

A DYBBUK'S JOURNEY

A Directorial Process of Tony Kushner's  
"A Dybbuk"

by

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## ABSTRACT

The following is a document outlining the process of directing a production of the stage play A Dybbuk as part of Theatre at UBC's 2007/2008 season.

My main objective in directing this piece of work was to explore the idea of theatre as a subject of memory and remembrance, of exploring how our knowledge of the past, present and future influence the way a work of theatre is presented and perceived, and of how history plays a role in how a work of theatre is transformed through the visions of other artists.

The process included a lengthy research period in which I examined the origins of the original S. Asnky script of The Dybbuk, comparing it to other later translations and adaptations, including the adaptation by Tony Kushner which was used for this production. The life of the playwright and the world of the play, historically and culturally were also researched. This investigation is outlined in Chapter One. This is followed by a detailed Directorial Analysis of the script which is outlined in Chapter Two. A journal chronicling the entire process spanning April of 2007 to March of 2008, including reflections on my research discoveries, inspirations from a variety of sources, and the trials and tribulations of both pre-production and rehearsals are outlined in Chapter Three. A final chapter of reflection and assessment on the entire process and thoughts on the final outcomes are outlined in Chapter Four.

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## PREFACE

As stated in the Abstract, this document is a summary of the process involved in directing the play A Dybbuk and should not be considered an academic paper.

The creative process in directing a piece of theatre is a little like trying to capture light – elusive and illuminating at the same time. Just when you think you have it in your hand – it may slip away, sometime reappearing where you least expect it. The text that follows represents and reflects that process.

## THESIS ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Camp Hatikvah/Massada, where I first met The Dybbuk

Professor Stephen Heatley – who is probably why I am here writing this

And of course,

To my adviser, Prof. Stephen Malloy, for probing, prodding, questioning, supporting and in the language of my people, “noodging” me every step of the way.

## DEDICATION

To my parents

Fay (Fayge bat Avram) and the late Gerry (Gedalia ben Yaakov) Sherman

And to my Zaide,

Jack (Comedy in Seven Dialects) Sherman,  
Who I never met, but somehow I feel inspires me.

## CHAPTER ONE – A DYBBUK’S JOURNEY

### Introduction

“It is impossible to regain the historical purity of a work and see it through eyes innocent of events that have happened since its creation....*The Dybbuk* is a Kaddish, a prayer for the dead, which asks us to remember the dead. But along with our nostalgia, we bring to the film a sense of the tragic that may not have fully been there to begin with but that makes the film more beautiful and painful to watch. And yet the film dramatizes death and loss ultimately to get beyond them, to suggest other paths, other realities that we may not see or understand that we may certainly sense and feel”.<sup>1</sup>

My production of S. Ansky’s *The Dybbuk* is greatly influenced by history, as is the adaption of the play by Tony Kushner. As is pointed out in the quotation above, it is impossible to divorce the play from the past or from the future that came after it. When *The Dybbuk* was first written, the shtetl life as presented in the play was already in decline. That decline was followed by obliteration, with the coming of WWII and the Holocaust, wiping out an estimated 6 million Jews and more specifically, almost 90% of the Jewish population of Poland.

In choosing the Kushner adaptation, I was interested to see how the play had changed, from the earliest surviving version, through various other translations and adaptations, up to the adaptation at hand. What had Kushner added? What had been left behind? How much of the play was Kushner and how much Ansky? And how did the answers to those questions lead me to my concept and approach to my production?

I was interested in tracing the roots of the story. Where did the “plot” of *The Dybbuk* actually come from and how did Ansky take his ethnographic collection of folk tales and music and turn it into a play? How have other authors approached the text and what, in the text chosen for production, is Tony Kushner saying about how *The Dybbuk* still has resonances for a modern and mostly non-Jewish audience?

The original title of the play was *Between Two Worlds* (in Yiddish “tsvishn tsvey veltn”). This was also a jumping off point for my exploration. What did the phrase mean to Ansky and to Kushner? How could that meaning and implications affect my production?

### S. Ansky – A Short Biography and the birth of The Dybbuk

Shloyme Zanvl Rapport, later Semyon Akimovich An-sky, was a contemporary of another, more familiar Yiddish/Russian writer, Shalom Aleichem, whose *Tevye Stories* became the basis for the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Rapport was born in 1863 in the town of Chshniki in the Vitebsk district of what is now Belarus. His mother Anna ran a tavern and his father Aron was at one point a messenger for a wealthy family. Under circumstances that remain unclear, Aron eventually deserted the family leaving Anna to raise Shloyme and his two sisters alone – not an



easy task for a single woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Shloyme had a typical Jewish education of the period, attending a cheder, or Hebrew/Religious school and then beginning his yeshiva studies.

By the time he was 17 he had moved away from traditional Judaism and was beginning to make stronger connections with the secular and Christian world. Besides speaking Yiddish – the every day language of shtetl life – and Hebrew, he could also speak Russian, which was unusual for a Jew of the time. From this early age he found himself between two worlds – between secularism and religion; between Russian and Yiddish; between being early socialist in Tsarist Russia

Around 1881 he began ten years of wandering around Russia and various parts of Eastern Europe. One of the ways he earned a living was teaching Russian and secular subjects to the children of wealthy Jews in larger towns and cities. Trying to get to know and better understand “the working man” and peasants, he also did manual labour, working in a salt mine and a coal mine.

In 1882 he published his first novel, The Stepchildren, written in Yiddish but published in Russian. He continued to travel throughout the rest of the 1880’s and into the 1890’s, working and writing articles about peasant life and on Jewish themes. He met with limited success as a writer. There are also records of his having a few run-ins with the law as a political organizer and activist, an “agitator”, a role he was to play for the rest of his life.

In 1891 he began to publish under the name An-sky. The roots of this new name are unknown and remain unclear. Was it a derivation of his mother’s name Anna? Or was it a way to hide his Jewish identity to gain wider fame in Russia?

He expanded his travels through Western Europe visiting Berlin and Bern in Switzerland. He also found work as a bookbinder. In 1894 he travelled to Paris to work as a private secretary. He soon fell in with the large ex-patriot – and very political – Russian community there. He remained in Paris until about 1900 when he returns to Russia.

On his return, he continued to be politically active, becoming involved in “The Bund”, the Jewish Labour movement. He was very well known and respected within Labour politics as an organizer and pamphleteer.

In 1914 he headed a Jewish Ethnographic Expedition, sponsored by a wealthy patron. He set off with a small team of researchers and photographers, recording folk songs, collecting manuscripts and ritual objects. The work was cut short by the outbreak WWI. Work on The Dybbuk began at about this time, inspired by a story he heard of a rich father marrying off his daughter, while her heart belonged to another. There is still debate as to whether these early versions were written in Russian or Yiddish.

A first reading of The Dybbuk took place in 1915 though in a slightly different form than the version than is familiar to us now. In 1916, anxious to secure a first production and trying to get it produced at The Moscow Art Theatre, he solicited advice from friends including the renowned Russian theatre director, Constantine Stanislavsky. It was Stanislavsky who suggested

the Messenger character, proposing him as sort of Greek chorus, commenting on the action of the play and as a surrogate and guide for the audience. Unfortunately, Stanislavsky became ill shortly after this, and the production of The Dybbuk was put on hold.

With the Russian Revolution of 1917, Ansky was forced to flee the Bolsheviks, and disguised as a priest he made his way to Warsaw. His health was deteriorating, and he was in despair, knowing that much of the ethnographic materials that he had gathered had been captured by the Revolutionaries. He had to leave behind much of his written work, including the early drafts of The Dybbuk. Luckily a Hebrew version of the play, which had been translated by the writer Hayim Bialik and was subsequently translated and published in Russian, survived. Ansky used both of these versions this to rewrite his play.

In 1920, after another ethnological expedition, Ansky published his other great work, The Destruction of Galicia, part of a three volume set chronicling the destruction of Jewish communities in WWI. The sense of loss that permeates this work influenced my thinking about my production, seeing A Dybbuk as a cultural record in the way that Ansky's other seminal work was a record.

Suffering from diabetes and angina, Ansky died on November 8, 1920 at the age 57, never having seen his play performed. On December 9, the Vilna Troupe, the main Yiddish Theatre in Vilnius, Lithuania, premiered The Dybbuk. It was rushed into production in part as a tribute to its recently deceased, and much loved, author.

In 1922, Habimah Theatre, the main Jewish Theatre in Moscow, presented The Dybbuk in Hebrew. The play was an instant success, as much for the production as for the play itself. It was a highly expressionistic, stylized production, directed by Eugene Vakhtangov, one of Stanislavsky's star students and a disciple of Meyerhold. It was described as "a symbolist masque"<sup>2</sup>, featuring stylized rituals, pantomime, dance and choral speaking. The production toured throughout Europe and to the U.S.

The play then entered the repertory of Habimah, which was a division of the Moscow Art Theatre. With the founding of Israel in 1948, it was produced by the national theatre of Israel, also called Habimah, and it remains in their repertory.

### **Tony Kushner – A playwright Between Two Worlds – A Short Biography**

Tony Kushner is an American playwright, probably best known for his two part play Angels in America, subtitled "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes", that was first presented in 1990. He was born July 16, 1956, in New York City, the second of three children of William and Sylvia Kushner. They were both classically trained musicians. His family moved when he was very young to Lake Charles, Louisiana where they were one of only a small handful of Jews living in the American South. His family was very much a secular one, passionate about both the arts and politics. One of his most recent works, the musical Caroline, or Change is semi-autobiographical in its Southern setting and themes. Kushner's Jewishness was never a large part of his life growing up, and his sexual identity as a gay man was a source of constant personal struggle.

In 1974, he returned to New York, where he did his undergraduate degree in English Literature at Columbia University, and immersed himself in the New York theatre world. Richard Foreman's production of The Threepenny Opera, had a huge impact on him. He writes that he saw it "about ninety five times"<sup>3</sup>. He was drawn to both by the words and music of Berthold Brecht and Kurt Weill, and also to the staging employed by Foreman. He was beginning to become an "experimental" theatre artist, surrounded by the commercial world of Broadway.

He then did his MFA in Directing at New York University, directing a short one-act play by Brecht as his "audition" piece and graduated in 1984. After graduation he began to have his work as a playwright produced by the Imaginary Theatre Company, as well as working as a switchboard operator and a teacher of gifted children. Some of his earliest plays were written to be performed by his students.

In 1985-86 he worked as the Assistant Director of the St. Louis Repertory Theatre and in 1987-86 he was the Artistic Director of The New York Theatre Workshop, always continuing to write and direct his own work.

Kushner views himself as a political playwright, and his works feature recurring themes of the conflict between the secular and the religious, between gay and straight, and the struggle to be a socialist in a capitalist country.

Both politically and culturally, the two writers, Kushner and Ansky, had common ground in being "between two worlds".

"The more I read about him, the more I felt that we had very similar backgrounds. He was somebody born into a non-religious home, who went toward Judaism, but who was always inhibited in his thinking about Judaism by his political convictions, which flew very much in the face. He was a social democrat and a Menshevik. His sense of himself as a political revolutionary was very much at odds with this sort of emotional tie he had to Judaism. He struggled with that all of his life. The Dybbuk is definitely the product of that struggle. So the play drew me, because it's not this little fairy tale. It's actually more complicated than that. I think it's very much about a very insular, pre-modern shtetl world, but one that's already being impacted upon by modernity and the arrival of the nineteenth century, and everything that would come after that. So I was very drawn to it for that reason."<sup>4</sup>

### **The "Frame"**

The idea of a framing device for the story has its roots in Ansky's original version, but the Kushner translation suggested something unique.

Ansky's early draft, referred to as 'the censored variant'<sup>5</sup>, was the first version submitted to the official censors in 1915. It was quickly rejected. The censor felt that the scenes featuring the driving out of the dybbuk were too similar to New Testament Gospel stories of the driving out of demons, and were therefore sacrilegious.

In that early version, the story of The Dybbuk is prefaced by a “frame” of its own. In the prologue, a daughter seeks comfort from her father. She has returned home after several years, having fled her arranged marriage to be with the man she loved. Now that the romance has died, she has returned home. Looking for a way to reconnect with her father and gain his understanding, she asks her father if he knows of any stories that mirror her own situation. The father then tells the story of a young man he knew at the Yeshiva, who followed his passion for a girl, which led to disastrous results. The story he tells is the story of Chonen and Leah.

### **Other Frames, Other Writers**

English playwright and director Julia Pascale includes her version of The Dybbuk in her volume of plays Holocaust Trilogy. The collection also features A Dead Woman on Holiday, a love story set during the Nuremberg trials and Theresa which explores anti-Semitism on the Channel Islands during the German Occupation. Her version of The Dybbuk premiered in London at the New End Theatre, Hampstead in July 1992, and then played at the Lillian Bayliss Studio Theatre. Since its’ premier it has played in Munich at the festival of Jewish Theatre, at Maubege’s International Theatre Festival, in Poland as part of a British Council tour, in Sweden, Belgium and on a major British regional tour.

The Pascal shares that the genesis for her version came “while performing on a German tour where I was conscious that, for a Jew, there were nothing but ghosts. Hitler had won. So I used the Ansky play as a way into my personal “dybbuks”. At the same time, I was very aware of being drawn into a culture that was mine. There is very little Jewish theatre tradition, no mystery plays, only The Dybbuk and The Golem.”<sup>6</sup>

The frame of Pascal’s Dybbuk starts in Germany where Judith, a British atheist Jew, on a holiday in Germany, looks at the society around her and feels that in spite of the Allies victory in WWII, Hitler has won, rather than being defeated. She is haunted by thoughts of her own lost family and this leads her in to a dream world haunted by ghosts - or dybbuks. She imagines a ghetto somewhere in Eastern Europe where five non-religious Jews awaiting transport to Auschwitz play out scenes they can vaguely remember from the myth of The Dybbuk. The play ends before the story of The Dybbuk can be completed as the five are summoned to board the train to take them to their death.

American actor and writer Bruce Myers wrote A Dybbuk for Two People. It premiered at the Avignon Festival in 1980, with Myers in the cast, and has since toured internationally. It was produced in Edmonton by Northern Light Theatre in April 2004.

In Myers’ version, elements of ceremony and ritual are set around a dining room table. The story of The Dybbuk is recounted by a married couple as they sit down for dinner to observe the Sabbath. They light candles and break challah, the rituals of the Sabbath. The husband shares with his wife that he is restless and dissatisfied with his life, and that he is searching for something more. His wife tells him the story of The Dybbuk to put his restless spirit at ease. In the production, the two actors play all the roles required by the story and use objects at hand – table cloth becomes a prayer shawl etc. – as part of the performance.

In 1937, a film version of The Dybbuk was produced and released in Poland. It was directed by Michal Waszynski, one of Poland's most famous directors of popular films, and himself a man caught "between two worlds". Waszynski was born Jewish but converted to Catholicism after WWI. He was a flamboyantly gay man in a conservative Catholic country. After the war he moved to the U.S. and worked more as a producer than a director. Somewhere in that journey he acquired noble lineage and was known as Prince Michael Waszynski.

Polish Jews were very involved in the early Polish film industry. A new script was written by Alter Kacyzne, who owned the copyright to Ansky's original script. Ludwig Prywes, who had financed the original Vilna Theatre production of the play, was the driving force behind getting the movie made.

One of the main additions to the film is a "back story". The movie starts long before the action of the story of The Dybbuk begins. We meet the young Nissen and Sender, and get to see their early friendship, including their pledge, blessed by Rabbi Azriel, that their children should wed. Both men get married and they are soon expecting their first children. Sender's wife dies in childbirth, and Nissen dies at sea just as his wife is giving birth to their son. Almost one third of the film passes before the story of The Dybbuk begins.

The action of the movie then moves forward in time, and we see an older Sender and his now grown daughter, Leah. Sender is shown forever sitting at his desk, counting and counting his stacks of money. Chonen, Nissen's now grown son, is first seen as a young Yeshiva student, walking on the road towards Brinnitz. The Messenger, who appears and disappears, through the magic of film throughout the movie, appears on the road as well. Chonen is soon riding in Sender's carriage to have a Sabbath meal with him. At dinner, Chonen and Leah meet for the first time and their connection is instant and powerful.

The movie then follows much of the narrative of the play. A match for Leah is set up by Sender with the son of a wealthy merchant. Chonen, on hearing the news, summons dark forces to come to his aid. Smoke and wind fill the screen and Chonen dies.

The spirit of Chonen appears at the wedding of Leah and Menashe, her would-be groom, during the Dance of the Poor. He is seen as a skull-masked reveler, and his true face is revealed through the use of film special effects.

Writer and Director John Hirsch used a similar device in his stage version, first presented at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in 1974, and subsequently at the Mark Taber Forum in Los Angeles. The spirit of Chonen appears at the wedding, disguised as an old, poor woman, and tells Leah to go to the graveyard to visit his grave.

The film is valuable for many historical details – costumes, settings, and rituals. It is also a rare opportunity to hear Yiddish spoken as the common language. Lili Liliana, who played Leah, used subtle changes of voice and facial expression when she was "possessed" by the spirit of Chonen. It was rather subdued but very effective, and was influential in our exploration of how the actress playing Leah in our production might approach the same difficult task.

The movie is also filled with music. The “Rikudl”, the celebratory dance by Sender and the men of the synagogue, featured a wonderful tune and a great vision of ecstatic dancing that inspired our production.

Watching the film, and knowing that the majority of the performers would not survive the war made for very sobering viewing.

### **The Neugroschel Translation**

Tony Kushner had worked with Mark Lamos, Artistic Director of the Hartford Stage Company, on an adaptation of Corneille’s The Illusion in 1989-90. Lamos, who was inspired by the John Hirsch version of The Dybbuk, planted the idea with Kushner of doing a new version of that play for his theatre.

Kushner had long been attracted to the history of the Yiddish Theatre.

“I’ve always been attracted to pictures and phonographs of the Yiddish theatre of the teens and the twenties and the thirties. I’ve heard lots of stories and heard phonograph recordings. Vanessa Redgrave did a benefit for a group called “A Memorial for the Victims of Stalin’s Oppression” in New York about four or five years ago, and one of the people that performed was an eighty-five-year-old actress from the original Jewish theatre in Moscow, who was this beanpole of a woman in this fabulous black velvet dress, and white face paint. She did a Yiddish poem about the Holocaust. It consisted primarily of the names of Jewish towns that don’t exist anymore in Russia. I’d never heard Yiddish spoken that way. I always think of, you know, Leo Rosten Yiddish (Rosten wrote The Joys of Yiddish, first published in 1968). But this was incredibly elegant, and fluid, and melodious. And I thought “God, this is an astonishingly beautiful language”. So I became very fond of hearing it, and decided that I’d be interested in working on a play, and The Dybbuk seemed like the obvious place to start, and it’s this great play”.<sup>7</sup>

Kushner approached translator Joachim Neugroschel, who had translated over 180 different works, to create a new translation of The Dybbuk in 1992.

Translator Joachim Neugroschel was born in Vienna, Austria, and grew up in New York City. He graduated from Columbia University with a degree in English and Comparative Literature, and then he moved to Paris and then Berlin. He returned to New York six years later where he began his career as a translator, translating works from French, German, Italian, Russian, and Yiddish, and also from English to German. He has translated the works of Moliere, Maupassant, Proust, Kafka, Mann, as well as of contemporary writers.

Neugroschel sees himself as more than just a translator. “My efforts may look like adaptation – and they are. But they focus on arousing the same emotions, the same reactions that the original drama, in its fashion, touches off in readers and spectators”.<sup>8</sup>

Neugroschel says of the language and language structure that he used for his translation -

“In the tradition of Yiddish melodrama, the overwrought language of The Dybbuk tends to be grandiloquent and melodramatic, reaching a gushing intensity that was perfectly acceptable to, indeed, demanded by its audience, but that would sound almost comically overcharged in English.

Given all of these peculiar problems, I have steered the English version toward a blend of normal and slightly elevated speech... I have used a fusion of free verse and blank verse for most of the prose dialogue of the more mystical characters – the Messenger, Leah, and Khonen – especially in the amorous parts, which in a culture that was very buttoned-up about public utterances of love, sex and even affection, had an intensely erotic effect that would otherwise be lost in English”.<sup>9</sup>

Kushner did not follow Neugroschel in attempting to versify his adaptation, but he did adopt a poetic style of prose that captures the spirit of drama, melodrama and passion of the original.

Working from this translation, Kushner created his own adaptation, which had its first performance at The Hartford Stage Company in 1995. The script was then revised, and received its New York debut in 1997 at The Public Theatre.

I began the process of comparing the two versions – Neugroschel and Kushner – to see where they converged and differed, by going through the script, scene by scene. Kushner is fairly faithful to the translation, and to the original texts, with some notable exceptions and differences:

The Scribe – this is a character invented by Kushner that does not appear in either Neugroschel or any other translation. He is the recorder of events, but also the conduit of a warning from God. He is the voice of “the prophet”, much like the Angel in Angels in America, announcing what is to come.

The Messenger – Kushner integrates The Messenger much more closely into the action of the play than in any other version. What are soliloquies or speeches of moral instruction in Neugroschel, are transformed into dialogues, debates and interactions in Kushner’s adaptation. His divine origins are more directly and yet still cryptically, referenced – comparing the length of his travels to the length of time that it takes for a prayer to reach Heaven, or sharing that “even in Paradise” they are celebrating the impending wedding of Leah and Menashe. He is both an emissary and an observer. He is the embodiment of the idea of “choice”. He foretells what may happen, depending on the path that each of us chose.

The Messenger’s inclusion into the action of the play is most clearly seen in his relationships with Chonen and Azriel. The Messenger is directly included in Chonen’s fateful decision to speak the “unutterable name of God”, whispering it directly into the Messenger’s ear just before he dies. Azriel recognizes The Messenger immediately as an emissary from God, and it is through their conversations - “who made the world...” etc. that Azriel’s doubts, fears and questioning of his own faith are illuminated.

Holocaust images – words of fire, death, a pit - all echo the coming horror. The Third Chasid in Act III talks of burning villages and burying the dead in a big hasty pit, much like the early images of the destruction of the shtetls before the death camps moved into high gear.

The scene at the train station is the most ironic Kushner invention. The train passengers talk about the wonders that are to come, and how only good may come from new technology like trains. “In a world of electric light, even Jews can ride the trains” predicts the Second Passenger. In a few short years, trains, these wonders of the coming age, were used to send millions to their deaths.

Further details of the comparison are noted below:

N = Neugroschel K = Kushner

#### ACT ONE

N - The play opens with a solo voice singing “Why did the soul...” in the darkness.

K - Chonen is first seen, singing “Why did the soul” while ritually cleansing himself in the mikveh.

N - The Battlons then pick up the song and repeat it at the top of the scene.

K - The Battlons begin by reciting poems extolling the virtues of various Rabbis/

N - The story of Rabbi Schmelke of Nikelshberg is not in Kushner.

N - There are no “jokes” about women.

N/K - Most of the scene - enquiring about who Chonen is etc. – is pretty much the same.

N - Chana Esther – enters with children – this is usual in the other translations.

N/K - The rest is the same.

N - After the yeshiva students etc. leave – Chonen speaks to himself – “Who opened the Ark?” etc. The Messenger is not involved.

N/K - Most of Chonen’s thoughts about Leah are the same, though he makes no mention of Sender etc.

N/K - Scene with Henech is pretty much the same.

N/K - The scene with Leah/Fradde, the meeting of Chonen/Leah etc. is the same.

N/K - The following scene with Henech/Chonen is the same.

K - Meyer returns with the news of Sender’s unsuccessful attempts at another. match for Leah rather than Osher, one of the yeshiva students.



N - When the Messenger leaves, there are no hints/allusions to his Divinity – “that’s how long it takes a prayer to reach Heaven...”

N/K - Sender scene plays the same.

K - Chonen’s death – the Messenger is included – Chonen whispers God’s name to him.

N/K - The rest of the scene plays the same.

N - The book in Chonen’s hand is identified as the Book of Raziel.

N – The last line – “He’s been destroyed by the demons!”.

## ACT TWO

N - There is no scene with Leah/Fradde at the mikveh. The song Fradde sings in K is adapted from a story the Messenger tells in Act III in N.

N - The act begins with “a guest” at the wedding rather than The Messenger, who arrives a bit later. The story of the Holy Bride and Bridegroom is told to The Guest.

K – “People are talking about it (the upcoming marriage of Leah and Menashe) all over the district” is replaced with “Even in Paradise...” – another holy reference.

K - Meyer’s song is expanded and is more pointed against Sender.

N - The Old Woman is also blind.

N/K - The scene with Leah/Fradde etc. is pretty much the same - though Leah’s thoughts about “the ones who die too soon” are expanded in K.

N/K The scene with Leah/Messenger is the same.

N/K – The rest of the scene is the same.

N - Nachman and the wedding party arrive but there is no Mrs. Nachman.

N/K - The Menashe/Rabbi Mendl scene is the same – except that Rabbi Mendl doesn’t use the word exegesis.

K - Menashe’s despair over his looks and his reaction to seeing the grave is expanded. Inclusion of a reference to the daily prayer in which God is thanked that a man was not born a woman.

N/K - The wedding scene is the same, except that in N., Leah yells “Murderer” at Nachman rather than Sender.

N – The final line of the act – “A dead soul:has entered the body of the bride: “A Dybbuk” in K.

### ACT THREE

K – The railway station scene does not happen in N.

N - The act begins in Azriel’s study. The Messenger is telling stories – including the story that is the basis for Fradde’s song in K’s Act II opening scene.

N - Following that, the scene continues with Azriel sharing challah with his disciples and telling stories of the Baal Shem Tov – a parable about souls and acrobats – “if a man could work on his soul as hard as an acrobat trains....”

N - The details about welcoming a stranger and offering a chair to the Messenger are between Azriel and Michl.

N - The long story about the holiest land etc. is a lesson given solo by Azriel. It is not an exchange between him and The Messenger. At this point, Azriel trembles and then goes into sort of a trance, but there is not the sense of weariness and regret as in K.

N - After all of this, Sender arrives with Leah. Azriel says he knows about the Dybbuk, even though nothing has yet been said about it in the scene.

N - This is where Azriel expresses his doubts – there are times when I lose my confidence etc.

N - Michl reassures Azriel here – rather than at the end of the act – even before he meets Leah etc. he has doubts.

N/K - The exchange between Azriel and Leah is the same.

N - Since in K. Sender arrives earlier in the scene, Shimshin has already been sent for.

N - The power dynamic between Shimshin and Azriel is a bit clearer. They need each other’s permission to perform the ritual.

N/K - The dreams of Shimshin are mentioned.

N - The Messenger speaks only at the end – “the bridegroom will arrive on time” – and then the clock strikes midnight.

N - The scene does not end with Azriel's feelings of doubt or his address to his Grandfather etc.

#### ACT FOUR

N - It is only 12 hours later, therefore the exorcism etc. would take place in daylight.

N/K - The trial proceeds in the same except that Shimshin does not become "possessed". Nissen's entire story is just reported speech.

N - Less is made in of Nissen not accepting the verdict by Azriel, though the judges acknowledge it afterwards.

N/K - I cut the business of covering the Ark in black cloth etc.

N/K - The exorcism plays out the same - shofars, white robes, the dybbuk dying.

K - The magic writing in the Scribes book; the predictions of the future; the instructions of Azriel to The Messenger to deliver the message to God.

N/K - Chonen's return plays the same.

N - Leah and Chonen "fuse" - Chonen does not take a flame from her body.

N - The scene quickly fades to black as the rest of the cast re-enter.

## **The World of the Play - Background**

There are a few key areas that needed exploration, not only for myself as the director, but also to help inform a predominately non-Jewish cast about the worlds in which A Dybbuk exists.

### **Chasidism**

The word Chasid, or Hasid, comes from the Hebrew word meaning “pious”.

Jews began to settle in Eastern Europe, fleeing the Crusades of the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. They settled in “Ashkenaz”, the Hebrew word for Germany. As a result Jews from Eastern Europe are today known as Ashkenazi Jews. This is where Yiddish began to be developed. It is based on 12<sup>th</sup> Century German combined with Hebrew. It is pronounced like German, but written with the Hebrew alphabet. It soon became the language of everyday Jewish life across Eastern, Central and Western Europe, with Hebrew being reserved for the synagogue.

In 1492, the Jews of Spain were given the choice of conversion to Catholicism, death or exile. There are rumors that Christopher Columbus saw ships carrying Jews out of Spain as he set out on his first voyage across the Atlantic. Up until this point, Spain had been the centre of Jewish learning. After the Spanish expulsion, Poland became a centre of Jewish learning and life.

Jewish history has always been one of destruction and despair. The Cossack Massacre led by Bohdan Chmielnitsky between 1648 – 54, while nominally a rebellion against the church and the Polish and Ukrainian nobility, also targeted the Jewish population. It was the first large scale destruction since the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 CE. To the despondent Jews of Eastern Europe, this seemed like a good time for the long hoped for Messiah to appear.

A pretend savior did emerge. Shabbatai Zvi (1626-78), a mystic and false messiah proclaimed himself Messiah in 1648. He forecast the year 1666 as the “millennium”, the year of his arrival as Savior of the Jewish People. He tried to enter Constantinople in his attempt to redeem/free Israel/Palestine but he was captured, and faced with the choice between death and renouncing his faith, he converted to Islam.

His betrayal, and exposure as a false Messiah and charlatan, rocked the faith of the entire Jewish community. Some rabbis turned to a more orthodox and strict adherence to torah and laws, believing that they and their congregants had brought this upon themselves by breaking their promise to God and straying from the path of orthodoxy.

But a new path came into being.

Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer (1698-1760) began his life as just a simple man and Rabbi. One day he went out for a walk in the woods, for prayer and meditation. This led to a profound revelation and a new approach to faith. Rabbi Yisroel now realized that only through joy. Through song, dance – even ecstatic dance – was there a way to get closer to God. The path to holiness was

not just through the slavish devotion to the minutiae of strict adherence. Much like Vatican II in the Catholic Church, Rabbi Yisroel advocated a way to return to God to the common people, not just the Rabbis and the learned men. His ideas quickly caught on and his mode of worship embraced. This was not the religion of despair, but a religion of joy and celebration.

Rabbi Yisroel became known as the “Baal Shem Tov”, meaning Master of the Good Name. His adherents were known as Chasids. His most devoted followers and teachers – great Holy Men – were known as Tzaddiks, or Righteous Men.

There had long been a medieval proscription against Jews wearing colored clothing. Both the church and state demanded that Jews wear black at all times, in order to more easily isolate and identify them. By law, Jews were non-persons and had to wear black clothes so they could be identified at once. The early Chasids took ownership of this law, and one of the most defining elements of being a member of a Chasidic community became the wearing of black clothing. From a tradition of turning adversity to a positive outlook, it was decided to embrace the wearing of black so as to avoid frivolity and also place distance between the wearer and everyone else.

A modern Chasidic Rabbi went on further to explain the continued embrace of black, somber clothing as a way to focus on the inside of the person not the outside, emphasizing that you are an individual because of who you are not because of what you wear.

“As to your claim that Chassidic Jews don't have originality because we dress the same, I must disagree. In fact the opposite is true - it is precisely because we dress the same that we can truly be individuals.

Being an individual means having something unique about you that no one else has. According to you, to be original I need a weird shirt, cool shoes and an unusual haircut. The more unusual, the more you stand out from the crowd. But let me ask you, is that really what makes you different from everyone else? Is that all you can do to be unique - put on this outfit or that? Couldn't just anyone look the same?

In Jewish tradition, what makes an individual is not the clothing, but the character. When you are a part of a community of people that all dress the same, there is only one way to stand out: you have to be original, not your clothing. The people around you notice you for your character, the way you treat people, your manner of speech. You can't hide behind a superficial individuality based on hairstyle and fashion -- you have to be a real individual.”<sup>10</sup>

Orthodox Jews also wear a prayer belt called a gartel in German or Yiddish. This belt is to indicate that the wearer separates his upper body from his lower body, since the head is the location of all that is inspired and holy while the lower part of the body serves more “earthly” purposes.

Many orthodox Jewish men also wear a black hat and some wear a streimel, or a fur lined hat. The hat style may vary according to each Chassidic sect. All men wear a skull cap, or yarmulke, all day, as a sign of respect for God, who exist above them. Wearing a covering on their heads at all times helped to separate themselves on Earth from God above.

The other most visible defining characteristic of a Chasidic male is their beards and long side curls on either side of their heads. In Leviticus Chapter 19:27 it is written “Do not round the corner of your head, neither shall you destroy the corners of your beard.” These prohibitions concerning the shaving of hair and beard were interpreted quite literally, so that a Chasid will have a long untrimmed beard and long sideburns. These are known as Payot Harosh or, in Yiddish, Payes.

Women dress modestly, covering their arms and legs at all times. Married women cover their heads, and some even shave off their own hair and wear a wig called a “shietel”, so that they will not appear attractive or sensual to any man other than her husband.

Men and women never touched in public. As stated by Menashe, there really is a prayer said every morning in which men thank God that they were not born women. All marriages were arranged. Men were the head of the household, but the women actually took responsibility for running the home and managed the household finances – the theory being that the men needed to focus on prayer. In families where the man of the house was completely devoted to the study of Torah, prayer and meditation, it was the woman who went out to work to support the family (although under different circumstances, it was Ansky’s mother Anna who supported her family when her husband deserted them).

### **Kabbalah**

Kabbalah is the most well known form of Jewish mysticism. The name comes from the Hebrew word meaning “receiving”. Kabbalah is a way of investigating the true, deeper meanings of the Torah and of God, and is a strong element within Chasidic belief and practice.

It is believed that Kabbalah had its origins in the Garden of Eden where the true nature of God was revealed when the world was first created. There is a long tradition of mysticism in early Judaism, but it became more common and codified during the Talmudic period.

Later, in the medieval period, mystical texts begin to appear. The Zohar, which is a collection of mystical texts, appeared in Spain in the 13 Century. The Book of Raziel also appeared at this time, though its traditional origins are much older. The book is purported to contain the true word of God, which was stolen by the Angel Raziel, who hid behind the throne of God and recorded God’s words. The book was then given to Adam after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden, in hopes that its’ knowledge would help guide him back to Paradise. In the generations that followed, the Book is believed to have passed to Noah and to King Solomon. It is thought that perhaps “Azriel” is an anagram of Raziel.

One of the core ideas of Kabbalah is numerology. Every letter in Hebrew also represents a number so every word in the Torah contains a hidden, deeper meaning. Since the Torah is the word of God, by constantly working and reworking the numbers, it is believed that the true nature of God will be revealed. Chonen uses numerology to prove that his love for Leah was meant to be - by adding and multiplying the number of Torah scrolls in the ark and comparing that

to the spelling of Leah's name, their love seems predetermined. Leah's name can also spell "not from God", a forbidding warning.

It is thought that using the Kabbalah could bring powers to the "user" by means of magic. The Book of Raziel itself was supposed to be a powerful source of magic. Because of the danger and the power of Kabbalah, Jews weren't allowed to study it until after they had finished their formal Jewish education - at least until they reached the age of 30.

### **WWII – The Holocaust**

In the magic writing that appears in The Scribe's book in Act IV, the world that Rabbi Azriel and the rest of his community knows, "will soon be swept away". WWII swept away almost an entire generation, and with them a way of life.

The Germans invaded Poland in 1939 and almost immediately the Polish Jews had to wear some sort of marker on their clothing to identify them as Jews. The Nazis were inspired by medieval edicts that all Jews had to wear articles of clothing that set them apart – and shame them for being different. At first, in Poland, the Jews wore a white armband with a blue star painted on it. By 1941, all Jews in occupied lands were forced to wear a yellow cloth Star of David on the left side of their coats. The star was outlined in black, with the word "Jew" printed in the centre of the star in the local language – "Jud" in Germany, "Yid" in Poland. The Jews were made to manufacture the stars themselves, and purchase them. The Jewish population was moved into ghettos, and the end of shtetl life was beginning.

In January 1942, a conference was held in the town of Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin in Germany. This conference, a meeting of top Nazi officials, was called to implement "The Final Solution" – the destruction of the Jews of Europe. After Wannsee the work of exterminating the Jewish population became more mechanized and methodical. Extermination camps were set up, with their gas chambers and crematoriums. These replaced mobile "killing wagons" and mass shootings into open pits that had been the methods of choice up until this point.

By the time the war ended in 1945, it is estimated that six million Jews had been killed. Poland had about 3 million Jews at the start of the war but by the end, almost 90% of them were dead. They were probably the easiest to target in all the occupied countries of Europe. They were the least assimilated, and the large Chasidic population made them easy to identify.

The shtetl life truly was "swept away" as the Scribes book predicts. A Dybbuk is about the death of an entire people – not just the death of one or two souls.

### **About our production:**

“Rabbi, only turn the page  
The wonders of the coming age  
Will dwarf your shtetl magic so.  
Dybbuks, Golems, all you know  
Your writings and the words you say  
Like oven ashes, swept away.  
At some not very distant date  
The martyred dead accumulate.  
Books of history will contain  
Mountain piles of the slain”

“Jews have tumbled from the pages of books...” Rabbi Azriel says in Act III. The history of the Jews is contained in our books. Being “inscribed in the Book of Life” is the yearly hope of every Jew at Rosh Hoshana, the Jewish New Year.

The poem appears magically in the Scribe’s book near the end of the play and Azriel’s instructions to The Scribe to write down everything that has happened and that the book should be thrown in the river were the starting point for the concept of the production. The Rabbi’s book, into which The Scribe dutifully records the events of the Rabbi’s “court”, is also a record of his people. It is not just the story of The Dybbuk. The history of the community must be preserved. A record must be kept.

My production would frame the story of Leah and Chonen with a story that reflects the Holocaust images and references that Kushner has woven into Ansky’s text.

After the war, I propose that the Scribe is the only survivor from the town of Brinnitz, which was his home. At the start of the play, he returns to his shtetl to reclaim the book. He has chosen to disobey the Rabbi’s instructions, and instead of destroying the book, has hidden it in his synagogue. The book contains the story of his people - and when he finds it again his memory conjures up a story from its pages. That story, the story of A Dybbuk, is then told by the people that the Scribe remembers, as he last saw them, when he, along with the rest of his shtetl community, assembled here in the synagogue to await transport. They could take only one suitcase with them. They would pack that which is most important to them – a Rabbi would pack shofars and the Torah scrolls. A bride about to be married might pack her wedding dress in hopes that one day she and her beloved might still be united.

The people of the town from the Holocaust era become both the actors and the watchers of the story. It is the last story they all remember and it is the story they need to tell. The people from the WWII period become, and intermingle with, the characters from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century story of A Dybbuk.

The production will then exist between two worlds – the world that the Scribe forecasts and the world in which the story takes place.



## Design Process

The process of deciding on a “world” in which A Dybbuk could be set travelled through many worlds. The Holocaust imagery that Kushner has included in his adaptation, and in particular the magic poem in The Scribes book, pushed me to find a visual representation of some aspect of the Holocaust.

I started with the idea of a bombed out theatre, maybe the Vilna Theatre itself, where The Dybbuk had its premier. The actors who we would see on stage would be the ghosts of the actors who had performed The Dybbuk, which stayed in the repertoire of the troupe for years after its first production. Perhaps the last production they mounted before they were transported was a performance of The Dybbuk. Unable to find enough visual and textual information to support the idea, I moved on.

Next an idea of setting the play within a concentration camp – perhaps even Auschwitz itself - was considered. Again my early research and investigation couldn’t find any material to support a theatrical performance inside a camp. I knew that there had been camp orchestras that played for the camp’s guards etc. as well as playing as prisoners were marched off to work or to their death. This is the basis for the movie “Playing For Time” (1980), starring Vanessa Redgrave.. The Theresienstadt concentration camp was set up as a “model camp”, to be observed and inspected by agencies like the Red Cross, in order to show that Jewish inmates were not being mistreated. A children’s opera, Brundibar, by Franz Krasa and Rudolph Freudenfeld was written for and performed by children in Theresienstadt and was recently adapted by Kushner for a production designed by Maurice Sendak.

Only after we had moved on to other design concepts did I discover Theatrical Performance During the Holocaust - Texts, Documents, Memoirs, edited by Rebecca Rovit and Alvin Goldfarb. It provided evidence that live performances did in fact take place in the camps, even in the prisoners’ barracks, where a table might serve as a hastily constructed stage. Even in the direst circumstances, the need for live performance persisted.

After that, the idea of a railway station, or platform was considered – the gathering place where Jews were gathered before they were loaded on to the trains for transport. Perhaps the story of The Dybbuk is a story that might be told by people as they waited with their luggage – one piece allowed per person.

The last idea, and the one that was finally settled on, was to set the action of the play in a synagogue. A place of worship is between two worlds - between heaven and earth. Older synagogues often featured an upper level, usually reserved for women, and a lower level for the men. It was a place of learning and a place of refuge, but it could also be seen as a dark and forbidding place. As Fradde says, the walls of the synagogue “are wet with God’s tears”.

There was a unique style of synagogue architecture that was particular to Poland, especially in rural shtetls like Brinnitz. They were constructed of wood, and the interiors were highly decorated and painted. Almost every interior surface was covered with words and pictures. Just as The Scribe’s book is a record of the life of his community, so too were the walls of the Polish

wooden synagogues. Sadly most of these synagogues were destroyed during the war. Fortunately many highly detailed pre-war pictures survived.

I took the opportunity to re-read Elie Weisel's Holocaust novel, Night, which chronicles, in horrific detail, his family's deportation and his struggle and survival at Auschwitz. A detail unknown to me jumped out of the pages. Jewish communities were often assembled first in a synagogue before being marched to board the trains and in the confusion, suitcases were often left behind.

With this picture, the vision of transport, synagogue and memory all came together.

## **CHAPTER 2 - DIRECTORIAL ANALYSIS**

### **Initial Response to the Play**

After reading 30-40 plays trying to choose a script for my thesis production, there was only one clear winner – S. Ansky’s The Dybbuk.

The first thing that I found interesting was the title – A Dybbuk, rather than the more common, and direct translation from the Yiddish *Die Dybbuk*– The Dybbuk. Why the difference? The use of the word “A” in the title makes the story both more immediate and more personal. This is a particular story about a particular incident – but the play as a whole can be seen as “a dybbuk” – a wandering soul. If, as I believe and as Kushner seems to intimate, the play is an elegy for a lost way of life, then the change in the title makes sense and is appropriate.

Like many in the Jewish Community, The Dybbuk was a work I knew of but had never seen on stage. My only experience with it was watching the 1937 Yiddish film (without subtitles) while away at Summer Camp. I remember how bewildered I was by the movie. I don’t think I could even follow the plot, and was certainly put off by the extreme characterizations and what seemed to me negative stereotypes. I had also seen pictures from both the original Vilna Troupe production and subsequent Habimah Theatre productions, all of which had a wonderful sense of mystery and stylization, looking very much like production photos for German Expressionist films like Metropolis and The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

Very little of my work as a director has had a strong personal connection. While I have been lucky to direct plays with great stories that I have enjoyed, I have never directed anything that has a strong connection to my own Jewish faith and culture. When my father died almost 15 years ago, I had the beginnings of a spiritual re-awakening. I began going to synagogue, or shul, on a regular basis to say kaddish (the prayer of remembrance for the dead) to remember and honor my father. While going to this particular shul – the first synagogue I had been to where I really felt welcomed – I began to get a sense of that connection to a larger community – a community that you belonged to just by virtue of who you were. In the rituals surrounding my father’s death and shiva period, I saw how a community responds to tragedy and loss, and how faith can provide guidance and answers during a tragic time – guidance and answers that the secular world seemed ill equipped to provide.

A Dybbuk is a story about MY people, but it is also a story that people from outside my community could share in.

Among the many things I have always liked about The Dybbuk were the elements of magic and the supernatural. Growing up, I was addicted to the daytime occult TV soap opera Dark Shadows – with its mix of ghosts, vampires, witches and spirits. While lacking any real knowledge about Kabbalah, I was naturally attracted to A Dybbuk’s mysticism and other-worldliness.

The magical writing that appears in the Scribes notebook in Act III of the play – “Rabbi, only turn the page, the wonders of the coming age...” gave me a key into the timelessness of the

play. I was drawn to the “modern” twists that Kushner had added to the text – how he had taken images of the Holocaust and woven them into Ansky’s text.

Images immediately began to come to my mind – of somehow mixing 19th Century Chasidism with 20<sup>th</sup> Century destruction. I began to think of the play as a “ghost story told by ghosts”. The history of a people is the record that is left behind. So much of Jewish history was wiped out by WWII. And yet, stories like the story of A Dybbuk remain as reminders, as guides, as history.

Shortly after reading the play, I found a picture of Ansky reading the text of The Dybbuk, by the light of a single candle, sitting around the table with friends. This led to a second strong image – ‘a story told by candlelight’.

The Dybbuk is a ghost story and a love story. Small intimate exchanges between people are contrasted with larger, sprawling scenes of music and dance and ritual that encompass the whole community.

The Dybbuk reminds me of an opera - with arias, songs, dances, music, ghosts and spirits – all elements that would not be out of place in grand opera (and ironically, considering his well known anti-Semitism, the mystical operas of Richard Wagner).

I was drawn to the idea of the questioning of faith, even by the most pious characters. Rabbi Azriel, the Tzaddik of Mirapol, doubts his own faith and is tired by the constant demands for faithful reassurance from his congregation. We have all gone through times of spiritual questioning in our own lives.

The Dybbuk is a BIG play , with 39 characters, 3 locations, 4 acts , all of which excited me and fit in well with what I had wanted to do as part of my MFA degree. I have directed many plays with small casts, and sadly, in the world of summer theatre, a cast of five is now considered a “large” cast. I was excited by the staging possibilities , and more than a little terrified by the density, complexity and foreignness of the text. How would I be able to translate the Yiddish? Who could teach actors to blow shofars? Where would we get that many tallisim? And then there is choreography! Oy!

### **Type or genre of play**

A Dybbuk is subtitled “A Dramatic Legend in 4 Acts”. What is a “legend” and what makes a legend “dramatic”?

A legend is defined in Webster’s On Line Dictionary as

“A **legend** (Latin, *legenda*, "things to be read") - a narrative of human actions that are perceived both by teller and listeners to take place within human history and to possess certain qualities that give the tale verisimilitude. A legend, for its active and passive participants, includes no happenings that are outside the realm of "possibility"; a legend is defined by a highly flexible set of parameters, which may include miracles that are perceived as actually having happened,

within the specific tradition of indoctrination where the legend arises, and within which it may be transformed over time, in order to keep it fresh and vital, and realistic.”

And how is it a “dramatic” legend? I think this refers to the manner in which the legend is told – as drama, as theatre. In The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination, by Joachim Neugroschel, which contains the translation that Tony Kushner used as the basis for this adaptation, the play is described in this way:

“We are faced with a different genre in each act. Act I is a romance with an unhappy ending; Act II is virtually a musical with dance numbers and macabre twist; Act III is a ghost story; Act IV is a trial and an exorcism with a bizarre and ambiguous outcome.”

What could be more “dramatic” than a play that features all of those elements together?

Ansky’s play is actually a collection of legends, based on his work as an ethnographer. The stories told by the Battlons, Chonen, Azriel and the Messenger, and the stories told by Michl of Azriel’s forefathers are all drawn from the stories and “legends” collected by Ansky during his 1912 Ethnographic Expedition. The story of the Holy Bride and Bridegroom, cut down by the Cossack leader Chmielnitsky as they stood beneath the wedding canopy, was a tale that Ansky heard in more than one village, each village claiming the incident as their own. Demonic possession stories, including stories of brides possessed by the spirits of dead lovers, were not uncommon.

The play is a tragedy. There is a sense of inevitability about it. There is only one way that this story can unfold, given the flaws in human behavior that set it in motion in the first place. The only way Leah and Chonen can be united is through death. It is also a melodrama, reflecting a theatrical taste common at the time of its writing. Melodrama is a term that has taken on a debased and negative meaning. Using a definition used by theatre theorist and teacher Jacques LeCoq, melodrama is a drama dealing with the purest of human emotions.

## **Style**

A good ghost story constructs a realistic world and then disrupts it with the intrusion of supernatural elements. The story of A Dybbuk begins in a realistic mode, on a typical night in the synagogue of Brinnitz. Very quickly other-worldly elements are introduced. A young scholar is studying the mystic texts of the Kabbalah. A mysterious stranger has appeared seemingly from nowhere. An old woman abruptly intrudes to lament the near death of her daughter. And finally, the death of Chonen, who utters the unutterable name of God, followed by the ghostly extinguishing of candles and a howling wind.

From there the story unfolds in the way most good melodramatic ghost stories are told. Life seems to have returned to normal. Leah’s wedding to Menashe is proceeding, but we quickly learn that the spirit world is unsettled. Leah has been visited by dreams. The route to Brinnitz taken by the wedding party is mysteriously altered and made almost impassable. The mysterious stranger (The Messenger) cryptically shares predictions of what will come to pass, and at the climactic moment of the wedding ceremony, the unsettled spirit of Chonen invades the body of his beloved

Leah. The remainder of the play follows the ghost story trajectory of trial and exorcism, and ends with the supernatural uniting of the doomed couple.

### **Space**

A Dybbuk is to be performed in the Frederic Wood Theatre (FWT) – the Department’s 350 seat proscenium theatre. I played with the idea of performing in the Telus Theatre at The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts on campus. In some ways it cries out for a play like A Dybbuk, with its natural sense of darkness and gloom. My experience working in theatre in the round at the Showboat Festival Theatre in Ontario made me curious about directing such a large production in an arena setting. But the Telus has always struck me as a flawed space. Breath taking when you first enter, you quickly become aware of its drawbacks – bad sight lines for audiences sitting at floor level, sound and vocal problems caused by the high height of the ceiling, and limited back stage areas. Scenically, theatre in the round has many restrictions. There can be no walls and no doors. So the decision was made to place the production in the FWT.

The play lends itself to the more presentational orientation of a proscenium theatre and the FWT would afford more options for a scenic vision. The large stage space will help to create a setting enveloped by darkness and shadows. A large playing space is also needed to accommodate the large cast (18 performers + up to 6 musicians) and provide the space required for choreography.

### **Audience**

The standard UBC audience is a mixture of students and community members, most of whom are well educated and well read. I would venture to say that the audience is also predominately non-Jewish, which presents a challenge with a text that is so loaded with Jewish, Talmudic and cultural references.

There are four languages represented in the script – English, Hebrew, Yiddish and Aramaic (with a smattering of Polish thrown in for good measure). While a Jewish audience would at least recognize the references, without necessarily understanding them literally (my own Yiddish is virtually non-existent), the challenge will be to make the text accessible to everyone – and to have the theatrical experience a complete one regardless of ones knowledge or experience with a “foreign” culture.

As director I have to approach the text and the production with two sets of eyes and ears. It has to look and sound accurate and believable to an audience member for whom the cultural references have a connection and resonance. We have a responsibility to get it “right” – to make sure words are pronounced correctly, rituals performed accurately, that the visual aspects of the production reflect at least a suggested representation of this particular world. For an audience who is approaching the production with no previous knowledge, I hope to give them a really great ghost story – a great ghost story that just happens to take place in a distant country in a distant time.

The larger issues addressed in this particular production – the destruction of a culture and a people – must be felt and understood deeply by the performers, since there may be audience

members for whom this experience is direct and personal. The characters must remain human and the human situation always remains recognizable.

I hope to do as much community outreach as possible in marketing the production to the specific Vancouver Jewish community. A Dybbuk is a great work of Yiddish theatre that most in the community have heard of, but have never seen. Direct approaches made to synagogues, Jewish schools, service organizations like Hadassah and B'nai Brith, Youth organizations like Hillel on campus, United Synagogue Youth, Habonim, and Young Judea would also hopefully bring a new audience out to UBC. Accessing the community's media – The Vancouver Jewish Independent, on-campus newsletters, and community e-drive services – should all be used to build an audience.

The House Program should include a glossary of the most important and recurring words and phrases from the play, with perhaps additional information on Chasidism, Kabbalah and the Holocaust. A lobby display of images from both time frames of the production could be used to enhance the audience's experience.

### **Given Circumstances of Production**

With the frame of the story that I am developing – overlapping the world of A Dybbuk with a 1940's world of transport and the Holocaust – the need to keep both stories clear is paramount. How and why the story is being told this way needs to be clear not only to me and the cast but to the audience. How these two stories intersect and why will be a key area of rehearsal exploration.

I have a cast of young actors and a cast of characters that includes many aged men and women. This is a dilemma often faced when directing at a theatre school. Also, most of the actors will be playing more than one character – some of them 4-5 characters. The preferred solution for me, to avoid the trap of old-man shuffle acting and shoe polish in beards, is to embrace the idea of theatrical story telling.

Azriel and Shimshun, as well as Sender, should be played by much older men, and Fradde by an older woman. In other versions of the play she is Leah's grandmother, a governess or an aunt (Sender's sister). Given that Fradde is being played by an actress who is actually younger than the actress playing Leah, her character needs to be rethought in terms of characteristics and attributes, rather than age. She is clearly the bossiest of the female characters, but also a trusted friend of Leah and Sender. The challenge will be to develop a new interpretation for this character.

To adjust the age of the older Rabbi, direct references to age may be eliminated. Azriel refers to being a Rabbi for over 40 years. If this specific reference is deleted, his age becomes less of an issue. I am a firm believer that audiences believe what you tell them about a character, and also will not call into question a fact that is never stated. The actor playing Sender is younger than the actor playing his daughter, but if we assume that the character of Leah is young – possibly late teens – then it is conceivable that Sender is not necessarily an "old" man. He might have married young and Leah could have been born early in the marriage, which could place him in his 40's. Now that age 50 looms for me, the possibility that I could have a 20 year old child is not so far fetched. We are not hiding the fact that we have young actors or fewer actors than the actual

number of characters. The production is about story telling. When telling a story, an actor can assume a character simply by adjusting one aspect of costuming or changing their physicality.

This line of thinking led to the idea of suitcases being used as a key prop and scenic element. Suitcases fit within the context of a group of Jews preparing to be transported to a camp. If people were allowed to take one piece of luggage, what would they pack? Prayer shawls, candles, books, even a wedding canopy – anything that is required to tell the story of A Dybbuk would be contained in this luggage. The luggage could also be used as furniture – chairs to sit on, an ark for the torah scrolls to rest in.

Gender plays a large part in Jewish tradition and religious practice, and the gender composition of the cast becomes a factor. For instance, with a female playing the role of Mayer, the shamas or caretaker in the Brinnitz synagogue, a job that would only traditionally be performed by a male, how would we accommodate what would be an historical and religious impossibility? How can I convene a full Rabbinical Court – or indeed a minyan of 10 men – when the cast doesn't include enough men to accomplish this? How can staging help to maintain the integrity of truthful religious practice but deal with the gender composition of the cast?

There are special skills required. The entire cast needs to sing and some will need to sing well enough to sing solos. Singing ability played a role in casting decisions. The decision to cast the role of Mayer with a female, for example, was based not only on her strengths as an actor but also on her strong singing voice.

There are dances, for the men in the synagogue when Sender returns to announce Leah's betrothal, and dances for Leah and the Poor before her wedding. Seven cast members will need to learn how to blow a shofar (rams horn) – and not just to be able to get a sound out of it, but to be able to produce the specific notes and rhythms required. A shofar teacher will need to be found.

Working with Patrick Pennefather, the musical director and composer, various sources of traditional music including a legacy of sheet music from my grandmother, recordings of klezmer bands, and on-line catalogues of Yiddish music will be used to develop a score for the production. A group of live musicians (hopefully experienced Klezmer players) will be assembled to provide live music, not only for the songs and dances, but incidental music and underscoring throughout. There are also specific tunes or melodies for some of the chants and prayers that will need to be sourced.

Accurate pronunciation will be needed to help create a unified and realistic world of the play. Yiddish has its own set of rules and problems. Also, the Hebrew that was spoken during both periods of the play is not pronounced the way that Modern Hebrew is pronounced. Once Hebrew had become the core spoken language of Judaism after the founding of Israel in 1948, the old “ghetto/shtetl” way of pronunciation was replaced.

Other than for me, the set designer and one actor, the world of A Dybbuk will be a foreign one to the majority of the company involved in the production. My task as director is help lead this disparate group to a sense of a unified community – to give them a good understanding of what life in a shtetl in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Poland was like and to understand the enormity of the concept of a



culture nearly destroyed. A total belief in the supernatural elements of the story by the actors will help lead the audience on this eerie adventure.

Knowing that I would have a student crew and have limited technical rehearsals with them, I decided on an actor driven approach to how the story is to be presented on stage. Any props, furniture or other on stage items will be moved and placed by the actors. The musicians and the actors will be brought together at an appropriate stage in the rehearsals to ensure everyone feels they are in the same production. The set does not move or change as the action and locations change so lighting will be a key factor in establishing locale, mood, and time and to enhance supernatural elements. I will work closely with lighting designer Ian Giles, and stage the production with lighting in mind.

Rehearsal time is limited, with much to be accomplished. I plan to combine detailed text analysis – questions, actions, background – with physical explorations of character and staging. Working with a vocal coach, the actors playing Leah and Shimshin will need to find solutions to their “spirit” voices. Possibly both will have their voices enhanced electronically. My plan is to have the entire play up on its feet before we move into the theatre for rehearsals, so that those rehearsals will be about refinement and enhancement and new discovery, rather than first pass through of major elements.

### **Period**

Ansky wrote the play between the years 1914-1915, but it was not performed in his lifetime. The script indicates that A Dybbuk takes place “at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century”. No specific year is mentioned in the text. There are indications and clues, however, in the Kushner version – the Passengers discussing the wonders of train travel, electric light, and magical wires that carry messages – all of which indicate a time in the late 1890’s, or possibly the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Shtetl life changed very little during its last period of existence. Much like Mennonite or Amish communities in our modern world, the world of the shtetl seemed frozen in time and removed from the world around it. There are no direct references to the non-Jewish non-shtetl world in the play, other than a fear that too many superstitious references might bar Jews from further train travel.

The Yiddish film of The Dybbuk, was made in 1937, only 15 years after the plays premier. One of the cruel ironies of the film is that a large number of the cast were dead within 5 years of its release, swept up in the Holocaust. The Wannsee Conference, the gathering of top Nazi officials to put into place the “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem”, happened in January, 1942, though Herman Goerring gave orders to begin the process in July 1941. The “secondary” story – the story of the “ghosts” – would be placed approximately in 1942, when the transport and the emptying of the Jewish ghettos had begun in earnest.

The character of The Scribe is an invention of Kushner’s. The character does not appear in any other version. This made me wonder why. Why would you need a “witness” to the story? This has led to the idea of the story being “told” by The Scribe. What he records in his book is the story of his community. Much like Ansky himself on his expeditions, the book would contain stories old and new. The Scribe is the sole survivor, who returns to Brinnitz after the war, and retrieves the

precious record.. The people he remembers are the people he lived with – and the last time he saw them was when they were all gathered together one last time, before they were crammed into cattle cars. This gives me an entry point into the story I want to tell.

### **Emphatic elements**

The Plot of A Dybbuk is very strong – but the play is anchored in Character and Language.

The core characters – Leah, Chonen, Sender, Azriel, Shimshun and Fradde - are wonderfully multilayered. The stakes they face are enormous – death, excommunication, their faith in God. The world of the play is a world where everyone knows each other. A shtetl was a small closed community. Their relationships are complex and difficult. The challenge will be to help guide the actors to a clear understanding of what is at stake through out the play and explore how important the events of the story are to them, and to explore how their characters are impacted by the events around them, and how those elements are affected by the secondary “frame” of the production.

This is a play rich in language – and multi-lingual language at that. The Jews are known as “the people of the Book” so even the lowly Battlons are well educated – at least in the world of Torah and Talmud, if not in knowledge about the world beyond the shtetl. Characters in the play are all story tellers. Everyone has a story to tell. Most of them are drawn from Ansky’s ethnographical studies and collections. This reflects the strong oral tradition within Judaism. The Talmud, for example, is the written version of what was for centuries the “oral law”. There are also dense passages of liturgical language – the rituals summoning the ghost of Nissen ben Rivka and the attempts to excommunicate the dybbuk from Leah’s body. Joachim Neugroschel talks about the poetry of the language and the Germanic tradition (and Yiddish is based on German) of using combinations of verse – both free and blank – and colloquial text. In the published version of his translation, much of the text appears as “poetry” – printed in stanzas or verses. This elevated poetic language will be a major challenge for the cast.

Because I am layering a frame of story telling on to the production, the imaginative elements of great story telling also come in to play. Locations and objects will be suggested rather than literal, but the actors must treat them and see them as if they were real.

### **Themes**

A key theme of the play is the idea of “A Promise”.

The action of the play is set in motion by Sender’s forgetting – or deliberately ignoring - the promise he made to his friend Nissen that their children should marry. Blinded by gold and a quest for money and an advantageous marriage for his daughter, Sender doesn’t even enquire about Chonen’s background, discounting him as a potential suitor simply because he is only a poor student. Chonen and Leah have promised that they will be together. Nissen refuses to accept the verdict of the Court, rejecting the idea that a broken promise can be repaired. These are the promises of the earthly world, merely the promises between “people”.

Kushner's adaptation, with its Holocaust imagery, and Azriel's admonition to the Messenger to deliver a message to God that the faith of his Chosen People will not be so easily eradicated, points towards a larger idea of a promise made between God and his people. The history of the Jewish people is filled with catastrophes, the Holocaust being the ultimate horror, but the Chmielnitski massacres mentioned in reference to the Holy Bride and Bride Groom, the exile to Babylon, the destruction of both Temples - all of these have led religious leaders and lay people to wonder "Why?". What had they done? Had they broken a promise to God, or did God break a promise to them?

Chadism was born out an attempt to renew the promise between God and his people. They rejected the belief that catastrophes came about because of a lack of obedience to the minutia of religious practice. Instead it embraced a more joyful and celebratory approach to worship and to fulfill their promise of faith. And yet, the Chasidic communities of Europe were all but destroyed during WWII. Who broke the promise? Was the Holocaust God's revenge for a lack of piety? Was this a punishment for a broken promise?

Faith is what sustains a people, but how does it survive the hardest tests? Can Sender's faith survive the death of his daughter? Can Azriel understand how his faith was not able to gain forgiveness for Sender from Nissen, or why his attempts to excommunicate the spirit of Chonen results in the death of Leah? Was his faith not strong enough? Or does it even matter, if this is God's will?

### **Metaphor**

A series of images have informed my thinking in the development of this production.

The first image/metaphor I came to was "A ghost story told by ghosts". This combines all the supernatural elements of the story of A Dybbuk with the Holocaust imagery that Kushner has worked into the text. The story of A Dybbuk is a story that The Scribe wrote down in his book. Azriel tells him to destroy it but instead it remains hidden until the end of the war. When The Scribe, seemingly the only survivor from his community, returns to retrieve it and begins to recount the story that he had written down, the story is told by the people he knew – the people from his community – whom he saw last as they were gathered for transport.

I also like the image of "A tale told by candlelight". The picture of Ansky reading The Dybbuk huddled around a single candle seemed the best way to tell a ghost story. Shadows are as important as light and the teller and the audience must draw close together to share the story.

Kushner has created a version of the Ansky story that functions as a warning voice. It is a reminder of a culture and a people who were almost destroyed. The play is a lament – for a world and a people lost.

### **Mood**

There is a sense of foreboding throughout the play – a sense that because of events in the past, there is no other way for this story to unfold. Once the spirits have been unleashed, their

affect over the entire world can not be stopped. The moods of the various acts of A Dybbuk range from joy to despair.

Act I begins with what seems to be a typical day in a synagogue – an ongoing – and probably endless – debate over arcane issues of religion and legend. That mood very quickly changes. The distraught Chana Esther shatters the calm of the night; The Messenger hints at magic; the almost tender exchanges between Chonen and Henech; the brief but impassioned meeting between Chonen and Leah; the celebration with Sender of an impending marriage. All end with tragedy and death.

Act II concerns the wedding of Menashe and Leah. There is a conflict between the mood of joyful anticipation for the coming celebrations and the anxiety and fear that Leah feels as the spirit world begins to invade the world of the living. The poor are seen as grasping, ungrateful and cruel. The actual celebration ends in catastrophe.

Act III is like a crime drama. The case is investigated, evidence is sought. There is a sense of unease – restless sleeps with prophetic dreams, the screaming voice of the Dybbuk, the unsettling of Sender. There is fear, frustration and anger abounding, with danger never far away.

Act IV features a rabbinical trial, a séance and exorcism. There is a tender lullaby from Fradde. There are elements of the fantastical – the voice of Nissen ben Rivka speaking through Rabbi Shimshin, in both the first and third person; the attempted expulsion of the Dybbuk and the ultimate supernatural reunion of Chonen and Leah as their souls join and ascend to heaven, united in death. This act is the play at its most operatic – the epic struggle between good and evil, with the music of the Shofer and the chanting of the rabbis as musical accompaniment.

The play ends in melancholy and a sense of loss, and not just the loss of two young lives, but in this production, the loss of a whole community.

### **Structural Elements**

#### **Exposition:**

The major plot points are established in Act I, and all the principle characters are introduced: Chonen's story and the relationship between Leah and Chonen; Sender's ongoing efforts to find a suitable bridegroom for his daughter; the power of the Unmentionable Name of God.

Act II plays out the story as introduced in Act I. We learn more information about characters – the death of Leah's mother; the story of the Holy Bride and Bridegroom – and get a clear picture of the unsuitable nature of Menashe, Leah's intended. Plot points indicating a spiritual incursion into the real world are shared – talk of ghosts, spirits and the apparent redirection of the road into Brinnitz are introduced.

Act III presents few points of exposition. The Act is mostly concerned with the preliminary challenge between Azriel and the Dybbuk.

Act IV contains the major revelation – Nissen’s story of the promise made between him and Sender years ago that their children should marry.

#### Complications:

Act I – the announcement that Sender has found a bridegroom. Up until that point Chonen was at least hopeful that his path through the Kabbalah might bring Leah to him. When Sender arrives back in the synagogue to share his news, that path is blocked and there is only one course of action that Chonen can take.

Act II - features a series of distractions more than complications – the delay of the wedding party, the insistence of the poor for their turn dancing with the bride, Leah’s graveyard pilgrimage. Menashe’s terror is a minor complication quickly over-ridden by the unbending threats of Rabbi Mendl. The arrival of the dybbuk in the body of Leah at the climactic moment of the wedding ceremony is the key complication of this act.

Act III – the complication is the steadfast refusal of the dybbuk to depart the body of Leah – the complication AND the obstacle.

Act IV – the story that the ghost of Nissen shares, through Shimshin, complicates matters. There is more at play here than just an unsettled spirit. At the conclusion of the trial, Nissen’s refusal to accept the verdict of the judges further complicates matters. The departure/death of the dybbuk at first appears to resolve the core of the story – but it turns out to be just one more necessary step towards its conclusion.

#### Development:

Like a good detective story, the plot points are slowly revealed throughout the course of the story – leading to the large revelation of the past promise between Sender and Nissen that set the tragedy in motion.

#### Crises

Act I – the news of Sender’s marriage arrangement followed by the death of Chonen.

Act II – Leah ripping off her wedding veil as the spirit of Chonen takes over her body.

Act IV – Nissen’s refusal to accept the Court’s judgment.

Climax – the play reaches its highest point during the exorcism, at the moment of the final blowing of the shofar. After this, the dybbuk announces that he is dying, and from this point the play moves towards its inevitable conclusion.

Resolution - In Act IV – Chonen returns, visible in spirit form, and takes away Leah’s spirit so they can spend eternity together.

### **Rehearsal plan:**

The demands of A Dybbuk are widely varied. Analysis, discovery, exploration and refinement need to be combined with specific rehearsals for music, choreography, shofar blowing and pronunciation. There are small intimate two character scenes and scenes that feature the entire company and musicians. I want to get the actors up and moving as quickly as possible. I am proposing to use the first full week of rehearsal to build familiarity for the company with the world of the play, the issues and themes involved and to introduce some of the core skills required. The afternoon of rehearsals will be spent reading, discussing and debating a particular Act, which then will be very roughly blocked the following day. This will give the actors the evening between rehearsals to digest and process what was discussed. The hope is to have the whole play roughly on its feet by the end of the first week. After that, we will return to the beginning and slowly take apart each scene to explore, evaluate and experiment. Once we move into the theatre, adjustments will be made as dictated by the theatre space and the set. Further explorations of the text will continue. I hope that all key props that are handled by the actors will be available from the earliest moments of rehearsal.

### **Directorial Approach**

In addition to the traditional directorial approach of exploration, discovery and refinement I am planning on a few additional approaches.

I am proposing that the first read through at the beginning of the first day of rehearsal be illuminated only by candle light. We will try and block out as much exterior light as possible from the Dorothy Somerset Studio – and keep the cast outside until just before we are ready to begin. A short introduction will be given and then the cast will be invited to share the story of A Dybbuk with each other – to tell a ghost story by candlelight.

On the second day, we will watch the 1937 Yiddish/Polish film version of The Dybbuk – with instruction that no one is to imitate the broad performance style of the movie. It will be a chance for the cast to hear Yiddish spoken and to watch the way Chasidim dance and pray. After the viewing we will discuss the impact of knowing of the death of most of the actors in the film so shortly after its release, and how that relates to our production. After that we will watch the French documentary Night and Fog which graphically shows images from the ghetto, the camps and their aftermath. If there are any members of the company who have never seen these images – they may be quite disturbing. It is important that everyone understand the enormity of the Holocaust, and how “like oven ashes, swept away” the lives portrayed in the shtetl of Brinnitz were soon to disappear. Other films may also be made available (movie nights?) such as Fiddler on the Roof and Yentl to help the company get a stronger feeling for the life and culture of the shtetl.

Music rehearsals and choreography sessions will be worked into the schedule and a shofar teacher, Mordechai Wosk, will be coming in to coach the seven actors who are required during the exorcism. I am hoping to bring a Rabbi in to talk to the cast, and perhaps the company could make a field trip to a synagogue on a Saturday morning to observe a service and get a sense of what Jewish rituals are like. Israeli dancing, which combines elements of Chasidic dance with Sephardic, Yemenite and other Eastern dances, may be used as part of a group warm up.

My main area of experimentation in rehearsal will be around combining of the two time periods of the production. We will to evaluate what furthers the plot and the theme and what confuses the issue or makes either or both stories more confusing.

I want to create a sense of magic around The Messenger. In the movie he mysteriously appears and disappears. On stage, I want to try having him fade into shadow, only to reappear somewhere else, so that he never comes back to the place he was last seen.

### **Design Words**

Shadows, appearing and disappearing;  
Candlelight;  
“Jews tumble from the pages of books”;  
Between two worlds;  
Destruction and rebirth;  
Fire;  
Gold;  
“The most profound descents contain ascensions to the heights again”;  
Wood;  
A record;  
Memory;  
Ghosts;  
“...so that we may turn her suffering into a text for others to study in the years to come”;  
Dust;  
Rubble, debris.

### **Audience Orientation**

A proscenium theatre has a natural distancing effect on an audience. They are viewing the action through the frame surrounding the stage. The challenge will be to use this distance so that the audience can appreciate and be swept away by the larger, group scenes within the play, and at the same time, create a feeling of intimacy for the smaller scenes between a few characters. Placing these scenes further downstage will help to accomplish this.

I would like to have music or a soundscape playing as the audience enters the auditorium will help establish the correct mood.

### **The World of the Play**

The world of A Dybbuk is a world where the fantastical can happen. There are ghosts, spirits, magic and Messengers from God. The company will have to believe in this world – that all of these things are possible and really are happening. They are not myths. They are not fairy tales. For the people involved the story is very real.

This is also a world of faith, where faith and religion provide both the keys and the obstacles of everyday life. This is a community that does not question its faith or question its value. In our secular world this can be a very difficult concept to grasp. The company has to see this world with respect and affection, not derision, or the sadness at its loss will not matter to them or to the audience.

### **Special Problems**

This is a play about a culture, a religion and a way of life that will be foreign to most of the company and the majority of our audience. Part of my task is to educate and to lead the company to an understanding of the stories and the rituals of shtetl life, which will in turn educate our audience. Finding the rhythm of the language and the correct pronunciation of non-English words and phrases will present a special challenge. The music and choreography will also present challenges as will dealing with an all-volunteer group of musicians.

The project is so vast that I think the main challenge will be to keep all the strands together and the “ship” travelling in the right direction.



## Unit Titles/Rhythms

### Act One Scene 1 – Prologue -

Finding the book – slow/holy/invocation  
Summoning ghosts

Posing the question – slow/pointed - song

The scene is set – the past reappears – moderate-quick/ a rush of time

### Act One Scene 2 – The Synagogue in Brinnitz

The Great Debate  
Gold, Gold, Gold, Gold – easy/relaxed – but played to win

A Voice of doubt – the mysterious stranger – a bit faster/ an interruption  
It's only a metaphor – there is an answer for everything

An interesting point – the sun is golden; fire is golden – moderate – a debate

A shul is for holy thoughts – faster – warning

Ward off evil – spit – fast - protection

An intriguing suggestion – there is a way – slow/pointed – an idea lobbed to Chonen

Caution and Danger - slow

My Rabbi works miracles – moderate/quick - bragging

Where can I find him? – Quick – press for an answer

Looking for signs – analyzing a formula – slow, analytical – with mounting excitement

Scene 2a

Who is he? Some sort of genius – moderate – sharing a secret

The story of Chonen – wander in exile – moderate - amazed

Warning and awe – slower - caution

Sender has been hunting for a bridegroom - upbeat

Negotiating in good faith? No one is good enough – building in tension – a bit faster

How to find a bridegroom – the old ways are best – moderate – reflective/instructive

Perhaps? A mysterious prediction – slow, an idea floated

How it should be done – marriages can't be arranged – up tempo – retake the argument

Scene 2b

A Terrifying intrusion – God Help Me! – fast – and explosion

Plead to God – restore my daughter to life – fast – desperate pleading

An offer to restore the peace – slower – or at least an attempt

Making a deal – moderate - calming

I have other calls to make! – fast – closing the deal - exit

Scene 2c

The World is full of mysteries – slow - recovering

The balance between life and death – slow – detailed instructions

There is work to be done – rallying the troops – bribery – up tempo

Scene 2d

Awakening – slow - thoughtful

Hope – a bit faster

Working out a formula – looking for hope – up tempo – proving

Doing the math – quickly - finalize

Proving the point – slower – deliberate - convincing

A confession – slow - personal

Complicity – quicker – reaching out

You seem familiar – slow – doubtful/fearful/hopeful

The story of a rich man – moderate – builds in tempo and anger - blame

She is MINE.- forceful - deliberate

Magic works! – slower - conspiratorial

Scene 2e

Come sit by me – slow/moderate - calm

The Talmud is bleak and cold – up tempo - dismiss

Kabbalah is different – up tempo – celebrate

Kabbalah has hurled me towards heaven – up tempo - exultant

An attempt at rescue – slower - calm

The story of the Four Rabbis – faith will protect you – moderate - reassure

Teach me – I yearn to see Paradise – up tempo - pleading

We must purify sin to make it holy – slow – instructive/conspire

God made sin – up tempo – revelation/discovery

The Song of Songs – moderate - seductive

Seduction – slow - inviting

Scene 2f

The Bride arrives – The old curtains – quick – break the rhythm

This place is grim and frightening – quick, nervous, fretful

A ghost story – the dead come to pray here – slower, deliberate

The walls are wet with God's tears – slower – revelation

This shul is old – it wasn't built, just found – slow – intrigue/celebration

Handle them carefully – moderate – instructive/caring

Their eyes meet – there's a boy staring at you – quick – Gitl/ Slow Chonen/Leah – slow, nervous

Kissing the torah – moderate – instruction - summoning

A brief reunion – slow – breathless - passionate

A passionate kiss – slow, intense, sensual

Enough! – quick abrupt - regain control

Scene 2 h

We should get home – slow/lazy

Scene 2i

Lovesick – slow, agonizing

Comfort – medium, encouraging

Hope – and fear - slower

Plead and caution – medium - pressing

I've seen a diamond – fast, intense

I must learn to make gold – slow – deliberate – planning/resolving

Edging toward doom – fast, intense

Scene 2j

Enough already! – medium – staggering in

News! I have news! – up tempo – announcement - gossip

I win again! Another rival defeated! – quick, intense - praise

My journey takes as long as it takes for a prayer to reach Heaven – slow, mysterious

Scene 2k

The Psalms are finished – duty done/ Let's have a drink – relaxed, jovial – a bit tired

Scene 2l

A grinning Sender – I have such news! – Fast – burst in - announce

Over run with women – quick – joking/grumbling

Mazel Tov! – fast – an explosive celebration

But the tailor said.....? – slower/ confused

I was promised – this is wrong! – fast/desperate

A fateful and dangerous decision – slow/deliberate

Victory – I win – the Name is said – slow – secretive

Death – slow, intense

The light of the world goes out – quick – a rush of wind

Deals made in the dark – quick, frantic

A warning – slow, pointed

Leave me alone! Quick - dismiss

A story for the journey – quickly try to refocus, rekindle the party

The story of a rich man – a coat of silver - slower – teasing/taunting/warning

Rattled – quick, panic

Let's have a song and dance – the celebration – fast – upbeat/joyful – blocking out the past

Dance – ecstatic – fast - joyful

Where is Chonen? – moderate - inviting

A fearful realization – slow - cautious

The book in his hand – The Book of Raziel – quick - realization

He is destroyed – slow – fearful pronouncement.

## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene 1 – prologue – preparation for marriage, a room in Sender's house**

Warnings before a wedding – medium – nervous/excited prattle

The soul is a candle – slower - deliberate

The world is a troubled place – quicker – changing the subject

A song to ease your troubled heart – slower - reassuring

The heart is forever watching – will the heart ever find the fountain? – gently, a lullaby

The cost of love – the price of beauty – medium - cautionary

## **Scene 2 – the square outside Sender’s House**

Alms for the poor – slow, pressing, desperate - insistent

A grave at a wedding – slow - contemplative

The Holy Couple – death under the chuppa – quickly – an exciting/terrifying story

Scene 2a

A wedding to end all weddings – up tempo – celebrate – breathless excitement

Is the bridegroom coming? – up tempo – excited/urgent

Who knew Sender had this kind of money? – quickly – joking – but pointed

Covering all the bases – anyone could be Moshiach – slow, cautious

Scene 2b

The Dance of the Poor – fast/frantic

I danced with the bride! – fast – bragging/celebration

Rescuing Leah – fast - urgent

Scene 2c

Mayer’s Song – Rich Papa Sender – slow to begin – then up tempo, mocking

Even God is in Sender’s debt – faster tempo – the joke intensifies

The rush for food – fast – a mad dash

Dancing is all I want now – slower - mournful

Scene 2d

Comforting Leah – slow, reassuring

Breaking the spell – protection from evil – quick, to ensure safety

There are souls everywhere – slow – weaving a spell, conjuring

Can a flame be rekindled – is death the end? – Quickly – pressing for a hopeful answer

He died too soon – slow, mournful

A warning on your wedding day – quicker - caution

My mother died young. – slower - reflective

Invitation – quicker – press for an answer

I've seen her – slow, quiet, conspiratorial

The Holy Couple visit me – slow – sharing a secret

Leah! Stop! – fast, short – and end!

Invocation – invitation – slow, entreaty

The bridegroom arrives – fast – an explosion of panic/worry/celebration

Scene 2f

A powerful message – moderate - leading

A prediction – slow – deliberate - warning

The story of our souls – a bit quicker – weaving a spell

Scene 2g

Naming the spirit – slow and deliberate -

Final preparations – quickly – refocus – build excitement

A father's comfort – slower – reassuring, ensuring success

Scene 2h

Another invitation – slower – working up to a secret

He died in uncleanness – quickly – reject, cut off, warn

I know where he is buried – quickly – a rebuttal

The bridegroom has arrived! – faster – a joyous announcement

To the cemetery – quickly - urgently

Scene 2i

Meeting of the families – welcome – upbeat, joyful, full of expectation – and fear

Evil is at work – demons were trying to keep us from Brinnitz – quickly – a bit of panic

Closing the deal – quickly – before the deal falls through

Scene 2j

A Rabbi's instructions to a nervous groom – moderate, forceful - anxious

I'm Frightened! – quickly - panic

The eyes of strangers – quickly - writhing

I fear my bride – slower – a confidential fear

Stop – let's rehearse – abrupt – regaining control of the situation

Scene 2k

The meal – and such small portions! – slow - disappointed

The grumbling poor – a bit quicker – off to the next possibility

Scene 2l

Anxiously waiting – quickly – pacing, nervous

Ominous signs – its best not to know – slow, trying to calm

Lighting the candles – quickly – brusque; officious – taking control

She fainted – quickly, distressed



Scene 2m

The Wedding – The Ceremony – Rituals – slow, formal

The Dybbuk appears – an explosion - terror

Chaos –fast panic

A pronouncement of doom – slow/deliberate

### **Act Three**

#### **Scene 1 – the Train Station**

It's a miracle! – up tempo – breathless excitement

The stranger re-appears – moderate, mysterious

Greetings – moderate - cheerful

Sharing news – up tempo - gossiping

The modern world – up tempo – full of wonder

This is the new world – a bit slower - emphatic

The world will be a better place – moderate – a hopeful pronouncement

Where can Azriel be found – up tempo – back to work

In a world of electric light – even Jews can ride the trains – moderate – a dream/hope

#### **Scene 2 – Azriel's study**

A father pleads – moderate - stressed

A Rabbi commands – quick - emphatic

Tell me who you are! – quick - forceful

The Dybbuk's secret – moderate – teasing/mocking

An order and a refusal – moderate – battle of wills

Have mercy on me – fast - pleading

Another refusal – fast - furious

The Rabbi's next step – quickly – deliberate – taking charge

A final warning – slowly - caution

A father pleads – the Rabbi demands an answer – quick – desperate/firm

Accusations – fast/forceful

Sender objects – the Scribe – the Rabbi refutes – quickly – nervous, a diversion

Pressing for an answer – slow/deliberate

A curse – fast - accusing

I recognize his voice – quickly – a dreadful realization

The interrogation – moderate – pressing for answers

Admonishment – fast, chastise

Scene 2a

The minyan is instructed – slow, entreating/warning

One last chance – quicker - pointed

I will never leave – fast – rejection - boastful

A Rabbi's instructions – moderate, forceful

Leah resurfaces – slow – as from a dream

Scene 2b

The two Rabbis meet – moderate - urgent

I have had 3 dreams – quickly, softly – sharing a secret

The Rabbis confer – moderate - urgent

I can't pray (Chasid) – quickly - panic, foreboding

The world is in its last age – warning – dread - slow

Preparing the next stage – quick - efficient

Leah is taken away

The house must vibrate with prayer – quickly – with conviction

Scene 2d

Shimshin cautions – amulets – quick – nervous – exercising caution

A prayer for help – quick - urgent

The interrogation continues – moderate – deliberate - forceful

Remembering Nissen – quick – rising panic

Shimshin's dream – and Nissen's charge – quickly - pressing

A revelation – brisk – an announcement

A broken man – quickly – pleading – self pitying

A plan – moderate - strategize

Azriel roars – fast, explosive, forceful

Scene 2d

A stranger in our midst/ Welcome the outsider – moderate, refocus, distract

There is no joy – slow – self pitying

A test of faith – moderate, deliberate – a challenge

Dismissed - abrupt

Scene 2e

The test – but whose faith is being tested? – moderate – a contest

Proof of faith – quicker - proving

Everything is destroyed if there is a single thought of sin – quickly a caution

A Rabbi's burden – who is to blame – slower, internal turmoil and doubt

We can all be tempted – slow, moderate - comfort

The Scribes dream – quickly – nervous, uncertain

Jews have tumbled from the pages of books – slower - reassuring

The building vibrates with prayer – exterior – slow, deliberate, sonorous – interior – the pace quickens

I am enormously tired – slower, defeated

Instructions to the Scribe – quickly – to calm, refocus

We have dreamed good dreams – slower - reassure

I wither and pale

Everyone wants something from me - slower, self doubt, tired

Reassurance – moderate, gentle, comfort

Times have changed – slow, considering, regret

How it used to be done – quickly -wishful

A plea to his grandfather – quickly - implore

I don't entirely trust God – slower – secret confession

## **ACT FOUR**

### **Scene 1 – Azriel's Study**

Evening prayers – havdallah? – slow, ritual, calm before the coming storm

The trial begins – summoning the plaintiff – brisk – down to business  
Will you accept the verdict?

I remember something – its too late – quickly – desperate interruption

Invocation – slow – but driven - deliberate

The ghost of Nissen arrives – slow – eerie, mysterious – sense of panic distress in the room

Swearing in the plaintiff – moderate – an invitation

The ghost stirs – writing and keening – slowly accelerating – magic begins

Nissen's story – the promise – abrupt changes – flash of lightning

The accusation – Shimshin becomes possessed – moderate – forceful - angry

The plaintiff rests – makes his demands – slower, emphatic, terrifying

How do you plead? – moderate – weighted - expectant

I simply forgot – quickly – justify, apologize

Caught in a lie – quickly, edgy

Nissen reject mercy – quick - panic

The judges confer – quick - urgent

The verdict – slow/deliberate

Do you accept the verdict – moderate – nervous expectation.

Push for an answer – quickly – but delicately

What says the defendant – a different tactic – quickly – trying to limit the damage

The Court is adjourned – Nissen is dismissed – quickly – hope for the best

Scene 1a

An ill - omened in court – Nissen didn't forgive Sender – quickly, uneasy

Bring the bridegroom – quickly – urgent, emphatic

A challenge to God – slow, forceful

Scene 1b

One last chance – moderate - plead

The exorcism begins – slow - ritual

The rituals – sounding the shofar – slow, formal, tense and terrifying

Appeal to Heaven – a bit faster

Appeal to Hell – deliberate - cautionary

Appeal to God – even stronger – the big guns

It's not working – slow realization – evaluate – too soon to panic

Moving to Plan B – quickly urgently – no time to waste

The final ritual – excommunication – quickly – with great force and determination

The final blast – long, slow and deliberate – and then we wait

The dybbuk is dying – quickly – a realization of victory

Restoring order – quickly, efficient – urgent in case it doesn't last

Scene 1c

A prayer for forgiveness – quickly – with desperation

Say Kaddish for me – slow - pleading

Last gasp – moderate, frightening

Scene 1d

One last mystery – demons still at work – quickly – panicked, frightened

Magical writing – moderate – but uneasy, fearful

A prediction from God – slow, considered, ominous

Preparing for the future – slow, deliberate

Destroy the book – quickly, forcefully, final

Scene 1e

Comforting the child – slower, reassuring

A lullaby – slow, comforting, worried

Scene 1f

Who is that sighing? – quickly - startled

Remember me – slow, an entreaty

Come to me – slowly – an invitation – a hope

Take me away – slow - exultant

The circle is broken – they are united – slow, a ritual celebration - magical

Scene 1g

Too late – quick – burst in panic/despair

We will always find God – we cling – he can never shake us off – slow, deliberate forceful

Scene 1h

The question is repeated – slow ritual - sadness

The ghosts are dismissed – slow, gliding, mystery

The book is closed – slow/deliberate

## **Characters - Notes and Laban Effort Actions**

### **Chonen**

A Yeshiva student

Age – probably 20's

He is now a rabbi

He left Brinnitz, has been travelling, wandering for several years and has returned to Brinnitz – to reunite with Leah

Talked in short tight breaths

Pale, thin, unhappy

Eyes – incredible eyes

He's always been odd

Delicate hair, sad eyes, long fingers

He doesn't go after what he wants – Leah – directly – though that may be more a result of circumstance and culture. He never identified himself to Sender – nor did he make his feelings for Leah known to him – or in fact to anyone – not even Henech, his best friend. He only talks about Leah in cryptic terms – a bright diamond.

Though his actions – using the Kabbalah – might seem direct at first, since as once he feels that all hope is gone he immediately utters God's unmentionable name, which leads to his death – the road to get there was certainly circuitous.

As he is now – wring – slow, heavy, indirect; as he was – dab - fast, light, direct

### **Three Batlonim**

Literal translation - Idlers

Though not wealthy – but they are not beggars. They are employed by the community to sit in the synagogue to fill out a minyan when necessary, since 10 men are needed to conduct a service.

On the one hand they don't really “work” which makes them indirect – and yet when they argue or debate, discuss the Talmud etc, they are very direct. They do jump into action as soon as Chana Esther enters – though they don't actually restrain her – a task that falls to Meyer. They do fully jump in to form a minyan and sing Psalms for Chana Esther – which is their job – but they only sing 18 of them before leaving the Yeshiva students to finish them all. They can be bought/bribed – either by money or food – the promise of kvass or a cookie.

They function as a sort of Chorus – commenting on the action and filling in bits of information and plot details. They need to have a sense of individuality – which one is smarter? Which one lazier? Which one a better talker?

Indirect, slow, light – float? Or indirect fast, light - flick?



### **The Messenger**

Hebrew word for Messenger is Malach- Angel

A character suggested by Stanislavsky to act as a Greek Chorus. Messengers were a recognized profession in Shtetl life – before electronic communication or a mail system; this was how important messages, documents or even money was transported.

Azriel is the only one who recognizes him, late in the play – as something out of the ordinary – when he instructs the Messenger to “tell him” – he is referring to delivering his message to God.

In the film of The Dybbuk the Messenger is an ominous, mysterious figure – who appears magically and disappears just as fantastically.

How to achieve this on stage – never reappearing in the same place that he was last seen? Use shadows to conceal him when necessary. Use the upper platforms – to put him “between two worlds”.

He pursues his task – to deliver a “message” directly, silently – appears and disappears as if by magic; he never loses his temper or gets angry

Glide – slow, direct, light

### **Mayer**

The shames (beadle) of the Brinnitz synagogue

A shames is a caretaker – responsible for the upkeep and day to day operation of the synagogue. A male shames would also participate in running of Shabbat services, guiding congregants to seats, up to the Torah etc.

In this production, Meyer becomes a female in a male domain; efficient, busy, reliable – she takes care of the shul. She is a bit of a busy body – she seems to know everyone’s business and is quick to pass on gossip or news when she hears it. She defies the men and the Rabbi and takes the Torah out for Fradde, Leah and Gitl to kiss. At the wedding, she sings a song critical of Sender.

Punch – direct, fast, heavy

### **Old Woman – Chana Esther**

A woman whose daughter is dying.

She lashes out in her grief, storming into the synagogue, a male domain, demanding help from God, from the community. And yet, she still only gives a small amount of money to have prayers said for her daughter’s recovery.– the direct way would be to pay whatever it costs.

Slash – fast, indirect, heavy

### **Henech**

A yeshiva student and a friend of Chonen

They went to Yeshiva together, and have remained friends, even during Chosen's wandering.

He is easily seduced by Chonen and the thought of Kabbalah, but he retreats quickly when he senses danger; he is concerned about Chonen but doesn't directly question him about the source of his upset, or suggest other courses of action.

Flick – indirect, fast, light

### **Fradde**

In various translations, Fradde is either Leah's grandmother, her aunt (Sender's sister) or her nurse/companion.

In our production the role is being played by a young woman and the character is being thought of in those terms – no "old lady" acting or makeup. As a younger woman, Fradde is a take-charge, reliable friend. She has answers for everything – the age of the shul, Talmud injunctions about marriage. She is a bit of a know-it-all and a gossip. She is someone to be relied on to get things done; She is concerned and loving towards Leah, but never intervenes with Sender on her behalf – and doesn't do anything but worry and fret over Leah's distress before the wedding. She is there to comfort and support Leah during the exorcism – but does not attempt to stop the wedding to Menashe.

Punch – direct (though sometimes blindly), fast, heavy

### **Leah**

The only child Sender of Brinnitz

Age – late teens, early 20's. her mother died some years ago. She is described as beautiful – and a good, virtuous - Jewish girl. She is adept at needlework – she offers to make new curtains for the shul. She has remained unmarried while her father hunts for a suitable match. She has loved Chonen since they first met when Chonen came to spend Shabbat with her and her family, but that love has never been fully acknowledged.

She has a strong will – but not strong enough to defy her father – though she attempt it indirectly. By not resisting her own possession by Chonen's spirit she seeks her own way to be united with her beloved.

Press - Direct slow heavy + Wring – Indirect slow heavy

**Gitl**

Leah's friend

Young – probably the same age as Leah. She accompanies Leah and Fradde to the shul at night – and figures out that Leah perhaps had more in mind than just making new curtains for the Ark – she has conspired to come and meet Chonen. She is helpful preparing Leah for her wedding – but also confused as to the colour of Menashe's hair. She and Bessye seem to be more closely matched. Leah is more cerebral than either of them.

Flick – indirect, fast, light

**Bessye**

Leah's Friend

Like Gitl, she is helpful and yet not particularly insightful. She and Gitl both get confused over the colour of Menashe's hair. The two of them should be similar, and yet with their own distinctive personalities.

She and Gitl may help Fradde dress Leah for her wedding, and may join in the song that Fradde sings.

Flick or dab

**Six or seven Yeshiva students**

Studying in the Brinnitz synagogue

These would be a group of young men studying – spending their days pouring over the Torah and Talmud. They would be older than 13 (after their Bar Mitzvah). None of them are named (except Osher, who is instructed to run ahead to Sender's house to prepare an engagement feast).

In this production, they will be played by the 1940's Ensemble – ghostly figures from the past – a link between the tragic “present” and the devotional “past”. Male and females will play the roles – but will be kept in shadows.

They may be incorporated into the engagement celebratory dance.

Individual characters/efforts will be developed in rehearsal – probably reflective of other characters the actors play throughout the rest of the story.

**Sender of Brinnitz**

A very wealthy man.

Father of Leah, he is a widower. Money is all he cares about – he is referred to a “God's Banker”. It is never expressly stated what the source of his wealth is – no profession is stated. In the film of The Dybbuk, Sender, and his relatives, are seen as vastly wealthier than anyone else in

the community. He appears in many scenes counting money. Money lending was one of the professions that Jews of the time were allowed to do – they could not own land, even in the Pale of Settlement – the large area of Russia designated as a place that Jews were allowed to inhabit. Due to Biblical/New Testament references and injunctions against usury, Jews were often the bankers and money lenders not only to their own community, but to the surrounding non-Jewish community as well. He is described as “a good Mirapol Chasid” – which means he is perceived as devout and observant. Rabbi Azriel, though, he says he has heard Sender does not read any more, implying that he has neglected his studies in favor of pursuing wealth. He is well regarded in the community – though that may only be because of his wealth. The question remains – why does Mayer (and the poor) sing such a negative song about him if he is so well regarded? He is self centered and self absorbed – he doesn’t make an effort to find Nissen – nor to identify Chonen. He tries to pass off blame – saying that it was Nissen’s responsibility as father of the bridegroom to search him out. He is driven by material things rather than spiritual. He forgets things easily when it suits him.

Press – direct, slow, heavy

### **Beggars**

A Poor Woman with a baby

A Lame Woman

A Very Homely Man

A Very Old Poor Woman

They can be identified/created by their character names. They beg for alms, demand their dance with the bride, and complain about the food they were served at the wedding feast. They are both a reminder of the poverty of the world in the midst of Sender’s opulence – but also a frightening group who terrorize Leah as they dance. They join in Meyer’s song, which is critical of Sender – and they race into his house to devour as much of his food as they can.

In our production – they may be visualized as the 1940’s Ensemble – another collision of past and present.

### **Nachman**

The Father of Menashe

While definitely “the man” of the family, his wife seems to be in charge. He is a bit of a worrier – concern about the change in the road since he last travelled to Brinnitz. He gives in to Sender’s demands in the end about the marriage contract. His family is described as “well connected”. They are probably not as wealthy as Sender – but desperate to marry off their ill-suited son.

Wring – indirect, slow, heavy

**Mrs. Nachman**

The mother of Menashe.

She is a very “take charge” person. Upon arrival at Sender’s home she instructs both men to finish off the negotiations, and summons Leah in to light the candles. She seems bossy – orders everyone around.

Punch – fast, direct, heavy

**Wedding Guests**

Various members of both Sender’s wedding party and the Nachman’s. Wealthy, well connected; more reserved and respectable than the beggars.

**Rabbi Mendl**

Menashe’s Teacher

He is very abrupt and with a short temper. He teaches through fear rather than through inspiration. He is more concerned about his own reputation as a teacher than about the welfare of his student. He is prone to yelling “I’ll Kill You” as a teaching methodology.

Slash/Punch – direct/indirect /fast/heavy

**Menashe**

The Bridegroom

A very nervous, insecure young man. He is terrified of everything – especially afraid of his bride to be. He becomes upset by the sight of the grave of the Holy Couple. Everyone bosses him around. He is either the last son to marry or the only son. He is obviously a tough sell which may be why his parents gave in to Sender’s demands. Perhaps Leah was their last hope.

Wring – slow, heavy, indirect or Flick – fast, light, indirect

**Three Passengers**

Three Chasids – since they notice and point out that the Messenger is not a Chasid. This is a scene that has been added by Kushner – it does not appear in any other translation/version.

Each of the three has a distinct identity, with Passenger #1 being the most pedantic and long winded. All of them are amazed and thrilled about the coming progress – trains, electric lights, messages travelling along wires. They have different opinions and beliefs regarding the idea of a Dybbuk.

In counterpoint to their appearance as train passengers and concern that Jews may no longer be allowed to ride on trains, the 1940’s Ensemble will provide a tragic reminder of a relationship between Jews and trains that is to come.

Individual efforts etc. will be developed in rehearsal

**Rabbi Azriel of Miropol**

A Great Chasidic Rabbi, a Tzaddik

As written, Azriel is an old man – he says he has been a Rabbi for more than 40 years – which would put him into at least in his 60's. He walks with a cane/staff which implies both age and infirmity. He comes from a long line of Rabbis, Tzaddiks and mystics. He refers to the way his father used to drive out dybbuks by yelling “haaa”, and he appeals to his grandfather Velvele for guidance and reassurance. He is a teacher –he taught both Sender and Nissen. He is not the Chief Rabbi – that duty falls to Rabbi Shimshin.

A Tzaddik is not only a Rabbi – but a spiritual leader of a community – or community of communities. Groups of Chasids still identify themselves by their leader as much as by their home of origin. The Lubavitch Community of Chasids are named for a specific location in Europe, but their Rabbi and Tzaddik, Rebbe Shneerson, who still held in high regard and many Lubavitch refer to themselves as Shneerson Chasids (Sender is referred to as a “Rabbi of Mirapol Chasid – in tribute to his teacher).

He is knowledgeable – but tired. Everyone looks to him for advice and spiritual guidance, leaving him no time for his own spiritual journey. He is beginning to have doubts in his faith – “sometimes I do not entirely trust God”. In spite of his efforts he is successful neither in the Rabbinical Court with Nissen – who does not forgive Sender or say “Amen” – or in successfully driving out Chonen's spirit from Leah. Chonen does leave – but returns to claim his bride none the less. In spite of that, Azriel ends the story with a declaration of faith and defiance – telling the Messenger to tell God that no matter what happens, the people will always find Him out.

In our production, Azriel will be played as a younger man – certainly mature, but no invitation to palsied hands and shuffling gait. Our dual time frames provides an even stronger resonance for his charge to the Messenger – even with the Holocaust, even with what is to come, he will not turn his back on God or his faith.

Press – slow, heavy, direct

**Michl**

The Gabbe (manager or secretary) of Rabbi Azriel

The function of a Gabbe is to act as an intermediary and assistant to a Rabbi. He would help set up certain functions – ritualistic communal meals called a “tish” and also write out petitions (kvitlech) to be presented to the Rebbe for his prayers and consideration by petitioners – and people seeking his guidance. A gabbe is like a modern Administrative Assistant.

Michl goes about his duties with a quiet efficiency. He reassures the Rabbi when he is feeling insecure and nervous about the events that are about to take place.

Glide – slow, direct, light

### **The Scribe**

Azriel's recording secretary

He is a young man, – probably a Yeshiva student or a young Rabbi - charged with recording everything that happens during the course of the trial and exorcism – to keep the story alive. He speaks the most Hebrew of anyone in the play. When the ghost of Nissen appears before the court, he lapses into prayers – with increasing fervor. The prayers are made up of different prayer fragments – which are either a deliberate attempt by Kushner to invent his own liturgy or are a reflection of how unsettling the Scribe finds all of this – that he is so unsettled that he calls out jumbles of other prayers to try and ward off evil spirits.

In our production – the Scribe becomes the witness and the survivor. He has defied Azriel's instruction to throw the book into the river and he has hidden it. At the beginning of the play, as the only survivor of his community, he returns to the ruins of his synagogue – the place he last saw members of his community when they gathered before they were transported to concentration or extermination camps – and it is these images – these memories of his community that dramatize the story that has been recorded.

Flick – indirect. fast light – for how he reacts to a crisis. Press – slow, direct, heavy – for the fortitude he must have had to survive.

### **Rabbi Shimshin**

The Chief Rabbi of Mirapol

While Azriel is the Tzaddik of Mirapol, Shimshin is the Chief Rabbi – a difficult distinction. Azriel is the spiritual leader of a whole community of Chasids – even beyond the borders of Mirapol. Shimshin is probably the Rabbi of the largest shul in Mirapol. Azriel asks for his consent before proceeding, but Shimshin says that he is Azriel's disciple in all things. He is visited by dreams and when Nissen arrives, the dead man's spirit inhabits his body and speaks through his mouth.

As written Shimshin would also be an older man. In our production, again, he is a younger man but of great and grave authority.

Press – slow, direct, heavy – or Punch – fast, direct heavy or Slash – fast, indirect, heavy when he is possessed by Nissen's spirit.

### **Three Chasids**

All followers of Rabbi Azriel of Mirapol

Part of the Minyan (10 men) gathered to perform the exorcism/excommunication of The Dybbuk.

#1 is afraid;

#2 is convinced that faith will protect him;

#3 is more cynical (or nervous?) – even with prayers we will not be saved.

#1 – wring – slow, indirect, heavy;

#2 - press – slow, heavy, direct;

#3 – flick – fast, indirect, light

### **Two Rabbinical Judges**

Both would be Rabbis – who would have other duties but would be summoned when a Jewish Court (a Beit Din) was convened. They would be especially knowledgeable about Jewish Law – particularly Talmudic instructions and rules of Halacha – the collection of laws both religious and secular. At the end of the proceedings they both “leave furtively” and one refers to that this is an “ill omened court” and one refers to something terrible happening. While men of authority, they lack the courage and conviction of both Azriel and Shimshin.

Press – slow, direct, heavy - with turns into wring – slow, indirect, heavy



## **Question Analysis – A Dybbuk – Between Two Worlds**

Why A Dybbuk – and not The Dybbuk?

What does Between Two Worlds mean – how does Kushner interpret this from the Yiddish – tsvishn tsvey veltn?

What is a “dramatic legend” – what is a legend?

Where is Brinnitz?

Where is Mirapol?

### **ACT ONE SCENE 1**

P.9

What happens in a ritual bath (mikveh). How is it done? Why is it done? How often does Chonen go. What is the ritual?

Why did the soul,  
Oh tell me this,  
Tumble from Heaven  
To the Great Abyss?  
The most profound descents contain  
Ascensions to the heights again

What is this chant about – whose soul? What is the Great Abyss?  
Why does Chonen chant this – who is he referring to. Is it part of his mikveh ritual  
Is this a Kushner addition?

Why are we seeing Chonen at the mikveh now? Why tonight?

Do we use real water on stage?

How does this first image relate to my secondary story?

What is Chonen seeking to cleanse/purify/wash away?

How does darkness “engulf” the scene at the end?

### **ACT ONE SCENE 2**

A small wooden synagogue – what would this look like/smell like/sound like  
Are candles the only source of light – can we have live flame onstage

Where is the ner tamid – eternal flame?

Different types of candles – yarhzeit, tallow

What can be seen through the window?

Is this pre-electricity

Is this a typical night at the schul? What usually happens in a synagogue at night?

What time is it?

Who are the battlonim? What are they doing there? Why are they there?

What are the Yeshiva students doing?

What is Henech doing?

What is Chonen doing?

Lighting – how do we achieve “deepening the shadowy corners”

How do we achieve a mysterious, mystical atmosphere? Is this the usual atmosphere in the schul – or is tonight somehow different

How do construct a schul using found objects – suitcases. What is required? What will people sit on?

Mayer – a beadle – what is a beadle. What is the implication for having this role played by a woman – would a woman be allowed to do this job – how does it play with the anti-woman sentiments that are expressed later?

Mayer is laying out tallis/teffilin – why? Is this for tomorrow’s service? Did people not own their own back then?

Why do the Batlonim have their heads in the clouds? What are they thinking?

p.11

Are the Battlons reading – or quoting – or making up their verses? What are they doing by reciting? Is this a competition? Is this a regular activity?

How does this differ from other translations?

What is an Epiphany?

Who are Levites?

What are Tzaddim?

Where is the lower world?

What started the conversation – which seems to be about gold and money? Were they thinking of themselves – dreaming of riches – or are they thinking about the wealth of others. Is this about envy or hope?

Why does The Messenger speak in a quiet faraway voice? Is this his usual voice? What does it sound like? Who is he? Why is he here? Why was he lying down? Why does he choose to join the conversation now?

p.12

Why does the Messenger stay lying down when he first speaks

Why is there a little pause before anyone answers? What are they thinking of before they speak?

What is the Battlons objection to the Messenger joining the conversation?

The debate – Talmudic tradition – parse words for hidden meaning. Is this how they spend their days - arguing finer points of Talmud/Torah?

p.13

Spitting to ward off evil spirits – how is this done? Why is it done? What is the tradition?

Desire – women – first hints of the evil of sensuality/sexuality?.

Men are from earth – women are from bone – biblical source?

Who is The Evil One?

Is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battlon correct – there is no way of summoning The Devil?

Who is the Devil in Judaic tradition?

Actually there is a way – how does the Messenger know? What is the way? Why does he choose to bring it up now? Is it directed at Chonen – does he know of his quest – is that the message he is here to deliver – is he the catalyst for the action that follows?

Why does Chonen look up when he hears this – what does he want to find out? What has he been searching for? With all of his study of Kabbalah etc. has he not found this out? Is the 1<sup>st</sup> Battlon right – it is not recorded in any text?

What is the Unutterable Name of God?

Who is the Angel of Light? When/ How was he hurled from Heaven – Is this Raziel – or Satan?

Spitting – how is it done? Why is it done? What does it accomplish?

But the vessel will burst only if the spark within lusts too hotly for the flame without – what does this mean?

p.14

Why does the 1<sup>st</sup> Battlon tell this story – is he boasting – trying to outdo the Messenger? – “if you think you are so smart – let me tell you about my Rebbe”

He wasn’t born in Brinitz – how did he end up here – how long has he been here?

Within and within – turn your eyes within – source – what is it in Hebrew – does it occur in other translations?

How does this saying relate to what he has been saying?

Why does Chonen speak in a voice like The Messengers – a faraway voice  
Does his story give him new hope – there is a way?

Why doesn’t the Battlon directly answer Chonen – where/who. Was he making up the story – never expected to be questioned?

Where is Polisia – is that Poland – or a part of Poland?

How far is a league? – it would take a month to walk – 3 miles = 1 league

p.15

Why doesn’t Chonen answer – you want to visit him – staring at the Battlon and then the Messenger?

Where is Krasne – in relation to Brinnitz?

Why does Chonen turn back – but then stop – what makes him stop?

How does knowing the Rebbe’s name is El-Chonen – God of Chonen – change his resolve about going – is this a sign?

Perhaps I should visit him – was Chonen not planning on going before? Or is this just to strengthen his resolve?

Memorize 500 pages of Talmud – is that a lot? – how many pages are there? – 5894 folio pages

A magical mind – odd choice of words?

What is a Litvak? Where is he from? How did he end up in Brinnitz? What did he know about his father Nissen and Sender?

How does Mayer know these details about Chonen?

Where did Chonen disappear to for a whole year?

Chonen was elevated to the Rabbinate – so he is a Rabbi?

Chonen not the same – how has he changed. Atoning for sins?

Why is he not eating and going to the mikveh so often?

Reading the Kabbalah – why is this whispered?

Is it extraordinary, unusual, forbidden – and what does his age have to do with it - he is too young? Is there an age when it is OK to study Kabbalah?

The whole town is talking – why? How would they know about him? Is he that different? Does he give off an aura of holiness?

Charms – what are they? And from a Rabbi?

Why does Chonen refuse to do charms for people?

To bed – have the Battlons been here all day? Where are they going?

They have not eaten – why? How poor are they? How is his not eating different from Chonen's?

Mayer – what would a female equivalent be in a schul? Would there be one?

Who is Sender? Why does everyone know him? Does he have more than one daughter? Why has he gone to look for a bridegroom?

Who/what is Moshiach?

If the Battlon doesn't work - what does he do? Are they beggars?

Three bridegrooms – no contracts – why not?

Bargain in bad faith - why did Sender offer too little for a dowry – bargaining in bad faith – is a sin?

What is a “real Rabbi of Miropol Chasid”? Devout, pious, wise?

p.18

The Bridegroom might be right here – who is he referring to? Chonen? How much does the Messenger know - what do the others think he means?

A Bride and Bridegroom belong to each other – is he speaking from experience

Can't be arranged – never?

Scene 2B

Door burst open – how will we do that?

How extraordinary is it that an old woman is at schul so late at night – and alone? How old is she?

How to justify Mayer (F) chastising Chana Esther for being there? Should the line go to a male?

Chana Esther threatens God – pull down the universe - how dangerous is that?

Chana Esther only gives a ruble – is she poor? Is her daughter not worth more?

How many synagogues are there in Brinnitz – how big is the town?

Messenger's story about souls – other Ansky story about souls? A progression in Kabbalistic belief?

How does he know this?

What is kvaas?

Is bribery needed to get them to pray – kvaas and buckwheat cake?

p.21

What is the tune to Psalm #1? What is Psalm#1 - words  
Should it be sung in Hebrew or in English

Nearly midnight - any significance? - is there a connection as in Christianity – witching hour?

How did Chonen not see Chana Esther when she was there? – where was he?

Young woman or old – is he thinking/hoping it might have been Leah?

How does this question - if it is about Leah – relate to the numerology/Kabbalah references that follow?

Numerology – 9 scrolls - add up letters of truth – Emet = truth = 9. What are the numbers for each letter?

What is the significance of the number 36?

L – Lamed – Leah

How is Leah written in Hebrew?

If L is Lamed = 30

Aleph is A = 1

Hey is H = 5

What is the link between numbers/numerology and Kabbalah/mysticism?

3 X 36 = Chonen?

Lamed and Hey – not God. How would that be written in Hebrew?

Not God – not from God – is there a difference?

Chonen – a man possessed – a man obsessed?

Messenger – melach – angel in Hebrew?

I seem familiar - why? Is that what Chonen was going to say – or does the Messenger just jump in?

Chonen's story – a hoarder of precious things – is this Sender? Is Leah precious as well?

Why hasn't he seen Leah since he has been back? Who is avoiding who?

p.22

Where has he wandered? What has he done?

How/Why does Leah come to him in his dreams?

Is he defying God by saying "she is in mine"?

I defeat his plans – how does he do this? What incantations has he done – what has worked so far?

Why is impressed in italics? What does he mean?

p.23

Has he made the voice of God come from salamanders? Meaning?

Who is Henech?- relationship to Chonen?

Why does the Messenger disappear – and how?

Henech - no better than a businessman – does he mean like Sender?

Why is Henech shocked by Chonen?

What are these – Talmud, Commentaries, Mishnah?

Chonen's description of Talmud beneath the earth – another world underneath – where does this idea come from? Talmudic source?

Talmud of THIS world – rooted in the here and now?

Kabbalah – transcends- mystical – other world – what is Kabbalah?

Henech – what does he know of Kabbalah?

p.24

Images Chonen uses – Kabbalah – paths, doorways – how to get closer to God

Eyes within eyes – source?

Great dark curtain lift – his own darkness – the darkness of the world?

Henech's worrying – is he too dull or conventional – to see the potential?

Four Rabbis – traditional story – what is the source?

How did Akiba survive?

Followed them to Paradise – what does this mean – not death – they came back?

Baal Shem Tov – who is this?

p.25

Why does Henech now want to learn about Kabbalah?

Has Chonen inspired him?

Chonen – can sin not be conquered?

Make sin holy – what does this mean? – trace the logic – what are the implications?

p.26

Sitra Achra – what is this? What is the other side?

Why is Henech now scared? What does sin mean to him?



Song of Songs – what is this? – source – lyrics – tradition – allegory?

Why does Chonen introduce it now – what is he trying to tell Henech?

What is/was the Holiest of Holies?

Purifying flame

Does Chonen sing this – chant this?

What is the Rose of Sharon?

2f

p.27

Leah Fradde and Gitl enter- add Bessye?

They knocked – didn't just walk in – what did they knock on?

Why are they here at midnight? Whose idea was it?

Did Chonen cast a spell to get her here?

Why do they hesitate at the door?

What does it mean to have women in schul at night?

Did Leah insist on coming – because she knew Sender would be back with a new bridegroom – and she needed to find Chonen?

Show me the curtains – is this just an excuse?

p.28

Simchas Torah – Simchat Torah – what is this holiday – how is it celebrated – is it a night service – when does it happen?

Brooding – good design word?

Fradde - -where does she know these stories from? Folk tales – legends?

p.29

Leah – stay here all night – ask their secrets – what does she want to learn?

Rebbetzin – what is this – Rabbi's wife?

Jews of Spain – history – 1492 – the exile – history – 400 years old?

When Leah sees Chonen – what does she think – is the first time she has seen him since his return – why had she not seen him before?

Has she been thinking of him as much as he has been thinking of her?

What do ark curtains look like – construction – material – embroidery?

p.30

Chonen – what is it about his eyes?

He spoke in short tight breaths - why?

Leah/Chonen – first exchanges – short polite tension?

A public reunion – what do they really want to say to each other?

What does it mean to have a female (Meyer) take out a torah? Do we need a man – she says don't tell the Rabbi – does this compound or excuse the sin?

Torah – black and white fire – where does this image come from?

Passionate kiss of the torah – what motivates her to do this? A substitute for Chonen?

Chonen – impact – implication? Is it a signal from Leah to Chonen?

Why does Mayer follow the women out?

Chonen continues with the Song of Songs – why? – which part of it does he pick up  
Is there an emotional change?

Where is Henech during the whole scene with Leah?

p.31

Chonen's hair is wet – how do we do that?

Why does Henech stroke Chonen's hair/head- love?Sex?

Book of Raziel the Angel – who? - what is this?

Why doesn't Chonen respond – about the book? Is it true?

Why is Chonen fasting?

Is Leah the diamond?

Third Temple – After the Moshiach – what is the story: – prediction?

Foreshadowing death?

United in Paradise not on Earth?

Why does he bring up gold? Why the transition – thought process?

How long has Chonen been considering the gold spell and why has he not done it? Is it the final step?

Why does Henech go?

Why do the Batlonim return? – 18 Psalms is enough – how many Psalms are there?

Meyer returns with news – no deal with the bridegroom – how did she hear? What is everyone's reaction?

Chonen – I won – a spell has worked – reaction?

Messenger returns – from where – where has he been? Why has he stayed out of view for so long? Is this all going according to his plan?

p.34

Why does the Messenger leave – is he going back to Heaven?

Length of time for a prayer to reach Heaven – source?

Throne of Heaven – God's Throne?

2L

Sender enters – Is he alone – do we have enough cast to give him some friends – 3 or 4 men – well dressed?

How is Sender dressed compared to everyone else? How rich is he - and how is that made visible?

Can the Yeshiva Students double as friends – cut their re-entrance – p.34-35?

Only have 6 men to be a minyan – Battlons – 3 Yeshiva students - 3 – still four women available – Kim, Hilary, Sarah, Krissy. Do we disguise women as men? Are they from this time or from the 1940's time?

p.36

Cut Battlon line – over run with women - in light of a female Mayer?

Why has Sender come to the schul with his announcement –why not go home?

Impact of this announcement on Chonen?

What are the Terrible Angel prayers?

I was promised – by who? Why the italics?

Saying “The Name” – huge step - huge risk?

What must be will be – the Messenger – how much of this is pre-ordained?

Is Fate/Destruction inevitable? Is this God’s plan?

The impact/importance of the action of Chonen speaking God’s name – embrace of The Messenger - saying goodbye?

Does he know he is going to die?

Echo of Leah embracing the Torah?

What does he whisper – what is the name of God?

Light/Flame/Rekindle - As Chonen falls – the candles go out – how do we do this – wind – sound?

Magically/Spiritually what is happening?

p.37/38

Messenger – “fathers make and then later break their promises”– what is he referring to – what does he know – foreshadowing?

Osher – who will this be? – yeshiva student – one of the friends?

How far away is Sender’s house?

Why is he all nerves?

A song – why? –what song?

Maggid of Koznitz – story

Singing – building to Dancing – joy?

Mayer can’t dance with the men?

Dance/Music – continues when they find Chonen – how? Volume?

Does the Messenger dance?

He is destroyed – pronouncement? Realization? Prediction?

How do we get the body of Chonen off the stage?

Props required:

Ark with Torahs in it

Candles

Messenger's Lamp

Ark Curtains

Kvaas

Money

Books – Talmud, Book of Raziel

## **Act Two Scene 1**

If not in a mikveh – where? How would the mikveh be constructed? Nudity?

Why is Leah here – why today?

What does a woman do at the mikveh?

What has happened in the last 3 months?

Seperation – what does this mean? Sexual?

How important is the image of ritual cleansing – does it appear in other versions? Is it from Kushner, and if so, what is he saying by including this?

Why is Fradde talking about death during childbirth on Leah's wedding day? Does this refer back to Act 1 Scene 2 – did the woman die in childbirth so the other woman lived? Or did the baby die? What are the implications of either story?

What is the offering of the first dough – challah – a piece pulled off and burned in the oven – why – what is the significance? Why are the consequences for not doing this so dire?

Light the Shabbes candles as a separate blessing – separate from what?

Talmudic quote – from where – in reference to what? How does Fradde know about the Talmud? Kushner addition?

How does Leah know it as well – she finished the quote?

Who is the Great Maggid?

What is a niggun?

Does this song occur in other texts – is it the same in other texts?

What is the song about – a spring/the heart?

Never meeting

Time

What is the story of Abraham the Angel?

Who was the son of the great Maggid – source, reference?

Why is Leah telling such an ominous story on Leah's wedding night? What does it say about Fradde?

## **Act Two Scene Two – The Wedding**

Another 3 months later? Or the same day as Scene 1?

Holy Bride and Bridegroom – 1648 A.D. = 5408 C.E.

What is their story?

References, sources?

A Square in Brinnitz – the only outdoor scene in the play. Significance?

Cemetery – death is every where?

Why are the poor, beggars and cripples at the wedding? How many – which actors are available to play them?

Is feeding the poor at a wedding a mitzvah?

What time is it – evening?

Why is the Messenger back, and why has he changed his clothes?

Who are the beggars begging from?

p.45

Does the Messenger not know the story of the Holy Couple – and if not, why not?

What is a pogrom?

Who was Chmielnitsky – what is his story, why is he hated?

Burial Story – in Ansky Collected Works – reference to the number of such sites that existed?

p.46

I go where THEY send me – who is “they”?

How does the Messenger know they are talking about the wedding in Paradise – is he being literal but everyone thinks he is joking (Mayer laughs)?

He will be here shortly – is the Messenger referring to Chonen or Menashe?

p.47

Who is the Messenger talking to/about? – “The Dead should not be excluded”

The Bridegroom cometh – an odd choice of words?

What is buffle fish?

Who knew Sender had this kind of money? – How rich did they think he was? Does Sender hide his true wealth?

What is an Itinerant Tzaddik?

What/who are God's 36 Just men?

Who are Lamed Vovniks?

Who was the Prophet Elijah?

Didn't Moshiach squat for years outside the gates of Babylon – what is the story?

No salvation because he wasn't recognized – is this doom/curse?

Messenger – all people are entitled to respect – what does he mean – why does he say this – vague warning – caution?

p.48

Tradition of the poor dancing with the bride – source?

Why are the poor portrayed so negatively?

Korva,, pinska, snake eyes – insults – translate?

p.49

Why does Mayer lead a song so critical of Sender?

rubles, groschen, kopek, zlotys – money?

Who/what is Ha Shem?

God's seven gold thrones – reference?

Bet Gimel Dalet Chay Yud Tet – why these Hebrew letters – significance?

Sender – why is he referred to as the Banker to God?

Why are the poor rushing to Senders house?



Very Poor Old woman – who is she? – in Hirsch version (and the movie) – she is Chonen in disguise

Old woman's cry – could be Leah's – don't take me yet?

How dirty is her gown?

Custom or superstition – bad luck to leave a bride alone unmarried?

Spitting – how is it done, why is it done?

Is Leah's mouth really dry or does she not want to block spirits? Does she know Chonen is coming?

Does Leah see bodies – has she seen them? Is Chonen in her mind already

Fradde – and those who don't belong – what does this mean? Why does she spit – is it a new thought which ends with the spit?

Why is the Messenger back – unobtrusively? – how do we do this?

Is Leah talking of Chonen – cheated of long lives?

Why is she thinking this now?

Has something provoked these thoughts?

Link to Chonen – there as a boy....?

The dead will talk to you if you permit them – has Chonen spoken to her?

Flame rekindled – Chonen brought back to life?

Alvinu Malchenu – our Father our King – spelling – Alvinu vrs Avinu?

Nothing unholy – are these then unholy thoughts?

How old was Leah when her mother died if they danced when Leah was very small?

Decision to go into the cemetery – where does this come from?

The Holy Couple visit Leah – is this new – or just since Chonen's death and her wedding announced?

Is it a warning or a prediction?

I've seen her – her mothers – at the Festivals – has she been in touch with spirits all her life? Is this one of the things the Chonen was drawn to?

Devil's stench – Holocaust image?

Scattered his teeth – whose teeth?

Music to announce the arrival of the Bridegroom – why do the women scream?

Where has the Messenger been during all of this – what has he heard?

Where does Fradde go when the Messenger speaks to Leah?

Has Leah ever seen him before – why does she stare?

Is he warning her or reassuring her about what is going to happen – how does he know?  
Predestined? God intervening

How does the Messenger vanish?

What does Leah think when she hears the word Dybbuk – a warning or a promise?

Is a trip to the graveyard a tradition before a wedding – origin? Reason?

The bridegroom has marvelous connections – what does this mean - \$\$? People?

Fradde knows that Leah is referring to Chonen – how?

Died in uncleanness? How? Why? Why is he buried in an unmarked grave?

p.56

Leah – he told me where – has Chonen appeared to her? A dream? Vision?

Why do Bessye and Gitl get the colour of Menashe's hair wrong?

Empty and gloomy – how to achieve this?

Who plays the Bridal Party – the Poor – do the Poor reappear?

p.57

Nachman's story about their trip – were demons trying to keep them out of Brinnitz? Is Chonen that powerful a spirit?

Mrs. Nachman – all business – but superstitious?

p.58

Where do the fathers go to transact? Where does the wedding party go during the Menashe/Mendl scene?

What is an exegis?

What is the story of Rabbit Meir and his wife Beruria – how is it relevant? Is this the same in other translations?

Menashe – shy – is he an only son? Has it been tough to get him married?

What did the Nachmans have to promise to get Sender to agree?

p.59

Aunt Rochele's evil eye – amulet?

Menashe has never met Leah – so how has he seen her eyes? – in a dream? Did Chonen do this as well?

Why does a grave in the town square seem to upset Menashe so much.

Does Menashe really think he's ugly – or is he just trying to get out of the marriage

The poor have eaten – but are melancholy – why?

What is the reason for this scene of the grumbling poor?

Candles lit – wedding approaches – transition – time?

What is Sender's fear - \$\$ - the deal is off?

Fradde – I will never listen to your daughter again – why not?

Does Sender go into the house as well?

Leah fasting all the time – like Chonen – whose idea was this?

What happened in the graveyard?

What did Leah do at Chonen's grave?

Fradde – don't ask me what happened – why does she repeat it 3 times? Something very traumatic – why doesn't she say?

p.61/62

## The Wedding

What are the rituals?

Where does the Chuppa come from?

Do other translations have details like circling 7 times etc.?

How much of the ceremony actually happens?

Candles now – what was the lighting before?

What is Leah's physical reaction/response to the veil being placed on her head?

Why does Leah run to the grave of the Holy Couple? How will this be done – how is the grave constructed – how sturdy does it have to be?

How do they lift Leah up?

Leah speaks in a strange male voice – how do we do this – what does it sound like?

Murderer – what does she mean?

Messenger – A Dybbuk has entered the body of the bride – other translations?

Who is he talking to – who hears him – what is the reaction?

Final look – candles out?

Props/Furniture required:

Chupa – canopy – held up by four poles

The Grave of the Holy Couple

Candles

Wardrobe – changes for wedding? How elaborate/ornate should things be?

## **Act Three – Scene 1**

2 days later – what has happened?

Why are we in Mirapol? How is Brinnitz different from Mirapol?

Arrival of the train – how is this staged? How does it fit in with the secondary story – is it an arrival NOW or THEN?

Why is the Messenger with them – if he can appear and disappear? Is he on the train – or is this at the train station?

Is it confusing if we recap transport images? – how can this be done visually – how to keep the time frame consistent?

p.63 – locations – Krakow, Tornapol, Mirapol?

Are they all from Mirapol – where have they been?

When was rail transport introduced?

3<sup>rd</sup> passenger seems the intellectual – who is he? Who are these people?

Where is Cheroszchev?

Messenger – blessed by He from whom all inventions come – is he being ironic? Does he know what the future of trains will mean?

p.64 – so how goes it with a Jew – odd greeting – what is it a translation of?

You're not a Chasid – how does the Messenger look different?

At the home of your Rabbi Azriel - Odd word choice – why not a messenger to the home of?

How does the Messenger know about the Dybbuk if he has been away? Do the other passengers know?

2<sup>nd</sup> passenger – the doubter – preposterous – what type of man is he?

p.64

They won't let us ride – because we will sound too backwards, superstitious?

Came from Minsk – an insult – only a stupid person would come from Minsk and ask such questions – everyone in Minsk is stupid?

Much further than Minsk – where – Heaven?

2<sup>nd</sup> Passenger – more doubt – is he Ansky – assimilated – modern?

What does the 1<sup>st</sup> Passenger bring up Moscow and electric light? How is that connected to what has been said before – earlier dialogue – trains, superstition?

When was electricity introduced?

Words over wires – telegraph – chattering crickets?

Words fly faster than angels – the messenger is an angel – will we still need Messengers/Angels in the new world of technology?

The Messiah will come by train – progress – promise of the future – irony?

1<sup>st</sup> class ticket – how did they travel on this train?

2<sup>nd</sup> Passenger – misogyny – hysterical women – it's always women who are possessed – true? Why? Judaic/Christian traditions?

Messenger – hard to believe such things are possible? Irony again – how much does he know of the future?

The Messenger changes topic – why? What is the urgency of his errand? What message is he bringing – and from who?

Ghetto – is Mirapol bigger than Brinnitz? – shtetl vrs city? Is the ghetto new or old?  
The smell – good or bad? And what smell?

2<sup>nd</sup> Passenger – in a world of electric light – is he cynical, hopeful or disdainful of the present?

## **Act Three Scene 2**

A large room in Azriel's house – scene change

What would a Rabbi's house be like – large/small, poor/grand?

Lots of furniture? How public is his house – or is this a public room in his house?

Ark – is it a mini-schul as well – a chapel in a house? How common is that?

Dining table – for shabbos meal – but would the Chasids travel on the Sabbath on a train?

Maariv – evening prayers – when are they said?

Saturday night – after shabbos – havdalah – candles, spices? What are the rituals

Were the passengers travelling on shabbos?

p.67

Has Sender spoken to the Rabbi already? What is the sequence of events?

How did Sender, Leah and Fradde get here?

Why is Sender concerned about shame when his daughter is in peril?

Leah – I want to but I can't – why not – what is stopping her?

Why does Leah enter when Azriel commands? What makes her do it – what makes the dybbuk do it

Dybbuk voice – how – where does it come from – music, sound?

Why does she sit down and then leap up?

What does the Dybbuk react to?

What is your name vrs. Who you are – what's the difference? What is Azriel asking? Is the Dybbuk teasing Azriel?

A little pause – what is happening? What is the Dybbuk thinking?

Dybbuk – a wanderer – a non answer – cryptic – why?

A battle of souls/will/religion – a narrow path – is righteousness not enough?

Torah reference – the dead may not dwell amongst the living – source? What law is this – Torah not Talmud?

So it is law – not just interpretation?

I never died – then what happened?

What does Chonen think/know has happened?

We are meant to be – is this about destiny/predestination?

Shofer sounded – Moshiach comes – what happens? What is the promise he is offering? A solution or compromise

Is he appealing to him, his sense of duty – Dybbuk has infected the whole of Israel?

The Individual vs. the collective?

Can Azriel summon angels?

I've no place to go – why is the Dybbuk trapped? what is holding him here?

Heaven is shut – why?

Waiting demons – is this a threat?

Leah kneels – a change of tactic?

No resting place – why not?

Have mercy/pity- is the Dybbuk sincere or cunning?

Azriel – pity – shred my heart – does he mean it? And if so, why?

I will rescue you – how – how would this be done?

Dybbuk reacts violently – why?

p.70

Why does Azriel summon Shimshun? Is he out of ideas? Or is this the idea?

A minyan – 10 men – why is this needed?

What is Sitra Achra?

What is anathema?

Is Azriel that powerful? How to make the audience believe that he is?

Dybbuk screaming – is that because he fears that Azriel can do what he says?

Heaven/hell – nothing can compare?

Sender – why does he leap in now? What are supplicant arms?

Azriel to Sender – he seems to switch gear? Where is Leah during all of this? Is she still or moving?

Can/would Azriel ignore her?



Azriel – how did this come to pass – does he know, or is it just that he knows it can't just be that simple as possession? Something had to cause it – what is the flaw?

Wrath across generations – does Azriel know/suspect that it has something to do with Sender? Why and what?

Why does Sender notice the Scribe now? Why does he care that everything is being written down?

Recording lessons/legends – is that what he is really doing? Does Azriel have a sense of history?

Suffering – does it serve a higher purpose?

Turn sufferings into a text – Holocaust lesson?

What does Impregnation mean?

Azriel – sins of the fathers – does he know or does he suspect Sender? How well does he know Sender?

Sender asks God what he has done to God, not considering that he might have offended a man on earth – why?

You can't ask him anything – has he tried? And if so – how/what has he tried? What was the Dybbuk's reaction?

Curse – Dybbuk – ALL in CAPS – why? Why the vehemence? Evil – ancient murder – old as in evil long ago? As in Original sin? Or is this directly related to Sender?

Money poisons your blood - \$\$ - the curse, the problem, greed – is this at the root of the play? Greed/promise/love?

Sender – how does he recognize the voice now? What is different? Is it in the sound or in the words?

How does Sender know so much of the story? Did Henech tell What did he tell him and why?

What is the Zohar?

What is the Book of Raziel, that Adam mislaid?

Powder of crushed pearls – why? Source?

7 colours of gold? Source?

Wicked old miser – Sender does not see himself like this – why not?

Azriel interrogation – does he know the back-story and is he leading Sender on the path – or is he putting pieces of the puzzle together?

I don't know his family name – why not? – rudeness? Didn't care because he was poor – and therefore no interest as a potential suitor?

Sender - Doesn't read any more – read the Talmud/torah – no reading for pleasure? Did people read for pleasure back then?

Eyes fading from adding sums – what does Sender do for a living?

p.73

Why does the dybbuk yell again? Is it because the minyan has arrived – a new threat? Is he defiant?

If choral effect is used for the dybbuk – how would we create that voice when almost the whole cast is on stage?

If the minyan talked in unison when they respond to Azriel – does this dilute the effect of choral speaking for the Nissen

What does excommunication mean in Judaism?

Is it significant that Azriel says “Almighty God” and the Dybbuk says “God Almighty”?

Michl – brings robes etc – from where? How does he carry them?

Why does he bring seven of them? What does it mean to put on white robes vs. black robes?

Significance of 7 – 7 candles, 7 shofars, 7 torahs?

Leah – as if waking – why? Where has the Dybbuk gone?

Leah wants to leave – not tell Azriel anything – why? Is this her of the Dybbuk talking?

Why can't Fradde hold Leah?

When Michl comes back, he returns with The Messenger – why? How does he factor into the process?

Does Michl carry everything himself?

What is the relationship between Shimshun and Azriel?

Who has the greater status – or are they equals?

If Shimshun is the chief rabbit – then who is Azriel?

Is Azriel older than Shimshun – he says he is his disciple?

Three dreams – why has Shimshun had these dreams? – why him? Who sent the dreams – why to him and not to Azriel?

What does Shimshun know? He hesitates to do the ceremony – why?

Why can't the girl touch the minyan – what will happen?

p.75/76

Shukkeling – what is this?

Why can't the 1<sup>st</sup> Chasid pray – what is he afraid of?

Three Chasids – do they debate the power of prayer?

3<sup>rd</sup> Chasid story – pogrom – people killed in tallis and tefelin – buried in a pit, fled into the forest – Holocaust images?

Darkness of the world – incomprehensible – how do you understand evil?

The world is in its last age – end of the world – no Jews left – ominous foreshadowing? Holocaust image?

Why does Azriel send Leah out? What does he know now?

The world is cold – no hope for the future – where does this pessimism come from?

p.77

Why does Azriel send the minyan away? Where do they go?

House must vibrate with the sound of prayer – how do we do that? What prayer? What is the tune/sound?

Amulet/teffilin – what will that do?

Dybbuks in Baghdad – Shabbatai Zvi – what is the story behind this?

The False Messiah – Shabbatai Zvi – what is the story?

Why doesn't Azriel spit?

Why does everyone else spit at Shabbatai Zvi's name?

Why does Azriel pray to God now? What does he want? What does he know? Why does he take action now?

How does Azriel now know the story of Sender and Nissen?

Twenty years ago – how old is Sender now if he and Nissen were students together?

Did they study in Mirapol? Was Azriel their teacher?

Little pause – what happens during that? What is Sender thinking?

Why is “Nissen died” the first thing that Sender says?

How did Sender know that Nissen died? What did he think when he heard the news?

What is a Rabbinical Court? How is it made up, what does it do, what are the rules?

What does Nissen want?

How has Sender spilled Nissen's blood?

Sender – Lies! – does he not remember or does he remember but doesn't want to admit it?

Pause after the revelation re: Chonen – what happens in the pause?

Azriel – summoning a dead man – is this something that he has done before? How is it done?

Why does Azriel need the bridegroom – Menashe – to be here?

Why does Sender hesitate?

Why does Azriel roar at Sender – Haaa!?

Why does the Messenger come in now? How does he know the bridegroom will arrive soon?

Does Azriel recognize the Messenger?

Who/what does Azriel think the Messenger might be?

Why does Azriel want him to stay – and Sender want him to leave?

Can a few short years really have changed a man so much – referring to whom? Sender? How has he changed – what was he like before?

How is joy connected to welcoming a stranger?

Everything I worked for is destroyed – reference to \$\$ or to Leah?

Who made the world – why does Azriel begin this line of questioning? A test of faith? What has Sender lost?

Why can't Sender answer – it is a simple question?

What task has Azriel given to Sender?

Why does this long exchange between the Messenger and Azriel occur?

If Azriel knows that the Messenger is from God, then why all the questions? Is Azriel looking for reassurance and confirmation of his own faith.

p.83

Speech about sin – high priest = individual/ collective vs individual  
Do we all have responsibility for each other?

Does every sin have consequences?

It all comes to rest – here?

Is Azriel afraid of the responsibility?

If he can't save Leah, what are the consequences?

Joyless and the frail – who is he referring to?

Messengers response – is it meant to reassure or to cast doubt?

Recap of “God made the world” – why is the argument/discussion ended?

Why does the Scribe pipe up now?

What or who is ruining the Scribes pens? What or who doesn't want him to write things down – record them? Who is stopping him?

Azriel – everything predestined – does everything repeats itself?

Why does the sound of prayer intrude now?

What happens to the Messenger – why doesn't he speak again? Where does he go?

Why is Azriel suddenly tired?

Has Shimshun been here all this time –why has he stayed silent?

P76

Michl left earlier with Leah – when does he return?

What is the Sh'ma?

Azriel tells the Scribe to write – but the scribe has said that his pens won't work – did Azriel forget?

Chelmo tovo chozze – we have dreamed good dreams – source – translation?

Till we return – where are they going?

Rebbe for more than 40 years – change age reference for younger actor?

Is Azriel questioning his faith? Why? And why now? What makes him tired?

Miles from the source of life – the problems of other people have kept him from prayer. Is this his regret over his own spiritual journey?

Michl reassures Azriel – why? What is their relationship?

Azriel – piety runs in his family – what is his family history?

Prepare ourselves – how? And for what?

Velvele has been dead for 67 years – do we adjust the age of the Grandfather to align with the age of the grandson/actor?

Lublin, Zlotchov – where are these towns?

Which pogroms is Azriel referring to?

Under my robe – costume note – does he need to be robed at this point?

What does he fear – progress? The world changing?

Why doesn't he trust God? What are the implications of this for a Rabbi?

Why doesn't he want the Scribe to write that down?

## **Act Four – Trial/Séance/Exorcism**

What is a Rabbinical Judge?

What is a Rabbinical court?

Why are they wearing tallis and teffilin?

How does Azriel put his on if there is not an act break?

Who will teach them how?

Where will we get them or will we have to build them?

Seating for 4 – Azriel, 2 Judges, Scribe?

A curtain is hanging – how is put into place? Secured? Made of what? large tallis – same material as the chuppa?

What prayer are they reciting?

What are the ritual preparations for a Rabbinical Court?

p.84 –

Azriel's cane – what is it? What does it look like? How big, how long?

If Azriel is not old then what sort of cane/staff is it?

Is this first time we have seen it? Where does it come from?

Zazahot/sefirot – what are these? Kabbalah references?

Drawing a circle on the floor – source – ritual – why is this done? And how is it done – how to make it magical?

Modesty curtain – for a ghost?

Is the curtain a feature in all translations – do we need it? Is it theatrically more interesting without it – LX effect – circles of light vs. projected light on the curtain?

Sender says he thought through the night – but it is only an hour later? Logic/time line?

Why doesn't Azriel listen to Sender?

What is the true world?

How do the judges know that Nissen is there? And how will the audience know?

What is the scribe chanting – translation – and why is he chanting

p.89

Our world is the world of illusion – what does this mean?

How does Shimshun know that Nissen has come?

Why does Azriel believe Shimshun?

A terrifying pause – they are petrified – what are they all thinking and feeling? What is happening?

Scribe – in a huge voice – why the change? What is he saying – and why in a huge voice?

How does Shimshun know what Nissen is saying? Is he hearing it? Is Nissen inside of him – is he possessed?

Why did Sender and Nissen make the vow about their children? What was their relationship?

Sender – didn't he say earlier that he thought he knew why Nissen was angry?

How did Nissen die?

Scribe – Keening – what is he saying? Why is he keening loudly? Is this a prayer or is it the words of Nissen?

Why does Shimshun begin to speak in Nissen's voice? How does this happen – is there a different voice?

Why does he switch back and forth between 1<sup>st</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person?

p.92

The last section is all in third person – why?

Dybbuk min ha hizonim – translation?

Not being remembered – no one to say kaddish – no memory – why is this so important?

Is Sender sorry – or just sorry that he has been found out? Does he accept any blame?

Why does Azriel keep pushing?

Little pause – is this Nissen deciding what to say in response to Sender?

Does Nissen catch Sender in a lie – he never asked?



Sender – why does he protest his innocence? And why does he try to blame Nissen – “it was your job to approach me” ?

Powerful, Compliant – is this to describe Menashe – or his family?

What does this mean – compared to whom? Other prospective bridegrooms?

Shimshin – the last Nissen yells ends in 3<sup>rd</sup> person – why?

What are the Rabbis conferring about? Are they all in agreement? Is the case clear – is there more than one possible decision?

Verdict – does it strike a balance? Is it about truth? “Caught between two worlds” – what does this mean – which worlds?

Is this a decision that can be supported by law? That something not yet created can’t be brought up in an oath?

What is the importance of saying Kaddish?

Is this a fair judgment?

Why does the Messenger say AMEN? And all in caps?

Why doesn’t Nissen accept the verdict? Why does Azriel give up trying to get him to answer and switch to Sender?

How does Azriel feel about Nissen not accepting? Has he failed? Is he doomed?

Sender accepts the judgement instantly – why?

Sender – “yes but he.... “What is he about to say?

Azriel doesn’t even wait for Nissen to respond – why not? What is his plan? What comes next?

Why does Azriel redraw the circle again – but in the opposite direction?

They all wash their hands – ritual – why? How is it done? Can this cleansing be a repeat of something Chonen/Leah do in Act I and Act II?

Why do the three Rabbis point out that Nissen has not accepted the verdict? Does Azriel not notice – or does he have a plan?

Nissen – was this about hatred – not sorrow?

Is Azriel frightened – and of what? Why are his hands shaking?

The judges leave furtively – why? Why do they sneak out? Fear? What are they afraid of?

Azriel – is he defying his own court?

Is this arrogance – or desperation? Does he just not want to lose?

Leah in her wedding dress – what was she in before? Why the black cloak – was she in this before?

Sanhedrin in Jerusalem – what is this?

Where do the 14 men come from – how do they enter?

Who has the shofars? Who has the candles? Who has torahs?

Open the ark – remove the scrolls – is this a necessary action? Does it slow the action down? Why are they removed? Does it make things more holy? Does this happen in all translations?

Obdurate – meaning?

Ruah tezazit ve ruah ra'ah – translation?

Metatron, Kerubim, Raphael, Gabriel, Michael, Sandalphon – are these all Angels?

Angels in Judaism – who/what are they – what role do they play?

Dybbuk voice – full cast is on stage – do they make the voice?

Shedim Yehudim – translation?

Upper air, middle air – what is this referring to?

Angels – pry

Devils – iron claws tear you away – similar imagery – why?

p.98

Tekiah, shevarim – shofar patterns – what are they – what is the sound/pattern?

Something powerful is helping him – what – Leah?

Why do they put the torahs back in the ark? Doesn't that diminish power – is this necessary?

Shroud the ark in black – why? What will this do? Could this be done earlier? Would anyone other than a rabbi know?

If the torahs go back – why light candles – shouldn't the ceremony build – should they come in lit – theatrically more effective?

Last entreaty is to God – first angels, then devils then god – is this the natural order?

Lord of the Saltpits – reference?

God of wrath and vengeance – reference?

Teruah – shofar sequence – what is the sound/sequence?

Do we need/want a tekiah gadol - long final blast - to end the sequence?

Messenger – why does he speak now? Where has he been throughout? Can he tell if it is working?

Spark – shatter vessel – what is the earlier reference?

What is it like when the Dybbuk dies? What happens to Leah? How does her voice change?

How to conclude the exorcism smoothly?

Azriel asks for forgiveness for the Dybbuk – why?

Messenger says Amen again – why?

Say Kaddish for me – again – the importance of Kaddish? Finality = ending

They never refer to the Dybbuk as Chonen – why?

Sender begins Kaddish in Hebrew – then switches to English – other translations – all in Hebrew? Old fashioned Hebrew pronunciation?

Clock strikes 12 – where is the clock – inside or outside? Is it a Church clock?

Get her married – is this the solution?

Michl's message – is this supernatural intervention? Nissen's last revenge – or Chonen's?

Who wrote the message in the Scribe's book?

What does the message mean?

Why did Kushner add this – what is he saying?

Look between Azriel and the Messenger – what does it mean? Is it an acknowledgement – of what?

Why does Azriel draw another circle? Is he still afraid of something supernatural? Is he convinced that the exorcism has worked?

Why does Azriel tell the Scribe to get rid of the book – not destroy it but drown it? Can't destroy a book that has the name of God in it?

They all leave – The Messenger is not included in the stage directions – has he left already?

Fradde – what does she think has happened – is happening? Use of lightness images vs. heavy?

What is Leah hearing? Why does she hear dancing around the grave of the Martyred Couple? Reference to Act II – dancing around their grave to celebrate a wedding?

Maccabbees – 60 of them – is the number significant – who were they? The story of Hanukkah.

Fradde – sings an odd lullaby – mixture of images – good and bad – death references – is she inventing this or is it traditional? There are lots of personal references in it – why?

Chonens Voice – how – amplified? Why does he appear now? Is this Nissen's revenge – there will be no forgiveness?

Voice like a violin – music cue?

Why does Leah say she has forgotten who Chonen is? But then immediately she does?

Why did you leave me again – does she wish she was still possessed?

Body vrs soul – what is the difference in Judaism?

Leah – decision to summon Chonen – does she know it would mean her death?

How does Chonen appear? What is he wearing – full chasid outfit – white? Streiml?

How does the last magic happen – light/bodies?

Leave her cloak behind – light vrs dark – flame out of her chest? How do we do this?

And rise rise rise – other translations for images?

When do the others come in – and why? What do they see? How will they know what has happened?

Boruch dayan ho emes – what does this mean – why does the Messenger say it?

Excoriation – meaning?

What is Azriel's message – and who is it meant for? Why does he give it to the Messenger? Does he know who he is – has he always known?

How does it end – how do we recap to the opening image? Music? Close the circle?

## CHAPTER 3 – JOURNAL

### The “Early Days”

Being a bit of a Luddite and techno-loser, my early journal entries were done – if you can believe it – by HAND! And written in ....notebooks! I tend not to have my laptop at hand all the time and found it much easier to travel with a notebook always at the ready – to record random scribbling, random thoughts, and to collect pictures and images that I could look at and consider without having to be near a power outlet. Hard to jot down an idea while riding the bus, when your laptop weighs (seemingly) 20 lbs and takes (seemingly) hours to boot up.

These early journal musings can be divided into a few categories that reflect the “conceptualization” journey I went on, beginning at the end of last year (Spring 2007), once A Dybbuk had been confirmed as my thesis play – and designers began to be put into place.

The idea of a Holocaust “frame” was pretty immediate. The Scribe’s “poem” in Act IV jumped out at me. What to do with it at this point was anyone’s guess but I knew Kushner was saying something about the end of a way of life. It is his most obvious addition to the Ansky text. But was that all the play was about? A lament for a lost people?

The other strong “theme” that came through was the idea of “a promise broken”. Sender has broken his promise to Nissen that their children should marry – with disastrous results. How could that theme be expanded and linked to the Holocaust imagery? I remember a discussion we had back at summer camp – Biluim near Huntsville – when the topic of “why did the Holocaust happen” was the focus of a group discussion. The obvious “it was the German’s fault” was of course the first thing that came to mind – but then the discussion veered into headier and more theological territory. Did the Holocaust happen because the Jewish people broke a promise to God, or did God break his promise to his people? The blame game is much easier when the perpetrator is easily pegged – those darn Nazis! But the other possibilities are more introspective – and much harder to answer. Were the Jews being punished for their lack of faith – which is an odd assumption considering the death machine cut a wide swath, irrespective of one’s devoutness. It comes in a long line of Jewish thought equating calamities with a lack of faith. Chasidism was born out of an attempt to try and pry that culture of “blame” out of the religion. Or was this a moment when God, for whatever reason, broke his commitment to His “chosen people”. And if so, why? A test? To prove what? There is the school of thought that the Holocaust had to happen so that Israel could be born – or reborn – as a nation. Was the price too high? Was the birth of Israel meant to be the harbinger of the coming of Moshiach (The Messiah – The Anointed One) – and if that meant world peace, was 6 million too high a price to pay for a return to Paradise?

I didn’t think A Dybbuk fully addressed such a weighty issue, but it gave me something to ponder. Was this version of the play about anything more than just a ghost story?

Out of those questions came the first ideas of a period to set the play – early 1940’s, just as the deportations were moving into high gear (note to self – when was the Wannsee Conference?).

Some early jottings:

July 8, 2007

Light a match – the others light matches. The Battlons?  
Summoning memories  
Images of loss and pain  
Recreate the world that was lost

First pictures – a synagogue – in Germany I think – in an issue of Macleans

Concentration camp photos – remembering the image from Schindler's List – stairs ways  
DOWN into the gas chambers – didn't know that. A raked stage? A death pit – ghosts rising up  
from the grave

September 5, 2007

Watched the DVD of the Yiddish film

Is The Messenger blind? He appears as if by magic  
Fradde – is Sender's sister

Sender is VERY rich – almost Shylock-like is his constant money counting

Nissen – death by drowning

LOTS of music – underscoring. Dance of the Wealthy Women, Dance of the Poor, Dance  
of the Dead

Wedding ritual – the Bride circles the Groom

It rains at the end of the wedding – a bad omen

The Rabbis wear their prayer shawls over their heads for the trial and exorcism.

The sound of wind.

Smoke “effects”.

If the movie was made in 1937 – how many of the actors were still alive 6-7 years later?

September 17, 2007

Design meeting  
A raked stage with a “cut” in the upstage edge – stairs down

Costumes will tell the story – more than the location  
Battlons – camp inmates – working in Kanada – the sorting area of Auschwitz – clothes,  
suitcases

Luggage to create the “locations”. All props come out of the suitcases – chuppa, curtains,  
torahs

A mix of inmates and arrivals  
Is The Messenger the survivor?

The idea of rail cars first discussed.

September 21, 2007

While watching A Midsummer Night's Dream at FWT: .

Blank space. Darkness.  
How much set do we need on the stage? Careful choice of objects.

Images – arrival, leaving luggage, exit to the showers, long lines of people, The Messenger  
arrives with a yarzeit candle

Nudity – leaving everything behind – the Battlons pick up the luggage

September 21 2007

From a dream – the named characters wear real clothes – the unnamed ones – like the  
Battlons - wear camp uniforms. By the end – everyone is in camp uniforms

Keep the set vague

September 23, 2007

Start the play with a recreation of the death of the Holy Bride and Bridegroom. Chupah,  
ceremony, attack, sounds, confusion, butchery, dead bodies everywhere – blood.

Mikveh – total immersion required - not just simple washing at a sink or bowl. How to do  
that on stage?

September 29, 2007

How is the book discovered?

How do the ghosts appear? Do they arrive from the trains – or waiting for the trains? Do  
the Battlons arrange the luggage?



October 5, 2007

Auditions yesterday – a big range of actor prep – some had done a lot – some seemed like they might not have even read the play. A few actors were actually off book. So who really wants the parts?

A few actors surprised me – they came in more prepped and with more thought than I had imagined they would.

Realized that we don't have enough men to cover all the roles. Some will have to be played by women. Mayer perhaps – but could she hold the Torah? Can the men dance with the women?

Azriel as a woman didn't work – the character needs to be male in any sort of non-modern historical context.

Will have to reconfigure casting breakdown of the ensemble – the NYC breakdown won't work.

Ideas – the ghost of Nissen yelling inside Shimshin's head.

The factor of time for Leah – she is about to get married – this has to be resolved soon.

The heightened emotional state at which Chonen starts the play.

Azriel – a grumpy old man – everyone wants something from him

Fradde as a bossy friend rather than an older woman

October 9, 2007

A Curtain Up Review – 1997 – Elyse Summer – of the Julia Pascal version

“The peril facing the world of ancient legend and traditions has come true in ways far beyond anything Ansky envisioned.

The train is a double symbol of peril – the sweeping away of the old modernity – and the more ominous uprooting of the old emptied box car”

October 10, 2007

The secondary story is still not clear – who is telling the story. Is there a rationale for the story being told by a young cast – a camp dormitory/cell block – Thereisenstadt?

Camp uniforms are too iconic – too much about a specific place. There is no ambiguity about those uniforms.

Save that for the end.

What is lost if you know Leah and Chonen are already dead at the beginning of the play? Why should we care?

The core story is hard to follow for a non-Jewish audience – will another layer of story just make it more confusing?

Still waiting for that “aha!” moment of solution when all the pieces fall into place.

Have we overdesigned the space?

October 12.

After seeing Futuristi at FWT

Simplify!

All black. Unit costume. Hints of the 1940's. Minimal changes of costume – actor driven.  
Theatrical. A black void rather than a specific location.

Theatrical frame makes gender blending easier.

Focus on the language

Timeless quality – and yet, old.

THE THEATRE - use it!

Leah – not from the mikveh – putting on her wedding dress

Suggestion of rail cars – sliding panels on the sides of the stage.

Grave – made with suitcases.

October 15, 2007

Design meeting

Simplify – focus on story telling

Raked stage – the world tipping into chaos

German markings on sliding doors

Echoes of things – not literal representations

Suitcases – who lives and who dies

Fire in the sky

Shadows

The only white on stage – Leah and Chonen in wedding garb.

Floor – covered with dust – ashes? Bones?

Rituals run these people's lives

Lights from inside a suitcase?

October 19, 2007

Prepping for seminar on Jacques LeCoq – invigorated by the idea of theatricality. Using actors and their bodies to tell the story – not feeling as restricted by the text.

LeCoq – Melodrama.

Obstacles – the journey of how to figure out getting around them

Is the “who” telling the story more important than the “how”? If the “who” is not answered fully until the end – will it be too confusing?

How “supernatural” to make the ghostly effects – too much and it will be funny. Not enough – will anyone know what is happening?

October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Design meeting – we are on separate trains – I am barreling forward, Y. is resisting to committing to anything. The production will be designed in my head by the time anything gets put down on paper.

Collaboration needs everyone to play the same game – with the same rules.

Back wall – bricks - a ghetto wall.

Ominous – very high

2-4 doors on either side – steps down off the rake.

Or 1 single opening – the gates of Hell.

Need to get the dimensions of the existing rake to see if it is even possible.

October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007

What do the “goyim” need to know.

Leah – complicit in the possession – does she fight it? Invite it?

Possession – disorder in Ansky – welcomed by Kushner

Chonen/The Messenger/Azriel – Kushner’s voices

Azriel’s power is waning – his time if over

God On Trial – Ansky – 1908

Emperor of Rumania – from a story collected by Ansky – the Emperor orders all Jews to leave in one week. He is put on trial – since only God can make decrees. The Torah says the Jews only need to obey God.

If the exorcism and trial are failures – does this mean God has turned his back on his people? Is death the only solution?

November 2, 2007

Design meeting – things seem stalled. No progress. Nothing brought to the table. Seem stuck on the question – “are they dead?”

Rail cars – if they are used before the end of the play – for transport – is this confusing?

Where is the sense of magic?

Prophetess Ines – Segovia – 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> Century

“Don’t be afraid, for it is the will of God that you ascend to Heaven and see the secrets, and see wondrous things”

November 12, 2007

Still no design progress – reluctance to meet.

Have no idea what the set might look like – and we start rehearsals in 2 months.

May have a lead on a band – The Creaking Planks. My posting at Hillel House may have paid off!

November 18, 2007

Watching the video of The David Glass Ensemble production of Gormenghast – pools of light, use of space, close vs. distant. Actors do it all.

November 21, 2007

Combine ruined theatre with a shul?

Being drawn back to the idea of synagogue. A Holy place.

Chonen and Leah – final pose – on top – Heaven.

November 26, 2007

Saw set white model – seemed very sterile – only serves the secondary story – doesn’t provide anything to support the core story.

No sense of “between two worlds”

Light/dark

Holy/sinful

This world/the other side

Good/evil

Profane/Divine

Kushner – “The Dybbuk is not a good play – but that’s what makes it a good play. Ansky an ethnographer not a writer”

Evil swirls around – anti-Semitism.

Dybbuk is a rural play – The Golem is more urban

Decision made to reject the “town square” idea and move the action to a synagogue

Instantly ideas begin to flow for staging – images etc.

December 4, 2007

Cost concerns – 3 elevated platforms – no stock scaffolding or risers? Or at least no one knows what is actually in stock

A preliminary ground plan and rough model of new concept – good – very workable. Lots of floor space. Debate wood vs. stone finish.

December 8, 2007

First costume meeting – prepared lots of notes, pictures etc. Very detailed due to the lateness in the process.

Designer at meeting did not present or share any research or sketches.

January 8, 2008

Lighting designer needs to withdraw for personal reasons – gives me back the designer I had wanted in the first place!

January 11, 2008

The set model has not changed since before the Xmas break. No idea of paint treatment, colour, texture etc.

Y. under the impression the set was supposed to represent ALL synagogues – not just one in particular. Where did she get that idea?

Need to replace top arch – too mosque-like.

I am forever being asked “what do I want” – but then I say what I want and am told we couldn’t possibly afford that. Wouldn’t it be better to tell me what we can afford first – and I will match what I want to that?

How does collaboration work??

January 15, 2008

First concrete set meeting – still have no idea if it is even affordable.

On the costume front – nothing has been done.

## The Computer Era

Sunday, January 27, 2008

A triple of theatre going has given me a few thoughts.

Hey Girl – an Italian (or was it Spanish?) import as part of the PuSH festival (does PuSH stand for anything – or is just about :”pushing” the boundaries?). Very imagistic – and largely unintelligible – but had great lighting and loads of smoke. Great image of people in the darkness – a sequence where one of the female actors was “beaten” by a large chorus of men (wielding pillows). They remained in shadow – which is exactly the look I want for parts of Dybbuk – people – the chorus – the people in the Star coats – lurking in the shadows. Not sure if the large/solid set we have will allow for the same depth – but that is the look I want. Shadow and Light.

Dark Rider – Casting of the Magic Bullets – arrived with lots of hype – it had played here before and won loads of awards in Edmonton etc. It was certainly performed with verve – great energy – great physical control – great singing voices. Over all it was a bit hollow – like a well mounted class room exercise – here is a story, here are some songs, here are some poems – now make a play out of it. Had a sort of cobbled together feel to it. But – at one point – the whole show was miked mind you – one of the actors voices was highly distorted – gave a wonderful eerie sound – I think I want that for Leah/Dybbuk. Not quite as amplified (Lord the show was LOUD!) but with that same sense of non-human vrs the human sound.

The Blond, The Brunette and The Vengeful Redhead – really showed what good acting could do. The script is interesting – sort of Rashoman-like – same story from different points of view - with one actor playing all the roles – each one was very different – never veered into cliché (except the young boy, which was probably the weakest). Good lesson for the actors playing multiple Dybbuk roles – how to make each one different – physically, vocally – even if they only appear for a few moment.

The question of where to put the curtain for Nissen’s trial – we need to keep “him” within the magic circle, so the curtain needs to be within the circle. Want a LX effect to show the circle – so where to put it? Do we do the circle first – and then raise the curtain – and how to do that so that the curtain poles – and the people constructing it are not within the circle.

Draw Circle first – LX effect – Curtain raised either in front of or behind the platform and brought into place? How is it secured – holes/brackets in the platform? Still like the idea of a Kabuki drop – certainly magical – but cost? How much material would we need? I know I should ask Yulia but at this point not sure she would bring a good idea to the table.

Great meeting with Maura – and some questions from Aslam – obviously the cast is already thinking about the script which is encouraging.

January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Meeting with Rabbi Lipa Dubrawsky – Lubavitch Rabbi.

He reminds me of what I think Azriel would look like.

He instantly could point out Torah and Talmudic references – he knew exactly which pages to look on.

Joy is a mitzvah.

A body without a soul – is like a limp rag

Angels – souls without bodies

Joy comes through knowledge  
There is no spirituality without knowledge

Men and women never touch

Dance in “ecstasy”

A Dybbuk is a soul not a ghost  
They summon the spirit of Nissen

February 10, 2008

The last few weeks have been fraught with tension and stress – all around the area of design. How is the process supposed to work? What is the meaning of “collaboration” – and can it actually be achieved? Am I so much of a megalomaniac and control freak that it’s actually impossibility? And is that necessarily a bad thing? What about the “vision thing”? If as a director you have a vision/idea/hunch and explain it, enact it, support it with pictures and books and references – and your nominal collaborators don’t seem to want to go along for the ride – or at least not along for the ride with the same enthusiasm – what is the solution – besides the usual fall back of “communication”. I am forever using the analogy of being a guest chef – I have been invited to cook dinner at an established restaurant (based on recipes that I pitched), but when I arrive – the kitchen is run by rules and customs that are a bit strange, or foreign, or just plain wrong. The kitchen staff is highly touted (at least initially) but it soon becomes apparent that there are gaps in their training – especially in the area of “prep”. But hey, I am here to cook my chicken and somehow it has to make it out on to the tables on the specified date at the specified time. Is it my place to fix the kitchen? Retrain the staff? This isn’t a new problem – but it is one that comes up whenever you work as a “guest director” at another theatre. They all have their own culture and “institutional memory” – much of which you are never made privy to. Things that strike you as odd may be the way this kitchen runs – so me being me, I just fuss and stress over it. How enviable it must be to have a group around you who share your same passion for research, for experiment, for getting an early jump on things so that there is ample time to work through both the best and

the worst case scenarios in advance – still leaving enough room for creation and discovery in the rehearsal process.

An example of how the sluggishness of the design process is getting in the way – for the dance of celebration in Act One Scene 2 – when Sender announces the engagement of Leah to Menashe – I will not know until early next week – if then – what the “ensemble” will be wearing. Will we be able to outfit them all in kapotes, hats etc. Or will that number of kapotes be outside the budget – and therefore they will have to appear in their 1940’s regalia. Makes a bit difference to how the actual dance will be choreographed – if they are all from the same time as the characters on stage – then they can be easily integrated. If they are not, then somehow the dance also becomes about a mixing of the two time frames – which tells a different and additional story. This may not be resolved until after we start rehearsals – which is stressing, given that discussions on costumes began in October!

Or maybe I am just too bossy and too controlling to relinquish control? Or maybe it is because unlike so many of my directing gigs, this one is personal. A small variation in the design of a Norm Foster comedy will have a marginal effect. But A Dybbuk is different. Kushner wrote the words but the idea – The Big Idea – is coming out of my fevered brain – and I know we are all supposed to be working together blah blah blah – but this is my BABY! Do I really want anything more than cooing and gushing and general agreement that my baby is the most beautiful baby ever and that if it takes a community to raise a baby, then we will all pitch in, raise the baby? But it damn well better look like the baby I had in mind in the first place.

So, all of this fussing has been a bit (a lot?) of a distraction. Even though I am pretty confident that I am ready to start rehearsals, some days I feel that I have been dragged away from my actual work. Every hour spent online looking for pictures to support a design discussion is time not spent pouring over the script. Or working out choreography. Or baking chocolate pecan pies!

On the very positive front, I am in receipt of seven shofars from Rabbi Baitelman at Richmond Lubavitch. He runs a shofar making workshop, and the ones he left for me at Chabad Vancouver are from some of his classes. They are a bit rough hewn – they have not been polished – but I have tooted them all and they all can make a sound. The roughness I think actually works for the production. Now I just have to figure out who is available to blow them and who the best blowers are. I gather I have 2 trumpeters in the cast so that makes them pretty much a shoe-in. Five more to choose.

February 18, 2008

First day of rehearsal – as stressful as always. The adventure begins. Have I done enough? Do I know enough? Will this all be a terrible mistake?

The candlelit read through was terrific – really set a good mood for things – loved the look of the entire company sitting around tables bathed in the warm light of the candles. Made people focus on their voices – it was too dark to really look at faces etc. You could tell who had done any prep/homework and who were just winging it. Gets a bit annoying after a while. It reminds me of why I don’t like to do first read-throughs. I am not sure how much you gain from it if everyone is



coming at it from a different place of commitment and preparedness. Timing was good – just about 2 hours – and I think that included a 10 minute bathroom break. Even with music and choreography I think we should be able to keep it at the 2 hour mark.

The after-reading chat/presentation went well. Some times I feel like I know what I am talking about. At other times, my lack of biblical scholarship tripped me up. We broke for lunch and came back, with the intention of me talking a bit more about Chasidism and Kabbalah, followed by a second read. Instead it turned into a long question and answer and discussion about things religious – good and evil, reincarnation; the sitra-achra – really detailed questions – many of a theological nature that I can't really answer and am not sure they are all that necessary for the actors know of in that much detail. But its lovely to have the level of interest and curiosity. I think I assumed a level of knowledge about Judaism that does not exist. Maybe because I think I know something about Christianity I thought the cast might return the favor. But the world of A Dybbuk is completely foreign to them. Some have no idea of what a torah is, or what one looks like. They had never seen a shofar before, let alone heard one blown.

I came home pretty exhausted – mentally more than physically. My brain just ached and I had talked too much. The next rehearsal, tomorrow afternoon, where we will just read Act I and start to ask questions and investigate etc, should be much easier (easier? Who am I kidding!). We will be addressing specifics related to the immediate concerns of the play rather than the larger questions of theology and biblical scholarship.

At the end of the day a cast member shared with me a personal family emergency that had just come up – so of course I am between two worlds – concern for the very human drama that this actor is now having to face – and my show business keep going at all cost practical AD brain thinking of what are the possible scenarios that might play out. A change of cast? Rehearsal plans change? It's easy to say "We're not curing cancer, just putting on a play!" But the more shallow part of my thinks "Damn it – could you not have had this family emergency LAST WEEK – or at least after this play has closed?!" Theatre and life – they have a funny way of putting each other into perspective.

February 24, 2008

Real life continues to intrude – this time a maternal health crisis on my home front which had me sitting in Emergency during what would have been Day 2 of rehearsals. Having had my own dealings with the Health Care System over the years I remembered the most valuable lesson – bring a book or something to read. So script in lap, I sat at the gurney-side reading and re-reading the script while nurses and doctors zipped around. Once again, human drama and drama-drama were brought into sharp relief.

I rethought my strategy for table work which, if we had continued in the same fashion as Day One, would have descended into theological quagmires and presented me with a whole round-table of bored faces. I decided that rather than answering the questions, we would just identify them – mine and the casts – which is a method more in line with the "dramaturgical" basis of the question analysis anyway. Just identify the questions, not provide the answers. It was good for me not to feel that I had to answer unknowable points of theology, and feeling like an idiot for not

knowing the answers to “how many souls are there in total?” The cast’s interest in such matters is admirable and encouraging, but I am not sure it is focusing on the real issues at hand, i.e. what is going on in the play itself. It is all very centered on understanding the world of the play – which is invaluable – but it distracts from core questions. Only calling in the most immediately involved cast members also allowed more time for discussion without the feeling that I was wasting people’s time while we debated how many angels could dance on the head of a pin.

I missed watching the film of The Dybbuk with the cast, and the Holocaust documentary Night and Fog, but the talk afterwards was very interesting. I think watching both together was a good idea, especially Night and Fog which left many of the cast a bit shaken. They had never seen Holocaust images like that before and it was unsettling.

Missing a day of rehearsal threw the schedule off a bit, and knowing that a key cast member was going to be missing 2 days at the end of the week called for a change in strategy and approach, or a modified approach. The “read the day before and stage the next” game plan was held to as much as possible with a few adjustment. We will be about 2 days off, but am still hoping to be able to stagger through just about the whole play by the end of the coming week.

I am way better working once actors are up on their feet rather than sitting around the table – which I find hard and a bit tedious. Much of the work I have been doing is more coaching than directing. And ignoring an admonition last year to be less pedagogical has been a good mind-saver. I like teaching – they need to be taught – so why not teach.

A lot of pushing for attention to textual details. The example set out in Hauser and Reich’s Notes on Directing citing the way even a simple text like Mary Had A Little Lamb can be dissected minutely was very inspiring. Much of the cast has found the rehearsals frustrating – they feel like they are “acting”. But as I often point out, that is what we are here to do. This doesn’t mean I am pushing them to be false or untruthful. I am just pushing them to use their craft and their training to lift the text out of the filmic and mundane and get it, and them, to soar into the world of theatre.

Now that we are up and blocking I can feel the creative “juices” flowing – this is the stage I love. It’s like painting with a pretty good idea of what the canvas is going to look like but still experimenting with colors and brush strokes. The cast is gradually getting used to the idea of “playing” – of trying things, of following an instinct to move when it feels right – and letting me arbitrate. I have given a couple of “trust me” pep talks and that are finally taking hold. The actors who have worked with me before already know the game and are grabbing the gift. In some of them though I can still sense the fear of not being “right” the first time and a reluctance to try or dare, thinking that whatever they do on Day 3 of rehearsal is the final product. If there is any difference between working with professionals and students it is the fear factor. Some of the cast were also in Old Goriot and they shared how impressed they were by the level of prep that the pros brought into rehearsal and their willingness to “act” in every rehearsal. Hopefully the Dybbuk process will be just as instructive and inspiring.

Good talks in smaller groups around the table about characters, motivations – and the bigger themes of the play (the promise, faith, Kaddish for a people, the play as Kaddish, the role

of Divinity). Luckily these discussions are being done by a pretty brainy group of young actors and they are bringing some great insights to the table. There is a tendency to see characters in a negative light. Is Sender a bad man, or a good man who made one terrible mistake? Being successful does not necessarily make you a bad man; is Fradde – and in particular a young Fradde – just a bossy boots who is forever nagging, or is she someone who cares deeply for Leah and Sender and only wants the best for her “family”?; how does Henech hope to get his best friend back if the only strategy he employs is to criticize and badger Chonen?

I guess being mean and hard is easier to play than kindness and concern (and faith). And way more fun. The play is a love story, and not just a love story between two people. It is a love story of a community. These are people who care about each other, and a tragedy for one is a tragedy for all.

Have to start on some of the more mechanical aspects, like choreography (double OY), but without some of the music being known that is a bit tough. Lying in bed this morning though I realized the solution to the Engagement Dance in Act I is not dance steps, but patterns – circles within circles – and figuring out how the two “times” can dance together – and whether they even should?

Had a great lighting/projection/set meeting on Thursday after rehearsal – I think we are all on the same page. As always I keep trying to set a tone of accommodation, diplomacy and compromise. Maybe this makes me less of an “artist”, but the chances are I will still get what I want for the production and get it without tears and resentment. Much of the set is built already – and it looks great! Still not sure of the actual paint treatment etc. but the plan is to have it mostly painted by the middle or end of the coming week so there should be plenty of time to make any small adjustments. Tomorrow I plan to drop into the costume shop and see what progress has been made there. It sounds like lots of stuff has been pulled and the work on constructing kapotes has begun.

Slow but very good progress.

Friday, February 29, 2008

Production meeting on Monday, February 25.

Not too much resolved, without set or costume designers in attendance. In general everything seems to be progressing well. The sticking points all come back to a lack of actual designs for certain things like the wedding chuppa and the “ghost” curtain. News of lighting sconces seemed to take everyone by surprise, which is odd since it has been talked about for some time. I guess it never made it onto any drawings or props lists. I find the meetings a bit frustrating. I am used to being able to make decisions fairly quickly and in the absence of the supposed decision makers, making them myself. But I guess protocol must be observed, though it seems to waste a lot of everyone’s time. Ultimately a lot of the decisions just get thrown back to me anyway.

“What do you want?”

“Well, what I want is not to have to make all the decisions!”

Rehearsals are going well. Except for the wedding, the finale and opening, the show is roughly blocked. I am so much better working with actors up on their feet. And happier, too! It feels more creative – and artistic! Most of the blocking I had worked out in advance seems to be holding. Adjustments made with lots of good suggestions from the cast. They are a mix of actors who follow their instincts, who move when it feels right and have a good sense of where to go – and others who just stand and wait to be told every move they should make. The David Glass advice that a director’s job is to figure out how each actor “plays” and try to incorporate that into the total game is once again proving true.

I continue to find the micro-coaching helpful, for me as well as for the actors. I am hoping that once this pattern of working is set, it will become part of the actor homework. I still find that most of the actors fall to anger as their default emotional state – is it easier just to be mad all the time? And so their strategies/tactics/actions tend to fall within a narrow range of nastiness. Why is it so hard to play people who in spite of the terrible things they might do to each other – actually love each other deeply? As in life?

Good work with Shimshin on the “séance” scene. I had another actor shadow him and constantly whisper in his ear as though the voice of Nissen was always pushing him forward and reminding him of his case. The distraction really helped him break out of some habitual vocal patterns and made things sound much more human and less proclaimed. That is also a problem with Azriel, who is doing good work but is also trapped in a vocal pattern and rhythm. How do you get a young actor to play world weary without just sounding like a jaded pouty youngster?

Music rehearsal on Tuesday with Patrick Pennefather was terrific. When the whole gang sets a’ singing it is a glorious sound! Like doing a musical! Kevin (Chonen) has a beautiful voice so his solo in the opening number is great. The Mayer song is not quite what I had imagined – it has a slower tempo – but I really like it. I just have to rethink how it might be staged to go with the slower rhythm. How to get the beggars to dance with Leah and tire her out? One of the melodies Patrick has chosen comes from the stack of sheet music from my grandmother, which is a lovely sentimental touch.

Choreography last night of the “engagement” niggun.

Slow going but it is done. I thought I had it all worked out, but when I came in to try things out before rehearsal I realized that my counts were way off and had to start all over again. The dance is more about patterns than steps – circles and lines and swirls – but still complicated enough to be a challenge. I think it will look pretty good. Having the “chorus” move into place slowly should help bridge the gap between the past and the present. Trying to keep the men and women apart proved too difficult so once the number starts there is a blending of time and genders.

Good adviser meeting. The end of the play still is “a puzzlement” for him (more in staging than in intellectual understanding). It is so rare to be able to run an idea by someone in advance and to hear that maybe the solution I came up with might just add to the confusion. The problem is time. So many things need to happen at the end of the play and there is so little dialogue to cover it

all. I had this idea of the “group” returning in 1940’s garb to finish things off – seeing Leah dead etc; but I think Stephen is right. If I do that, the actual Dybbuk story will not really come to an end. The loose ends won’t be tied up and what could (hopefully) resonate as an emotional finale could get lost in an intellectual figuring out. So, it’s back to the drawing board. I am sure the solution is staring me in the face. It is, as always, probably just a matter of bravery. Of me not being afraid of the script and making it work on my terms.

Our field trip to Beth Tikveh on Tuesday has been postponed. The Rabbi’s sister died suddenly and he has had to leave for the funeral, followed by shiva. Yet again, life has intruded into the theatre and theatre comes in a distant second.

Monday, March 03, 2008

We did a stumble through of the whole play on Sunday and things are looking pretty good. Other than one big musical number (Mayer’s Song and the Dance of the Poor) and the opening and closing moments everything is up on its feet. Most of it has a good shape, though there is lots of tweaking and some rethinking to do. The “engagement” dance seems to go on forever. I will try to stagger the entrance of the chorus and look for a modulation – something to break it up and give it momentum and build. Fradde’s first song also seems long but we are planning to add in Gitl and Bessye at the half way point which should build interest. We also need to look at how Leah reacts to the song. Maybe dressing her will take longer which will make the song less static?

There is a real chasm in the amount of prep and work ethic in the cast. Some are coming in really well prepared. The work they have done and the thought they have given to the play are very evident. But others? Well, you could be forgiven if you thought that the script had not been looked at since the last rehearsal. The trials and tribulations of working with young student actors. Torn between wanting to be the stern disciplinarian and fall back on “in the real world” speeches which always sound lame and even more pretentious than I usually do. The hammer will have to be dropped though. It is very tiring fighting to get their attention.

Yulia brought in the set model. Though not fully painted it was great to finally see it. It gave the cast (and me) a real sense of the size of it. I talked about being inspired by that size, rather than intimidated. If the set is “operatic” then permission is given to act “operatically”.

Have to revisit the idea of “melodrama”. I will go back and look at my LeCoq notes. How does he define it? And what exercises does he suggest to achieve it?

Music rehearsal – Patrick P is bringing in great ideas of song performance. A good collaboration. Things are still a bit unconfirmed about the “band”, which may end up being just an accordion. If that is all we end up with, I would be fine, but maybe it can be augmented with recorded tracks as well?

A few thoughts and ideas from the run –

The Scribe could give the book to the Messenger near the end, after Azriel instructs him to throw the book into the river. That would link up to some action in the opening – showing that that the Messenger returns the book. Maybe it is in a suitcase which he opens, and it is revealed.

Leah/Dybbuk – how much movement should there be? Will too much writhing become distracting or, worse, funny?

Some sort of sound whenever the ghost of Nissen takes over Rabbi Shimshin - some sort of audio cue – or could it be vocal – made by the Ensemble? Or both?

There is a nice balance between movement and stillness which I want to maintain.

At the moment, the wedding is ending with both a comic moment (the chuppah falling on Menashe's head) and Leah throwing herself on the Holy Couples grave and then being carried back to the platform. Will the comedy undo the drama?

Thursday, March 06, 2008

A few days gap.

Went to see the Amorous Adventures of Anatol at the Playhouse, which was only so-so, but interesting to watch and listen to the stillness. Impressed by the actors ability to use the language. Not a word missed. Loads of vocal colour, and much of it delivered without racing around. Very Shaw Festival.

Had a smoke/fog demonstration yesterday. It seems to be OK for actor's lungs! It looks amazingly spooking oozing out from under the platform. And it gives a nice hazy effect to the whole stage, which should help with the feeling of gloom.

Rehearsals are going very well but very slowly. Spending a lot of time going over the text. Not all the actors have taken the cue from the way we have been working with the attention to word detail, understanding the context, coming up with a playable actions – and taking that away to use as their homework. Some very good work being done by the principals, but the “ensemble” for the most part has been a tad....lax. Had to pull one of those dreaded “when you get out into the real world” moments with the company. Trying to stage/work on the scene leading up to the Engagement Dance was really hard. Around the outside of the stage, the Ensemble was happily engaged in talking, gossiping, game playing...anything but paying attention. Directions given to them as a group were only heard by a portion of them so that we had to go back over the same things several times. In the last few days I have had to separate two actors during a notes session. One of the notes was being directed at one of the actors but he was so busy playing some sort of word game on paper with another actor that he didn't even hear that a note was being given to him. And another actor didn't hear that a note was being given to him because he was totally engrossed in checking his email or some such on his laptop. Aargh!

Some good discoveries:

It is much stronger if Sender only recognizes Chonen's voice inside Leah at the moment that he says it. It helps to build the sense of rising dread and realization as the implications of what his actions have led to slowly dawn on him. And yet he still refuses to accept blame. This makes him a much more interesting and pitiful character.

Stillness works very well for the Dybbuk in the exorcism/Act III scenes. A change in stance gives just as much information as does running all around the stage.

Spent an hour working with Azriel going through the sense of all of his long Act III and Act IV speeches. The clarity is coming. I need to keep pushing him to discover other strategies besides just yelling and being angry.

What is it with anger? Why do young actors always fall to that as their default emotion?

Good work with Chonen and Henech. Their relationship is beginning to make sense, and Henech's concern for Chonen is becoming more human and personal and less pedantic and authoritarian.

Feeling the push of time. We only have 3 days left in the rehearsal hall before we move on stage. As much as having the stage will be of great benefit, another week in the DSS would be so helpful. I think I will try and stay onstage as much as possible during the early onstage rehearsals so that I can keep focusing on the details.

Major pieces still to stage: the opening sequence; Mayer's Song and the Dance of the Poor; the final sequence; scene transitions – suitcase moving etc; setting up and striking the Act IV curtain; setting up the chuppa.

Monday, March 10, 2008

Run on Sunday – things are looking pretty good – but it is running LONG! 2.5 hours! We have added half an hour from the read throughs! Some of that is the length of some of the musical numbers. The dances are too long. The songs are too long. Mainly it is a question of actor pace. There are a lot of unnecessary gaps, slow tempos, and late cues. There is still a lack of vocal energy. My focus over the next few days I think will fall mainly to "coaching" Everyone knows what they are talking about. It is just HOW to talk about it.

Made adjustments that have helped – Azriel is less angry all the time; Chonen actually seems filled with a bit of ecstatic joy; the ending has been clarified. I don't have a good sense of the shape of the whole yet. It just seems to plod along.

What's missing is the heart. The drama. The tension. The sense of momentum. The change from the first scene to the last scene. Is that from my lack of prep? Or a misunderstanding of the play in the first place? Or just the usual way a production should be at this stage? No sense of panic yet, but can see there is a lot of work ahead for all of us.

We move on to the stage tomorrow, which will be both good and bad – great for the sense of space, atmosphere etc. – but bad as it is harder to focus on small details in the theatre rather than in the rehearsal hall.

If only I didn't have this lighting design presentation to do I might have gotten a good night's sleep!

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

On stage rehearsal last night. Don and Jim worked like dogs and got the centre platform in place. At the production meeting that seemed doubtful. Hopefully today we will be able to use the upper platforms. It is great having "the world" to play in, though I can see all sorts of challenges ahead. Not least is a sight line problem with the upper deck on stage right. If you are sitting in the house, the outside 4-5 seats in many of the rows can not see that balcony at all. That means they will not see the band – ever. And how will The Messenger be seen when it is most important – Act I closing line? I may have to do some hasty re-blocking.

Worked on the opening sequence. Seeing how close the scrim is to the front of the platform meant that I had to make adjustments. I ended up clearing the stage and putting out a few suitcases, and then started with The Scribe entering alone. The Messenger then produces a suitcase with the book inside. As The Scribe approaches the book, the ghost from the past start to appear – and slowly move into place. I have inserted lines from the stage directions that the Scribe reads as though reading the book. The story is coming to life, since Jews tumble from the pages of books. It has a nice creepy, mysterious feel to it. The "dressing" sequence seems a bit long, but with adjustment it should be fine.

We shortened the Sender rikudl so it feels much better and not like a dinner guest that over-stays their welcome. Made a few adjustments to Mayer's song to make it tighter and give it a better ending. Still have to look at restructuring Fradde's first song. Should it end with music rather than text? And should it also be cut down even more?

We got through all the scene changes/transitions and plotted out setting up the curtain. The chuppa is available so today we will work on setting it up. It is made of great material that looks very tallis-like. The poles might actually be too tall! I will have to see what sort of picture it makes.

The poster came out and it is a thing of beauty! Very evocative and it captures the mood of the play perfectly. The cast is very pleased with it – it makes them very excited. Now that we have a graphic element I can start to send things out to help build even more buzz in the community. I am supposed to be having an email interview with The Independent and plan on pushing how many people in the community have helped already.

This is the scary stage. There is no time left to fully explore, but things are not so set that changes can't be made. The "craft" of the actors' performances will really come into play now that we are out of the Studio. Can they take what they have learned and translate that into theatrical



terms – emotionally and vocally large enough to fill the space? Hopefully not too much whip cracking will be required.

Sunday, March 16, 2008

The last few days have been a whirlwind of activity – most of them not related to A Dybbuk. As we geared up to our performance of Diary of a Madman and all the travel details and fundraising details, I have been very distracted from the tasks looming. Like actually doing work on my thesis and the play. The other distraction is that at the moment I am much happier with my work on Madman than I am with Dybbuk, which is feeling uninspired and not terribly imaginative.

I feel like I am at a roadblock/impasse with the actors. They don't seem to be throwing themselves into the "game" as much as I would like or had hoped. Is that me? Have I not inspired them enough? Have I not been clear enough? Comments today from Herr Adviser and M. Le Vocal Coach all pointed to a lack of clarity. The actors are not engaged with the text and not understanding what they were saying. How much of that is because of the way we rehearsed? Did I ignore too many details with them and with myself? I am seeing that my new found "question analysis" is probably OK for lesser plays like I Ought To Be In Pictures, but it is woefully inadequate for a text as dense and complicated as A Dybbuk. Some actors are doing very good work, but others are very inconsistent. One moment it will seem that something has clicked, but it is fleeting. A scene later, a day later, nothing seems to have stuck. Did I pick the wrong play? Is it beyond me? Have I "Peter Principled" and risen above my level of competence? Maybe a ripping good version of Neil Simon is as good as I get. I don't think I have plotted out the rehearsal plan much differently than large productions I have done at Windsor (and they have had their share of frustrations, God knows). But on this one I seem to be powerless to make things happen. Should I have played more games at the beginning? More "exercises"? Was I wrong to suppose more skill than was actually within my casts grasp? Sigh.

Loads of technical woes already. We have discovered that the sightlines are terrible for the outside audience seats to be able to see the balconies. If you are sitting on the outside of audience left you won't be able to see the band at all. I also think the set looks "flat". The paint treatment lacks texture and the whole thing seems overbuilt. So many things could have been done with scenic paint instead of being built in 3-D. The costumes look great on the rack, but what they will look like on anyone is anyone's guess. No word on when we are doing a payis test.

For the first time I wish we had not moved into the theatre when we did. I am feeling disconnected from things and the distance that the theatre gives also makes me feel more removed from the actors. And of course, pressed for time! Oh for one more week! I would love even a solid three days where we could work through the whole play, stopping and starting whenever things were lagging or the sense was being lost. Maybe we will work tomorrow, run on Tuesday, work on Weds and run again on Thursday. And then tech!!!

Lighting will help. Or at least it had better.

Wednesday, March 19, 2008

Monday's rehearsal was mostly about music. Patrick P. came in, we rolled in a piano and we actually had a music rehearsal, the first one in weeks. Bits of tweaking and adjusting - making songs actually have an ending; compressing Fradde's last song; confirming the details of her first song; setting a tune for the Poor Dance; and a pattern for the opening. I never realized how disciplined good music theatre performers are. Their ability to focus, concentrate and assimilate new steps, lyrics, music is pretty impressive. Well, the good ones anyway. Acting programs could learn a lot by spending a few hours in a high pressure musical rehearsal. The songs are sounding great and my lame choreography is, well, lame - but workable.

At the end of rehearsal, thinking about Brad G.'s vocal note suggestion that the cast all go home and whisper through their text, and sensing that that was pretty unlikely, I decided to run Act 4 whispered AND lit only by the ghost light. It slowed things down a lot, but for the first time in ages, there was actually a play! The story was clear. Vocally the cast were all engaged and made their points. Talking so quietly they HAD to listen, and without volume as their only means of emphasis, they had to rely on using the words themselves by making their meaning clear. I felt very encouraged by that. A suggestion was made that the run through scheduled for the following day also be done in the same way. I checked with all the production people who would be attending (since this run was as much for them as for us) to make sure it was OK. Thankfully they all agreed.

That said – the run last night was terrific. LONG! But terrific! There was a real sense of engagement with the story and each other, and at last a belief in the passion of the story. It was melodrama in the best sense of the word. Azriel did some amazing work last night. For the first time I saw his journey from weariness, to annoyance, to anger, to frustration, to resignation – and when he said he was tired and weary, I believed him. Chonen made some good strides which will help anchor the core love story of the play. The shadows were as interesting as was the light. Now the trick – and hope – will be to hang on to what was learned and not lose it when volume and light gets added back in. Sender still needs some work but watching last night I think I saw the problem. He keeps coming across as guilty (which he is) instead of stubbornly holding to his position of being in the right. It can't be a trial if the defendant already agrees that he has done something wrong. The murderer still loudly protests his innocence even if all the evidence points to his guilt.

Tonight is the arrival of the band! Excited and very nervous. How will it sound? How will it work? Will they show up? How will they be cued? Who will be in charge? Will they have a script? I think, if they are OK with it, I will have them just stay in place, rather than coming and going from the balcony, which would be too distracting. Hopefully they are OK to sit.

The poles to hold up the trial curtain are ENORMOUS and heavy. I was thinking very long dowels but instead we have these massive heavy square constructions. It will take two people to maneuver each one. But it should look mighty impressive once they are up.

Still undecided about the ending. Should we still try to send Leah up to Heaven or not? Hopefully we can actually try it today (or tomorrow before the run) and see if she can make it up

in time. I think I know how to accommodate it, but might have to lose a bit of the image of Sender grieving over Leah's body. He will have to separate himself from her so that she can exit, and we can delay the "chorus" coming in until after she has exited. This should give her enough time to get up to the platform. Since that was my initial instinct for a final image I should stick with it.

Friday, March 21, 2008

Final run through before tech. Still a bit rough around the edges and the energy levels fluctuate wildly. Some actors are attacking the stage, working with all pistons firing. Others still float along. Hopefully the thrill of lights and frocks will spur them along. The séance (Nissen) is still sluggish. Shimshin needs to take hold of the role of "prosecutor" and not get so caught up in feeling sad about the story (a note that has been given many times – by me and the vocal coach – but does not seem to have stuck).

Successfully got Chonen and Leah up on to the central platform! And other than looking a bit like the topping of a wedding cake, it looks very impressive. And it is the best way to end proceedings. Getting up doesn't seem to be a problem. Getting them down for the curtain call may be a bit more...hazardous.

Some great acting moments. Many actors held on to what they learned doing the whispering run through in the dark. Azriel remains very strong. Flashes of strength from Sender, who was much better in the second half than in the first, but I think the road is now at least clear to him. Leah's wedding dress is problematic. She keeps tripping on it whenever she goes up on the bimah, and when she is "possessed", it doesn't make that much sense for her to reach down and lift it up. The train also keeps getting in the way. Other than being made of nice material, I don't really like it that much. It looks way too modern, and the open neck seems way to "sexual" for a good Jewish girl to wear, wealthy family or not.

S. Malloy still has reservations about The Scribe narrative. He says he doesn't really follow it, and now that I am seeing the piece as a whole, I am wondering if it is really necessary. Do we need the "survivor" story? Is the visual element of the costumes and the transformation strong enough? How to resolve this without hurting an actor's feelings? The HR part of the job is often the most difficult.

We took a group picture to be used in the opening projection sequence with all the actors in their 1940's garb holding their suitcases in a low light. A very powerful image. A bit creepy actually.

We shaved time off the run last night. About 10 minutes off the first half, not sure about the second, but I think maybe about the same amount. If we can goose things along we could lose another 5, which would put us closer to the 2 hour running time. We are at 2:16 at the moment.

Set sound levels and had to change or discard some cues. They were not appropriate to the action or not the right length. The mix/blend of live and recorded music will be tricky. Did some experimenting with the effects box and a lav mike. Some very interesting effects – including sounding like you had swallowed helium. Not appropriate, but very funny.

Lighting levels today. I am looking forward to it. Working with a lighting designer whose company I enjoy – and whose artistry I respect – should make the day go smoothly (with maybe a few laughs?). Paper tech at 4 which should make tomorrow's cue to cue go smoothly.

Sunday, March 23, 2008

The paper tech was ENDLESS – almost 4 hours! I even sprang for a pizza for everyone before I keeled over from hunger. There are still a lot of loose ends and not sure Stage Management is really confident in being able to call the show. The Lighting level set went OK – though most of the projections were not really ready to be looked at. We got the whole show into the board though which is really the best goal.

Q2Q day was a bit – no – a LOT – of a nightmare. For the first time in almost 20 years we didn't make it through all the cues (and this includes a much shorter time allotted for a way more complicated show – and a musical! – like Into The Woods). Everything just seemed to take forever. As a result the actors got more and more undisciplined and unfocused as the day progressed. The value of a really top notch Stage Manager was brought in to relief by the situation on this show. I don't feel at all confident. The lighting all looked OK, but very dark. So dark you could barely see faces. I think the designer is caught between wanting to capture the mood of candlelight and the basic need for an audience to see what is going on stage. Today's rehearsal will involve a lot of tweaking and adjusting. This is what comes from doing a level set with no light walker. What may look good on the stage can be woefully inadequate on the actors.

Had a notes session with my adviser. As always, some good questions and helpful suggestions. He expressed concerns over the work of some the actors – saying it was unfocused, lacking a clear intention or action. I agree, but is it because I didn't do a thorough enough job in leading the actors beat by beat through the text? Did I assume a level of ability and homework that was overly optimistic? And if I had taken the amount of time to do that sort of coaching, would we ever have gotten the play up on its feet or would we still be sitting around the table working out each action for each unit? And how much of that is “teaching”? When I work with professional actors, even on difficult texts, much of the analysis is left to them. When I ask a question about what they are “doing” or what they want, they have an answer – either because they are way better bluffers, or they have done the homework. Or is that way of thinking is just part of their second nature of working?

My adviser still has reservations about the “frame” of the story and the enhancement of the Scribe's place in the story. He feels the narration pulls him out of the story and wonders if it is necessary? Since my “concept” is built around this frame I am very reluctant to just discard it. Is it necessary? Not sure.

Had a few thoughts though as I lay in bed this morning (early as always). What might be missing is the “acting” of the framing story. There is no sense of what the book means when it is found. The Scribe's search for the book should be one of rising frustration, with him really, really looking for it, rather than just going through the motions. He needs to be really clear of what finding the book would mean to him. And then of course, the moment of “finding” needs to be

much stronger and have an impact. Seeing the suitcase is one thing, but what does The Scribe think when he opens the case and there is “the book”? Is the book what has sustained him through the war? The hope of its retrieval? And once he finds it, what does it mean to him? If I do keep the narration, then I think the missing question is why does he read it? And who is he reading it to? Who is the audience – his audience? What does he think when he sees the “ghosts” swirling around him? Is he excited to see his friends again? Thrilled to be telling their story? Is this a chance for him to reconnect with his past? All the narration is a bit neutral at the moment – dispassionate and lacking a focus.

The other moment that needs to be beefed up is his decision to disobey the Rabbi and place the book into the suitcase that the Messenger is holding for him. Why does he make this decision – and in a play about decisions and choices? This is a moment that needs to be strengthened.

The most dispiriting part of my chat with my Adviser was his sharing with me that in talking with some of the actors they confessed to being afraid of me! They found me intimidating – and they felt that no matter what they did they couldn’t please me. They think of me as “an intellectual”. All of this was quite devastating! I have worked so hard – or thought that I had – to create a good atmosphere in rehearsals with loads of laughter, a fairly loose discipline, a hope that trying things was OK and encouraged. So how much of this is me and how much is them? As is usual I took the full blame myself and spent the rest of the day questioning everything about myself as a director. Is my role to say yes to everything? Am I not supposed to keep pressing actors to find the truth? To try different approaches? To not settle for the first attempt? There does seem to be an overall reluctance on the part of the cast to push themselves past a first draft. Is that generational? A factor of this particular school? And how am I supposed to deal with an actor – a student actor – who, in spite of being given the same notes over and over, not only by me but by the vocal coach, still can not (or will not) move out of old habits and familiar patterns to actually invest themselves in the work?

It is very odd being in this position, but I think some of it is from being somewhere between a teacher, a director and a student as well. I know there has been friction during various Windsor productions, but I seemed much more able to push actors to keep working and exploring – without really doing any more “teaching” in rehearsal than I am doing on this project. Does the sword of “marks” hanging over their heads make them at least make the effort? I know my job as director is to lead actors towards the truth, towards an understanding of the play and their role within it. But what do you do when what I am asking for is beyond their training or ability? How much pressure can I put on someone if they are trying their best (but are they?) but just can’t deliver the goods? Can I get angry at a non BFA actor who just doesn’t have the background or skills to give much more than he is giving at the moment? If there is an actor who has made it through his training and some of his habits are well known to the faculty but remain unchallenged, is it my role to try and “fix” that? Or fix it to the way I think things need to be done? Is the type of acting I am pushing for a thing of the past (someone described it as “flamboyant”)? Is the nature of would-be theatre actors now completely at odds with my vision of what acting in the theatre can and should be? Does the idea of “play” mean anything to actors who are still at the stage of being overwhelmed by concepts like actions and objective? Am I completely incapable? Have I Peter Principled and taken on a project that is completely beyond my level of competence? Is Norm

Foster about the maximum I am capable of? Hopefully today will go better and I will feel a bit more confident.

And of course – I HATE the wedding dress! It looks shapeless, formless and frumpy – there is no definition to it. And it doesn't fit. And it is getting the way of the actor. And it does not look like the dress that a “good Jewish girl from a good family” would wear. The open neck is far too sexual for a conservative society. When you have a world where the men run and hide when a woman enters the shul, would a young girl ever choose, let alone be allowed, to wear such a provocative dress?. The throw back rational is that is an exact copy of a dress seen in the Holocaust Museum at the JCC, which may be, but no one has ever seen a picture of it so I have no idea of the context. Whose dress was it? What country was it from? Urban or rural? Because of its construction there is no good place to hide the mike pack, which is leading to all sorts of troubles. I guess this is the result of not seeing renderings in good time and not demanding research materials to back up choices.

Tuesday, March 25, 2008

The tech dress on Monday was not too bad. The Battlons dropped back in energy and focus, so the play got off to a slow start. Not as slow or de-energized as it was but it still lacked the pep of the last run on Sunday. The rest of the cast was able to hang on to what they learned and the performances were pretty consistent.

Not sure the “concept” is working. Or clear. Or working and clear for anyone but me. My adviser continues to express strong reservations about the Scribe's role as story teller and whether it is needed or not, and if it adds an extra layer of story that gets in the way. I have simplified some of The Scribe's journey making his discovery of the book a bigger event for him so that it means something that he has re-found it. Will anyone know that he is a survivor and the others are not? Probably not – what could we have done to make that clearer? Have him in partial concentration camp garb? Maybe just the pants or a shirt showing under his jacket? Give him a buzz cut when everyone else still has their hair? Can anyone tell that he doesn't have a star on his coat? Still want to keep the idea. I guess whether it worked is a topic for a discussion, and maybe a better topic of discussion to have with someone seeing the play with no previous knowledge or expectations.

Over all the production looks good. It has a wonderful sepia toned feel to it visually, like looking at an old photograph, and definitely photographs taken in low light. I am not totally satisfied with things, but short of having major fits and yelling and demanding that people come in and work and work and work....including me – I think it has reached it's the point of opening night. It will continue to develop and grow as the actors get more comfortable with it.

Saturday, March 29, 2008

A few days after opening night which, like many opening nights, was neither the best nor the worst performance. It looks great. The lighting captures the mood of a tale told by candlelight and now that Leah's wedding dress has been adjusted, the costumes work beautifully. A great unified, almost timeless feeling to them. Sometimes 1940's, sometimes older. Great subdued palette of tones and textures.

Questions at intermission from a family member – “what’s with the Holocaust stuff?” They thought it was great and interesting but weren’t sure what it meant. I told them to wait for the last act, for The Scribes magical writing to appear. A later email me assured me that once all the pieces were in place the big picture made sense.

But does the other story – of The Scribe, finding the book and surviving the Holocaust read? I am not sure. I don’t think so. I think it was an intellectual idea that I didn’t find a way to flesh out adequately in a visual sense. There was not a strong enough way of identifying him. Maybe he should have had the vestiges of a concentration camp uniform showing under his coat to better tell the story. Did I really need an additional frame? Even if it was only clear to me, it helped to provide a context. For an audience completely unfamiliar with the story and the traditions and the exotic rituals, maybe any little clues were helpful even if it was just to tell the audience where things were happening since the set never changes throughout the action.

Still plagued with sloppy stage management. Cues not called or called at the wrong time. Maybe no one notices but me and the poor cast members who find themselves stranded on stage waiting for a blast of music that never appears. It would be nice to have one clean show where everything on the production side went smoothly and correctly and ALL the actors managed to keep their energy up and alive. The core of the play is still very strong which is where the strongest actors are. The play still does not get off to a strong enough start. The Battlons are a bit hit and miss whether they will be able to find the vocal and actor energy needed to move things forward. Discussions about stakes, actions, intentions etc. don’t quite seem to land. Perhaps “louder, faster, funnier” is the way to go.

The beggars are spilling into caricature. I am not sure how some of them decided that all beggars are drunks. I have to remind them that they really want and need the money so that their pleas will have some impact.

The Creaking Planks are great. I am so glad I stuck to my guns and pushed for live music. The fact that they stay in place is actually working out to be a visual blessing. They are like silent watchers of all the action. If only some of the cast could mirror their discipline!

### Sunday, March 30, 2008

While sitting in last night’s performance – which was actually pretty good and much more energized than the night before – I started to think about the “breakthroughs” in rehearsal.

In no particular order:

Keeping “the dybbuk” still. After several rehearsals with much thrashing and gnashing, we finally arrived at a much more “still” idea of possession which much aided by comments from the vocal coach. With all the physical explosions, it was seeming more that the Dybbuk wanted to get out of the Leah’s body rather than fighting desperately to stay in. As a result the text became much clearer and easier to listen to. This demanded much more vocal technique from the actor – and luckily she was up to the challenge.

The Messenger. The image of “a guy in a trench coat, smoking a cigarette” – sort of like a Tom Waits character/film noir detective – made a huge difference. It had been very hard to establish some sort of human identity for a character that is nominally supernatural (and holy). Once this new character image was discussed – and absorbed – the character of the Messenger became much more “real” and at the same time more cryptic. Once we got him a longer coat, so he looked less like Dick Tracey, and more like a man you might see smoking a cigarette in a pool of street light, the effect was more complete. Was it understandable to anyone but us? Maybe not – but certainly more intriguing. It was interesting to hear that some audience members first thought he was the Devil – reflecting, perhaps a more Christian idea of the constancy of temptation. But as the play moved forward his Divine connections became more apparent.

The Scribe. The simple idea that when he recites “the poem” that he has actually read it already and is just repeating it back to Rabbi Azriel. Up until that point the reading always sounded stilted and lacked any sort of resonance – too much of an actor “acting” reading. Now it actually means something, to The Scribe, to Azriel, to the audience. There was a wonderful little moment of Azriel looking to the Messenger for confirmation of the prediction. A simple nod of the head tells him that “what must be....will be”.

Sender. Playing to WIN rather than playing defeat – and not taking his words at face value. Just because a character says he is miserable is it always right to believe him? Or at least – to think he is miserable about what we first think is making him so unhappy? A great moment of revelation – in the “trial” – having Sender only then recognizing Chonen’s voice gave the actor a new “journey” – a realization. Just when he thought that this might be a fairly straight forward problem to fix, things become extremely complicated and the realization of what his actions have led to the more devastated. And yet, in spite of that, he still fights to cover his butt and deny blame.

Chana Esther. Making her poor rather than rich and cheap made the actor’s journey much easier – she only pays a ruble because that is all she can afford. In her desperation she is going to every synagogue in town – paying a ruble at a time, to try and save her daughter.

The Battlons. Bringing them to life! Finding a sense of fun in their opening debates – having them argue about their favorite foods – and arguing to win but still remaining friends was helpful. Giving them the idea that if they left any unnecessary pauses this would allow one of the other Battalion to jump in and take over the argument helped to move them forward.

One broad character stroke. When the actor playing “the very old, very poor woman” made some bold – and broad – character choices, it gave permission to other actors to actually make a stab at playing “characters”. Finally we started to have the population of a whole town on stage – not just the same few people appearing in different coats.

Pulling the Scribe away from the Messenger. While the idea of linking them was a good one, it ultimately proved distracting and unnecessary.

Music. Underscoring. I love it. It was used sparingly, but feedback from the actors was that it really helped them. And it sure helped fill the space of the theatre.



Keeping the chandelier in place. I am not sure why there was so much design confusion about locations. I thought it was very clear that we never really left the synagogue and that the “ghosts” told the story where they were. It was never my intention to magically transform the stage into its various locations. I think this is why the narration of *The Scribe* actually helped. The play is so exotic and so foreign to most audiences; it was helpful to at least tell the audience where things were happening. And since Kushner is such a big Brecht fan, I think it falls within his world.

Monday, April 07, 2008

All over but the shouting. Or more accurately – the writing.

I saw most of the performances, or at least an act or two. Much of my energy seemed to go into baking for Brno and trying to get some paper work done. Had a pretty good familial turn out – 2 of the aunts, 3 of the cousins, a few friends from the “old days” and of course my mother – who delivered her verdict at intermission - “Well, we could have skipped that – it wasn’t very good”. Lord love the demented. Not quite the “there were a lot of tall girls in that play” verdict on Oliver!

We never did manage to get a “clean” show. Never once were all the cues called at the correct time or sound cues played at the correct level. Closing night had a particularly spectacular light show right off the top. Instead of establishing a lovely mood of gloom and foreboding as the scrim flew out, we were treated to display of lighting cues going up and down in rapid succession. Picturesque, but bloody annoying. And someone thought it was OK to shorten a sound cue (a pivotal ringing of a clock chime at the stroke of midnight) so that instead the “witching hour” was reduced to more like a call for dinner with only 6-7 chimes. When I asked to have it restored I was told that the rest of the cue had been erased and that was that.

The Battlons continued to be inconsistent. Sometimes it got things off to a good rousing start and other times it dragged and was so low in energy that the first Act could barely take off. Even a wailing Chana Esther couldn’t kick-start the proceedings. The core of the play stayed strong – the Leah/Dybbuk story, Sender, Fradde and the two Rabbis (though Shimshin continued to wallow in his woe taking progressively longer and longer to recover from each fit of possession). The Beggars continued to occasionally descend into the worst Coarse Acting excesses. They needed to be reminded that at no time was it discussed that the Beggars should be a) drunk or b) suffering from some sort of severe mental disability.

You could always tell when there were Jews in the audience. Little laughs of recognition (“The Talmud is cold and bleak...”). And I think, in spite of the in-program glossary they were the only ones who understood any reference to Moshiach. The other thing that I found interesting was that they accepted – and followed – the Holocaust imagery without any problem and thought it added so much to the production. The resonance of the Scribes reading the magical writing in the Rabbi’s book made complete sense. The sense of loss was very real and immediate. And that reaction seemed to cut across generations. Old and young had the same reaction.

The critical response was a bit tepid, though most had better things to say about the production than the play. Criticism aimed at Kushner was more in reference to Ansky – Kushner’s “dialectic” additions are actually quite minimal. Most of the long theological debates and references to texts and rituals are directly from Ansky. And I think my program notes introduction set things up as an easy target. “Why do this play?” I asked. The critical response seemed to be “why indeed”, equating the long gap between the premier of the Kushner version and our production with a lack of quality of the play, ignoring the fact that the main reason any version of The Dybbuk is rarely performed is because of the huge size of the cast. Reminder note to self – don’t assume the public has a sense of humour.

## Chapter 4 – Reflection

### Research and Analysis

It has been a long time since I have had the chance to delve so deeply into the world of a play – its history, its background, an immersion in another time and another place. Probably the last time I got to do this was directing Stephen Jeffrey's The Libertine in 1999. A Norm Foster comedy doesn't usually require that much research. And the joy of reading! I had forgotten what that was like! There was so much to learn. My Judaic knowledge seemed so limited. Where to begin? How much would I need to know? How much would the actors need to know?

I had decided to use a "Question Analysis" as the core of my script dissection. It is a method with roots in Dramaturgy. Ultimately it proved less helpful than I had hoped. It is a method more attuned to the structure of new plays – to finding out what works and what doesn't - to identify plot points and character inconsistencies. It is good for structure and big questions of plot clarity, but most of those questions, in a successful play that has already been produced, have already been answered and are there in the text. What it doesn't address is the moment to moment minutiae of the play. Beat by beat, action by action. I ignored my own admonition to actors that the devil is in the details. Doing an "action analysis" of the text, if nothing else, forces me to confront every line and word of the play. The Question Analysis left me with too many "actor" questions that I found I couldn't always answer or had to scramble to think of something. It was a good experiment. Question analysis works best to discover what is NOT there, not what IS.

What I learned was it is always best to return to the basics – actions and/or objectives. I regret not doing a Backwards/Forwards analysis, which is the one analytical tool I never really used whole hog on a project over the last two years.

### Design and Collaboration

While the final production was really beautiful, the journey to get there was difficult. The process of "collaboration" never seemed to come together as I had hoped. Where I wanted to be able to sit with my designers and exchange ideas and pictures and work through the play visually – none of that happened. All of the research on set and costumes was pretty much done by me. I never had a meeting where I was shown a book of photos, or even some sketches of what was going through the designer's minds and imaginations. Where I thought starting early and being able to lob ideas back and forth would be a good thing, it seemed the designers felt it was a pressure to come up with things long before they wanted to. And in the end, I started rehearsals without fully knowing what the production was going to look like. Operating on faith is fine with people you have worked with before and know that they will deliver "the goods" in the end.

It's one of the topics that has come up many times over my two years in the program. How to make that collaboration work? Is there a template? I keep coming back to my train travel analogy. I started out on the train, I thought, with everyone on board for the journey. What I didn't know was that the others on the train had taken a break at an early station and not jumped back on as the train was pulling out. As a result, I was miles down the track while they were miles back.

And a train is a very large thing to turn around or back up. I couldn't – or didn't want to – put on the breaks. A meeting would be held and the next one not schedule for one or even two weeks later. Well, the train keeps moving during those two weeks, so whatever we may have discussed in the earlier meeting may not still hold true when the follow up meeting finally happens. There wasn't a sense of immediacy to the process which I found very frustrating. How much blind faith is a director supposed to be asked for? Can actors do virtually nothing in rehearsal and is the director supposed to trust that “it will be there on the night”?

### Rehearsal

Table work with a large cast – with a large part of the cast having less to do – can be counterproductive. Boredom can set in very quickly, and it did. After a couple of days of calling the whole company in to sit around the table, I started to call in only to core actors in a particular scene. If nothing else it took the pressure off me to try and keep the entire company engaged. It also made discussion much easier and more focused.

I found it interesting the level of theological question that some of the cast had. Issues that had never occurred to me as being crucial sometime ground a rehearsal to a halt. “How many souls are there?” etc. For all my reading and research I felt woefully unprepared to answer some of their questions. And I was amazed at how little most of the cast knew of even the most basic – to me – tenets of Judaism. I supposed because I have a smattering of knowledge of Christian theology and ritual that that knowledge might be reciprocated. Sadly – no.

As is usually the pattern with me as a director, I was much happier once we started to get the play up on its feet. It was also when many of the unanswered questions from my analysis started to be resolved. This was quite late in the process but it was only when the actors started to relate to each other and to talk to each other, and I could experiment with physical relationships that I began to clarify things. Would a different method of preparation have helped this? Hard to say. In my last few years of directing I have found that a more physical and active approach gets my imagination going much more than sitting around the table.

The last part of the rehearsal process was probably the most fruitful and satisfying. It was a long time in coming but the actors finally began to actually “play the play”. I am not sure if they were afraid of the material (or afraid of me) but it took along time, and longer than it usually does when I work with a student cast, to establish the idea of “playing” in rehearsal. To try things. To experiment. To dare to fail. God knows I made loads of detours and changes as we went along as new things would occur to me, or I would have a brain storm.

Because of the shortness of the time, or my bad planning, not enough of the rehearsals were spent on character exploration. A really short Laban review was helpful, but there wasn't the time to fully explore how it could be used to help develop characters. Some actors got so caught up in a particular effort action that their actual acting was impeded. I think the length and depth of the script made me nervous about using time away from the actual nuts and bolts of a straight forward rehearsal. As a result I think I missed out on an opportunity for real exploration, over and above dealing with the script.

I had made some decision based on “trying to make things easier” for everyone, rather than pushing for some great artistic “vision”. The best example of that was the final image of Leah and Chonen elevated above the stage for the final moments. It is the look always wanted but then ladders and pulleys on dresses and glow tape and seemingly everything else, conspired to make me think I needed to come up with a more “do-able” solution. In the end the urging of the actress playing Leah to at least let her try to make the fast journey from stage to platform before making the final decision prevailed, and I ended up with the final tableaux I always wanted. But, as noted in my thoughts about the design process, I had no way of knowing what was actually involved until very late in the rehearsals. It was only a day or two before tech that we were actually able to attempt the move. I guess the message is to have faith. I think I have spent so much time working in such a crunch-time rehearsal world that I had forgotten that it is alright to leave decisions alone for a while.

We were about week short of rehearsal for a play of this size and for actors at this level of experience. There were so many facets to cover over and above just exploring the text and blocking the scenes. Choreography. Music rehearsals. Shofar lessons and rehearsals. It was like doing a musical without all the resources and time for a musical. The melodies etc. were very late in coming in and the actual music rehearsals for the bulk of the process quite limited. Fradde’s last song was not brought in until after we had moved into the theatre, which I know made the actor very nervous. And I was reminded of the focus and dedication to detail of good music theatre performers, and their ability to maintain that focus during a long rehearsal.

### Performance

The big question –“Did the “frame” work?” It depends on who you ask, though no one has said it was terrible or a distraction. Jewish audiences put the pieces together very quickly and thought it added an amazing layer of poignancy to the story. Many found the vision of the ghosts always watching the story unfold unsettling.

I thought the cast did a wonderful job, if an inconsistent job. Some performances were very solid and only grew through the run of the play. Others were more hit and miss. Some days the energy was good. Others days, it was very scattered and unfocused. Over all though I thought it worked very well. It told a good story, presenting some thought provoking moments and educating people about a way of life they may have never seen before. Sitting in the audience, especially in Act IV I realized how exotic all of this must seem to a non-Jewish audience. But even a Jewish audience was surprised by things. Many did not know the religion actually included exorcisms.

I am glad I stuck to my guns and pushed for a live band. The Creaking Planks were amazing, sitting like a ghostly presence above the action, and more than willing to jump in and provide various effects and noises as required.

The production looked beautiful. The lighting captured the sense of light and shadow and gave a real sense of being lit only by candles.

Other than one patron (and mother of a cast member) who declared, inexplicably, that the play was “anti-Semitic”, the reaction was very favorable. Negative comments in the press seemed

to focus on the play more than the production, and “blame” assigned to Kushner, though very few of the words in the play are actually his. It is almost all Ansky.

The merging of the two worlds - the 19<sup>th</sup> Century world of Brinnitz and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century world of the Holocaust, worked well. With more time, I might have integrated the two time periods even more, but I think the end result was an effective way of serving both Ansky and Kushner’s vision of the story of The/A Dybbuk.

## Appendix A

### A Dybbuk Glossary

5408	45	1648 CE (Note is Jewish tradition - BC and AD are referred to by BCE - Before the Common Era, and CE - Common Era
36 Just Men	47	lamed vavniks - minimal number of anonymous righteous me, privileged to see the Divine Presence - the world exists on their merit; Hidden saints; unknown by others, one may be the Messiah; hidden by their humble nature and vocation
acolytes	13	One who assists the celebrant in the performance of liturgical rites.2. a devoted follower or attendant
Aher	24	The Talmud has a section in which it claims that Elisha ben Abuyah, also called Aher ("another", as he was an apostate), entered Paradise and saw Metatron sitting down (an action that in heaven is permissible only to God Himself).
Akiba	24	Akiba or Akiva - 50-135 BCE, scholar, teacher martyr, tortured to death by the Romans
amulet	59	pieces of paper or metal with inscriptions to ward off evil spirits - worn close to the body, may be illustrated, star of david, menorah, the hand, kabbalistic numerology
anathema	70	object of loathing: somebody or something that is greatly disliked or detested and is therefore shunned; 2. religion somebody or something formally denounced: somebody or something cursed, denounced, or excommunicated by a religious authority; 3. general curse: a forceful curse or denunciation; a ban or curse solemnly pronounced by ecclesiastical authority and accompanied by excommunication b : the denunciation of something as accursed c : a vigorous denunciation
anathematize	99	ban, curse
Angel Abraham	43	the story is a legend - made up about the son of the great Maggid - who was Called Abraham the Angel - because of his piety etc.
Angel of Light	13	one of the seven chief angels
apocryphal	11	not true: probably not true, but widely believed to be true
Assyrians	12	ancient civilization - conquered Judea
avinu malchenu	52	Our Father Our King
Azzai	24	Simeon ben Azzai or simply Ben Azzai. was a distinguished Rabbinic Sage of the first third of the 2nd century. Student of Akiva/Akiba

Baal Shem Tov	24	Rabbi Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer, August 27, 1698 – May 22, 1760) is considered to be the founder of Hasidic Judaism. Name means "Master of the Good Name" He was born in Okopy, small village that over the centuries has been part of Poland, Russia, Galicia and is now part of Ukraine. He died in Medzhybizh, which had once been part of Lithuania, then Turkey, Poland and Russia, and is now in Ukraine. Known by the acronym BESHT
Babylonians	12	Ancient civilization - Babylon is where Baghdad is today; conquered Judea, sent the people into exile, during the Babylonian exile the Talmud was written
batlon	11	idler; someone who made their living by accepting donations in order to pray on behalf of others
beadle	10	caretaker of synagogue: an official who acts as caretaker of a synagogue and oversees the running of the service
Belshazar	38	in the Bible, a King of Babylon in the sixth century bc whose death is foretold in an inscription that mysteriously appears on the wall of his palace during a feast (Daniel 5)
bet gimmel dalet chey yud, tet	49	Hebrew letters
bimah	10	platform in synagogue for scripture readings: in a synagogue, the raised platform where the scriptures are read; also means "stage"
Book of Raziel	31	collection of mystical, cosmological and magical hebrew works; a handbook of magic; 1st printed in Amsterdam in 1701; Traditionally, the Angel Raziel overheard God by hiding behind the Divine Curtains, and wrote down God's true intentions and meanings; he revealed the secrets of creation to Adam 3 days after the expulsion from Eden;
boruch dayan ha-emes	106	Traditionally said as soon as someone dies - Blessed be the God of Truth
Brinnitz	22	Town in Poland
b'tsalmoy uchdmesoy	83	In His image - a passage from Genesis
buckwheat	16	A triangular seed that can be ground into flour. Use: cereal foods, animal fodder.
buffle fish	47	A type of mullet
Chasid	17	A follower of Chasidism
chelmo tovo chozze	85	I have dreamed a good dream -
chelmo tovo chozesoy	85	You have dreamed a good dream - if a person has a strange or trouble dream, he gathers 3 friends - asks the first as a question, the second is the groups response
Cheroszchev	64	town in Poland



Chmielnitski	45	Also spelled Khmelnytsky Uprising (also Chmielnicki Uprising or Khmelnytsky/Chmielnicki Rebellion) refers to a rebellion in the lands of present-day Ukraine which raged from 1648-1654. Under the command of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Cossacks fought several battles against the armies and disorganized militia of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and eradicated the control of the Polish nobility, Roman Catholic priests and their Jewish intermediaries in the area. Estimates of Jews killed in the uprising - 100,000 or more,
codex	88	a manuscript book especially of Scripture, classics, or ancient annals
commentaries	23	commentaries on the Torah - Talmud - Mishnah, Gemmara; etc.
credulous	65	<b>gullible:</b> too easily convinced that something is true
day of judgement and awe	69	Rosh Hoshana - trial before god - when you are judged by God - it is decided if you will be inscribed in the Book of Life for another year
Divine fire	83	as in the Burning Bush - Moses
El -chonen	15	from Chonen - El = from
Elijah	47	9th Century BCE biblical prophet; vigorously fought for monotheism; taken up to heaven in a Chariot of Fire ; is said that Elijah will herald the coming of the Messiah
emes	20	Hebrew - truth - old fashioned pronunciation
epiphany	12	1. sudden realization: a sudden intuitive leap of understanding, especially through an ordinary but striking occurrence; 2. appearance of god: the supposed manifestation of a divine being
excommunication	73	an ecclesiastical censure depriving a person of the rights of church membership- has not been performed in Judaic traditions since Spinoza in the 17 <sup>th</sup> Century
excoriate	106	<b>denounce:</b> to severely criticize somebody or something
exegesis	58	<b>analysis of texts:</b> the explanation or interpretation of texts, especially religious writings; <b>interpretation of specific text:</b> an explanation or interpretation of a specific text, especially a religious one
fissure	42	<b>crack:</b> a long narrow crack or opening, especially in rock; <b>schism in group:</b> a division into factions of a group or political party
The Four Rabbis	24	A Talmudic Story - these Rabbis are also featured in the Passover Haggadah – the books containing service conducted before the Passover meal
Gabbe	67	rabbi's secretary
Gabriel	97	Angel - Angel of Severity
God's other angels, the fallen ones	37	Angels who rebelled against God; taught man to use weapons and about immorality - from Genesis

Golem	14	Magical clay figure: in Jewish legend, an imaginary being made of clay and brought to life by magical incantations. The most famous was made by Rabbi Loew in the 16th century to defend the Jews of Prague from a pogrom.
Groschen	45	coin - German - but used in other Central European countries
heyeh asher tehyeh, heheyeyh baruch ba'asher tihyeh	91	slight corruption of a quotation for Genesis - I am what I am; let us bless what will be
Holiest of Holies	26	the holiest spot within the temple; only the High Priest could enter - where God would reveal Himself
impregnation	71	permeate something with quality: to permeate something with a particular aura or tone, or make something contain a particular quality
itinerant	47	traveling on job: traveling from place to place, especially to find work or as part of your work
Kabbalah		Jewish mysticism; It refers to a set of esoteric teachings and mystical practices that form an additional level within traditional Jewish interpretations of the Bible and religious observances While other terms have been used in many religious documents from the 2nd century AD up to the present day, the term Kabbalah has become the main descriptive of Jewish esoteric knowledge and practices.
Kaddish	100	a prayer of blessing; the Mourners Kaddish - said to commemorate someone who has died -the final prayer of most services; said daily for one year after a person dies, then once a year on the anniversary of their death; written in Aramaic
Kerubim	97	cherubim - winged celestial creatures - like angels
Klimkove	33	town in Poland
kopek	45	coin – Russian
korva	48	whore (Yiddish)
Krakow	63	Polish city - old capital
Krasne	15	town in Poland
kvass	20	fermented alcoholic drink: an alcoholic drink similar to beer, made in Russia and eastern European countries from rye or barley or from stale bread
lamed vovniks	47	36 just men; lamed = 30, vov = 6
leagues away	14	units of distance from about 2.4 to 4.6 statute miles (3.9 to 7.4 kilometers)
Levites	12	descendants of Aaron - the priestly class
Litvak	15	from Lithuania
Lord of the Salt Pits	98	a reference to God - God of Everything - even that which is negative - Salt Pits may also refer to Sodom and Gemorrah

maariv	67	evening service
Maccabees	102	Heroes of the story of Chanukah. A Jewish national liberation movement that fought for and won independence from Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Hellenistic Seleucid dynasty, who was succeeded by his infant son Antiochus V Eupator. The Maccabees founded the Hasmonean royal dynasty and established Jewish independence in the Land of Israel for about one hundred years, from 164 BCE to 63 BCE.
machshovve zorre	83	strange thoughts
Maggid	39	an itinerant preacher, skilled as a narrator of stories; the early maggidim (Hebrew – plural) based their preaching on questions addressed to them by the multitude
Maggid of Koznitz	39	Great Rabbi
matriarchs	19	There are four important women mentioned in the Book of Genesis of the Hebrew Bible, the wives of the Biblical Patriarchs. They are Sarah, wife of Abraham; Rebecca, wife of Isaac; and Leah and Rachel, the wives of Jacob. They are considered to be the ancestral "mothers" of the ancient Children of Israel as well as of the Jewish people. <sup>1</sup>
men are from earth, women from bone	13	Adam was created from earth, and Eve created from one of Adam's ribs - Genesis
Metatron	97	is the name of an angel in Judaism and some branches of Christianity. There are no references to him in the Jewish Tanakh (Old Testament) or the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). Metatron does appear in later post-scriptural Islamic esoteric and occult sources. There is no consensus as to his genesis or the role that he plays in the hierarchy of Heaven and Hell.
Michael	97	an Angel – Archangel – the Angel of Compassion
mikveh	9	ritual bath – for cleansing and purification / full immersion
min ha-hizonim	92	from the other side/ from outside
Minsk	64	is the capital and largest city in Belarus; both Minsk and Pinsk were subject to ridicule
minyan	19	Group of ten men - needed for prayer - quorum
Mirapol	63	town in Poland;
Mitzrayim	12	Egypt (Hebrew)
Moshiach	17	the Messiah - Anointed One - a descendant of the house of David - will herald a time of peace, restore Israel

moshiach squats outside the gates of babylon	47	Talmudic story - a man is promised that the Messiah will come - he waits and waits - and then asks Elijah where he is - Elijah answers - why don't you ask him - he has been here all along - dressed as a beggar outside the gates
ner tomid	19	eternal light - hangs over the Ark/Torahs
niggun	41	A tune or melody - a wordless melody - devotional
n'vakeysh et nitzotzot hanefesh matzitey m'orey ha'esh. Nhaley et nishmat kol chay unvarech al miney b'samim	89	slightly invented prayer - fragments of other prayers - rebuild the spark of the soul/the souls of all things/smell of spices (taken from Havdalah service)
n'vareych et eyen hachayim m'kor havchanah! Nizkey no l'havin ulhaskil, lishomo'a, limod ul'lameyd, lishmor v'la'asot ulkayeym divrey torah b'ahavah	90	slightly invented prayer - fragments of other prayers - praise the well spring of life; praise to be understood/to hear the good work of the Torah
obdurate	97	stubborn: not easily persuaded or influenced; 2. hard-hearted: not influenced by emotions, especially not inclined to feel sympathy or pity
offering of the first dough	41	commemorates the offering of the first harvest in the temple - a portion of dough - challah - is separated and burned in the oven
one of the just Phoenicians phylacteries	16	36 Just Men
	12	ancient civilization
	90	See teffilin
pinska	48	prostitute; loose woman – Yiddish or Polish
pogrom	45	organized killing of minority: a planned campaign of persecution or extermination sanctioned by a government and directed against an ethnic group, especially against the Jews in Tsarist Russia
Polisia	14	an area of Poland, that was once part of Ukraine or Lithuania
pomegranates	27	round red fruit: a round reddish fruit with a tough rind enclosing numerous seeds within a tart juicy red pulp
Rabbi Meir/Beruria	58	Talmudic Rabbi - whose wife was one of the few female teachers/scholars of Talmud
Rabbi of Mirapol	17	A Great Tzaddik

Rabbinical Court	38	From the Hebrew Beth Din - House of Judgment - derived from the San Hederin – the biblical court – had power over religious matters
Rabbinical judge	87	a rabbi whose duties involve resolving religious issues with reference to Torah and Talmud
Raphael	97	Angel – Angel of Curing Illness
Reb David of Talna	12	Great Rabbi
Reb Israel of Richin	12	"
Reb Shmuel of Kaminka	12	"
rebbetzin	29	a rabbi's wife
rikudl	39	rikud - a dance
ru'ah tezazit, me ru'ah ra'ah	97	Leave spirit/evil spirit - ru'ah - spirit (ruach?)
ruble	19	coin - Russian/ also used in Ukraine
salamanders	23	small animal resembling lizard; mythical reptile living in fire: a mythical lizard that can live in fire
Satan	13	The Hebrew word "Satan" means "Hinderer." Satan is an angel whose purpose has been determined by God. Satan's role is to make things difficult for us, so we can overcome evil temptations.
Scribe	90	recorders, record keepers also the people who write out the Torah by hand;
scrupling	39	To hesitate as a result of conscience or principle
Sefirot	39	in Kabbalah - 10 emanations or spheres - ten levels of God - 10 ways of revealing God, The sefirot have been presented as the receptacles, or the tools, of God; or as his ten faces or hands, or his clothes. ... They represent overlapping divine attributes. Relations between the sefirot are governed by three principles, the Hidden Splendours (Zazahot). These are: Will, which keeps balance; Mercy, which spreads the flux of the emanation; and Severity, which contains it. In this way, the Splendours organize the sefirot, according to a model known as the Tree of Life or Cabalistic tree....
Seven Gold Thrones	49	for the seven principle angels who sit by the throne of God

Shabbathai Zvi	77	1626–76, Jewish mystic and pseudo-Messiah, born in Turkey; founder of the Sabbatean sect. After a period of study of Kabbalah, he became deeply influenced by its ideas of imminent national redemption. In 1648 he proclaimed himself the Messiah, named the year 1666 as the millennium, and gathered a host of followers. In 1666 he attempted to land in Constantinople, was captured, and to escape death embraced Islam.
Shabbes	16	the Sabbath - old Hebrew pronunciation of Shabbat
shammes	58	beadle or sexton at a synagogue
Shedim	97	Jewish demons
Yehuda'im		
shekel	45	coin - Biblical reference
Shem Ha - mfoyrosh	83	God's unspeakable name (Hebrew)
Shema	83	devotional prayer - cornerstone of belief - Hear Oh Israel the Lord your God the Lord is One
Shevarim	97	one of the sequences of notes on the shofar - 7 short blasts
Shtetl	14	a village - from the Yiddish - shtot - a village, shtetl means a small village
shukkeling	75	some orthodox Jews use a rocking motion called 'shukkeling' when praying
Simchas Torah	28	Festival for the "rejoicing of Torah, on this day the final portion of the Torah is concluded, the scrolls are rewound, and the first one is begun. The day is marked by rejoicing and processions with the Torah
Sitra Achra	26	Literally – the “other side”. In Kabbalist traditions, this term is used to refer to the forces of evil which underlie all of reality.
Sadnalphon	97	Some of the earliest sources on Sandalphon refer to him as the prophet Elijah transfigured and elevated to angelic status. <sup>[2]</sup> Other sources (mainly from the midrashic period) describe him as the "twin brother" of Metatron, whose human origin as Enoch was similar to the human origin of Sandalphon. <sup>[3]</sup> Whatever his origin, Sandalphon figures prominently in the mystical literary traditions of Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, notably in the Midrash, Talmud, and Kabbalah. Other sources, possibly even more ancient than others, say that Sandalphon is female, and that she is the female counterpart of Metatron.
Song of Songs	26	written by Solomon - a literal love poem; but also a symbolic love poem between God and man
Spanish exile	29	1492 - Jews who would not convert to Christianity were expelled from Spain

spitting	13	spitting three times to ward off Evil Spirits - expels the evil spirit from you. In some areas the spitting was done between 2 fingers
supplicant	70	humble petitioner: somebody who makes a humble and sincere appeal to a person who has the power to grant the request
Tallis	76	prayer shawl
Talmud	15	The Talmud is a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, customs, and history; created during the Babylonian exile  The Talmud has two components: the Mishnah (c. 200 CE), the first written compendium of Judaism's Oral Law; and the Gemara (c. 500 CE), a discussion of the Mishnah and related Rabbinical writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on Bible.
Talmudic melody	12	a melody specific to the reading of the Talmud – reading the Torah has its own melodies
tamarind husk	51	the exterior of the tamarind seed - which is edible; popular in South Asian cooking; ingredient in Worcestershire sauce
Tarnapol	63	town in then Poland, ,now in Ukraine
tefelin	76	phylacteries; small boxes with inscriptions inside, leather straps to attach one to the forehead, one on an arm; a proscribed way of wrapping the leather on the arm - number of wraps on the arm, hand wrap to spell out an acronym for God
Tekiah	97	one of the sequence of notes on the shofar – the first blasts
Teruah	99	one of the sequence of notes on the shofar - three short blasts
tetragrammaton	83	the four letters used to represent the name of God – yud, hey, vav, hey
The Evil One	13	Satan - one of God's angels
The Great Maggid	43	Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezhirich, who succeeded Ba'al Shem Tov as leader of the Hasidic movement in the 18th century, is known as the Great Maggid.
Third Temple	32	Since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, religious Jews have prayed that God will allow for the building of a Third Temple. This prayer has been a formal part of the traditional thrice daily Jewish prayer services. Though it remains unbuilt, the notion of and desire for a Third Temple is sacred in Judaism, particularly Orthodox Judaism, as an unrealized place of worship. The prophets in the Tanakh called for its construction, to be fulfilled in the Messianic era.
tractate	88	A treatise; an essay.
unmentionable name of God	13	the tetragrammaton - In Jewish tradition - the Name of God is never spoken - or even written. It is represented by the tetragrammaton - 4 letters

we have dreamed good dreams	85	as above - in Hebrew - said when someone has had a bad dream - 3 friends are summoned to interpret etc.
Within and within turn y our eyes within	14	slight corruption of a quote from the Mishnah - Ethics of the Fathers - Turn and turn, for everything is within
yahrzeit	10	Annual anniversary of a death - a candle is lit (called a yarhzeit candle), which is allowed to burn for 24 hours; The Mourners Kaddish is said
yeshiva	10	institution for Torah and Talmud study – from the Hebrew - literally means "sitting"
zazahot	89	Relations between the <i>sefirot</i> are governed by three principles, the hidden Splendours ( <i>Zazahot</i> ). These are: Will, which keeps balance; Mercy, which spreads the flux of the emanation; and Severity, which contains it. In this way, the Splendours organize the <i>sefirot</i> , according to a model known as the Tree of Life or Cabalistic tree....
Zlotys	49	Polish coin
Zohar	72	a collection of mystical books; The Zohar, from the Hebrew: meaning splendor or radiance, is widely considered the most important work of Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism. It is a commentary on the Torah (the five books of Moses), written in medieval Aramaic and medieval Hebrew. It contains a mystical discussion of the nature of God, the origin and structure of the universe, the nature of souls, sin, redemption, good and evil, and related topics
Zoma	24	Simon ben Zoma or simply Ben Zoma was a Rabbinic Sage of the first third of the second century.



## **Appendix B**

### **Production Information**

Theatre at UBC:  
Presents

A Dybbuk  
by  
S. Ansky  
Adapted by Tony Kushner  
Based on a translation by Joachim Neugroschel

Frederic Wood Theatre  
March 27-April 5, 2008

### **Production Credits**

Cast:  
(in alphabetical order)

Sarah Afful - Ensemble  
Shaun Aquiline - Rabbi Azriel & ensemble  
Spencer Atkinson - Henech & ensemble  
Yoshie Bancroft - Bessye & ensemble  
Wil Carlos - Batlon 3, Nachman, Michl & ensemble  
Hilary Fillier - Chana Esther, Mrs. Nachman & ensemble  
Nick Fontaine - Rabbi Shimshin & ensemble  
Max Gilbert - Batlon 1, Rabbi Mendl & ensemble  
Maura Halloran - Leah<sup>†</sup>  
Kim Harvey - Gitl & ensemble  
Aslam Husain - The Messenger  
Krissy Jesudason - Ensemble  
Jeff Kaiser - The Scribe & ensemble<sup>†</sup>  
Courtney Lancaster - Mayer & ensemble.  
Gord Myren - Sender  
Michale Neale - Batlon 2, Menashe & ensemble<sup>†</sup>  
Becky Shrimpton - Fradde  
Kevin Stark - Chonen

Production:

David Savoy - Director  
Stephen Malloy - Faculty Advisor, Directing  
Brad Gibson - Voice Coach

Breanne Jackson - Cultural Advisor  
 Don Griffiths - Technical Director  
 Rob Higgin - Assistant TD  
 Cassandra Tattrie - Stage Manager  
 Steph Meine - ASM  
 Laura McLean - ASM  
 Jay Baker-French - ASM  
 Megan Gilron - ASM  
 Bob Eberle - Faculty Advisor, Stage Management  
 Steven Tsang - Crew  
 Patchakin Saugupta - Crew  
 Ashley Serl - Crew  
 Lynn Burton - Props  
 Janet Bickford - Props  
 Yulia Shtern - Set Designer  
 Irena Hoti - Assistant Set Designer  
 Elena Dubovaya - Assistant Set Designer  
 Sally Song - Shadow  
 Patrick Walden - Set Builder  
 Ron Fedoruk - Faculty Advisor, Set Design  
 Lorraine West - Scenic Artist  
 Jeff Hitchcock - Scenic Painter  
 Jay Taylor - Scenic Painter/Construction  
 Ian Giles - Lighting Designer  
 Ian Schimpf - Assistant LX Designer  
 Jay Taylor - Assistant LX Designer  
 Jo Saligupta - Light Operator  
 Ryan Warden - Projection Operator  
 Esther Chen - Shadow  
 Ariel Rivera - Costume Designer  
 Chantel Balfour- Assistant Costume Designer  
 Basha Ladovsky - Assistant Costume Designer  
 Erin Samuda - Costume Builder, Dresser  
 Amanda Larder - Dresser  
 Patrick Pennefather - Original Musical Adaptations & Songs  
 Jason Ho - Sound Design  
 The Creaking Planks - Original Music

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 The Sigal Clan (Marilee, Ruth, Cecil, Avihu Nachmani  
 Mordecai Wosk – Shofar Instructor Extraordinaire

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Bridge of Light – Yiddish Film Between Two World Wars, J. Hoberman  
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<sup>2</sup> The Dybbuk and Other Writings by S. Ansky, Translation – Golda Werman  
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<sup>3</sup> Tony Kushner in Conversation, Edited by Robert Varlicky  
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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Worlds of S. Ansky – A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century  
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<sup>6</sup> interview with Julia Pascale in The Guardian – November 22, 1995, Michael Arditti

<sup>7</sup> Op. Cit – Tony Kushner in Conversation

<sup>8</sup> The Dybbuk And the Yiddish Imagination – A Haunted Reader  
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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Aaron Moses, Lubavitch website

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