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Haunted by *The Cradle Will Rock*: History and Adaptation in Jason Sherman's *It's All True*

It's All True (1999), Jason Sherman's play about the 1937 premiere of Marc Blitzstein's proletarian musical *The Cradle Will Rock*, brings together two central elements of Sherman's work: historically-based political theatre and adaptation. In choosing to dramatize the events leading up to the opening night of *The Cradle Will Rock*, Sherman stages an iconic episode in the history of American political theatre that resonates with current concerns about state funding for the arts and uses it to construct a debate about the social function of theatre today. *It's All True* exemplifies the complex nature of adaptations: it is not only "haunted" by its numerous sources; it is also productive, giving new life to them through appropriation, most notably to *The Cradle Will Rock* itself. Although, due to copyright restrictions, *It's All True* uses neither Blitzstein's music nor his lyrics, *The Cradle Will Rock* is a ubiquitous presence in Sherman's play, providing an alternative structure focusing on proletarian heroes rather than celebrities, including gender in its political analysis, and eschewing a linear narrative in favour of an exposé of the circumstances leading up to the celebrated opening night of Blitzstein's legendary music drama.

It's All True *(1999), la pièce de Jason Sherman sur la première de la comédie musicale prolétaire* The Cradle Will Rock *de Marc Blitzstein en 1937, réunit deux éléments centraux de l'œuvre de Sherman : le théâtre politique s'appuyant sur des faits historiques et l'adaptation. En choisissant de donner une forme dramatique aux événements menant à la première de* The Cradle Will Rock, *Sherman met en scène un épisode iconique de l'histoire du théâtre politique américain qui trouve écho dans les préoccupations actuelles à l'égard du financement des arts par l'État et l'utilise pour construire un débat sur la fonction sociale du théâtre aujourd'hui.* It's All True *exemplifie la nature complexe de l'adaptation : non seulement est-elle « hantée » par ses nombreuses sources, mais elle leur donne une nouvelle vie en se les appropriant – c'est le cas, notamment, de la pièce* The Cradle Will Rock. *Des restrictions liées aux droits d'auteur font en sorte qu'on ne retrouve dans* It's All True *ni la musique ni les paroles de Blitzstein, et pourtant* The Cradle Will Rock *est omniprésente dans la pièce de Sherman. Elle lui fournit une*

structure peu conventionnelle qui met l'accent sur des héros prolétaires plutôt que sur des célébrités, intègre la question du genre dans son analyse politique et évite la narration linéaire en faveur d'un exposé des circonstances menant à la célèbre première de la légendaire comédie musicale de Blitzstein.

It's All True,[1] Jason Sherman's play about the "runaway" 1937 premiere of Marc Blitzstein's proletarian musical *The Cradle Will Rock* (Houseman 274), brings together two central elements of Sherman's work: historically based political theatre and adaptation. History plays a significant role in a number of Sherman's polemical plays, among them *Three in the Back, Two in the Head* (1993), *Reading Hebron* (1995), and *None is Too Many* (1997). As well, many of his plays are adaptations, whether in the sense of a work based on an acknowledged source or in the more complete reimagining identified by the term "appropriation" (Sanders 26), a process that produces, in the words of the fictional author of the preface to Sherman's collection of adaptations, *Adapt or Die*, a work that is "more than an adaptation and yet less than one; a new play made from an old one" (iii).[2] In choosing to dramatize the events leading up to the opening night of *The Cradle Will Rock*, Sherman stages an iconic episode in the history of American political theatre that resonates with current concerns about state funding for the arts and uses it to construct a debate about the social function of theatre today. "The basic argument," he states, "is about what the most effective way to do theatre is, so that it becomes a social tool" (qtd. in Connolly). Although Sherman was refused permission to incorporate either Blitzstein's words or his music into *It's All True*, the play is not only a fictionalized re-enactment of theatre history, but also an "unmarked" (Stam 30) appropriation of *The Cradle*. While the lyrics and songs ostensibly from *The Cradle* are actually clever pastiches, Blitzstein's work contributes substantially to the structure and characterization of *It's All True*, shaping Sherman's distinctive approach to the legend of *The Cradle*'s first production.

It's All True exemplifies the complex nature of adaptations: it is not only "haunted" by its sources, "palimpsestuous," to use a term borrowed by Linda Hutcheon from Michael Alexander to describe the conspicuous intertextuality of adaptations (Hutcheon 6); it is also productive, giving new life to its sources through appropriation. In *A Theory of Adaptation,* Hutcheon eloquently

characterizes the generative power of adaptations in opposition to the prejudice against them as "inferior and secondary" (4):

> An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep the prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise. (176)

Hutcheon also uses a suggestive evolutionary metaphor to describe the productive function of adaptation. She writes of "narrative adaptation" as a "process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment [. . .]: Stories [. . .] like genes [. . .] adapt to [. . .] new environments *by virtue of* mutation" (31-2). Diana Taylor provides an additional, suggestive framework within which to think about adaptation in her critique of Joseph Roach's concept of surrogation, in the context of a discussion of cultural memory and trauma. The process of surrogation, whereby, according to Roach, culture "reproduces and re-creates itself" by "attempt[ing] to fit satisfactory alternates" into "the cavities created by loss" (2), is, in Taylor's interpretation, an "act of substitution" that "erases the antecedent" (57). As an alternative model of cultural transmission, she proposes a "strategy of doubling and staying the same" (60), which is particularly useful for understanding the adaptive processes operating in *It's All True*, with its proliferation of doubles.

The process of adaptation is unusually complicated in *It's All True*. The play is densely "palimpsestuous" and structurally multilayered. Its primary antecedents are Blitzstein's expressionistic "music drama" and its legendary opening night. *The Cradle Will Rock*, the "love-child" of the "arts of Music and the Play" according to Orson Welles (Preface 14), dramatizes the opposition to unionization in "Steeltown, U.S.A.," pitting the union organizer Larry Foreman against the factory owner Mr. Mister and his "Liberty Committee," made up of representatives of the town's middle class, all of whom have been corrupted by Mr. Mister and his wife, Mrs. Mister. The work begins on a street corner where the streetwalker, Moll, is accosted by a potential customer and is arrested when she will not give the Dick a free sample of her wares. The action quickly moves to the night court that is the play's principal setting, where the entire Liberty Committee is also incarcerated, having been arrested at the union rally along with Larry Foreman. The climax is the confrontation between Larry and Mr. Mister, who tries to buy his cooperation. The defiant Foreman

proudly rejects the boss's bribe and predicts the triumph of the union movement in the stirring reprise of the title song: "when the wind blows… / The cradle will rock!" (Blitzstein 150).

The first night of *The Cradle* became "[o]ne of the most famous performances in the history of the American Theatre […]" (Witham 213). The production was staged by Project #891, the company that Welles and John Houseman had been permitted to set up within the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), the theatrical relief component of the Roosevelt administration's Works Progress Administration (WPA). Welles was the director, Houseman the producer. The production's fame derives from the WPA's attempt to prevent it from opening, along with other productions in rehearsal during June 1937, while the WPA prepared for massive anticipated budget cuts. As Barry Witham points out in his article on the circumstances surrounding the production, "many saw it as a blatant attempt to censor the politically explosive Blitzstein opera" (213-14). Labour unrest was widespread in 1937 and attempts to organize steelworkers had resulted in violent clashes between workers and the police, climaxing in the deaths of ten strikers at the Republic Steel plant in Chicago, on Memorial Day, 30 May 1937 (see, for example, Robinson 8-10). As a result, Blitzstein's music drama had become both highly topical and potentially embarrassing to the FTP, which had to defend itself against allegations that it promoted communism. Its provocative reputation has become part of its legend (Witham 214).[3] According to Houseman's account of the premiere,

> [w]hat Hallie [Flanagan, the director of the FTP] had taken, in mid-February, for a dynamic piece of Americana had turned, by early June (with the WPA in turmoil and steel strikers on the front page) into a time bomb that threatened to bring the entire project tumbling about her head. (254).

In the event, Welles and Houseman refused to comply with the order not to open. Prevented by padlocks and guards from using the theatre in which they had been rehearsing—or the sets, props, or costumes—and by the musician's and actor's unions from involving any of their members in an alternate performance, they rented another theatre, the Venice, encouraged the assembled audience to attend, and staged the premiere on 16 June 1937 on a bare stage with Blitzstein performing the score on the piano while most of the original performers sang their roles from seats in the auditorium.

It's All True is set during the two days prior to the opening of *The Cradle Will Rock*, beginning on the morning of 15 June 1937 in the Maxine Elliott Theatre, where *The Cradle* is being rehearsed, and ending on the evening of 16 June at the Venice Theatre as its premiere performance begins. The "present" action of *It's All True* takes place during the final rehearsals of *The Cradle*. The play begins just as Blitzstein learns from Welles and Houseman that the opening of *The Cradle* will be postponed on orders from the WPA; the scenes set in the present focus on Welles's and Houseman's eventually successful attempts to open anyway. Most of *It's All True* is devoted to flashbacks, though: we are shown Blitzstein meeting Welles backstage after the latter's performance as Faustus and their subsequent agreement, over dinner at the 21 Club, to collaborate; the casting of Howard da Silva, who will play Larry Foreman, and Olive Stanton, who will play Moll; the disintegration of Welles's marriage during the rehearsal period; and the torturous rehearsals themselves, in which Stanton's shortcomings as a performer are mercilessly exposed, and Blitzstein, Welles, and da Silva argue vehemently for opposing production concepts, with Welles championing theatrical "magic" and elaborate and impractical sets, while Blitzstein and da Silva advocate the kind of bare-stage, Brechtian staging that *The Cradle* eventually received, thanks to the last minute move to the Venice in defiance of the WPA's edict.

This complex script was developed by Sherman in collaboration with the Necessary Angel Theatre Company, which staged the first production at the Tarragon Theatre from 31 December 1998 to 7 February 1999. In the program, Richard Rose, the director, described the production's development:

> What does it take to write a new play? Over twenty drafts; three years; […] months, if not years of research; […] the synchronicity of writing, directing and acting disciplines surging into one intense moment […].
>
> Writing a new play is a collaborative journey at Necessary Angel. From the beginning, *It's All True* by Jason Sherman has been explored by an ensemble of theatre artists: actors, designers and director.

Sherman, in an interview published shortly after the opening of *It's All True*, commented on the contribution of the Necessary Angel actors to the delineation of their characters, noting that he "built" the da Silva character "entirely from what Martin Julien [who played da Silva] brought into the room. And to one degree or another, that's true across the board" (qtd. in Connolly).[4]

Rose's staging added another layer to the evocation of the historical event on which the play is based through a quasi-environmental use of the Tarragon Theatre Mainspace that placed much of the action in the auditorium, transformed by designer Charlotte Dean into a "lovingly recreated [. . .] old vaudeville house" (Taylor, Kate). For most of the play, the Tarragon stood in for the Maxine Elliott theatre with much of the action taking place in the midst of the audience; when the action moved to the Venice, the Tarragon audience stood in for the spectators of *The Cradle*'s opening night, with the singers rising from their seats among them to perform the opening scene. Although I saw this production, I will be focusing on the published text and how it adds yet another layer of complexity to the adaptation, thanks to the shadow presence of *The Cradle* as a model.

The Playwright's Notes to *It's All True* list Sherman's numerous sources. They include Houseman's vivid first-person account in *Run-Through*, which Sherman characterizes as "the most thorough and authoritative description of the events in the play," Welles's "unproduced screenplay" about the production, and Simon Callow's biography *Orson Welles*, *The Road to Xanadu*, which, in addition to providing "Welles's description of the death of his mother, [...] quoted verbatim" in Sherman's play (Playwright's Notes), contributes a picture of Welles's grandiose plans for staging Blitzstein's "taut, gritty worker's opera [. . .] like a Broadway musical" (Callow 293) and his frenetic, exhausting rehearsal process that are echoed in Sherman's representation of the event. In many respects, the play that Sherman constructs from his sources reproduces familiar theatrical legends and scenarios. The focus is on the famous protagonists, an emphasis increased by Sherman's revisions after the first production. In revising the play Sherman gave "Blitzstein and Welles [. . .] more stage time," as he explained in an interview with Larry Loebell, "eliminating everyone and everything that had no affect on these two men" to prevent them from being "overwhelm[ed]" by "details." The focus on the "main characters" reduces the earlier version's exposition of historical context and its substantial female presence: appearances by Hallie Flanagan and Welles's mother, Beatrice, are cut; and Blitzstein's deceased wife Eva, who acts as his spectral conscience, has less dialogue. The outcome is a more conventionally structured play centred on celebrities, which reviewers agreed was clearer than the original play (see Coulbourn; Al-Solaylee).

The famous characters of *It's All True* are represented through their established personae. Welles is the Faustian "magician" that

he was in his own screenplay based on the episode and in his personal myth (see Robbins 55), a troubled, self-proclaimed "[f]ake" (Sherman, *IAT* 113) who seduces Blitzstein with his friendship and the promise to "make magic" through theatrical spectacle, despite Blitzstein's preference for "simplicity" and professed hatred for "sentiment" (Sherman, *IAT* 27, 41). The fictionalized Blitzstein is a mass of contradictions: a homosexual trying to exorcise the memory of the dead wife to whom he was devoted, an enemy of "sentiment" who always carries her ring and whose proletarian opera is her monument, a privileged socialist with no understanding of working people or unions. This Welles and Blitzstein are both tortured artists, whose deep personal conflicts are embodied in the dead women—Eva and Beatrice—who haunt them, leading more than one critic to complain of this evocation of "*Citizen Kane*'s Rosebud, twice warmed over" (Cushman, "It Simply"; see also Taylor, Kate). Houseman is portrayed as Welles's appendage, their rapid-fire dialogue variously evoking a vaudeville act[5] and bickering spouses who finish each other's sentences. The process of theatre-making in which all three are engaged, represented as founded on personal anguish for all concerned, is also easily recognizable: not without reason did one reviewer see *It's All True* as an example of "the kind of familiar, semi-fictionalized showbiz stories that invariably make up a good theatrical yarn" (Jones).

More inventively, Sherman has reinscribed this story as a debate about the process of making theatre in the twentieth century, pitting Blitzstein's vision of his work as "an agitprop piece" (Connolly) against Welles's advocacy of theatre as spectacular entertainment. Blitzstein believes that his "theatre will wake people up [. . . ,] [i]t will help them understand the way the world works" (Sherman, *IAT* 59) and lead to social change. Welles, more interested in the opportunities for spectacle that he sees in Blitzstein's work than in its content or characters, argues that an audience needs to be entertained by theatrical "magic" before they can hear Blitzstein's message. Regaling Blitzstein with his grandiose vision of *The Cradle*'s climactic political demonstration, complete with "the stage [. . .] tilting and rocking, the whole damn theatre [. . .] rocking, the audience [. . .] knocked out of their seats," he concludes:

> they're standing. . . and they, they've heard you, your message, only they don't realize they've been given a message, because they're so damned entertained by it all, and now, now they're

> ready to rush out there and tear down those fucking walls, baby, and there's your revolution, there is your revolution. (Sherman, *IAT* 31)

Although Blitzstein initially allows himself to be seduced by Welles's production concept, which featured sets on wagons pushed around the stage by the actors as well as a "[f]orty-member Negro chorus" and a "30-piece orchestra" (Sherman, *IAT* 22-3; cf. Callow 293), he eventually aligns himself with the Brechtian staging whose advocate in Sherman's play is the actor cast as Larry Foreman, in the play within the play: Howard da Silva. "We ain't doing no opera here," da Silva proclaims:

> This is street theatre. No fancy sets, costumes, none of that rigmarole. All we need is one guy at the piano, and the rest of us in our street clothes.[…]
>
> Let's admit the truth for once, that we're all just a bunch of people, and that we have come here tonight to figure out something about ourselves. Some of us are on stage, and some of us are not, but we are a group –that is something you get in the theatre and you can't get nowhere else. (Sherman, *IAT* 27)

Thanks to the intervention of the WPA, this is, of course, how *The Cradle* was eventually performed. Asked by Loebell about Welles's view of theatre as being "like a magic trick," Sherman replied, "I gave Welles that argument not because I believe it, but because it's the dominant force in American and Canadian culture […]. Welles argues that art which does not also entertain is deadly," Sherman continued, "and that I agree with; the problem with that argument is that it often hides its true agenda, which is to snuff out dissent of any kind, to ensure that art is free of meaningful discourse."

In dramatizing this ideological conflict and the "showbiz" story within which he has embedded it, Sherman had to deal with being denied the rights to include Blitzstein's music (Houlihan; see also Friedlander). Ironically, although Sherman in the end used neither Blitzstein's music nor his lyrics, *The Cradle Will Rock* is a ubiquitous presence in *It's All True*, providing an alternative structure focusing on proletarian heroes rather than celebrities, including gender in its political analysis, and eschewing a linear narrative in favour of an exposé of the circumstances leading up to the climactic moment.

The most obvious way in which *The Cradle* is present in *It's All True* is in the score and the lyrics, which evoked the original sufficiently that two auditors of the first production asserted that the

original was being quoted (Taylor, Kate; Connolly). Don Horsburgh's music recalled both Weill and Blitzstein: "[f]or all anybody knows," Sherman commented, "these songs sound like they came straight from 'The Cradle Will Rock' or any other pro-labor musical from the 1930s" (qtd. in Houlihan).[6] Two lyrics are featured, which allude to, but do not reproduce two of the iconic songs of the original: Moll's opening number in which she describes her struggle to subsist, "I'm checkin home now," and Larry Foreman's climactic "The Cradle Will Rock." The latter, like Larry's associated dialogue, is paraphrased in Sherman's text (see for example 25, 90-1, 110), but in Moll's original, thematically resonant song in the spirit of the hardboiled prostitutes of *Threepenny Opera*, "Are you the man I'm going to love, tonight?", she describes herself as the "cursed" descendent of a sailor and a gypsy and invites Larry (instead of the anonymous "Gent" of the original) to "Just be as real, real as you feel / and I will too" (49).

The temporal structure of Sherman's play also echoes that of Blitzstein's. *The Cradle* is structured in imitation of Clifford Odets's labour classic, *Waiting for Lefty*, with a present-time action that is interrupted by numerous flashbacks explaining the dynamics of the climactic present-tense situation. *It's All True* similarly has a dual time scheme. As indicated earlier, the present is 15-16 June 1937, climaxing in the beginning of the performance at the Venice theatre. This action takes up five out of the play's nineteen scenes; the remaining fourteen scenes (that is, nearly three-quarters of the total) are flashbacks that take us from the first meeting between Blitzstein and Welles to Houseman telling Welles about the arrival of the cable informing the company that they will not be allowed to open. While the function of these flashbacks is expository, in both plays they also put intense emphasis on the present moment. The present-time action emerges as the climax of a complex process freighted with the issues and meanings, both personal and ideological, that have been developed in the flashbacks.

The Cradle Will Rock also suggests parallel, shadow identities for Sherman's protagonists, adding an additional layer of meaning to his play. The historical characters of *It's All True* are constructed to resemble some of the characters in *The Cradle*: sometimes the similarity is made explicit; sometimes it is only implied. There are a couple of candidates for the role of the boss, Mr. Mister. Houseman's wealthy background and his opposition to a strike by the cast to protest the WPA's actions lead da Silva to label him explicitly "a real regular Mr. Mister" (Sherman, *IAT* 95). But it is

Welles who more actively embodies the character in his early confrontation with da Silva over how *The Cradle* will be staged, when he admonishes the actor to "learn to keep your station" and defer to Welles as director (Sherman, *IAT* 28). Welles's unhappy wife, Virginia, sees herself in Mrs. Mister, "that silly society woman [...] who loves to be surrounded by artists" (Sherman, *IAT* 59) and confirms the appropriateness of the identification by trying to pick up Blitzstein. As this scene, set at the fashionable "21 Club," suggests, Blitzstein runs the risk of becoming an artist-prostitute like the painter and violinist in *The Cradle*, a fate against which Eva has warned him, asking if what he wants is "the life of a provincial artist, taking in the shekhels [*sic*] and 'believing' in yourself" (Sherman, *IAT* 39). Sherman's fictional version of the historical da Silva implicitly resembles Larry Foreman in being a proletarian defender of workers' (in this case, actors') rights, and, especially, in being the boss's, that is Welles's, antagonist. Although Blitzstein agrees with him, da Silva is the principal opponent of Welles's staging ideas and Blitzstein's self-appointed aesthetic and political conscience. Unlike the incorruptible Foreman, however, da Silva is a hypocrite, delighted to eat oysters with Welles and Blitzstein at "21" and eager to condemn Odets and George Kaufmann as "sell-out[s]," as long as they are out of earshot (Sherman, *IAT* 25-6). Finally, Sherman's version of Stanton resonates with her role in Blitzstein's play: Moll.

Sherman's Stanton is an example of the use of historical fiction to recover "lost or repressed voices" (Sanders 140). Little is known about the historical Stanton beyond her involvement in the 1937 production of *The Cradle*. The main source of information about her is Houseman's account of the premiere in the first volume of his memoirs, where he identifies her as a relief worker and an "inexperienced performer" who had been cast only because "we had already exceeded our non-relief quota" of performers; who was "wholly dependent on her weekly WPA check," which was at risk because of her participation in this unauthorized performance; and who "held no political views whatsoever." He recalls the "emotions of gratitude and love" that "we" felt when she stood up in her seat at the Venice and sang the opening lines of *The Cradle*, and he quotes Hiram Sherman, who played Reverend Salvation and Junior Mister, crediting Stanton with giving the others "the courage to stand up and carry on" (Houseman 268-9). A memoir of the production written by Tony Buttitta, at the time an FTP publicist, reported that Welles "told her he did not want a brassy or hard-boiled girl for the part [...]. He

wanted just an ordinary American girl driven to sell her body because of the Depression" (Buttitta and Witham 139). Welles also "liked" her, according to Stanton, "because he said I could take direction—and I do exactly what he tells me" (qtd. in Buttitta and Witham 140). In his interview with Loebell, Sherman explains that Houseman's account of the premiere led him "to make Olive the hero" of his play:

> [. . .] Olive Stanton, and the dozens of other actors and musicians who sat in that audience tearing themselves apart over whether or not to take part [in the unauthorized opening night], they represent the forces of change. And Olive, in particular, stood out among all the others. She was apolitical, says Houseman [. . .]. [S]he didn't want any part of the fight, yet she found herself in the middle of one, and, as one of the other actors wrote later, if Olive Stanton hadn't stood up, it's doubtful the rest would have as well.

This unlikely "hero" is largely fictionalized: Sherman gives her a husband and three children, all dependent on the "twenty-three-sixty-eight" she makes a week as an FTP relief worker (Sherman, *IAT* 32-3), circumstances that she cites to explain her reluctance to get involved in political demonstrations, and he invents an affair between her and da Silva. The paralleling of Sherman's characters with those in *The Cradle* contributes to Stanton's prominence in *It's All True*: his characterization of Stanton echoes Moll in Blitzstein's work. The most significant similarity between Sherman's Stanton and Blitzstein's Moll is their shared function as the initially naïve, exploited outsider who is educated, along with the audience, in the operation of the corrupt societies that victimize, in different ways, both Stanton and Moll.

Stanton is the battleground for the artistic dispute at the centre of Sherman's play. She is cast only as a last resort; she is considered for the role of Moll only because she is "the least worst" of the auditioners, as Welles puts it, and Houseman will not try to get yet another exemption from the WPA to employ a non-relief performer for the part (Sherman, *IAT* 34). Blitzstein adamantly opposes hiring Stanton for a variety of reasons: because of her failure to participate in the strike by the Brooklyn FTP Unit to protest the impending WPA cuts, which he interprets as "cowardice" (Sherman, *IAT* 35); because, ironically, he thinks that she cannot believe in or understand the role of a woman "who's been exploited by men all her life" (Sherman, *IAT* 35); but most essentially because he needs to "stay true" to the dead Eva, who inspired

the work, which precludes the hiring of this "simple-minded girl" (Sherman, *IAT* 41). Welles reconciles him to this casting choice by asking, "wouldn't Eva want you to teach her?" (Sherman, *IAT* 41). This dispute sets the terms for Stanton's position in the action of *It's All True*: as the patronized representative of the working class, who is perceived to be in need of instruction and who in the course of the rehearsal process experiences all too immediately what it is like to be "exploited by men." The artistic aspect of the conflict that becomes focused on her is also established at the outset, when Houseman asserts, in response to Blitzstein's claim that Stanton will not "believe what she's saying," will not "understand it," that "[t]hose are two different things" (Sherman, *IAT* 35).

Welles's is the first to attempt to "teach her," but as he describes her character's attitude toward the man she is soliciting, it becomes clear that he is talking about himself and his relationship with his mother: "You're afraid that, if you give yourself to someone, for anything but money, that someone will disappear, vanish forever, no matter how much you'd wish she'd never left" (Sherman, *IAT* 50). Da Silva is next, in a flashback in which he attempts to get her to take a Method approach to the role, asking her first to "think about a time in your own life [. . .] when you felt lost." When this does not produce results, he suggests, ominously, that she "think about how you'd feel if, if you was to lose me," a suggestion that reduces her to tears (Sherman, *IAT* 67-8). Back in rehearsal, Blitzstein unhelpfully attempts to coach her in Brechtian acting, informing her that "[w]e don't want you to feel the emotion of the song" because "you're not playing a real person" (Sherman, *IAT* 68). It is nevertheless Blitzstein who suggests to Welles the Methodish "wicked idea" (Sherman, *IAT* 76) that eventually delivers the performance for which they have been looking: Welles advises da Silva to break off his affair with Stanton, rather than see her fired, on the grounds that it will allow her to experience her character's disillusionment (Sherman, *IAT* 79). As Stanton, thanks to da Silva's compliance, finally "gets" her lyric, "that's okay, honey/ just pretend you love me [. . .]," Blitzstein cynically congratulates Welles: "Well done. Magician" (Sherman, *IAT* 81).

Stanton again exposes the bad faith of the men who hold the power in the company on her next significant appearance, as Welles, da Silva, and Blitzstein are celebrating their plan to perform despite the WPA and the unions. Speaking for the actors, da Silva announces "we're saying screw the government [. . .] and screw the unions" (Sherman, *IAT* 116) when Stanton steps forward to explain that she's "walking" because she can't afford to lose her job

and what it will cost her not to participate: "My whole life I've been waiting for the chance to do something I could be proud of, to stand up and do something where people could see I was good. […] I think I was good, and it kills me to have to walk away from it. […] Don't hate me, alright?" she asks Blitzstein, "You don't have to hate me. I got enough of that myself for the both of us" (Sherman, *IAT* 117-18).

When she nevertheless bravely stands up to sing her opening number, as history requires, this moment of triumph and "camaraderie" (Sherman qtd. in Loebell) is profoundly ironized. Her lyric—"the whole damn bunch of us are cursed… are cursed… are cursed!"—when juxtaposed with Welles's curtain line, "Magic" (122), becomes a metatheatrical reminder of the manipulation and anguish that underlies this iconic moment. Her lines, and her experience, are an indictment of the theatrical "[m]agic" that Welles claims we are witnessing. The result is a sceptical perspective on this legendary episode in American theatre history that embodies its contradictions in a gestic climax: not a celebration, like the jubilant performance represented in Tim Robbins's 1999 film on the same subject, *Cradle Will Rock*, but a bitter reminder of the unequal power relations and coerced sacrifice that underpin Welles's brand of theatre. Welles and Blitzstein provide a "dialectic" (Friedlander) that brings together art and politics, but Stanton exposes the oppressive conjunction of gender, class, and privilege that underpins their debate. In his interview with Loebell, Sherman argues that unless the history represented in the theatre "is more or less similar to something going on in our own time, no one is going to take anything away from it, except a souvenir program." *It's All True*, metatheatrically named for Welles's never-completed, pseudo-documentary of the same name, conflates history and adaptation to produce a work both true and "not all true" (Sherman, Playwright's Notes) that addresses things "going on in our own time," including still current opposing theatrical philosophies and contemporary themes of gender and power, egotism and victimization.

It's All True, like the adaptations anthologized in *Adapt or Die*, dramatizes this episode of theatre history through Sherman's "sensibility" (Sherman, *Adapt* iii). It embodies many of the distinctive characteristics that Urjo Kareda attributed to Sherman's work in his introduction to *Jason Sherman: Six Plays*: "bold juxtapositions of past and present, the shackling together of very dissimilar personalities and the frequent separation between intention and behaviour"; "an arsenal of brilliant theatrical rheto-

ric"; a "pervasive instinct for irony"; and "the unshakeable resolve that only responsible behaviour will save us," combined with "few illusions about how difficult it is for the individual to behave well in a world with too many seductions" (ii-iii). Sherman's thorough appropriation of the historical event and, thanks to copyright restrictions, Blitzstein's work, incorporating both into a play that is distinctively his, points to the fundamental issue of the relationship between an adaptation and its source, wittily evoked by Hutcheon through the image of the "vampiric" adaptation that "draw[s] the life-blood from its source and leave[s] it dying or dead" (176).

This attitude to adaptation appears in a review of the Lyric Stage Company of Boston's production of *It's All True*, in which Suzanne Bixby argued that the "disquieting" absence of Blitzstein's music and libretto from Sherman's play inadvertently "serves [...] to diminish Blitzstein's place among American's [*sic*] valued theatre composers."[7] Yet, as this paper has demonstrated, Blitzstein's work is re-presented in numerous ways in *It's All True*. *The Cradle Will Rock* is made present through processes of adaptation and appropriation that generate two "doubles" (Taylor, Diana 60) which extend, but do not replace—let alone diminish—Blitzstein's work: the first, the music drama within the play; the second, Sherman's play itself. *It's All True* perpetuates and amplifies Blitzstein's music drama by using *The Cradle* and its history as a vehicle for the exploration of current issues, re-inscribing them in a play that takes some of its essential components from Blitzstein's work at the same time that it embodies both Sherman's distinctive style and his ongoing concerns about "the place of the arts in society" (Houlihan), "the relationship between public creation and private behaviour" (Taylor, Kate), and the challenge of behaving ethically in complex circumstances.

Notes

1 This paper discusses the revised version of the play, published in 2000 by Playwrights Canada Press. This edition will be cited in the body of the article as Sherman, *IAT*. Reference is also made to the chapbook version published by PUC Play Service at the time of the premiere in January 1999.

2 This description refers to the Chekhovian *After the Orchard* (2005). In addition to the plays in *Adapt or Die*, Sherman's adaptations include *An Acre of Time* (2001) and his retelling of the story of Job in *Patience* (1998). History and adaptation meet in both *None is Too Many*, based on the book about Canada's anti-Semitic immigration

policies during the 1930s and 40s by Irving Abella and Harold Troper, and its successor, *Remnants (A Fable)* (2003), which reworks material from the earlier play by fusing it with the biblical story of Joseph.

3 As Witham's article demonstrates, it does not seem that the WPA order was intended to censor *Cradle*. The intent of the order is debated in *It's All True*, with Blitzstein adamantly asserting that it is directed specifically at his work (Sherman, *IAT* 7).

4 In addition to Julien, the cast included Victor Ertmanis as Welles, Tom McCamus as Blitzstein, Richard Binsley as Houseman, and Melody Johnson as Stanton (among others, including Eva Blitzstein). Johnson's memorably tough performance has undoubtedly influenced my view of Stanton as a strong, pivotal character despite her victim status.

5 Houseman describes himself and Welles addressing the audience at the Venice "like partners in a vaudeville act" (266); in *It's All True*, Blitzstein sarcastically suggests that they "take this act on the road when this is all done" (Sherman, *IAT* 42).

6 Robert Cushman, who wrote liner notes for a 1998 compilation CD of Blitzstein's "Musical Theatre Premiers," was not among those who thought Horsburgh's pastiche was genuine Blitzstein (see Cushman, "It Simply").

7 When TimeLine Theatre of Chicago produced *It's All True* in May/June 2004, it compensated for this absence by also presenting three concert performances of *The Cradle Will Rock* as "a companion piece" ("TimeLine").

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