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**The Difference Between Boys, Girls, and Otherwise: Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*
as Queer Dramaturgy**

A Thesis Presented

by

Elizabeth Sager

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

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The Graduate School

Elizabeth Sager

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Fine Arts degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

Steve Marsh – Thesis Advisor
Lecturer and Director of Graduate Studies, Theatre Arts

Elizabeth Bojsza – Second Reader
Lecturer and Graduate Teaching Mentor, Theatre Arts

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis is based on the project I completed for my Master's degree, which was split into two parts: translation of Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* from German to English, and the presentation of this translation as a production. In order to endow further meaning on the controversial play, I sought to undermine the audience's expectations of sex and gender by using cross gender casting and other production values in order to cause an audience to question their expectations of the gender binary and the societal expectation for men and women to adhere to prescribed gender roles. This thesis first traces the inspiration for the project and factors that led to my interest, methodology used in translating the play and casting for the gender bent production, and its overall effectiveness.

Dedication Page

Thanks and love to my parents and family, who have supported me even when they thought dramaturgy was something I was making up. Thanks to my circle of friends, both near and far, who did more handholding and cheerleading than anyone can reasonably be asked to do.

Thanks to everyone who was part of the production: my stage manager Christina Lydy-Mills who was a godsend, Caitlin, Eric, Molly, Andrew, Eileen, Shan, Becky, Chris, Victoria, Megan, Shelly, and Alina who breathed life into the characters, technical helpers Kevin and Andy, and Peggy Morin who consulted on costumes and the borrowing thereof. This project belongs to them, too.

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Chapter 1

Spring Awakening has been a constant itch in my brain for five years. Like a lot of people my age, my first experience with the material was through the Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik musical. In the summer of 2007, I read the play, and then I read it again. Even though I was an undergraduate theater major at the time, I hadn't had a lot of experience with "Isms" or how to read literature of the particular movements. I spent a lot of time processing the action of the play, and interpreting or reinterpreting the subtext. Even today, after engaging with several different translations of the play, including my own in performance, I am constantly finding new meaning in the text.

Learning more about Frank Wedekind helped. Knowing his background of gymnasium school in Switzerland, a troubled relationship with his father, and that *Spring Awakening* is only the first play in a large, controversial body of work illuminated things considerably. Disdainful of Naturalism and too early for "official" German Expressionism, he occupies a lonely space in theatre history, but at the same time there's the feeling that he would not have been comfortable any other way. Wedekind paid for *Spring Awakening* to be published himself in 1891 when he could find no publishing company willing to take on the risk, and when it was performed for the first time, directed by Max Reinhardt at the Berlin Kammerspiele in 1906, it could only be presented in a cut down version.¹ It wasn't even until 1974 that the play was able to be performed in its entirety, and as recent as 1991 a production of the play was cancelled because of sexual content.²

Spring Awakening takes place in a small town in 1890's Germany, focusing on three teenagers: Wendla, a naive but curious girl whose mother keeps her sheltered, Melchior, an

¹ Peter Skrine, *Hauptmann, Wedekind, and Schnitzler* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 76.

² Judith Levine, "Kids," *The Nation*, January 8, 2007.

intelligent boy whose permissive mother has allowed him to philosophize himself into cynicism, and Melchior's friend Moritz, who is emotionally intelligent but does poorly in school. Melchior helps Moritz in school as well as educating him in matters of a sexually reproductive nature. He also reconnects with Wendla, a childhood friend, as he questions her selfless nature and she searches for the answers her mother will not give her. Their experimentation culminates in Melchior raping Wendla, while Moritz fails out of school and is driven to suicide because of it. In order to preserve reputation in polite society, Melchior is made into a scapegoat, expelled by the school and sent to a reformatory by his parents. He escapes from the reformatory, only to find out that Wendla has died (presumably of anemia -- actually from a botched abortion). Moritz reappears to him, tempting him into committing suicide, but another, mysterious figure known as the Masked Man interrupts and convinces Melchior to embrace life.

The play treats issues which continue to be serious and real for modern day audiences: sex between teenagers, rape, child abuse, abortion, and homosexuality to touch on the explicit ones. The play's overt message about the dangers of not educating our children was less than subtle, but one we were due for.³ But this still doesn't explain its enduring popularity. There have been stumble blocks and lackluster productions (a 1955 Off-Broadway production was called "an unpleasantly graphic museum piece"⁴), but what keeps us coming back to *Spring Awakening*? I suppose, as with all things that are a matter of taste, it varies from person to person. I'm amazed that I consistently feel such a strong sense of empathy for these characters. So much of what Wedekind writes, even in the best of translations, could be played as overwrought and melodramatic, inviting ridicule of the teenaged characters. But rather than

³ Deborah R. McFarlane, "The Alchemy of Abstinence-Only Education: Will the New Study Be Sufficient to End It?", *The Journal of Public Health Policy* 29, no. 3 (2007): 376, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4498973>.

⁴ Arthur Geld, "Theatre: Dated Sermon," *New York Times*, October 10, 1955.

dismissing them, the audience feels for these children. Pain is not reasonable or relative at that age -- it is absolute.

In this way, I think *Spring Awakening* does more than challenge a society that is repressed and so afraid of the consequences of sex they cannot bear to speak of it. It challenges the superiority of the "parentocracy" as a matter of course.⁵ The parents have the power, yes, but do they have the respect to wield their authority effectively? Their portrayal suggests not. The adults range from well-meaning but constrained to malicious or ridiculous in action, which leaves them ineffective, unsympathetic to an audience, and at worst harmful to the children who are in their care. I am not the first to think this; in 1968 Friedrich Rothe wrote that the sexual question of the play was secondary, and that "the work is an illustration of the system of bourgeois repression in the institutions of family, school, church, and reformatory."⁶

The play also questions the value of knowledge itself. Melchior has the knowledge of reproduction, but not from good, sensible talk he had with his parents. By his own admission, he has the information from "books and illustrations, but mainly observations in nature."⁷ His own mother, Frau Gabor, lampshades the problem when she says, "I just wanted to point out that even the best things may have harmful effective if you don't have the maturity required to properly process it."⁸ The issue has become the reaction to the knowledge rather than possessing it. Possessing the knowledge has not made Melchior any more careful with it. He behaves recklessly and despite the knowledge he possesses, has a very immature outlook on relationships and more than one life is destroyed or violently altered because of his immaturity.

⁵ Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik, *Spring Awakening* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2007), 46. Clearly a word made up by Melchior, but one that gets his frustrations with the absolute authority of parents and adults in general across splendidly.

⁶ Friedrich Rothe, *Frank Wedekinds Dramen: Jugendstil und Lebensphilosophie*, as quoted in Ward B. Lewis, *The Ironic Dissident: Frank Wedekind in the View of His Critics* (Camden House, 1997), 11.

⁷ Frank Wedekind, *Spring Awakening*, trans. Elizabeth Sager (2011), 8.

⁸ Ibid 25.

Because of my interest in queer dramaturgy, it was only a matter of time before I looked at the play through a queer studies lens, and applied the text to breaking down the gender binary as well. I saw the potential for subverting the audience's expectations of the men and women on stage -- both characters and the actors themselves. Showing the audience a man played by a woman or vice versa creates a disconnect and throws them off. A variety of techniques would be employed in order to execute this effectively, but the root of the concept laid in my interest in social justice activism.

The definition of "social justice" is hard to pin down precisely, because many people of all different philosophical systems have different definitions and criteria. To me, social justice means creating an equal playing field for all people regardless of age, sexuality, gender, creed, class, race, disability, etc., not only by legislation to mandate things like education programs for minorities or otherwise disadvantaged groups, but by being mindful of behaviors and speech that oppress others, such as perpetuating rape culture by blaming victims, or using a gendered insult like "bitch" or a homophobic one like "fag."

An active interest in feminism beyond the image of hairy, bra-burning women and oft-quoted statistic about the wage gap between men and women led to an interest in queer issues, and feminist/queer theatre followed.⁹ I became interested in the portrayal of female and queer characters, and how it had changed over time. Even though my interest grew, I was forced to acknowledge my privileged position -- while I am a woman, I identify as straight and cisgendered (my biological sex [woman/girl] matches my gender [female]) and this sticks me pretty firmly in the "ally" category of queer activism. Part of being a good ally is knowing when to say something, and when to sit down, shut up, and wave your flag. I struggled for a time with

⁹ While "queer" is a term that some LGBTQIA individuals and groups have rejected because of its pejorative, oppressive connotations, others on all points of the spectrum have reclaimed it and use it proudly. When I use it, I use it respectfully and in good faith to include the wide range of individuals on the LGBTQIA spectrum.

this -- what do I have to add to the discussion on queer dramaturgy? Am I going to be called onto the metaphorical carpet for speaking about oppression that I have not personally experienced? I determined that the instinct to please everyone would have to be quashed while remaining respectful.

The idea for translating *Spring Awakening* came about after the idea for a genderbent production. I was reading through one of my translations when I was thinking about putting that concept on it -- the stratified, strict culture of Wilhelmine Germany seemed to put Victorian England to shame, and the idea of undermining that with using the theatre's proud history of cross dressing and the relatively modern politicization of cross dressing, which has come to be known colloquially as "genderfuck" was intriguing.¹⁰

In addition to wanting to try out this concept, I missed directing. I've always had a flirtation with directing. The problem was that since our budget was limited if we used an existing translation, then we would have to pay for performance rights. Besides, which translation would we use? All five of the translations I have read (five of them: Francis J. Ziegler, 1917, Eric Bentley, 1960, Tom Osborne, 1969, Edward Bond, 1979, and Jonathan Franzen, 2007) had elements that I liked, but none stood out to me as the one that we *had* to do. Ziegler was rather archaic, having been written at the beginning of the last century. Bentley is solid but stiff in places: Wendla and Melchior's first meeting in act one, scene five contains dialogue like:

MELCHIOR: ... I shall write a treatise and send it to Pastor Skinnytum. He's the cause of it all. How he drools about the joys of self-sacrifice! -- If he can't answer me I shall stop going to catechism class, I shall refuse to be confirmed.

WENDLA: Why hurt your parents like that? Go through with your confirmation. It won't cost your head. If it wasn't for our horrid white dresses and your long pants it could even be something to get excited about.

¹⁰ Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 246.

MELCHIOR: There's no such thing as sacrifice! No such thing as unselfishness! -- I see the virtuous rejoicing and the wicked trembling and groaning -- I see you, Wendla Bergmann, shaking your curls and laughing, and I can't join in because I feel like an outlaw!¹¹

Osborne and Bond are both quite British in their translations, which can be alienating to an American audience as well as lend it some European authenticity. These translations tend to be a bit more on the reserved side. The same passage as above in Osborne reads:

MELCHIOR: ... I'm going to write an essay about it and send it to Pastor Hirsute. He started me off on this, with all his talk about the joys of doing good works. If he can't give me a satisfying answer then I refuse to go to his confirmation classes.

WENDLA: You'd only upset your parents. It won't do you any harm to be confirmed. We'll both be confirmed at the same time. It could be fun, even in our terrible white dresses and your baggy trousers.

MELCHIOR: There is no such thing as self-sacrifice. There is no such thing as unselfishness. People are good because they enjoy it, otherwise they do it because they're scared stiff... You, Wendla Bergmann, do what you want and shake your locks and laugh -- and it makes me feel -- as if I'm an outlaw...¹²

The difference is subtle, but there. Franzen's translation reads quite coldly and rather more like someone who is pleased with himself for even completing the project. Sometimes things read different to the point that I'm not sure the original meaning hasn't been lost:

MELCHIOR: ... I'm going to write a treatise and send it to Reverend Bleekhead. He's the cause of all this. The trash he feeds us about the joy of *self-sacrifice!* -- If he can't give me an answer, I'll stop going to Sunday school and I won't get confirmed.

WENDLA: Why make things miserable for your mother and father? Just get confirmed; it's not going to kill you. If there weren't those awful white dresses for us and those trooper pants for you, a person might even be able to get excited about it.

MELCHIOR: There's no such thing as sacrifice! There's no such thing as selflessness! -- I watch the good people enjoying the warmth of their hearts, I watch the bad people trembling and groaning -- I watch you, Wendla Bergmann, shaking your curls and laughing, and it makes me feel as stone sober as an outcast...¹³

¹¹ Frank Wedekind, *Spring's Awakening*, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2002), 24.

¹² Frank Wedekind, *Spring Awakening*, trans. Tom Osborne (London: Calder and Boyars Limited, 1969), 28.

¹³ Frank Wedekind, *Spring Awakening*, trans. Jonathan Franzen (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2007), 25.

Poet Ted Hughes also has a translation, published in 1996, but I have not read this one. With five English translations out there (six if you count the musical), it probably begs the question: does the world really need one more *Spring Awakening* translation? I am telling you that yes, it does.

I make no presumptions about motivations, education, or artistic intent of the gentlemen involved in translating the play before me. But the fact is that they are all males, presumably white, and in their later thirties (at the very least!) when working on their translations. I know little and less about most of their personal lives, but surely there is room for one more take on the material. My point of view is unique as a young, female artist. It was only a decade ago that I was the age of the students in the play, and as a woman I don't receive the same benefit from society at large that a man will.

I have the distinct advantage of being a devoted student of history as well as theatre. This has, I think, given me a unique ability to view pieces such as this both inside and outside of their historical context -- not only what it means to us today, but also what it meant in the time it was originally written/produced and what it tells us about that society. For instance, one of the reasons that none of the current translations satisfied me was the way the children spoke. It was, at times, overly formal, stiff, and came off as false. Now, to a certain point, this is to be expected given the period. As explored in Matt Wolf's documentary *Teenage*, based on the eponymous book by Jon Savage, there was no such thing as a teenager in the late 19th century, not as we know the idea today.¹⁴ One was either an adult or a child, and even children were treated and expected to behave as miniature adults. The children's speech comes off as an attempt to sound grown up, like they've been taught, but if one is not careful then they all start to sound the same.

Individual characters must be taken into consideration. For instance, Melchior is hyper intelligent and disillusioned. He is no longer buying what society is trying to sell him. I feel like

¹⁴ Matt Wolf, "Director's Notes," *Teenage*, accessed June 3, 2012. [http://teenagefilm.com/film#Director's Notes](http://teenagefilm.com/film#Director's%20Notes).

he can be afforded a little more freedom in his speech with both peers and adults. His friend Moritz, on the other hand, is trying so hard to be the perfect child for his parents and never achieves the same freedom as Melchior, except after his death. He is also more prone to heightened, poetic language regardless of the company he is in, whereas none of the other schoolboys are so unless they are alone. By the same token, Wendla goes between two poles. She is the perfect specimen of young womanhood: sweet and obedient, but she also has a dangerous streak in her that cannot be ignored. I was not interested in modulating Wedekind's dialogue, so that as Jonathan Franzen said: "an English-speaking actor has some hope of sounding natural while speaking."¹⁵ As much as possible, I wanted the dialogue to be unique to each character and understandable on a visceral level, even if it may not make sense from a strictly academic viewpoint. In the German each character has similar patterns of speech, and when translating into English, I made an effort to maintain individualism as will be discussed in the next chapter.

I had a very strong reaction to the stiff, unforgiving world of the play. Each character -- men, women, children (further split, boys and girls) -- has rules of decorum to follow, and the punishment for stepping out of line is severe. I look at this society, and I recognize it. Like Frau Gabor, who is told "women are not qualified to judge" and told she is not taking her son's lapse in judgment seriously, I am part of a broken system that would rather make me play with a fixed deck than get fixed itself. Men are privileged over women and children, and being a woman is a shameful thing. When a man is not performing to societal expectations of manliness, he is called a "pussy" -- because a woman is less valuable and less capable than a man.¹⁶ A woman, however, is sometimes praised for exhibiting masculine qualities, such as level-headedness (as opposed to

¹⁵ Jonathan Franzen, introduction to *Spring Awakening* by Frank Wedekind, trans. Jonathan Franzen (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2007), xvii.

¹⁶ The same can be said for calling this same man a "fag." There is, in fact, a lot of misogyny tied up in homophobia.

a woman's irrational emotionality) and scholarly accomplishments (rather than womanly accomplishments). Even though we may not actively think it so today, these are viewed positively because it is a woman aspiring to a higher level -- that is, to be a man. Some of the oldest beliefs allow for this, stating that a woman was little more than an incomplete male.¹⁷ If a woman should be reaching *too* far, however, and upsetting the status quo, such as Joan of Arc, then it became a problem to be tamped down. Otherwise, it was an urge deemed normal enough, "not unlike the desire of a peasant to become a lord."¹⁸ Understanding these inequalities is the first step to pointing them out, and fixing them.

These are things that occupy my mind, as a woman going about her daily life. I am constantly paying attention to how I present myself, and how others, particularly men, perceive me. Were I gay or trans, there would be other issues lurking in the back of my mind. But men or women, gay or straight, our society is obsessed with shaming us for our sexuality. A crucial step in correcting the privileging of one way of being over others is to throw into question how these standards are even set in the first place, and why they are seen as the ideal. This was what I sought to put on stage, and what I wanted my audience to be inspired to examine for themselves. Using my translation of Frank Wedekind's play *Spring Awakening* and theatrical conventions such as cross gender casting and doubling, I sought to undermine the audience's expectations of sex and gender as well as highlight the harm done by pressure to adhere to societal expectations, and particularly prescribed gender roles.

¹⁷ Bullough 76.

¹⁸ Ibid 67.

Chapter 2

My first translation project was in the eleventh grade. Though somewhat less sophisticated than an entire play, the task was to retell a fairytale in Spanish using our own words. I had chosen *Little Red Riding Hood* -- also known as *Caperucita Roja*. It was easy enough -- after all, how much deviation can there be, talking about *abuela's ojos, nariz, and dientes?* -- but there was still a challenge to it. The Big Bad Wolf became *el lobo grande y terrible*, which is a mouthful and a bit clumsy. I would face a similar challenge in translating *Spring Awakening*; I would have to take a play in a foreign language full of complex ideas and beautiful imagery, and turn it into something similarly elaborate and elegant in English.

To start, I found the German text of *Spring Awakening* (*Frühlings Erwachen*) available online at the German Project Gutenberg, which is home to the largest electronic collection of German literature.¹⁹ To the best of Gutenberg-DE's knowledge, all text is in the public domain.²⁰ Satisfied that I would not get my backside handed to me in the form of a cease and desist letter, I began to work on the text, using a combination of a good old fashioned German-English dictionary, the bits and pieces I was (and am) learning from Rosetta Stone and German grammar books, including gems such as *Teach Yourself German* (Paul Coggle and Heiner Schenke) and *Nice 'n Easy German Grammar* (Isabel Willshaw). I also used Google Translate and online resources such as dictionaries and even once a message board of native speakers.

While *Spring Awakening* has definite "main" characters, there are also secondary characters like Frau Gabor, Melchior's schoolmates Hänschen and Ernst, and the ethereal but troubled Ilse, who have storylines and change through the course of the play. Other characters

¹⁹ The play is available in its full German text here: <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/2611/1>

²⁰ In the German: Alle Bücher im Projekt Gutenberg-DE sind nach unserem besten Wissen frei von Urheberrecht. (<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/information>)

are tertiary, more device than character, but they must also be individuals rather than a Greek chorus, one body made of many voices.

For example of tertiary characterization, consider the schoolboys. Aside from Melchior, Moritz, and the two named in the last paragraph, there are four more: Robert, Georg, Otto, and Lämmermeier. The last of these appears in only one scene but is mentioned in another, and the first three appear in three scenes, and they are all always as reaction for the characters driving the action; commenting on occurrences rather than perpetrating them. They each have distinct personalities just like the primary characters. Wedekind has not reduced his characters to archetypes or principles with only designations like "Father, Mother, Husband, or Wife" for names in the script -- this would later become a quality of Expressionistic drama, and picked up by Bertolt Brecht to be used in service of his alienation effect.²¹ All I had to do was make sure that once I'd found the characterization of a given school boy, I stuck to it faithfully.

While I have never had the honor of being a teenaged boy, having them all in scenes together made the task somewhat easier. When you have one character soliloquizing, you can keep them in character and show some of their qualities, but in conversation with others is where it will really start to show other aspects of their character. In act one, scene four, the personalities really begin to shine when boys begin to be boys. Otto is a wonderful example. Whereas other boys are fretting over Moritz sneaking into the teacher's conference room and are obsessing over whether he was or was not caught, he is a bit more laid back. He only speaks a couple of times before Moritz's entrance, and one is a laconic response:

LÄMMERMEIER: He's got the devil in him.

GEORG: The Rector probably left the key in the door.

ROBERT: Or Moritz made a lockpick.

²¹ J.M. Richie, *German Expressionist Drama* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), 15.

OTTO: I'd believe that.²²

He has more smart remarks in his pocket and is not afraid to use them. When Moritz reveals that his promotion is only provisional and he has to compete with Ernst for the spot, he replies, "I'll bet you five marks you don't get the place." The boys deride Moritz's claim that he would have shot himself if he were not to be promoted, and Otto seals his wisecracking status with, "I would like to see you try and shoot anything" -- the implication being that Moritz would not be able to hit the broad side of a barn, let alone succeed at shooting himself.²³

Robert, however, individualizes himself in act three, scene two, Moritz's funeral. In what I can only describe as a show of adolescent male braggadocio, Robert insinuates that he had seen Moritz's body before the casket was closed. Even the circumstances of their friend's death has been kept tightly under wraps, because they all seem to be under the impression that he had hanged himself, rather than shot himself as he had promised to earlier:

GEORG: Did they find the gun?

ROBERT: Why? He didn't shoot himself.

ERNST: Did you see him, Robert?

ROBERT: Well. (Pause.) Who did see him?

OTTO: No one. -- they threw a sheet over him.

GEORG: Tongue hanging out?

ROBERT: And his eyes bulging out! -- No wonder they covered him up... I touched the rope! Besides, they always cover them up when they've been hanged.²⁴

By bragging that he saw the body, Robert perhaps seeks to increase his own popularity. Claiming to have seen Moritz's body would have certainly gotten be of interest to the other school boys, and ensure their careful attention as he answered those questions. When he asks the group who did see the body, he was clearly checking to see if he can get away with his lie.

²² Wedekind, trans. Sager 15.

²³ Ibid 17.

²⁴ Ibid 45-46.

The exception to tertiary characters having individualized personalities is undoubtedly the teachers. We meet a number of them -- seven, in fact -- and save for possibly Rector Sonnenstich, the headmaster and central head of the hydra, they are all interchangeable. They have names, but their names are not what we would consider real names. In German they look forbidding, but in translation the names are revealed to be as ridiculous as they are.

Knochenbruch is literally "bone break," and is translated in a number of different ways. Some texts use the translations as names, such as Jonathan Franzen, while others keep the German. I have chosen to keep the German because to English speaking ears the names sound more severe than their translations. It could be argued that using the translations would be a way to undermine their cruelty, but I felt that more would be lost than gained in that instance.

The teachers are all more or less the same, as they show in their moment on stage in act three, scene one. They are more concerned with the reputation of their school than they are for their students. This has shown to be the case from the very first, when Melchior relates the tale of poor Max von Trenk's death to his mother: "Today at noon Hänschen Rilow came from Max's deathbed to Rector Sonnenstich to tell him that Max had just died. 'So?' Sonnenstich says. 'Don't you still have two hours of detention to serve? Take this note to Caretaker Mach and take care of that. The whole class will attend the funeral together.'"²⁵ Their callous treatment continues not only in Melchior in making him the scapegoat for his friend's suicide, but also in their treatment of Moritz himself after his death. As they shake Rentier Stiefel's hand at the funeral, they tell him, "It is unlikely we would have been able to promote him for the next school year anyhow," and "Even if we had been able to promote him, he would have almost definitely been out next spring."²⁶ The complete lack of empathy is mind boggling.

²⁵ Ibid 25.

²⁶ Ibid 45.

Secondary characters have their peculiarities and particular patterns of speech as well. Even though she has one scene where in she makes her impact, Martha is an interesting case. She tells the story of her own abuse, but it is not a linear narrative:

"... Mama pulled me out of bed by my braid. So -- I fell on my hands on the floor. Mama prays with us every night... 'Just what I expected! Yes, exactly! -- That's right! At least she will never be able to blame her mother!...'... I laid on the ground and cried, and cried. Then my father came and -- rip, my nightshirt was torn. I run and stop at the door, Father yells, 'There you have it! She's going out in to the street.'"²⁷

We hear that she is beaten by her parents and made to do things like sleep in a sack, but regardless of the physical pain this may cause, the psychological damage that has been caused is revealed in how she says it rather than what she says. It comes out in fragments, the words of a girl who is too afraid to give away too many details. The one hint of a normal teenaged girl is her crush on the "soulful" Moritz Stiefel.

Ilse, like Martha, is drawn to Moritz, but in the last moments of his life. Also like Martha, she is a girl with no adults in her corner who has been used and abused. Rather than the source of acutely felt pain being her parents, Ilse runs away from home and spends time with the Bohemian residents of Priapia, an artist's colony in the city. Though we are told nothing about her parents and their life as a family, "neglectful" seems to be a fair appraisal. In Priapia, she associates with artists and musicians who paint her and otherwise give her attention of varying degrees that she is lacking elsewhere. She recounts one wild night at a tavern, where she was "so drunk it took them all to put me to bed."²⁸ The unfortunate implication -- one that I have amped up in this particular translation -- is that these men will pass around a fourteen year old girl as a

²⁷ Ibid 10-11.

²⁸ Ibid 37.

model and a lover; whether she is fully aware of it and downplays it or in denial for these particular fellows is not clear.

It does become clear, however, that she considers these men the lesser of a number of evils to which she has been exposed. When recounting to Moritz her story about Carnivale, she describes essentially being kidnapped and held hostage for two weeks by a man named Heinrich where she modeled for him and was raped. Heinrich does things like bring a gun to bed and point it at her before turning the gun on himself to manipulate her. While Martha tells her story in childish fragments, Ilse paints an almost frighteningly clear, poetic image of what happens to her with Heinrich: "He had a mirror on the ceiling over his bed, and it made the room look like a tower. When you looked up, you would see yourself in the sky, like an angel. You'd also see everything he was doing -- oh, God -- he would say, 'Good night, Ilse. You're beautiful when you sleep. Beautiful enough to murder.'"²⁹ She manages to escape one day when he leaves for absinthe, and is picked up by the police. She is in turn rescued from them by her friends in Priapia, and this, she declares is why she is loyal to them. She has no illusions about their nature, calling them a "pack of animals," but she claims she would not stay with anyone else, "even if the world was filled with saints and millionaires."³⁰

Once we see them together, though, we understand them a bit better. Each of the girls is introduced to the audience separately and has one scene in which to make an impression. They each appear once more, this time together, in the very last part of act three, scene two. Once the adults and schoolboys have paid their respects to Moritz and left the graveside, Ilse and then Martha rush on and leave flowers for their friend. Ilse then confesses that she has kept the gun and had in fact taken it off Moritz's body. Martha meets the news with her typical subdued

²⁹ Ibid 38.

³⁰ Ibid.

response, while Ilse is again, morbidly vibrant: "He must've really loaded it up good. The flowers were all red with blood and his brains were splattered all over the place."³¹ One gets the sense that while the two girls may have had limited interaction before Moritz's death, they now have a friend who can understand each other's pain.

The challenge did not come with main characters, however. It wasn't even the conversational dialogue of especially early scenes -- it was the longer speeches, the blocks of soliloquy and monologue that begin to make their appearance in act two. The first major instance is Hänschen's soliloquy as he masturbates to a postcard of Palma de Vecchio's "Venus," in act two, scene three. This scene has the potential to be deadly and turgid, and not to mention it was one chance to reveal some things about Hänschen that would not be shown in scenes with other characters. I also took it as an opportunity to play with the line between rape imagery and a dominant/submissive sexual fantasy. Given that the next scene, act two, scene four, is the scene in which Melchior rapes Wendla, I thought that it would be a wasted opportunity to do otherwise.

Wedekind himself invokes the idea. Hänschen's first line quotes Othello, "Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?"³² In Shakespeare's play, Othello is about to murder his wife, Desdemona, out of jealousy that has been manufactured by his supposed friend, Iago. He does this by suffocating her in their marriage bed just as she is about to turn in for the night. The intimate setting and method of homicide gives it all a definite patina of sexual violence, and by invoking this moment, Wedekind sets the tone for Hänschen's nocturnal mischief. The sexually violent tone is continued he claims to be committing his "seventh wife murder," and he paints the woman of the fantasy as a "temptress." Just as he is coming to his climax, the ante is upped as he

³¹ Ibid 48.

³² Ibid 31.

paints a picture of a woman who is resisting the sexual advance: "You press your knees together. -- Why now? When your fate is upon you? Show me any kind of life, and I will let you go. Lust, sympathy, anything. Don't you know it's your chastity that gives birth to my lust? Oh you cold, cold woman!"³³ The image that is created is one of refusal -- a refusal that Hänschen is not listening to. While this is only one example of the rhapsodic, Expressionistic soliloquies written for characters, it is a prime example of what I did as translator.

My methodology started with a straight translation from German to English, at which point I would adjust what could be a rather convoluted conversation according to character and tone of the scene. The aim was not only to tell an accurate and compelling story, but to maintain the meaning and poetry to the words, while sometimes taking care of enhance it.

³³ Ibid.

Chapter 3

It took me about eight months, from March to November 2011, to complete my translation. I spent seven taking the German and turning it into English, and the next month was spent tweaking details, rewording certain things, and general editing. I will probably still be fixing and fussing with this translation twenty, forty, sixty years from now, but I had finally deemed it acceptable for public consumption. My project required a presentation, which in the case of a translation meant a reading or a production. When I started examining the play through the queer lens and how this would enhance the point I wished to make about how repressive societies enforcing a heteronormative gender binary ultimately damage everyone, my motto became, "In for a penny, in for a pound," and I went full steam ahead on my gender bent production.

To continue, I should clarify exactly how I was planning on "bending" *Spring Awakening* to serve my purposes. At first I didn't even think about it, but when a friend of mine began asking questions, namely, "How do you plan to deal with the pregnancy thing if Wendla is a boy?" I had to explain myself. The bending would not be textual. Each character would remain a boy or girl, and it would be through casting that the bending would take place. So we could possibly have men playing women or women playing men, but I wanted the illusion to be as exact as possible.

Part of this was practicality. Even though I had a vague idea of what the interest in the department amongst the acting set was, I had no way of knowing who was going to show up and even then, who was going to stick with me to the end. Changing character genders would be creating a new set of demands that I had no way of knowing if I would be able to fulfill or not. As it was, I had three brave men and nine gutsy women show up to audition. This is, to be

perfectly honest, just about what I expected. In my experience with theatre departments, you tend to wish you had more men and end up with more women than you know what to rightly do with. Since I had intended from the start to do some gender blind casting, this was less of a concern than finding enough people to fill out the cast was.

Spring Awakening, as written, has thirty-four different characters. Many of these are people who are only seen in one scene, such as Wendla's doctor in act three, scene five or the locksmith in act three, scene four. While these character all have a purpose, no matter how small, the fact is that I had twelve actors to work with and while I knew that doubling and even tripling of parts would have to occur, I was also prepared for cutting and combining parts in order to fit the cast that I had. This kind of streamlining was perhaps the real challenge of pre-production, because while some characters could afford to be cut altogether, some were part of a larger group and so replacing them or redistributing their lines as part of the dialogue was unavoidable, all while keeping even the smallest of characters in character. In the end, eight characters were cut or replaced in the script; Lämmermeier, a schoolboy, Ina, Wendla's older sister, Gaston and Reinhold, two boys at the reformatory with Melchior, as well as Professors Affenschmalz, Hungergurt, and Zungenschlag, and Uncle Probst, a mourner at Moritz's funeral.

With the practical question of being able to cover all the roles no longer a concern, I turned my attention to my first concern: the gender bending. For the most part, each role was carefully considered from both ends, "What if I cast a male in this role?" as well as "What if I cast a female in this role?" Even though sex is a biological component and gender is psychological, influenced by socialized behavior (i.e. boys get to play with guns and G.I. Joes while girls get EZ Bake ovens and Barbies), personal experiences and preferences, and yes, perhaps biology, the two have become inextricably linked. As recently as sixty or so years ago,

gender was only used in the grammatical sense to classify nouns. John Money originally proposed using the term “sex” for biological classification, and “gender” to refer to “differences in behavior by sex.”³⁴

In the 1970’s, the term was adopted by feminist scholars in order to differentiate “socially constructed” aspects of differences between males and females from those determined by biology, which was still referred to as “sex,” although today this differentiation is rarely seen in lay people, and even in social scientists. A more recent study surveyed over thirty million titles published between 1945 and 2001 in the Social Sciences Citation Index and found that starting in 1955 there was an increase in use of the word “gender.” It wasn’t until the 1980’s that while the trend of increasing continued, there began a decrease in the use of the word “sex.” This led the authors to conclude that the major increase of “gender” and decline of “sex” suggests that the former has been adopted as a synonym for the latter.³⁵ Anecdotal evidence supports that this – however false – is the case.

So with gender and sex linked so directly in the minds of my audience (and indeed, my actors and even myself), I had to examine the implications of every possible casting decision. Director Robert Wilson has a famous quotation: “If you take a baroque candelabra and you put it on a baroque table, that’s one thing. But if you take a baroque candelabra and you place it on a rock, that’s something else.”³⁶ Another version of the quote says that, “If you place a baroque candelabra on a baroque table, both get lost. You can’t see either. If you place a candelabra on a rock in the ocean, you begin to see what it is.”³⁷ Whatever the arrangement of the words, the

³⁴ J. Richard Uhry, “The Nature of Gender,” *Demography*, 31, no. 4 (Nov., 1994), 561, accessed March 28, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2061790>.

³⁵ David Haig, “The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Titles, 1945-2001,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 33, no. 2 (April 2004), 96.

³⁶ Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 129.

³⁷ Arthur Holmberg, *The Theatre of Robert Wilson* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 53.

sentiment is the same: juxtaposition will highlight both the table and the candelabra, and everything you put on stage means something. So while it is one thing for a man to be Melchior, and have all the knowledge of sex, contemplate the morality of helping the poor, and rape Wendla when he can't handle his emotions, it is another to dress up a woman in the short pants and let her say the same thing. I wanted to be vigilant of the statement I was making at all times.

I first considered the main three protagonists: Melchior, Wendla, and Moritz. I knew that if I could cast the three of them well then everything else would fall into place. Who did I want to bend? One? Two? All three? As it turns out, I only bent one of them. This caused a little eyebrow raising – after all, what was the point of advertising a gender bent production if only one of my three main protagonists were going to be bent? I admit, there was a part of me that agreed with that idea. At first I was afraid that I would be accused of cheating somehow, like by bending secondary or tertiary characters that technically, yes, I was gender bending but what would I be saying? Keeping in mind that visibility of queer characters in the media is a large issue for queer artists and their allies, was I taking the easy way out by only bending one of my three main characters? Ultimately, I decided not.

I considered the relationship amongst them, and how Melchior is really the center of everything that goes on. Melchior, as a boy, has a freedom that Wendla, a girl, does not, and as a more masculine temperament and expression than his friend Moritz, has an easier time with other people. An interesting point that is brought up by Elizabeth Boa among other critics of *Spring Awakening*, is that Melchior and Moritz more sharply define feminine and masculine than Melchior and Wendla.³⁸ Melchior is characterized as the ideal male, in temperament, at any rate. He is intelligent and deals with fear and emotions by intellectually distancing himself from them,

³⁸ Elizabeth Boa, *The Sexual Circus: Wedekind's Theatre of Subversion* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1987), 43.

and is shown to take life's difficulties in stride. Moritz, however, is the opposite. He "wallows in anxious misery" regarding his sexual awakening as well as the pressure to perform in school, and is a nervous, emotional wreck next to his friend.³⁹

Other characters reinforce this portrayal, as the young girls are drawn to Melchior, regarding him as handsome and comparing him to a young Alexander the Great, but belittle the more emotional, "soulful" Moritz as "stupid" and "embarrassing."⁴⁰ Melchior himself is not innocent of such a thing either -- when Moritz suggests Melchior write his essay on sexual intercourse and slip it to him covertly, Melchior tells him, "You're such a girl," deriding what he sees as squeamish (i.e. feminine) behavior.⁴¹ When he does receive the essay and read it, Moritz connects much more deeply to the woman's part than the man's: "To receive rather than give! It must be the greatest pleasure on earth... I think the man's satisfaction must be flat in comparison."⁴²

To this end, I thought it would be a much more powerful statement to bend Melchior and not Moritz. Putting a woman in Melchior's shoes and giving her all the knowledge that he has as well as bringing out a more intellectual, unemotional side would be unexpected, since women are traditionally seen as more emotional and nurturing than men. Conversely, if I were to bend Moritz and cast a woman as a feminine man, it felt like what would be expected. It would be much more interesting to see a man cast in that role, and act alongside a Melchior who was being played in all his intellectual glory by a woman. So I cast Caitlin, a very talented actress who auditioned with an Andrei monologue from *Three Sisters* as Melchior, and Eric, a high energy

³⁹ Stephanie E. Libbon, "Anxious Masculinity in Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*," *Culture, Society & Masculinities*, 2 (Fall 2010), 167.

⁴⁰ Wedekind trans. Sager 14.

⁴¹ Ibid 9.

⁴² Ibid 26.

actor with a frenetic stage presence who nailed a heartbreaking piece in his audition, as Melchior and Moritz respectively.

I had the choice of bending Wendla, but I was of course again confronted with the question of what that would then say. If I had a man playing the effeminate Moritz, why shouldn't I switch the girlish but slightly dangerous Wendla played by a boy? Practical considerations (i.e. not having enough male actors) forced my hand in this issue, but had I a myriad of actors to choose from, I still would not have bent Wendla.

Whereas Moritz is a feminine male, Wendla is a female that has brushes with her more masculine qualities. Though on the outside she is the perfect picture of a young girl who is kind, beautiful, and loves her mother more than anything in the world, a burgeoning sexuality lurks under the surface. Rather than remain passive and docile, Wendla instead dares to ask questions and explore her environment and her sexuality, even if she isn't sure what the feeling really is or what the consequences will be. In act one, scene five, Wendla meets Melchior in the woods while collecting woodruff for Maywine. In conversation, Wendla makes a confession that she had been daydreaming by the river of being a poor beggar child who would be hit when she didn't bring home as much money as her father wanted, and she has been thinking of this ever since hearing about her friend Martha being beaten in act one, scene three. She says, "it makes me hot all over."⁴³ Whether this is with sympathy, anger, arousal, or some combination of the three is up for interpretation, but the scene certainly takes a quick turn for the violently sexy as Wendla makes a strange request:

WENDLA: Would you hit me? With this [switch]?

MELCHIOR: Wendla!

WENDLA: What?

⁴³ Ibid 21.

MELCHIOR: You don't really think I'd beat you.
WENDLA: If I let you.
MELCHIOR: Never, Wendla!
WENDLA: But I asked you, Melchior!
MELCHIOR: Are you insane?
WENDLA: I've never been beaten in my life!
MELCHIOR: Then you don't know what you're asking.
WENDLA: -- Please -- Please --
MELCHIOR: I'll show you please! -- (He hits her!)
WENDLA: Oh God -- I didn't feel that in the slightest!
MELCHIOR: I believe that. With all your skirts...
WENDLA: So hit me on the legs!
MELCHIOR: Wendla! (He hits her again.)
WENDLA: You're only stroking me -- only stroking --
MELCHIOR: I'll beat the devil right out of you, you witch!⁴⁴

This goading is quite intentional. Melchior refuses no less than four times, and each time Wendla asks again until he complies. When it goes further than either of them foresaw, Melchior runs away from the scene and his emotions, which he can no longer distance himself from.⁴⁵

Wendla is similarly persistent with her mother, who infantilizes her from the very beginning. Though she is fourteen, Frau Bergmann permits Wendla to abandon her "sackcloth" in favor of her "princess dress" which has long since become too short for her, content to keep her as a child even as she is becoming a woman.⁴⁶ In act two, scene two, she is similarly insistent that Frau Bergmann tell her the truth about where babies come from. At first it is a battle of the wills. Determined to catch her mother in the childish lie, she says she would like to know, "whether [the stork] flew in through the window or down the chimney." Frau Bergmann does not budge, telling Wendla she must ask her sister. Only when Wendla calls her bluff by saying she will ask the chimney sweep -- after all, he will "know whether it's been in the chimney or not" --

⁴⁴ Ibid 21-22.

⁴⁵ Libbon 171.

⁴⁶ Wedekind trans. Sager 2.

does Frau Bergmann settle her down and tell her the truth after much hemming and hawing.⁴⁷ Wendla compromises, encouraging her mother to be brave, until she gives up what Wendla comes to believe is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: “In order to have a child, you must be married to a man... and you must love him as only you can love him. You must love him so much that you cannot speak of it, and love him as someone your age cannot... Now you know.”⁴⁸ The equation of making babies with love rather than sex has, predictably horrific consequences as Wendla becomes pregnant after being raped by Melchior. When confronted with what has happened in act three, scene five, she exclaims, “I have never loved anyone in this world but you, mama.”⁴⁹ And the audience has to believe that she means it.

So in Wendla, I needed someone who could be that paragon of young womanhood as well as a little feisty and a little curious, and someone the audience could buy as completely innocent as well as see the ability to be a little bit unwittingly naughty. The illusion would be easier for an audience to swallow if they saw a woman, rather than a man in a dress.⁵⁰ So the part went to a young actress named Molly. Molly is astounding, beautiful as well as intelligent, and if I had even a fraction of the talent that she has I would have stuck with acting. I was confident that she could bring the innocence as well as the burning curiosity that I wanted to see in Wendla.

As I predicted, with my main three cast, the rest fell into place. I cast the other children next. As it turned out (perhaps somewhat predictably, thanks for my 1:3 ratio of men to women), all the schoolboys were played by women. The full impact of this choice didn't hit me until one night in rehearsal for act one, scene four, which begins with the schoolboys after school lets out

⁴⁷ Ibid 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid 30.

⁴⁹ Ibid 55.

⁵⁰ This is a question that would come back to haunt me when I was casting Thea, a dilemma that will be addressed shortly.

one day gossiping in the schoolyard that Moritz has snuck into the teacher's conference room to look at his grades. He comes in last, and gives the whole story in his own, excited words. I looked at the stage and I realized that Moritz was surrounded by his more masculine classmates – females, all. The baroque candelabra was not only on a rock in the ocean, it was surrounded by other rocks which just served to point out how wonderfully baroque this candelabra was.

Early on in the process, while still contemplating whether I would bend Moritz or not, I also came up with the question of whether or not to bend Ilse. Much is made of the connection between Ilse and the Masked Man at the end of act three, so I knew that I would want to double them. This comes from a line uttered by the Masked Man himself, in response to the deceased Moritz's demand of why he didn't appear to him when he was preparing to commit suicide. The Masked Man answers: "Then you don't remember me. I was there, in your last moment between life and death..."⁵¹ Indeed, there is scholarship stretching all the way back to the 1920's about the two; Elizabeth Boa underlines it best when she writes of Ilse as the Masked Man's "female alter ego."⁵² I considered casting a man as Ilse, which would change meaning based on whether Moritz was a male or female actor. In the end when I settled on a male Moritz I settled on a female Ilse, partly for practical considerations, but also in consideration of the sexual content of the scene they share.

Martha was simple to cast, but Thea was coming much harder because of the pool of actors I'd been left with. In order to avoid hurried costume changes and chaos of that nature, I made a point to avoid double casting actors in scenes which were back to back, and made sure that there was at least one scene in between the different characters. Looking at who I had available to me, I decided to use the double casting (in this case, triple casting) to my advantage.

⁵¹ Ibid 64.

⁵² Boa 2.

Whereas I was aware that cross gender casting “says” something, most pointedly, the same can be said for double casting actors.

Double casting is a theatrical convention as old as the theatre itself. It remains a practicality, as often playwrights would write for troupes of actors rather than how we often practice it today, where the play is written and then we hire actors to fill the parts. Shakespeare turned doubling in to “an art,” and clearly used it to its maximum.⁵³ For most of his career he wrote for a core troupe of ten men and three or four boys, but his plays contain many parts than that.⁵⁴ Without doubling, Shakespeare’s plays would not be able to be staged – take for example *Henry VI, Part 3* which contains sixty-seven different roles. Whether this was mere practicality or conceptual in Shakespeare’s own time, there is no way to tell, but it has become popular storytelling tool as a metatheatrical device in order to, “inform, comment on, and, perhaps, augment the events enacted.”⁵⁵ Thompson and Taylor assert that an audience who is “assumed to be aware of the practice” will “make connections between the roles doubled.”⁵⁶ In the interest of concept as well as keeping costs down, many Shakespearean productions today will double. Productions of *Hamlet* are usually the most notable for this. In his 2009 production, director Michael Grandage double cast the Ghost and the Player King (a common doubling)⁵⁷ and perhaps of more interest, double cast Polonius (Ron Cook) as the First Gravedigger.⁵⁸ On some level, an audience member sees Polonius digging his own daughter’s grave after her death and

⁵³ Giorgio Melchiori, “Peter, Balthasar, and Shakespeare’s Art of Doubling,” *The Modern Language Review*, 78, no. 4 (Oct. 1983), 789, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3729489>

⁵⁴ Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, “Your Sum of Parts’: Doubling in ‘Hamlet’.” Quoted in Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie, ed., *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare’s Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 112.

⁵⁵ Richard Abrams, “Double Casting of Cordelia and Lear’s Fool: A Theatrical View,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 27, no. 4, The English Renaissance and Enlightenment (Winter 1985), 354, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40754779>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ben Brantley, “Ready, Set, Emote: A Race to His Doom,” *New York Times*, October 7, 2009, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://theater.nytimes.com/2009/10/07/theater/reviews/07hamlet.html>

⁵⁸ Matthew Murray, “Hamlet,” *Talkin’ Broadway*. <http://www.talkinbroadway.com/world/Hamlet2009.html>, accessed March 22, 2012.

spouting philosophy and puns. In 2007, Patrick Stewart was double cast as Cladius and the Ghost – a doubling that is also common enough, as it was first noted in a 1975 production directed by Peter Hall at the National Theatre in London.⁵⁹

It's not only classic plays that are using double casting; contemporary playwrights such as Tony Kushner and Caryl Churchill have utilized doubling to increase the impact their plays have with audiences. In Kushner's *Angels in America*, a cycle of two plays, *Millenium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, eight actors play thirty-four characters. While some doubling that occurs is no doubt arbitrary and dictated by practicality, some doubling is thematic and done on purpose. Most notable is the double casting of the Angel and nurse Emily, who cares for Prior while he is in the hospital. The Angel also doubles as a homeless woman in the South Bronx who directs Hannah to the Mormon Visitor's Center, and the Mormon Mother in the diorama room at the center who speaks to Harper. She does a lot of caring and guiding over the course of these four roles. Prior himself doubles as an anonymous man in Central Park who Louis hooks up with after he abandons Prior, who is sick in the hospital. There is also a lot of gender bending taking place: the actress who plays Hannah also plays three different men, and the actor who plays Louis plays his own grandmother.⁶⁰

While Tony Kushner is an undisputed master of queer issues in modern drama, the casting decision for Thea ultimately owed more to Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* than *Angels in America*. In *Cloud Nine*, gender is not only turned on its head, but so is race, time, and sexuality. Act one takes place in 1880's Africa, during the height of British colonialism, while act two takes place in 1980's London – but for the characters, only twenty-five years have passed. Between the acts is when the doubling kicks in. The actor who played the extremely masculine

⁵⁹ Ralph Berry, "Hamlet's Doubles," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37, No. 2 (Summer 1986), 208, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2869958>.

⁶⁰ Sadly, this short scene in *Perestroika* is often cut for time in productions.

and heterosexual patriarch, Clive, in act one, plays his effeminate, homosexual son, Edward in act two. The actress who plays Edward as a child in act one becomes his bisexual sister, Victoria, in act two – and Victoria in the first act isn't even played by an actor at all. She is represented by a doll on stage. What stuck with me the most, however, and came back to me while making this decision, was the role of Cathy in act two. Cathy is a four year old girl, the daughter of Victoria's lover, and played either by the (white) man who played the black servant Joshua in the first act, or the actor who played Clive. Cathy is, according to Churchill herself, "partly... a simple reversal of Edward being played by a woman, partly because the size and presence of a man on stage seemed appropriate to the emotional force of young children, and partly, as with Edward, to show more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behavior for a girl."⁶¹ But this doubling is not just about the gender or what character connections may be made between Cathy and Joshua or Cathy and Clive, but it, "hurls the second act outside the pale of naturalism and provides a stylistic link with the first."⁶²

With all this in mind, I confidently made the decision to cast Chris, a fellow grad student, as Thea. I had already cast Chris as not only Rector Sonnenstich, the headmaster of the school who gives a frightening tongue lashing to Melchior in act three, scene one, but as Herr Gabor, Melchior's father, who delivers a verbal (and in this production literal) dressing down to his wife in act three, scene three. Doubling him in this way made sense to me, as they are both repressive forces in society, having them played by the same actor (and by an actual man to boot) would drive this point home. Thea, while a teenaged girl, is still very much an indoctrinated member of the rigid, unforgiving Wilhelmine society:

⁶¹ Caryl Churchill, *Plays: One* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 245.

⁶² Joanne Klein, "Seeing Double: Theatrical Conceits in *Cloud Nine*," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Vol. I, No. 2 (Spring 1987), 67.

THEA: When I have children I will dress them all in pink – hats, dresses, shoes, everything! Except for the stockings – those will be black as night. And when we walk, I will make them march in front of me. What about you, Wendla?

WENDLA: How do you know that you'll have any?

THEA: Why wouldn't we?

MARTHA: My Aunt Euphemia has no children.

THEA: Because she isn't married, you goose!⁶³

By reinforcing the idea that children come from married individuals, the unthinkable idea that they would not have children, her preference to have all male children, and later when she is the first to praise Melchior and denigrate Moritz, Thea is displaying exactly how she has drunk the kool aid. She, like Sonnenstich and Herr Gabor, reinforce the repressive society by not only conforming themselves to expectations, but by forcing those around them to conform as well – by whatever means necessary. But like Cathy played by Clive or Joshua, a Thea played by Sonnenstich and Herr Gabor, it would jolt the audience as unexpected in what is otherwise a rather naturalistic scene. I had reservations about the choice before I made it – would the point be lost amongst the laughter over a man in a dress?⁶⁴ Ultimately I decided to trust my actors, and trust the audience. If the actors played it straight and sold it, the audience would buy in to it, no trouble at all.

The only major casting decision left to make was of the two mothers, Frau Bergmann and Frau Gabor. They were also the easiest. The actor I chose for Frau Bergmann, Andrew, is a very talented individual. He gave a female monologue in the audition, which confirmed what I already knew: he is a very in control, mature presence on stage. While Frau Bergmann is at first to all appearances in control of what is going on, she easily becomes flustered when Wendla seeks the truth of growing up, most specifically where her niece and nephews have come from. Like Thea, Frau Bergmann is a cog in the repressive machine, and in fact delivers her daughter to the

⁶³ Wedekind trans Sager 12.

⁶⁴ Not to mention Chris's impressive facial hair.

abortionist with a sincere belief that she, after assuring her daughter that everything will be fine if they trust in God, has done the best thing for Wendlä.⁶⁵

Frau Gabor was to require a different sort of bending, for what I had in mind. Casting an actress in the role kept things firmly in the naturalistic vein, until we clothed her in men's clothing. In her first appearances, Frau Gabor was dressed in trousers, a men's shirt, and vest, while the rest of her was still charmingly feminine, hair was twisted back, soft make up, and heeled boots. This was done because at first glance she seems to be quite a liberal character, doing things like allowing Melchior to direct his own educational experiences not only in matters of sex but avoiding stepping in beyond questioning the appropriateness of *Faust* for such a young mind. As things would take a decidedly more expressionistic turn in act three, during scene three an argument occurs between Melchior's parents which is not only over his fate, but is Herr Gabor reasserting his control over his household. He does so brutally, attacking Frau Gabor's "progressive methods" and her role as a mother – the only role society allows her to have. In this production, the dressing down would not only be verbal but literal. As Herr Gabor tore down his wife in words, he would also be undressing her, taking her out of the men's clothing that she has worn to this point and force her back into submission, with corset and dress. With Chris and Becky, as Herr and Frau Gabor (respectively, of course) I felt this scene could be done not only because of the talent, but because of the level of intimacy they have already built between themselves as friends. I have no doubt that there were others who could have individually risen to the demands of the scene, but a level of trust where you can get your actors to undress one another and get borderline sexually violent⁶⁶ is difficult to manufacture,

⁶⁵ Alan Best, *Frank Wedekind* (London: Wolff, 1975), 79.

⁶⁶ A term I actually used in rehearsal for this scene to direct my actors.

particularly when working with young and early career actors who may have never been in a state of undress on stage before.

Aesthetically, there is only one way I can imagine this play being done successfully. There is much talk about the “Wedekind style,” and indeed, the effect he had on playwriting particularly in Germany is immeasurable. Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre owes an enormous debt to Wedekind's work, and counted Wedekind amongst his greatest influence. Research on the both of them suggests he was more than a literary role model for Brecht. German expressionists also certainly owe Wedekind a stylistic debt. J.M. Richie’s appraisal of characteristics of expressionism in the introduction of his book, *German Expressionist Drama*, certainly conjure familiarity with Wedekind and his work as well as Brecht and his Epic Theatre; things like being unconcerned with an illusion of reality on stage, exposing the artifice of theatre, an elimination of unnecessary detail, abstraction,⁶⁷ the monologue,⁶⁸ extreme situations (versus the “slice of life” that naturalism sought to present),⁶⁹ a tendency towards episodic structure (“A sequence of scenes which follow rapidly one upon the other, often with no obvious link between them”),⁷⁰ frequent alternation between prose and verse and also the “proliferation of exclamation marks, dashes, and question marks, sometimes in clusters,” as well as exploitation of the grotesque.⁷¹ Wedekind, Brecht, and Expressionists paint situations on stage in broad strokes in order to see a larger picture showing societal ills rather than embroiling the audience in the drama of a few characters for a short amount of time.

Given the similarities between the “Wedekind style” and Brecht’s Epic Theatre, I think it is forgivable and even called for to retroactively apply Brecht’s dramaturgy to Wedekind’s plays.

⁶⁷ Richie 15.

⁶⁸ Ibid 16.

⁶⁹ Ibid 17.

⁷⁰ Ibid 18.

⁷¹ Ibid 19.

While we should feel for the characters in question – perhaps especially the children – we should not lose sight of the larger forces at work that drove them to their misery. Brecht is one of my big influences in any case, the fact that Wedekind and *Spring Awakening* lend themselves to the aesthetic makes it easy.

I knew that I would be somewhat limited in resources, but our limitations forced us to be creative with what we did have, and it allowed the actors to do good work without depending on costumes, props, or scenery. The black box theatre we had to work in was intimate, and provided a perfect place for a minimal production. Minimal was perfect, given that I wanted to be able to move between scenes quickly with little fuss, and allow the text and the actors to create the world of the play more so than any set could have. We created all the locations we needed with the use of a chair, a small café table, a bench, a cube, and coat rack. It was more important to create broad swaths of locations than it was to see them in excruciating detail, to create the tone and mood of the time and place than it was to be able to pinpoint an exact date and location.

That said, I wanted to be as period as possible. As I began borrowing furniture and costume pieces from the theatre department (where there are strict limits on what a student may and may not use in production), my expectations began to loosen somewhat. As we went from “Late Victorian” to “vaguely 19th century,” we discovered a sort of freedom in that, too. Once we became liberated from strict antiquarianism, we were able to concentrate on telling the story with words rather than clothing or set pieces.

One thing that helped remarkably with pulling it all together was music. I commissioned a friend in the music department, a graduate student named Karl, to write some incidental music to bring us in and out of acts, and cover up scene changes. I sent him the script in December and he enthusiastically agreed to do some composing. My expectations for what he would create

were not low, not at all, but it was more a question of what he would come up with. We spoke a couple of times about my gender bending concept and what I saw for the aesthetic outside of this, and then I left it in his capable hands. What he presented to me was so much what I hadn't even known I wanted that I could hardly contain myself. Karl had written a series of short movements for woodwind quartet and horn, ranging from about twenty seconds to a couple of minutes, some of them for very specific moments (such as a piece following act two, scene four, the rape, and act two, scene seven, just as Moritz has committed suicide) and others for insertion wherever it would suit. It could set a mood that gave the image of somewhere quaint and idyllic, but also of something more menacing happening, creating an uneasiness when needed.

With all of these decisions made in service of this gender bending concept, there was now nothing to do but production itself.

Chapter 4

Being a teacher has taught me to gauge whether my students are finding my lecture enlightening or helpful. I've come to realize that this is not only something teachers do, but directors. My job is to clarify, not obfuscate. I have learned always to ask if there are any questions, and make sure that I get a response. If it is in the affirmative, I take the question and we try to clear things up, and if it is in the negative then we move along. I took this lesson into the rehearsal room with me, and resolved to deal with matters in the same way. If an actor is unclear as to what something means or what they are doing, it will show through and in turn the audience won't understand it either, so it's very important to make sure that every last person understands and has their questions answered. It's not all that different from the classroom; a student who is unclear in class (rehearsal) will not do well in exams (performance).

A shortcoming of mine is my very limited experience. I have taken two formal classes in directing, one as an undergraduate and the second as a grad student, and my practical experience in directing has been limited to one acts written by people my age, early career or even casual playwrights, or short scenes lasting about ten minutes each. I have no experience with full length plays, especially of the caliber and kind Wedekind has written. The closest I have to assisting a director in a full length is stage managing, which is more practical considerations and fewer creative ones. So I will be frank and say that my own inexperience was working against me, and likely showed. I learned a lot from doing, and if I want to keep learning then I think I will have to keep doing. Theory is important and all well and good, but this experience has reinforced my belief that especially in theatre, there is no substitute for doing.

The inexperience probably showed nowhere more clearly than in directing scenes with violent or sexual (or both) content. Not because sex and/or violence bothers me, but because the

first is deeply personal for every person and because it's difficult for me to pair the two together.⁷² I was also dealing with actors who had varying degrees of sexual and romantic experience. But I was determined to treat it with frank maturity, and hopefully lead by example. I wanted to make sure that the entire cast knew that rehearsals would be a safe space, where they should feel free to say if they weren't comfortable or had questions, and that we wanted to create a trusting, collaborative environment where everyone felt respected. At the same time, we could talk about it all we wanted, eventually talking would have to become doing.

Some scenes were dealt with more easily than others. Working with Caitlin and Wendla on the end of act one, scene five (the beating scene in the woods) or act two, scene four (the rape) were the most challenging on paper, but in the end were the easiest to work with, partly thanks to the professionalism on their part. In the earlier scene we quickly discovered that our collective knowledge was outstripped by the material – no one had stage combat training, and so we weren't sure of how to do the beating safely. We brought in Kevin, a friend who does have that training and was able to help us stage it so that it looked real. We talked about that scene and how it starts innocently enough, meeting in the woods, but it edges towards a very sexual line without Melchior or Wendla even knowing it – and then leaps right over that line. The stage directions read: “He gets rid of the switch and begins to hit her with fists. She begins to cry, but he takes no notice and continues to hit as they both cry. Suddenly, he stops and head in his hands, runs away into the woods, sobbing.”⁷³ I'm glad we were able to execute this scene with Kevin's help.

The rape was difficult. No two ways around that one. It is a short scene, barely a page in its entirety:

⁷² I mean actual violence, not a controlled sexual experience between consenting adults like BDSM. Different strokes and all.

⁷³ Wedekind trans Sager 22.

WENDLA: So this is where you've been hiding. Everyone is out looking for you, Melchior. There's a storm coming.

MELCHIOR: Get away from me! -- Go!

WENDLA: What's the matter? -- Why are you hiding from me?

MELCHIOR: Go away, or I'll throw you down the ladder!

WENDLA: No, I won't go away. (*She kneels beside him.*) Why not come outside, Melchior? -- We can dance in the rain until we're soaked to the skin!

MELCHIOR: The hay smells wonderful. -- I bet the sky out there is pitch black. -- I see the flowers on your dress -- and I hear your heart beating --

WENDLA: Don't kiss me, Melchior! -- No kissing!

MELCHIOR: Your heart -- it's beating so quickly --

WENDLA: When you kiss, it means you love each other -- -- -- -- -- No, no! -- -- -- --

MELCHIOR: There is no such thing as love! It's all selfishness, just selfishness! -- I love you as much as you love me.

WENDLA: No! -- -- -- -- No, Melchior! -- --

MELCHIOR: Wendla...

WENDLA: Oh, Melchior! -- -- -- -- -- no -- -- no -- -- ⁷⁴

The balance to be struck here was between too short, which would not give the audience time to process what was happening, and too long, which would ruin the shock and awe of the moment. Timing was everything. We also didn't want it to be too safe – we were here to push the envelope, although too far would be over the top; after all, sometimes less is more. Much like the beating scene, we looked for the line where it goes from innocent to violent. The physicality of it was also something we struggled with. This scene only works if Melchior really is a threat to Wendla, so we ended up referencing scenes of sexual violence we had seen in movies and television to block the scene.⁷⁵ There were uncomfortable moments, but with a sense of professionalism and humor, we got through it and I think it was one of the most moving scenes in the show.

⁷⁴ Ibid 32-33.

⁷⁵ We came up with more than I would like to think about.

Another actor who had to deal with sexual content in her rehearsals was Victoria, who was playing Hänschen. Hänschen has wonderful act two, scene three, which as we've already discussed is the masturbation scene. Even though Victoria is young (still eighteen) I was impressed with monologue work I had seen before from her, so I thought she would be a good candidate. I was having second thoughts after her first rehearsal. In first rehearsals we would do a read through, talk about the scene, and try to put it up on its feet and see how the actors moved with it, but Victoria was reluctant to put it up on its feet. I didn't push the issue because frankly I wasn't sure how to direct her for such a thing, and we settled for having a productive discussion about the character himself. She had been caught up on the fact that while the postcards Hänschen masturbates to are of women in erotic poses, he kisses his schoolmate Ernst later in the play. She wasn't quite invoking the "No Bisexuals" trope, but without overtly accusing anyone of bisexual erasure, I led her in another direction.⁷⁶ Given the imagery I discussed earlier in the paper, I helped her reframe her approach as one of dominance and submission, rather than one of a female partner or a male one. With Hänschen as the alpha male, it opened up new avenues for Victoria to explore in character. As a director I'm proud of this moment, because I think I really did direct and did it in a collaborative way that illuminated an interpretation rather than prescribed one.

The second rehearsal when she eventually did have to put action to the speech, however, was another story. Let me set the scene for you: in this particular rehearsal there are six women, ages eighteen to twenty-six and covering the spectrum of sexual experience from virgin to married woman. We pool together our collective knowledge of the male body and male habits,

⁷⁶ Bisexual erasure is, "the conscious or unconscious effort by individuals and groups to ignore, remove, or alter aspects of bisexuality in an effort to diminish the idea that bisexuality is a valid sexual orientation." – "Word of the Gay: 'Bisexual Erasure'," *Queers United* (blog), <http://queersunited.blogspot.com/2008/05/word-of-gay-bisexual-erasure.html>

and we still are only having the vaguest of ideas about the mechanics of male masturbation. What we ended up doing was viewing a video of the masturbation scene in the *Spring Awakening* musical, where the act is simulated on stage, mid song. While our version was a bit more subdued, it gave her an idea of what we were going for. I reminded her that we had also talked about the build of the monologue to the climax – and if she could do it vocally, people would be much less concerned about what she was doing (or not doing) with her hands. The first time she went on stage and did it, she did a spectacular job. There were small adjustments to be made, but she had taken all of the things we had talked about and the video into consideration and assimilated it into one impressive performance. I was very proud of her.

The scene that I was least impressed with was the reformatory scene, act three, scene four. In the opening of this scene, the boys who are in the reformatory with Melchior play a masturbation game. A coin is placed on the floor and the boys stand in a circle, then, as the boy delicately puts it, “the one who hits it, gets it!”⁷⁷ This had apparently escaped the actors who would be playing the school boys (three of them in the pared down version of the script), and while it is not explicit what they’re trying to hit the coins with, it’s their reaction when I enlightened them that I didn’t care for much. Here, dealing frankly and maturely failed me. There was laughter, as I expected, but the laughter would not stop and at one point there was a refusal to do it at all. I suppose I should have expected it when I had a group larger than two, but it was disheartening. I tried not to take it personally, but that rehearsal was a bust. I let my stage manager play the bad cop and speak sternly with them; my temper was flaring and I’m sure that if I had said something at that point it would have been something I regretted, would have to apologize for, and may permanently damage my working relationship with those actors.

⁷⁷ Wedekind trans. Sager 51.

Some of the tension had relieved itself by the time the second rehearsal rolled around, but not all of it. They did get through it, and it was fine – but it was just that: fine. This is where I fell short as a director. I should have pushed them harder to actually make something of the scene, rather than doing it just because the script said so. But rehearsing the scene the first time and having to deal with their cavalier reluctance had put me in a not very good place mentally and destroyed my desire to do anything with the play for a couple of days. So I was mostly thankful that they were doing it at all, but it was a definite example of the inmates running the nut house. And while I was the director and nominally “in charge,” I don’t feel like playing Nurse Ratched should have been in the job description. Or maybe it is, and that is an example of yet one more thing that I have to learn. But I had a responsibility to help them make that masturbation game the best masturbation game they could put on stage and I settled. If I had it to do over again, I wouldn’t have folded quite so easily.

In other considerations, I should have given us more time. Because of the department’s main stage production dates, I moved the performances from March 16-18 to March 9-11. If I had moved it after, performances would have taken place in early April, after the university’s spring break. I also scheduled rehearsals to take place on Tuesday and Thursday nights and Sunday afternoons, even the week before opening when we would be doing technical rehearsals. I had anticipated being able to get an internship for the spring semester, and so left space in my schedule to accommodate that, scheduling rehearsals for the days I knew that I would be free or on campus because of teaching commitments. Once it became clear that this was not going to be the case, I should have spoken to my cast about committing to more time, at least in those last couple of weeks. I didn’t feel like it would be fair to do it, especially when they are all students as well with their own jobs and class work to take care of, but I should have at least asked.

When the show finally opened, it went very well. I saw the small blemishes, of course, but rather than looking at the small imperfections, I concentrated on the feedback I was getting from the audience. The response was overwhelmingly generally positive, which made us all feel good about the work we had done as group. I was particularly pleased that the moments designed to buck expectations had landed. Even the ones I had feared wandered into esoteric, such as Frau Gabor's forced strip and redressing in women's clothes, were met with understanding. I'm not sure if I was mostly preaching to a choir, but the overall reaction that indicated our intent was understood made me feel as though I was able to stage something effectively and give it meaning beyond what was in the text.

Feedback from one person indicated that not all of the choices made were quite so effective. Thrown off by Chris's facial hair as Thea, this person asserted that it threw them out of the moment and they didn't completely buy the moment. I understand where this came from, and agree that this was a risk, but one that I wanted to make. Using Chris for Thea was meant to highlight a relationship between the adult men in the play and how their rule is passed down to the next generation. This was also an example of employing Brechtian technique of not concealing the theatrical artifice in order to create meaning -- in other words, the audience wasn't meant to believe that Chris was a girl.

The feedback overall was good, and I think that the production concept put into practice was effective. But the production was not the only thing that has to stand up to analysis.

Chapter 5

I feel the need to preface by saying that no matter how the creative decisions I made came out on stage, this chapter is not to put my actors on trial. Some of these decisions I shared with them and others were mine entirely. I am not going to examine their performance, but rather mine. I am very proud of the whole cast and crew and was privileged to work with them all. That said, the show was certainly not without its challenges.

One of my major stumbling blocks is a personality flaw that I will have to deal with if I intend to pursue directing further. I enjoy the creative process of it – the analysis, making pictures on stage, helping actors along their way to the best performances possible – but sometimes my personality is unsuited to the task. I can be too accommodating, too gentle, and say too little. Is this part of the conditioning I've gone under as a woman in modern society, where I am meant to be all these things? Perhaps. I can afford to be more assertive in all areas of my life.

I am satisfied with the production as it was, but it would have been a better all over product if we could have had more time, particularly as we began to do run throughs and technical rehearsals. I believe that we had a total of three run throughs when we started tech, and none where all cast members were present due to one conflict or another (some I knew about ahead of time, others that I didn't), and we had three technical rehearsals before we opened, one cue to cue and two dress rehearsals. Again, it's not that I'm complaining or blaming the other people who were working with me – but the transitions all could have been tighter. I wish I would have given us more time in the theatre that week, in order to tighten up things like mid-scene light cues, light cues that were not what we dubbed the "general wash" (the downside of still dealing with a manual lighting board rather than a computerized one!), and scene changes,

which were executed by the actors. My failing here was lack of planning, and poor stress management. Upon reflection, I could have said more and taken time to tighten it up, but I found myself often saying, “Good enough,” instead of, “We need to run that again.”

The general response to the production was positive. It was by no means a perfect show, and whether it would have been better with time is of only little interest to me. “Could have, should have, would have” is only helpful in as far as I can learn from my experience and use it for next time. Overall, I think the fact that we let the story speak for itself and put the characters first served us well. People connected to the characters on a human level and were able to engage with them that way. I think the point that I was looking to make with the gender bent casting – that everyone suffers in a rigid system based on prescribed gender roles and arbitrary moral standards, and people only get hurt when conformity is forced – was made without being hamfisted or too obvious. The point got across, but I don’t there was a time where the general consensus was that it was too much.

I count the project as a success. I explored the dramaturg as director, which is a culmination of my education thus far. I was able to actively engage with a play that has been a huge part of my life for half a decade now, and I’m sure that I’ll continue to engage with it as I get older and grow as an artist, and find new things each time. Wedekind spoke to me from the century before last, and here in the twenty-first century I found a meaningful message in the play for a contemporary audience. The queer lens brought out things that are important to people today. Though Wedekind may have never thought his words would be used to explore such a thing, he was a rebellious character with a penchant for causing trouble. Anything that purposely questions the status quo would certainly cause him great pleasure, and honor the spirit if not the letter of his work.

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