



Music, Lyrics, & Book by Jason Robert Brown

DRAMATURGY

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Pennsylvania State University | Spring 2021

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I. PRODUCTION HISTORY

Composition

The Last Five Years was based on composer, lyricist, book-writer Jason Robert Brown's failed marriage to actress Theresa O'Neill. Brown speaks about the musical's composition, "Honestly, I wasn't trying to settle any scores, I was just working through the very painful wreckage of a relationship that meant a lot to me." The work speaks from the side of both members in the relationship, Cathy and Jamie, speaking to their perspective during and after the relationship; Brown articulated his intentions in the unreliability narration, "I felt very sure, and still do, that there are no victims and no bad guys. Both of these people are equally responsible for the good things and the bad things in their relationship. It is, of course, my hope that the audience perceives it that way as well. I really just wanted to be honest about who these people were and how they acted." Brown clarifies that the narrative is not solely based on his marriage but inspired by it, "There's a general assumption that the show is strictly autobiographical, but it's not—Jamie and Cathy started out being fairly close to their real-life counterparts, but as the writing went on, they both became much different; they followed their own paths, and I just chased after them and wrote down what they said."

Productions

Chicago's Northlight Theatre Production (2001)

The original production of *The Last Five Years* opened at the Northlight Theatre in Skokie, Illinois on May 23, 2001. The production starred Norbert Butz as Jaime Wellerstein and Lauren Kennedy as Catherine Hiatt, was directed by Daisy Prince. The production notably portrayed the character of Catherine as Irish-Catholic, a marked change in later productions of the show. Jason Robert Brown's ex-wife, Theresa O'Neill, sued Brown after the Chicago production, protesting that the portrayal of the character of Catherine Hiatt was incredibly similar to herself and that it violated the nondisparagement and non-disclosure terms of their divorce agreement. Following the production, Brown took measures to differentiate the character of Hiatt from O'Neill, deleting all Irish references, as well most uses of the pet-name "Angel", which he had used to refer to O'Neill.

Off-Broadway Production (2002)

The original New York production of *The Last Five Years* opened Off-Broadway at the Minetta Lane Theatre in Greenwich Village on March 2, 2002 and ran for two months. The production had a roughly ninety-minute runtime. The scenic design featured a large scrim outlining a clock-like circle as the backdrop, with a revolving platform. The backdrop and turntable stage was used to highlight the passage of time, such as during "The Next Ten Minutes". Jaime first faced forward, speaking to an empty boat; then, Cathy joined him for the duet; and then, Jaime left the confines of the boat, and Cathy sang forward to an empty boat, as the platform revolved, showing Cathy's passage of time forward.

The cast and production staff for the production were as follows:

Cast

Catherine Hiatt	Sherie Rene Scott
Jamie Wellerstein	Norbert Leo Butz

Production Staff

Lyricist	Jason Robert Brown
Composer	Jason Robert Brown
Director	Daisy Prince
Set and Costume Designer	Beowulf Boritt
Lighting Designer	Christine Binder
Sound Designer	Duncan Edwards
Orchestrator	Jason Robert Brown
Musical Director	Thomas Murray



Above, a photo of the original Off-Broadway production of The Last Five Years, featuring Sherie Rene Scott in the role of Catherine Hiatt (left) and Norbert Leo Butz in the role of Jaime Wellerstein (right) during “The Next Ten Minutes”.

Other Notable Productions

Off-Broadway Revival (2013): In 2013, an Off-Broadway revival of *The Last Five Years* ran from March 7 to April 28 in New York at Second Stage's Tony Kiser Theatre. Directed by Jason Robert Brown, the revival was the first production of the musical in New York since its first Off-Broadway production in 2002; Brown chose to set the revival in its original time period, in 2002 not 2013. The revival starred Adam Kantor as Jaime Wellerstein and Betsy Wolfe as Catherine Hiatt. The production featured scenic design by Derek McLane, costume design by Emily Rebholz, lighting design by Jeff Croiter and sound design by Jon Weston. Brown's production notably featured tall windows in the scenic design that rose or fell in height during the show and pictured "bewitching views of New York skies filled with snow or rain", as Charles



Isherwood illustrates in his *The New York Times* theatre review of the production.



Film adaptation (2014): In 2014, Richard LaGravenese's filmic adaptation of the stage musical starring Anna Kendrick as Catherine Hiatt and Jeremy Jordan as Jaime Wellerstein was released. The film is notable for how it adapts the solo stage numbers for the screen; in each number in the film, each character is present for the other's solo in naturalistic performances where they are present in the same moment in time and space. The film opened to mixed-to-positive reviews from critics, some of whom criticized the film's adaptation between mediums as lackluster in its use of setting, blocking, and cinematography. The film production was also praised as charming, and it succeeded in bringing wider recognition and awareness of *The Last Five Years* and Jason Robert Brown through its function as a much more accessible product and medium than stage productions.

By virtue of medium, the filmic adaptation grounded the narrative in more concrete reality that theatrical stagings have or can; the mystical elements of the elusive passing of time were adapted into stated years that were prominently displayed in the settings and props of the film for the audience to understand at what point in the narrative the plot was occurring.

*An interesting note on LaGravenese and Brown: The year that LaGravenese was directing the filmic adaptation of Brown's stage production, *The Last Five Years*, Brown's theatrical adaptation of the novel, *The Bridges of Madison County* premiered, of which LaGravenese also directed a famous and acclaimed filmic adaptation in 1995.*

Concert (2016): On September 12, 2016, Jason Robert Brown—in collaboration with the performance venue, SubCulture, with whom Brown is an artist-in-residency—produced *The Last Five Years* in concert as a fundraiser to raise money to protest against gun violence. The concert starred Joshua Henry as Jamie Wellesterin and Cynthia Erivo as Catherine Hiatt. The concert is notable for casting a Black actor, Joshua Henry, in the role of Jewish Jamie Wellerstein, creating representation for Black Jewish people. *(Above, a photo of Joshua Henry, Jason Robert Brown, and Cynthia Erivo at the end of the concert)*



Criticism & Reviews

Theatre critics of the original 2002 Off-Broadway productions praised the originality of Brown's work, especially the initiative in the framing device and the complexity of the lyrical and musical composition. Within the domain of musical theatre, a form that traditionally takes on love stories, the subject matter of a relationship in entanglement has been praised as daring and mature. Specifically, the subversion of expectation in the audience's desire to see the two leads sing a traditional love duet in "The Next Ten Minutes" and "Goodbye Until Tomorrow/I Could Never Rescue You" has been noted as ingenious. Some have criticized the "gimmick" of the show as difficult to understand, or otherwise, unengaging, articulating the message of the show as a dirge that fails to capture any representation of the two character beyond caricature. Others have considered the two characters as rich, complex, three-dimensional and fully-realized human experiences, praising the show's chronology for its deliberation on time and its relationship to both human experience and the central relationship.

Awards

The original Off-Broadway production of *The Last Five Years* won the Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Music and Outstanding Lyrics in 2002; it was also nominated for Outstanding Musical, Outstanding Actress, Outstanding Actor, Outstanding Set Design, and Outstanding Orchestrations.

Popularity

Despite *The Last Five Years* not seeing large critical or commercial success in any major New York productions—for example, the musical has yet to see a Broadway production—it has reached widespread recognition and has become a classic of contemporary American musical theatre. As of 2013, *The New York Times* reported over 1,000 productions of the property, in community and regional theatres domestically as well as internationally—the musical has been translated from English to multiple languages, as well, including Dutch, Japanese, Korean, German, and Italian. The musical’s popularity can be attributed to, in part, its intimate, pared-down production. Jason Robert Brown himself expressed his intent to create a smaller, more intimate production after his work with *Parade*, which utilized a large venue, cast, and sets. A piece that is not just “theatrical[ly] intimate”, but “emotional[ly] intimate”, as Jason Robert Brown articulates, *The Last Five Years* thrives in smaller, more intimate venues that community and regional theatre often has access to. As theatre critic David Finkle illustrate, the set designer Beowulf Boritt outlined the original Off-Broadway production sparingly, with hints of a set in “employ[ing] a turntable to send out a few pieces of furniture—a bed, a chair made of Jamie's best-selling books, a series of small, papier mâché automobiles.” In combination with its non-demanding staging, the musical has, thus, become a natural gravitation for companies. The filmic adaptation has allowed for international audiences to find the work, making it a “cult classic”. Familiarity with the show has also improved perceptions of it, as the chronology can be different to understand for a new audience member, but recognizable and easily-digestible with those previously exposed to the story and its conceit.

II. THE AUTHOR: JASON ROBERT BROWN

Biography

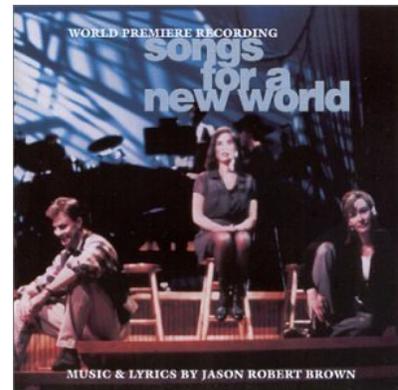
Born in Monsey, New York, in the suburbs of Manhattan, Jason Robert Brown was gifted at music from a young age. At age five, he was taking lessons, and at six, he was playing recitals and outperforming his instructors in piano. In third grade, his teachers moved him to fourth grade as he was not paying attention in his classes. For formal post-secondary music education, Brown attended the Eastman School of Music for two years. Brown's career in New York began as a rehearsal pianist, conductor, pianist, and arranger for shows; he served the rehearsal pianist for the musical, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, and worked in piano bars across the city. Jason Robert Brown is Jewish. He has been married twice; first to actor Theresa O'Neil, and then to composer Georgia Stitt in 2003, with whom he shares two daughters.

Works

Below is history about a number of Brown's notable works.

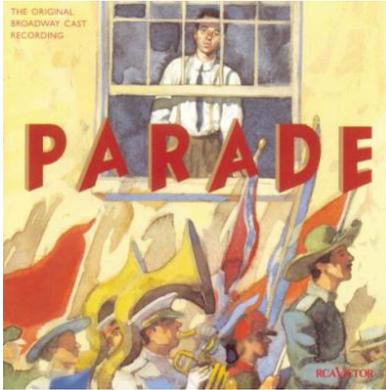
SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD

Songs for a New World is a song cycle and Jason Robert Brown's first produced work of musical theatre, first staged Off-Broadway in 1995 at the WPA Theatre in New York. Directed by Daisy Prince in the first of Brown's collaborations with her, and featuring a four-person cast with Andrea Burns, Brooks Ashmanskas, Jessica Molaskey and Billy Porter. The songs are vignettes of moments in a variety of characters' lives, including an American flagmaker in 1775, a contemporary separating couple, a Spanish explorer in 1492, and a regretful married woman. Reflecting the differing characters and time periods, Brown's music style includes a variety of genres and influences, including gospel, country, and pop. The characters and sketches in each number are not connected in a uniting narrative; in Brown's words, the uniting, central theme of the sixteen songs in the work is that they are "about one moment. It's about hitting the wall and having to make a choice, or take a stand, or turn around and go back." At the WPA Theatre, the song cycle played for twenty-eight performances; after its original run, it has become a popular choice for revues and amateur performing groups due to its minimal design. The song "Stars and the Moon" from the song cycle has become a cabaret standard and remains one of Jason Robert Brown's most popular songs.



PARADE

Parade is a musical with a book by American playwright Alfred Uhry and with music and lyrics by Jason Robert Brown. Taking place in George in 1913 to 1914, the musical depicts the life of Jewish-American Leo Frank—specifically, the false accusations against him of murdering a thirteen-year-old girl, his subsequent trial, and his lynching. American theatrical producer and



director Harold Prince asked Brown to compose the score for his idea of a dramatization of Frank’s life, after musical theater composer Stephen Sondheim had turned down the project and daughter of Harold Prince, Daisy Prince, the director of Brown’s *Songs for a New World*, had recommended Brown for the project. Book writer Alfred Uhry, who has previously won a Pulitzer Prize for his play, *Driving Miss Daisy*, joined the project as he has personal knowledge of the subject matter; his great uncle has been the employer of Leo Frank, and his grandmother a friend of Lucille Frank, Leo Frank’s wife.

After a Philadelphia reading, a New York reading, and a Toronto workshop, the musical opened on Broadway at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center in December 1998; the musical played for 39 preview performances and 84 regular performances, starring Brent Carver as Leo Frank and Carolee Carmello as Lucille Frank. The Broadway production received generally positive reviews, especially for the score, with some reservation for what was considered an excessive use of racial slurs in the text. The 1998 Broadway production was nominated for nine Tony Awards and won Best Book of a Musical for Alfred Uhry and Best Original Score for Brown. The musical saw a national tour in the 2000, directed by Harold Prince, and its first major United Kingdom production in the 2007 London production directed by Rob Ashford.

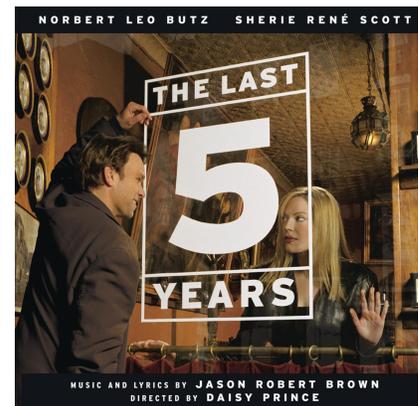
The musical is notable in the history of musical theatre for its status as an original musical—with an original score and plot, one that is not an adaptation of an existing narrative work—and as a narrative work, unlike the revues and concerts that were popular and dominated New York theatre in the last 1990s and early 2000s. Additionally, its serious content and contemplative lyrical style reflects musical theatre lyricists like Stephen Sondheim, an inspiration to Brown, who has been credited with revitalizing the musical form with complexity and sophistication.

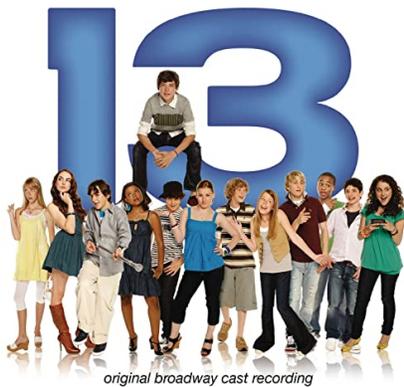
A note on Parade in relation to Brown’s bibliography: It was during the composition of *Parade* that Jason Robert Brown says his “marriage fell apart and several close friendships floundered or vanished”. At the root of the narrative is the marriage of Leo Frank and Lucille Frank, a journey depicted as the two seeing through some disharmony and falling in love further and truly, which makes Leo Frank’s death even more tragic in its punctuation to reaching marital bliss and understanding.

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

The Last Five Years is a musical with its lyrics, music, and book written by Jason Robert Brown.

Please refer to [I. Production History](#) for more on the work.





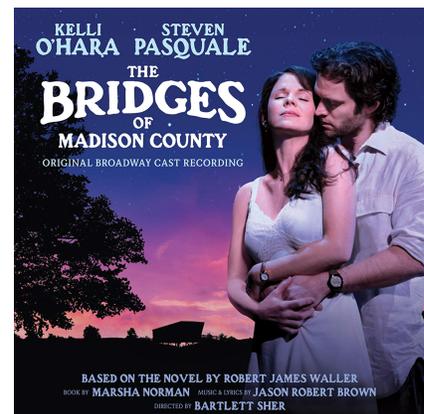
13

13 is a musical with lyrics and music by Jason Robert Brown and a book by Dan Elish and Robert Horn. The narrative musical follows thirteen-year-old Evan Goldman in his move from his life in the idyllic New York City to Appleton, Indiana following his parents divorce and his subsequent adventures in trying to fit in a new school and inspire his peers to attend his Bar Mitzvah. Partly inspired by Brown's experiences in childhood, the musical attempts to depict the realities of teenagehood on the theatrical stage, a group of people not often represented in musical theatre, or otherwise mischaracterized in caricature.

The musical premiered in Los Angeles in 2007, in a production directed by Todd Graff at The Mark Taper Forum. The next production was at the Norma Terris Theatre in Chester, Connecticut, by Goodspeed Musicals, in 2008, directed by Jeremy Sams and featuring most of the cast that would continue in the Broadway production. The Broadway production opened at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre in September 2008 and played for 22 preview performances and 105 regular performances. The cast featured thirteen actors for the musical's thirteen characters: Graham Phillips, Allie Trimm, Aaron Simon Gross, Eric Nelsen, Delaney Moro, Elizabeth Gillies, Al Calderon, Malik Hammond, Caitlin Gann, Ariana Grande, Brynn Williams, Joey La Varco, Eamon Foley. Jason Robert Brown himself conducted the production's band, composed entirely of teenage musicians. The Broadway production was the first and remains the only production to have an all-teenage cast and an all-teenage band. As Bob Verini articulates in his *Variety* review of the Broadway production, the musical "leaves out the harsher realities of adolescence", but critics had generally positive reviews of the middle-school story. The stage musical is in process of being adapted into a Netflix original film.

THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

The Bridges of Madison County is musical with a book written by Marsha Norman and lyrics and music written by Jason Robert Brown. Adapted from Robert James Waller's 1992 novel of the same name, *The Bridges of Madison County* is a narrative musical that takes place in Iowa in 1965 and depicts a four-day forbidden love affair between Francesca Johnson, an Italian immigrant who married an American soldier to escape a war, and *National Geographic* photographer, Robert Kincaid who drove into her driveway one day to ask for directions. The musical saw its first production at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts in August 2013, before beginning its Broadway run at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre in January 2014. The original Broadway production starred Kelli O'Hara as



Francesca Johnson and Steven Pasquale as Robert Kincaid and ran for 137 performances. Criticism of the show was generally mixed, with some praising the score and O'Hara's performance, while others criticizing the length and pacing of the narrative. Subsequent productions of the work include a national tour 2015 and its international premiere in Manila, in the Philippines, in the same year.

Writing Style

Lyrics & Music

Jason Robert Brown's lyrical style has been compared to that of Stephen Sondheim, featuring unconventional and unexpected rhythms and rhymes. Brown's works are also known to feature compositions that range a wide variety of musical genres, including rock, Klezmer, latin, jazz, and blues. Textually, this supports the episodic, as opposed to climactic, nature of many of his narratives, where scenes or songs build on each other as a narrative progresses, as opposed to following a linear story where one action directly leads to another—a vertical narrative, as opposed to a horizontal one.

Themes & Topics

The topic of marriage and fidelity is a recurring theme within Brown's later works. In *Parade*, a dramatization of historical events, the relationship of Leo and Lucille Frank serves as an emotional core of the story, as their shaky marriage and relationship is rebuilt with renewed love and trust over the course of the musical. In *The Last Five Years*, an original narrative, a couple separates and one partner is depicted as having cheated. In *The Bridges of Madison County*, the main character, Francesca Johnson is depicted as cheating on her husband in a passionate love affair.

Brown's works have also contributed to the representation of Jewish peoples within the musical theatre canon, depicting facets of the Jewish-American experience in the depiction of thirteen-year-old Evan Goldman and his Bar Mitzvah in *13*, the tragedy of Leo Frank's death in *Parade*, and the relationship woes and pursuits of Jamie Wellerstein in *The Last Five Years*'s "Shiksa Goddess" and the character's Jewish folklore traditions in "The Schmuel Song."

Brown's Work Within the Musical Theatre Canon

Jason Robert Brown is considered one of the preeminent composers and lyricists that is leading the new wave of musical theatre in the 21st century. His works have been representatives of a strand of contemporary musical theatre that is not beholden to the corporate influences on the New York theatre scene. Recent trends in New York and Broadway theatre have shown a popularity with jukebox musicals (*Mamma Mia!*, *Jersey Boys*, *Moulin Rouge!*, *Beautiful*) and with adaptations of films or other popular culture properties (*Mean Girls*, *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, *The SpongeBob Musical*), including the work of Disney Theatrical Productions. In terms of original work, both narrative and music, Jason Robert Brown has been a leading writer in developing the voice of contemporary American musical theatre, despite no resounding commercial successes on Broadway or in New York, and varying critical consensus in journalistic theatrical reviews.

Jason Robert Brown has noted Stephen Sondheim as a particular inspiration to him, and as of 2008, he has noted only four musicals in the past ten years that has captured his interest: Adam Guettel's *The Light in the Piazza* and *Floyd Collins*; David Yazbek's *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*; and Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's *Once on This Island*.

III. A LITERARY ANALYSIS

Overview

The following table visually demonstrates the changing perspectives throughout work as Cathy and Jaime exchange the role of narrator.

	<i>Cathy</i>	<i>Jaime</i>	<i>Monologues</i>
<i>Scene 1</i>	Still Hurting		
<i>Scene 2</i>		Shiksa Goddess	
<i>Scene 3</i>	See I'm Smiling		<p><i>Jamie: "Hi, I'm calling for Ms. Whitfield..."</i></p> <p><i>Jamie: "Hello? This is. Oh, Ms. Whitfield..."</i></p> <p><i>Jamie: "Rob? Yeab, listen..."</i></p>
<i>Scene 4</i>		Moving Too Fast	<i>Cathy: "Hello, this is Catherine Hiatt, I'm calling for Mike Stelmer..."</i>
<i>Scene 5</i>	I'm a Part of That		
<i>Scene 6</i>		The Schmue Song	
<i>Scene 7</i>	A Summer in Ohio		
<i>Scene 8</i>	The Next	Ten Minutes	
<i>Scene 9</i>		A Miracle Would Happen	
<i>Scene 10</i>	Climbing Uphill		<i>Jaime: "Cathy, what are you doing now?..."</i>
<i>Scene 11</i>		If I Didn't Believe In You	
<i>Scene 12</i>	I Can Do Better Than That		
<i>Scene 13</i>		Nobody Needs To Know	
<i>Scene 14</i>	Goodbye Until Tomorrow	I Could Never Rescue You	

Transitions

The following is some brief notes on the emotional transition between scenes and moments in the show, to track the journey of the audience's experience of the relationship.

	<i>Cathy</i>	<i>Jaime</i>	<i>Transitions</i>	
Scene 1	Still Hurting		<i>Cathy's desolate pain contrasts with Jaime's prophetic euphoria.</i>	
Scene 2		Shiksa Goddess		<i>Jaime's realization of artistic inspiration is juxtaposed with the image of Cathy working on summer stock repertoire.</i>
Scene 3	See I'm Smiling		<i>Jaime's career success in his monologues at the beginning of his career contrasts with Cathy's lack of success in her monologue</i>	
Scene 4		Moving Too Fast		<i>Jaime's self-focused breakout success with his novel directly leads to understanding of how Cathy fits into his life; it is suggested that Jamie's attitude has caused her isolation and servitude.</i>
Scene 5	I'm a Part of That		<i>Cathy's position of servitude for Jaime's work, both in promoting and creating it, is contrasted with Jaime's gesture to help her in her career. The reasoned-away tension of Cathy's is juxtaposed with a sure hope of Jaime's for her.</i>	
Scene 6		The Schmuel Song		<i>Closer in time than previous moments, Jaime's sweet gesture in the watch and Cathy's "sweet sorrow" found in their parting over distance creates a throughline of attempts in the relationship; the happier notes of both songs serve as a honeymoon moment, and both reflect on Cathy's happiness specifically.</i>
Scene 7	A Summer in Ohio		<i>Having established that they will be married in "Ohio", "Minutes" dwells in the anticipatory moments, contemplative.</i>	
Scene 8	The Next	Ten Minutes		<i>Trading Cathy and Jaime's pain, Jaime's contemplation of infidelity or non-monogamous thoughts after his vows strikes as particularly tragic. The dramatic irony of the show belongs to Jaime beginning in this moment.</i>
Scene 9		A Miracle Would Happen	<i>The difficulty of Jaime's experience with "resist[ing] Temptation" with the domain of marriage is juxtaposed with Cathy's determination with the domain of career.</i>	
Scene 10	Climbing Uphill			<i>The transition after "Uphill" implies a causation in the effects of Cathy's career struggles on the relationship, despite the moment prior happening in a different time.</i>
Scene 11		If I Didn't Believe In You	<i>The tension revealed between Jaime and Cathy in how their relationship relates to their respective careers is devastating and vulnerable; the transition to "Better Than That" is particularly tragic in Cathy's sheer hope in finding something unlike her hometown in moving to the city for work.</i>	
Scene 12	I Can Do Better Than That			<i>In a moment paralleling the transition between "Moving Too Fast" and "See I'm Smiling", there is a great juxtaposition between Cathy's hope for her relationship and Jaime's confession of how he has struggled with Cathy in their relationship.</i>
Scene 13		Nobody Needs To Know	<i>Jaime's linear chronology shows a direct link in his desolation for his actions in leaving Cathy; meanwhile, the juxtaposition between the last actions of Jaime and her first impressions show an irreconcilable experience of time.</i>	
Scene 14	Goodbye Until Tomorrow	I Could Never Rescue You		

Framing & Title

The narrative's conceit for depicting the separation of a couple is that each person within the relationship, Cathy and Jaime, illustrates the relationship through independent narration except for one moment ("The Next Ten Minutes"), with Cathy's timeline for moments progressing in a reverse chronology and Jaime's in a straight-forward linear chronology. Cathy's last moment of the

experience of the relationship begins the show, and Jamie's last moment of the experience of the relationship ends the show. The title of the musical, "The Last Five Years", implies a retrospective look back on the relationship depicted; thus, in conjunction with Cathy's perspective beginning the story, the framing suggests that the retrospect, and not in-real-time experience, is the driving force of the narrative. Indeed, a sense of *dramatic irony* pervades the narrative, a case of irony where the audience has full knowledge of the significance of current events or actions that remain unknown to the characters. The audience's experience of the events of the story is with the knowledge of how it ends, that which the two characters do not know for the majority of the plot.

Perspectivity

The separate perspectives of Cathy and Jamie allow for the two characters to function as unreliable narrators; the narrative emphasizes each characters' personal experience of their relationship, while allowing for questions of whether their experience was true to reality or to their significant other's reality.

Chronology

Interpretation

The significance of Cathy's reverse-chronology and Jamie's linear-chronology may be viewed in relation to a search to understand where in "the last five years" the relationship soured. Cathy's reverse-chronology can be understood, in one sense, as Cathy searching for which moment in the trajectory of the relationship that it went wrong; meanwhile, Jamie's linear-chronology can be understood as Jamie believing that the relationship was doomed from the start. In this, the belief of *fatalism*—the belief that events are predetermined, caused by fate or destiny as opposed to individual or human decision—can be understood to be woven in with rationalizations of the story's events.

Defamiliarization

The differing chronologies may also be understood as serving the effect of *defamiliarization* within the narrative, the effect by which the narrative presents events in a way that strikes as unfamiliar to the audience, aiming to draw the audiences away from their own reality into a new perspective. In this postmodern narrative, the experience of time within the events of the story, the plot, creates an effect of defamiliarization as an audience member attempts to rationalize and understand these events to create a narrative discourse, an *understanding of how* the events are organized.

The chronology of the work definitively creates a patchwork image of the relationship depicted, a series of images that, together, create an atmospheric work, as opposed to climactic. The experience of the different moments in time creates a temporal texture for the narrative, as the first half of the narrative narrows in the temporal discrepancy between each characters' scene to culminate in the "The Next Ten Minutes", before splitting and speeding up rate of difference of the time between scenes. Ultimately, the lack of a definitive interpretation of the depiction of chronology in relation to the relationship creates simply a sense of "happen"—complete defamiliarization.

IV. JEWISHNESS

“Jewishness”: An Introduction

“Jewishness”, or “the quality of being Jewish or of having characteristics regarded as typically Jewish”, has functioned as a nebulous term, an amalgam of different conceptions of being Jewish. Jewishness is sometimes broken down into different manifestations or forms of experience—as a culture, a religion, an ethnicity, a nationality. However, the conception of these categories as discrete has been challenged by scholars who encourage “Jewishness” to be understood, as uniquely natured, theorized as having interconnected meanings within social systems and their own subjective natures.

Jewish Cultural References

A CLOSE READ OF *THE LAST FIVE YEARS*

The following is a list of Jewish cultural references within the text of *The Last Five Years*, and accompanying notes on translations, cultural context, and other information helpful for understanding the narrative and its characters. This list attempts to be as exhaustive as possible with explicit references that may be helpful to understand within the musical, while acknowledging that the narrative, the characters, and the text are in many ways wholly steeped in Jewish culture inseparably and essentially by virtue of the existence of Jaime’s character, the nature of his experience, and the background of the lyricist. The page numbers for each reference refer to the libretto for *The Last Five Years*.

SCENE 2: SHIKSA GODDESS

Shiksa Goddess (pg. 3)

The term, *shiksa* (pronounced **shik-suh**), is a Yiddish word used, especially by Jewish people, to refer to a gentile (non-Jewish) girl or woman. The term is generally considered derogatory, with the implication that the individual being referenced is not part of one’s community. The word originates from the Hebrew, *shekets* (שֶׁקֶט), which itself translates roughly to “blemish” or “abomination”. (The equivalent term for a non-Jewish boy or man is a *sheygetz*, a word that is used far less often in American discourse; one may attribute to this to a combination of misogyny and heteronormativity in this context.) *Shiksa* is often used in contexts where a Jewish man is romantically pursuing a gentile woman; as a derogatory term, it is used to express disapproval for pursuing a woman outside of one’s faith and characterizes the *shiksa* in question in a negative light, often as a dangerous temptress.

The widespread use of the word in American popular culture may be attributed to a number of factors. First, the term was popularized, in part, by male Jewish-American creators—comedians, writers, storytellers—who, with a predominantly heteronormative

skew and in expression of stepping outside of one's faith, popularized a concept of a gentile woman as an attractive partner for their status as an outsider to the Jewish community.

Within Jewish culture, the term accompanies a significant concept in how Jewishness is passed down, per Jewish law: by the matrilineal line, from mother to child. Otherwise, a mixed-faith couple may still be questioned at how well or if they will be able to fully communicate traditions and beliefs of Jewish society to children and future generations. Therefore, the prospect of a non-Jewish mother may strike as a threat to the passing on of Jewishness to future generations. In recent decades, more liberal Jewish movements—such as the Reconstructionist and Reform, as opposed to the Conservative and Orthodox—have embraced broader definitions of Jewishness, where simply one parent of any gender must be Jewish for the children to be raised as Jewish. Otherwise, the matrilineal descent may still be accomplished for gentile mothers within Conservative and Orthodox traditions through formal conversion.

Used in a negative light and disparagingly, the term *shiksa* can be exclusionary and/or misogynistic.

Used positively, such as in the phrase *shiksa goddess*, the word can reflect a negative image of Jewish women, as less attractive than their gentile counterparts; the phrase may be offensive to Jewish women. The *shiksa goddess* and, especially, the *blonde shiksa goddess* is a popular trope in American stories; coupled with American culture's conceptions of Semitic features and its difference with the culture's beauty standards, the positive phrase *shiksa goddess* may be harmful in implying that Jewish men are more attracted to *shiksa goddesses* without such features. The positive conception of a *shiksa* furthers existing unjust power structures in communities with discrimination against Jewish people, where being with a gentile woman may be perceived as a status symbol for Jewish men in an anti-Semitic culture.

The fundamental idea of a *shiksa goddess*, a gentile woman that a Jewish man is attracted to, also furthers the stereotype of an overbearing, guilt-inducing Jewish mother. As George Constanza proclaimed on *Seinfeld*, "You've got Shiksappeal. Jewish men love the idea of meeting a woman that's not like their mother." *Shikas* are perceived as exotic and, therefore, desirable; the appeal of a *shiksa* is largely that *shikas* are outside of one's faith and community, a perceived freedom from the bonds of Jewish society, as personified in American culture's Oedipal interpretation of a Jewish mother, one who is not desirable in her nature, therefore prompting her son to seek out her opposite.

JCC of Spring Valley (pg. 3)

JCC is the acronym for "Jewish Community Center". A JCC is a general recreational, fraternal, and social organization serving the Jewish community in a given area. The Jewish Community Centers Association of North America is an umbrella organization that has been

promoting and supporting the Jewish Community Center movement, helping to start new centers and contributing to community causes throughout the United States and Canada. JCCs promote Jewish culture and heritage to build social and cultural identity through programming that celebrates holidays and provides Jewish education. While promoting Jewish-related programming, JCCs are open to everyone in the community, and all ages.

Spring Valley, New York is a suburb of New York City, a town located in Rockland County of New York State. Rockland County, with a 31.4% Jewish population of roughly 90,000 Jewish residents, has the largest Jewish population per capita of any U.S. county.

Hebrew school (pg. 3)

In the United States, *Hebrew school* is most often an educational institution and program separate from secular education that educates students on Jewish history and learning the Hebrew language. (Outside of Israel and not within the United States, the term *Hebrew school*, more often refers to educational institutions—at any level, primary, secondary, post-secondary—that teach entirely or part-time in the Hebrew language.)

The first *Hebrew school* in the United States was founded by Rebecca Gratz, a preeminent Jewish-American Philadelphia native in the early 1800's in response to the spread of Christian Sunday school in the later 1700's, to provide proper education on Jewish culture, history, and traditions and the Hebrew language to those who would not be able to access or afford that education otherwise. Modern Hebrew school is typically taught on Sunday and on one other day during the week—typically Tuesday or Wednesday—following secular education in the morning. Students from kindergarten through seventh grade can attend *Hebrew school*, with the education culminating in an individual's Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. Hebrew school is typically held at one's synagogue; after seventh grade, one may choose to continue one's education through attending a program of the Gratz Academy, the high school program of Gratz College, a private Jewish college that offers further studies.

Students in early elementary school may study topics such as major Jewish holidays, the Hebrew alphabet, and various engaging activities related to music, cooking, games, and crafts. Students in later elementary school grades often build on established skills in practicing reading Hebrew; reciting common prayers; learning Jewish concepts, ideas, and values (such as the concept of *tzedakah* or charity); learning Jewish history, geography, rituals, and traditions; and taking classes on Jewish ethics and morality. Students will begin preparation for their Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, a Jewish coming-of-age ceremony, working with a rabbi or cantor to prepare for it by studying the Torah and a system for chanting sacred texts.

*I've been waiting through Danica **Schwartz** and Erica **Weiss** / And the **Handelman** twins. / I've been waiting through Heather **Greenblatt**, Annie **Mincus**, / Karen **Pincus** and Lisa **Katz**. / And Stacy **Rosen**, Ellen **Kaplan**, Julie **Silver** and Janie **Stein**. (pg. 3)*

The bolded last names above are surnames with Ashkenazic Jewish and/or Yiddish origins, that are often last names that Jewish Americans hold.

MORE ON THE NAMES: *Schwartz* is a surname with German and Jewish origins, that is a nickname for someone with black hair or a dark complexion, derived from the pre-medieval word “scwarz” which means “black”. *Weiss* is a surname with German and Ashkenazic Jewish origins, a nickname of someone with white hair or a pale complexion, derived from the Middle High German word, “wiz” meaning “white”; alternatively, it can also be a habitational name for those from the German places Weiss or Weissen. *Greenblatt* is a surname, Americanized from the name, Grünblatt, an Ashkenazic Jewish name, compounded from the German words *grün* (meaning “green”) and *blatt* (meaning “leaf.”) *Mincus*, as a last name, can trace its roots to Polish origins and Ashkenazic Jewish origins, derived from the names *Minke* and *Minkin*. *Pincus* is a surname with Ashkenazic Jewish origins, derived from the Hebrew name, *Pinkus*, which is derived from the name *Pinechas* as featured in the Torah. *Katz* is a surname with Ashkenazic Jewish origins, derived from the Hebrew phrase, *kohen tsedek*, meaning “priest of righteousness”. *Rosen* is a surname with Ashkenazic Jewish origins, derived from the German word, “Rosen”, meaning “roses”. *Stein* is an Ashkenazic Jewish and German surname, meaning “rock”, often used as an ornamental name—one assigned out of necessity in the 18-19th centuries, often by force—for someone who lives in a stony topography. *Silver* is a surname that, among many origins, has been a translation of the German and Ashkenazic surname *Silber*.

The inclusion of this rather extraneous information serves to give dignity and personhood to each of the names.

Shabbas dinners on Friday nights (pg. 3)

Shabbas or, more often, *Shabbos*, is the Yiddish term for the Jewish Sabbath, (alternative titles: *Shabbat*, or *Shabbat*, from the Hebrew word *shavat*, meaning “cease” or “desist”), a day of rest, of religious observance and abstinence from work, kept by Jewish people from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. On Friday evenings, as Jewish families transition from their everyday lives to a spiritual time, a dinner may be held to observe the Sabbath, potentially involving an evening of singing prayers, engaging in conversation, sharing inspirations, and a meal. Sabbath dinner may be multi-coursed, involving traditional dishes such as challah bread, gefilte fish, matzo ball soup, roasted brisket, kugel, and pareve dessert. In synagogue on Saturday morning, a portion of the religious text, the Torah, is read aloud.

Shapiro in Washington Heights (pg. 3)

The last name, *Shapiro*, is an eastern Ashkenazic Jewish last name; the name is a habitational name, one that denotes a locality that is peopled or inhabited, among Eastern European Jews, named after the German city of Speyer, which was an important Jewish center during

the Middle Ages. The name is fairly common among Jewish Americans, due to the history of immigration to the United States for Jewish people from Germany, where the name originates.

Washington Heights is a neighborhood within Manhattan, the New York City borough. While the neighborhood's Jewish population is not as large as it was in its peak in the 1950's and 1960's, the area seeing great demographic changes with an increase in its Puerto Rican and Dominican American populations in the time since, there still exists a Jewish presence in the neighborhood and a lasting history from earlier decades.

Wandr'ing through the desert! (pg. 3)

A reference to a story from the Book of Numbers, the fourth book in the Hebrew Bible, that recounts how Israelites wandered in the wilderness and desert for forty years before reaching the Promised Land. During this time, God gave the group provisions, including *manna*, a food, from Heaven, and water from a rock.

My people have suffered for thousands of years (pg. 3)

The Jewish people and Judaism have persisted through time, despite a number of atrocities committed against Jewish people. Some of these include:

- 586 BCE: The Babylonians' conquest of the Kingdom of Judah, and the Jewish people's exile to Babylon.
- 132-135 CE: The Romans' conquest of the region and a revolt that resulted in a massive Jewish depopulation, where 580,000 Jews died in battle, let alone those who died due to disease and hunger.
- 4th-7th century CE: The forced conversion to Christianity of Jewish populations thriving in the Meditarrean basin under the Byzantine and Visigoth empires,
- 1099 CE: The launch of several Christian crusades which persecuted Jewish people in their path to reclaim the Holy City of Jerusalem.
- 16th century CE: The scapegoating of Jewish people as the cause of the Black Death, bubonic plague pandemic that killed half of Europe's population, and the subsequent expulsion of Jewish populations from many regions.
- 1648-1654 CE: The slaughter of Jewish populations in Ukraine after accusations of having a privileged relationship with those in power during the Khmelnytsky Uprising, in numbers of 100-300 thousand.
- 1941-1945 CE: The Holocaust, a genocide committed by Nazi Germany against European Jews that killed roughly six million, around two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population.

I've been waiting for someone, / I've been praying for someone (pg. 4)

Judaism may be considered an amalgam of many things—a religion, a culture, an ethnicity, a nationality, and a heritage. Many people identify as Jewish without identifying as religious, as

secular households practice traditions and customs associated with a religious Judaism. Otherwise, Jewish ethnic groups exist, including the modern division of *Ashkenazim*, denoting their base in Central Europe, and *Sephardim*, denoting their base in Spain, Portugal or North Africa. Still yet, Jewish populations may be considered a nation, either a stateless nation that must have a nation, per Zionist views, or a separate society of governing, infrastructure, and customs that has existed within or alongside other societies throughout history. A self-identifying Jewish individual's experience of "Jewishness" within their own life might be one or a number of overlapping definitions of what it means to be Jewish.

SCENE 6: THE SCHMUEL SONG

Schmuel (pg. 12)

The name, *Schmuel*, is of Jewish name of Hebrew origins that means "God Has Heard"—or, otherwise, "His Name is God" or "God". Another version of the name is *Samuel*, the name of the prophet who anointed the first two kings of Israel.

Tailor (pg. 12)

In Yiddish folklore and literature, the *amkbo sher un ayren*, "the simple people of the scissors and ironing board" or tailors, came to express the joys and struggles of the Jewish people through depictions of their lifestyle and songs.

Klimovich (pg. 12)

Ostensibly, a town. The only found source with record of such a town name, the Jewish Telegraph Agency's Friday, May 13, 1943 daily news bulletin, names Klimovich as one of many towns of Byelorussia (or the BSSR, a federal unit of the USSR, a region that is now the country of Belarus), in which atrocities against Jewish people were committed by the Nazis.

Minsk (pg. 12)

Minsk is the capital of Belarus, a landlocked Eastern European country.

Odessa (pg. 13)

Odessa (or, *Odesa*) is the name of the third-most populous city in Ukraine, a large Eastern European country. Located in southwestern Ukraine, *Odessa* is a coastal city on the Black Sea. The image below shows the geographical relation of Odessa, Ukraine and the country of Belarus, aforementioned as the country of which *Minsk* is the capital.



The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16th to 17th century—composed of the modern nation-states of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia, and parts of Russia—had adopted favorable migration policies that made it a safe haven for European Jews during those centuries. It is during this time that tailors and the folklore of tailors were established and thrived in Jewish culture.

Goyisha (pg. 14)

The term, *goyisha*, or, as it's more often seen, *goyish*, is an adjective referring to someone as not Jewish, or as a *goy*, a non-Jewish person. (The plural of *goy* is *goyim*.) The term is sometimes used disparagingly, and its perception can range from derogatory to insulting.

In recent years, the term has been used anti-semitically to self-identify by white supremacist groups. In 2020, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that the word “goy” has been used on Twitter to sign, “ironically”, the acceptance of anti-semitic conspiracy theories. For example, a white nationalist fundraising platform created by the Traditionalist Worker Party, a far-right American group, was called “GoyFundMe”, a wordplay on GoFundMe, the popular crowdfunding platform. In a similar vein, “Goyim riders” refers to the members of the Goyim Motorcycle Association, an antisemitic Hungarian ultra-nationalist political movement.

The term, *goyim*, has also been used recently in a popular anti-Semitic Internet meme: “The Goyim Know/Shut It Down”. The phrase is one crafted by white supremacist Internet users to reference to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that portray Jewish people as manipulative puppet-masters in the worlds of media, finance and banking, and government. The phrase is posited to be words uttered by a Jewish person to alert others that non-Jewish people are now knowledgeable of supposed manipulation and to indicate to “shut [the manipulation] down”. The implied Jewish speaker can also be interpreted to be urging fellow, supposed, co-conspirators to move onto another practice of malevolent manipulation. The phrase is most associated with alt-right movements on the Internet message boards, 4chan and 8chan.

The phrase was first identified in use on 4chan in 2013, and in the time since, it has sprung from the Internet into physical use, as seen in signs during the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

SCENE 11: IF I DIDN'T BELIEVE IN YOU

Tsuris (pg. 28)

The Yiddish word, *tsuris*, means trouble, woe, or aggravation.

V. THE WRITER

Publishing

The following section pertains specifically to the publishing of fiction novels; other genres of books typically have different processes for publishing.

For novelists, choices for publishing include: either self-publishing or traditional publishing, in the form of indie-publishing or commercial publishing. Each option has advantages and disadvantages when it comes to feasibility, prestige, the ability for the work to reach mass audiences, and how long it takes to publish a work.

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING: INDIE & COMMERCIAL

Fiction novelists can expect a years-long process to achieve a book deal with a publisher.

For indie-publishing and commercial publishing, debut authors must first find a literary agent by which to be represented. The publishing industry, as is, operates with literary agents acting as middlemen between authors and publishing companies, a process in which authors submit works to literary agents, literary agents sign on a very small number of the submitted works, and publishers auction for the works that literary agents represent.

Literary agents are paid by commission, taking a percentage of the revenue generated from any contracts that they secure; they handle the finding, negotiating, and securing of contracts for authors and their work or works. Literary agents may also help with editing an author's work.

To find a literary agent, authors must submit a query letter—a back-of-the-book-jacket, 250-word pitch that sells the idea of their novel—and a couple pages or summary of their writing. Authors are encouraged to submit their queries widely, as literary agents may receive up to dozens of submissions a day and may accept one or two per year. If the literary agent is interested in the work, they may ask for a couple chapters after the first pages, and if interested in further, they may request the full novel. (When novelists are seeking traditional publishing and literary agents, it is expected that a fully-written and thoroughly revised draft exists, one that one could be printed as is—although it will definitely go through many more revisions. For debut authors, fiction is rarely sold on proposal; it must be completed before seeking a literary agent.)

After signing on with a literary agent, a novelist may complete extensive edits and rewrites with the literary agent. Once a final draft, one that is deemed sellable, is complete, the work is proposed for auction with independent and commercial presses. Generally, in the 21st century, publishers are looking for which works will sell for a mass-market audience, and they may be seeking out certain genres for certain subdivisions, certain “imprints”, of their press label. With independent presses, an

author owns their work and has greater control over its marketing and cover than with a traditional press. Meanwhile, traditional publishing holds a trusted and prestigious reputation as the oldest of the types of publishing and for the immense competition an author faces in trying to find traditional publishing for their works. The “Big 5” publishers—all considered part of “commercial publishing”—are, in order: Penguin/Random House, Hachette Book Group, Harper Collins, Simon and Schuster, Macmillan. All “Big 5” publishers have their headquarters in New York City, which is therefore considered the publishing capital of the world in Anglo- and Western-centric spheres.

SELF PUBLISHING

Self-publishing involves an author publishing a book without an established publisher; often, this is done through electronic means in the form of an ebook, or through platforms that offer services for selling print books, including Amazon. Self-publishing is not a new phenomenon, but has increased in popularity in recent years due to advancements in technology and the internet that allow for the easy publishing in ebooks or the easy solicitation of print publishing my individuals. It is seen as a democratization of publishing for authors and readers. Authors may choose to pursue self-publishing their novel if their work is not finding success with finding a traditional publisher, potentially due to the genre of the work and what the market is supposedly looking for; to have independent ownership over their work, as well as the marketing of it and presentation or cover-design of the it; or to most easily publish through the high accessibility of self-publishing with the internet, either virtually or through print-services. Self-publishing can be a very quick process, especially in comparison to traditional publishing which involves many formal steps and contracts. For all its ease and feasibility, self-publishing is sometimes considered lesser-than as it has a lower bar to clear.

Author Readings

PURPOSE

Author readings may be held for the purpose of selling books and establishing a reputation, a known-name, for the author. Author readings are often followed with question-and-answer sessions and coupled with book-signing events; they offer a chance for readers and potential readers to personally interact with and get to know the author and their work. Generally, authors aim to help their work find new readers through reading events, whether that be reaching hundreds in the audience or signing books for a handful of new interested readers.

PLACE AND INVITATION

Author readings are often done by invitation by organizations with an interest in the author’s work. For example, a local bookshop might be interested in holding a reading for a local author’s work that takes place in the region, or a writers’ conference may hold a reading of all the works nominated for an award. Invitations may also be extended as a means of cultural development and outreach for institutions like seniors’ homes, schools (K-12 and universities), and community centers.

SETUP & ATMOSPHERE

The logistics of an author reading are largely dependent on the space. Speakers may speak from a raised platform with a podium in a larger venue with a larger audience of conference-goers, or from a seat level and next to their audience in a more intimate venue like an independent coffee-&-book shop with a small audience composed of locals and shop patrons. Depending on the venue, an author reading might occur in silence or with the bustle of its enveloping environment. Generally, an audience's undivided attention is granted to the author, or the unspoken rules of the event insist that it should be.

CHOOSE AND READING A PASSAGE

Authors typically read a passage from the work they are promoting or presenting; if a novel, the novelist may choose to read a chapter or number of pages, and if a collection of poetry, the poet may choose to read a selection of poems. The passage chosen aims to engage the audience and function as representative of the work as whole. For this reason, veteran reading authors recommend that an author chooses and practices a selection of passages from the work and that they be prepared to read any of them depending on the demographics of the crowd; for example, depending on whether an audience skews younger or older, an author may decide which passage that they think will engage with their audience better. If a passage is from the middle of a work, the author may begin with first thanking the hosts and then giving some contextual details of what came before in the work; otherwise, an author traditionally does not comment on or explain their work in the middle of the reading, but let their words speak for themselves. Authors may choose to end on a cliffhanger to allow for audiences to be further engaged and interested in their works.

FUNCTION

Author readings function as a performative exercise for a traditionally private experience. The reading of literature is most often a solitary experience, in the form of aural or textual reading. The author reading transforms the experience to a social or community event, inviting readers to share the experience of a narrative. In that, the author becomes the narrator, or perhaps narration, for their story, acting as both storyteller and story. In the print-dominant tradition of Western storytelling, oral storytelling remains an alternative form of experiencing stories. While an author reading is not strictly “oral storytelling”, as it is a story read from print and therefore immutable in word, the spoken word gives an additional dimension to the textual storytelling. The pauses, tempo, tone and audience interactions of a reading author's speech can influence the impression of the words written. These can be largely (self-)directed by the author to give the impression of the work and themselves that they intend; depending on the author's personal purpose, this may range from attempting to exude an aura of intellectualism to giving off an air of personability.

TIPS

Below is a list of tips for authors preparing for readings of their works, compiled by veteran reading authors and audiences:

- Preparation & Practice:

- Practice every day ahead of time! Practice for pauses with punctuation and paragraph breaks.
- Choose a passage that has a strong emotional arc, that can connect with the audience. Feel free to cut out parts of your passage, to edit it to get the best material for a reading. You are allowed to edit your own text!
- Become very familiar with your text, and know the words very well, so that you can lift your eyes from the page to speak from time to time to connect with the audience.
- Time your reading ahead of time to ensure that your passage fits within the allotted time. Do not rush a slightly longer passage for your reading—pick a shorter passage, and allow for a natural and flowing oral storytelling.
- Technical:
 - Don't staple your pages. They create extra noise when flipping. On that note, number your pages, in case they fall!
 - If possible, ask your hosts, when you get to the venue, if you can test your speaking conditions, whether that be standing at the podium or testing out the feedback at the microphone.
- During the Reading:
 - Before you begin, thank your hosts!
 - Remember your personal purpose in the reading. This may be showing off your material, or establishing a personal reputation with your audience, potentially for being intellectual, charming, witty, funny, etc.
- After the Reading:
 - Thank your audience! Engage with them after the reading as you transition to the next leg of the event. If you are getting off a platform, smile, make eye contact, thank your audience as you pass them. Let your personality come out as you transition from being the narrator to being yourself.

EXAMPLE VIDEOS

Below are three videos that may serve as examples for different types of author readings.

Joe Hill, *The Fireman* (2016) [\[Video\]](#): On May 22, 2016, American author Joe Hill read excerpts from his then-new post-apocalyptic novel, *The Fireman*, at the Coralville Public Library in Iowa. Son of authors Tabitha King and Stephen King, Hill is a *New York Times* bestselling author, commercially and critically celebrated for his horror, dark fantasy, and science fiction stories. The reading at the library shows him standing in casual streetwear before a sizable seated crowd, beginning the reading with jokes and enjoying a kazoo-concert intermission.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2010) [\[Video\]](#): On June 25, 2010, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie read from her then-new collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, as a guest speaker for the for-girls, non-profit writing and mentoring organization, Girls Write Now's, June 2010 *Chapters* event, a monthly series of readings from invited guest authors.

The opening seconds of the video shows a medium-sized room filled with event participants as Adichie introduces her work with banter and laughter in front of flashing bulbs.

Kyle Kallgren, *Awoken* (2015) [\[Video\]](#): In 2015, friend-of-the-authors Kyle Kallgren performed a dramatic reading of the young adult fantasy novel parody, *Awoken*, written under the name of Serra Elinsen by a series of ghost writers, at the Enigma Bookstore—an independently-own genre (science fiction, fantasy, and mystery) bookstore—in the Astoria neighborhood in Queens, New York. The atmosphere of the event was jovial and the tone of the reading melodramatic. The venue held a smaller audience snugly for the novel’s launch party.

Publishing Culture & Literary Culture

The following information reflects changes in publishing culture and literary culture in the past two decades in America and reflects the current state of both cultures.

Publishing culture refers to the culture that surrounds the process of publishing works, while literary culture refers to understandings of literature that develop in the culture; specifically, in this moment in time, literary culture manifests largely in program of studies in universities. Publishing culture has evolved in the 21st century to aim less to develop the socio-politico-cultural trajectory of America’s literature, but to appeal to a mass-market. (Knopf publisher, Sonny Mehta, was notable for exceptional ability to seek out and publish works that lend themselves to influential and best-selling success.) This is largely due to an increasing precarity in the business of publishing, and the dependence, in a capitalist market, on adapting to existing popular interests and tastes. Additionally, due to the advent of the internet and the interest in consuming media online, audiences for published print books have been decreasing in size in recent decades. Therefore, literary culture has steadily been divorced from publishing, and in the same capitalist structure of society, universities have become the home of literary culture and development of literary tastes in the form of MFA writing programs.

University programs have become the system through which many authors today are finding publishing. In MFA creative writing programs, the short story is preferred form and medium of reading and writing, as it allows for easy consumption, reading, and editing by peers in creative writing workshops, the process by which MFA student writers predominantly develop their own writing. (This has shifted, in recent decades, from the previous most popular form of literature in university literary courses: poetry.) Following the completion of an MFA, graduates may seek out a PhD and a position within the university, where one can teach MFA courses, while having the ability and time to write and publish their own works through the university press. The university has therefore become the setting through which writers can write and publish their works, where one is employed for salary and where one can publish their works for money.

VI. ANNOTATIONS

The following section contains notes on the cultural context of the references within the text of the musical. Note: all Jewish cultural references will be solely in section *IV. Jewishness (Cultural Context)*. The page numbers for each reference refer to the libretto for *The Last Five Years*.

SCENE 2: SHIKSA GODDESS

Gotti clan (pg. 3)

John Joseph Gotti, Jr. (1940–2002) was an Italian-American crime boss that took over as head for the Gambino crime family and died in 2002.

SCENE 3: SEE I'M SMILING

Daisy Mae (pg. 5)

Daisy Mae is a character from the American satirical comic, *Li'l Abner*, which ran from 1934 to 1977, took place in the fictional American mountain village, Dogpatch, and featured a cast of hillbilly characters. *Daisy Mae* was depicted wearing an iconic polka-dotted top with varying color palettes through the series. (Pictured at right.)



The name of the character has also recently been adopted as the name of a character in the social simulation video game, *Animal Crossing*. The game reached new heights of popularity during the 2020 American national lockdown for the coronavirus pandemic, during which the sale of the video game console, the Nintendo Switch, rose. In the game, the character, Daisy Mae, visits players' "island" every Sunday to sell turnips for prices varying from fifty to 400 bells, which players subsequently sell to local convenience stores within the world of the game. (Pictured at left.)

Columbia (pg. 5)

Columbia University is a private post-secondary educational institution located in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of New York, NY. *Columbia University* has a top-ranking graduate writing program that is widely highly regarded for its rigor and acclaimed curriculum, professors, and speakers. With Manhattan as the publishing capital of the world as home to the "Big 5" publishers, *Columbia University's* MFA Writing Program places graduate students in both the literary or university culture and publishing culture, a position primed for both excellence and success.

SCENE 4: MOVING TOO FAST

Aphrodite (pg. 9)

The ancient Greek goddess of love, beauty, sexuality, and desire, *Aphrodite* was worshipped for her powers over the sea, seafaring, and fertility, and presided occasionally over marriage.

The Atlantic Monthly (pg. 9)

The Atlantic, formerly known as *The Atlantic Monthly*, is a publication and online platform publisher. In 2004, the publication dropped the “Monthly” from its title, and in 2007, it was officially rebranded as “The Atlantic”. The publication is geared towards today’s “thought leaders”, in its provoking and contemplative articles on contemporary issues in politics, art, technology, health, education, culture, and science.

Sonny Mehta (pg. 9)

Sonny Mehta (1943–2019) was an editor and the editor-in-chief of the American publishing house, Alfred A. Knopf, whose parent company is Random House.

SCENE 5: I’M A PART OF THAT

“Leave it to Beaver” (pg. 10)

Leave It to Beaver is an American television sitcom that ran between 1957 and 1963, that depicted the life of the fictional young boy, Theodore “The Beaver” Cleaver, in his misadventures with friends and family. The show is known for its idealized portrayal of suburban family life and wholesome atmosphere.

SCENE 6: THE SCHMUEL SONG

Backstage (pg. 14)

Backstage Magazine is an entertainment-industry publication that helps to connect performers with opportunities to work and talent-seekers with teams to work on performing arts projects. In the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, print publications of *Backstage* featured information on where to find auditions and professional development opportunities like education and workshops, which performers could use to further their career. In the time since, the *Backstage* brand has launched *Backstage.com*, a website with the online publication and a database of opportunities and resources.

SCENE 7: A SUMMER IN OHIO

Borders (pg. 15)

Borders Group was a book and music retailer that was founded in 1971 and became defunct in 2011 due to bankruptcy. The bankruptcy of Borders has been attributed to the rise popularity of ebooks and ereaders and to the success of Amazon at facilitating the online shopping of print books.

Nirvana (pg. 16)

Nirvana was an American rock band, whose name is derived from the concept, *nirvāna*, that originates in Indian religious thoughts. The word is Sanskrit and translates to “becoming

extinguished” or “blowing out”, referring to the final destination of being that is the goal in its state of enlightenment and liberation.

SCENE 8: THE NEXT TEN MINUTES

JAIME on a boat on the lake in Central Park, pointing to the apartment buildings on the Upper West Side.

Central Park is an urban park located between the Upper West Side and Upper East Side in Manhattan, the most populous of New York City’s five boroughs. The park is known as a verdant oasis and respite from the city’s bustling cityscape, its buildings and noise. Central Park was built on the land that had housed Seneca Village, which featured predominantly a population of African-American residents, before it was bulldozed for construction. Central Park serves as a destination for local New Yorker’s daily routines for finding nature in the city and for tourists visiting New York’s famous sites. *(At right, a map of Central Park.)*



Above, an image showing Central Park’s position among the buildings of New York City.



Above, an image of Central Park’s verdure and its design in constructing an insulated forest amid New York’s bustling cityscape.

There are several lakes within Central Park, most notably: The Pond, located in the southeast-most corner of the park, surrounded by large boulder-like rocks that park-goers climb on; the Lake, on which the famous Loeb Boathouse Restaurant sits and where park-goers can rent boats; and the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir, the park's largest body of water.

The Lake, or the Central Park Lake, is a site that allows for park-goers to rent boats to paddle with oar and row on the water during the spring and summer seasons. The Lake itself is located between 72nd Street and 78th Street, with the American Museum of Natural History bordering it on the western side and its north-most point. A man-made body, the Lake is nestled in dense flora and overlooks the Ramble, one of Central Park's three main woodlands. The Bow Bridge, a pedestrian bridge designed after design of stringed instruments, crosses over the lake.



Above, a photo of Central Park's Bow Bridge during warmer weather stretching out over the Lake, featuring park-goers on the bridge and paddling a boat.



Above, a photo of Central Park's Bow Bridge and paddle-boat renters on the Lake.



Above, a photo of a couple's proposal in a Central Park Lake by the Loeb Boathouse, a popular destination for proposals.

Central Park is a very popular venue for both proposals and marriages; [popular locations](#) include the Bethesda Fountain Terrace, Bow Bridge, Cherry Hill, Gapstow Bridge & The Pond, Belvedere Castle Terrace, Summit Rock, and the Dene Summerhouse.

Jerry Seinfeld (pg. 17)

American comedian Jerry Seinfeld bought an apartment in the Beresford, a luxury apartment building, at 211 Central Park West in 1999, at which he has resided ever since. Jerry Seinfeld had also resided at the Bolivar, another apartment building on the same street, at 230 Central Park West, beginning in 1990, which he sold in 2006. The Beresford can be seen from the Central Park Lake.



Above, a famous image of comedian and veteran habitant of Central Park West Jerry Seinfeld precariously perched on the edge of the Bolivar apartment building.



Above, two photos of the Beresford, Jerry Seinfeld's home since 1999 and a sight that can be seen from Central Park's Lake. At left, a photo of the building taken from street-view on Central Park West, and at right, a photo of the building taken with the Central Park Lake and a floating gondola in the foreground.

John Lennon (pg. 17)

John Lennon was the founder, co-lead vocalist, and rhythm guitarist of the English rock band, the Beatles. He was famously murdered in the arched entryway of the Dakota Apartments in New York City. (See below for more on the Dakota Apartments.)



Above, an image of the entryway arch of the Dakota, where Beatles-member John Lennon was shot and fatally wounded.

The Dakota (pg. 17)

The *Dakota* or the *Dakota Apartments* is a luxury apartment building that is famous for its famous tenants throughout the years, as well as its architecture and its role in sculpting the Upper West Side as New York real estate and apartments for the rich. The Dakota has had a range of tenants over the years that represent a variety of New York art and culture across medium and genre, including Judy Garland, Lauren Bacall, Leonard Bernstein, Rosemary Clooney, and Yoko Ono and John Lennon. Opened in 1884, the building is notable for its efforts in introducing the wealthy to apartment living, by making luxurious apartments of up to sixteen rooms to mimic the experience of a mansion.



Above, an overhead photo of the buildings that make up the skyline as viewed from the Lake. The building with a green pointed roof towards the bottom left is the Dakota.



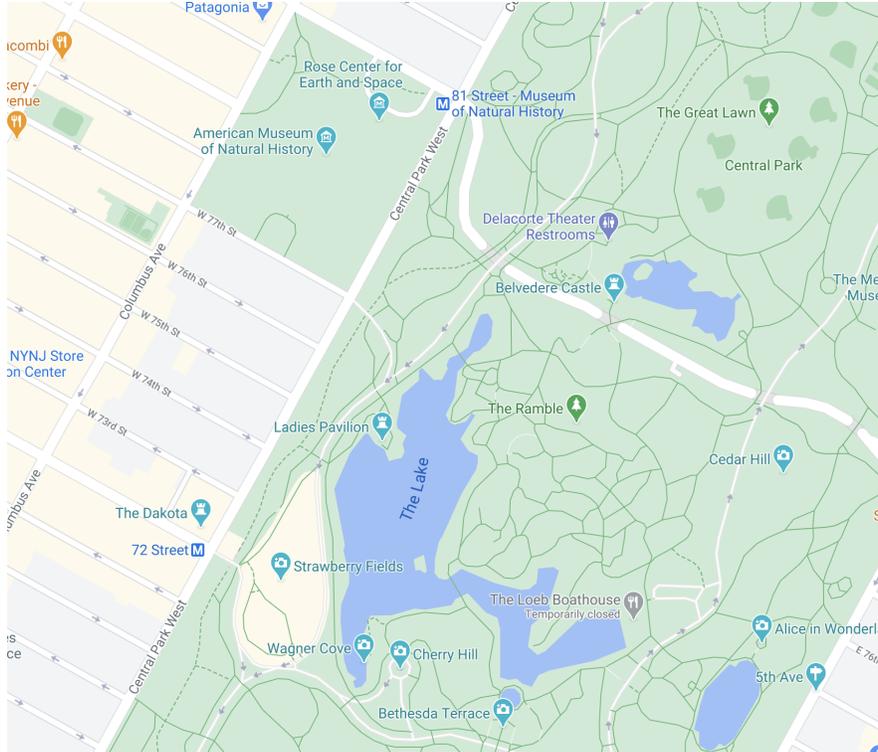
Above, a street-level photo of The Dakota, as can be seen from the intersection of 72 Street and Central Park West.



Above, a photo showing the view of buildings from the Central Park Lake. Above the Bow Bridge (pictured at center), the Dakota can be seen with green, triangular architecture in the roof.

The Museum (pg. 17, 19); *dinosaurs* (pg. 17, 19)

The American Museum of Natural History is a natural history museum located in the Upper West Side of New York City. Its main entrance opens onto the street, Central Park West, bordering Central Park itself; at times, it is considered part of Central Park for its continuation of the verdure into the cityscape. The dinosaur exhibits at the museum are one of its most iconic and sought-after sights; they are located on the top, the fourth, floor of the main building.



Above, a map showing the American Museum of Natural History, as seen in the top left, and its proximity to the Central Park Lake, as seen in blue in the bottom center.



Above, an image of the Central Park West entrance to the American Museum of Natural History.



Above, two images of dinosaur fossils at the American Museum of Natural History.

At left, a fossil of a Tyrannosaurus rex in the Hall of Saurischian Dinosaurs.

At right, a fossil of a Barosaurus under the museum's Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda.

San Remo (pg. 19)

The San Remo is a luxury apartment building located on Central Park West. The building features a twin-towered frame. From a viewpoint in the Central Park Lake, the towers are a very prominent sight and an iconic image from the experience of boating in the waters.



Above, an image of the San Remo's twin towers in the evening light.



Above, a photo of the San Remo from the Central Park Lake, with boating park-goers in the foreground. As seen in the photo, the San Remo building is a very prominent feature of the view from the Lake.

SCENE 9: A MIRACLE WOULD HAPPEN

The grand fromage (pg. 20)

A French phrase that literally translates to “the big cheese”. Figuratively, it denotes “the person in charge”, “the boss”, or “the leader.”

Mister Ed (pg. 21)

Mister Ed is the titular character of an American television sitcom of the same name that ran between 1961 and 1966. The character of *Mister Ed* is a talking horse, voiced by Allan Lane and played by Bamboo Harvester.



Above, a photo of Mister Ed, the talking horse (at left), played by Allan Lane, and Wilbur Post, Mister Ed's owner (at right), played by Alan Young, as characters from the show, Mister Ed.

Random House (pg. 21)

Random House is an American book publisher based in New York City and the largest paper-back bookseller in the world. One of the “Big 5” publishers, Random House is considered to produce the best of fiction and non-fiction books; the publisher also produces popular reprints of classic works.

SCENE 10: CLIMBING UPHILL

Linda Blair in a musical (pg. 24)

Actress Linda Blair, known for her Academy-Award nominated performance in the 1973 film *The Exorcist* and a string of B-movies and exploitation films in subsequent decades, acted as a replacement for the role of Rizzo in the 1994 revival of *Grease* between May 11, 1994 and January 25, 1998.

A very good review, in the New Yorker (pg. 24)

The New Yorker is an American weekly magazine in-depth reporting, cultural commentary, political commentary, publications of fiction and poetry, and its humor selections. Many regard it as one of the most publications today, a leading voice in topical issues, journalism, and commentary and selection of literary works. Today, the magazine can be accessed both in print, to be bought at newsstands, and digitally by subscriptions, where subscribers have access to every issue since the magazine's first in 1925.

John Updike (pg. 24)

John Updike (1932–2009) was an American novelist, writer of short stories, poet, literary critics, and art critic. His work was known for its witty illustrations of the “American, Protestant, small-town, middle-class” life. He held a prolific and renowned career, during which he served as a contributor to the publication, *The New Yorker*.

SCENE 12: I CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT

Tom Cruise (pg. 29)

American actor Tom Cruise is regarded as a sex symbol within American culture, particularly in respect to his work with the *Mission: Impossible* film franchise, the first two films of which, *Mission: Impossible* and *Mission: Impossible 2* were released in 1996 and 2000 respectively.

Duran Duran (pg. 30)

A very popular English new wave band that was considered part of the New Romantic scene when they emerged in 1978. In 2001, after exchanging members over the years, Duran Duran's original members reunited and stirred renewed dialogue and presence.

VII. MASKS

HISTORICAL USE OF MASKS IN ANCIENT AND MODERN TRADITIONAL DRAMA

Masks have historically been used in the theatre to convey large facial expressions, either for the purpose of conveying emotion at a distance in spaces where audiences are seated far from performers, or for the purpose of conveying highly dramatized expression through elaborate masks.

For example, ancient Greek theatre often featured choral performers and actors wearing masks to convey character or expression to audience members who sat in outdoor theatre seating at quite a distance from the orchestra, the ancient equivalent of the stage.



Above, two tragic and comic masks of ancient Greek theatre.

By contrast, the traditional dance-dramas of Noh, a classical Japanese dance form, and Kathakali, a classical Indian dance form, utilize elaborate masks in conventional shapes and expressions to convey character archetypes such as a ghost and the elderly, as in Noh, or from mythology, as in Kathakali.



Above, a mask used in the classical Japanese dance-drama form of Noh.

MASKS IN STORIES

Masks in stories—from drama in plays, musicals, and film, or otherwise, prose, poetry, and song—have served to symbolize a wide range of meanings in the various portrayals of differences in

appearance and reality. Often, the mask serves to convey a psychological case of fractured identity, in the sense of how one views oneself, how others view oneself, and the question of which is true—a deliberation on the nature of socialization and isolation against the human condition. Otherwise, the mask can serve to show the superficiality of society, the wearing of a symbolic “mask” in masquerading with false pretense, grandeur, and shallowness. Below is an exploration of the role of masks in select modern stories, to explore previous uses and their meaning of masks:

In Edgar Allen Poe’s short story, *The Masque of the Red Death*, Prince Prospero attempts to hide from a fictional plague—called, “The Red Death”, that may serve as a reference to the tuberculosis or cholera of Poe’s time—that is devastating his constituents, by holing up in his castle with other wealthy nobles, collectively abandoning his responsibility to his people. The wealthy nobles hold a party, a masquerade, in the castle, in seven rooms of the chateau, each with a color: one blue, one purple, one green, one orange, one white, one violet, and one black with red lighting. During the party, a mysterious, cloaked figure shows up, dressed in a skull mask, contrasting with the royals’ Venetian masks. The figure steps through the rooms, following Prospero as he runs to the end, from blue to purple to green... reaching the black and red room, the Prince threatens the figure with a dagger, and the revelers remove the mask and cloak, finding nothing beneath. The Prince cries out and dies, and the royals’ all die of the disease. The figure was the plague and Death itself, and the short story conveys how all of humanity, regardless of power or wealth, is equal in death. The masks convey the superficiality of the wealthy royals, and their ultimate inability to escape, through shallow parties, from life and death itself. The text itself functions by unsettling the reader through highly disturbing prose descriptions of the atmosphere.

In Gaston Leroux’s *The Phantom of the Opera* (French: *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra*) uses the societal function of the masquerade as celebration in the Paris Opera House to convey the superficiality of Parisian society, the lack of intimacy, honesty, vulnerability and interaction between partygoers. Andrew Lloyd Webber, Charles Hart, and Richard Stilgoe’s stage musical, *The Phantom of the Opera*, uses the titular character’s mask to convey his hiding from the outside world, covering up insecurity and the physical appearance that wouldn’t be accepted by others. In moments of vulnerability with his obsession and muse, Christine, the Phantom, Erik, takes off the mask; the first moment when he does, Christine recoils in horror and disgust, and the last time, she kisses him in acceptance and ardor.

In Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, referring both the stage musical and its 2007 film adaptation, the masks worn by masquerade-goers in the number, “Poor Thing”, reflect an interpretation of the masquerade, as a social phenomenon, in Victorian London as a debauched affair. The anonymity of masks allows partygoers to indulge in a party activity that would be looked down upon, and in the company of those who commit crimes. The antagonist, Judge Turpin, rapes the wife, Lucy, of the protagonist, Sweeney Todd, in the set-up for a revenge tragedy plot that functions, because Judge Turpin is able to masquerade publicly as a man of the law while committing heinous crimes in his private sphere. The mask here functions similarly to that of Poe’s *Masque*, with the resolution showing that one can hide from others but not from death.

Sweeney Todd operates with horror conventions, a breakdown of humanity on the face of others and the existential despair of not recognizing humanity.

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the titular characters are wearing masks at a masked ball when they first meet each other and do not recognize that the other is one of the family that their family is rivaling. The mask serves to communicate the suspension of disbelief and hate that allows the two youths to look beyond their families' "ancient grudge" towards love, in each other.

In Franju's psychological horror movie, *Eyes Without a Face* (French: *Les yeux sans visage*), the daughter of a scientist and doctor, Christianne, was in a car accident that left her face horribly and horrifically scarred. Now, her father and his assistant, Louise, give her a mask to wear that covers her whole face, save her eyes, in a single flesh-toned wash; the two say the mask is for Christianne, but she confesses that she knows it is so that her father will not feel guilty when looking at her. The father and Louise work to abduct women from the streets of Paris to surgically remove their faces and attempt to suture them onto Christianne's scarred one. Christianne, meanwhile, moves through the house like a damsel from a fairytale, in a long white dress in the tower of her father's larger chateau, in which she befriends white birds and canines, only half-conscious, but still partly conscious and responsible, of the murders committed for her beauty. The film emphasizes how women in this society are valued solely by their beauty, which leads to one of the Parisian women jumping to her death after waking up to find her face bandaged and gone. The film highlights the feelings of identity and humanity as experienced by Christianne. While her father manages to suture one of the Parisian women's faces onto Christianne, she says, speaking without a mask and with a beautiful, angelic face, that she feels like death. Ultimately, that face decays into necrotic tissues, and Christianne must resume wearing her mask. In the resolution, Christianne kills Louise, lets out the canines her father was practicing procedures on (which kill him), and disappears into the night with her birds following her, as she wears her mask. The mask of *Yeux* is used to delve into the psychological experience of self and personhood; Christianne may look like a damsel, but her movements also echo that of a ghost, turning mechanical and mannequin-like. The mask reflects the maddening and paradoxical conditions of the human experience, and a horrific and comforting need to hide from them in proceeding with a mask.

Largely, stories with face masks cover either the entire face, with cutouts for the eyes, or cover the top half of the face, allowing movement of the mouth for communication and embrace that is based on the perception, often faulty, emphasized by the open eyes.

THE SYMBOLISM OF CORONA MASKS

While the necessity to use face masks as a measure of safety guidance to prevent the spread of the coronavirus functions as a challenge for our intent for the production, I think that this could also be an opportunity to make new theatre—an opportunity to create a new language and body of mean for masks, and this time, for our quotidien face masks.

As is, face masks that have been in use during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent the spread of the virus—what I will call “corona masks” to differentiate between the aforementioned masks of each ancient/traditional drama and modern psychological stories—function in our society to represent a break of time from the “before” and “after” of living during the COVID-19 pandemic. The presence of a mask represents a kind of “after”, the aftermath of the death of a way of living and life that in many ways we may never return to, before the changes to people’s lifestyles and expectations for the future. Masks represent a loss of expectation and an expectation of loss. This can be felt on an individual level when one views media created before the pandemic or media that portrays a lifestyle set before the pandemic, when one feels a visceral immediate instinct to separate people that are too close together or not wearing masks in public. Sometimes, instead of a call-to-action, such media simply strikes fear in seeing people not adhering to safety guidelines. Either way, there’s a disconnect between acknowledgement of the past without bringing in conceptions of the—then, future—now, present.

Masks represent a divide in social life, representative of the social distance between individuals and the barrier for communication, intimacy, and interaction. Related, but in contrast, masks serve as protections for individuals from others. Thus, masks are simultaneously an unwelcome barrier and a welcome safeguard.

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