

Found in La Mancha: The Novel, the Theater, and Reality Principles

Edward H. Friedman
Vanderbilt University

DHH. I was planning to maintain the ambiguity about reality versus fiction—through the end of the play.

MARCUS. Well, I think that's intellectually dishonest.

DHH. Hey, hey! If you're my creation, do as I say!

—David Henry Hwang, *Yellow Face*

In this essay, I would like to juxtapose several texts whose points of contact are neither obvious nor pat: Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), Richard Greenberg's *Take Me Out* (2002), and David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face* (2008). I hope to show that the works share an emphasis on the themes of reality versus illusion and realism versus artistic self-referentiality. Time, place, and media differ, but the conceptual deep structure reveals a kindred spirit, in the refashioning of chronology and a corresponding celebration of the power of the mind.

Two of the most striking features of *Don Quixote* are the predominance of techniques borrowed from the theater and the recourse to metatheater. Theatricality affects the narrative from all sides. In the prologue to Part 1, the fictionalized author enters into dialogue with a friend. Their discourse centers on the problem—the conflict, as it were—of writing a prologue, and the friend offers a solution. He exhorts the author to concentrate on filling up the space that the prologue must occupy, by force of convention, without relying on quotations or on the words of wisdom and erudition of sages from the past. The friend argues that, under the given circumstances, form can supersede content and substance. The preliminaries set forth a narrative design that is metafictional, self-consciously innovative, and both mindful of and resistant to tradition. As in the case of the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), the prologue is intimately connected to the text proper; it is not separated from the story, but is the beginning of the story. The message systems, the literary derring-do, the complex irony, and the dependence on the reader come into play in the prologue, and, analogously, the exposition of the first chapter and Don Quixote's preparations for his initial sally may be seen as extensions of the prologue. Alonso Quijano—his brain dried up from his obsession with the books of chivalry—reinvents himself as Don Quijote and warms up for his knightly journey. The world becomes his stage. He imagines reviews even before he starts to perform, and Cervantes supplies theatrical set-pieces, starting with the scenes of the first inn, where he is dubbed a knight by the innkeeper, who decides to enter the fantasy realm and thereby to validate, at least to an extent, the vision (and the script) of a madman. From the moment that other characters begin to acknowledge the delusions as reality, the delusions cease to operate as such, and the blending of the domains clouds the distinctions.

Don Quixote fabricates a reality from the books of chivalry. If he had no encouragement in his mad ravings, the story would be different. Once others join in the enterprise, the center shifts,

and illusions are redefined. The scrutiny of Alonso Quijano's library leads the inquisitors to "invent" an enchanter, which Don Quixote readily accepts as real. His friends and family do not align themselves against him, but rather they adopt the chivalric frame that he has established. As they fight fire with fire—quite literally—they elide difference, differentiation between the real and the invented. Cervantes was operating, after all, in a social system in which appearance could constitute, and even supplant, reality. Don Quixote's metatheatrical impulse is, seemingly, contagious, and much of the plot of *Don Quixote* relies on the affinities, whether acknowledged or not, between the knight's dramatized chivalric memories—actualizations of his readings—and the imaginative vigor of those around him. Cervantes manages a simultaneous foregrounding of the book, including the processes of reading and writing, and of the stage, concrete and metaphorical. The acting out of chivalric episodes synthesizes the two spaces by converting events in the present into a literary past by means of dramatic devices. Don Quixote emulates not only the knights errant and the protocols of chivalry, but also the poets of oral tradition who write and recite spontaneously, with a clear consciousness of their audience. Sancho Panza is his supporting actor and his foil, often seen as the representative of reality, but disposed to waver between common sense and chivalric temptations. The illiterate Sancho is, appropriately, difficult to read and thus a sign of the complex semiotics (and of the floating signifiers) of *Don Quixote*.

The dialogue of the prologue to Part 1 of *Don Quixote* gives a theatrical cast to the proceedings, and it anticipates the continuing dialogue between the knight and his squire. Although his models are narrative works, Don Quixote takes his show on the road, where he writes himself into existing or invented scenarios. Some characters need little impetus to engage in role play, and the hostility of naysayers can be incorporated into the knight's agenda and into his metatheatrical plots. The enchantment defense provides Don Quixote with a ready-made counterargument for any lack of confidence in his explanations. The knight functions alternately as playwright, protagonist, secondary character, and member of the audience (as in the episodes of Marcela and Grisóstomo and Camacho's wedding). He is never fully off-stage, as illustrated in his battle with the wineskins as the tale of "El curioso impertinente" is being read aloud or, most emphatically, when he moves from spectator to participant in Maese Pedro's puppet theater. In the Sierra Morena sequence in Part 1, Don Quixote's battles cede to the narrations of Cardenio, Dorotea, the captive Ruy Pérez de Viedma, and others. In these stories, there emerges a pattern of narrative switching to drama, as when Fernando and Luscinda appear at the inn and when the judge Juan Pérez de Viedma reunites with his brother and introduces the drama of his lovesick daughter Clara and her teen-aged suitor. It is as if Juan Palomeque's inn were a combination of theater house and early modern Grand Central Station, where all manner of people would pass through and perform, observe, interact, and, to an extent, change partners. The theme of stories-in-the-making—the encompassing boundaries of which would have to be the composition of the chronicle of Don Quixote's sallies—finds a parallel in the variations on theater and metatheater. In chapter 48 of Part 1, the priest Pero Pérez and the canon from Toledo discuss the theater of the day, praising the plays that preceded the *comedia nueva* of Lope de Vega and condemning the "new art of writing plays." The frustrated playwright Cervantes seems almost palpably present in the conversation, which is metacritical, hypercritical, and blatantly transparent.

Part 1 of *Don Quixote* teases the written word of chivalric romance and narrative genres in general by transforming theory into praxis, through Don Quixote's imitation and performance of what he has read. Inns, windmills, roadside stops, and other venues become impromptu stages. Other characters enter Don Quixote's dramas or create their own, with Cervantes as a master puppeteer who barely attempts to hide the strings of his cast members. The 1605 *Quixote* contains an element of surprise. No one expects to come across a knight errant and his squire on the road, in the streets, and at their rest stops. Don Quixote has the effects of *admiratio* on his side; he startles and shocks his makeshift audiences, and they often comply with his instructions, his direction. Cervantes aligns the responses of Don Quixote to an assortment of stimuli with the gathering of material for the chronicle and with the discovery—when data is lacking—of the manuscript in Arabic of the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli. Reading and writing become intimately and unequivocally linked, and art finds new approaches to the representation of reality. The first part of *Don Quixote* marks the place of narrative realism and the place of metafiction. In drafting this template, Cervantes makes a paradigm of paradox. He mixes contradictory designs that become not only compatible but reasonable, *la razón de la sinrazón*, one might say. The writer depends on the reader to grasp alterations, adjustments, and radical curves in a narrative that could be called sure of itself, daringly experimental, and hard to categorize. The construction of the work of art and the portrait of various artists are components of a story that by no means relinquishes plot. In Cervantes's baroque trajectory, there are openings for inventor, invention, conformist, and iconoclast, highlighted against the real and the imaginary. Don Quixote is the symbol of an abnormality that questions all notions of the norm.

Part 2 of *Don Quixote* is informed, most pronouncedly, by Part 1. The university graduate and trickster Sansón Carrasco tells Don Quixote about the book that has been published, and a number of characters within the narrative are familiar with the story and with the newly-unveiled celebrity. Fame pleases the knight, but news of the Muslim author disturbs him. As he embarks on his third sally, he finds that he does not need to identify or explain himself. The chronicle has preceded him, and characters—notably Sansón Carrasco, Maese Pedro, Don Antonio Moreno, and, in the height of extravagance, the duke and duchess—can develop metaplots of their own. The interlopers of Part 2 are producers, directors, and scriptwriters, and their metatheatrical maneuverings threaten to dislodge Don Quixote from the formerly uncontested center of the narrative, and certainly to cause an imbalance that is not present in Part 1. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are spectators of the metatheater of Basilio in the episode of Camacho's wedding, in which beautifully choreographed "spoken dances" complement the industrious Basilio's plan to marry Quiteria. This is theater, but it is not the knight's theater. In the episode of Maese Pedro's puppet show, Don Quixote reacts to the events on stage, but from the audience. He falls into the illusion generated by another. Don Quixote is conspicuously an actor in the palace of the duke and duchess, who position Sancho Panza as governor of Baratania and furnish him with a set of situations and a partially written dialogue. He triumphs as arbiter of justice and man of common sense, but the machinations of his sponsors force him to retire. Part 2, guided by the reception and the episodes of Part 1, contains countless tableaux that engage Don Quixote but that are devised and staged by others. Even Sancho Panza builds upon experience and knowledge of his master's vulnerabilities in order to "enchant" Dulcinea del Toboso in chapter 10. Metatheater and metafiction proliferate in the 1615 *Quixote*, thanks to its predecessor, but Don Quixote becomes, to a degree, a victim of his success, more passive and more subject to the

whims and productions of his literary admirers. Always a compelling character (and entertainer), he is no longer the commanding presence of Part 1. Both texts prioritize reader response; it is the focal reader that changes from the knight to his devotees.

There is a wonderful irony to the fact that what energizes Don Quixote in Part 2 and what most spurs him to action—more, arguably, than the encounters with Sansón Carrasco as a rival knight—is his knowledge of a “false” sequel to his adventures, published in the fall of 1614 and written by one Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, whose identity remains unknown. Don Quixote wants to fight back, to challenge the intrusive author and alter ego, and to underscore his superiority. The accommodating Cervantes gives him the ammunition to do so. What makes Avellaneda’s unlikely contribution to the brilliance of the “legitimate” *Quixote* so appropriate, so perfect, is that he supplies Cervantes and Don Quixote with a *book* as rival. The spurious continuation serendipitously links the author and the knight. The satirical thrust of *Don Quixote* yields to an allegory of property rights and a spirited defense. The state of affairs pushes Cervantes to align himself with Cide Hamete Benengeli, now the authentic chronicler. While berating and undoubtedly annoying Cervantes, Avellaneda nonetheless accentuates metafiction and the creative process, and he allows the “genuine” author to prevail. Cervantes reanimates Don Quixote and inscribes into the text a refutation of Avellaneda, the second Don Quixote, and the literary merits of the false second part. Don Álvaro Tarfe, a character in Avellaneda’s sequel, appears in Cervantes’s book and swears before a notary that the knight before him is the true Don Quixote. The very real violation of the author’s (and the character’s) space works in favor of the narrative fiction and its ties to the world at large. And this seems to be the message that Cervantes is endeavoring to convey: the two ambits function as a single entity; art is not a supplement to life, but inextricably bound to reality.

Don Quixote breaks away from literary idealism, yet its particular mode of representation must be qualified as the interplay of realism and metafiction (v. Friedman 33-106). In *Reality and the Poet in Spanish Poetry*, Pedro Salinas notes that Luis de Góngora’s verses capture the essence of nature, while enhancing the natural with verbal artifice and with the intensity and uniqueness of the written word (Salinas 131-47). In this sense, art surpasses nature by including and expanding upon it. Similarly, *Don Quixote* evokes history and the present through the mechanisms of literature. Cervantes foreshadows the “literariness” exalted by the Russian Formalists of the early twentieth century, who praise works that respect, honor, and relish the mingling—and the inseparability—of ideology and art. The summoning of chivalry in *Don Quixote* refers to chivalric romance and social institution and to the mediating ground between them. *Don Quixote* tells a story and looks at madness as an amalgamation of pathology, narrative pretext, and comic code. Much of the story relates to reading, writing, theory, criticism, metacriticism, parody, history, contemporary events, the new print culture, oral and folkloric tradition, doctrines of the Church, institutions of society, politics and policies of the State, and, of course, the elaboration, transmission, and critique of the “chronicle” itself. Reality and self-referentiality go hand in hand, not seamlessly but in precisely the opposite manner, by enacting what the Russian Formalists would call “laying bare its devices” (v. Shklovsky 3-24). For me, the bottom line of *Don Quixote* (a composite of two and, debatably, three narratives) is the indivisible line between what we label external reality and the text(s) that serve to replicate, modify, and enrich that reality. Cervantes chooses a both/and proposition, a concerted evocation of reality and the art object itself. History, perception, perspectivism, the work of art in progress,

word processing, the trope of irony, a comic vision taken seriously, and the faces (and phases) of representation concern him and obliges his readers, by all measures in willing and satisfying cooperation, to multitask.

The lesson of *Don Quixote* is lasting and widespread. My personal favorite example of the figurative rewriting of *Don Quixote* is Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914), in which the amorous trials and tribulations of the exaggeratedly pensive protagonist Augusto Pérez are counterbalanced by the writer Víctor Goti, whose intraliterary undertaking is, *con perdón*, overdeterminedly similar to the text itself. In the most celebrated episode, Augusto Pérez visits a fictionalized Unamuno to declare his suicide plans, and the consequence is a debate over who controls whom in the scheme of things. For many, the contest ends in a glorious tie, and pretty much every reader finds the debate glorious in one way or another. When I teach variations on the theme of *Don Quixote* and metafiction, I have used certain texts with some frequency. Among them are Carlos Fuentes's *Aura* (1962), Mario Vargas Llosa's *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977), Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), and Javier Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina* (2001), along with short stories by an array of writers, including Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Felisberto Hernández, and others who might be designated as the usual suspects, and films such as Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) and Bigas Luna's *Anguish* (1987). I have also chosen eighteenth-century novels: Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1721), with obvious ties to the Spanish picaresque, a key factor in the development of metafiction; Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752); and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759). Less noticeably metafictional but prominent for their *constructedness* are, to cite but two examples, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Wally Lamb's *I Know This Much Is True* (1998). Because Cervantes's exercise in narrative is so exceptionally far-ranging in scope, *Don Quixote* lends itself to infinite interpretive options and comparisons and to infinite possibilities in the selective process.

While it is not common to discuss Cervantes's work in connection with dramatic output in the United States—although, like *Niebla*, it is mentioned alongside Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921)—it is clear that the self-consciousness of *Don Quixote* and the dialectics of realism and metafiction find their way onto the American stage. A standard of U.S. theater, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938) uses the figure of the Stage Manager as a narrator; he shows art in the making, while the individual scenes display the happiness and burdens of family life. Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* subtly alternates between a narrative presence—and the presence of memory—and scenes of delicate and moving realism that cannot elide the suffering and brutality of life. Many of Williams's most memorable characters—Blanche Dubois of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is perhaps the epitome—aspire to substitute poetry for abject reality, and that quality may be the essence of the playwright's dramatic formula. It would seem that Williams not only wants to inject a dose of poetry into prosaic existence, but that he also wishes to recognize poetry as a sign of the interrelation and reciprocity of life and art. He does not strive for stark realism or for the ethereal, but for theatrical designs that suggest the operations of the mind and artistic sensibility as fundamental aspects of the human condition. As he writes dialogue, he may be seeking surrogates for himself as a poet, a dreamer, and a dramatist facing the anxiety of influence. In his production notes, Williams calls *The Glass Menagerie* a “memory play,” which he associates with Expressionism and with a flexibility of recourses and means of approximating the truth. He argues: “When a

play employs unconventional techniques, it is not ... trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but is actually ... attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are” (Williams xix). Realism, for Williams, is not photographic realism but modification or adaptation, since “the poetic imagination can represent only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which [are] merely present in appearance” (xix) The stage directions for *The Glass Menagerie* specify that the depiction of memory is “nonrealistic” and that it allows for poetic license, touching the heart and omitting some details (Williams 3). This is hardly far-removed from Cervantes’s conception of the aims of art. In Williams, the poetic voice and the search for a new style while respecting and integrating the past are at the fore.

The Glass Menagerie has a narrator who is a leading character, as well. Tom Wingfield is detached from the immediate action and involved in it. Living in Saint Louis, he is a writer trapped in a warehouse, in a nearly unbearable home life, and in poverty. His father has abandoned his mother Amanda and his introverted sister Laura, embarrassed by a limp that has incapacitated her well beyond physical considerations, and Tom struggles between responsibility and a yearning to break away. Amanda Wingfield is dissociated from her roots in the Deep South and from the affluence and lifestyle to which she was accustomed. She is absorbed in memories of her youth, punctuated by visits from innumerable “gentlemen callers” who have grown exponentially over time. Amanda rejects the present in favor of a more agreeable and promising past. Laura, whose collection of glass animals gives the play its title, is as fragile as the objects for which she scrupulously cares. She is caught in time; neither past, present, nor future offers hope. She has failed miserably in secretarial school. She has no self-confidence, no self-esteem. She embellishes the past by taking bits of kindness shown to her and making them over into positive memories. Into this world of constraints comes Jim O’Connor—a colleague of Tom, Amanda’s proclaimed gentleman caller, and a former classmate of Laura—an optimist full of personality and charm, and strong on self-improvement, but, alas, as he announces after having charmed Laura, engaged. Jim’s dinner at the Wingfield residence is a turning point. Amanda’s illusions are shattered. Despite a weak start—indisposition from the tension of the moment—Laura converses amiably and even dances with Jim. He accidentally breaks the horn of her prized unicorn, but this symbol of normalcy, not lost on Laura, may strengthen her for the future. Newly chastised and tormented by his mother, who blames him for the lost opportunity, Tom takes his leave. He speaks to the audience at the end of the play. He has escaped from his mother and sister, but not from his devotion to Laura, who continues to mediate his thoughts. He does not fill in the history, but he draws attention to the primacy of the mind. His memory does more than fill in gaps. It rewrites the story and assumes a point of view, and it poeticizes the reflection on the family’s dilemma.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, as in *Don Quixote*, Aristotle blends with Brecht, the mimetic with the antimimetic. Williams envisions a type of expressionistic lighting and set, and he calls for the projection of words on a screen to guide the spectator and, presumably, to break the strict illusion of realism. Because he stresses the delicate Laura as the center of concern of both her mother and brother, her reaction to their disagreements is of critical importance, as is her affecting dialogue with Jim. All the characters are dreamers, and *The Glass Menagerie* isolates and distinguishes the dreams: their focus, their hold, their level of practicality or lack thereof. Williams transmits an air of desperation among the three members of the Wingfield family. He draws the public into

the high emotions, fears, and feelings of entrapment of the characters, while he offsets the psychological weight with a stylized backdrop. He is framing the play as a slice of life inflected, significantly, by poetry and by emblems of make-believe, which become, in turn, emblems of the playwright's presence and, therein, the visibility of the creative act. Williams borrows from other media, from his own life, and from current economic realities, polemics, and topics of discussion, but his goal seems to be to make the play a genuine theatrical experience for the audience, to create an intimacy that a live production can achieve. His audience is drawn into the family drama while being asked to meditate on issues that extend beyond the direct action. Through the motif of memory, *The Glass Menagerie* places the spectator in the Wingfield apartment and in the mind of Tom Wingfield, whose remembrances are personal and partial. The memories are removed in time, deflected, and prone to lose their sense of immediacy. Ultimately, the memory play puts forward two versions of reality, which could be regarded as two perspectives, as Williams accordingly inserts Expressionism into realism without diminishing the latter. His exploration of the mind does not require an erasure of the dramatic past as much as an opening of visual and mental images, together with three troubled souls in demarcated spaces.

In *Take Me Out*, Richard Greenberg recounts recent events through a narrator, so that its constructedness shows through, with rather dissimilar results. The play examines a controversial topic against the backdrop of the All-American sport of baseball. Darren Lemming, a superstar with the fictional New York Empires, is, as they say, at the top of his game. Handsome, charismatic, and biracial, he is hugely popular with fans, he performs with great consistency (the Empires have won the last two World Series and are in contention for a "threepeat"), and he has just signed a new multimillion-dollar contract. His sense of self is, at the very least, inflated. This hubris allows him to mention in passing, in an interview, that he is gay, and that miscalculation determines the course of the play. The concept of hubris is relevant here, for tragedy ensues. The narrator of the ironically (and incisively) titled *Take Me Out* is Kippy Sunderstrom, a Stanford graduate known as the smartest man in baseball and a close friend of Darren Lemming. In the opening scene, Sunderstrom uses the term "mess" again and again. Lemming has expected a separation of his public and private lives, but he could not have been more wrong. His life changes radically from one minute to the next. Other players, his manager, his best friend, and his fans interact with him in a decidedly negative manner. Sunderstrom hopes to comprehend the comments, but he does not fail to see the damage that has been done. Following the incident and its initial aftermath, two crucial characters enter the play: Mason Marzac, a gay accountant with no knowledge of baseball who will take over as Lemming's money manager, and Shane Mungitt, a highly talented relief pitcher just up from the minor leagues and a redneck. The text shows the effects of both Marzac's ever-increasing love of baseball and Mungitt's inflammatory remarks. The dialogue between Lemmings and Marzac has an odd-couple air (and flair); they have a surprising, and surprisingly gentle, rapport, and each causes the other to see the world from a different vantage point. Mungitt is the play's antagonist. He is successful as a closing pitcher, which keeps the front office happy. Sunderstrom leads the audience through the escalating tensions in the locker room and outside. In an interview that elicits comparison with Lemming's, Mungitt opines, in the closing speech of Act 1, "Now, don't get me wrong. I don't mind the colored people—the gooks an' the spics an' the coons an' like that. But *every night* t'hafta take a shower with a *faggot*? Do ya know what I'm sayin'?" (Greenberg 45).

Greenberg takes advantage of the dialogue between Lemming and Sunderstrom, and between Lemming and Marzac, to assess the damage and to show Lemming's adjustment of his worldview. The management expresses its outrage at Mungitt's statement, but allows him to return to the team. Lemming, appalled by the decision, goads Mungitt on the day of his return, approaching him with feigned sexual interest in the shower. Mungitt, outraged, has observed a heated argument between Lemming and his closest friend Davey Battle. When he goes to the mound, his first batter is Battle, whom he strikes on the head with his pitch and kills. In a critical scene, Sunderstrom and Lemming speak with Mungitt about his action. It is disclosed that Sunderstrom wrote the apology note that exonerated Mungitt after the derogatory rant. Mungitt seems to think that he again will sit out a few games and return to the team, but that is not the case. He is exiled from baseball, but is not prosecuted. He goes to jail shortly thereafter, for vandalism committed with a shotgun. The Empires win the World Series, and, in the closing scene, after an uncomfortable encounter with Sunderstrom, Lemming invites Marzac—now an expert on baseball and a true devotee of the game—to the party in celebration of the victory.

Take Me Out has a distinct place in the history of gay drama. Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (1968) helps to bring members of the gay community to the stage. Its dialogue is sharp and daring for its time, and, although the gallery of characters now may seem a bit stereotypical, Crowley's effort must be applauded as art and as a social document. Sadly, one can differentiate between pre-AIDS and post-AIDS drama, with plays such as Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy* (1982) and William Finn and James Lapine's musical *Falsettos* (1992) in the first category, and William Hoffman's *As Is* and Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (both of 1985) at the forefront of the second. Tony Kushner's two-part *Angels in America* (1991, 1993) is a monumental work that serves as testament to the mores of the United States as it approaches the new millennium, in a way that is astonishingly comprehensive *and* idiosyncratic, that both fits with a brand of poststructuralist decentering and scrutinizes old values and new. *Angels in America* is a virtual roadmap of American society. Two major characters—one on the far left and the other on the far right—suffer from AIDS. Protestants, including Mormons, merge with Jews, closeted gays with those who are “out” and proud. The clearest antagonist, and the embodiment of hypocrisy—is an historical figure, the lawyer Roy Cohn, and the convicted and executed spy Ethel Rosenberg makes an appearance. *Take Me Out* moves toward the deconstruction, and perhaps reconstruction, of American myths by tackling an honored pastime (and the uncontested masculine values that it brings to mind) and aligning baseball with homosexuality. Productions of the play have put the physicality of the locker room—male bodies undressed—on display. Greenberg investigates the deep structure and more—the depths—of popular culture. Victimizers and victims are recast, and the past and the present clash in meaningful proximity. Reminiscent of *The Glass Menagerie*, the discourse of *Take Me Out* is unpredictably poetic and eloquent. Lemming and Sunderstrom are wordsmiths, and Marzac is articulate and a quick study. Greenberg seems consciously to set the play in what would be, for many, a sacred territory and to analyze social conscience from multiple angles. The role of Kippy Sunderstrom may be intended to give the play its moral center, but that presumption is proven to be resoundingly off-center, and that may be the message.

Darren Lemming has quixotic qualities that include, despite the attitude of insouciance and cynicism, an idealistic faith in the benefits of celebrity and in himself. His stature will shield him from the madness of the world, or so he thinks. Smarter and more savvy than most of the people

around him, Lemming is a believer in poetic justice, which could be classified as social justice. He is a man of color in the twenty-first century, and he has reaped the rewards for which Jackie Robinson and other men of color courageously fought. Battles have been won on behalf of civil rights, but the war still is being waged, and here the man who inadvertently sacrifices his privacy is anything but a crusader. As his manager points out, he makes his sexual preference known after agreeing to an especially lucrative salary package. Mungitt's assertion and the subsequent pardon add fuel to the fire of prejudice. This moves Lemming to retaliate in the shower scene and hence to push Mungitt to the edge, into the realm of tragedy. *Take Me Out* is a play of and about mood swings, deceptively light and profoundly sobering, familiar and defamiliarizing, conscious of its artfulness and of its social impact. Its protagonist is hard to read, because he wants to be judged via his public persona; his interior self is secluded and his emotions guarded. He is never quite there before us, and that may be why his exchanges with Mason Marzac—whom he nicknames Mars and who wears his heart on his sleeve, as the expression goes—are so effective. (One may be tempted to say, pun intended but with respect, that their dialogue offers superb comic relief, with neither as the straight man). In *Take Me Out*, Greenberg imposes a narrator and crafts an arresting rhythm and a structure that, like Darren Lemming, hides much below the surface. Audacity is a keyword for the play, which provokes, entertains, stretches boundaries, and shrewdly teaches, as it interrogates privilege, entitlement, heritage, and heroism.

David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face* is a play about several plays, successful and unsuccessful, and about extraordinary—*spectacular* may be *le mot juste*—junctures between life and art. With respect to the dialectics of history and fiction, its strongest analogues in Spanish literature may be *Don Quixote* and Javier Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina*, with a smack of Unamunian authorial bravado and self-doubt. Hwang takes real-life situations and transforms them into an amazingly quirky, original, and self-referential play, in which he is the main character: protagonist, antagonist, crusader, and trouble-maker. The blurring effect—to give the dramatic method a name—fuses fact and fancy, but neither reality nor art is diminished. On the contrary, Hwang duplicates, through his own slant and line of attack, Cervantes's insistence on mutual *inclusion*. Truth, perspective, reception, irony, paradox, and so on and so on, come into (the) play as an echo and reinscription of sorts of earlier examples of metafiction and metatheater. Cervantes's first *Quixote* prologue fills the space of a prologue; it is a variation and expansion of Lope de Vega's "Soneto de repente" (Rivers 225). Hwang takes events from his life and his writings—indivisible in themselves—and turns them into a drama, or tragicomedy, of identity, theatrical praxis, human nature, family dynamics, trial and error, irony, paradox, and justice. Humor is an essential tool, but the objectives are higher and broader.

David Henry Hwang won acclaim for his 1988 play *M. Butterfly*, about the affair of a French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer whom he did not realize was a man. As a Chinese-American, Hwang had, and has, a special role in the theater community. *Yellow Face* (which alludes to the term *blackface*) uses that stature to initiate the action. In 1990, producers were planning to bring the musical *Miss Saigon*, by Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil, and Richard Maltby, Jr., and based on the opera *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini, from the London stage to Broadway. There erupted a controversy when the British director Cameron Mackintosh chose to bring to New York the actor Jonathan Pryce, from the original cast, in a leading role, that of an Asian. The dispute was not about the acting credentials of Mr. Pryce, but about the exclusion of Asian actors. Hwang mentions Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu as depicted

in American films, with actors in yellow face. Hwang registers a complaint with the union Actors Equity, and a polemic between minority rights and artistic freedom takes shape, with Hwang on the side of Asian actors yet conflicted about the principles at stake. He does not realize at first that he has helped to open, metaphorically speaking, a can of worms, or that he is about to become a whipping boy, “the poster child for political correctness” (Hwang 14). Actors Equity at first rejects Pryce, then reverses its decision and welcomes the actor from Great Britain with open arms. Pryce later receives a Tony award for the performance, while Hwang receives a good amount of negative publicity. The playwright sets himself up for ridicule by directing his next theatrical effort to a play entitled *Face Value*, built around the to-do over the casting of *Miss Saigon*. There really was such a play—with B. D. Wong (of *M. Butterfly*), Jane Krakowski, and Mark Linn-Baker—which failed in previews in 1993 and received devastating reviews in its pre-Broadway tryout.

In *Yellow Face*, the backstage story focuses on the casting of an Asian character in *Face Value*. Through miscommunication and unconscious deception, an actor named Marcus G. Dahlman is chosen to play the Asian lead. Caught in a bind that is ludicrous, ironic, and potentially humiliating, Hwang must defend the choice and rationalize an Asian, or partially Asian, identity for Dahlman, whom he renames Marcus Gee. He finagles an excuse to release Dahlman from his contract, but Marcus Gee turns his new identity and his socio-political platform into success on stage, for example, as a Yul Brynner for the new millennium in *The King and I* (“ethno-authentic casting,” lauds the *Los Angeles Times*).¹ As Gee becomes more and more popular, Hwang’s stock goes down, in and out of the Asian-American community. Marcus Dahlman’s firing becomes a blessing in disguise; he becomes a spokesman for ethnic pride and dates a former girlfriend of Hwang. Marcus Gee comes across as the ideal representative of a community that he has adopted. His popularity and commendations mount. In contrast, Hwang, a member of that community, seems lost (perhaps, in translation). Hwang’s misreadings and resulting misfortunes multiply. His father, a self-made financier born in China, convinces David to serve as a compensated member of the board of his bank. The senior Hwang’s associations lead to trouble with the U.S. government that the playwright’s celebrity and notoriety intensify. Politics in general and the politics of race—disguised at times as matters of national security—come into the mix. Even Marcus suffers, but he ultimately finds peace and acceptance in China.

Identity is at the core of *Yellow Face*. Hwang elects to study the topic through the elasticity of fact and fiction, which are undifferentiated in the play. The events purport to be real, but the technique is heavily and unapologetically theatrical. Actors play various roles, historical and fictional. Hwang laughs at himself and his circumstances while dealing with weighty and contentious issues. The dialogue is rich and ingenious, and the actors are called upon to cover much ground, verbally, geographically, and psychologically. The two ends of the spectrum—spectacle and reality, contrivances and targeted signifieds—meet, or collide, in the middle. Hwang is a master of theatrical technique, so that story, discourse, and art converge to produce an impressive symmetry. It would be hard for an audience to ignore the acute critique and the insights of the play and impossible to miss the splendid theatricality at its base. Hwang seems to trust the spectator to separate art from life and also to appreciate the enormous mediating ground between the two. *Yellow Face* goes all over the map, literally and figuratively. The world of the

¹ Hwang 37.

theater and the so-called real world face each other, and both flinch. Hwang's mirror—and his approach to mimesis—may comfort and discomfort the public, since any laughter that it triggers will bear traces of a serious counterpart. Real historical personages and events, and real theatrical personages and events, enter the illusion that does not pretend to be other than an illusion. The fact that the playwright makes himself the narrator and primary object of the satire is admirable, and the autobiographical flavor is nicely offset by the glaring histrionics of performance. The strange case of Marcus G. Dahlman supplies an absurdist touch and a foil figure for David Henry Hwang. An Asian-American by chance, Marcus Dahlman becomes one by choice, as he personifies the puzzles and the paradoxes of identity, as defined by self and society. Marcus Gee eventually is “unmasked,” but by then his mask has become his reality. His yellow face is the countenance that shines upon him.

Like narrative fiction, theater has its conventions and its idiosyncrasies. The spectator can step into an illusionary realm and remain distanced from it, as well. Cervantes favors a synthesis of realism and metafiction, or, more accurately, a never-ending dialectics. From the Spanish picaresque to the aftermath of postmodernism, novelists—who regularly cite Cervantes as a source of inspiration—follow the lead of *Don Quixote* by incorporating and assimilating the mimetic and the antimimetic. The artifice of theatrical performance permits great leeway in uniting the two modes. Playwrights, directors, actors, and designers can visualize, conceptualize, and organize the material as they see fit. In *The Glass Menagerie*, *Take Me Out*, and *Yellow Face*, respectively, Tennessee Williams, Richard Greenberg, and David Henry Hwang are guided by outward reality and by theatrical and metatheatrical urges. The approach to reality is as significant as—and closely tied to—the approach to dramaturgy. Playmaking becomes a representation of reality and, in concert, a representation of representation. Form and content feed off each other and validate the one through the other. The playwrights employ, and reshape, the tools of their trade as they bring concepts, language, and artistry to the stage. The deep structure of the three plays hints at a Cervantine template, wherein the depiction of facets of reality coincides with the joy of artistic creation and innovation. The artist is always identifiable within the work of art, and writers are always dependent on consumers of art to comprehend and value their work. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes establishes a circuitous route to reality. His successors—all quixotic, in their fashion—find their own heartfelt, inventive, and poetic routes.

Works Cited

- Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de. Francisco Rico dir. *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1998.
- . Tom Lathrop ed. *Don Quixote*. New York: Signet Classics, 2011.
- Friedman, Edward H. *Cervantes in the Middle: Realism and Reality in the Spanish Novel from Lazarillo de Tormes to Niebla*. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2006.
- Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2003.
- Hwang, David Henry. *Yellow Face*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2008.
- Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America. Part One: Millennium Approaches*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993.
- . *Angels in America. Part Two: Perestroika*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994.
- Rivers, Elias L. ed. and trans. *Renaissance and Baroque Poetry of Spain*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland P, 1988.
- Salinas, Pedro. Edith Fishtine Helman trans. *Reality and the Poet in Spanish Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1966.
- Shklovsky, Victor. "Art as Technique"; "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary."
- Lee T. Lemon & Marion J. Reis trans. and eds. *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965. 3-24;25-60.
- Unamuno, Miguel de. Warner Fite trans. *Mist: A Tragicomic Novel [Niebla]*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000.
- . Mario J. Valdés ed. *Niebla*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2000.
- Williams, Tennessee. *The Glass Menagerie*. New York: New Directions, 1970.