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Miss Littlewood and me: Performing ethnography

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Abstract:
Joan Littlewood (1914-2002) was a pioneer of theatre directing in the UK, most famous for her production of *Oh What a Lovely War!* (1963). This article performs an ethnographic study of *Miss Littlewood*, a 2018 musical by Sam Kenyon, that documents Littlewood's life and work using the style of the earlier show. *Miss Littlewood*'s plot reveals details of Littlewood's life and work, while its form mirrors the montage techniques that she pioneered in Britain. The article uses interviews and rehearsal observations to document aspects of the process by which *Miss Littlewood* was developed. It reflects on the tensions that are revealed between that relatively luxurious process and Littlewood's political and financial realities. Ethnography was an ideal method for documenting this process because it facilitated observation of relationships between the various works and demonstrated the fluidity and creativity of academic writing.

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Miss Littlewood and me: Performing ethnography

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Described as 'one of the foremost directors of her generation' and 'a maverick with anti-establishment views', Joan Littlewood (1914-2002) was a pioneer of theatre directing in the UK: an anarchic revolutionary who incorporated European practices into her Theatre Union, and later Theatre Workshop (Holdsworth 2006: 1). Her companies toured in the north of England and later were based at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East. As Robert Leach notes, 'Theatre Workshop introduced what are now accepted as modern forms of stage design and lighting, and the modern use of the open stage, often attributed to Brecht, was actually pioneered in Britain by Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl. The notion of a "theatre of synthesis" was theirs, too, as was the method of structuring a play by montage techniques' (Leach 2006: 209). Her acting methods still underpin the teaching at the East 15 Acting School (University of Essex), while the Theatre Royal Stratford East continues her ethos of popular politically engaged collaborative theatre by and for the working classes. 'Her theatre practice did effect a complete change in the British theatre,' Leach adds, 'and she […] dragged Britain into the age of modernism' (ibid: 210).

This article documents two ethnographic processes that sit on top of Littlewood's practice. The first is the data gathering that led to the production of the musical *Miss Littlewood* (2018, dir. Erica Whyman) by Sam Kenyon, a biographical musical about Littlewood. Her process and methods are articulated in a performance that draws attention to her historical importance – so perhaps we might think of this as an ethnography for biographical performance. The second is my data gathering process that documents the production of *Miss Littlewood* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, home of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-upon-Avon. When Littlewood and her Theatre Workshop company created her most famous work, *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (1963), the

company performed its own kind of ethnography – perhaps we might call it an ethnography for creative practice — which used popular entertainments of commedia dell'arte and the music hall to reach out to the local community in Stratford East. *Oh, What a Lovely War!* and Littlewood's devising and directorial strategies became in these cases palimpsests from which later ethnographic processes moved ever further away, while presenting creative and critical commentaries of that practice in new contexts. This article demonstrates the slipperiness of attempting to understand a complex multi-faceted creative process from such an ethnographic distance. Ultimately, while my method of research reveals the politics and processes of writing and producing a new musical, the discoveries it makes are particular to the project it documents. It remains difficult to draw conclusions about creativity, process or identity, even though (or perhaps because) this article documents something that is culturally specific and local. However, the research does demonstrate some of the challenges and opportunities that arise from using ethnography as a research tool in creating and studying musical theatre.

Ethnography and my subjectivity

The ethnographer gathers data that combines ontological facts with material that is created through the 'intersubjective exchange of research interviews' (Castaneda 2006: 82). Fieldwork not only demonstrates the impossibility of the researcher's objectivity, but it demonstrates the impossibility of rendering the invisible object of study visible to the reader since it is necessarily partial and not without bias or inflection. Instead, according to Quetzil E. Castaneda, the encounters themselves offer value to those who have allowed the encounter to take place (ibid: 86). The ethnographic value is shaped, in other words, not only from its representation of some ontological truth but also from the interactions of the encounter itself (ibid: 91). Just as the documentary theatre demonstrates awareness of the complexity of

reality, so, too, mixed methods research encourages awareness of the hierarchies created by research design and the emergence of the research within the encounter of researchers and their subjects/objects of study. As Dwight Conquergood reminds us, 'we challenge the hegemony of the text best by reconfiguring texts and performance in horizontal, metonymic tension', creating a 'commingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing that unsettles the institutional organization of knowledge and disciplines' (Conquergood 2004: 318). When applied to *Oh, What a Lovely War!*, the creative use of ethnography allowed Littlewood (a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) to present a political position about a war that her companies had long characterised as 'tied up in capitalist profiteering, imperialism and the exploitation of the working classes' (Holdsworth 2006: 79). Observing the layers of this process and the politics of each layer drew my attention to my own subjectivity and political bias, and left me with myriad possibilities for crafting responses to it.

In 2018, the other British Stratford, the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon, was the home for a new musical about Littlewood's life and work called *Miss Littlewood* (Whyman 2018b). Book, music and lyrics were written by Sam Kenyon and the show was directed by RSC Deputy Artistic Director Erica Whyman,[1] with an entirely female stage management team, a female dominated mixed race cast and a predominantly female creative team. The hit line of the show was undoubtedly when Joan Littlewood (JL)[2] asked the audience 'Why do we know about so many unremarkable men and so few remarkable women?' The structure of the work reflected that of *Oh, What a Lovely War!* in its use of metatheatrical devices and in its design. Its music, while entirely original, drew on genres from popular culture. On the other hand, this work was developed and staged at the heart of the British theatre establishment, drawing comparison with the difficulties the maverick Littlewood had with the establishment.[3]

In the musical, Kenyon explored the relationship between Littlewood's methods of collaborative practice and the politics her company espoused, which in turn informed the relationship between form and content in the work. My documentation of the development and performance of *Miss Littlewood* demonstrates a process of collaborative practice, and the relationship of process to product, as well as problematizing the politics of the production of the work at the RSC. The combination of these analytical and artistic ways of knowing demonstrates some of the potentials and the limitations of this method, but also allows a horizontal tension to be revealed between these layers of practice, research and remembering.

I had the opportunity to attend some rehearsals, interview Sam Kenyon repeatedly throughout the process, and speak to the entire music department. I was able to attend only three days of rehearsal partly because of my own commitments and the short notice the stage management team were able to give me, and partly because it is not common practice for rehearsals to be open to anyone not taking part in the project. One limitation of this project, therefore, is that I was not able to be enmeshed in the project throughout, but I sought to replace the lost continuity through a series of interviews particularly with the writer. However, perhaps the occasional observations supplemented by long and frequent interviews helped me to maintain the balance Margaret Mead suggests is necessary: 'a balance between empathic involvement and disciplined detachment' (quoted in McAuley 2012: 9).

Scholarship and creativity: Overlapping methods

I was introduced to everyone and made to feel welcome at the first rehearsal. The actors were the most interested in what I was doing and why, but all members of the company and creative team responded to informal questions at appropriate moments. In fact, I discovered in the interviews with Sam Kenyon that director Erica Whyman had instigated the recording of some rehearsals of her production of *Romeo and Juliet* as part of a schools' education

strategy, so I was pushing at an already half-open door (Kenyon 2018e). Perhaps this interest in education, community and openness demonstrates one area of influence from Littlewood to Whyman. Littlewood took this further than the RSC in that she preferred working with untrained actors, 'willing amateurs, ordinary working people and those prepared to explore beyond the limits of their social, cultural and theatrical inhibitions' (Holdsworth 2006: 47). The RSC not only supports the continued training of its performers[4] (though perhaps less assiduously than Littlewood had done) but also occasionally involves school and community groups in some productions, including in Whyman's 2018 production of *Romeo and Juliet* (Whyman 2018a). This demonstrates a similar ethos and developing openness, though the political agenda in Littlewood's work and the extent of her engagement with that politics is different.

I also came in with some experience with Littlewood's staging, note-giving and training methods, having worked with some of her protégés, writer/director Ken Hill,[5] performer Toni Palmer and Littlewood's former personal assistant Peter Rankin at Stratford East and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne during my career as a musical director.[6] While working with Hill on *The Wicked World of Bel-Ami* I saw that the script changed almost every day in response to improvisations and devising by the actors. The director would revise the script each night and provide new pages each morning for the actors to incorporate, creating more of an ensemble piece than an interaction between key protagonists. In Hill's production of *Sweeney Todd*, meanwhile, I recall that actors rarely entered an empty stage: a setting was devised to frame most appearances. Hill's comment, reflecting Littlewood's practice (Holdsworth 2006: 72-5), was that keeping actors on edge made for a better, more alive, performance. Whyman's rehearsal room was a much more supportive place than this, and contemporary use of technology and musicians in an internationally renowned theatre required a greater level of fixity in performance than Littlewood liked. Yet the extent of

ensemble involvement in the development of material, and the constant development and transformation of material even during the previews was, indeed, reminiscent of the Theatre Workshop model.

During *Miss Littlewood* I focused almost entirely on Sam Kenyon's process, undertaking five interviews with him beginning immediately before rehearsals commenced (a public interview on 12 May 2018), three during rehearsals (14 May, 24 May, 14 June) and a final interview some weeks after the production closed (13 September).[7] The focus on Kenyon came from my own interest in the structures and processes through which new British musicals are being created, as discussed in my book *Theatre Music and Sound at the RSC: Macbeth to Matilda* (2018). That research discovered that the subsidised sector offers a unique opportunity to develop work over a considerable period, whether by offering a long rehearsal period, as the RSC had provided for *Les Misérables* in 1985, or by commissioning work within a structure more like that which Diane Paulus describes at the American Repertory Theater (in Simonsen 2017: 183-96), where work is developed through a series of workshops and rehearsed readings. A similar pattern of workshops and rehearsed readings led to the RSC's production of *Matilda* in 2010 (documented in Taylor 2018) and, indeed, to *Miss Littlewood* as will be outlined below.

The data-gathering process that Kenyon used to develop a biographical musical about a deceased director with a 'living' performance practice was somewhat similar to my own mixed method approach: documenting the rehearsal of that work in the awareness of prior experiences. Kenyon had used a combined methodology to gather the materials from which the show was developed: he read all the available writings by Joan Littlewood and much of the secondary literature about her and the Theatre Workshop, he interviewed many of the surviving Theatre Workshop performers, and he watched all the productions that were available. Meanwhile, my experience in professional rehearsal rooms gave me prior

knowledge of what to expect, but it also limited the newness of the experience for me. There may be information I could consider that I simply took for granted. My own position, therefore, could never be objective in recording Littlewood's influence on British theatre history, nor was it naïve in the awareness of some of the idiosyncracies she handed down.

Background: Kenyon's process as described in interviews

Already an established actor, Kenyon's first steps toward *Miss Littlewood* came in an autumn 2005 production of Seamus Heaney's *Burial at Thebes* for the Nottingham Playhouse. Murray Melvin, who had been in Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, played Tiresias. He was in his 70s by this time and regarded Littlewood's company as having been his 'University'. Kenyon, who knew nothing of Littlewood at the time, took every opportunity to talk to Melvin about her. As he puts it, 'I basically stalked him' always seeming to be on the same train to and from London while they were working together, and then buying DVDs or reading scripts Melvin had mentioned so that he could quiz him further. Melvin's passion was evident to Kenyon through the conversations they had about the director. He tried to read Littlewood's autobiography, *Joan's Book,* at this point, but found her prose, which is somewhat convoluted, completely impenetrable.

A few years later, in 2009, Whyman invited Kenyon to collaborate on a production of Littlewood's *Oh, What a Lovely War!*. In the end he wrote musical arrangements and co-directed the show with Whyman, discovering much more about Littlewood's working and training practices in the process. There followed a number of opportunities for Kenyon to collaborate with either Whyman or Tom Morris[8] on exciting new projects as arranger, writer, lyricist or co-director. In the following years he wrote a novel and continued working as a singing coach and actor until in 2013 he picked up *Joan's Book* again. This time he engaged with the story of the unmarried teenage mother who won a scholarship to a local Catholic

school and later to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London (RADA), before leaving training early—purportedly walking over 200 miles to Manchester to direct politically engaged (agit prop) theatre for local workers.

Wondering whether this story would make for a good musical, Kenyon discussed the idea with Whyman, who expressed interest in the project. He contacted Melvin again, who remembered their many train journeys together and agreed to help. Kenyon's conception of the show even at this early stage was that there would need to be 'seven Joans'. Melvin's response was 'Thank f*** for that' (in response to the question 'what's she [Joan] like?' he always wanted to say 'Which one?'). Each Joan would represent different aspects of her character as she aged (numbered Joan 1-6), with the final Joan, Joan Littlewood (JL) being the narrator and 'present' (1975) Joan revisiting her working life, marriage to Jimmy Miller (who changed his name to Ewan MacColl) and partnership with Gerry Raffles. Drawing on the close networks of actors, Kenyon met and interviewed many people who had worked with or knew Littlewood, including Barbara Windsor, Toni Palmer, Barbara Young, Pearl Turner, Jean Newlove and Hamish MacColl. He even had a meeting with Hal Prince who, having seen three of her shows on Broadway, sent her the script of James Goldman's *They Might be Giants* and in 1961 came to Stratford East to produce it, with Littlewood directing.[9] Although the show was a terrible flop and Littlewood stopped directing for two years afterward, Prince gave up an afternoon of his time to talk about her. As Kenyon remarked, 'that is where the passion, if you like, comes from in terms of this woman. And by the way there are people I interviewed who hated her and still gave me two hours of their time' (Kenyon 2018a). It was this human side of the director that he discovered in all the interviews, and which he wanted to portray in the musical.

Although the initial research and writing took more than four years, the final stages of writing the book, cutting, redrafting and revising were extremely swift and intensive, largely

driven by the author himself. Once the piece was commissioned by the RSC in June 2016, Kenyon worked with dramaturg Pippa Hill on the book, and Bruce O'Neil also offered feedback as a kind of musical dramaturg. The RSC offered to provide as many workshops as were needed, with O'Neil commenting that 'there can be no such thing as too many workshops – *Matilda* took seven years to write!' (O'Neil 2018). Meanwhile, Kenyon established a series of ambitious deadlines for himself in preparation for a workshop in December 2016. He produced a complete first draft for comments in September, received comments in October, so that by December he had a complete draft of the show that consisted of two Acts of about 65 minutes and 30 minutes respectively. That one-week workshop took place in Clapham for an invited audience. There was a subsequent presentation of the workshop material to Gregory Doran (Artistic Director of the RSC), who hadn't been able to attend the December workshop, and the artistic director of Stratford East in an attempt to stimulate collaboration between the two theatres, but, for a number of reasons including changing personnel, the RSC went forward with the project alone. There was a further script workshop in September 2017. Then, at the start of the season in which the show was to be produced, a further week of workshops was scheduled with the actors who had been cast (December 2017). Rehearsals began in May 2018, previews in late June and the show opened officially in July 2018 for a six-week run. A cast recording was made during the preview weeks.

Observations in the rehearsal room

On my first day in the rehearsal room the actors and director were sitting around a table with their scripts, discussing the relationship between Littlewood and Gerry Raffles. Kenyon offered information from his research as the actors discussed how they understood the relationship, drawing on their own emotional experiences. The group discussed Raffles'

privilege, Littlewood's working-class background, and the class war. They considered which members of society are the most likely to be upwardly mobile. They commented on cultural norms around food, on domestic responsibilities, and the things that might be valued by people from different backgrounds. In the same way that my life experiences fed into my awareness in the rehearsal room and into this writing, so the performers' experiences fed into the interpretation and focus of the text.

Whyman wanted Kenyon to be present during the first reading of each scene, expanding on his research and discussing his ideas, and identifying what he had imagined for the scene. He was able to make corrections, and to clarify and simplify the language so that it was clear, for example, when one performer playing Joan was being replaced by another. Kenyon offered anecdotes from his interviews and information from Whyman's conversations with him about earlier drafts. All of these contributions afforded a relationship with the text that was flexible in each reading of the scene as diverse ideas were incorporated or developed.

When I returned to the rehearsals in Week 4, small sections of the material were being developed with enormous attention to detail for the characters, but also by devising ensemble contexts so that the protagonists did not walk into an empty space. This was reminiscent of what I remembered from my own experiences with Ken Hill. The through line from Littlewood to Whyman was apparent. One section I watched develop was a scene at Littlewood's Catholic school that transformed into her first theatre experience – seeing Gielgud in *Macbeth* at the Old Vic on a school outing. This scene is followed by the song 'The Trouble with Theatre' that identifies the event as a catalyst for her developing vision of a new kind of alive and relevant theatre. While the music team worked on inserting some underscore derived from a hymn (that had been cut) to create an immediate context for the sequence, Whyman and choreographer Lucy Hind discussed a movement style for the three

school nuns. They devised a moment when the actors as the nuns transformed into the three witches of *Macbeth* and the scene became increasingly melodramatic. Everyone was busy and focused but there was a lot of laughter, and suggestions from all the participants were welcomed, though not all were finally incorporated. Whyman was very clearly always the centre of decision-making and everyone brought ideas to her, but she ran the room as a collaborative space and encouraged suggestions from all the team. The differences between my earlier experience of Hill's rehearsal room and Whyman's in *Miss Littlewood* was her supportive approach and her organisational ability in working to a tight timetable and keeping all the creative departments informed and enthused.

As Nadine Holdsworth notes, Littlewood 'believed in texts as starting points for creativity' that 'generated exhilarating depictions of working-class life and language that drew on the rumbustious spirit of the popular music hall' (Holdsworth 2018). A tiny moment of performance that established a context for Littlewood's desire to transform British theatre took many people and several rehearsals to hone – using a process that Littlewood herself had introduced. That moment of theatricality arose from shared creativity and, since it was the live embodiment of ideas developed together, it never became fixed. Littlewood herself remarked 'I do not believe in the supremacy of the director, designer, actor or even of the writer. It is through collaboration that this knockabout art of theatre survives and kicks' (in Holdsworth 2018). The rehearsal process likewise was characterised by mutability. It was a negotiation in which, although one person had to be the final arbiter, all suggestions were treated with respect and consideration. Influences and ideas were drawn from many contributors, who, even while the author was present in the room, took the material and made it their own.

Previews and performance

During previews Kenyon continued to rewrite sections of material to clarify the narrative line. In the first preview there was a section about censorship with the performers holding up newspapers and talking about the Gresford Mining disaster of 1934[10]. Kenyon realized the problems with this moment, commenting, 'if you're a socialist you feel like you're being patronised and if you're a Tory you feel like you're being preached to' (Kenyon 2018e). He therefore went back to the drawing board, looked at *Joan's Book* for inspiration—which reminded him to educate by being entertaining rather than didactic—and then considered what was important about that scene. He did some research on another aspect of the existing lyric, which glossed the Munich Agreement of 1938[11], and told the story in limericks to present political material as Littlewood had in *Oh, What a Lovely War!*[12]

In performance, *Miss Littlewood* incorporated many of these moments. The show begins, for example, with a naturalistic kitchen sink drama that was influenced by Littlewood's production of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* – Littlewood's mother vomiting into the sink and revealing her pregnancy. Once the name of the father of the child is revealed to him, Joan's grandfather turns to an audience member and, pointing at him, says 'You there, I want a word with you. Yes, you'. JL, in middle-age, appears and also speaks to the audience member telling him what to do and, using the script set under his seat, how to respond. Thus, there are multiple realities: the reality of the scene that is continued by the actor angrily addressing the audience member as a character in the play (c1914), a second reality in which the same audience member is addressed by JL (c1975 – after Gerry Raffles' death) as she is directing this version of the story of her life, and, third, the present moment of the performers and audience member playing the scene. This moment of metatheatricality is extended as JL explains who she is and introduces her first number, 'About time for a song, don't you think?'

To compound the audience insecurity, Joan 1 is also planted in the audience; when JL

asks for a volunteer the audience is uncertain whether the person who is picked to go onstage is, in fact, an actor. Later, JL sends Joan 1 off to make her a cup of tea and engages a second actor for the part of Joan 2. This latter is a gesture to Littlewood's practice, as she did indeed cast by availability. Added to this, each scene is introduced by JL with a spoken title – in the case of Scene Two it is 'Things I Learned at School: How a School Trip Can Change Your Life'. These aspects of the performance – metatheatricality, breaking of the fourth wall, involvement of the audience – all feed into the Brechtian style of performance that Littlewood introduced to the British stage. As Kenyon notes 'any fully-realised production should draw on this Littlewood-inspired theatrical economy whereby, with a simple change of hat, a woman plays many parts'. He also stipulated that the Joans should be diverse 'in a number of ways – age, ethnicity, appearance, accent – and no-one should be concerned about doing an impersonation' (Kenyon 2018f). There are two exceptions to the rule about impersonation, since the specific accents of Jimmy Miller and Avis Bunnage need to be as authentic as possible, in the latter case for a comic song (Kenyon 2018e). In these ways the continuity with Littlewood's dramaturgical and directorial techniques can be perceived.

Reflection

Some reviewers found the show a little long, or lacking in show-stopping numbers, but most commented on the importance of the work in revisiting Littlewood's legacy, the catchy songs, and the metatheatrical complexity. As *Broadway World*'s reviewer remarked, 'It's a chance to discover the person behind the name that is woven into the history of British theatre - and why she is still relevant today' (Naylor 2018). A five-star review for *What's On Stage* describes the work as 'Lovingly researched' and that 'Erica Whyman's rich, colour-blind production feels intimate, joyous and touching' (Vonledebur 2018). Other reviews critiqued the show as overly 'reverential' (Taylor, P. 2018) or even 'hagiographical' (Cavendish 2018),

and expressed concern that the focus on the somewhat passionless love story between Littlewood and Raffles was, perhaps, too predictable in a musical theatre form struggling to move away from the heteronormative 'boy-meets-girl' trope. Paul Taylor of the *Independent* synthesized these responses succinctly in his review: 'Is there a tension between the roughness of her theatre and the smoothness of the production values here? A bit perhaps – but there's not an atom of hypocrisy. You're swept up by the force of the show's enthusiasm for Littlewood and what she represents' (Taylor, P. 2018).

I thoroughly enjoyed the show and was pleased to see the identity politics it represents. I was also delighted that new musical theatre writing was being treated with the seriousness and support often reserved for other theatre practices. However, I felt that the left-wing politics of Littlewood's theatre practice, although replaced by a liberal concern for equality and representation, was neither experimental nor overtly political. This was perhaps the slight lack, or the 'smoothness' that some reviewers noted. The work's focus on the importance of 'herstory'[13] and colour-blind casting is almost common practice in contemporary theatre, and while this work is important in continuing those narratives, it makes no other innovations in terms of either form or content. That said, the show delivered an entertaining evening that revived awareness of this aspect of British musical theatre heritage.

What also became increasingly evident through the parallel layers of observation, interview and literary research by Kenyon and me, was that the type of rehearsal methods Littlewood used had influenced this production. The openness to contributions from all participants, the development of introductory scene settings, and the involvement of the ensemble throughout the piece arguably all derive from Littlewood's practice, though 'the work also shows her to be a caustic and prickly figure who could be a nightmare to work with' (Tripney 2018). Kenyon's performative writing of his ethnographic research not only

documented, but re-enacted, Littlewood's practice in both theatrical form and biographical content. His approach to ethnography created a fictionalised biography of Littlewood in musical theatre form that incorporated many of her theatrical innovations. By attending rehearsals, I discovered in my own ethnographic work that many of her methods of working with actors on text were also being used, though it is unlikely that was unique to this production.

However, there are different kinds of process and politics at play here. Littlewood was always vehemently anti-establishment, working with communities and outsiders to represent the politics of minorities and the working class in a theatre company that struggled to survive financially. *Miss Littlewood* documented that story in a publicly subsidised, globally important, highly commercial and technologically sophisticated theatre. The performance itself featured the earthiness of working-class characters onstage – including a simple set with a moving platform (truck) for transformations of place, and a nod to the 'authenticity' of actor musicians and onstage musicians. However, a sophisticated sound design that used microphones to augment singing voices and mix the band, and other aspects of what Taylor describes as 'smooth' production values, undermined that earthiness. We might also consider the tension between the communist sympathies of Littlewood and the (benignly?) dictatorial qualities reflected in some aspects of her practice and relationships. This tension can be compared with the similarly benign dictatorships of most rehearsal rooms and musical theatre companies – supportive collaborative ensembles that must, ultimately, cohere by accepting the directors' decisions. Perhaps most interesting and potentially problematic is the placement of the work at the RSC. And yet, this globally important corporation supported and made possible another new piece of British musical theatre writing, and an important redressing of the historical balance – something that perhaps only the subsidised theatre is able to accomplish.

Ethnography was an ideal method for documenting this process because it facilitated observation of stages of the process, and of the relationship between process and product. While the design and theatrical style of *Oh, What a Lovely War!* served as a palimpsest beneath this production, and the writing documented Littlewood's life and working practice, it was only through this kind of personal interaction with the project, through interviews and observation, that the continuity of Littlewood's rehearsal methods showed through. My subjectivity and experience thus became an important element of this analysis as I chose the material to focus on and how to use it here: this essay does not represent the performance as a whole, nor its creative process, but focuses instead on elements I found interesting within it. It presents my perspective on the available materials, and so is necessarily partial and partisan. And intersubjective: I believe the conversations with the creative team also proved valuable to them, because of the interest demonstrated in their often-undocumented work, and because of the additional opportunities my observations afforded them to reflect on and discuss their own practices.

In the processes discussed here, Littlewood's, Kenyon's and my raw material was gathered using a mixed methods approach that included ethnography and archival research and was crafted through dialogue into something new—performative, biographical, creative, and scholarly. The choices made in each process demonstrate the tensions between truth, integrity, reality and fiction: there is never only one choice or only one truth. Ethnography is mobile, fluid and flexible, and as a method it allows space for the unexpected to occur. It encourages reflection not just on the object of study but on creativity and ways of knowing. It allows the tensions between perspectives and contexts to appear as the object of study is revealed to be complex, intertextual and constantly shifting. When combined with archival and literary research, moreover, ethnography provides a powerful method for analysing a creative process in detail, though not without bias. As scholars we accept subjectivity and

choice in all creative work, so perhaps one thing the ethnographic approach does is to remind academics that we are also creative writers making choices.[14]

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[1] Whyman trained at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. She was Artistic Director of Southwark Playhouse from 1998-2000, Artistic Director of the Gate Theatre, Notting Hill (2000-2004), Chief Executive of Northern Stage from 2005-12 and became Deputy Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company in January 2013.

[2] The director, Joan Littlewood, will be referred to as Littlewood. The leading characters in the show are Joan 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 and Joan Littlewood (JL).

[3] She had problems with the Lord Chamberlain's Office because her process of continually developing her work even after opening night was a challenge to the oversight of the censor (Holdsworth 2006: 70). She also struggled to gain any financial support from the Arts Council, and later, when her commercially successful productions transferred to the West

End and Broadway her company was scattered, and she had to keep training new performers in her methods. This is in contrast with the subsidised global commercial operations at the RSC where there are well-fitted out rehearsal rooms, costume, design and music departments and plenty of support.

[4] See Lyn Darnley 2013 for a history of training at the company.

[5] Hill worked with Littlewood as a writer in 1970 and stayed on as an actor, associate director and resident writer before taking over as artistic director at the Theatre Royal from 1974-6 after the death of Gerry Raffles and departure of Littlewood.

[6] *The Wicked World of Bel-Ami*, written and directed by Ken Hill at Stratford East, and Sondheim and Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd* directed by Hill with Toni Palmer playing Mrs Lovett. For both these productions Peter Rankin was a kind of dramaturg/personal assistant to Hill.

[7] I also conducted interviews during rehearsals with the RSC's Head of Music, Bruce O'Neil (14 June), and with Musical Director Tarek Merchant during the run of the show (31 July), and with Music Supervisor Sarah Travis shortly after the opening night, when she had moved on to another actor musician show at Newbury Theatre (5 July). I attended the first preview performance on 22 June and another performance just before the production closed (31 July) but these are not directly referred to in this article.

[8] Morris is an associate director at the National Theatre and Artistic Director of Bristol Old Vic.

[9] In the show Hal Prince (played by Dawn Hope) has a song with the company: 'A Taste of Honey: Hal Prince Reprise'.

[10] An explosion and fire at Gresham colliery resulted in the deaths of 266 men. An inquiry appeared to gloss over numerous safety failings at the mine and the culpability of managers and owners, with no blame being attributed.

[11] An agreement between Nazi Germany, Britain, France and Italy that allowed the annexation of part of former Czechoslovakia in a process widely condemned as a failed act of appeasement.

[12] The first stanza is 'Near a country called Czechoslovakia, whose people are known as the Czechs, a fascist called Hitler, like Franco but littler, is growling and flexing his pecs.'

[13] A term used to denote history written from a feminist perspective.

[14] I would like to express my thanks to the peer reviewers and the assiduous editors of this Special Issue, who have helped shape this article.