classical allusion.

Adaptations

Robert David MacDonald, **In Quest of Conscience** (London: Oberon Books, 1994) ISBN 1 870 25955 6.

An adaptation based on Gitta Sereny's book *Into that Darkness*. It is an astonishing record of harrowing interviews with the Treblinka concentration camp Kommandant, Herr Stangl, who speaks with horrifying banality about his part in the Nazi extermination machine.

This adaptation links with –

- MacDonald's *Summit Conference*
- MacDonald's translation of Rolf Hochhuth, *The Representative*

Translations

Macdonald is an internationally renowned translator. His work on Schiller and Goethe has been particularly celebrated, and he is one of the few British translators to work consistently on the Italian playwright Goldoni.

Goethe, **Faust: Parts One and Two** (London: Oberon Books, 1988) ISBN 1 870259 11 4.

_____, **Tasso** (London: Oberon Books, 1994) ISBN 1 870259 44 0.

Carlo Goldoni, **Plays One: *Mirandolina* and *The Housekeeper*** (London: Oberon Books, 1994) ISBN 1 870259 48 3.

_____, **Plays Two: *Don Juan, Friends and Lovers, and The Battlefield*** (London: Oberon Books, 1997) ISBN 1 870259 37 8

Rolf Hochhuth, **The Representative** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963). No ISBN.

_____, **The Representative: A Christian Tragedy** (London: Oberon, 1998) ISBN 1 870 25939 4.

The Representative is MacDonald's translation of Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* a play that was premiered in a production by Erwin Piscator in Berlin in 1963.

The 1963 Penguin edition is now out of print, being replaced by the Oberon edition. However, if you can find a Penguin edition in a library or second-hand book shop you will find that it contains wonderfully rich, if rather dense, secondary material including –

- a preface,
- an essay giving historical commentary and background information, and
- a variant to act five.

The Oberon edition contains an updated preface and bibliographical references.

Also of relevance is –

Claude Schumacher and Derek Fogg, eds., **Hochhuth's *The Representative at the Glasgow Citizens'*, 1986** (Glasgow: Theatre Studies Publications/Goethe Institute, 1988) ISBN 0 951 35950 9.

This is a text-book example of how to contextualise a play and a production through historical contextualisation, political debate, interviews and performance analysis.

The Representative links with –

- MacDonald's *Summit Conference*,
- MacDonald's adaptation of *In Quest of Conscience*,
- The Citizens' production of MacDonald's translation of *Judith* in 1984, and
- the Citizens' 1983 production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

Pirandello, **Enrico Four** (London: Oberon, 1990) ISBN 1 870 25921 1.

Friedrich Schiller, **Five Plays** (London: Oberon Books, 1998) ISBN 1 870 02036 9.

Secondary material on translation and adaptation

The following might suggest ways of discussing issues of translation and the adaptation of novels for the stage –

David Johnston, ed. **Stages of Translation: Essays and Interviews on Translating for the Stage** (Bath: Absolute Classics, 1996) ISBN: 0 948 23075 4.

Peter Reynolds, ed., **Novel Images: Literature in Performance** (London: Routledge, 1993) ISBN 0 415 09103 9.

CONTEXTUALISING *CHINCHILLA*

Production context -- The Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow

This company is founded on the talents of every man and woman working in it, coming together to create something none of them could have conceived, let alone achieved, on their own. That is a miracle we pull off more times than we have the right to.

– Chinchilla in MacDonald, *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 137.

Chinchilla is a play that MacDonald wrote 'on order' to Philip Prowse who both directed and designed it for the Citizens' in 1977.

There are a number of published sources relevant to a study of *Chinchilla* in relation to the Citizens' –

Michael Coveney, **The Citizens': 21 Years of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre** (London: Nick Hern, 1990) ISBN 1 854 59038 3.

This is the most important text for studying *Chinchilla*, telling the story of the Citizens' under the artistic directorship of Havergal, Prowse and MacDonald. It also contains a very useful interview with MacDonald in which he reflects upon his practice and the context of the Citizens'. Note that this volume was published in 1990 and is now a little out of date, obviously not including reference to more recent work at the Citizens'.

Other key Citizens' related sources, arranged in descending order of relevance for the study of *Chinchilla*, are –

Giles Havergal, **Choosing Plays: The Conditions of Artistic Choice at the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow, 1969-1985**. The James Arnott Memorial Lecture, Tenth World Congress of the International Federation of Theatre Research, September 1985. (Dundee: Lochee Publications, 1985) ISBN 0 947 58420 X.

Jan McDonald, **What is a Citizens' Theatre?** Proceedings of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow new series n1 November 1984. ISBN 0 947 58403 X.

David Hutchison, 'Glasgow and its Citizens'' in **Scottish Theatre since the Seventies** edited by Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 57-64. ISBN 0 748 60781 1.

Cordelia Oliver, **Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, Robert David MacDonald and German Drama** (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1984) ISBN 0 906 47442 6.

Jan McDonald and Claude Schumacher, eds., **The Citizens' Theatre Season: Glasgow 1990** (Glasgow: Theatre Studies Publications, 1991) ISBN 0 951 35951 7.

Cordelia Oliver, **Magic in The Gorbals: A Personal History of the Citizens' Theatre** (Aberdeen: Famedram Press, 1999) ISBN 0 905 48955 1.

On-line resources

- The Citizens' own rather beautifully designed web site includes a brief history and biographies along with some photographs. You can also book tickets for the Citizens' Theatre on line – **<http://www.citz.co.uk/>**
- 'Citzsite' is a kind of 'unofficial' Citizens' site. It is the work of a New York-based fan. It can be a bit of a hit and miss affair but it is still an extraordinary resource, full of information, comment and images that certainly captures something of the style of the company –
<http://members.aol.com/citzsite/citz/citzinfo.htm>
- The Scottish Arts Council site includes information as to subsidy, policy and links to other cultural resources in Scotland and beyond –
<http://www.sac.org.uk/>

Production context -- Theatre in Scotland

This company isn't a company, it's a snobbish clique parading their obsessions regardless of what anyone else may wish or think.

– Maxim in MacDonald, *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 137.

In studies of Scottish theatre since 1970 MacDonald generally gets a mention as one of the artistic directors of the Citizens. However, no critic has yet focused in detail on his contribution as a playwright. None the less the following, arranged alphabetically by author, will provide information and ideas about late twentieth century Scottish theatre, in particular allowing contextualisation to the theatre of the 1970s –

Alan Bold, **Modern Scottish Literature** (London: Longman, 1983) ISBN 0 582 49064 2.

Maria Di Cenzo, **The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990: The Case of 7:84 (Scotland)** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) ISBN 0 521 55456 X.

Joyce McMillan, **The Traverse Theatre Story, 1963-1988** (London: Methuen, 1988) ISBN 0 413 19250 4.

Donald Smith, '1950 to 1995', **A History of Scottish Theatre** ed. Bill Findlay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1998), pp. 253-308 ISBN 0 7486 6220 0.

Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace, eds., **Scottish Theatre since the Seventies** (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) ISBN 0 7486 0781 1.

Randall Stevenson, 'Scottish theatre, 1950-1980', **The History of Scottish Literature: Volume 4, The Twentieth Century**, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 349-67 ISBN 0 08 035057 7.

Stephen Unwin, Jenny Killick and Alan Pollock, eds., **The Traverse Theatre, 1963-1988** (Edinburgh: Traverse, 1988) ISBN &

Marshall Walker, **Scottish Literature since 1707** (London & New York: Longman, 1996) ISBN 0 528 02892 2.

Historical and cultural sources – The Ballets Russes

You, me and Vatz, at one stroke we have destroyed the whole of the old ballet and created something quite new, a male dancer who does more than stand around in wrinkled tights waiting to stop his partner from falling over, and a dance theatre in which to show him off.

– Chinchilla to Gabriel in *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 116.

Chinchilla uses and references the history, work and personalities of the Ballets Russes, the most influential ballet company of the twentieth century.

MacDonald allows that '*Chinchilla* is clearly based on Diaghilev, his company, his career' but also notes that that 'Most of the characters are amalgams of various people, and even that not consistently' ('Introduction' to *Three Plays*, p. vii). This qualification, insisting on the play and its characters as an imagined and created take on the Ballets Russes, is rather at odds with much of the critical and review material. Contemporary reviewers tend to insist upon the 'authority' of the piece and criticise it when it is not 'accurate' about the people and company involved.

Nevertheless, allowing that the piece re-imagines and re-sets the Ballets Russes it is important to think about the paralleling that MacDonald undertakes in which –

- Chinchilla is a version of Sergei Diaghilev,
- Vaska a version of the dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky,
- Maxim a version of the dancer and choreographer Leonide Massine, and
- Gabriel a version of the artist and designer Leon Bakst.

The following suggests a range of books that are based on these parallels and will provide ideas and resources for actors, directors and designers alike –

Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky* (first published London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971; third edition, 1980; paperback reissue, London: Phoenix Giant, 1998) ISBN 1 85799 984 3.

This is the only book that MacDonald references as a research source for his play and even then the reference is subtly tempered –

Most of the characters are, in fact, amalgams of various people, and even that not consistently. (Maybe it is worth pointing out that Tamara has nothing in common with Karsavina, a woman of great charm and distinction, by all accounts, including her own.) Most of the events mentioned are based on actual happenings, and the curious can check back in Richard Buckle's magisterial biography, the only book I read to supplement my memory; though they will find that the events often happen to people other than those they will think they can identify in the play. It illustrates a danger of research: if you are accurate on one point, you will get no thanks, but are trounced for not being accurate on all.

Anton Dolin, who appeared to identify himself, with ironic inaccuracy, with one of the characters, complained in the *New York Times* that Diaghilev was never known to smoke — a trait that has changed from production to production, depending whether it was played by a non-smoker or not — and had certainly never been known to ogle boys on the beach in his, Dolin's, company. I should think not, indeed.

MacDonald, '**Introduction**' to **Three Plays**, p. vii-viii.

The following provide useful textual and pictorial references to Diaghilev, Nijinski, Bakst and the Ballets Russes –

Arsène Alexandre, **The Decorative Art of Leon Bakst**. With notes on the ballets by Jean Cocteau. (New York: Dover, 1972) ISBN 0 486 22871 1.

Richard Buckle, **Diaghilev** (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993) ISBN 0297813773.

Adolf De Meyer, **L'Après midi d'un faune by Vaslav Nijinsky**. 33 Photographs by Baron Adolf De Meyer, with an essay by Jennifer Dunning, and contributions by Richard Buckle and Ann Hutchinson Guest. (London: Dance Books, 1983) ISBN 0 903 10278 1.

John Drummond, **Speaking of Diaghilev** (London: Faber & Faber, 1998) ISBN 0 571 19549 0.

Lynne Garafola, **Diaghilev's Ballet Russes** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; New York: Da Capo Press, 1998) ISBN 0 306 80878 1.

Lynne Garafola and Nancy Van Norman Baer, eds., **The Ballets Russes and Its World** (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999) ISBN 0 300 06176 5.

Elisabeth Ingles, **Bakst: The Art of Theatre and Dance** (London: Parkstone Press, 2000) ISBN 1 859 95499 5.

Vera Mikhailovna Krasovskaia, **Nijinsky** (New York: Shirmer, 1979) ISBN 0 028 71870 4.

Irina Nikolaevna Pruzhan, **Léon Bakst: Set and Costume Designs, Book Illustrations, Paintings and Graphic Works** (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1987) ISBN 0 670 81019 3.

Alexander Schouvaloff, **The Art of the Ballets Russes** (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997) ISBN 0 300 07484 0.

Alexander Schouvaloff, **Léon Bakst: Theatre Art** (London: Sotheby's, 1991) ISBN 0 856 67391 9.

Charles Spencer, **Leon Bakst and the Ballets Russes** (rev. ed. London: Academy Group, 1995) ISBN 1 854 90348 9.

Charles Spencer, with Philip Dyer and Martin Battersby, **The World of Serge Diaghilev** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) ISBN 0 140 05155 4.

Historical and cultural sources – Music

Sixteen years old and you have never been... to an opera? I am astonished.
– Chinchilla in *Chinchilla*, act 2, p. 160.

Chinchilla makes reference to number of important ballets created by the Ballets Russes, including –

- Claude Debussy's **Prelude à L'Après midi d'un faune** and **Jeux**,
- Igor Stravinsky's **The Rite of Spring**, and, in passing
- Carl-Maria von Weber's **Le Spectre de la rose**.

Some understanding of these ballets and musical pieces would enhance any study of *Chinchilla*.

I would suggest that teachers and students find out more about **Debussy** by –

- listening to audio recordings of Debussy's *Jeux* and *Prelude à L'Après midi d'un faune*.

This can be supplemented by reading –

Jonathan Brown, **Claude Debussy: An Essential Guide to his Life and Works** (London: Pavilion Books, 1996) ISBN 1 857 93972 7.

Roger Nichols, **The Life of Debussy** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) ISBN 0 521 57887 6.

Robert Orledge, **Debussy and Theatre** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) ISBN 0 521 22807 7.

Wendy Thompson, **Claude Debussy** (London: Faber & Faber, 1993) ISBN 0571512682.

Find out more about **Stravinsky** by –

- listening to audio recordings of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and *Apollon Musagète* – one of the Ballets Russes' last productions choreographed by George Balanchine in 1928.

And then reading –

Jonathan Cross, ed., **The Stravinsky Legacy** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) ISBN 0 521 56365 8.

Paul Griffiths, **Stravinsky** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) ISBN 0 460 86063 1.

Peter Hill, **The Rite of Spring** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) ISBN 0 521 62714 1.

Mina Lederman, ed., **Stravinsky in the Theatre** (New York: Da Capo, 1975) ISBN 0 306 70665 2.

Pieter C Van den Toon, **Stravinsky and *The Rite of Spring*: The Beginnings of a Musical Language** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) ISBN 0 520 05958 1.

Stephen Walsh, **The Music of Stravinsky** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) ISBN 0 198 16375 4.

_____, **The New Grove Guide to Stravinsky** (London: Palgrave, 2000) ISBN 0 333 80409 0.

Historical and cultural sources – Ideas of modernism

Maxim I am suggesting our work take some account of what is going on in the world. In Russia. Last year's revolution may have failed. Next year's won't.

Chinchilla Well, when it succeeds will be the time for the artist to go into opposition, where he belongs.

– MacDonald, *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 130.

The artists and the art discussed in *Chinchilla* are all part of the interdisciplinary aspects of modernism. Whilst the play itself is not part of this cultural movement I would suggest that some awareness of what the characters believe is at stake in their work, what they believe about art and about their place in cutting-edge cultural practice would be useful.

Christopher Butler, **Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe, 1900-1916** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) ISBN 0 198 18252 X.

Captures the interdisciplinary nature of modernism: the mixing of art forms, disciplines and artists that *Chinchilla* discusses.

Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., **Modernism, 1890-1930** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) ISBN 0 140 13832 3.

Although originally published in 1976 this single volume is still a useful guide to the various movements of modernism.

Michael Levenson, ed., **The Cambridge Companion to Modernism** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) ISBN 0 521 49866 X.

A useful anthology that introduces major literary genres, intellectual, political and institutional contexts, film and the visual arts of modernism.

Historical and cultural sources – *Death in Venice* – novella, film, opera

And because it is all too ecstatic, absurd, miserable, happy, horrible and holy to contain within myself, I will show what I love, and tell what I love, with ardour, style and impeccable bad taste, whether it is Utopia, or the death of kings, or simply those beautiful young men without whom my life is as dry as a nut; so that for a moment we can see them, created in our image, in the glare of arc lamps, as we should; beautiful, clever, wise, just and alive, and for that moment forget that we are ugly, crass, guilty, foolish and dying.

– Chinchilla in MacDonald, *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 141.

I would argue that *Chinchilla* is greatly influenced by Thomas Mann's great German novella *Death in Venice* (*Der Tod in Venedig*) first published in 1912.

The novella tells the story of Gustav von Aschenbach, a highly respected critic and artist who distractedly travels to Venice where he becomes obsessed by the beauty of a young boy. It is a story that reflects upon the role and nature of the artist, the nature of the abstract and the physical, as well as the role of the intellectual.

The novella exists in numerous English translations. A useful one is the following that also includes other short stories including *Tristan* and *Tonio Kroger* (both 1903), as well as an interesting introduction –

Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*. Translated and with an introduction by David Luke. (London: Minerva, 1996) ISBN 0 7493 8623 1.

In 1999 MacDonald adapted *Death in Venice* as a one-man piece for the Citizens'. The script remains unpublished.

To explore *Death in Venice* in relation to *Chinchilla* In addition I would suggest that useful reference might be made to other versions and adaptations of the novella.

Most obvious might be Luchino Visconti's 1971 **film** version of *Death in Venice*.

Visconti's film is certainly highly stylised, and perhaps rather mannered, but it is none the less fascinating in its depiction of Venice and Venice Lido, where, of course, *Chinchilla* is set.

The film famously stars Dirk Bogarde as von Aschenbach who, in this version, is a composer rather than the writer of Mann's original. This also allows the film to make evocative use of Gustav Mahler's *Third Symphony* and the *Fifth Symphony*, in particular, the fourth of its five movements, the Adagietto. The film is readily available in the UK on **video**. A viewing of the film might be supplemented by –

- listening to audio recordings of Gustav Mahler's *Third Symphony* and his *Fifth Symphony*.

And then reading –

Henry Bacon, **Visconti** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) ISBN 0 521 59960 1.

Another gay artist, Benjamin Britten, has used Mann's novella as the basis for a new work of art. His **opera** *Death in Venice* was premiered in 1973. Teachers and students might find out more by –

- listening to an audio recording of Benjamin Britten's opera of *Death in Venice*

And then reading –

Mervyn Cooke, ed., **The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 0 521 57476 5.

Paul Godfrey's **Once in a While the Odd Thing Happens: A Play from the Life of Benjamin Britten** (London: Methuen Modern Plays, 1990) ISBN 0413644804; reprinted in Godfrey, **Plays: One** (London: Methuen, 1998) ISBN 0 413 71880 8.

This more recent play is an interesting companion piece for *Chinchilla*. It is about Britten and his career and his relationships with his sister Beth and his lover Peter Pears, but it is also about the role of the artist and the nature of creativity.

In addition there are two versions of Britten's opera *Death in Venice* readily available on **video** in the UK: a 1990 Glyndebourne production; and a 1981 production featuring the English Chamber Orchestra.

Ideas and interpretations – performing gender

He has the body of a god, certainly; the mind of a peahen probably; the constitution of a steam-roller with luck; and... *perhaps*... the sense to do what he is told. But in the end he is the image Chinchilla wants, and when he dances it will be Us out there on the stage; overweight, balding, furtive, unattractive Us.

– Liovka in *Chinchilla*, act 2, p. 148.

In both a narrative and a thematic sense *Chinchilla* is concerned with the presentation of the body – generally speaking the male body – on stage. By extension the play is also about the presentation and/or performance of gender and, in particular, the idea and nature of masculinity.

These ideas – of the body on stage and of gender as something performed – are of frequent interest in contemporary theatre and performance studies.

A well-chosen reader – an edited collection of essays and abstracts on a clearly identified topic – is often helpful and focused way into this kind of theory-based work.

See, for example, the following anthologies on masculinity and the male body –

Laurence Goldstein, ed., **The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures** (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) ISBN 0 472 06597 1.

Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner, eds., **The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation** (Boston: MIT Press, 1995) ISBN 0 262 16154 0.

In addition you might consider consulting –

Lizbeth Goodman, with Jane de Gay, eds., **The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance** (London & New York: Routledge, 1998) ISBN 0 415 16583 0.

Although the focus of this volume is women's bodies on stage and feminist approaches, it does include a useful section on '**Gendering the bodies of performance and criticism**', pp. 163-86.

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds., **Literary Theory: An Anthology** (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) ISBN 0 631 20029 0.

A useful reader that includes a major section on '**Gender Studies, Gay/Lesbian Studies, Queer Theory**', pp. 675-774.

More specialised, but still useful in thinking through ideas of gender in performance, are –

Philp Auslander, **From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism** (London: Routledge, 1977) ISBN 0 415 15787 0.

Marvin Carlson, **Performance: A Critical Introduction** (London: Routledge, 1996) ISBN 0 415 13703 9.

Lesley Ferris, ed., **Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing** (London & New York: Routledge, 1993) ISBN 0 415 06269 1.

Marjorie B Garber, ed., **Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety** (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) ISBN 0 415 91951 7.

Janelle G Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach, eds., **Critical Theory and Performance** (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) ISBN 0 472 06458 4.

Calvin Thomas, **Male Matters : Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line** (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996) ISBN 0 252 02202 5.

Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, **Man Enough: Embodying Masculinities** (London: Sage, 1997) ISBN 0 761 95408 2.

Laurence Senelick, ed., **Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts** (Hanover, NH: Tufts University/University Press of New England, 1992). ISBN 0 874 51545 9.

Mark Simpson, **Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity** (London: Cassell, 1994) ISBN 0 415 90991 0.

Ideas and interpretations – gay and queer theatre

Betrayal is never worth it. I know it's the fashion now to sneer at [Oscar] Wilde, but only because he makes it all sound so easy. Particularly in England, where they like their art the hard way. That's why they like us so much, because they sense how difficult it is. They know that, backstage, ballerinas stink like horses. But Wilde did us all a great service. He made the whole business of art disreputable again. He down-graded the artist and up-graded the product.

– Chinchilla in *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 134.

Useful works in this field include –

Paul Burston and Colin Richardson, eds., **A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture** (London & New York, 1995) ISBN 0 415 09618 9.

An anthology offering queer readings of popular culture texts as well as focusing on overtly queer texts.

Corey K Creekmur and Alexander Dotty, eds., **Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture** (London: Cassell, 1995) ISBN 0 304 33488 X.

An anthology that demonstrates the evolution of gay and lesbian studies in the 1970s to more recent work in queer cultural studies.

Diane Fuss, ed., **Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories** (New York & London: Routledge, 1991) ISBN 0 415 90237 1.

A now classic anthology, with useful sections on '**Decking out: performing identities**', pp. 11-116, and '**Zoning In: Body/Parts**', pp. 203-88.

Laurence Senelick, **The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre** (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) ISBN 0 415 15986 5.

Senelick is one of the pre-eminent scholars writing on gay theatre, cross dressing and drag. This volume offers both an historical and international account of cross dressing.

Alan Sinfield, **Cultural Politics: Queer Reading** (London: Routledge, 1994) ISBN 0 415 10947 7.

Gay readings of key cultural texts including Shakespeare and Austen.

Less good, but sometimes more accessible, are –

Roger Baker, **Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts** (London: Cassell, 1994) ISBN 0 304 32855 3.

Ian Lucas, **Impertinent Decorum: Gay Theatrical Manoeuvres** (London: Cassell, 1997) ISBN 0 304 32797 2.

Carl Miller, **Stages of Desire: Gay Theatre's Hidden History** (London: Cassell, 1996). ISBN 0 304 32817 0.

Sean O'Connor, **Straight Acting: Popular Gay Drama from Wilde to Rattigan** (London: Cassell, 1996). ISBN 0 304 32864 2.

Alan Sinfield, **Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) ISBN 0 300 08102 2.

Ideas and interpretations – camp

We are five people who have known each other since before we all started
dying our hair.

– Chinchilla in *Chinchilla*, act 1, p. 140.

The play *Chinchilla*, like the Citizens' aesthetic, is often, and rather too easily, labelled 'camp'. But what does that mean? The following titles debate the idea, meaning and influence of camp.

Fabio Cleto, ed., **Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, A Reader** (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) ISBN 0 7486 1171 1.

A very useful reader that charts the development of the debate around camp from sensibility to radical queer politics. It includes the following key essays and extracts

–

- Susan Sontag, '**Notes on camp**' (1964), pp. 53-65.
- Richard Dyer, '**It's being so camp as keeps us going**' (1976), pp. 110-16.
- Andrew Britton, '**For interpretation: notes against camp**' (1978), pp. 136-42.
- Jonathan Dollimore, '**Post/modern: on the gay sensibility, or the pervert's revenge on authenticity**' (1991), pp. 221-36.
- Andrew Ross, '**Uses of camp**' (1988), pp. 308-29.
- Judith Butler, '**From interiority to gender performatives**' (1990), pp. 361-8.

Moe Meyer, ed., **The Politics and Poetics of Camp** (London: Routledge, 1994) ISBN 0 415 08248 X.

A useful anthology that is historical and interdisciplinary in perspective. See in particular –

- Moe Meyer, '**Introduction: Reclaiming the discourse of Camp**', pp. 1-22.
- Kate Davy, '**Fe/Male impersonation: the discourse of camp**', pp. 130-48.