A Study Guide by Assistant Director Nicholas Leno

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Study Guide

by Nicholas Leno, assistant director

Company of *The Belle's Stratagem* 2014 Production

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Hannah Cowley - An Eighteenth Century Dramatist

Hannah Cowley's London

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, Hannah Cowley lived in the city of London at the epi-centre of the British Empire as it experienced a roller-coaster of industrial and political change concurrent with imperial expansion. This was age of the Patent Office (established by the Patents Law Amendment Act 1852) and of multiple inventions. Industrialization brought about social mobility and created a new financial middle class. Increased literacy rates, a higher value placed on education, and the success of the publishing industry allowed for the middle class to participate in consuming leisure products and activities, opening up new opportunities for playwrights and theatres. Social change allowed greater mobility in the class system; middle class managers could now move up in class status provided they worked hard and invested their money wisely in the expanding Stock Exchange. The middle class had to struggle to stay out of the labouring class, whose poverty and desperate living conditions fuelled underground social movements that ultimately inspired the major events of Cowley's lifetime: the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. Despite defeat in America, however, Cowley witnessed Britain's success in the Seven Years War and the consequent expansion of the British Empire to cover a third of the globe. Parliamentary politics continued to decrease the power of the monarchy, and Thomas Hobbes' vision of a monarch who was responsible to the Commonwealth of the people began to take hold. Adam Smith's ideas that Capital should enjoy free markets to increase the prosperity of the Common Wealth were at odds with the government's tactic of increasing taxation to pay for repeated war efforts against France, and resulted in furious intellectual debate concerning the nature of society, the role of government, and the significance of borders that continues as the basis of politics today. Together, these changes in economics, social structure, and political theory destabilized traditional ideas of the role a woman should play. If you had a daughter, should you educate her, or would that simply make her dissatisfied? Should you arrange her marriage to secure her financial status? Should you hand over her dowry to her husband, who might fritter it away? Should you put your daughter on the marriage market to obtain the wealthiest match? Hannah Cowley wrote outspoken, intelligent female characters during this time of growing cultural anxiety about female relationships to money, to the City and to Marriage. Divorce was a hotly debated topic. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 made divorce an expensive, drawn out, scandalous process restricted to the very wealthy. As Ingrid Tague points out, by the mid eighteenth century there was a burgeoning market for ladies conduct manuals. Most of these attacked the mercenary "marriage for money" practised by aristocratic

classes, arguing that female subordination could be justified precisely because marriages were based on a woman's freely given love for her husband (Tague,88). Since, after marriage, women must give their entire subjective selves to their husbands in utter obedience, their choice must be freely made.

Who was Hannah Cowley?

Hannah Cowley had a successful career as a journalist, poet, and playwright in London, England in the late 18th century. Originally born Hannah Parkhouse, she grew up in Tiverton where her father owned a bookstore (Hughes, i) . Cowley received an education in the classics from her open minded father. This education, unusual in an age that considered learning to be wasted on girls, combined with access to newly published material in her father's store, gave Cowley the resources to become one of the 18th century's most successful female dramatists. She began her career as a writer at the age of 32 after marrying her husband Thomas Cowley in 1772. For the next four years Cowley worked as a journalist for an annual salary of 50 pounds; 'writing for bread' to support her family, since her husband's salary was not enough.

One night, after spending a disappointing evening at the theatre, Cowley remarked "Why, I could write too!" and, after being dared to follow up on her declaration, she completed a draft of her first comedy *The Runaway* (Hughes, xi). The play was produced by the famous actor-manager David Garrick at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1776, and was a smash hit in the London theatre scene. Cowley enjoyed an extended run of her new comedy. It brought her success, in terms of both income and audience reception. Her popularity continued to rise until Garrick retired. Without his patronage, Cowley's reputation declined: Drury Lane's new actor-manager Richard Sheridan delayed the production of her plays and, to make matters worse, her reputation was smirched when she accused Hannah More of plagiarism, for plagiarising her tragedy *Albina*. She and More exchanged a series of letters in the Sunday papers, to great scandal. Feeling undervalued, and perhaps loving the drama she could stir up, Cowley left Drury Lane for London's rival stage, Covent Garden Theatre.

Success followed when *The Belle's Stratagem* opened at Covent Garden Theatre on February 22nd 1780. The production was widely acclaimed by audiences and enjoyed multiple runs. London's critics praised the play for both its sentiment and its cleverly handled farce. Her play was reviewed by *The European Magazine* as "a picture of modern manners" (Rhodes 9). Cowley had borrowed from the best: for her plot, she had drawn on two of London's most popular comedies, *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith and *The Beaux Stratagem* by George Farquhar. These plays inspired *The Belle's Stratagem's* with, respectively, the Country and Town character stereotypes (represented in Sir George

Touchwood and Courtall) and the idea for a deception plot. "Talking back" to Farquhar's comedy, Cowley changed his *Beaux Stratagem* so that a woman could replace the male protagonist at centre stage. Cowley knew what her audience enjoyed, and drew upon the most popular plot devices of her time to deliver an ideal sentimental comedy. *The Belle's Stratagem* brought Cowley monetary success: she made over 500 pounds off productions alone, and the theatre paid her an additional 100 pounds honorarium to keep the text out of the press. She could not control 'actors' editions' from being published in Ireland, however, and as many as seven different versions were in print when, after retirement, she wrote her definitive revised version (Rhodes, 131). Contemporary editors are happy about this, as the older Cowley cut many of her topical references, entire characters and cleaned up her more bawdy double meanings in the language (Rhodes, 132). Derek Hughes does a fine job of combing the best of these sources in *Eighteenth Century Women Playwrights: Vol. 5*

Miss Ellen Terry.

In the years prior to her retirement, Cowley became London's most famous female dramatist. She expanded into Romantic poetry, which was considered the most elite pursuit in the craft of writing. She caused another scandal when, in the London newspaper *The World*, she exchanged a series of verses containing 'erotic imagery', with a male poet. Despite her very public life d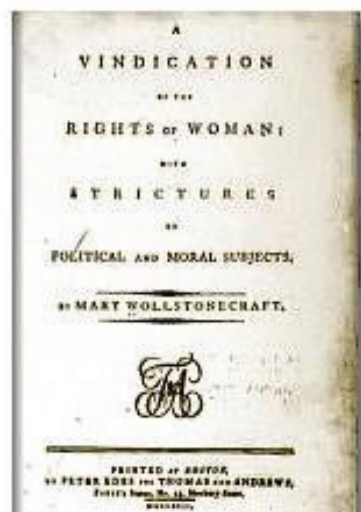ramas, she insisted on her status as a respectable middle-class woman. It might have been to protect her reputation that she purged some of the sexual humour from her final edition of her plays. After retiring to Tiverton, she held weekly salons where women could discuss charitable causes—and this continued until her death in 1809.

The Belle's Stratagem

The Belle's Stratagem is one of the few classical plays to offer numerous strong roles for women. In its time it became particularly famous for its heroine Letitia Hardy. The role was so popular that it was regarded as a test for actresses who worked in sentimental comedy, and to this day continues to be known for spring-boarding the career of many actresses. It is for Cowley's witty criticism of 18th century elite society and cultural attitudes toward marriage, however, that feminist scholars of the 1990's fought to restore recognition of Hannah Cowley by including it within the literary

Belles Stratagem. **A Spoiled Brat Romance by Hannah Cowley:** A Study Guide
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'canon' of famous classical works. You can currently find *The Belle's Stratagem* in a number of discipline defining anthologies such as *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration & Early Eighteenth-Century Drama* (2001).

As popular as it may be, the romantic focus of *The Belle's Stratagem* is problematic for contemporary women who seek destinies other than marriage. Letitia's stratagem relies on her ability to attract Doricourt by presenting herself as a sexual object in the masquerade dance. Further, Letitia's marriage is not her own idea: she is used by her father, Mr. Hardy, as capital- or a bargaining resource- in his negotiations with Doricourt's late father. It is merely good fortune that she *likes* her father's choice for her husband. The strong, wilful, heroine Letitia who so inspired women of the eighteenth century seems to be rather a dupe today, as we realize that a young woman is being sold as a possession, and is bought for the appearance of her body. Letitia even points out, "Sure, I must say I think before I'm married, since I'm not supposed to after!" (Act 3, scene 1). Here Cowley expresses a concern for the loss of women's identity within the marriage contract. She accepts the transfer of wealth through women in marriage, but by means of a stratagem Cowley allows Letitia to participate in the terms of the wedding contract; "I will touch his heart or never be his wife" (Act 2 Scene 1). Once entered into the marriage contract, the gender roles of husband and wife were very strict. This can be seen in the play with the other female lover, Lady Frances, who is silenced by her husband. After she is saved from Courtall's villainous plot to seduce her, she returns home to her husband, Sir George, where she agrees not to go out alone any more: "My dear Sir George, you shall be my constant champion and protector".

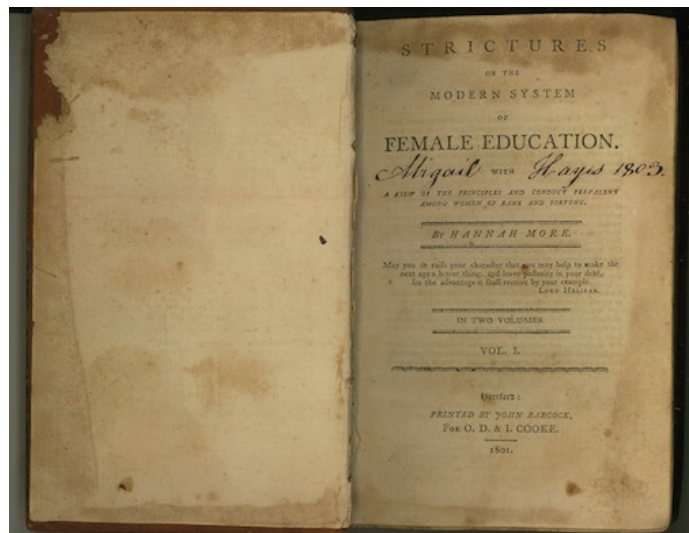(Act 5 Scene 2) In other words, Lady Frances learns that her proper place is at home, with her husband.

It is important to note, however, that Hannah Cowley was a feminist for her time. Although she claimed not to "understand" Mary Wollstonecraft's ground-breaking book, *A Vindication of The Rights of Women (*1792), she did read it. Cowley believed if women could enter into a marriage contract than they should be able to sign other contracts and own property, as well as prescribe to a divorce if the terms of the marriage contract were not being fulfilled (Anderson, 69).

Juggernaut theatre's production of *The Belle's Stratagem* featured Letitia singing a song from The Spice Girls to advertise her sexuality.

Most importantly, Cowley's plays followed those of Restoration playwrights Aphra Behn and Susannah Centlivre in opening up a new cultural space (the theatre) for women. In a time when an outspoken woman was considered a "shrew," she created a platform where women were permitted to speak. She represented a broader range of roles that women could play in society—from her own role as playwright, to Mrs. Racket the outrageous widow, Lady Francis the shy housewife and Kitty Willis the whore. Arguably, Cowley's work helped to pave the way for female-dominated Temperance and Anti-Slavery movements, as well as Suffrage (women's right to vote). However, many audiences who attend classical productions today are accustomed to women having the vote and rights over property and reproduction; they are unaware of the politics that shaped the lives of women in the 18th century. The

on-going cultural pressure on women to make romance their 'number one priority' means that *The Belle's Stratagem* appeals to the most conservative options that our culture offers to young women.

An essay by Barbara Darby suggests that the culturally accepted habits of men and women's behaviour has not changed very much since western women achieved the vote. She suggests that *The Belle's Stratagem* resembles a performance of *The Rules*, a 1969 'self-help' book for women by Fien and

Schneider, which contains "Time tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right." According to Darby, Fein and Schneider repeats in all key aspects the arguments of popular 'female conduct manuals' of the 18th century. These "convince women to aspire to a standard of ideal behaviour, to perceive themselves as always in need of regulation and improvement, and above all to desire the […] world of romance and male attentiveness" (Darby, 335). These gendered behaviours that motivate the behaviour

of the women in *The Belle's Stratagem* are entrenched in many stories, both ancient and current to our society. The women have agency and a measure of independence until marriage, and then submerge their identities beneath their families. Does producing Cowley's play without questioning the gender politics ask audiences to view the silencing of women as a natural and inevitable norm?

Can program notes convey the restrictions of the time so as to illuminate the risk Cowley is taking in presenting her cheeky, mouthy women to audiences of her time? Or, might our canon of "classics" that includes women playwrights be as oppressive as the old? As scholar Sue Ellen Case argues, in theatre history "Classical" is often a synonym for banishing females from the stage (in Greek, Renaissance and Kabuki theatre, females were not permitted to act). Director Gyllian Raby decided to take on *The Belle's Stratagem* partly because so many of the attitudes and observations about City Life hold true for today. Her idea to update it and to sharpen Cowley's satire using the servant characters as a spoken word band came at the start—and this is what interested me, Nicholas Leno, in working on the project. But we quickly realized that if it was set in the present day, the production had to be *adapted*, so that the more archaic and limiting aspects of romance could be critiqued rather than 'normalized' like *The Rules* of Fein and Schneider.

Our adaption sets out to satirize the plot for all the ways in which it is "an 18th century conduct manual". Our first step was to examine Cowley's play for 'tropes' or, as Classics professor and sci-fi critic Nick Lowe calls them, 'plot-coupons'. These are cultural clichés that reinforce normative, and often restricting, ideas of male and female identity. By identifying the play's tropes we were able to zero in both on the comedy (because familiar tropes catch an audience's sense of humour) and on the satire (because we could find contemporary equivalents to each trope in order to exaggerate and satirize it). Our goal throughout the adaptation was to "send up" the clichéd conventions of the marriage plot while still providing a romantic adventure that can draw the knowing audience along.

Cultural tropes and plot coupons

What are they?

Whether we're watching movies, plays, or reading a novel, we can often predict the hero's line, the next event, or in some cases the ending. We've all watched a summer blockbuster and said, "Oh, I totally know where this is going!"

Nick Lowe coined the term 'plot coupons' to encourage literary critics to comment on "the grammar of cliché," which he suggests has never received the study it deserves. Lowe theorizes that popular stories are frequently recycled from writer to writer, and that from Homer to present day, story tellers call upon recognizable plots tokens ("tropes") that underpin mainstream attitudes in the dominant culture.

Author Linda Hutcheon takes this idea further by comparing stories to Internet memes. When an image is sufficiently successful that it is repeatedly copied, it becomes a 'meme'-- not simply another picture on the Internet. Memes are like tropes-- idea-viruses that are constantly being replicated and recreated for the enjoyment of many. In *A Theory on Adaptation,* Hutcheon argues that stories are actually virus-like memes that mutate as they pass from medium to medium and generation to generation (32). As our civilization has multiplied the forms of communication media and more methods of spreading idea-germs have been created, cliches dominate as 'viral memes' in a predictable algo-rhythm called "the power-law" by Albert-Laszlo Barabasi (Reed, 39).

Screenwriter and author Robert McKee argues that our grandparents consumed 6 hours of story in all mediums (plays, movies, novels) over the course of their work-week (McKee, 67). Compare this with how often you consume stories, and you may discover that you easily consume the same amount in only one day. Our desire to be "linked in" continually increases our appetite for stories. However, instead of creating new stories we often retell the same ones over and over again end generate enjoyment in our audience by offering to fulfill the expectation of the familiar.

Simply put, tropes define a story in terms of its audience's expectations. As playwrights and theatre artists we use this to our advantage: by knowing what tropes are present we can work consciously to draw the audience into our story. Audiences stay engaged to collect the 'plot coupons,' which create a 'bargain bond', encourage loyalty similar to interactive stamp-collecting, and repeated

on-going commitment to the story. As adaptors, we hypothesized that if we wanted to break the audience's expectations but then draw them back into our spectacle, we should play the tropes with super-clarity. So, in our adaptation of *The Belle's Stratagem* we emphasize tropes from the Harlequin Romance genre (the inarticulate male, the emotional female, separation at birth, seduction spectacle, marriage) to entertain the audience. We attempt to disrupt the genre by asking Kitty Willis to comment on it mockingly. We hope to take the audience beyond a simple Brechtian dichotomy by showing that the larger experience of the lovers contains the extreme pain, anxiety and even madness, that accompanies the conflation of love with capital and the polarisation of gender roles.

FAMILIAR TROPES IN *THE BELLE'S STRATAGEM*

· "Betrothed in Childhood & Destined to Love";
· "Town versus Country";
· "Bird in a Cage";
· "Too Cool to Appreciate Her";
· "The Superiority of All Things British";
· "Stalked by a Villain";
· "The Makeover", or "The Ugly Duckling";
· "Kidnap the Damsel"
· "Seduction in Disguise"
· "Shamed Villain Slinks out of Town";
· Commedia dell 'Arte lazzi: "The Tirade", "The Lament", the "Perquisite of the Role".
· "Feigns a Mad Scene"; "Pretends Mortal Illness";
· "True Identity Revealed at Last".

How does Cowley's play utilize tropes?

Romance has not changed very much. As Gyllian Raby pointed out while purposing the adaption at ATINER, *The Belle's Stratagem* tropes are recognizable from most of Hollywood's Romantic Comedies today (Raby, 1). Even separated by hundreds of years, the popularity of the play shows that audiences are still interested in collecting and cashing in on these plot coupons! Of course, the names of the tropes change, as no official titles exist, and our list is simply our best attempt to label the 'circle of expectation'.

What happens –the tropes revealed!

Letitia and Doricourt were betrothed to each other from a very young age, as a "tax maneuver for the family", but separated from one another at adolescence. Within the first breath of describing Cowley's plot, a trope has already reared its head. "Separated at birth but destined to love" is a favourite Harlequin Romance plot device that immediately lets audiences know they are in a world of mythic fantasy.

At first this trope may seem distant, as the concept of arranged marriage is somewhat foreign us-- but stories, like memes, can mutate. Think of *13 Going 30*, where Jennifer Garner is transported to the future and she must make amends with her next-door neighbour and destined lover. The trope can also be seen within: *Just Friends* (2005), *The Bounty Hunter* (2010), and numerous other works.

As we move further into the plot more tropes emerge. Doricourt's time away in Europe has made him arrogant, and he is *"too cool to appreciate" Letitia* when he compares her to exotic foreign women. Letitia, as the spirited heroine, will *"touch his heart or never be his bride".* She formulates a plan to deceive Doricourt into falling in love with her. At the following's evening's masquerade, she *"dons a disguise to seduce"* Doricourt by means of a sexy "makeover" and a mask. These two tropes often go together in romantic comedies, as the heroine's pathway to success and her obstacle. The underlying message to viewers is that if a woman can make herself pretty enough, she'll get her man. Think of *She's All That* (1999)*, The Princess Diaries* (2001), *The House Bunny* (2008), and *A Cinderella Story* (2004).

Harlequin Romance is not the only genre in which we recognised Cowley's tropes. Letitia determines that she won't wed Doricourt simply because of their parents' financial and sentimental arrangement. To persuade audiences to sympathize with her she uses "The Lament" and "The Tirade"— favourite techniques of the *Commedia dell'Arte* that show female emotional volatility and sentiment in super-exaggerated hyperbole. The *Commedia* is a popular form of stock character comedy that was imported to England from Italy during the 16th century. Popular in Cowley's day they continue to denote starring roles for women: think of the blockbuster film *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), in which Meg Ryan demonstrates the continuing popularity of The Lament and The Tirade!

Tropes from the genre of the Melodrama that we now associate with the Western are also important to the plot of *The Belle's Stratagem*, located in Courtall's story. His foiled attempt to capture and seduce Lady Francis is reminiscent of the "Kidnap the Damsel" trope from melodramas that featured moustache twirling villains, and which continue today in films such as *Taken* (2008) and *Taken 2* (2012). After the masquerade, Courtall is found out and ambushed in his home. He realizes that his plot to trick Lady Francis has failed. The crowd of men who storm Courtall's chambers to expose his villainous ways are part of a kind of "vigilante posse." Westerns rely heavily on this trope because it communicates a masculine image of tough, courageous men, ready to fight for what's right even if it means going outside the law. You can find this trope in westerns as old as *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) through to films such as *Tombstone* (1994). In Hollywood today, it has been recycled into the genre of gangster films where the hero's illegal activities are somehow righteous and noble- think of the first scene in Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs (1992)* where all characters walk down the street in black suits and sunglasses. It's this kind of hyper-masculine image that Cowley uses to make Saville the right-thinking hero-- and that we seek to satirize by allowing Kitty Willis stage-space to "speak back" to it.

How did tropes inform the adaptation?

In telling Letitia's story, Cowley was in line with 18th century ladies' conduct manuals that, scholar Ingrid Tague (2001) points out, were increasingly popular as the burgeoning publishing industry satisfied the needs of the expanding middle class. These manuals attacked the idea of "marriage for money" that was practised by the aristocratic classes. However, the mainly middle class authors asserted that female submission in marriage was justified because true marriages were based on a

The trickster figure Reynard the Fox as depicted in an 1869 children's book by Michel Rodange.

woman's freely given love for her husband (Tague, 88). Cowley's Letitia mimics this. Although Letitia's father has already negotiated her marriage, she rejects her family's wishes and declares she will win Doricourt's heart. Cowley empowers Letitia by giving her the intelligence and wit to trick her lover, and this enables us to overlook the fact that, even in her rebellion her goal is the same as that of her patriarch. We believe that Letitia is a powerful and interesting character because she harnesses the archetype of the Trickster—and further, that it is Letitia Hardy's "trickster plot" that makes *The Belle's Stratagem* story a successful meme.

The Trickster is a cunning and clever character, who uses these traits to disobey rules and conventional behaviour. The Trickster can be found in stories from ancient civilizations, folklore, aboriginal creation myths, and Hollywood today. Think of the Greek god Dionysus, Puck from Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream, Bart Simpson, Captain Jack Sparrow, Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner (two tricksters in competition with one another), and The Crow who features in numerous indigenous creation myths, including Inuit and Iroquois and Haida. Carl Jung argued that The Trickster (like all archetypes) is a universal capacity that humans all share (Jung, 116). He argued that this is why we can see the same qualities in so many different stories from different times and places in the world. The Trickster is a particular favourite in the comedy genre and, by combining this beloved archetype with popular Harlequin Romance tropes and Commedia techniques, Hannah Cowley achieved the character of Letitia Hardy.

We argue that the appeal of The Trickster archetype runs deeper than do the tropes of gendered courtship rituals and their sentimental affects. If she is viewed as The Trickster, Letitia's

journey becomes a masterful jog across a wide array of both public and private spaces, through disguises and deceits that eventually access a mythopoeic space of love, fantasy, and wish-fulfillment. We realized that, although we feel we must satirize the Harlequin Romance tropes to expose their inherent sexism, we walk a fine line as adaptors. A 'politically correct' adaptation could destroy the play by preventing audiences from empathising with Letitia's mythic journey to love and self-esteem. We decided that it was important for the adaptation to retain Cowley's wide range of emotional participation, rather than to diminish the plot to a single level of satirical commentary. Cowley skilfully varied the affective modes by which she went after her audience's engagement: from infectious passion, to empathetic situation comedy, to the cognitive tracking of complex "game-playing" relationships. After this research and discussion, we decided that our strategy should be to use the same "plot coupons" with which Cowley ensured the popularity of her comedy, but that we would update them so that, as far as possible, our audiences could recognize them as part of contemporary pop culture. This greatly influenced the scenography for the show: in our conversations with designer Kelly Wolf we sought a way for the play to flow between numerous locations, but also to convey the "replicant culture" of tropes and memes that we want to emphasize. The ideas of philosopher Jean Baudrillard became extremely useful in developing the "QR Code" design that Kelly eventually proposed.

Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard was a French philosopher, sociologist, and literary critic whose work is associated with post-modern thought. Famous in both academic circles and popular culture, Baudrillard was quoted in The Wachowski brothers' 1999 block-buster and cult-hit film *The Matrix* (1999) for describing our simulated, manufactured culture as, "the desert of the real" (Baudrilliard, Le Nouvel Observateur Interview, 2003).

The few items represented create a 'circle of expectation' in the audience that enables them to 'fill in the blanks'. This inspired the way we approached location representation in the production.

Baudrillard theorized that because of their constant immersion in the images of modern media (internet, tv, etc.) people no longer relate to an 'original perceptual reality' but

experience the things of 'the Real' simply as models ready to be reproduced. Rapid technological innovation and the emergence of the Internet has overloaded us with images, to the point where Baudrillard theorizes that we are at a point where the lines of what is virtual or 'fake' are being blurred with the lines of what is real. Was there really a moon landing in 1969? In his book *The Gulf War Did not Take Place* (1991) Baurdrillard claims that from the western perspective the Gulf War did occur because American troops suffered so little causalities and rarely engaged in direct combat with the Iraqi army. However, a multitude of war images were propagated by the American media, which Baudrillard considered to be a selective misrepresentation through "simulacra" (Baudrillard, *Gulf War Did Not Take Place,* 2). Baudrillard argues that we are living in "a hyper-reality" where we can "no longer employ categories of the real in order to discuss the characteristics of the virtual" (Baudrilliard, Le Nouvel Observateur Interview, 2003).

For example: we all know the image of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa.* The original, painted by Da Vinci, currently hangs at the Louvre in Paris. Any of us could look up the painting online, and we could print it out in just about any resolution and hang it wherever we like. Baudrillard asks, 'What then is the purpose of the original? Why should we go see it in the Louvre when we can see it anywhere because the image is reproduced so often?' Why travel to Austria to see the alpine villages when we can experience a scaled, themed replica at the Mont Tremblant resort? Our consumer culture, fuelled by capitalism, causes us to place value on certain images that are continuously replicated for our pleasure. For Baudrillard, the replications of Da Vinci's work are just as real as the original. In this way *imitations* of reality have become *more real* than we consider reality to actually be, because we can see the replications and not always the original.

The Matrix film captures the core of Baudrillard's idea. The film narrative proposes that human reality is nothing more than a simulation created by machines. This simulation, called *The Matrix*, was created by humans and, before it enslaved humanity, was considered by them to be a technological innovation. When the film's protagonist is removed from *The Matrix,* he is shown that the original, real world is nothing more than a waste land --a desert of what was once considered 'the original.' Some (evil, inauthentic) characters prefer to live in the "dream-simulation" of *The Matrix* rather than to face survival in the desert, oppressed by the machines that allowed replication to replace generation. Is this our fate? Do we desire to immerse ourselves in replications of images that enable us to live pretend celebrity lifestyles? Is it more important to us to get the bigger, flatter screen TV than to solve the problems of pollution that their manufacture causes? The elite, wealthy characters of *The Belle's*

Stratagem would answer with a hearty "yes". Hannah Cowley was patriotic and supported imperial expansion and the developing stock market as a way to enable, financially, the middle class of which she

> "DORICOURT: Open your mind, my dear Saville! Go to Germany, where the people study mechanics, a fascinating science, and then to France, where the whole kingdom designs fashions; avail yourself of these insights and replicate them in India, Africa, and Brazil: taking the best from the wide world, as do I. Then at last return to Toronto, to join your nation on the most important object of all--- management of resources!" (Act 1 Scene 2).

was a part, and to strengthen women's independence as a consequence. Her peer, playwright Elizabeth Inchbald rose from poverty to an annual investment income of seven thousand pounds—a small fortune in the eighteenth century. Today, attitudes to globalization are more complex. When Doricourt explains to Saville how he makes money from exploitative, out-sourced manufacture, Saville is outraged.

To emphasize the constructed artifice of the aristocrats' world, we designed the set for our adaption of *The Belle's Stratagem* as a giant QR code. This choice was influenced by Baudrillard's concept of hyper-reality. The QR code is an innovation used to tag products; it is also used in augmented reality generation that allows for easy immersion into the digital world. Baurdrillard would have considered augmented reality to be a ' hyper-reality'. Today's social elite purchase iPhones, tablets and laptops that allow us easier access to images and online worlds such as twitter, Facebook and Instagram. *The Belle's Stratagem* social elite do this as well. Miss Ogle, Mrs Racket's protégé, is constantly immersed in the world of social media. Another examples of this is seen at the Auction scene, where our wealthiest character, Councilman Squander, purchases a piece of expensive technology that replicates a city of your dreams. He does so in a semi-conscious state; similar to the way most of us are semi-conscious or unconscious of the implications of what resources fuel our technology (i.e. the civil war in the Congo that is significantly financed by mining for coltan) and the digital world in which we participate in (i.e. Facebook's privacy policies) (Sutherland, 2011).

Follow our QR code and you will see students from Dr. Karen Fricker's DART's Praxis class 3P95 (focused study and application of performance theories) offering satirical commentary on Mrs. Racket's lifestyle. Their commentary is inspired by Baudrillard's theories, as interpreted by our production. The students have taken signs that are considered valuable in our

current culture, such as brand logos. They have plastered them on various incongruous items. The items, such as Gucci toothbrushes, do not exist in reality but because of the cultural and reproductive value of the Gucci brand we believe in their possible "hyper-reality". These images highlight the ridiculous value we place on brands. The blog, "Keeping Up with Mrs. Racket," functions as a fake acquisition site where Mrs. Racket - the play's most socially elite character - recommends these branded products. To further this exploration, the students have created a social media presence for Mrs. Racket. Is the representation of this fictional character who was created in the eighteenth century any less real than,

'Through the Looking Glass' chair sculpture by Janny Fraser

say "Kid President"? In doing this, we hope to promote reflection about Baudrillard's insights about 'hyper-reality' and to mock our own habitual inability to question digitally constructed worlds.

Perhaps the first "simulated theme park" was created in Frances at Versailles by architect Jules Hardouin Mansart. His famous Hall of Mirrors allowed the elite to observe their every lived moment as a performance. Queen Marie-Antoinette had a pretty theme-park "farm" where she played the role of a milkmaid, to escape the unpleasant realities of the court. Our furniture was inspired by the art work of Niagara artist Janny Fraser, co-founder of the Jordan Art Gallery, who has generously taken an interest in our production. **Kelly Wolf and assistant designer Jess Sweeny have embraced** Fraser's idea of "time as the vehicle of change and transformation visible in landscape and urban overviews… contrasting human and natural habitats". Janny Fraser's vision works nicely with Hannah Cowley's themes and with the artistic direction of our production. More of Janny Fraser's work can be found at: http://www.jordanartgallery.com/janny-fraser.html.

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