Screenplay:

In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau

Adaptation of the Play "In the Voodoo Parlor of Marie Laveau" by Frank Gagliano

Dissertation submitted for the degree

Doctor of Creative Arts

Submitted by:

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3 February 2010

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Maria Cristina Beato-Lanz

Acknowledgements

To earn my Doctorate of Creative Arts in screenwriting I have chosen a strange animal – Frank Gagliano's play *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* (an unsung Voodoo chamber opera) – to transform into an even stranger animal: an unsung Voodoo-ritual opera feature film, thus spawning a new form of dramatic screenplay. That it would take Australia to provide aegis and encouragement for such an outlandish procreation reflects the singular genius of this country and its people, who could so easily fathom *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* when baffled European naturalists declared the animal an elaborate fraud. Neither the jumbled form of this duck-billed, beaver-tailed, otter-footed mammal, nor the fact that it lays eggs, nor the unexpected venom in its hind foot, hinder the Australian's appreciation of the outrageous creature who is the sole living representative of its family and genus. Fortunately for me, the same whimsy and originality of mind that unites with platypus and nurtures its progress now supports and nurtures my ornithorhynchean screenwriting creation; and for this I am deeply grateful.

I would also like to express my gratitude for the rare genius and even rarer congeniality of Frank Gagliano and to my supervisor Margot Nash for her cheerful guidance, talent, open-mindedness and creative company. I'd also like to thank my family, in particular my husband Larry, whose sacrificial absence made it possible for me to complete this monumental task; my daughter Dorian for wrestling with Word formatting at those final hours when I was down for the count; my son-in-law Rafael for the emergency M*C*S*H* services (Mobile Computer Surgical Hospital) which kept me from faking my own death as a viable solution; and my father Dr Virgilio Beato who with great sagacity at the age of 92 asked me, "*Es posible que eso te ayude a ganar más dinero*?"

Cover Art

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Note: Symbol on title page and those in screenplay are Voodoo “Veve” symbols.

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Abstract

This dissertation presents and works out the creative and practical challenges of adapting a 1969 avant-garde play – *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau,* "an unsung Voodoo chamber opera in one long act and a prologue" – into a screenplay for a full-length motion picture. The endeavour was chosen as an attempt to explore, and perhaps widen, conventional parameters of film in an effort to create a lasting impression upon regular moviegoers; one that would deeply convey the theme of the original work and provide the transformational experience described by Aristotle as the requisite and purpose of drama. The search for an appropriate style and analysis of relevant theatrical, film and musical forms – the differences and commonalities between them as well as their relationship with each other – culminated in the creative work, the screenplay *In the Voodoo parlour of Marie Laveau,* an unsung Voodoo-ritual grand opera feature film – a new form of screenplay for the motion picture genre.

Introduction

I present this thesis in the order of its evolution from notion to idea to concept, followed by search and research and plan, culminating on the creative battleground and ending with the execution of the original work. Originality might sound like an odd quality to ascribe to an adaptation, which is by definition derivative; but it is nevertheless an apt term because immersing oneself in a deeply creative work encourages creativity. Successful adaptations have two useful outcomes. Firstly, for audiences unfamiliar with the adapted source, the adaptation works like any good work of art that succeeds in expressing its ideas. Secondly, for audiences who do know the original source, a re-contextualising of what is already familiar can provide new insight toward a deeper understanding and appreciation of the work.

My subject work – Frank Gagliano's play *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, an unsung Voodoo chamber opera in one act and a prologue – is designed strictly for the stage. The action takes place between three characters, in real time (approximately 90 minutes), in one room, to one drummer's improvised accompaniment. Part of the play is in verse. There is no music, apart from occasional opera fragments overheard and referred to by the characters; but there is an undeniable, pervasive musicality in the rhythm of the writing and the structure of the piece.

Because of this characteristic, and because of the unusual nature of the play, it was important to settle on an appropriate style and form for the screen adaptation, one that corresponded with music, before plunging into the many adaptation challenges that lay ahead; the search for this style and form comprises the first half of the thesis. Once this question was settled, it became easier to work on the nuts and bolts of adaptation as set out in the second half of the thesis.

The author of the play *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, Frank Gagliano, has a highly respected, long-standing and critically successful writing career that began with radio plays in the 1950's and the Off-Broadway movement in the 1960's and persists to date, alongside the equally respected and long-standing teaching career that culminated with his position as Benedum professor of Theatre at West Virginia University, a chair he has occupied since 1976. [1] His successes in the United States and internationally (summarised in Appendix 1) include the grand prize for the 1999 International Ernest Hemingway Playwriting competition for his play *The Total Immersion of Madeleine Favorini***.** Although Gagliano has written one novel (*Anton's Leap*) and his plays *Big Sur* and *Father Uxbridge Wants to Marry* have both been televised, he has not yet ventured into film; his body of work belongs to the theatre.

The excitement of theatre emanates mainly from the involvement created by the live presence, the expectations and the uncertainty of live performance, the immediacy and unpredictability of watching something unfolding before you entirely in the present moment, that particular performance taking place for the very first time. In spite of the undeniable visual component, in the theatrical experience is mainly auditory; voice and language take primary focus, words and sound take precedence over the visual. The opposite is true of film, where the image reigns supreme and words can be of secondary importance or entirely unnecessary. The intimacy of the stage experience comes from the (metaphorically) naked presence of the actor, open and vulnerable. The screen accomplishes intimacy through the close-up, through arranging images that evoke emotional, visceral reactions. Dudley Nichols, screenwriter of *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Sam Wood, 1943) and *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawkes, 1938), as well as many other adaptations and original screenplays, has suggested that the stage is a "medium of action" whereas the cinema is "the medium of reaction".[2]

In spite of that, however, the differences and characteristics of the two media are not always so strictly separate and clearly distinct. Beautiful, artistically successful films with no dialogue at all, such as *The Red Balloon* (Albert Lamorisse, 1956) -- the first film I ever saw, at the ripe old age of 5 years, and have never forgotten; *The Thief* (Russell Rouse, 1952); and *Baraka* (Ron Fricke, 1992) exist alongside beautiful, artistically successful dialogue-driven films such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (Tom Stoppard, 1990), *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (Sidney Lumet, 1968) and *Wag the Dog* (Barry Levinson, 1997).

Similarly, plays with minimal dialogue that require the creation of vivid images onstage, such as Antonin Artaud's *The Spurt of Blood*; Dion Boucicalt's seminal works which require train wrecks, sinking ships, a full-scale avalanche, and a riverboat travelling on water to take place onstage (*The Shaughraun*, *The Octaroon*); and Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, a play described as 'cinematic',[3] form an important and respected part of the history of legitimate theatre, often found sharing space in textbook anthologies with the quintessentially verbal plays of George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Miller and Sean O'Casey.

Within the spectrum between the above polar theatre and film examples live countless plays and motion pictures with varying degrees of emphasis on language or visual elements. So rather than taking a purist stance on the battle for supremacy between word and image, a useful approach toward adaptation is one described by actor/director/writer Tim Roth as taught to him by Tom Stoppard during the making of Stoppard's film version of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, "which was that you have to chop apart the original play or book, do an autopsy on it and find out what's really going to work on screen".[4]

After the autopsy of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* -- which included direct discussions with the playwright and examination of other relevant theatre – came reconstructive surgery, in consultation-by-proxy with screenwriters of film adaptations and their work. The resulting screenplay adaptation presents a functional combination of sight and sound dominance, albeit a strange one, like the platypus – with components that one would not usually consider to be matching pieces but work well together nevertheless to produce an interesting effect, complete with the occasional unexpected sting of venom – an unsung Voodoo-ritual opera feature film, *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*.

Chapter 1 : Innovation, Adaptation and Creation

Revolution which flings doors wide open to explorers! The new generation will continue its experiments in which the fantastic, the dance, acrobatics, mime, drama, satire, music, and the spoken word combine to produce a new form.[5]

Jean Cocteau, 1922

1.1. Why a new form?

Well, love, for one thing – the love of spectacle and pageantry and ritual so incisively expressed by the Roman poet/satirist Juvenal when he wrote that people 'have an obsessive desire for two things only: bread and circuses'[6] – and most relevantly, my own love for motion pictures. In her book *The Screenplay*, Margaret Mehring gives eloquent voice to the conviction that 'the motion picture is truly the most powerful of all media. It combines the best of all art forms and, in the combining, creates its own form. The power of this dynamic medium lies in the full utilization of its eclectic nature and the *deliberate* integration of its form and content'. [7]

Filmmakers from India, the country that produces more motion pictures than any other nation in the world[8] often complain that the potential for films to create an indelible impact on the human psyche is too often undervalued or ignored in favour of what they see as Western ideas about motion pictures, as expressed in the following diatribe from a popular Indian website aptly named passionforcinema.com:

Film is but a reflection of life. As we ape the West day by day in our life style, it's quite natural that our films follow the Hollywood path of commercialization. Hollywood is mostly about money and commerce. Art *generally doesn't find a place in Hollywood and so it is in Bollywood and all the Kolly, Molly, Tollywoods of the Indian film industry. In all these woods it's the same old beaten paths that people take and some come out winners and some failures. Week after week, when the audience eagerly wait in the darkness, to be transported into a different world, all they get is a ready mix of emotions packaged with a routine formula of 5 songs and 5 fights with an added comedy track.*[9]

The author of the above quotation, B. R. Ishara, urges the public not to minimize motion pictures by looking at them as mere entertainment, which phrase he uses with a disdainful connotation; instead, he sets out a ten-point Manifesto for Cinema of Passion[10], which declares in point number two:

At one side of the coin, film is a medium of entertainment but on the other side of the coin it is an art form. It should be a conscious struggle of every filmmaker to make films beyond the star system and to respect film as an art form. Cinema of Passion balances art with entertainment and portrays life in films close to reality.[11]

While I have no disdain whatsoever for mere entertainment, having enjoyed much of it myself, and having learned during 58 years on this earth that there are times in life when there is no single more important thing than making people laugh (an epiphany shared by the protagonist in *Sullivan's Travels* (Preston Sturges, 1941) I nevertheless share the passionate Indian filmmakers' view of cinema as a valuable and mightily potent art form through which we can enlighten, astound, inspire, provoke, probe, elucidate, confront and connect with each other about the most crucial elements of our humanity and the world we must share in order to continue to live. I find enormous excitement in dissecting different aspects of the cinematic form in search of new ground, exploring the possibility of creating fine film by incorporating and mixing other art forms -- such as music, magic and poetry -- into the screenwriting process.

Love brings its own complications, a common one being the occasional disquiet or perturbation which figures prominently in this endeavour. My desire to explore and expand the parameters of a feature film arose out of some dissatisfaction with much of the present state of the art and the audience as it manifests. The many excellent movies and the few brilliant ones that exhibit every year do not appear to come close in number to the more sensationalistic, often misogynistic, gratuitously violent and exploitative commercial products that fill our theatres, or, as B.R. Ishara grieves, 'the wafer thin story lines, logically challenged scripts, bad acting and tantrums that fog the art that is cinema'.[12]

According to Aristotle, drama must provide a transformative experience that moves and changes the spectator;[13] that's how we take away something of value for our time, money and attention. The current preponderance of shock-purpose movies poses a challenge to the writer who must try to make enough of an impression on jaded viewers to provide that transformative experience. Referring to what he considers to be lacking in the Australian film industry, Peter Sainsbury reaffirms and contemporizes the *Poetics* as follows:

> *It is the transformation of character through story, be it in comedy or tragedy or any permutation of story types, in whatever genre or non-generic form it occurs, that transfixes audiences that are themselves transformed. It converts audiences from observers to participants, and it's what audiences pay for at the box office.*[14]

In today's version of bread and circuses, empty calories in the form of junk food are served up along with, some might argue, 'junk viewing' for audiences to consume inside the theatre, as they watch scenes of bloodshed and brutality that rival the spectacles of ancient Rome – and make no mistake, today's audiences are voracious consumers. For example, the movie *Monsters vs. Aliens* (Rob Letterman, Conrad Vernon 2009) brought in $59,321,095 over the weekend; *The Haunting in Connecticut* (Peter Cornwell, 2009) a modest $23,004,767 – and this during a time of economic crisis and recession.[15] In terms of violence on screen, both casual and heated discussions, shallow and in-depth analyses by all and sundry taking every possible point of view abound with very little (if any) discernible effect resulting from all that discussion and analysis; similarly, the effects of a steady diet of shocking, sensationalistic material upon the viewer has been the subject of thousands of studies that are not the province of this thesis; but as brief summary and superficial aide-memoire, three articles with opposing viewpoints on those subjects can be found in Appendix 2.

From my own perspective, nine years' experience working closely with adult state prison inmates as well as children and youth in juvenile detention in Los Angeles – which work included regular viewing and discussion of films -- taught me that many habitual viewers of graphic violence and gore often become anaesthetised to suffering on screen, and refuse to suspend disbelief or to empathise deeply with characters and their problems. Hearing -- as too often happens in mainstream movie theatres -- an audience cheer as one-dimensional villains are blown to bits onscreen does not represent the fear, pity and purgation that Aristotle describes; instead it reaffirms film director Sam Peckinpah's assertion that 'violence in motion pictures is usually treated like fun and games'.[16] As Aldous Huxley so brilliantly put it, 'Abused as we abuse it at present, dramatic art is in no sense cathartic; it is merely a form of emotional masturbation'.[17] The plots of most high-concept action movies and horror movies generally progress through external contrivances instead of by actions through which the characters redefine themselves:

…characters that never move on from the initial definition given to them. Such characters have no internal dimensions, and cannot be transformed. However much action the writer builds into such a plot, no transformative dynamic of character merges, and the story remains incapable of engaging an audience. [18]

In this case, we do not feel that these super-human or subhuman characters are genuine individuals, so we do not 'pity in them what we fear for ourselves'[19]. We do not identify with them beyond a kind of voyeurism that is just one short step away from the stultifying experience of so-called 'reality programming' (which begs to be the subject of another thesis). With these conceptually crude movies, no deep connection forms that we can take home to ponder and use to enrich our mutual understanding -- no insight, no lasting satisfaction, no transformative experience, even though our overwhelmingly troubled and troubling world clearly can use art to help us heal, to help us connect at fundamental levels, to penetrate and guide us toward each other as we thrash around wildly threatening our own existence. Art -- including the cinematic art form -- humanizes us,[20] an idea at least as old as ancient Greece and probably older, and as contemporary as militant writer/Renaissance woman TK Kenyon (see Appendix 3). The destruction or denigration of art, or the attempt to eliminate or subjugate it – for example, in the case of totalitarian regime tactics -- as well as the cheapening of art through excessive commercialization, dehumanizes us and erodes our dignity.

This erosion and the devaluing of art comprise a situation disturbing enough to motivate some effort at breaking through. Most of my professional writing experience has taken place in the field of comedy, which of course is supremely serious business, as succinctly expressed by the famous last words of British actor and director Sir Donald Wolfit, 'Dying is easy, comedy is hard'.[21] The problem with serious comedy, or satire, besides the heartbreaking fact that the Comedy section of the *Poetics* was lost, lies in what the great satirist George S. Kaufman most accurately pointed out: 'Satire is what closes on Saturday night'.[22] Not only have I noticed the paucity of packed houses applauding Voltaire, Moliere, and Dorothy Parker of late, I have also noted the resounding failure of many intelligent satires that made it to the screen in the past two or three decades -- for example, *S.O.B*. (Blake Edwards, 1981); *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992); and *Hollywood Ending* (Woody Allen, 2002). From a pragmatic point of view drama appears to be a likelier genre in which to forge ahead, keeping this controversial thought in mind: 'Only films that discomfort or alienate the viewer, or which radically challenge the normal structure of narrative, can hope to make an effective attempt to bring reality to him or her'.[23]

I now ask myself the first formative question: How does a dedicated, exasperated screenwriter engage today's mainstream film audience profoundly enough to break through habitual viewing ennui and reach down to gut level, providing that transformative experience that is the requisite of art? How does one nudge -- or shove, or hurl -- viewers out of their cinematic comfort zones in a meaningful and productive way?

The answer to that question came accidentally backwards in combination with the answer to the second important question:

1.2. Why adaptation?

> *Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls. The art form most like cinema is not theatre or literature but music, which transcends the intellect and directly touches the emotions.*[24]
>
> \- Ingmar Bergman

It is a privilege to experience art so wonderfully executed that one can feel it engraving itself into the soul, impacting deep into one's chromosomes, having the literal molecular structure of one's person permanently altered after exposure to and absorption of certain plays, films, operas, books, paintings -- not only those that are universally accepted as sublime but also those startling discoveries that sparkle boldly in unexpected places, undiscovered or unrecognised by most of the world. Among those cherished experiences shines a vivid memory many years ago of being jolted, stunned out of my comfort zone, hair standing on end, an eerie knot caught in my throat, after reading and experiencing the explosion in my mind's eye caused by a one-act play written in 1969 by Frank Gagliano, *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*. I wanted the world to see that play, to know about it -- I wanted to scream, 'Did you see that? Wait -- what was that? That was tremendous, I've never ever read anything even remotely like that!'

That first reading and reaction over twenty-five years ago began a complicated relationship with that play which is finally coming to fruition with this thesis. I describe the journey as complicated because not everyone who has read the original one-act has had the same delighted reaction. A few did, but as many others were seriously confused. The reason for that is that a play script resembles a music score more than it does a book or a novel. In the same way that music does not exist only on paper, but must be played in order to have a life, a play does not exist until it comes to life in a production (nor does a screenplay until it is filmed). Composers write symbols that stand for the sounds they hear in their imagination. In the same way, the playwrights' words on paper are only the bare bones of the play they see in their minds, which also serves as the bare bones of yet another play that a reader or a director sees in his or her imagination.

From the very first reading, the embryo of a fantastic motion picture began to stir in my mind exactly in the way that Ingmar Bergman described - it bore 'directly into' my 'feelings, deep down into the dark rooms' of my soul. Regardless of outward details, in spite of the fact that *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* is an unsung Voodoo chamber opera in one act and a prologue, a work highly theatrical, not at all cinematic, and has very little, if anything, in common with a feature film, I could sense the 'movie genome sequence' in the script acutely and with the utmost certainty. That vision took this long to conceive because of the certitude that the embryo would have to grow into a feature film that was like no other feature film, just like Frank Gagliano's play was nothing like any other one-act play. For many years the idea of the film kept gestating in my mind, seeking a style, quaking to give birth to an appropriate form.

So when pondering the aforementioned formative question, *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* came to mind and my work appeared all cut out for me: to write a screenplay adaptation of Frank Gagliano's play, a form of motion picture that would include rhythm, verse, and musical elements without music, in combination with standard cinematic elements. A major part of the impact of the original play comes from its poetry and from the use of percussion, both of which engage one at a visceral level, affecting the body and the emotions while the dialogue attacks the intellect. If obtrusive vocal and musical rhythms, almost like spirit presences, could be successfully added into a film version, the explosive mixture – a form combining cinema, theatre, poetry and ritual -- might transport the audience out of the usual movie experience into unfamiliar territory, hopefully shaking up their minds a bit and engaging their subconscious.

Both the subject matter and the setting of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* facilitate this strategic combination in an organic way. The setting – New Orleans at the turn of the century -- will be discussed at length in a later chapter. The subject matter – the Voodoo religion, also called Vodou, Voudou, Vodun and Hoodoo – can be encapsulated as follows:

> *Vodou is a set of beliefs and rites that derives from the heritage of the enslaved men and women brought to the Americas in the 18th century from the west coast of Africa. The term probably comes from the word for "spirit," vodou, in the Fon language spoken in Benin, reflecting the influence of the Fon as well as the Yoruba and Kongo. While many Vodou spirits can be traced back to African deities, Haitian practice has also been heavily influenced by Roman Catholic symbols and images. Indeed, there is a remarkable number of distinct spirits to be propitiated, each with its own distinct disposition and particular rites. A person can incur responsibilities to spirits lodged in trees, wells, and more urban sites, or even inherit them. While simple ritual offerings may be left at cemeteries, crossroads, or temples, there are also elaborate rites of possession in which different drum rhythms and dances invoke the descent of different spirits.*[25]

Fortunately, there is no need to reach for rhythm and poetry as interesting elements to superimpose upon the story for effect. Those elements fit in as already existing basic ingredients of the very nature of magic, of Voodoo, of New Orleans, of ritual, of Creoles, of Africa -- of everything that forms part of the world of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*; they are the natural components of the Voodoo-ritual opera feature film.

Chapter 2 : The Search and Research for Style and Form

> *A film is - or should be - more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what's behind the emotion, the meaning, all that comes later.*[26]
>
> *- Stanley Kubrick*

The above quotation resonates deeply in relation to *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* because the original work plays musically without music -- it contains lyrical dialogue, drum accompaniments, and the staging of an opera in which characters speak arias and move through clear, accelerating progressions of moods and feelings that begin with fear and uncertainty, progress to frenzied resolve, and end in murder and sacrificial death. This is the first reason that a good deal of research time revolved around the search for a musical form that would provide something like a template for the entire film structure, for the characters' particular progressions of moods and feelings as elucidated by Kubrick. The chamber opera category, characterised by a minimal number of instruments and personae, seemed insufficient for containing all the elements that would comprise a full-length feature film.

The ritual aspect of the film provides another reason for the musicality of the form: 'Closely interwoven with the ritual experience of African peoples is the vibrant pattern of music'. [27] The setting of the story provides the final reason. While in most cities of the world music is a form of entertainment, in New Orleans it is a way of life, as reported by their musician-icon Louis Armstrong when asked what it was like to grow up in the streets of his native city: 'Yeah, music all around you'.[28] Clarinetist Dr Michael White explains the city and its music: 'It's like a transformation into another world. It represents an Africanized approach to music and culture that became mixed and, if you will, Creolized. That created a new outlook – a new color'. [29]

In the search for an appropriate style I profited greatly from the creative wisdom of Maya Deren, the artist best known for her avant-garde films in the 1940's, whom one biographer coincidentally calls 'the high priestess of experimental cinema'[30]:

> *My detailed and precise interpretations were derived specifically from that fact that, as an artist, my predominant professional concern was with **form**. An artist usually recognizes the integrity of a form, whether or not he agrees with it if only because he would do unto others as he would desperately hope to have them do unto him. He would be the first to insist that what was important about a Cezanne was not that it contained an apple and a pear, but the form in which those were conceived and rendered, and that this form was the significant distinction between Cezanne's still life and one with similar fruit...He would not react to the apple or the pear in terms of what these objects had come to mean to him personally, in terms of his own background (as the layman is inclined to do), but he would be concerned first with the ideas implicit in the **form** in which the objects were rendered -- whether analytic, naturalistic, lyric, whimsical, frivolous, etc. -- after which he might choose to agree or disagree with those ideas.*[31]

By another fortuitous coincidence, Maya Deren spent several years of her life deeply involved with Voodoo. In 1947 she travelled to Haiti with the purpose of making a film about Haitian dances and instead spent four years studying, filming, and practicing Voodoo. After her immersion in the subject and at the urging of Joseph Campbell she wrote the book *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti*, to which Joseph Campbell provided the foreword in 1953. While in Haiti she shot more than 18,000 feet of footage related to Voodoo practices and rituals, some of which can be seen in the documentary with the same title as the book.

The first insight that compelled Maya Deren to abandon her plan to make a film about Haitian dance was of particular importance in the search for style:

> *It was this order of awareness which made it impossible for me to execute the artwork I had intended. It became clear to me that Haitian dancing was not, in itself, a dance form, but part of a larger form, the mythological ritual. And the respect for formal integrity that makes it impossible for me to consider Cezanne's apple as an apple rather than as a Cezanne, made it equally impossible, in Haiti, to ignore the total integrity of cultural form, and to cut up the canvas into apples and pears to be catalogued or compared with other apples and other pears.* [32]

Maya Deren's realization that the form and style of her intended creation was inappropriate to her subject issued a profound warning, reinforcing the commitment to making sure that the style of the adaptation was not only thematically appropriate for the work, but also rich and broad enough to incorporate the many levels of action both at the surface and in the subtext of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, and in harmony with the verse and the rhythm as well as with the story.

To bastardize Tennyson's phrase, with a story of New Orleans in the spring, a writer's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of jazz -- particularly when the subject story includes a reference to the cornet artist extraordinaire known as Charles 'Buddy' Bolden, considered by many authorities to be the creator of that musical form.[33] But after much consideration (and by 'consideration' I happily include many hours of careful and delightful listening) beginning with Jelly Roll Morton, Joe 'King'

Oliver, Kid Ory; to Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Papa Celestin, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, Count Basie; to Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, Dexter Gordon, Thelonius Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Chick Corea, the Marsalis family; and most of all, of course, that quintessentially New Orleans artist, Louis Armstrong -- the slightly disappointing reality emerged that the jazz form did not suit the purposes at hand. However endemic and seemingly appropriate to New Orleans in the spring, the whimsical spiraling and frequent amorphousness of the newer, smoother jazz sounds simply did not dance in step with the measured, square-cornered progressions of the characters' emotional journeys in the play. The older, grittier forms came closer to fitting, but the characters' journeys scaled heights more linear and complex than the music could reach.

Jazz strains do turn up at various times in the body of the story, like extras or walk-on characters; and at certain moments when the protagonists move into reverie or musings within the recitation of their arias, their dialogue undeniably resembles jazz riffs. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, although the jazz form exists within the piece and is a presence in it in the same way that it is a presence and an inextricable part of New Orleans, it could not constitute a natural template for the entirety of the adapted screenplay.

On another front, research into musical theatre forms both past and present had uncovered one song that stood out as clearly relevant and potentially significant to the quest for music genres. In Stephen Sondheim's musical *Into the Woods,* the character known as the Witch sings what must be the cleverest rap song ever written. Although this song is neither performed as a rap number nor necessarily deliberately written as such, one keeps hearing the boom box thumping with the cadence of the lyrics, as illustrated below (the syllables to be stressed when reciting the lyrics are printed in upper case):

GREENS, GREENS, and NO-thing but GREENS:
PARSley, PEPpers, CAbbages and CElery,
asPAragus and WAtercress and FIDDLEferns and LEttuce!
he said, 'ALL RIGHT,' but it WASN'T QUITE,
'cause i CAUGHT him in the AUtumn
in my GARden one NIGHT!
he was ROB-BING ME,
RA-PING ME,
ROOTing through my RUtabaga,
RAIding my aRUgula and
RIpping up my RAM-pi-on,
My CHAM-pi-on! my FAV-or-ite!-
(aside: 'I should have laid a spell on him right there, could have changed him into stone, or a dog, or a chair..'.)
but I LET him have the RAM-pi-on,
i'd LOTS TO SPARE.
in reTURN, how-EV-er,
i said, 'FAIR IS FAIR:
you can LET me have the BAby
that your WIFE WILL BEAR –
(beat)
and we'll CALL IT SQUARE'. [34]

This musical number, which works beautifully and seamlessly inside a play and a setting that have nothing to do with the rap genre, compelled exploration of the worlds of contemporary street music -- rap, hip-hop and their seemingly endless subcategories such as gangsta rap, jazz rap, trip-hop (originating in London), conscious hip-hop, political hip-hop, acid rap, pornocore, and horrorcore. I remained in this musical world for a while (though an extremely brief stay in the last six) working with rap and hip-hop sounds because, however far removed this form might be from the original style of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, the genre -- like the street music contemporaneous to Marie Laveau, early jazz and blues -- undeniably shares certain elements that are importantly close to the heartbeat of the play, such as colour, urbanity, survival struggles, crime, cadence, and violence, particularly violence against women -- in addition to the obvious superficial fact that Marie Laveau was of mixed racial origin.

Rap and hip-hop germinated in the African American community in New York[35] and flourished there like the musical version of the ironweeds that sprout and shoot up doggedly through cement and concrete cracks in that city. The sounds then spread to California and the southern United States through the label No Limit Records and its competitor Cash Money, both of which promoted a significant roster of popular artists from the south and the west including Ice-T, Ice-Cube, Tupac Shakur, Snoop Dogg, Mystikal, and Trick Daddy.[36] New Orleans musicians -- notably MC T Tucker and DJ Irv -- then enhanced the genre by adding extensive use of drum machines, synthesizers, Mardi Gras Indian chants and call and response parts, creating yet another subcategory nominated as 'bounce music'[37] with a style characterised by particularly infectious beats and rhythm as exemplified in the Showboys' 'Drag Rap' (also called 'Triggaman', or the Triggaman beat) and Derek B's 'Rock the Beat' (also called 'Brown Beat'). [38]

In spite of this last spicier variation, however, the soul and mettle of American rap and hip-hop remain inextricably bound to New York City and environs. After experiencing life in northeastern, southeastern, and southwestern United States, the beat and sense and flavour of rap and hip-hop sounds, even jazz rap, still feel essentially northeastern. Although the elements of 'bounce' move the genre appreciably closer to the heart of New Orleans, rap and hip-hop forms remain too simplistic and generally unvarying in rhythms that lack the percussive complexity of the African and Caribbean components that permeate the music and culture of the states along the Gulf of Mexico.

According to some experts, rap and hip-hop have ceased to grow and develop creatively in the United States (though not in other places in the world) and the American form lacks 'innovation, surprise, and musical substance'.[39] Related to this situation, it appears that where the jazz genre produced a stylistic mismatch in relation to *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, the rap and hip-hop genres ultimately came up short and rhythmically shallow and geographically estranged from the substance of the play.

The search for geographical intimacy, on the other hand, turns up that most obvious and appropriately grass-roots genre, the 12-bar blues -- apart from jazz, arguably the only musical form created wholly in the United States.[40] The smooth groan of the 12-bar blues with lyrics spawned from the hardships of slave life exists palpably within Marie Laveau's Voodoo Parlour, imprinted there from years of tales of pain and degradation and joy and redemption that have played inside those walls. It also exists inside the original play in the same way that the jazz form exists - as an atmosphere that comes and goes, an invisible but perceptible walk-on character accompanying some of the deeper, raspier arias spoken by the protagonists. But while there is no doubt that the 12-bar blues lives an important life inside the parlour, as a musical form it remains much too primitive to accommodate and encompass all the complex aspects of the entire piece.

Navigating different musical waters with Gagliano's original one-act play script-map for guidance, I kept bumping into three elements of the original work that suggested, if not outright demanded, the operatic form. They are listed here in ascending order of importance:

I. Characteristics of the setting - the opera within the city.

II. Dimensions of the protagonist - the opera inside the woman.

III. Analysis of the text – or the opera inside the ritual.

One by one, each of these elements exerted their influence toward the final choice of style, each one more convincing than the previous one until in the end, the initial rejection of the chamber opera style notwithstanding, this ornithorynchean adaptation persisted in clamouring for an operatic form.

Chapter 3 : First Vote for the Final Decision: The Opera within the City

> *It is hereby decreed that melancholy be put to route, and joy unconfined seize our subjects, young and old of all genders and degrees...that the spirit of make-believe descend upon the realm and banish from the land the dull and the humdrum and the commonplace of daily existence.*[41]
>
> *- Public proclamation, Morgan L. Whitney*
> *King of Carnival, New Orleans, 1967*

The bold, brassy palettes, turbulent history and extravagant eccentricities of the city of New Orleans provide a scenario so flamboyant and theatrical that American composer Anne Le Baron created an opera in 2006 entitled *Crescent City* with New Orleans not just as the setting, but the subject matter of the piece. [42] Crescent City, one of the many nicknames for New Orleans, relates to the fact that the city was built on a great bend of the Mississippi river. New Orleans is also known as The Big Easy, allegedly coined by musicians and bootleggers referring to the ease of finding work (in the case of musicians) or buying and selling whiskey (in the case of bootleggers). Mark Twain's contribution to the list of nicknames was The City that Care Forgot, alluding to New Orleans' renowned easygoing atmosphere. Newspapers and travel guides christened New Orleans The Northernmost Caribbean City. Welcome signs appearing at the city limits read, North America's Most Interesting City. James Lee Burke writes, ‘Every writer, every artist who visited New Orleans fell in love with it’.[43] Pianist Ellis Marsalis says, ‘In other places, culture comes from on high. In New Orleans, it bubbles up from the streets’. [44]

I have had a lifelong love affair with that city which took a painful turn immediately after I arrived in Sydney in July 2005 to begin my research. The very next month, hurricane Katrina followed by hurricane Rita destroyed 80% of New Orleans, leaving in its wake only the remnants of an endangered location, as so many horrified and helpless viewers witnessed on the television screen the massive devastation impacting the lives of 15 million people, killing 1,836 individuals and 600,000 animals, annihilating 275,000 homes and 400,000 jobs.[45]

This unspeakable catastrophe obliterated my dreams of travelling to New Orleans again to conduct primary research. Besides the fact that countless records have been destroyed or sent into turmoil, the inhabitants and officials of New Orleans will of necessity have agendas of reconstruction as their highest priority for many years to come. Experiencing from afar the tragedy of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the frustrating inability to provide aid other than monetary in the face of so much agonising ruin took the form of intensifying what was initially an aspiration into an urgent longing to bring to the world a bit of the cultural spice and mystery that characterised that brilliant urban jewel throughout its history -- and, in the Marie Laveau context specifically, during the last part of the 19th century, when

> *New Orleans was the wealthiest city in the United States, cotton capital of the world…The brilliant theatre and opera season drew thousands of travelers who came south for the easy winters. They raved about the plays, dances, symphonies, and round after round of elegant parties…Visitors used words like exotic, glittering, and bewitching.*[46]

The native cultures in New Orleans -- Choctaw, Apache, Natchez, Apalachee, Chitimacha, Houma, Koasati and Tunica tribes[47] -- mixed with French, Spanish, Canadian, African, and Caribbean newcomers to create populations (Creoles, Acadians, Cajuns)[48] with their own language, cuisine, religions and music some of which are not found anywhere else in the world. New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz[49], and music in that city doesn't just play in the background -- it lives, breathes, evolves and invades all parts of everyday life. The environment created by this so-called 'human gumbo' inhabiting the lush, drenched geography with its bayous and coastal cypress forests and mangroves and weeping willows bestows an exotic beauty and fascinating ambience to the surroundings.

Visiting writer James Creecy noted:

> *Have you ever been to New Orleans? If not, you'd better go. It's a nation of a queer place; day and night a show! Frenchmen, Spaniards, West Indians, Creoles, Mustees, Yankees, Kentuckians, Tennesseans, lawyers and trustees, clergymen, priests, friars, nuns, women of all strains; Negroes in purple and fine linen, and slaves in rags and chains. Ships, arks, steamboats, robbers, pirates, alligators, assassins, gamblers, drunkards, and cotton speculators; sailors, soldiers, pretty girls, and ugly fortune-tellers; pimps, imps, shrimps, and all sorts of dirty fellows; white men with black wives, et vice versa too. A progeny of all colors – an infernal motley crew!*[50]

Journalist Lafcadio Hearn wrote, 'It is unlike any other city in the Union, being foreign in air, in customs, and mainly in population'.[51] He was particularly fascinated with the women: 'Uncommonly tall were these famous beauties – citrine hued, elegant of stature as palmettos, lithe as serpents; never again will such types appear on American soil'.[52] According to many writers, men at the turn of the century would visit New Orleans just to see the women; another English visitor wrote:

> *They were endowed with lively countenances, full, dark, liquid eyes, lips of coral, and teeth of pearl, long raven locks of soft and glossy hair, sylph-like*

> *figures, and such beautifully rounded limbs and exquisite gait and manner that they might furnish models for Venus.*[53]

One governess, perhaps somewhat less charmed than the men, simply stated, 'Spaniards and Frenchmen everywhere, African lingo predominating, Indian women selling herbs accompanied by their husbands marketing wild game and hides,' and was apparently annoyed by 'the negro women in bright bandannas, neatly dressed' who 'presided over tables, and were evidently the popular traders. And these were slaves, laughing and chatting and apparently as free as the customer who ordered this omelet or fruit'. [54]

While elsewhere in the United States men were ostracized for mixing with black women, New Orleans offered different opportunities. Although interracial marriages were illegal there as in the rest of the country, the local people created ways around that obstacle. Wealthy men often had two sets of families. Where there was only one family, men found legal methods of leaving their inheritance to their non-white partners -- for example, by saying 'for taking excellent care of me through a long illness'.[55] Father Antonio de Sedella, aka 'Pere Antoine,' the city's all-time most popular priest [56] and a good friend of Marie Laveau, served a racially integrated congregation at St. Louis Cathedral, the center of Louisiana's Roman Catholicism. All shades of people attended mass on Sunday, beautifully dressed, and all were baptized by the popular 'Pere Antoine'. [57]

Even slavery in New Orleans was handled somewhat differently. French colonialists passed laws referred to as the 'Code Noir' which not only forbade slave owners to kill, torture, or mutilate their slaves (although this part of the law was seldom enforced) but also stated that Africans could only be sold in family units.[58] This aspect of the law was definitely enforced because it made good economic sense. Keeping uprooted African families together strengthened and preserved the workers, kept them from dying of local diseases, neglect, suicide, and other adversities. As a result, African populations became not only physically stronger, but also able to establish a much stronger identity and cultural presence in Louisiana than in other parts of the country.

This somewhat ameliorated condition between the races did not mean, however, that all groups always coexisted happily and smoothly. When the Americans bought Louisiana from the Spanish, they endeavoured to replace the French assimilationist colonial policy with the English segregationist colonial policy, which resulted in constant struggle. Even before that, although the French did encourage intermarriage and mixing and living with natives, and they did grant all people living within French territory the same citizen rights, they ruthlessly and brutally punished any opposition whatsoever to their government. One example of this was the near annihilation of the Natchez Indians for refusing to give up sacred land to the French and for resisting other intrusions into their culture, such as conversion by Jesuit missionaries. [59]

In spite of all this colourful history, New Orleans has not been extensively explored cinematically through the years, not even merely as an interesting location. Relatively few films have been set in New Orleans. One noteworthy exception now exists with *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (David Finchner, 2008):

> *…an epic film based on a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, stars Brad Pitt as Benjamin Button…The original story and initial screenplay were set in Baltimore, but the project took on the energy required to see it through when the setting was moved to New Orleans. Brad Pitt told a New Orleans journalist that the film was a "love letter" to the storm-ravaged city, the restoration of which has become his passion. "There's a sense of magic here, so it made this fantastic story almost believable", he said.*[60]

The above testament to the power of New Orleans as a location, however, appears to be a recent discovery in the motion picture industry, as shown by the compiled list of films set in that city (limiting the search to English language movies) in Appendix 4. Very few, if any, exist apart from the twenty-nine adaptations (some literary, some theatrical) and thirty original screenplays that comprise the sixty-one motion pictures in total. At first thought, that many films might not sound like a small number; but consider that this total spans the period from the first film ever made up to the present time, whereas, for example, a cursory investigation of films set in Chicago reveals 240 movies set in that city just between the years 1990 to 2006;[61] in taking a quick survey of films set in New York over a similar period, I lost count after 500.

Another consideration is that out of the sixty-one films set in New Orleans, very few featured the city and its ambience in more than a nominal or fleeting way. This state of affairs cries out for a celebration of the culture of New Orleans in a cinematic work of suitably operatic character; and the film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* exemplifies the appeal of this city as a featured location in a motion picture.

Chapter 4 : Second Vote for the Final Decision: The Opera Inside the Woman

> *She could have a policeman fired with one snap of her fingers and she could get one promoted with two snaps. Sometimes she used hoodoo to do that and sometimes she just walked into a big politician's office and said 'Do it! I is Marie Laveau and I wants it done!' And he knew better'n not to do. If he didn't, something awful bad was sure gonna happen to him. That's the truth. A lot of things they say about her is lies, but that is true. You may not believe it, but that woman was the real boss of New Orleans.*[62]
>
> *- Pop Abou, interviewed by the Federal Writers Project*

4.1 – The Mystery of Power

In one of his novels, pertinent to a passage discussing Louisiana character and history, popular crime writer James Lee Burke attests, 'the woman considered the wisest person in Old New Orleans was a witch by the name of Marie Laveau'.[63] Earlier in that same novel he affirms, 'The person who believes he can rise to a position of wealth and power in the state of Louisiana and not do business with the devil probably knows nothing about the devil and even less about Louisiana'.[64]

If we accept Mr Burke's propositions -- and it would be difficult to find a person today who loves and understands Louisiana as intimately as that writer -- we can surmise that Marie Laveau understood much about both Louisiana and the devil because she managed to rise to a position of great power against the formidable odds presented by her gender, race, and lack of education. Being female, illiterate, and not white constituted the same massive hindrance to success in turn-of-the-century New Orleans as it did in most of the world at that time. Yet Marie Laveau, who as a woman would be expected to be submissive; who as a non-white was supposed to be in bondage; and because of her illiteracy should have been at a disadvantage, became known as 'the real boss of New Orleans'.[65] Today her name has traveled so far across the globe that the second restaurant bearing her name (the first one located in Charleston, North Carolina) can be found in Stockholm.[66]

Yet for all the marvel of her achievements, Marie Laveau's life until now has remained largely unexplored and unrepresented in film, literature and art, short of a few books, stories and songs (see Appendix 5) plus one lawsuit in 1958 (Appendix 9) against a person pretending to have her name and her powers. The appropriately unclear outcome of the lawsuit involved an order for the fraudulent enterprise to cease, and presumably it did so; but the legal action and penalties appear never to have concluded, reportedly owing to the illness of the hearing examiner.

At the commencement of this dissertation, there was almost nothing written about Marie Laveau. Two years later, two non-fiction books and a PhD Dissertation were published which will be discussed later on. To date, no films or documentaries about her life exist, although strangely enough there were four distinct occasions in twenty-odd years of my employment in the entertainment industry in Los Angeles when upcoming Marie Laveau projects and films were announced, the last one a mention in a Los Angeles newspaper in the early 2000's about a biographical movie about to go into production. None of these ever came to fruition.

Inclusion of the three Marie Laveau novels in Appendix 5 on the list of works with her as the subject matter should be somewhat qualified by explaining that they contain little or no valid information about her. The novels are simply works of fiction with a person by that name as the protagonist.

The two recent non-fiction works mentioned earlier, both of which were published after the beginning of this dissertation - *A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The*

Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau by Carolyn Morrow Long (2006) and *Voodoo Queen: The Spirited Lives of Marie Laveau* by Martha Ward (2005) --illustrate and recapitulate the many contradictions and unanswered questions that remain surrounding Marie Laveau, as does Ina Fandrich's dissertation, 'The Mysterious Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau: A Study of Power and Female Leadership in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans'. Who was this woman who became so powerful against all the social odds? How did she do it? The answers thrash inside a complex mystery wrapped in layers of myths, archetypes, and historical records which portray her as either evil witch, saint, subversive leader, powerful sorceress, or devout Catholic humanitarian. Since her death, nearly everything about her life has been contested, including her burial place and even the very fact that she ever died. [67]

Records indicate that Marie Laveau was born in New Orleans on September 10, 1801, the daughter of a free man of colour ('mulato libre' in the Spanish records) Charles Laveaux and a free woman of color ('mulata libre') Marguerite Darcantel.[68] Both parents had African mothers and white fathers (a Frenchman in the case of Charles, an 'unknown' in the case of Marguerite) and both were members of St. Louis Cathedral, where the child was baptized by chaplain Pere Antoine six days later. [69] Many people have described Marie Laveau as 'Indian-looking' and claimed that she had Native American blood. [70] The possibility exists from her mother's 'unknown' paternal parentage, though at the time the term 'unknown' for the white father of a child with a black mother most often meant that although the priest knew exactly who the father was, he was not allowed to reveal his name for the sake of other family members.

Many leads point to a strong likelihood that Charles Laveaux was an illegitimate son of one of the most influential politicians in New Orleans, who served as the surveyor to the King of Spain in Spanish Louisiana and later became the first president of New Orleans' City Council under American rule. [71] If this was indeed Marie Laveau's grandfather and he kept close ties with his second 'coloured' family, as was common in those times, as a sharp teenager she might very well have gotten valuable insight into city politics from the conversation and behaviour of her grandfather. [72]

One month before her eighteenth birthday Marie Laveau married Jacques Paris, a free quadroon from Haiti, in a ceremony again performed by Pere Antoine at St. Louis Cathedral. [73] The marriage did not last long and most people say it was not a happy one. Jacques Paris disappeared suddenly and was never seen again. Rumours abound that she killed him with poison or with a gris-gris (voodoo curse) for being an unfaithful womanizer, but of course there is no proof of this. [74] Except for Ina Fandrich's dissertation, all existing records declare that the marriage was childless, including Marie Laveau herself attesting to the fact before a notary,[75] yet the Catholic Church has record of a daughter named Marie Vangelie Paris born in November 1823 and baptized in St. Louis Cathedral three months later [76] which Ms Fandrich also found and included in her book.[77] No one has found further data, death or burial records on either the child or Jacques Paris; the little girl must have died around the same time that her father disappeared - mystery upon mystery.

After Jacques Paris had been gone for more than a year and was officially declared dead, Marie Laveau (now also called the widow Paris) started a business as a hairdresser.[78] According to some accounts she had a beauty parlour on Royal Street, but it is much more likely that she made house visits to style her clients' hair in their own homes.[79] This undoubtedly presented an excellent opportunity for an observant, clever and charismatic woman – similar to the situation illustrated by Mozart's line in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, another indelible memory from research: 'Come on now, be honest. Wouldn't you all rather listen to your hairdressers than

Hercules? Or Horatius? Or Orpheus? All those old bores! People so lofty they sound as if they shit marble!' [80]

After several years of widowhood Marie Laveau began a liaison with Captain Christophe Glapion, which by all accounts was very happy and lasted almost 30 years until his death in 1855.[81] In many ways Glapion's history is as mysterious as Marie Laveau's, and although some accounts describe him as a free quadroon from Haiti, most of the evidence identifies him as a white man whose father was of pure French ancestry and whose mother was Creole.[82] His being white would explain why his well-known and successful union with Marie Laveau is not recorded anywhere, since it would have been illegal. Although stories claim that Marie Laveau and Glapion had 15 children, researcher Ina Fandrich was only able to identify five in the Sacramental Records of St. Louis Cathedral -- three daughters and two sons.[83] Fandrich's research also shows that only two daughters - Marie Eloise Euchariste and Marie Philomene - reached adulthood, and only Marie Philomene outlived her mother.[84] It appears most unlikely that there were any other siblings, though not unlikely at all that there were more children in the household. Marie Laveau had a reputation for taking in abandoned children, so she might have raised several such informally adopted children as well as nieces, nephews or grandchildren who may have lived at her house. [85]

After Marie and Christophe's first child (Marie Eloise Euchariste) was born the family moved into the famous Laveau residence on St. Ann Street, almost adjacent to Congo Square, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Here is where Marie Laveau carried out most of her important Voodoo work. [86] To further add to the confusion, after Charles Laveau's brief affair with Marie Laveau's mother, he later legally married an elite Afro-Creole lady who gave birth to another daughter born in 1804 and named Marie de los Dolores Laveaux, Marie Laveau's half sister (both of Charles Laveaux's daughters were named after his mother, the first Marie Laveaux.)[87]

This half-sister, unlike the illiterate and poor Marie Laveau, was a well-educated, affluent businesswoman who owned several houses and slaves and lived a luxurious lifestyle. She married at 14 (ceremony again performed by Pere Antoine), had nine children, then in an amazing feat of assertive liberation she left her husband and continued her business dealings on her own, signing her name as 'Marie Laveaux, femme separée de corps et de biens de Francois Auguste' (the physically and economically separated wife of Francois Auguste).[88] She lived only two or three blocks away from her famous half-sister in the French Quarter, and the sacramental records show that the two Maries chose each other as godmother for their children, which indicates that they were close and on good terms. The liberated Marie Laveaux later moved to Paris and died at age 35, but her body was brought back to New Orleans and interred in St. Louis Cemetery - another remarkable feat for the time.[89]

And to add yet another Marie to the mix, Marie Laveau's mother Marguerite Darcantel also had a long-term, well-established relationship with a prominent French white planter and government official with whom she had a daughter christened Marie Louise, born two years before the Voodoo Queen. [90]

One of the many powers attributed to Marie Laveau was her ability to be in more than one place at the same time. It seems possible that eyewitnesses who saw her in one place simultaneous to other witnesses who saw her in a different location were seeing the various Maries - mother, daughter, or half-sister - perhaps even intentionally arranged by the women to enhance their power and mystique.

Marie Laveau and Christophe de Glapion occasionally engaged in buying enslaved persons only to procure their freedom.[91] Newspapers of the time record bits and pieces of Marie Laveau's work as a Voodooienne and humanitarian, and researcher Ina Fandrich found civil court records showing several instances of Marie Laveau putting up bail bond money for friends or clients. [92] Numerous reports recount that she always gave money to the poor, nursed the sick and terminally ill at Charity Hospital, comforted prisoners on death row, and gave food and spiritual support to the incarcerated.

There are also stories of her providing succor to death row prisoners who were terrified of the gallows who then mysteriously died in peace the night before their execution after eating Marie Laveau's gumbo or praying with her. [93] Rumours also abounded that she would give a particular potion to prisoners - tetrodotoxin, the so-called 'zombi poison' from Haiti - that would paralyze them for several hours so that they appeared dead, then after their burial she would have someone dig them up and help them escape to a new life somewhere under an assumed name. [94] These accounts, although historically plausible in the context of the details that surround them, are nevertheless difficult to prove. We can know with certainty, however, that she did visit prisoners on a regular basis up to an advanced age, probably facilitated by the location of the parish Prison which was just behind Congo Square, not too far from her St. Ann house, as described in the following excerpt from a story in *The Daily Picayune* on May 10, 1871 printed when Marie Laveau was 70 years old:

> *For more than twenty years, whenever a human being has suffered the final penalty in the parish prison, an old coloured woman has come to their cell and prepared an altar for them. This woman is Marie Laveau, better known as a Priestess of the Voudous. Arriving at the prison yesterday morning, she*

proceeded at once to prepare an altar for the worship of the men who have been sentenced to expiate the guilt of murder on the scaffold.[95]

A former neighbour of Marie Laveau recounts,

> *Marie Laveau corrupted New Orleans until God stopped her by death. She walked like she owned the city and everything. She looked like a devil – I can see her now. She was banana color and wore always a madras handkerchief tied around her head. That hell-cat! She must be a burning for her sins. She could call spirits outer your house. She would make pictures come off the wall. She could do anything she wanted.*[96]

From a nineteenth-century New Orleans criminal lawyer and journalist:

> *Marie Laveau was an essentially bad woman blending African mysteries and superstitions with the worship of the Blessed Virgin. To idolatry she added blasphemy. She was nothing but an errant and consummate impostor. Her apartments were often thronged with visitors from every class and section, in search of aid from her supposed supernatural powers. Ladies of high social position would frequently pay her high prices for amulets supposed to bring good luck. Politicians and candidates for office were known to purchase what we would call mascots today at her shop of Fortune, and sports would wear, attached to their watch chains, pieces of bone or wood dug from the graveyard, some curiously and fantastically carved. She practiced herbal medicine, some say she learned it from native Americans.* [97]

In March of 1869 the New Orleans Times reported that Marie Laveau had conducted her last Voodoo ritual and was about to retire; the article included a description of the ritual.[98] The *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin* reporting on the same event included some strange details, as in this excerpt:

> *The first of June is the season devoted by the Voodoo worshippers to the celebration of their most sacred and therefore most revolting rites. Midnight dances, bathing and eating together with other less innocent pleasures make the early Summer a time of unrestrained orgies with the blacks. This season is marked by the coronation of a new Voodoo Queen in the place of the celebrated Marie Laveau, who has held that office for a quarter of a century and is now superannuated in her 70th year.*
>
> *Old Marie gained her place through her reputation in laying out dead bodies, and maintaining it by a powerful fetish in the shape of a large doll-like idol from Africa. She has held her office of Priestess against all her rivals, until now old age compels her to retire, and a more youthful hand puts up love philters and makes fetishes for the intelligent freedmen who elect governors and members of Congress out of their own number.*[99]

When the time came for Marie Laveau to die, newspaper accounts -- as often happens with celebrities -- regarding her passing and her accomplishments wax partisan and whimsical in their coverage, printing conflicting information. When she died (some sources say at age 98, others say at age 80) on June 16, 1881, with 'diarrhoea' listed on her death certificate as the course of her passing,[100] three New Orleans newspapers (*The Daily Picayune, Daily Item, Daily States*) printed long obituaries practically canonizing her, without mentioning one single word about her Voodoo practice, as exemplified by the following one from the *Daily Picayune*, June 18, 1881:

> *A WOMAN WITH A WONDERFUL HISTORY ALMOST A CENTURY OLD, CARRIED TO THE TOMB YESTERDAY EVENING.*

...At 5 o'clock yesterday evening Marie Laveau was buried in her family tomb in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. Her remains were followed to the grave by a large concourse of people, the most prominent and the most humble joining in paying their last respects to the dead... Marie Laveau was born ninety-eight years ago. Her father was a rich planter, who was prominent in all public affairs, and served in the Legislature of this State. Her mother was Marguerite Henry, and her grandmother was Marguerite Semard. All were beautiful women of color. The gift of beauty was hereditary in the family, and Marie inherited it in the fullest degree...

Besides being very beautiful Marie also was very wise. She was skillful in the practice of medicine and was acquainted with the valuable healing qualities of indigenous herbs. She was very successful as a nurse, wonderful stories being told of her exploits at the sick bed. In yellow fever and cholera epidemics she was always called upon to nurse the sick, and always responded promptly...Notably in 1853 a committee of gentlemen...waited on Marie and requested her on behalf of the people to minister to the fever stricken. She went out and fought the pestilence where it was thickest and many alive today owe their salvation to her devotion...

Not alone to the sick man was Marie Laveau a blessing. To help a fellow citizen in distress she considered a priceless privilege...At anytime of night or day any one was welcome to food and lodging. Those in trouble had but to come to her and she would make their cause her own after undergoing great sacrifices in order to assist them...

Besides being charitable, Marie was also very pious and took delight in strengthening the allegiance of souls to the church. She would sit with the condemned in their last moments and endeavor to turn their last thoughts to

Jesus. Whenever a prisoner excited her pity Marie would labor incessantly to obtain his pardon, or at least a commutation of sentence, and she generally succeeded...

All in all Marie Laveau was a most wonderful woman. Doing good for the sake of doing good alone, she obtained no reward, oft times meeting with prejudice and loathing, she was nevertheless contented and did not lag in her work. She always had the cause of the people at heart and was with them in all things...Her last days were spent surrounded by sacred pictures and other evidences of religion, and she died with a firm trust in heaven...Marie Laveau's name will not be forgotten in New Orleans.[101]

On the same day, however, *The New Orleans Democrat* printed the following entirely different account:

MARIE LAVAUX
Death of the Queen of the Voudous
Just Before St. John's Eve.
'On the eve of St. John
I must wander alone,
In thy bower, I may not be!'

Marie Glassion, nee Lavaux, was buried yesterday evening, and her funeral was attended by large numbers of the colored population. Marie Lavaux, as is well-known...was the Queen of the Voudous, that curious sect of superstitious darkies that combined the hard traditions of African Legends with the fetich worship of our Creole Negroes.

She was a woman of some presence and considerable conversational powers. Somewhat bent with years when she last officiated as regnant mistress of her weird domain, she yet retained a remarkable control over her whilom subjects and impressed them with her sovereignty...she was somewhat loquacious and quite a spirited talker. Her eyes were peculiar in their look and had considerable magnetism about them...

She was a peculiar character, and one which essentially belongs to an era of Louisiana long since passed away. That remarkable woman died at the advanced age of ninety-eight years, and it is curious that her demise should have happened within a few days of the 'eve of good St. John,' which is the anniversary of the Voudou...she had love charms that brought lovers together and fearful drugs that sundered loving souls...her incantations, fetiches and charms were supposed to be without fail, and thousands crowded around her to obtain relief, fortune or revenge...they believed in the dark superstition, and faith covered all the faults and lies that made her a sorceress and a Queen. With Marie Lavaux dies the last of these old Negro Creole characters...

First went old Zabette, the celebrated cake woman of the St. Louis Cathedral... Of early mornings Zabette gave out choice black coffee in tiny cups to her clients, and we remember an old song composed ex tempore by a representative Creole on a certain morning...which she took as the price of a cup of coffee, and which began in this wise:
'Piti fille, piti fille, piti fille,
Piti fille qui couri dan de lo.'

Then went Rose, the coffee woman of the French Market, one of the comeliest of her race, black as Erebus, but smiling always and amicable as dawn. Her coffee was the essence of the fragrant bean, and since her death the lovers of *that divine beverage wander listlessly around the stalls of Sunday mornings with a pining at the bosom which cannot be satisfied.*

Now Marie Lavaux is gone...of these strange personations of the past...undoubtedly the most powerful, and we can say that with her vanishes the embodiment of the fetich superstition...Much evil dies with her, but should we not add, a little poetry? 102

In yet another article on the day following the above account, this same newspaper printed,

The fact is that the less is said about Marie Lavoux's sainted life, the better. She was, up to an advanced age, the prime mover and soul of the indecent orgies of the ignoble Voudous and to her influence may be attributed the fall of many a virtuous woman. It is true that she had redeeming traits. It is a peculiar quality of the old race of Creole negroes that they are invariably kind hearted and charitable[103]

while *The New York Times* declared that

lawyers, legislators, planters, merchants, all came to pay respect to her and seek her offices and the narrow room heard as much wit and scandal as any of the historical salons of Paris. There were business men who would not send a ship to sea before consulting her upon the probabilities of the voyage…Marie soon possessed a larger clientele than the most astute and far-seeing legal counselor.[104]

Although it appears to be widely accepted that at some point before her death Marie Laveau retired from her Voodoo leadership role which was taken over by her oldest daughter, who reportedly looked strikingly like her mother and also started calling herself Marie Laveau, it was impossible to determine exactly when, where or how this happened; and regardless of the if or when or how the Voodoo power-transfer took place, the daughter Marie never achieved the celebrity status of her mother either in the Voodoo world or in general New Orleans society.

Winnowing all the conflicting information, it is possible to assert with confidence that Marie Laveau dedicated a great portion of her life to helping the sick, the poor, the incarcerated and the dying, and that she went to St. Louis Cathedral on Sundays to attend mass celebrated by her close friend Padre Antonio de Sedella, aka Pere Antoine. It is equally verifiable that she was the undisputed Voodoo Queen of New Orleans, consulted by everyone from the humblest citizen to the most powerful political figures in the state of Louisiana. In the sense that most of history is accepted conjecture, we can also accept that Marie Laveau was not only simultaneously a working sorceress and a devout practicing Catholic, she was also a hairdresser, medicine woman, nurse, prison chaplain, free woman of color, mother, wife, and even more than one person.

The experience of researching the person of Marie Laveau became disturbingly similar to another experience many years ago of researching the person of Grigori Rasputin, where the subject would change over and over again right before my eyes depending on which absolutely trustworthy and well-documented account I was working with at the time. The commonalities of these two historical 'mystery characters' and the nature of their effect on those around them are not lost on me; but in the case of Rasputin, although the man who eventually emerges from the incongruities on record remains fascinating and puzzling, he is nowhere near as multifaceted a character as the mystifying Marie Laveau, nor is his personal journey as deliberate.

Whereas with research it eventually becomes clear and nearly undisputable that most of the contradictions surrounding Grigori Rasputin originate directly from the ulterior motives and political agendas, either intentional or subconscious or both, of the reporting entities (such as the accounts written by his murderers who felt the need to justify their crime) this is not so in the case of Marie Laveau. The deeper one searches, the more apparent it becomes that it is the chimera of the woman herself that brings about the paradoxes. Marie Laveau's identity resembles two separate jigsaw puzzles with identically cut pieces which display different pictures. One can mix the puzzles and fit together the pieces that match to make one single puzzle that will show parts of both pictures.

The legendary intelligence, talent and charisma of Marie Laveau amount to something like a vast fluidity of being that made it possible for her to incorporate a multitude of identities and functions in order to make her way in New Orleans society. The research uncovers the person of Marie Laveau as an extraordinary individual of operatic dimensions -- a true diva, a ‘superstar’.

4.2 – The Power of Mystery

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.[105]

Albert Einstein

The complicated question now arises – in adapting the play into a screenplay, does one expand – and if so, how -- on the part of Marie's character shown in the original? What is the best way to put this kaleidoscopic individual on screen with integrity, in a way that does her justice and is also artistically responsible? Who will we see on that big screen -- the charming hairdresser, the octogenarian prison chaplain, the she-demon dancing with the snake wrapped around her, the earth-mother and healer tending yellow fever victims, the power monger, the businesswoman, the machinator of slave freedom, the Voodoo priestess? What choices must be made, and what is the reason for those choices?

In her PhD dissertation Johanna Fandrich says, 'I seek then to 'debunk, unmask, and disentangle' (as womanist theologian Katie Cannon puts it) the...images of Laveaux... I hope to reinstate her as who she really was, an important leader in American history'. [106] This is an important goal, and one that the author fulfills brilliantly with meticulous effort; but my job is different. Mine is to produce a work of art, and as Sir Francis Bacon said, 'The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery'.[107] Allowing for the many learned opinions proffered to the contrary, my position is with those who believe that art isn't life and life isn't art. Art demands painstaking choices, made for the right reasons. In *The Storyteller* Walter Benjamin contends that information is valuable only in its own time, whereas story transcends time, offering value beyond the moment of its creation.[108] So for my purpose, which is story, the best choice is to look at all the information available about Marie Laveau and then not separate the person and the myth at all -- in fact, not to dissect or disentangle anything about Marie Laveau or her life.

Instead, it is crucial to look at the whole mismatched puzzle of her existence and interact with it in order to penetrate its heart and find the essential truth of the person to put on the screen -- the vibrant, intrinsic, indispensable substance of Marie Laveau, the part of her that provides the valuable insight that leads to our transformative experience. In other words, I must attempt to know Marie Laveau in the Zen sense of knowing, which is non-intellectual – a process beautifully described by D. T. Suzuki in the book *Zen Buddhism & Psychoanalysis*. Suzuki dissects the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson's attempt to understand a flower, recounted in Tennyson's poem 'Flower in the Crannied Wall' [109] whereby the writer plucks the flower, studies its parts, wonders and marvels at the dissection and concludes that in order to understand the flower he would have to be God. Granted, this is an unpoetic oversimplification of Tennyson's work, but it does constitute the essential plot of his lines. Suzuki compares this to the Japanese poet Basho's haiku upon encountering a flower growing in a crevice.[110]

> *The difference between the two poets is: Basho does not pluck the flower. He just looks at it. He is absorbed in thought. He lets an exclamation mark say everything he wishes to say. For he has no words to utter; his feeling is too full, too deep, and he has no desire to conceptualize it.*
>
> *As to Tennyson, he is active and analytical. He first plucks the flower from the place where it grows. He separates it from the ground where it belongs. Quite differently from the Oriental poet, he does not leave the flower alone. He must tear it away from the crannied wall, 'root and all,' which means that the plant must die. He does not, apparently, care for its destiny; his curiosity must be satisfied. As some medical scientists do, he would vivisect the flower. Basho does not even touch the nazuna, he just looks at it, he 'carefully' looks at it - that is all he does. He is altogether inactive, a good contrast to Tennyson's dynamism…What does Tennyson do next? Looking at the*

plucked flower, which is in all likelihood beginning to wither, he proposes the question within himself, 'Do I understand you?' Basho is not inquisitive at all. He feels all the mystery as revealed in his humble nazuna - the mystery that goes deep into the source of all existence. He is intoxicated with this feeling and exclaims in an unutterable, inaudible cry'.

Contrary to this, Tennyson goes on with his intellection: 'If I could understand you, I should know what God and man is'. His appeal to the understanding is characteristically Western. Basho accepts, Tennyson resists. Tennyson's individuality stands away from the flower, from 'God and man'. He does not identify himself with either God or nature. He is always apart from them. His understanding is what people nowadays call 'scientifically objective'. Basho is thoroughly 'subjective'. Basho stands by this 'absolute subjectivity' in which Basho sees the nazuna and the nazuna sees Basho…

Basho says: 'look carefully'. The word 'carefully' implies that Basho is no more an onlooker here but the flower has become conscious of itself and silently, eloquently expressive of itself. And this silent eloquence or eloquent silence on the part of the flower is humanly echoed in Basho's seventeen syllables. Whatever depth of feeling, whatever mystery of utterance, or even philosophy of 'absolute subjectivity' there is, is intelligible only to those who have actually experienced this. [111]

In other words, you only truly 'know' flower if you sit in soil with your roots in the ground, feel the breeze and absorb water and use it to capture sunlight to create your nutrients via photosynthesis, and so forth – in effect, you 'become' flower. The so-called scientific method which according to Jacques Lacan, 'murders nature by dissecting it'[112], represents a contrast to the Zen meditational method which always yields self-knowledge – 'by knowing the flower I know my Self'.[113]

With Marie Laveau as the flower, this type of understanding relegates a faithful portrayal of the facts (if you can call them that) and practical details of her life to minor importance, as this project is not a documentary, docudrama, or a biographical motion picture. A work of art to celebrate the core truth of a person requires different choices. When asked about the myths and fantastical stories that are told about the life of the historical person Siddhartha Gautama who became known as the Buddha, Buddhist monks sometimes answer by explaining that a story is just another way to tell the truth. Similarly, Maya Deren explained that 'Myth is the fact of the mind made manifest in a fiction of matter'.[114] The Marie Laveau myth is the fact of the mind as recalled and recounted by those who remember her and took part in her life. The story and all its contradictions represents the fiction of matter -- and the important things about Marie Laveau, which are not the debatable details of her life, will be made manifest in this fiction of matter, i.e., the screenplay 'In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau'.

'Genius is another word for magic, and the whole point of magic is that it is inexplicable'. [115] In spite of all the disagreement and controversy, it appears that Marie Laveau surely must have had genius. What type of genius depends of course on who defines it, but the fact that she had genius appears nearly indisputable. The fact that she had magic appears even more indisputable, and her magic renders her qualities inexplicable. Neither recorded history nor anecdotal information nor biography nor film will explain Marie Laveau. But through careful observation – like the careful observation by Basho of the nazuna – it is possible to get delightfully, excitingly close to her and grow from that exploration. It is possible to create a motion picture to celebrate that growth, in the manner described by that other priestess/genius Maya Deren: 'More than anything else, cinema consists of the eye for the magic — that which perceives and reveals the marvelous in whatsoever it looks upon'.[116] That is the job of the writer of her screen celebration -- to perceive and reveal the marvelous in the Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau.

Chapter 5 : Third and Final Vote: The Opera Outside the Ritual

> *My films might be called poetic, referring to the attitude towards these meanings...My films might be called choreographic, referring to the 'design and stylization of movement which confers ritual dimension upon functional motion... My films might be called experimental, referring to the use of the medium itself... I am addressing myself not to any particular group but to a special area and definite faculty in every or any man — to the part of him which creates myths, invents divinities, and ponders, for no practical purpose whatsoever, on the nature of things... The important truth is the poetic one.*
>
> *- Maya Deren 'Statement of Principles'*[117]

The teacher who taught me the most about play analysis, playwriting and directing was frustratingly fond of repeating that 'Everything is in the text. You don't have to look any further, you don't have to look outside -- it's all there, it's all in the text. Everything is inside the text'. Whether it was Shakespeare -- no, particularly if it was Shakespeare -- or Artaud, from the most conventional to the most esoteric or arcane plays, his insistence on digging deep into the writer's words to find message and meaning or to clear up confusion, rather than simply superimposing your own interesting ideas, often exasperated self-proclaimed creative types while challenging and inspiring the best students -- 'if it is not in the play, it does not exist'. [118] In the unique case of the play *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau,* an unsung Voodoo chamber opera in one act and a prologue, the text – specifically Marie Laveau's monologues -- goes one step further and beyond elucidating its theme by actually suggesting, or at least bringing to mind by implication, grand opera as a form for its own adaptation, as you will see.

The story begins at a crucial turning point in the life of Marie Laveau: She discovers that her position as Voodoo Queen and indeed her very life are in serious danger. Some unknown entity has done the unthinkable – planted a deadly Voodoo curse, a *gris-gris* (pronounced 'gree-gree') on her doorstep. Marie Laveau, shocked and terrified at the inconceivable audacity and defiance of such an act, roars at the night: 'Who would dare?!' [119] Until now, she has luxuriated in her reign as undisputed Voodoo Queen of New Orleans, relishing her influence, making others tremble, inviolate through her reputation and her power. How is it possible that without even realising it she could have weakened to the point that an enemy would feel confident enough to attack, to force her to take steps to defend herself? She rages: 'In the past they'd never dare...now they dare!' [120]

In part, Marie Laveau fears that this new vulnerability visited upon her represents a cosmic punishment -- one she feels she richly deserves -- for a certain degree of charlatanism that she has mixed into her work:

MARIE LAVEAU

> Why should you Voodoo gods - you Loas - mount me now, after all these years? Marie Laveau is a Mambo, a Voodoo priestess who has never been mounted. Marie Laveau is a Voodoo priestess who has become all theatrics, nothing more! 121

A Loa is a Voodoo deity. 'Being mounted' by a Loa refers to what is commonly known as 'possession', i.e., the temporary displacement of the spirit of a person by a Loa who then becomes the animating force of the physical body that it enters. [122] The mounting metaphor is not sexual; it refers to a horse and its rider, meaning that the actions of the possessed person, the horse, are entirely directed by the will of the rider. [123] In fearing that she has not officially been mounted, or genuinely fused with a Loa, Marie Laveau feels herself in the predicament warned against by the Indian Gandharva Tantra admonition:

One should worship a divinity by becoming oneself a divinity. One who has not become a divinity should not worship a divinity. Anyone worshiping a divinity without becoming a divinity will not reap the fruits of that worship. [124]

Marie Laveau feels that because she has worshipped a divinity without doing what it takes to become one, her once-sacred powers have degenerated to 'mere theatrics' and for this reason she has been cursed.

The danger and spiritual crisis at the beginning of the play are comparable to the opening scene of Guiseppe Verdi's opera *Macbeth*, where the three witches leave Macbeth feeling inexplicably anxious and fearful in spite of their seemingly positive prophecy, insecure in spite of his recent triumph at war.

Returning to Marie Laveau in the play, in spite of her insecurity, logically implicit in her worry that 'she has become all theatrics' lives the knowledge that her position was once genuine, honestly earned and entirely deserved. The discovery of the *gris-gris* curse deals a stunning blow to Marie Laveau's ego that shatters her complacency and sends her reeling into a psychic hurricane, rattling inside fits of outrage, fury, self-examination, recrimination and self-doubt; but this tempest, rather than destroying her, gives rise to inspiration. In a fit of self-professed genius, she decides to reaffirm her invincibility by creating a masterpiece ritual, an earth-shaking ceremony that will both prove and safeguard her position and her life:

MARIE LAVEAU

Then my power divine from above and below will spark the kettle to blaze and glow; and the gris-gris curse, I'll overthrow, in this year of nineteen O and O! [125]

This decision to vanquish her enemies through the creation and wielding of superior magic reveals that blindsided or no, Marie Laveau's confidence in her own abilities remains alive and well, even if momentarily shaken. Feeling exposed and threatened, vulnerable for the first time since her ascension to power, she is nevertheless not rendered helpless or unwilling to defend herself. Her psyche survives the ambush and declares war, boldly convinced that she will win and that her divinity will prevail:

MARIE LAVEAU

With compassion excluded yes, you Loas will mount me; and, unscarred, yes, I'll keep my hands in the Kanzo flame. And with my new power, I will hear the blessed voices of the dead. Oh, yes. [126]

Her plan of action now hatched, she next ponders the magnitude of its requirements, for creating the magnum opus of Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau is no mean feat. After a lifetime of practicing Voodoo and Catholicism, both in earnest and for effect, depending on what she felt was required; after years of carrying out and/or masterminding rituals, both traditional and improvised, both mundane and outrageous, with the flamboyant theatricality that characterised her work and her personality, Marie Laveau realises that her masterpiece will have to involve something utterly extraordinary. In effect, the Voodoo Queen embarks on a search for style (much as this writer does in her wake):

MARIE LAVEAU

For tonight Marie Laveau will save herself -- will rise above her mere ‘theatrics’ -- will choose the perfect classic form for this violent show she needs to show --

> for you cruel Voodoo gods so that you'll know I'm one of you. But what form? What? [127]

Wringing her brain for ideas she declares, 'There must be contrast -- contrast to the primitive madness,' [128] which indicates that she is seeking something fine and exalted -- the word 'civilized' was used in an early draft of the play [129] -- within which to frame her ritual, something with features and adornments even grander and richer than what Catholic pageantry has to offer, which is considerable already.

In order to expiate her former fraud, she must also eschew artifice or any sort of falseness in the connection between content and form. The material and conflict with which she works must be real, with the ritual form profoundly and organically grounded in that reality:

> MARIE LAVEAU
>
> Recall the two desperate people coming here, and the content of their confrontation, Marie Laveau. That will give you the form. [130]

As it does in most contexts, in playwriting 'form' refers to the shape and structure of something while 'content' means the material or the something that is being shaped;[131] this definition carries over into screenplay structure which consists of 'the aggregate of the elements of film form and film content in their relationship to each other'. [132] The two 'desperate people' seeking help from Marie Laveau 'were once patched to the same art',[133] that art being opera. Although at this early point in the play the audience cannot yet know that these two characters in dire straits were once prominent players in the New Orleans opera world (because having this knowledge would interfere with the suspense in the plot) the character of Marie

Laveau does have that information at the forefront of her mind at the time of her ruminations and artistic considerations.

In revising the ingredients that she has to work with in order to find a style for her ritual, Marie Laveau examines three things: 1.) the individuals who will be participating in the ritual ('recall the two desperate people coming here' [134]) -- not just who they say they are, but their essential truths and how those might connect them to each other; 2) the problems that they bring - not just what they say should be done, but the essential nature of their crises ('the content of their confrontation'[135]); 3) the requirements of the fine art that she wants to create -- elegance, integrity, power, violence, revenge -- all of which must be grounded in the truth of the characters and their problems.

'Style is what makes form individual and specific'. [136] After reviewing the facts at hand and considering all of the elements above, Marie Laveau happily resolves her search for the perfect style for her ritual:

MARIE LAVEAU

Ah, yes...yes! Yes!! An opera! Of course. The form of my masterpiece shall be an opera; you Voodoo gods will soon see why. An opera, yes. Something refined and elegant, to sugarcoat the violence that must come, yes! [137]

So the Voodoo Queen plans a Voodoo chamber opera, as described in the title of the play, an artistic form ideally suited for her task at hand to be carried out in her small confined space, with only two other people and a drummer for her to work with. However apt this may be for Marie Laveau, the chamber opera remains inadequate for the purposes of a screenplay adaptation – but the Voodoo Queen's insistence on the operatic form leaves no choice but to plunge into the world of *grand* opera to embark upon the writing of a screenplay for a Voodoo-ritual opera feature film.

Chapter 6 : Challenges of the new Form: Views from atop the Shoulders of Giants

> *Opera, that most difficult of genres, raised crucial problems concerning the aims and effects of music, drama, and indeed the arts in general that could not be ignored. These problems remain as valid today as they were to the first composers, librettists and patrons of opera; and the history of opera is a history of repeated attempts, variously conditioned by time, place, and circumstances, to find their solutions.* [138]
>
> *- The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*

6.1. First Cinematic Challenge: The Opera in the Voodoo Ritual Film

'Opera on film is a pretty impossible affair,' wrote author and film expert John Simon in the October 20, 1975 issue of *New York* magazine. [139] Referring to Jean Marie Straub's adaptation of Schoenberg's opera *Moses und Aron* (which original he did not like) he goes on to expound in erudite but stinging terms why the film made a bad and boring work even worse and duller; and in general terms, though he does allow one exception in Ingmar Bergman's *The Magic Flute* which he calls 'the greatest filmed opera ever', he nevertheless insists that it proves his point that

> *Opera on film is an impossibility. The trouble with putting opera on film is that even when you do it right, you are wrong to do it at all; you are only reminding us how much better the thing is in the opera house, where it belongs.*[140]

Fortunately, *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* does not exactly qualify as 'opera on film'; and even though I disagree with the eminent and illustrious (though nettling) Dr Simon, it is an enormous relief not to be attempting what he considers the impossible – but not a total relief. Some might say that differentiating between 'opera on film' as distinct and divergent from 'a ritual opera film' amounts to nothing but semantic silliness or hair-splitting, probably in an attempt to avoid squarely facing a difficulty; so much better to acknowledge the problem and solve it head-on -- in effect, to acknowledge that although *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* is not opera on film, there is enough opera in it in the form of conventions and dramatic structure to warrant a careful analysis to determine what steps must be taken, if any, to ensure that it holds its own cinematically.

From a historical point of view, the public's reception to filmed operas in the past largely supports John Simon's view, though somewhat less prohibitively. A few other opera films generally accepted as successful do exist apart from the consistent triumphant winner (Bergman's *The Magic Flute*) notably Franco Zeffirelli's *Otello* and Francesco Rosi's *Carmen*, and to a lesser extent Zeffirelli's *La Traviata* and Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni*.

Referring to these works, musicologist/composer/author James Wierzbicki takes issue with John Simon's pronouncements, arguing that

> *If one defines "opera" as the sort of theatrical magic that can transpire only in the opera house, then of course opera on film is - as John Simon claims - an impossibility. But such a definition, I think, is foolishly narrow, especially in this day and age.*[141] *Operas and movies have much in common: They occupy finite periods of time, they tell stories, they attempt to engage their audiences with a mixture of music, words and visual images. But the media are different, as different in their potential as they are in their limitations. A Zeffirelli staging of Otello might be just as powerful as the film; the overall*

> *effect, however, could only be similar, not identical… I agree with the purists who feel that Zeffirelli's Otello, because of the severe cutting, does disservice to one of the greatest masterpieces in the 19th-century Italian operatic repertoire. But I also agree with those who feel that Zeffirelli's Otello is something of a masterpiece in its own right. Its infidelities to libretto and score not discounted, Zeffirelli's Otello is a brilliant...Like any treatment of any opera, the new Otello movie is just an interpretation; its very existence is proof enough that opera on film is not at all an impossible affair.* [142]

Alex Fleetwood, co-producer of the film opera *The Eternity Man* produced with Goalpost pictures in Australia, provides more insight on the complications of working with the two art forms:

> *The process of reworking an opera for the screen poses many technical challenges. Altering the text of a play is straightforward compared to cutting and reshaping an orchestral score. The pacing of a film narrative can be at odds with the spacious structures, emotional pauses and lengthy climaxes of operatic form. It was the intention of the creative team to make something that retained its overall shape as an opera whilst also living as a fast-paced, visually arresting and exciting film.*[143]

It seems reasonable to accept that opera on film is difficult, maybe even nightmarish -- but surely not impossible. The happy solution is best described by author and critic Alan Vanneman:

> *…just making a "real" movie and dubbing in the singing won't work either, because most of the drama in opera occurs in the arias — people singing about what they're going to do or what they've done, rather than actually doing it. The action of an opera doesn't occur in the "real time" and the "real world" of*

> *film. So what to do, what to do? The answer, for Bergman at least, and for The Magic Flute at least, is to accept, and often to emphasize, the artificiality of opera while using the superior flexibility of film to vary what we're seeing in ways that are impossible during a live performance.*[144]

6.1-A. 'In ways impossible during a live performance': Immersion in setting and atmosphere

> *Spectacularity can be part of the story, integral to establishing the diegetic world…Spectacularity also can be used to slow or stop the narrative, not to provide a substitutional element in place of story but a beat of pacing so that the emotional load or intellectual weight of a narrative moment can be experienced…There are instances where spectacularity is not necessarily in the tradition of the 'cinema of attractions' but more in keeping with Hollywood's 'magic of the movies' and its power owes something more to the classical narrative tradition.*[145]
>
> *Shilo McCLean*

In exploring what works and what doesn't about the film/opera combination, an unexpected and useful source came in the form of the film *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, an adaptation of Bizet's opera *Carmen* translated into Xhosa and set in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha. The director of that film, Mark Dornford-May, when asked 'What are the logistics of filming opera?' replied laughing, 'It's a nightmare!'[146] The film, a daring effort with severe limitations of time and budget imposed on the project, successfully fuses its subject matter with its location:

> *…what I've tried to do on Carmen is make Khayelitsha a major character in the narrative, Khayelitsha is a protagonist. It's because of the character of*

Khayelitsha that Carmen is what she is, and because of the nature of Khayelitsha that the events in the story happen the way they do.[147]

The director did, indeed, immerse the viewer in the township setting and atmosphere. At no time did I find my mind moving to the roots of the original work, nor was I tempted to compare what was happening on screen with other versions of the story. The faithfulness and fusion of subject and location reinforced the feeling that the New Orleans location of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* looms almost as significant as another character.

On the other side of this coin, the film version of Stephen Sondheim's stage musical *Sweeney Todd* exhibits the result of taking this concept too far by allowing the setting and atmosphere to play too much of a role. The ubiquitous cockroaches, the bucketsful of blood, the seemingly endless string of cut throats, all lined up and killed in a row, one after the other over and over again, and the excessively detailed dinginess of the sets all but obliterated the main action, making the characters' inner revelations – clearly depicted in the original work – nearly impossible to notice.

There is ample spilled blood and filth in the original *Sweeney Todd*, with the same series of slashed throats and sliding cadavers which are horrifying to watch; but the selectiveness, the skilled placement and timing of the atmospheric elements creates a sort of hypnotic effect where one finds oneself reluctantly transfixed, not being able to look away, almost playing the part of an accomplice to the murders as they play out accompanied scathing, incisive and insightful lyrics and haunting music. The blood never splashes so thickly that it upstages the complicated psyche and bizarre emotions gnawing at the characters as they act. The film adaptation of *Sweeney Todd* provides a valuable lesson with regard to how easy it is to fall into excessive immersion in setting and atmosphere when one is working with horror and disgusting elements.

The overemphasis on atmosphere also paradoxically interferes with the dark humour of the piece -- paradoxically because the occasionally exaggerated squalor, gallons of blood and supernumerary insects, as featured in certain scenes, appear to be there at least partially for comic purposes. Ironically, however, the comedy gets lost in the places where it exists in abundance and organically within the action and lyrics of the original work, such as in the number 'Have a Little Priest,' which builds onstage to a rousing, raucous, exercise of ghoulish humour that is utterly lost in the screen translation.

6.1-B. 'The flexibility of film to vary what we're seeing': – The chorus in different form

> *The Chorus, too, should be regarded as one of the actors. It should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action.*[148]
>
> *Aristotle*

Another important insight yielded by the film *Sweeney Todd* supported my decision to create a character who would serve the function of the chorus. Both the John Logan screenplay and the stage musical *Sweeney Todd* include a chorus of the dead, comprised of Sweeney's victims, who appear at the beginning, the end, and the act transition, adding the dimension of a commentator to the whole. Given the phenomenal opportunity presented by the camera to make impressive use of the dead chorus, their omission presents a puzzling choice and leaves that outside point of view lacking in the story on film.

This lack supported the decision to create the character Hannah, Marie Laveau's best friend, confidant, and assistant, and the only main character in the screenplay who is not mentioned in the play (some historical characters appear in the screenplay that do not exist in the original work, but their roles are minor). Although there is no chorus in Frank Gagliano's three-character play, the circumstances surrounding the historical Marie Laveau provide ample logic for the existence of a person or persons like Hannah. All Creoles of Marie Laveau's station belonged to a number of interlocking benevolent societies, such as the 'Ladies and their Sacred Friends' and the 'Society of the Ladies with Tignons', whose women dressed in black skirts, white waists, a blue silk scarf and their distinctive Creole headgear on solemn occasions.[149] At her death Marie Laveau was the last living member of a benevolent sisterhood that honored women and children and called themselves the 'Society of Mother Hens and their Baby Hens'.[150] A real-life Hannah could easily have been in charge of either of these societies; she might have even been one of the other Marie Laveaus, although this choice would not have worked for the film.

Most importantly, the practical necessities of the expanded action in the motion picture require that such a person be in evidence and interact with Marie Laveau during the course of events. For example, acts that have already been set in motion as the original play begins – such as the discovery of two people with problems and then the manipulation of these two persons into the parlour – are shown at the time that they happen in the action of the screenplay. We see the inciting forces that culminate in both characters' decisions to consult Marie Laveau. Logically, after they have made this decision, they must find a facilitator – hence the appearance of Hannah, both required by the action of the film and consistent with the historical world of Marie Laveau.

Similarly, in the play Marie Laveau verbalizes her thoughts intermittently as she goes through crises of conscience or moments of fear and self-doubt. The device works well when we're absorbed in watching a live woman function, because we have the privilege of seeing her actions with the added advantage of reading her mind; but once the immediacy and the attraction of the live presence is removed and we are watching through the camera, the person casually and sporadically talking to herself projects differently. Here again, as the screenplay has taken the action out into the wider setting of Marie Laveau, it can easily accommodate regular aspects of her world and her everyday life – in this case, a friend and helper -- with whom she can discuss whatever is preying on her mind, and from whom she can get a response, adding yet another interesting dimension for the audience. Playwright Gagliano enthusiastically endorsed the creation of Hannah as a useful and enjoyable character, referring to her as ‘a combination chorus, confidant, liaison, seer and observer’.[151]

The last small lesson learned from the *Sweeney Todd* film adaptation related to the waif-like, awkward, nearly prepubescent nature of the hero and heroine which made it difficult to identify with her as the bold captive lady colluding with her knight in shining armor, the brave impetuous sailor; it makes it difficult to believe such a boy-hero when he sings ‘I have sailed the world, beheld its wonders, from the Dardanelles to the mountains of Peru’.[152] This weakening of the hero and infantilizing of the heroine creates a somewhat disturbing effect, almost as if a touch of pedophilia was adding a different type of horror to the overriding emotion. It was a useful model for ensuring that the Beauregard/Angelica relationship came across as an utterly selfish, neurotic and self-aggrandizing attachment but without active sexual implications, so that Angelica – a mystery waif through most of the story – is revealed at the end as a cold, calculating and vengeful spirit in angel guise, exacting revenge for her stepfather’s cruel treatment of her mother’s depression, rather than a crushed victim of sexual abuse.

6.1-C. 'To accept, and often to emphasize, the artificiality of opera': – Music, verse and the fourth wall

> *Ironically one of the biggest CinemaScope blockbusters of the early fifties contained two elements usually considered a grave disadvantage at the box-office: Opera and a black cast.*[153]
>
> *Richard Fawkes, Opera on Film*

The huge hit referred to in the above quotation is *Carmen Jones* (Otto Preminger, 1954), the film of Oscar Hammerstein's reworking of the Bizet opera *Carmen*. Opera and a black cast also immediately calls to mind the extraordinary *Porgy and Bess* (Otto Preminger, 1959) with its turbulent history from novel in 1925 by DuBose Heyward; to stage play in 1927 by DuBose and Dorothy Heyward; to opera in 1935 by the Heywards, music and lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin; to film (as above) and then to television opera in 1993 adapted and directed by Trevor Nunn, to its last (and arguably best) incarnation in 2006 as musical theatre, *Porgy and Bess: The Musical* adapted by Trevor Nunn.

Carmen Jones and *Porgy and Bess* were both directed by Otto Preminger, but the former film was a triumphant hit while the latter – having finally made it to the screen twenty-four years after the opera opened on Broadway, and after ninety approaches for the film rights had been rejected – failed at the box office, though it gained four Oscar nominations and significant critical acclaim.[154]
Both *Carmen Jones* and *Porgy and Bess* succeed in accepting and often emphasising the artificiality of opera by keeping the music as it was in the original, and not completely eliminating the presentational aspect. Both films strengthened the decision to preserve some opera conventions in the adaptation.

More specific support for this conviction came from the Andrew Lloyd Weber/Joel Schumacher screen version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (Joel Schumacher, 2004) which exhibits problems that correspond to choices that accomplish the opposite. The first choice involves the leading character, the Phantom, played by Gerald Butler who is the only actor in the film who does not sing in an operatic style (supporting actress Minnie Driver does not sing, but her songs are dubbed by an operatic soprano). Although this could be looked upon as an intentional contrast with the leading man's stunning voice, perhaps even a metaphor for the Phantom's monstrosity, the problem that remains is not just one of vocal range or lack of classical technique. Countless singers who lack vocal power or finesse and/or classical training can still perform masterfully, with power and conviction; but in this case, the main character's singing lacks interpretational skill, and since the Phantom is not only the leading character but also defined by the story as endowed with enormous power and hypnotic qualities, the choice belies the essence of the character. The result of this deviation toward a more natural, accessible choice of villain convinced me to keep Marie Laveau unapologetically and unashamedly operatic in her manner.

The second choice, 15-year-old Emmy Rossum in the leading role of Christine, presents a similar problem but somewhat in reverse in that although her voice is lyrical and operatic in range and quality, her singing and acting lack depth of feeling and maturity, as one might expect from so young an actress. In her case, the fact that the camera can scrutinise her reactions and bring her 'up close and personal' on the big screen proves detrimental rather than advantageous because while it magnifies her pure, young beauty it also magnifies her inexperience. This becomes most painfully apparent in the scenes where Christine's dark side is supposed to emerge and come into focus, to be sorely tempted by the Phantom's inducements. On stage, it is possible that the actress's live presence and voice might have overcome or at least rendered less noticeable her acting deficiencies. On screen, her immaturity completely visible through the camera accounts for dark scenes that are entirely lacking in darkness, without any undercurrents of sensuality that are so important in propelling that part of the story. A Christine who is less Madonna-like but able to emote and transform, however much less natural she might have appeared on camera, would have been a choice truer to the acceptance and emphasis of the artificiality of the operatic form. Although it is possible or even most probable that this choice of a younger, purer heroine was a casting decision and not one made at the screenplay stage, it is still an adaptation choice and as such it illustrates against eliminating artificiality in favour of a more naturalistic approach.

In planning the adaptation it was important to look at the possibility of turning the original into a 'real' opera, one that would eventually include a composer who would write original music; this is something that playwright Gagliano has considered and discussed, particularly as he has written many musicals and collaborated successfully with composers many times in the past. [155] Ultimately the addition of more music apart from the drums and percussion often used in Voodoo rituals appeared to present a hindrance to the story rather than a help. Two Australian opera films proved particularly useful in clarifying the complexities of the relationship between the music, the singing, and the action on screen.

Black River (Kevin Lucas, 1993) and Andrew Schultz and *One Night the Moon* (Rachel Perkins 2001) provided great inspiration through their effectively disturbing use of surreal, nightmarish sequences in *Black River* and the sharp, minimalist representation of the stark, unforgiving physical world of the events in *One Night the Moon*, which corresponded so palpably with the stark, unforgiving inner world of the male leading character in that story. Although the faithful, nearly ascetic style of depicting the pain and the pathos in both of those film operas accorded with the similar musical style of the songs, most of the time – with a few exceptions – that the characters were singing one felt as if one were watching from an opera house, rather than connected to the landscape. This is not necessarily a problem, as it depends on the filmmaker's intentions; but for the

Marie Laveau adaptation there appeared no cinematic advantage to adding music and transforming the unsung opera into a more conventional opera film and in doing so to risk creating a distancing effect. In addition, adding music would change the verse and percussion into songs, which provide a different and much more familiar feeling than verse punctuated by percussion and engage different parts of our attention.

With regard to the percussion, drums play a significant role in the historical context of the film because at that time the instrument was banned in every other American colony, as was the gathering, singing, and dancing of slaves, because of a general fear of anything close to African 'savage' customs and the related fear of slave uprisings. Only in New Orleans were slaves permitted to meet in groups on Sunday afternoon at Congo Square, and allowed to drum and sing and dance. These weekly performances not only preserved and disseminated the music of Africa, they also reinforced a spiritual connection. Saxophonist Donald Harrison is quoted as saying, 'All the music of New Orleans is fueled by the fact that slaves had a place to retain their African culture'. [156] As that influenced much of the music in New Orleans, it in turn influenced much of the music around the United States.

With regard to poetry, all the successful Shakespeare film adaptations – most notably *Henry V* (Kenneth Branagh, 1989), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Kenneth Branagh, 1993) and *Hamlet* (Kenneth Branagh, 1996) - prove that characters on screen can speak in verse and still remain on intimate terms with the audience, as does *El Perro del Hortelano* (Pilar Miro, 1996). Besides this film and the Shakespeare adaptations – since obviously not all verse is as accomplished as Lope de Vega or as prodigious as the bard's – the film *Yes* (Sally Potter, 2005) serves as an excellent constructive role model not only for speaking in rhyme, but also for the skilled use of breaking the fourth wall, as does *Call Me Mum* (Margot Nash, 2005). In both of these films characters speak directly into the camera-as-audience, using a narrative style that combines the presentational formal element with a confidential and intimate tone which serves to draw the audience in and capture their attention.

The final contributor to the search for insight about the many challenges of combining opera and/or operatic factors with film was *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars Von Trier, 2000), a motion picture that represents a significant departure from the ordinary, as described hereunder in an article in *The Washington Post*:

> *Masterpiece or masquerade? Lars von Trier's digicam musical split the critics in two when it debuted at Cannes in 2000. There were those who saw it as a cynical shock-opera from a manipulative charlatan, others wept openly at its scenes of raw emotion and heart-rending intensity. There is, however, no in-between. Dancer in the Dark is that rarest of creatures, a film that dares to push viewers to the limits of their feelings...Von Trier's passionate, provocative film runs all our emotional resources dry with suspense, giving us occasional flashes into Selma's gold heart and mind with superb song-and-dance numbers she conjures to banish the nightmare (Björk also wrote the score). At some two-and-a-half hours, it's not for lightweights, but anyone bored with today's smug, ironic cinema will relish this as an astonishing assault on the senses and a stark reminder of von Trier's uncompromising talent.* [157]

As happens with most truly daring artistic endeavours, critics either love or hate this film. The story is so horrendously tragic – for example, the heroine is given the death penalty and dies by hanging right before our eyes, kicking and screaming as she is led to the gallows by a compassionate prison matron who has become her friend during the heroine's stay on death row – that it becomes almost unbearable to watch at times. Research indicated that not many people knew what to make of this film, as illustrated by the description on its DVD packaging which reads, 'Bjork stars in Lars von Triers' powerful film about a young woman in rural America who, facing blindness, escapes into the fantasy world of Hollywood musicals'. Although partially correct, this statement in no way foreshadows or summarises the film, nor does it even clarify the genre, which could be anything from melodrama to musical comedy.

The contribution this film provides is its courage. As the article states, the film truly 'dares to push viewers to the limits of their feelings' and the risk that it takes demonstrates enough artistic nerve to encourage all potential convention-flouters, path blazers and barrier-breakers to persist with their efforts.

6.2 - Second cinematic challenge: Opening it up or keeping it in

Static chamber plays don't translate easily to film. [158]

John Patrick Shanley

The above quotation preceded an article in that quintessentially show business publication, *Variety*, discussing John Patrick Shanley's successful screenplay adaptation of his four-character chamber play, *Doubt*, which received several 2008 Academy Award nominations. Of his adaptation efforts John Patrick Shanley declares, 'It was the hardest script I ever wrote. How was I going to take this setting and turn it into a world without losing the narrative propulsion? How can I have people talk that much and have it be visually interesting?' [159]

This question gets to the heart of the challenge of adaptation, and a crucial one to answer with regard to *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* by taking advantage of the wisdom of many successful works -- *Doubt* (John Patrick Stanley, 2008) being the most recent one -- as well as from those endeavours that failed and those that yielded mixed results, as in the case of so-called critical successes/box-office failures (and vice versa). Besides studying stage-to-screen adaptations that were new to me I also found it invaluable to revisit and analyse others that had some special relevance to *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* for reasons of style, subject matter, scope, setting, language, structural elements, or some particular detail. These particular motion picture adaptations comprise Appendix 6, under the title Film Ancestors and Relatives of the Voodoo-Ritual Opera Feature Film.

Accordingly, the first adaptation challenge to tackle was the chamber setting -- or, as Patrick Shanley expressed it, how to 'turn it into a world'. The action of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* takes place in one night within a claustrophobic, nowhere-to-run atmosphere masterfully created by playwright Frank Gagliano that heightens the suspense and the tension in that way that theatre is so perfect for, as best exemplified by Jean Paul Sartre's classic *Huis Close* (*No Exit*) and by two other Frank Gagliano one-act plays, *Conerico was Here to Stay* (which takes place on a New York subway platform) and *The Night of the Dunce* (set inside a library). The close quarters in which these plays are set serves to exacerbate the fear and the feeling of impending threat for the audience as well as tremendously intensifying the psychological violence; however, what is ideal for the stage in one-set dramas can easily become ineffective, confining, ponderous or tedious cinematically.

To avoid this possibility writers have turned to 'opening up the action' [160] by placing scenes in outdoor settings or alternate surroundings -- sometimes economically, as in Alfred Uhry's *Driving Miss Daisy* (Bruce Beresford, 1989), which he adapted from his play, and even more sparsely in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Mike Nichols, 1966), an adaptation of Edward Albee's play in which screenwriter Ernest Lehman moves the action out of George and Martha's house only to include their back yard, their car, and a nearby roadhouse; sometimes moderately, as in Doug Wright's screenplay adaptation *Quills* (Philip Kaufman, 2000) of his play by the same name, a work that has much in common thematically with this project; and at other times more opulently. For example, the Anthony

Burgess adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990) moves into a wide range of settings including city streets, a theatre, battlefields, open countryside, a convent garden, a fencing-practice salon. Similarly, Jeffrey Hatcher's film adaptation of his play *The Compleat Female Stage Beauty* on screen includes two theatres, city streets, a gazebo, a park, stagecoach interiors, public steam baths, dressing rooms, courtyards, a country inn, and various rooms inside the king's palace such as his bedroom, dining room and theatre room as settings for the film *Stage Beauty* (Richard Eyre 2004).

The 'opening up'[161] device has produced mixed results. All four of the above films, even the surprising *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, play beautifully on the screen as does the aforementioned *Doubt*; but in other instances the relocation of scenes out of their original dramatic container works less well or not at all.

For example, in the film *Staircase* (Stanley Donen, 1969), Charles Dyer's adaptation of his play which portrays an aging male homosexual couple in crisis, the author moves the action outside the couple's house into the neighborhood in which they live, and he expands the time frame from one to ten days' time. But in spite of Oscar-winning director Stanley Donen and superstars Rex Harrison and Richard Burton in the title roles, the film does not succeed as a motion picture. Even though the performances are thoroughly enjoyable and there are some delightful, deeply moving and insightful moments, the equation of fine acting plus some fine moments fails to equal a fine motion picture. In this case, stretching the action over time does not increase the tension; instead it produces a sort of thinning or dimming effect, like watering down the soup or adding turpentine to paint, resulting in emotional colours that are faded, much less vivid. Similarly, travelling outside the house in *Staircase* dilutes and weakens the conflict rather than sharpening it. The new surroundings distract the viewer from the characters' inner struggles, distancing us from the close and confidential nature of the men's crisis that is so aptly enhanced by the cherished, intimate container of the home that they have shared for twenty years.

The History Boys (Nicholas Hytner, 2006), Alan Bennett's adaptation of his play by the same name, exhibits similar difficulties. Once again, in spite of superb performances and exceedingly witty, pithy dialogue, the subject conflicts, which are clear and clearly framed inside the school in the stage version, become scattered and somewhat loose-ended when moved elsewhere on the screen, their focus less clear, the viewer more at a distance -- particularly at the end of the film when a character (for the first and only time in the entire picture) turns to the camera and breaks the fourth wall to relate subsequent events to the audience.

'Static chamber plays don't translate easily into film' -- the operative word here, of course, being 'easily'. It can be done and has been done well, just not easily. In contrast, to quote the late multifaceted and multitalented writer/performer Steve Allen, 'It is also true that when you have a very complete and self-contained work like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* a faithful rendering on screen is really all that is needed'. [162] With *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, the challenge loomed as the choice between: 1) Opening up the play and placing it in the world in an organic way that would enrich the action and not obscure the characters' massive inner struggles; or 2) Not to open it up at all, taking the lead from Mr Allen's point of view as amply supported by the many successes that stayed well within their restricted settings -- for example, *Sleuth* (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1972); *Deathtrap* (Sidney Lumet, 1982); *12 Angry Men* (William Friedkin, 1957); *The Petrified Forest* (Archie Mayo, 1936); *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948); *Disturbia* (DJ Caruso, 2007); *Wait Until Dark* (Terence Young, 1967); and many others.

One feasible choice would have been to keep the action inside its original claustrophobia, and leave the problem to a genius filmmaker to solve directorially, as Sidney Lumet did in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*:

O'Neill's 1957 Pulitzer Prize winning play was the subject of four television adaptations…Little physical action occurs in the drama. O'Neill instead relies entirely on the psychological conflict among the four major characters who through self-exculpatory monologues reveal their tormented, anguished lives. The home becomes a prison, metaphorically encapsulated by fog, in which they have lost their bearings and cannot escape save only through liquor or morphine...Although Lumet's film has been criticized as being nothing more than a filmed staged play, on closer examination one finds that Lumet takes full and subtle advantage of the technical capacities of the film medium.

Lumet insists that the four characters are not only confined but metaphorically imprisoned within the walls of the house and within their own problematic egos. The film's composition allows Lumet to fully explore this design of imprisonment. The walls and narrow corridors of the house are filled with bric-a-brac and furniture that clutter the interior of the house...The bars of the stair railing further enhance this image [of imprisonment] in several scenes...Lumet also begins the ...outdoors in natural sunlight; as the film progresses the audience is brought inside the house, underscoring…the image of imprisonment. Lumet…sought visual equivalents for the characters…through lighting, lens selection, and camera angles. Mary Tyrone, for example, was shot with increasingly longer lenses and the subsequent loss of depth further isolated her within the film's composition…Edmund was kept "objective" by utilizing few lens changes. Camera angles helped to "dynamize" the film's composition. Mary is filmed from increasingly high angles, diminishing her screen size as she is further isolated from reality. Both Jamie and Tyrone are shot from low angles, magnifying both the size and nature of their conflicts. Edmund is shot from eye level angle, enhancing his "objectivity"...One of the tour de force technical *images occurs at the end with Mary's lengthy monologue…Mary is sitting at the kitchen table with the other characters…slowly pulls the camera back until the characters at the table become isolated in a single shaft of light; the entire space surrounding them becomes black, except for the lighthouse lights slowly flashing across the windows of the room…this image accentuates the theme of isolation and imprisonment…the image of the four seen from above at great distance, with blackness totally surrounding them, visually reinforces the idea both of their isolation from the world and of their confinement with each other. Lumet has skillfully realized O'Neill's dark vision through cinematic means.*[163]

However tempting (and reasonable) the notion of abdicating responsibility for answering the 'to open or not to open' question might be, the fact remains that the writer must make the choice, regardless of what a director might do about that choice in the future. Unexpectedly, the film that inspired the answer to this question was *Good Night and Good Luck* (George Clooney, 2005) which is not an adaptation from another source but rather a screenplay based faithfully and meticulously – almost to the point of news documentary accuracy -- on the true-life events that it portrays. The skillful confinement of the action in that motion picture compelled me to look carefully into the making of it, the nuts and bolts and the decision-making factors involved.

About *Good Night and Good Luck*, director George Clooney stated that:

The idea was to be able to create an outside fear without going outside, which is actually in a way what old Twilight Zones were good at. The trick seems to be, if you don't go outside, you can sort of keep the fear in -- keep the tension inside the room without letting much air out. [164]

Clooney discussed the technique and the rationale behind the one relationship that was taken out of the newsroom and into the world into the characters' homes.

He quoted Paddy Chayevsky who said, 'Drama is emotion',[165] which statement brought to mind a lecture given by writer Jimmy McGovern at UTS in September 2006 in which he explained: 'The complexity of emotional reactions of characters – that's what enriches, not the set-up or extending the action'.[166] Considering these two aspects – the technique and justifications for containing or moving the action, combined with the importance of maintaining the complexity of emotions – helped to identify the one most important element shared by all the successful stage-to-film adaptations, which was either weak or altogether lacking in the unsuccessful pieces, was the consistency of the overriding dramatic emotion.

The reason for the resonance with *Good Night and Good Luck* is the fact that the dramatic emotion maintained in that film is the same overriding emotion of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* -- dread. Stephen Gaghan, writer of another dread-dominant motion picture, *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005) explains,

> *Dread is a really valuable emotion. Dread was something that I felt – this low level anxiety – quite often. My feeling after 9/11, and that continues to this day, is this precipitous hurtling toward something. The car accelerated and I don't know where we're going and I feel totally uneasy. How do you capture that dread?* [167]

6.3. Third cinematic challenge: Keeping it in and opening it up

> *On almost any plane one might mention, cinematic adaptation brings, whether for good or ill, not an impoverishment but rather a multiplication of registers.* [168]
>
> *- Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*

After much play and film study culminating with *Good Night and Good Luck* (and to a certain extent *Syriana*) I was forced to conclude that there was no choosing between taking the action out or keeping it inside -- I had to find a way to do both things. I found three important dramatic keystones on which to build this paradoxical model, happily remembering that the pyramid is the most stable of all structures. Firstly, in order to do justice to the subject matter of the piece, the screenplay must be placed in the outside world within its rich, valuable historical setting -- Mardi Gras, the city of New Orleans, 1900:

MARIE LAVEAU

The supreme artist Marie Laveau sets the time. The last day of Mardi Gras! [169]

The action requires much, much more than the above narrative reference -- specifically, it requires a visual scenario sumptuous enough to fully convey the unique magic of that time and place, and one dense enough to contain and maintain the feeling of dread.

Secondly, in order to correctly frame the 'complexity of emotions' as referred to by Jimmy McGovern without distractions, and to retain the 'narrative propulsion' during characters' long speeches referred to by John Patrick Shanley, the action must stay in the parlour.

MARIE LAVEAU

So be it. The Voodoo Priestess, Marie Laveau, sets her own scene. [170]

Marie Laveau's chooses her scene – her parlour -- as the crucible in which to brutally test the characters and pit them against each other, ultimately even including herself. Her parlour is the container in which, by use of the right magic, anything is possible:

MARIE LAVEAU

There's nothing that doesn't go in the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau.[171]

Here is the seat of her throne, entirely her turf, from which the Voodoo Queen of New Orleans operates completely and confidently in charge, setting all the rules:

MARIE LAVEAU

Everything must be said in the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau or the Voodoo doesn't work. [172]

The third dramatic component sustaining the pyramid, and the broadest in scope, is the fact that the parlour represents a microcosm of the world outside its doors. The events inside Marie Laveau's Voodoo parlour on the scale of three people and their ritual correspond with events occurring simultaneously on a citywide scale in New Orleans, and with events occurring globally at corresponding times through history, as Marie Laveau describes:

MARIE LAVEAU

Centuries and centuries ago, my friends, celebrations were celebrated to insure the growing of the crops of Spring. Sacrifices were made for the earth's fecundity; and sometimes couples coupled in the fields to help Nature get the point. Later, Mardi Gras became a day of

> blood when those being admitted to the priesthood had their testicles cut off as sacrifice; and testicles and blood were spattered on the altars. Still later, the carnival known as the Lupercalia in Rome gave the citizens free reign to let themselves go. And behind the masks of concealment, all laws were abandoned so that men could, in one great orgy, sweat the evil from their pores. That was the carnival day when crimes of vengeance and rape and murder were done as well as public executions. So you see, sex, murder, vengeance and religion have been the antecedents of all carnivals whose aims -- as now -- has always been to force the corruption out, before the next corrupt cycle begins again.173

Inside the parlour, the characters drop their 'masks of concealment' – both the physical masks worn as part of their Mardi Gras costumes and their metaphorical masks as they reveal their true motives and confess their sins (the 'shriving' particular to Shrove Tuesday). They perform rituals of vengeance to destroy the old order, which they feel has wronged them and carries the responsibility for their distress, followed by rituals of fertility and subsequently death and rebirth. Outside the parlour, the planned revelry, debauchery and moral devastation of Carnival in New Orleans, ending in Mardi Gras, precedes the sacrifices and asceticism required by the Lenten season which ends in the death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead.

Carnivals feature an atmosphere of jubilation and celebration; but more than that, they rejoice in lampooning the status quo and even apparently reversing or overthrowing it. The anthropologist Victor Turner made the study of this aspect of ritual a focal point of his own research, as he argued that societies need to periodically challenge the status quo 'in this ritualized fashion…which involves a suspension of societal structures that allows people to engage in activities that would otherwise be considered inappropriate or even obscene'.[174] The activities during the Mardi Gras phase of Carnival in New Orleans correspond with universal patterns of rituals that function as so-called 'safety-valve customs' for mankind.[175] These ritual patterns, as do the events inside Marie Laveau's parlour, move from a false order to disorder, chaos or revolution to destruction to rebirth. But even though the affairs in the parlour have such far flung consequences and implications, to seek to illustrate the point by moving the action too far from the confines of the parlour after the inciting forces are set in motion, or to set them in more open, more general or universal surroundings, would weaken the impact of the story, lessen the suspense, distance the audience from their intimate connection with the characters, subtly changing the viewer's role from an involved spectator or voyeur who is almost a participant to that of passive onlooker; and it is uncertain that it would underscore the universal symbolism or elucidate the message. It may be worth noting, however, that the unconventional form of the screenplay adaptation itself also illustrates, like Carnival, a lampooning or abandonment of the status quo as it pertains to filmmaking.

So based on those grounds, the parlour stays. But staying in the parlour cannot fulfill all the needs of time and place as discussed earlier, which means that leaving the parlour is essential as long as the departure does not take place at the wrong time or for the wrong reasons, or that the move does not end up in inappropriate places.

6.3A. Building the pyramid – departures through discovery

The film adaptations listed in Appendix 7 contain soundly motivated, logical scene changes and locations. They illustrate skillful creative judgment and imaginative but congruous departures that serve as excellent resources toward the effort to adapt *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* for different reasons and in varying ways. For example, in the case of *Hamlet, Titus* (Julie Taymor, 1999) and *Sweeney Todd*, the adaptations are especially pertinent because the main action of these three films is very contained, even though they have a wide scope – in the case of *Titus*, an epic scope.

6.3A(I) – The Opening

Relating to this epic scope, earlier this writing touched on the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina on the people and the landscape of Louisiana, and the impact of that catastrophe on my psyche and on this project. In 2005 I sensed that Katrina would have to play a part in this composition, although I had not the faintest idea how it would. While one is loath to impose such a tragedy artificially or arbitrarily onto another place and time, it nevertheless felt cosmologically intrinsic to the eternal whole of New Orleans, part of the infinite life cycle and the essence of Louisiana and therefore part of the eternal and infinite heart of Marie Laveau.

Several screenplay drafts later, the story opened with Katrina, in an acknowledgment of the simultaneous existence of all elements both then and now -- the hurricane force, the Marie Laveau force, the fragile and the indestructible -- in a completely natural and lucid way. At the beginning of the story we see the connection and interdependence of these elements even through the deceptive separation of chronological time. All the details of the interdependence mechanism -- exactly how it works, how all the dots are connected and what exact cause leads to what precise effect, how that disaster links to what we are about to see -- are not in evidence, just as they are not in evidence in real life. The film *Cache* or *Hidden* (Michael Haneke, 2005) demonstrated the startling value of moments shown onscreen that provide the audience with some clarity and insight into connections without supplying them with a neat set of direct answers, illustrating the writer/director's point of view as:

> *…a cinema of insistent questions instead of false (because too quick) answers, for clarifying distance in place of violating closeness, for provocation and dialogue instead of consumption and consensus.*[176]

Both the opening scene and the ending of the last draft of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* follow this dictum, similarly expressed in *Alternative Scriptwriting: Successfully Breaking the Rules*:

> *If the conflict is designed to touch on the larger world right from the beginning, if we are asked to see the individual's problems against an ongoing historical process, then we don't expect the same kind of complete resolution. In fact, if we get it, we tend to think that the writer is naïve for ignoring the long-term persistence of such problems in the world beyond the story.* [177]

Similarly, Vivian Sobchak contends that the writer's primary goal is not to inform, nor to philosophise, but to create a narrative that dramatically – through its style and structure, its characterizations, its events and objects and places – provokes the reader to think, to observe, to draw his own abstract conclusions.178

The film opens on Marie Laveau's grave, surrounded by offerings, as storm winds start to blow. We see a shop sign -- Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo, 714 Bourbon Street -- thrashing on its chain, and we get a look inside the shop before the hurricane smashes through the window and shatters everything inside. Only Marie Laveau's portrait remains intact, untouched by the wind and water, eyes staring defiantly. This scene leads the viewer into the world of the motion picture through a contemporary linked portal, much like the young boy playing war with toy soldiers in the opening scene of 'Titus', who gets carried out of his kitchen by a Roman soldier and dropped into the Roman Coliseum. The prologue-type opening, the screenplay's first departure from the parlour, serves to introduce the viewers to the wider context of the world and the mystery they are about to enter.

6.3A(II) – Implied Scenes

Other scenes outside Marie Laveau's parlour fall into the category of the 'implied scene' as described by Linda Seger in *The Art of Adaptation*.[179] I placed these new scenes outside the parlour because the dialogue on which the scenes were based contained crucially important ingredients that are much more advantageously combined and displayed visually than by recounting.

For example, at the beginning of the play when Marie Laveau rages about her adversaries trying to curse her, we can use the camera to look into the wicked expressions on their frightful faces and witness their repulsive, foul deeds, which renders their threat much more vivid. This provides a distinct cinematic advantage for the adaptation, since the impact of theatre falls somewhere between literature, which is intellectual, and film, which is visceral.[180] Playwright Frank Gagliano openly stated that he was never completely happy with that beginning moment even as it played in the theatre: 'I always felt that that beat in the opening of the stage play -- just mentioning who Marie suspects is after her -- was always a difficult one for actresses playing Marie to solidify'.[181]

Watching the events onscreen as they happen effectively eliminates that weakness in the original; and throughout the play in general, seeing the shuddersome components of Voodoo cursing rituals creates a much more disturbing effect than mere narrative. Close ups of hair, fingernails, hands over a candle flame, faces convulsing in trance – whatever choices the director makes, these are important opportunities offered by the camera to increase the visceral impact of the events upon the audience; for however descriptive the dialogue in the play, not all of our imaginations can conjure as richly as film directors, writers and special effects experts in collaboration. Playwright Gagliano expressed the opinion that the screenplay 'really activates the Yah-Yah/Boho-Vi/Lily/Latour cabal and makes visually potent, up front, their threat to Marie'. [182]

Kenneth Branagh fulfilled a similar need in the film 'Hamlet' by showing columns of sinister grey soldiers plodding relentlessly through vast expanses of snow, bringing home the advancing threat of war mentioned in the play. This same device helps the viewer to grasp more clearly the nervousness of the soldiers guarding Elsinore Castle, which is less obvious in other *Hamlet* productions before this film. Branagh also featured newspaper headlines and images of Fortinbras, giving an icy, devilish face to the Norwegian commander and an ominous immediacy to his approach.

Besides clarifying and intensifying the danger to Marie Laveau, the camera also allows us to witness first-hand the downfall of her enemies, which serves up a more satisfying dish of revenge and a better rounded denouement in the film than we can glean from the play, which does not include the fate of the Voodoo villains.

Scenes depicting the villains' activities provide a marvelous opportunity for dramatic foreshadowing that helps to maintain the overriding feeling of dread. I seized this opportunity by choosing Malvina Latour, identified by Marie Laveau's dialogue as an aspiring rival, to constitute the weak link in the 'cabal' -- electing Malvina out of the four characters mentioned in the play because the other three are invented personae, whereas Malvina has a historical presence, albeit a sketchy and dubious one. Most research does not mention her at all, and the accounts that do exist claim that she was either Marie Laveau's daughter mistakenly identified as someone else[183] or an aspiring but unsuccessful successor to Marie Laveau.[184]

Accordingly, during the cursing rituals carried out against Marie Laveau, Malvina Latour never completely fulfills her part of the tasks, a fact that she takes great care to hide from her co-conspirators. These partial failures signal the possibility that at some point things might fall apart or go horribly wrong in some unpredictable way, as they indeed do in the end. For example, at one point Malvina fails to go into a trance at the appropriate time in the ceremony. Later she fails in her attempt to burn a lock of the Voodoo Queen's hair -- a startling image best conveyed on the screen, then tied by the camera to Marie Laveau's reaction as she senses, like an animal who can smell fear, the danger emanating from Malvina's weak efforts. Though unaware specifically of her reasons for feeling attacked, Marie Laveau's impulse --- or intuitive reflexes -- automatically repels the curse by sheer force of temper and will.

Implied scene sequences to be built up and expanded[185] and those necessary to fill out the characters' personal stories [186] also required settings outside the parlour. The camera facilitates our travel through time to visit the turning points in the lives of the characters referred to in their dialogue. We see their trauma and better understand the insidious causes and pernicious forces that drive Gabrielle and Beauregard to Marie Laveau's parlour. The camera shows us Gabrielle's suffering as the Judge heaps abuse on her; we experience Beauregard's pinnacles of glory and lowest depths of shame. The more we live through with our characters directly – i.e., visually -- the better able we are to unite with their suffering to fathom their behaviour and penetrate their epiphanies in the parlour.

In this same vein, as Mrs. Lovett relates the story of Lucy Barker to Sweeney in 'Sweeney Todd', we flash back from the all-important barbershop container to see Judge Turpin tormenting Lucy in her own home, then Lucy's humiliation and rape at the ball in Judge Turpin's mansion. These dreadful events unfolding before our eyes, accompanied by the increasingly urgent music and meticulous lyrics, pull us intimately into the suffering of the moment until Sweeney brings us back to the present with his agonized scream -- 'Nooooooooo!!!' [187] -- as we come crashing back to the barbershop.

The Marie Laveau screenplay adaptation had similar transitions for the scenes in which the characters fall into trances and perform spoken arias, then come crashing back to the present; so it was helpful to see this device work onscreen in another film. Logically, the characters must leave the parlour to inhabit the world of their arias in the same way that a person in a trance no longer inhabits the world of the present moment, but resides in 'another world', the world of the trance. Besides the obvious advantages of seeing an event rather than watching someone recount it with a glassy-eyed stare and a throaty voice, a departure to the scene of the aria is essential, required and demanded by the mental teleportation of the characters.

In order to make this device true and consistent, however, the nature of the departures must develop in the same way that the nature and depth of the characters' trances and their resulting arias evolve as the story progresses. As the evening wears on, Gabrielle and Beauregard's arias become increasingly self-directed and more exposing, more honest, less and less externally orchestrated and closer to the core of their present crises and physical circumstances. Correspondingly, the aria worlds begin to include the occasional presence and participation of Marie Laveau, and dialogue begins to emerge inside the aria scene, not just as voice-over narrative over the action. In the case of Gabrielle, at an important point in her metamorphosis from victimized caterpillar to vengeful butterfly, she casts herself as the star of her own grand aria in an operatic double world that includes both past and present.

The arias of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* serve all three purposes of the screenplay pyramid. They exhibit, as if under a microscope, the complexity of the emotional responses of the characters to the injuries they have endured; they propel the narrative; and they function historically and metaphorically as well. As Bell Hooks explains, 'For the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, the movement from silence to speech is not merely an attempt to insert a selfhood into history. It is part of a strategy for liberation'.[188] Without a doubt, the arias composed and recited by the characters become part of their strategy for liberation. This point is most eloquently expressed toward the end of the night, when Marie Laveau realises that in order to liberate herself from her curse, if her ritual is to have integrity, she also must step down from her role as orchestrator and become a participant by providing her own aria in which she examines her own soul, so that her ritual can be complete. Marie Laveau's decision brings to mind the end of the life of the protagonist in *Lola Montes* (Max Ophuls, 1955) the film adaptation of Alan Berg's opera *Lulu*, in which Lola Montes, in order to make her living, must act out her life in performance.[189] Marie Laveau, in order to continue living, must perform the grand aria of her life.

This metaphorical and internal process of liberation through which the characters struggle, accompanied by the literal, external physical liberation of shedding first their blindfolds, then their masks, provides another component ideally suited for cinematic strategies. Both playwright Gagliano and the director of the play's Hollywood run, Lawrence Peters, mentioned the difficulty of having actors on stage wearing masks and blindfolds during a significant portion of their performance as one of the serious challenges in staging this play.[190] From the point of view of adaptation, the camera provides the advantage of allowing the audience to become familiar with the characters before they end up masked and blindfolded in the parlour. Apart from that, there are two other important dramatic reasons for that choice. Firstly, it eliminates any distracting curiosity about the characters' appearance. An audience member once mentioned to Gagliano that she kept wondering what the Judge's Wife looked like under her disguise, and was thoroughly delighted when the actress's stunning beauty was suddenly revealed at the unmasking. [191] However gratifying this surprise may have been for this particular theatregoer – and this is an excellent example of the moments that make live theatre such a captivating art form – one can't help wondering if the viewer had missed anything important while preoccupied with this question; and if so, how much she had missed and how it might affect her understanding of the play. In contrast, by the time the characters in the screenplay end up masked and blindfolded in Marie Laveau's parlour, we are fully acquainted with them physically and therefore not distracted from the main action by wondering what they might really look like.

Secondly, our familiarity with the person under the mask and blindfold intensifies the underlying atmosphere of dread. Although the sight of anyone subjugated in this manner undoubtedly would disturb most human beings, knowing the individual held captive makes the feeling of anxiety much more acute than the sight of an unidentified person in the same situation. The opportunity for the audience to see the characters early on, and to experience their lives and contexts both on the way to the parlour and in the world of their arias, once again motivates, if not compels, the creating of implied scenes that are located outside Marie Laveau's parlour, such as the scene in the Judge's mansion when the Judge's Wife overhears her husband plotting her murder; the subsequent scene when she asks Hannah to help her by contacting Marie Laveau; and the scene where Beauregard consults with Hannah about the meaning of the gris-gris left on his doorstep.

6.3A(III) - 'One small part public' [192]

The grandest and most extreme departure from the parlour begins with a prologue scene, which occurs when Marie Laveau, galvanized by anger at both herself and her enemies, storms to the theatre in search of Malvina Latour and fails to find her there. Bursting with the surge of attack-energy, she instead launches into an improvised lesson in showmanship for the benefit of the unsuspecting persons there, using a kind of theatrical 'shock and awe'[193]technique that achieves rapid dominance over the participants through her application of the four core characteristics that define that technique: Knowledge, rapidity, brilliance, and control.[194] The subjugated actors, director and scene painter cave in and follow her stage directions unquestioningly, ending the impromptu performance with a round of rapturous applause.

The prologue continues into Congo Square, where Marie Laveau, freshly fueled by the success of her improvisation, hatches a plan with the help of Hannah (her best friend and confidante) to repel the curse and vanquish her enemies. The prologue ends with Marie Laveau announcing her plan:

MARIE LAVEAU

Yes! It's genius! An unsung Voodoo chamber opera of revenge!

(pause)

Well, mostly chamber. One small part public. [195]

The 'one small part public' becomes perhaps the wildest highlight in the wild festivities of the last day of Mardi Gras -- Marie Laveau's performance of her opening grand aria, 'A Time for Punishment',[196] with the entire city of New Orleans as props and scenery and its inhabitants as her audience.

Three key dramatic ingredients demanded the creation of this scene, the first one being character. In the same lecture mentioned earlier, scriptwriter Jimmy McGovern expounded on the necessity of allowing characters to have free will, meaning that a writer must guard against having a character do something that he or she does not want to do. It is easy for a writer to fall into the trap of writing an action for a character that facilitates the plot, or creates an easy segue into the next scene, or makes something easier for the writer, when in the world of that character he or she would most probably not take that action. This view is eloquently echoed and elucidated by writer Harold Pinter, as follows:

> *Given characters who possess a momentum of their own, my job is not to impose upon them, not to subject them to a false articulation. The relationship between author and characters should be a highly respectful one, both ways. And if it's possible to talk of gaining a kind of freedom from writing, it doesn't come by leading one's characters into fixed and calculated postures, but by allowing them to carry their own can, by giving them legitimate elbow-room…I'd like to make quite clear at the same time that I don't regard my own characters as uncontrolled or anarchic. They're not. The function of selection and arrangement is mine. I do all the donkey-work, in fact, and I think I can say I pay meticulous attention to the shape of things, from the shape of a sentence to the overall structure of the play. This shaping is of the first importance. But I think a double thing happens. You arrange and you listen, following the clues you leave for yourself, through the characters.*[197]

In this context, it is unlikely if not inconceivable for Marie Laveau, the diva, to undertake what she knew to be her magnum opus entirely in private. Her plans require the ritual to be conducted with the utmost secrecy, its details and participants concealed. In addition, the practical requirements and mechanisms of the magic would be more efficiently facilitated with priestess and participants remaining ensconced inside the parlour. Notwithstanding these factors, a person of Marie Laveau's celebrity status, reputation, and flamboyant personality would probably not want to play out the greatest moment of her career entirely isolated from her adoring public.

The key to resolving these conflicting needs lay in framing her opening grand aria as a grand entrance -- one as flashy as the fanfare and fireworks and flaming chariots of Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey superstar Gunther Gebel-Williams riding into view, wearing live roaring tigers draped across his neck, that I so vividly remember from my childhood (which brings us back to bread and circuses) but hopefully not as tacky. Marie Laveau needed a warm-up, an entertaining pre-ritual spectacle that she could share with her fans and followers, with the city she controlled as her backdrop.

This solution fulfills a second salient need by uniting the action with its extravagant, sumptuous historical setting, the place 'as sybaritic as it is religious,'[198] where 'even death becomes an excuse for celebration' [199] and we experience the city that 'might have been the Great Whore of Babylon, but few ever forgot or regretted her embrace'. [200] This is the scene that shows us New Orleans, Mardi Gras, Carnival, where the corresponding 'bigger-picture' atmosphere of light and dark, magic and violence unfolds as Marie Laveau struts through the streets playing to the crowd and is finally carried aloft by the frenzied throng on a throne and deposited on the platform for the King and Queen of Mardi Gras, where she finishes her aria.

Besides immersing the audience in the large-scale time and place, the scene also demonstrates Marie Laveau's position, influence and social significance. Her orchestration of the performance, as she inexplicably succeeds in concealing her presence while standing in full view of the crowd, then mysteriously charms five youths into announcing her arrival, captures her extraordinary power as a priestess. The reaction of the crowd when her presence is revealed and their responses to her performance as they follow her lead, echoing her phrases like a possessed congregation in a religious revival, leave no doubt as to her popularity and charisma as both a leader and a performer.

6.4. Fourth cinematic challenge: The ritual of revenge

> *Scholars of religion as well as others are now more willing to admit that ritual, the 'doing' of religion, is just as critical to religious life as the beliefs and ideas expressed in mythology or theology. Essentially, religion must be performed to become meaningful.* [201]
>
> *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*

Inside the unsung grand ritual-opera screenplay lies the chamber opera within the film – Marie Laveau's opus, the ritual ceremony through which she intends to achieve her goals of vanquishing her enemies, fighting off their curse and achieving divine status. In order for this to succeed at all levels, it is not sufficient only to fulfill the dramatic and cinematic requirements of the moment; it is vital that Marie Laveau's performance in the ritual remain meaningful from a religious point of view as well. Once again, the work of Maya Deren proved to be an invaluable source – not just her aforementioned documentary on Voodoo, but her body of work composed before her Haitian experience - *At Land, Meshes of the Afternoon, A Study in Choreography for Camera, Ritual in Transfigured Time, The Very Eye of Night*, and *Meditation on Violence.* These exquisite short films, as Joseph Campbell stated, 'testified to her understanding of the pictorial script of dream, vision, and hallucination'. [202]

With her background in dance, her immersion in Voodoo and her extraordinary talent for composition and abstract form, it is not surprising that Maya Deren's explanations and illustrations of the strong connection between film and ritual became an influential and formative source for the components of my 'platypus'. She wrote:

A Ritual is an action distinguished from all others in that it seeks the realization of its purpose through the exercise of form. In this sense ritual is art, and even historically all art derives from ritual. Being a film ritual, it is achieved not in spatial terms alone, but in terms of time created by the camera. [203]

Accordingly, Marie Laveau's ritual opera, which existed in an orderly linear time span written to be performed onstage, had to be adapted into something more. That 'something' had to translate to the eye and the mind as a genuine Voodoo ritual, without the limitations of, for example, copying one from a documentary or reproducing a traditional version on film by following written or oral expert instructions. It had to be an interpretation of a ritual – bearing in mind that 'the interpretive process is a creative one allowing a person to make connections in the processes of perception, observation, thoughts and writing'. [204] The interpretation, however, had to be strict because the ritual process by nature and definition must be specifically set, orderly, strictly formulated and according to plan, as '…in a ritual or ceremony, like a wedding, it is crucial for the participants that all contingencies be removed'. [205] In addition, the ritual had to work within the motion picture as a spoken or unsung opera number accompanied by Voodoo rhythms; and most importantly, as it was a now a *film* ritual opera, it had to work as Maya Deren described -- as a ritual opera achieved on film in terms of time created by the camera.

To accomplish the above it was necessary to analyse the formal movements of priests and priestesses and participants in Voodoo rituals -- since those movements are, after all, the mechanism through which the ritual 'seeks the realization of its purpose' [206] -- and instead of replicating those movements, to write them into the scene in broad strokes, while simultaneously using the spatial freedom provided by the camera to illustrate instantly and with explicit force the connection between these ritual movements and the gruesome events that they set in motion – for example, Gabrielle blows out a candle, extinguishing the flame; we immediately move to the corresponding life to be extinguished, and witness the murder. This strategy directly and eerily connects the viewer to the effects of the ritual in the same way that one connects a conductor's baton sailing through the air with the sounds made by the orchestra musicians.

The strategy required that picking and choosing from myriad traditional components, props, and choreography pertaining to Voodoo rituals of death and revenge those elements most salient to incorporate and formalize cinematically in order to write the right ritual for the camera, one that would speak the truth and essence of Voodoo while maintaining the underlying dread and connecting the audience with the events that result from the magic executed in Marie Laveau's Voodoo parlour. After arduous immersion in Voodoo books and documentaries, a very useful one being *Les Maitres Fous* or *Mad Masters* (Jean Rouch, 1955), shot in Ghana, it was time to put all this information in a mental centrifuge and discard all but the essential.

In making choices it was important to remain faithful to the Voodoo religion and to respect its integrity of form; but also -- and perhaps more importantly for the purposes -- to choose with three other requirements in mind, related to the pyramid building blocks: 1) Those elements that pertain to historical time and place; 2) Elements that have crucial connections to the crises and evolution of the characters; 3) Elements that are best explored visually (cinematic) and are advantageous in propelling the narrative. After choosing based on those criteria, the ritual steps and movements had to be modified to form a suitable choreography that would work as an unsung opera number with dialogue that could be dramatically enhanced by accompaniment on drums.

The final result comprises the Ritual of Revenge, [207] the details of which are better read in the screenplay – and ultimately best watched on screen – than recounted here.

Chapter 7 : Looking for Power in All the Wrong Places: The Theme and the Source of the Struggle

> *Horror. Horror has a face, and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not then they are enemies to be feared. They are truly enemies. I remember when I was with Special Forces. Seems a thousand centuries ago. We went into a camp to inoculate the children. We left the camp after we had inoculated the children for polio, and this old man came running after us and he was crying. He couldn't see. We went back there and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile. A pile of little arms. And I remember... I... I... I cried. I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out. I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it. I never want to forget. And then I realized, like I was shot -- like I was shot with a diamond, a diamond bullet right through my forehead. And I thought: My God... the genius of that. The genius. The will to do that. Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized they were stronger than we. Because they could stand that these were not monsters. These were men, trained cadres. These men who fought with their hearts, who had families, who had children, who were filled with love, but they had the strength -- the strength -- to do that. If I had ten divisions of those men our troubles here would be over very quickly. You have to have men who are moral, and at the same time who are able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill without feeling... without passion... without judgment... without judgment. Because it's judgment that defeats us.* [208]

- Kurtz in Apocalypse Now *(Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)*

Only please...please keep me free from compassion. Please...please...With compassion excluded the Loas will mount me and, unscarred, I'll keep my hands in the kanzo flame. [209] *So stage your opera, Marie Laveau! Get even in it, Marie Laveau. And when your victims, Marie Laveau, begin to snivel and rant and crow; you'll steel your heart so the Loas will know that your bone-deep cruelty has started to show. Then my power divine, from above and below, will spark the kettle to blaze and glow; and the gris-gris curse, I'll overthrow.* [210]

- Marie Laveau in In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau

7.1. Power Misconstrued

The story begins when Marie Laveau plunges into crisis after discovering that her position and her life have been threatened. As the Voodoo Queen faces the possibility of her death, she races through the first four of the famous five stages of grief propounded by the late Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance -[211] in one tempestuous tantrum and in record time, with a speed and a style appropriate to the diva that she is.

She achieves the fifth stage much later, after going through what St. John of the Cross termed a 'dark night of the soul' [212] that yields a flash of self-revelation which ends her self-doubts, and how she reaches that moment of clarity comprises the plot. Acceptance comes at the end of the story -- just as it comes at the end of the grief cycle -- because the few minutes of 'stage four depression' that Marie Laveau allows herself are briskly followed by a bounce back into a combination of the former stages of anger, bargaining and denial, as she finalises a deal with the gods that she is certain will save her.

Marie Laveau's crisis indicates that in spite of the position of power and influence she has attained in the world in which she lives, her inner world remains fragile, fraught with an insecurity that is inappropriate to her external achievements. Although self-doubt is universal, it is much more insidious and pernicious for women who historically have been forced to resort to oblique ways of snagging the power denied to them by men and their laws and often doubt their genuine achievements, feeling them tainted by indirect tactics, eventually becoming unable to distinguish between what they believe is 'real' versus 'false' in their accomplishments. To see how that particular type of insecurity manifests, one has only to look at the disastrous lives of so many female celebrities. Perhaps this is one reason that Elizabeth Grosz refers to feminism as 'a struggle without end, a process of endless becoming-other rather than the attainment of recognizable positions and roles that are valued'. [213]

The psychology of insecurity and lack, which according to Jacques Lacan leads to desire and demand[214] -- and in this case, the lack is specifically the feeling of powerlessness, or lack of power -- can seek remedy in various ways depending on the circumstances and history of the individual involved. Marie Laveau, who belongs to two categories of oppressed people, reacts by taking steps to increase her power and cure her lack. She is aided and abetted in her plan by Hannah, another person belonging to the same two categories of oppressed people and the product of a similar environment. It is perfectly understandable, however unfortunate, that the steps taken by the women follow the model of the power mongers in their world – they determine, as Shylock did in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, that 'the villainy you teach me I shall execute, and it shall go hard, but I will better the instruction'.[215]

The aforementioned years of working with girls in juvenile detention and adults in Los Angeles county gaol and California state prisons helped me to see how often the abuse of power leads people who have been abused to equate abuse with power. Closely related to this misconception is the idea that 'real power' is cold and emotionless, cruel if necessary, born of a superobjective that will not weaken through pity or empathy, as illustrated by the character of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* who is revered by the natives because of his savagery, and refashioned in *Apocalypse Now* as he describes the men who had the 'brilliance' and 'the strength' to cut off the children's arms, who could 'kill without feeling' and who were therefore 'stronger than us'. We need look no further than our recent world history to find entirely too many exemplifications of that view – Stalin, Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin, Papa Doc Duvalier, Omar al-Beshir, Nicolae Ceausescu, Mussolini – the list continues, terrifyingly long.

Encouraged by Hannah, who opines that Marie Laveau's vulnerability owes as much to her tendency to get 'soft' and feel sorry for people as it does to her proclivity for theatrics, Marie Laveau determines that she must wield this type of ruthless power, which she calls 'Divine cruelty',[216] in order to prevail. She and Hannah also believe that Marie Laveau must endure the formal Voodoo initiation known as 'Kanzo,' which involves being 'mounted' (possessed) by a Voodoo deity, in order for the priestess's power to solidify. There appears to be a flaw in the logic through the displacement, or the 'disempowering' dynamic of this supposedly 'empowering' process. The possessed woman is a person who is spoken-through, rather than speaking, and whose will is the will of the deity that wields her, so that the possessed woman's power seems to lie in her receptivity,[217] which is traditionally considered a feminine type of quality. The questionable quality and the stability of personal power that is attained through a source outside one's own internal resources – conferred, as it were, rather than earned or achieved by one's own efforts -- contributes to the problematic nature of female passivity. But Marie Laveau demands this path, so there is nothing I can do about it for I must continue to allow my characters to have free will.

As part of her plan, Marie Laveau manipulates the two desperate people in her parlour -- Beauregard and Gabrielle -- into a ritual ceremony that includes excruciating psychological explorations that grow increasingly darker, deeper and more painful as the night progresses. During the proceedings, Marie Laveau, Beauregard and Gabrielle play out the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors, between torturers and victims, as rage turns both outward and inward and victims become victimizers, participating together in ritual acts of revenge and murder, some of which do not turn out precisely as planned.

Beauregard's final revelation leaves him completely crushed, his psyche and spirit annihilated. His mangled condition arouses Marie Laveau's compassion. As Beauregard attempts to rise from the ashes, his suffering ironically giving birth to his first genuine creative impulse, Gabrielle moves to finish him off -- and Marie Laveau defends him. Enraged, Gabrielle rebels and strikes down the both of them, killing Beauregard and wounding Marie Laveau.

It is in this wounded state that the Voodoo Queen has her final epiphany and receives a message from her gods, the true source of her power revealed as her compassion. The key to her divinity has always resided in her heart, just like the proverbial beggar who unknowingly carried a precious jewel in his pocket throughout his life. All her fears now gone, Marie Laveau chooses to take the blame for Beauregard's murder and to sacrifice her life, again bringing to mind the narrator in *Heart of Darkness*:

> *Droll thing life is -- that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself -- that comes too late -- a crop of inextinguishable regrets…perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible.* [218]

7.2 – Power Redefined

> *The appearance of reality depicted in the film is actually a cover for its ideology.*[219]
>
> *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals and Rituals*

If we accept the validity of the above statement, we can logically assume that the responsibility for the ideological cover-up falls squarely with the author of the film. Unless the author is deceitful, or making the film solely for fun or finances, we can also assume that the film reflects the author's own ideology.
In the case of the Marie Laveau screenplay, the revelation of compassion as the source of true power definitely reflects the ideology of the author.

In referring to compassion as the theme of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* I employ the Buddhist definition of compassion, which includes the elements of action, fearlessness and personal responsibility. Not that the inclusion of these elements is unique to Buddhism -- many other definitions, particularly in spiritual contexts, share similar terms -- but calling on the Buddhist definition is a simple and efficient way to clarify the use of the word in this context, as distinct from its mere literal etymology of 'feeling with', which is an important clarification to make. Of the many (too many) definitions of Buddhism that abound, a particularly useful one comes from Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama: 'Buddhism is the practice of compassion'.

In the Buddhist definition, compassion comes from a deep internalised understanding of the other's suffering as if it were your own, without fear – most often achieved through the practice of meditation – and this deep fearless understanding comes with the responsibility to do what you can to be helpful, that is, to help relieve that suffering in accordance with a realistic assessment of your position and parameters. Because its source is true understanding, compassion automatically leads to kindness and cooperation, will always be protective rather than destructive, and will never seek to harm or interfere with others in a negative way.

How is compassion then redefined as power? The clearest route to that answer is anecdotal:

> *One day the Dalai Lama received a visit from a monk arriving from Tibet after spending twenty-five years in Chinese labor camps. His torturers had brought him to the brink of death several times. The Dalai Lama talked at length with the monk, deeply moved to find him so serene after so much suffering. He asked him if he had ever been afraid. The monk answered: "I was often afraid of hating my torturers, for in so doing I would have destroyed myself."* [220]

Another example:

> *Tenzin Choedrak…was first sent to a forced labor camp…He was transferred from camp to camp for nearly twenty years and often thought that he would die of hunger or of the abuse inflicted on him. A psychiatrist who specializes in post-traumatic stress and who treated Doctor Choedrak was astonished that he showed not the least sign of post-traumatic stress syndrome. He was not bitter, felt no resentment, displayed serene kindness, and had none of the usual psychological problems, such as anxiety, nightmares, and so on. Choedrak acknowledged that he occasionally felt hatred for his torturers, but that he had always returned to the practice of meditation on compassion.* [221]

And finally, the awe-inspiring Etty Hillesum, who one year before her death at Auschwitz wrote, *I've already died a thousand times in a thousand concentration camps. I know everything. There is no new information to trouble me. One way or another, I already know everything. And yet, I find this life beautiful and rich in meaning at every moment…* [222]

also provides this overwhelming account:

I am not easily frightened. Not because I am brave, but because I know that I am dealing with human beings and that I must try as hard as I can to understand everything that everyone ever does. And that was the real import of this morning: Not that a disgruntled young Gestapo officer yelled at me, but that I felt no indignation, rather a real compassion, and would have liked to ask, "Did you have a very unhappy childhood? Has your girlfriend let you down?" Yes, he looked harassed and driven, sullen and weak. I should have liked to have started treating him right there and then, for I know that pitiful young men like that are dangerous as soon as they are let loose on mankind.[223]

Dangerous indeed. Etty Hillesum, with startling wisdom, expresses the insight that power and control over other people through force or manipulation is actually weakness masquerading as power, nothing but an attempt to subjugate fear; and seeing clearly the perils and terrifying consequences of such a misdirected attempt, she nevertheless responds with compassion to the Gestapo officer's attempt to frighten her, perceiving him as 'harassed and driven, sullen and weak,' even 'pitiful'. These are not the mere platitudes of safe 'holier-than-thou' types pretending to feel sorry for their enemies; this is enlightened wisdom, for she is in the position of a completely crushed, most hopeless victim, he in the position of powerful victimiser, completely free and in charge. In spite of outward appearances, who has power over whom?

The officer appears to be reacting from some disturbing emotion, not from inner personal power but entirely at the mercy of whatever is consuming him; whereas she is entirely in charge of her own reactions regardless of external circumstances, like the monk who knew that if he grew to hate his enemies, he would have destroyed himself. Similarly, the late Dr Choedrak (who was the Dalai Lama's personal physician) found enough power through the practice of compassion to endure twenty-two years of imprisonment and torture without suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome. Dr Choedrak was released in 1980 and died in 2001. Although his broken face and body displayed alarming proof of the horrors that had been inflicted on him, his luminous smile and manner demonstrated his power to remain whole throughout the ordeal, in astounding contrast to most victims of torture who continue to suffer from their torments well after they are no longer physically bound to them, and never completely heal or regain their lives. Dr Choedrak, Etty Hillesum and others like them lend a luminous light to the Spanish aphorism, 'In order to insult me, first you have to get my permission'.

The element of fearlessness stands out markedly in the earlier examples – in Etty Hillesum's statement that she is not easily frightened, and in the monk's fear not of his torturers, but of hating his torturers. Zen Buddhist teacher Taizan Maezumi Roshi often taught that the greatest gift one can give others through Buddhist practice is the gift of no fear.[224] One of the most popular and best known Buddhist scriptures, the Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra, defines Nirvana as simply the state of no fear – not a place outside this one, or a super-state of bliss achieved through mysterious exercises, just a state of clarity and pure awareness that renders one able to respond appropriately – without hindrance, without fear -- to whatever happens in life.

Marie Laveau receives the gift of no fear along with her realisation about compassion:

MARIE LAVEAU

Place the bloody spike in my hands, Gabrielle. Place the blame on Marie Laveau. I created this evil.

GABRIELLE

Are you dying?

MARIE LAVEAU

Yes.

GABRIELLE

Why? You don't have to.

MARIE LAVEAU

I know.

Hannah enters, takes in the scene, runs to her friend.

HANNAH

Marie Laveau!

(then)

I'll get help.

Marie Laveau stops her.

MARIE LAVEAU

No! I will not let you take the cup from me.

She places her hands in the fire, then takes them out.

MARIE LAVEAU (CONT'D)

See? My hands are unscarred. I'm not afraid anymore. [225]

Wisdom and acceptance have replaced Marie Laveau's confusion and turmoil. She has been released through compassion and is prepared to move on, freed from the need to replay the cruelty that she learned. Her insight, however, cannot magically erase the consequences of all of her actions. Marie Laveau was, after all, a powerful sorceress. Her violent ritual took on a life of its own, reflecting the instability and unpredictability of outside forces combined with the mysterious inner universe of human beings, the unknown, unplumbed depths that lie beneath all persons, including those we foolishly think we understand.

Marie Laveau's powerful magic gone awry succeeded in creating a brand new monster in the form of the downtrodden woman who came to her for help. The weak and talentless, press-manufactured celebrity who fled from insecurity to persecution under the thumb of her disgusting, abusive husband, has transformed through the ritual into a narcissistic, ruthless superstar who will do anything – including murder -- to preserve her status. Thus the wheel of the 'cycle of violence'[226] keeps on turning as victims becomes victimisers – dangerous when unleashed on society, as Etty Hillesum points out, and as sinister as the forces that created them.

Chapter 8 : At the End: The Tragic Pleasure, the Pain, the Wonder and the Renewal

The conflict extends from the story world out to us. Rather than being left unscathed by the story, we are forced to question our desire to look on and enjoy.[227]

Alternative Scriptwriting

8.1. Why are we watching?

At the beginning of my candidature my supervisor asked me a very important (and rather astute) question: Why would a person committed to non-violence, who has taken Buddhist clergy precepts, who deplores the state of the cinema vis-à-vis gratuitous gore and so forth, choose such a disturbing work full of violence and depravity? She must have intuited (shrewdly) the existence of some underlying reason, one not immediately obvious, motivating this paradoxical choice of material, which in fact does exist. I explained the reason as best I could in answer to her question, whereupon she immediately charged me with the responsibility of again explaining it here.

The seed for this research and adaptation was inadvertently planted by the retreat master during one particular clergy summer-training retreat in the Mojave Desert. It sprouted in the stubborn, unforgiving soil of Mojave and mind and sent out roots with each meditation session of that frustrating, scorching retreat, watered by sweat and nourished by failure – or what I saw as my failure – after each teacher/student interview session. Much had happened in my life between a stint as a sitcom writer in Hollywood and this permanent detour into Buddhist ordination, and those events – added to earlier life traumas and my generally problematic nature – were interfering with my training efforts. In other words, I found myself sitting firmly in my usual position, i.e., getting in my own way.

The particular obstruction at that moment took the form of rebellion against being asked to experience genuine love and compassion for evildoers. I have never been able to stomach the type of discussion that purports to 'shed light' on the world's villains and heroes by giving undue importance to alleged moments in their lives or aspects of their personality that belie the total person – for example, harping on Hitler's vegetarianism, love for his dogs, and the fact that he made the trains run on time; or launching into criticisms of Mother Theresa (whom I once heard admit to slapping a woman!) or Mahatma Gandhi that rob them of their right to be human. In my view, the totality of the life of certain phenomenal individuals represents such a massive contribution, whether constructive or destructive, that it overwhelms any secondary points to the contrary and renders it beneath contempt to waste time and speech advocating for the devil.

Being asked to generate genuine love for someone like Hitler felt like an enormity, a heinous injustice, a vicious insult to his victims. Similarly, I found it impossible to feel anything but agony and rage in response to rapists, torturers, abusers of children and the like. Admittedly my inability to cope with – or even hear about -- such gruesome realities, and the effect it was having on my sanity, was one of the main reasons I sought meditation instruction to begin with. At this stage, although my hold on my sanity had improved considerably, I was still unable – i.e., surreptitiously unwilling – to go the full distance with the cultivation of love and compassion by extending it to those whom I saw as monsters.

Without a doubt that has been, and continues to be, the hardest part of my practice, and one that I can ill afford to neglect; for as Etty Hillesum wrote, *I can see no way around it. Each of us must look inside himself and excise and destroy everything he finds there which he believes should be excised and destroyed in others.* [228]

It is the most difficult of endeavours, as set out hereunder by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hahn:

One day we received a letter telling us about a young girl on a small boat who was raped by a Thai pirate. She was only twelve, and she jumped into the ocean and drowned herself. When you first learn of something like that, you get angry at the pirate, you naturally take the side of the girl. As you look more deeply you will see it differently. If you take the side of the little girl, then it is easy. You only have to take a gun and shoot the pirate. But we can't do that. In my meditation, I saw that if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, I would now be the pirate. There is a great likelihood that I would have become a pirate. I can't condemn myself so easily. In my meditation, I saw that many babies are born along the Gulf of Siam, hundreds every day, and if we educators, social workers, politicians, and others do not do something about the situation, in twenty-five years a number of them will become sea pirates. That is certain. If you or I were born today in those fishing villages, we might become sea pirates in twenty-five years. If you take a gun and shoot the pirate, you shoot all of us, because all of us are to some extent responsible for this state of affairs. Can we look at each other and recognize ourselves in each other? [229]

What a daunting, if not unfathomable task -- how to do this? Not all persons have a meditation practice, much less one as deep and sustaining as has the author of the above passage, who joined the monastery at the age of sixteen. Before I began Buddhist training, my big defence against the horror of such stories was avoidance – run, hide, don't listen, and for heaven's sake, never, ever watch the six o'clock news. The strategy, however, was failing me. Avoidance did not decrease my hypersensitivity by providing a healing distance. I was definitely not getting stronger or less prone to depression; if anything, I was getting worse.

Other more traditional methods, such as serious study, had failed even earlier -- for example, acquiring a Bachelors degree in Psychology taught me that I was ill suited for a career in Psychology, even though my marks at university were excellent, often the best in the class. Studying is an invaluable supportive activity, but in a crisis it is insufficient in and of itself. As scientist and monk Matthieu Ricard contends,

> *Mere intellectual understanding is not enough. It is not by leaving the doctor's prescription by the bedside or learning it by heart that we are cured. We must integrate what we have learned so that our understanding becomes intimately bound up with our mind's flow.*[230]

So apart from the practice of meditation, what other tools do we have at hand that can help us achieve the mindset for compassion, that mysterious intellectual force that enables perceptions to act on the mind in a profoundly affecting manner, simultaneously giving the mind the clarity and power to respond productively? Another part of the answer comes from the irrepressible Roshi (Zen Master) Bernie Glassman:

> *In my view, we can't heal ourselves or other people unless we bear witness… bearing witness to the wholeness of life, to every aspect of the situation that arises. So bearing witness to someone's kidnapping, assaulting, and killing a child means being every element of the situation: being the young girl, with her fear, terror hunger and pain; being the killer, with his rage and hurt; being the girl's mother, with her endless nights of grief and guilt; being the mother of the man who killed, torn between love for her son and the horror of*

> *his actions; being the families of both the killed and the killer, each with its respective pain, anger, horror, and shame; being the dark, silent cell where the girl was imprisoned; being the police officers who finally, under enormous pressure, caught the man. It means being each and every element of this situation. You can see immediately how hard this is. Sometimes all we can do, at least in the beginning, is bear witness to our own rage.*[231]

Glassman's teachings and practices for bearing witness take myriad forms, a summary of which is inappropriate here; but my practice of them forms an integral part of the reason for my choosing such disturbing material. The abominable, horrific events of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* were, initially, nearly unbearable for me to read; only the art and the craft with which they were being communicated kept me from giving up. There was nothing sensationalistic or shallow about the suffering in those lines, both personal and historical. They represent the kind of pain and depravation that I do not even want to hear about, much less become intimate with – and that is precisely why I chose to do so. The arias spoken by the characters in which they desperately proclaim their intimate suffering as part of the 'strategy of liberation' discussed earlier, resonate deeply with the practice of bearing witness.

I cannot so much as begin to understand – and therefore help to counteract or prevent -- cruelty and violence and abuse unless I face them head on, interact with them, acknowledge the seeds of cruelty and violence in myself and others and make sure never to water them inside or outside myself. That does not mean I have to become more horrible, or forgive or excuse horrors; it means I must find a way to see clearly into them and dispel the comforting illusion of their separateness from me, in order to be effective against them. Conversely, I must also discover the seeds of goodness in myself and others – even the pirate -- and do everything I can to water those inside and outside, so that the helpful seeds grow and the destructive ones die. If I shoot the pirate, he will be dead, and there is no way that I will ever understand what happened. Without that understanding, I can do nothing to prevent the next horror, or to keep three or four other angry pirates from taking his place.

As set out in the beginning of this writing, I believe in the power of art, and in this case specifically cinematic art. Bearing witness through art, becoming one with the suffering caused by violence and depravity in an honest way, without cynicism, without the intention to titillate, gives us an opportunity to attest to the destructive aspects of the human condition not just to enjoy revenge when the 'bad guy' is killed, or to glamourise crime and criminals, but to recognise and acknowledge the harmful seeds in ourselves in a way that incites understanding and compassion, in a way that brings us together as human beings who are capable of all that is good and all that is bad, rather than as people divided into 'good guys' and 'bad guys' with a set of corresponding behaviours unique to each group.

Conclusion

> *The good work is one which has both a rich meaning and a correspondingly complex form, wedded together in a unity (Romantic) or isomorphic with each other (Classical).* [232]
>
> *Peter Wollen*

The screenplay adaptation of *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* represents the good work to be used as the basis for something of value to be seen on the screen, hopefully a good film, whose theme provides the richness of meaning – compassion -- the cultivation and practice of which is considered by many experts to be the only hope we have for humanity to break the cycle of violence and, indeed, to survive as a species.[233] I agree with those who see the development of compassionate behaviour as adaptive in the Darwinian sense, as a step toward the further evolution of man.[234] To present drama that resonates emotionally and intellectually with these ideas comprises, I think, a good reason for this cinematic endeavour.

The corresponding complexity of the screenplay form has been discussed at length throughout this thesis. Whether or not the wedding, or joining, of form and meaning succeeds can only manifest in how one feels after experiencing the work – in other words, to some extent after reading the screenplay, and to the full extent, one hopes, after watching the film. The enjoyment of experiencing drama is extremely paradoxical, as endings do not necessarily make us happy. At the end of the story we mourn dead bodies, we have witnessed dreadful things, felt pity and fear and horror and pain; but although these feelings are not strictly pleasurable, we somehow emerge with a feeling of wonder, in some way feeling renewed by it all. The tragic pleasure is felt as a renewal or cleansing of the spirit through suffering, or the sharing of suffering. If that is the feeling and the effect that results from experiencing the unsung Voodoo-ritual opera feature film entitled *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, adapted from Frank Gagliano's one-act play by the same name, then my work is done.

Epilogue – the Practical, the Feasible and the Possible

I have not addressed the issue of the actual making of the motion picture from the script partially because I feel that that is the province and concern of the director and the producer, rather than the screenwriter; but mostly because I so thoroughly enjoyed the freedom afforded by a university Doctoral project to stretch out into the adventurous, to exercise creative muscles with less regard to practical considerations such as shooting budgets, studio agendas and fears, backers' opinions and interests, and other so-called "real world" external constraints. One of the greatest opportunities that an academic endeavour provides is to allow for an extent in imagination and inventiveness that an artist often does not have the luxury to employ in the practical world.

The screenplay *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* is challenging, different, rich and full – even overfilled – as opposed to most traditional industry-appropriate scripts. The "overfilling" is intentional, guided by what Stephen Gaghan, writer of *Syriana*, described in an interview:

> *I find scripts very hobbling because you can't really express yourself and it's very hard to go deep because you're describing sight and sound and nothing beyond that. Whenever you describe emotion in your text, it reads irrelevant. It's very difficult. You have a limited format and then you're reducing it all down after that. You're already starting with something reduced and then when you make the film, you're going to reduce it even more. So your process is about finding as much as you can so that when you reduce it down, it's chockfull of information, really dense and heavy…if you don't start with too much, you can't have something rich.*[235]

As a new cinematic form, *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* "starts with too much" in order to allow the director or the director and writer to streamline it according to his or her vision, like the many directors who traditionally cut two hours from *Hamlet* before producing it (which two hours, of course, depends on the director):

> *Some directors cut the opening scene on the battlements. Others cut Voltemand and Cornelius, the ambassadors to Norway, and Polonius's spy, Reynaldo, is frequently elbowed out. But all these characters reinforce the politics of the play, and the familiar world of hypersurveillance that operates in Elsinore. Then there's Fortinbras, the action hero who happens to wander into the body-strewn court and ends the play. He often gets the boot. But he provides the play's international perspective, and opens out the play from the claustrophobia of Denmark.*
> *One scene (which, although in the Second Quarto, was kicked out of the Folio) contains one of the play's most resonant modern images: Fortinbras's huge army being mobilised against a tiny part of Poland, which in itself is worthless. They are fighting for an eggshell, at a potential cost of millions and the loss of 20,000 lives. It is easy to cut from a narrative point of view but it deepens the context of Hamlet's indecision… Deciding what to cut depends on what your priorities are. As Jan Kott wrote in Shakespeare Our Contemporary, an inevitably shortened Hamlet "will always be a poorer Hamlet than Shakespeare's Hamlet is; but it may also be a Hamlet enriched by being in our time".*[236]

An exception to the usual is Kenneth Branagh's film *Hamlet,* which includes the entire four-hour text, thus providing a successful example of work which is often considered overwritten and overwhelming succeeding through the particular ways in which different artists deal with it. The same can be said of the film version of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, discussed earlier – a controversial film with an exceedingly long and overwritten script, structured more like poetry than theatre or film, yet Sidney Lumet turned it (with most of the original dialogue) into a motion picture that most experts consider brilliant, although the public is divided into those who either love it or hate it – the inescapable position of art with unfamiliar and unconventional work.

If I can be forgiven a flight of fancy, imagine the German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, having had a completely different life, struggling inside an artistically stunted Hollywood community and deciding to do a DCA as an opportunity to create his famous surreal 15-hour film *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Fassbinder, 1980), the longest narrative film ever[237]. It is possible that given the freedom of academia combined with his talent and proclivities, he might have written a 32-hour screenplay to begin with.

Having said all of the above, I believe that there are enough unconventional directors and producers who can translate *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* to the screen in a variety of different ways, depending on the funds available and their point of view, whether as an *Avatar* type project (James Cameron, 2009) or in a *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrman, 2001) style or a lá *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuaron, 2001)., or in the style of Terry Gilliam films. In case of budgetary constraints, artistic choices can be made to minimise expenses, such as the technique used in *The Lady and the Duke (L'Anglaise et Le Duc)* (Eric Rohmer, 2001) that uses exteriors consisting of digital recreations of pre-Impressionist painting styles[238] or perhaps the use of minimalist mise en scéne such as in *Perceval* (Eric Rohmer, 1978) or Richard Burton's *Hamlet* (John Gielgud, 1964).

The roles in the film are complex and difficult enough to interest major film actors who enjoy challenging work, particularly the role of Marie Laveau, considering the scarcity of exciting leading roles for women of colour. Studio packaging with actors who are in demand would also enhance the possibilities of funding. All in all, realization of the screenplay on film may not be likely, but it is definitely possible.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Highlights from the biography of Frank Gagliano

Frank Gagliano was born in Brooklyn, NY and was educated at The University of Iowa (BA), and at Columbia University in New York (MFA). He was part of the 1960's group of Off-Broadway playwrights that revitalized American drama. Gagliano's Off Broadway plays include *Conerico Was Here To Stay* (at NY's Cherry Lane Theatre); *Night Of The Dunce* (first developed as The Library Raid, at Houston's Alley Theatre, directed by Nina Vance), produced in New York at The Cherry Lane Theatre; *Father Uxbridge Wants To Marry* (first developed at the O'Neill Theatre Center), produced at New York's American Place Theatre, starring Olympia Dukakis, and later televised on New York's WNET-TV, starring Roy Scheider; and *The City Scene*.

In The Voodoo Parlour Of Marie Laveau also was first developed at The O'Neill Theatre Center, showcased in New York's Phoenix Theatre Sideshow Series and at The Neighborhood Group Theatre (also in New York). *In The Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau* had its West Coast premiere at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in Hollywood on 11 June 1986.

Other plays have been produced in regional theatres and universities throughout the country; they include *The Hide-And-Seek-Odyssey Of Madeleine Gimple* (a children's play, first commissioned by The Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center and which starred Raul Julia); *The Prince of Peasantmania*, first produced at The O'Neill Theatre Center and which had its World Premiere at The Milwaukee Repertory Theater, starring John Glover); *Congo Square* (a musical, with Broadway composer Claibe Richardson); *The Resurrection of Jackie Cramer* (a Rock Opera with composer

Raymond Benson, recently the official writer of the James Bond novels): *Big Sur* (first produced as an original television play on the NBC network, starring Billy Dee Williams and the late James Coco); *The Total Immersion of Madeleine Favorini*; and *San Ysidro*, a cantata with composer James Reichert (written in memory of those who were massacred at a MacDonald's restaurant in San Ysidro, California, on July 8, 1984).

Gagliano's musical theatre piece (original book and lyrics) *From The Bodoni County Songbook Anthology*, with a score by Claibe Richardson, was developed at the 1989 O'Neill Theatre Center Musical Theatre Conference, and inaugurated the new Musical Lab productions at New York's Vineyard Theatre in the Spring of 1991 and, in its revised text, was showcased by Pittsburgh's Pyramid Productions, August 1995.

His two theater monologue pieces, *Hanna* and *My Chekhov Light*, were performed at The Birmingham Lofts, Pittsburgh(1991); The New Dramatists, NYC (1992); A Contemporary American Theatre Festival, Shephardstown-on-the-Potomac (1992); Primary Stages in New York City (May, 1993).

Gagliano has given reading-performances of My Chekhov Light here and abroad, at: The Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, 2004; New York's Cherry Lane Theatre, 2004; Kirovograd, Ukraine, 2005; Dancer Stage of Amsterdam,19 November 2005, and at The E.T.A. Hoffman Theatre in Bamberg, Germany, June14-15, 1998; followed by the world premiere production of My Chekhov Light on 28 November 1998 at the E.T.A. Hoffmann's Studio Theatre, starring Ernst Hofstetter and directed by Georg Immelmann.

Gagliano's theatre piece *Eulogy* was included in Primary Stages' Legacy Project (Oct.,1994). Gagliano's latest play in the Bodoni Cycle, *The Farewell Concert of Irene and Vernon Palazzo*, was workshopped in the 1995 Showcase of New Plays, featuring Rita Gardner (the original "girl" *in The Fantasticks*) and Bill Young (of the NY cabaret group Shake, Wilder & Young, with original music by Mr. Young). Gagliano conceptualized (along with director Robert Brewer and choreographer Rick Pessagno) *And The Angels Sing: The Songs of Johnny Mercer*, which premiered in Las Vegas (Jan, '96) and soon after, at the Odyssey Theatre in Los Angeles (Feb '96). He wrote the book for a new musical *Piano Bar (At The Chateau De LaMer)* with composer/lyricist Gene Nordan which had its world premiere at the Vivian Davis Theatre in Morgantown, WV in April 1998. At West Virginia University, Gagliano is currently the Benedum Professor of Theatre, a chair he has occupied since 1976.

Mr. Gagliano is a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP); The New Dramatists (alumnus); The Dramatists Guild; The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center; has served on the Board of Directors of The Theatre Association of Pennsylvania (TAP); and was a panelist on the PEW Trust's Philadelphia Theatre Initiative.

Gagliano has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in playwriting, two Rockefeller Foundation playwriting grants, an O'Neill Theatre Center/Wesleyan University grant, a 1989 Pennsylvania Arts Council Playwrights Fellowship—and was awarded the grand prize for the 1999 International Ernest Hemingway Playwriting competition for his play, *The Total Immersion of Madeleine Favorini***.** He is represented in anthologies of dramatic literature and in critical studies.

Gagliano helped found Carnegie Mellon Drama's Showcase of New Plays (1986), and was the Showcase's Artistic Director from 1986 to 1998. His most recent position as Artistic Director was with the University of Michigan's Festival of New Works (A professional developmental showcase for New Dramatic Writing; plays, screenplays, musicals), 1999-2001. His first season was in the Spring of 1999, in

Ann Arbor, Michigan—where he established the Arthur Miller Award For Dramatic Writing, with Mr. Miller attending.

Gagliano's play, *The Commedia World Of Lafcadio B*, was presented in the Play Labs of the 2005 Last Frontier Theatre Conference, Valdez, Alaska. There, Gagliano also gave a tribute to Arthur Miller, a tribute he again gave on 4 August 2005 in Beijing, China, at the Beijing Institute Of World Theatre and Film, and at Open Stage Theatre in Pittsburgh, Feb 10, 2006, on the first Anniversary of Arthur Miller's death.

Gagliano's *Big Sur* was performed at the Beijing Institute of World Theatre and Film at Peking University in May 2007. A scene from the musical *Congo Square* was showcased at The Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre in June 2007. Applause Books selected Gagliano's *My Chekov Light* for its 2008 edition of *One on One: The Best Men's Monologues for the Twenty-First Century*, published by Applause Books. Gagliano's first novel *Anton's Leap* was published by BookSurge in June 2008, available on www.amazon.com.

http://www.gaglianoriff.com/page/bio

Appendix 2 - A study in Sexual Violence

by: Alex Cox - *The Guardian*, Friday 14 July 2006

The British Board of Film Classification has commissioned a study by Aberystwyth University into audience responses to sexual violence in films. A cynic might say that is just a ploy by the BBFC to keep itself in business. Among the countries of the world in which film regulation exists, Britain is one of only two - the USA is the other - in which regulation is not a function of the state. At the same time, the issue is a real one, apparent to anybody whose cinema going extends beyond Harry Potter and cartoons. Sexualised violence has become a staple element of Hollywood entertainments and art cinema alike over the past few years, and a new expression - 'extreme cinema' - has been coined to describe the films that feature it. So maybe the censors are on to something. It'll be interesting to see what Professor Martin Barker's team discover when the audience start answering their questions.

Having conquered and wrung dry the former taboos of onscreen sex and violence, filmmakers are now encouraged to conflate the two. 'Irreversible' and 'Baise-Moi' immediately spring to mind; but easily half the reviews I read of low-budget art films by new filmmakers refer, en passant, to 'the gruelling but thematically-essential rape-and-torture scene'. Cannes, in particular, seems to seek out such films. Now, are these films selected because festival programmers know there's an audience for them? Or are filmmakers, festivals and distributors creating an audience for increasing levels of sexual violence, by making and screening these films? I don't know, and I wonder whether the Aberystwyth report can answer such complex questions.

From my own experience, I think filmmakers are often encouraged, by their financiers, to include these things. Once, the studios or foreign sales agents were happy with a glimpse of a woman's breasts. Now that nudity is old hat and porn ubiquitous, directors are being jostled to provide something 'a bit harder'. In 2001, while we were editing 'Revengers Tragedy', the producers and I received a request from the Film Council to 'make the rape scene more violent and explicit'. Of course, we usually strove to accommodate our financers' ideas and wishes. But on this occasion, we could not.

Perhaps the New Cinema Fund genuinely believed a more brutal, visible rape would add to the artistic quality of 'Revengers': the film was based on a pretty extreme and demented play, and it needed a certain shocking aspect. Equally possibly, the Film Council may have reckoned a more explicit rape might get us into Cannes, or pick up a few more foreign sales. In other words, this was a pragmatic rape, a money thing.

Would a first-time director, with his (or her) future career at stake, be so rebellious? Or would he/she knuckle down, re-cut the scene, call the actors back, and shoot a crueler, more explicit version? When we do these things, film directors essentially become pimps - persuading usually reluctant women to do what the clients expect them to. Why is the heroine of 'V For Vendetta' so cruelly tortured, something surely not essential in a film devoid of narrative? What do Tarantino's fans think about violence against women? Why does Hollywood action cinema demean women and minorities? Is this a political agenda, and if so who sets it? Why is 'extreme cinema' so focused on sexual violence and rape? Over to you, professors! (This article was first published on guardian.co.uk at 10.37 BST on Friday 14 July 2006. It appeared in the Guardian on Friday 14 July 2006 on p14 of the Features section. It was last updated at 10.37 BST on Monday 17 July 2006.)

http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2006/jul/14/3

"ECONOMISTS SAY MOVIE VIOLENCE MIGHT TEMPER THE REAL THING"

By PETER S. GOODMAN - Published: January 7, 2008

NEW ORLEANS — Are movies like 'Hannibal' and the remake of 'Halloween,' which serve up murder and mutilation as routine fare, actually making the nation safer? A paper presented by two researchers over the weekend to the annual meeting of the American Economic Association here challenges the conventional wisdom, concluding that violent films prevent violent crime by attracting would-be assailants and keeping them cloistered in darkened, alcohol-free environs.

Instead of fueling up at bars and then roaming around looking for trouble, potential criminals pass the prime hours for mayhem eating popcorn and watching celluloid villains slay in their stead. 'You're taking a lot of violent people off the streets and putting them inside movie theaters,' said one of the authors of the study, Gordon Dahl, an economist at the University of California, San Diego. 'In the short run, if you take away violent movies, you're going to increase violent crime.'

Professor Dahl and the paper's other author, Stefano DellaVigna, an economist at the University of California, Berkeley, attach precise numbers to their argument: Over the last decade, they say, the showing of violent films in the United States has decreased assaults by an average of about 1,000 a weekend, or 52,000 a year. Crime is not merely delayed until after the credits run, they say. On the Monday and Tuesday after packed weekend showings of violent films, no spike in violent crime emerges to compensate for the peaceful hours at the movies. Even a few weeks later, there is no evidence of a compensating resurgence, they say.

The findings in their paper are part of a recent wave of economic research in what might be called the 'freakonomics era.' Practitioners of the dismal science are transcending traditional subjects like labor and markets, and are now crunching numbers to evaluate matters like cheating among sumo wrestlers or the effects of a crackdown on cocaine. In this case, the authors have waded into a long-simmering debate about media violence, with their findings likely to attract controversy: Their conclusion seems to collide with the research of psychologists, which has fed concerns by parents and policy makers that brutal imagery in films, video games and other media sows aggression in American life by rendering viewers insensitive to horrific acts.

'There are hundreds of studies done by numerous research groups around the world that show that media violence exposure increases aggressive behavior,' said Craig A. Anderson, a psychologist and director of the Center for the Study of Violence at Iowa State University. 'People learn from every experience in life, and that learning occurs at a very basic level of brain function.'

The study's authors acknowledge that their research does not refute and in fact lends credence to the findings of laboratory studies. Neither does it address the long-term effects of exposure to violent media, an influence they view as pernicious.

Rather, the research uses a decade of national crime reports, cinema ratings and movie audience data to examine what has happened to rates of violent crime during and immediately after violent films are shown. Though such films may indeed stimulate a greater tendency toward aggression in audiences, Professor Dahl offers a rejoinder much favored by economists: Compared to what?

Young men are the most likely to commit violent crimes. In opting to see a movie — even one featuring, say, gang rape or chain-saw amputation — they forgo activities that have a greater tendency to encourage mayhem, like drinking and drug use. 'Economics is about choice,' Professor Dahl said. 'What would these people have done if they had not chosen to go and see a movie? Whatever they would have done would have had a greater tendency to involve alcohol. If you can incapacitate a large group of potentially violent people, that's a good thing.' Professor DellaVigna added, 'It's not as if these people watching violent movies would otherwise be home reading a book.'

But critics of violent media worry that the study, with its focus on immediate effects, could distract policy makers from troubling signs of long-term harm to society and leave parents thinking that violent films may be the least bad way for their adolescent children to occupy leisure hours. 'The study's premise strikes me as somewhat goofy,' said Melissa Henson, senior director of programs at the Parents Television Council, a media watchdog based in Los Angeles. 'I'd hate for people to walk away with the message that, 'Oh, I ought to send my son to watch violent movies so they won't go out and drink or do drugs and commit violent crime.' What about going to the Y.M.C.A. and playing basketball, or after-school activities?'

Professor Dahl seems an unlikely advocate for the crime-snuffing potential of sadistic cinema. A Mormon, he forbids his four children from watching violent films. He recently purchased a DVD player that strips out brutal or sexual images. He eschews violent films himself, professing discomfort even with 'Schindler's List,' the epic portrayal of the Holocaust. 'I don't like how I feel when I watch them,' he said.

Yet his rejection of violent media was, in a sense, the spark for his inquiry. In 2005, he and his wife, Katherine, concerned about their children's viewing, consulted a Web site, kids-in-mind.com, that rates films for violence, sexual content and profanity. Professor Dahl was then working on another project employing a national database of crime reports. He wondered: Could one combine the movie ratings with the crime data and the numbers of people seeing films to explore how crime rates change with exposure to violent movies?

Analyzing the data, the authors found that 'on days with a high audience for violent movies, violent crime is lower.' From 6 p.m. to midnight on weekends — when the largest numbers of people are in theaters — violent crimes decreased 1.3 percent for every million people watching a strongly violent movie, the study found. Violent crimes dropped 1.1 percent for every million seeing a mildly violent film.

In the hours after theaters close — from midnight to 6 a.m. the next day — violent crimes dropped 1.9 percent for every million people at a strongly violent movie, and by 2.1 percent for every million at mildly violent film. Strikingly, the data shows that crimes also drop, though not by as much, when large audiences see nonviolent films that young men find appealing.

In other words, Professor Dahl suggested, Hollywood could help cut crime in more palatable fashion by cutting out the gore while making movies that still attract male teenagers and 20-somethings. 'We need more Adam Sandler movies,' he said. 'Even though I'm not a big fan of Adam Sandler, that's the implication.'

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/07/business/media/07violence.html

"VIOLENCE STUDIES: A GROWTH BIZ"

Guest Commentary - By Edward J. Fink, Ph.D. -- Broadcasting & Cable, May 31, 2004

Television professionals recently learned that FCC Chairman Michael Powell has caved in to a request from the House Energy and Commerce Committee to issue a notice of inquiry about the impact of TV violence on children. I sigh. Our taxes will pay for it.

As an academician, I'm all for research—when it serves a purpose. This does not. We don't need a federal mandate here or even federal money. For over half a century, the issue of TV violence and children has been explored from every conceivable angle. Over a thousand studies exist, and more are conducted every year.

So, Mr. Powell, drawing on that vast body of literature, here is what you want to know.

Some children, when exposed to some TV violence, may sometimes demonstrate some increase in aggression. Stated another way, in some contexts, violent programming may lead to negative attitudes and behaviors; in other contexts, it may not.

Do you want to believe that TV violence is bad? Plenty of research there. One example comes from Dr. L. Rowell Huesmann and associates in the American Psychological Association journal Developmental Psychology, March 2003. They found that a high level of TV violence in childhood is a predictor of more-aggressive behavior in adulthood.

Do you want to believe that TV violence is not necessarily bad? There's plenty of stuff! One example comes from Dr. Ron Warren in the Broadcast Education Association's Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, September 2003. He found that parental mediation of children's TV viewing can both inhibit negative effects and enhance positive effects.

Do you want to believe both? Once again, a bounty of data! One example is the comprehensive National Television Violence Study, published by the University of California, Santa Barbara. It concludes, 'Television can be a powerful influence on social mores concerning violence and aggression, for good or for ill.'

Do you want summaries of research? One example comes from the Kaiser Family Foundation's fact sheet, Key Facts: TV Violence, Spring 2003, which outlines studies that present opposing viewpoints. If you prefer your summary from the government, have a look at Section II, 'Violent Programming on Television,' of the 108th Congress's Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2004.

All reasonable people, and yes, that includes most broadcasters and academicians, are sensitive to the potential—though not always the actual—harm of TV violence. This argument is not for TV violence; it is against the government's exercising a right of censorship it does not have, not even in an election year.

Mr. Powell, here is the report you ordered, ahead of the Jan. 1 deadline and free in this magazine. Rescind the notice and cancel the checks. Or send them to me.

Author Information
Fink is chair of the Department of Radio-TV-Film at California State University, Fullerton.

http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/print/100798-Violence_Studies_A_Growth_Biz.php

Appendix 3 - Why Read Fiction?

By TK Kenyon – October 27, 2006

Lately, several times, people have said to me with some pride that they don't read fiction, because it isn't real. They read only non-fiction. I am taken aback by this every time I hear it, yet I hear it again and again, many times from intelligent people who do read. Considering that non-fiction books outsell fiction books as categories by (last time I heard) 3:1, it is not surprising that this opinion is out there.

How do you answer these people, who say with pride that they do not read fiction? And they do not read fiction because it isn't real? Without getting snarky that these are the people I would expect to watch reality TV shows, I stop and consider the deeper issue at hand: if it isn't real, what is the purpose of art?

The purpose of non-fiction is to inform. The purpose of technical writing is to describe a process, protocol, or idea. But what, what is the purpose of art as a whole? It's not just pretty. Art that merely delights the senses with no deeper thought is pornography. It can't be to describe good versus evil. That is the realm of religion and morality tales.

The purpose of art is to explore what it means to be human, one human in particular and human in general. But what then is the outcome of doing this? We already know what it is to be human. Been one all my life. Why should we read fiction and engage art?

It seems indicative to me that art and violence seem to be inversely proportional in cultures. While some (Cocaine Nights byJC Ballard) would deny this and even say that the insecurity of violence foments creativity, it seems to me that there are several examples of cultures where my premise holds.

1) The Chiracua Apaches of Southwestern USA (note: I'm a 1/4, so I can say this) had very little art. They retold stories through dance (though these were usually the recounting of exploits, not creative endeavors) and had a few decorative arts (beading and such). They were also one of the most violent peoples in history. Essentially, it was a culture of serial killers. Brutal, sadistic killing was encouraged and celebrated. They ate a lot of raw horsemeat, many times their own horses. I'm researching serial killers right now for my next novel, and Ted Bundy, et al, were amateurs

compared to Apaches. Art humanizes others to us. The Apaches' lack of art allowed them to not recognize the humanity of other people and so kill them, usually horribly.

2) Indians from India, on the other hand, fought very few wars among themselves and had peace for generations upon generations, even though many different ethnicities, languages, and religions crowd the subcontinent. They produced some of the oldest creative works known to man, decorated everything, and made art part of their religion. Their temples are some of the most gorgeous in the world. Even their clothes, like saris, are silk shot with gold thread. Every morning, many women make sand paintings as a religious devotion that is swept away every night. (Note: Navajos make sand paintings as part of their religion, not Apaches.) Jewelry, household items, and clothes are elaborately decorated. They invented condiments to further decorate food. Some of their spices add little taste to the already highly seasoned food but add color. Whole segments of society are vegetarian and practice ahimsa, non-violence to every living thing. These are the folks who threw the British out by passive resistance. They defeated the world's greatest empire by not fighting.

Some people might say that the disparity in the wealth of a culture makes a difference. I disagree. Rural India and the slums of Calcutta are every bit as desperate as the reservations are now and the desert was 150 years ago.

I think art humanizes us. That's its purpose: to make us fully human and able to see the humanity in others, so that we cannot be murderers.

http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewArticle.asp?id=23764

Appendix 4 - Motion Pictures set in New Orleans

(chronological order by year of release)

Adaptations

Naughty Marietta (1935)

Adaptation By Frances Goodrich And Albert Hackett From The Victor Herbert Operetta

Banjo On My Knee (1936)

Adaptation By Nunnally Johnson From The Harry Hamilton Novel

The Buccaneer (1938)

Adaptation By Harold Lamb, C Gardner Sullivan And Jeanie Macpherson From The Lyle Saxon Novel *Lafitte The Pirate*

Jezebel (1938)

Clements Ripley, Abem Finkel, John Huston, Robert Buckner And Owen Davis From The Owen Davis Play

The Cat And The Canary (1939)

Adaptation By Walter Deleon, Lynn Starling From The Play By John Willard

Flesh And Fantasy (1943)

Adaptation By Ellis St. Joseph, Ernest Pascal, Samuel Hoffenstein From Stories By Laszlo Vadnay And Oscar Wilde

A Streetcar Named Desire (1951)

Adaptation By Oscar Saul From The Tennessee Williams Play

Adventures Of Captain Fabian (1951)

Adaptation By Errol Flynn From The Robert T. Shannon Novel

Holiday For Sinners (1952)

Adaptation By A.I. Bezzerides From The Hamilton Basso Novel

The Iron Mistress (1953)

Adaptation By James R. Webb From The Paul Wellman Novel

Tammy And The Bachelor (1957)

Adaptation By Oscar Brodney From The Cid Ricketts Sumner Novel

King Creole (1958)

Adapted By Herbert Baker And Michael Gazzo From A Harold Robbins Novel

Suddenly, Last Summer (1959)

Adaptation By Gore Vidal From The Tennessee Williams Play

The Fugitive Kind (1960)

Adaptation By Tennessee Williams And Meade Roberts From Tennessee Williams Play *Orpheus Descending*

A Walk On The Wild Side (1962)

Adaptation By John Fante From The Nelson Algren Novel

The Cincinnati Kid (1965)

Adaptation By Ring Lardner Jr And Terry Southern From The Richard Jessup Novel

Hotel (1967)

Adaptation By Wendell Mayes From The Arthur Hailey Novel

Mandingo (1975)

Adaptation By Norman Wexler From The Kyle Onstott Novel

The Drowning Pool (1975)

Adaptation By Tracy Keenan Wynn, Lorenzo Semple Jr. And Walter Hill From The Ross Macdonald Novel

Angel Heart (1987)

Adaptation By Alan Parker From The William Hjortsberg Novel

Blaze (1989)

Adaptation By Ron Shelton From The Book By Blaze Starr And Huey Perry

Johnny Handsome (1989)

Adaptation By Ken Friedman From The John Godey Novel

Wild At Heart (1990)

Adaptation By David Lynch From The Barry Gifford Novel

The Pelican Brief (1993)

Adaptation By Alan Pakula From The John Grisham Novel

The Client (1994)

Adaptation By Akiva Goldsman And Robert Getchell From The John Grisham Novel

Interview With The Vampire (1994)

Adaptation By Anne Rice From Her Novel

Dead Man Walking (1995)

Adaptation By Tim Robbins From The Sister Helen Prejean Book

Double Jeopardy (1999) David Weisberg, Douglas Cook

The Curious Case Of Benjamin Button (2008)

Adaptation By Eric Roth And Robin Swicord From The F.Scott Fitzgerald Story

Original Screenplays

Belle Of The Nineties (1934)

Mae West

Birth Of The Blues (1941)

Harry Tugend, Walter Deleon

Charlie Chan on the Docks of New Orleans (1948)

Scott Darling

The Flame Of New Orleans (1941)

Norman Krasna

Lady From Louisiana (1941)

Edward James, Francis Edward Faragoh, Vera Caspary, Michael Hogan, Guy Endore

Buccaneer's Girl (1950)

Samuel R. Golding, Joseph Hoffman, Joe May, Harold Shumate)

Glory Alley (1952)

Art Cohn

The Mississippi Gambler (1953)

Seton I. Miller

Abbott And Costello Go to Mars (1953)

D. D. Beauchamp, Howard Christie, John Grant

New Orleans Uncensored (1955)

Orville H. Hampton

Davy Crockett and the River Pirates (1956)

Thomas W. Blackburn, Norman Foster

The Invisible Avenger (1958)

George Belak, Betty Jeffries

The Louisiana Hussy (1959)

Charles Lang

Hard Times (1975)

Walter Hill, Bryan Gindoff, Bruce Henstell

J.D.'S Revenge (1976)

Jaison Starkes

Crypt Of Dark Secrets (1976)

Irwin Blache, Jack Weiss

French Quarter (1977)

Barney Cohen, Dennis Kane

Mardi Gras Massacre (1978)

Jack Weiss

Pretty Baby (1978)

Polly Platt

Cat People (1982)

Dewitt Bodeen, Alan Ormsby

Down By Law (1982)

Jim Jarmusch

Tightrope (1984)

Richard Tuggle

French Quarter Undercover (1985)

Bill Holiday

No Mercy (1986)

James Carabatsos

*The Big Easy (*1987)

Daniel Petrie, Jr

The Unholy (1988)

Philip Yordan, Fernando Fonseca

*The Waterboy (*1998)

Adam Sandler, Tim Herlihy

*Dracula 2000 (*2000)

Joel Soisson, Patrick Lussier

Sonny (2002)

John Carlen

The Skeleton Key (2005)

Ehren Kruger

Appendix 5 - Works about Marie Laveau

Non-Fiction

- Martha Ward, *Voodoo Queen: The Spirited Lives of Marie Laveau* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004)
- Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006)

Novels

- Francine Prose, *Marie Laveau* (New York: Berkeley Publishing, 1977)
- Robert Tallant, *The Voodoo Queen* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1983)
- Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Voodoo Dreams* (New York: Picador, 2004)
- Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Voodoo Season (*New York: Washington Square Press, 2005)

Theater

- *In the Voodoo Parlour of Marie Laveau*, a one-act play by Frank Gagliano (1969)

Music

- 'Marie Laveau,' Papa Celestin and his New Orleans Band
- 'Marie Laveau,' Dr. John
- 'Marie Laveau,' Baxter Taylor and Shel Silverstein
- 'Witch Queen Of New Orleans,' Redbone
- 'Marie Laveau,' Dr. Hook & The Medicine Show
- 'Voodoo Queen Marie,' the Holy Modal Rounders
- 'Marie Laveaux,' Cubanismo

PhD Dissertation

Ina Fandrich, ‘The Mysterious Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau: A Study of Power and Female Leadership in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans’, PhD thesis, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2005.

M.A. Thesis

Rachel Sussman, ‘Conjuring Marie Laveau: The Syncretic Life of a Nineteenth Century Voodoo Priestess in America’, MA thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York, 1998.

Appendix 6 - Film Relatives and Ancestors of the New Form

(alphabetical order)

Amadeus (1984)

Peter Shaeffer

American Buffalo (1996)

David Mamet, Michael Corrente

Black River (1993)

Kevin Lucas

Call Me Mum (Margot Nash, 2005)

Kathleen Mary Fallon

Carmen Jones (Otto Preminger, 1954)

Oscar Hammerstein Ii, Harry Kleiner

Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmie Dean, Jimmie Dean (1982)

Ed Graczyk

Cyrano De Bergerac (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990)

Edmund Rostand, Jean-Paul Rappeneau, Anthony Burgess

Dancer in the Dark (Lars Von Trier, 2000)

Lars Von Trier

*Dangerous Liaisons (*1988)

Christopher Hampton

Deathtrap (1982)

Ira Levin, Jay Presson Allen

Driving Miss Daisy (1989)

Alfred Uhry

El Perro del Hortelano (Pilar Miro, 1996)

Lope de Vega, Pilar Miro, Rafael Perez Sierra

Frankie and Johnny (1991)

Terrence McNally

*Glengarry Glen Ross (*1993)

David Mamet

Good Night and Good Luck (Gorge Clooneym 2005)

George Clooney, Grant Heslov

Hamlet (Kenneth Branagh, 1997)

William Shakespeare, Kenneth Branagh

Hard Candy (2005)

Brian Nelson

Henry V (Kenneth Branagh, 1989)

William Shakespeare, Kenneth Branagh

Hidden (Michael Haneke, 2005)

Michael Haneke

House Of Games (David Mamet, 1988)
David Mamet, Jonathan Katz

La Vie En Rose (2007)
Olivier Dahan, Isabel Sobelman

Lady Sings the Blues (
Chris Clark, Suzanne De Passe, Terence Mccloy, Billie Holiday, William Dufty

Long Day's Journey into Night (Sidney Lumet, 1968)
Eugene O'Neill

Lola Montes (Max Ophuls, 1955)
Cécil Saint-Laurent, Annette Wademant, Max Ophuls, Jacques Natanson

Oliver! (1968
Charles Dickens, Lionel Bart

One Night The Moon (2001
Rachel Perkins, John Romeril

Porgy And Bess (Otto Preminger, 1959)

Quills (2000) Doug Wright

Rashomon (Akira Kurosawa, 1950)

Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead (1990
Tom Stoppard

*Six Degrees Of Separation (*1993

John Guare

Sleuth (1972)

Anthony Shaffer

Sleuth (Kenneth Branagh, 2008)

Anthony Shaffer,

Sophie's Choice (Alan J. Pakula, 1982)

Stage Beauty (2004)

Jeffrey Hatcher

Staircase (1969)

Charles Dyer

Suddenly Last Summer (1959)

Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal

Sweeney Todd (Tim Burton, 2007)

Stephen Sondheim, Josh Logan, Hugh Wheeler

Sunset Boulevard (Billy Wilder, 1950)

Syriana (Stephen Gaghan, 2005)

Stephen Gaghan

The History Boys (2006)

Alan Bennett

The Petrified Forest (Archie Mayo, 1936)

Robert E. Sherwood, Charles Sherwood, Charles Kenyon

The Phantom Of The Opera (Joel Schumacher, 2004)

Gaston Leroux, Andrew Lloyd Weber, Joel Schumacher

The Rose (1979)

Bo Goldman, Bill Kerby

Titus (Julie Taymor, 1999)

William Shakespeare, Julie Taymor

Twelve Angry Men (1957) Reginald Rose

U-Carmen E-Khayelitsha (Mark Dornford-May, 2005)

Wait Until Dark (1967)

Frederick Knott, Robert Carrington, Jane Howard Carrington

What's Love Got To Do With It (1993)

Kate Lanier

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf (Mike Nichols, 1966)

Edward Albee, Ernest Lehman

Yes (Sally Potter, 2004)

Sally Potter

Appendix 7 - Films Cited

(title, director, release year)

The Red Balloon (Albert Lamorisse, 1956)

The Thief (Russell Rouse, 1952)

Baraka (Ron Fricke, 1992)

Long Day's Journey Into Night (Sidney Lumet, 1968)

Wag the Dog (Barry Levinson, 1997)

Sullivan's Travels (Preston Sturges, 1941)

Monsters vs Aliens (Rob Letterman, Conrad Vernon, 2009)

The Haunting In Connecticut (Peter Cornwell, 2009)

S.O.B. (Blake Edwards, 1981)

The Player (Michael Tokin, 1992)

Hollywood Ending (Woody Allen, 2002)

Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods Of Haiti (Maya Deren, 1961)

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (David Finchner, 2008)

Carmen Jones (Otto Preminger, 1954)

Porgy and Bess (Otto Preminger, 1959)

The Phantom of the Opera (Joel Schumacher, 2004)

Henry V (Kenneth Branagh, 1989)

Much Ado About Nothing (Kenneth Branagh, 1993)

Hamlet (Kenneth Branagh, 1996)

Yes (Sally Potter, 2005)

Call Me Mum (Margot Nash, 2005)

Black River (Kevin Lucas, 1993)

One Night the Moon (Rachel Perkins, 2001)

Doubt (John Patrick Shanley, 2008)

Driving Miss Daisy (Bruce Beresford, 1989)

*Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf? (*Mike Nichols, 1966)

Quills, (Philip Kaufman, 2000)

Stage Beauty (Richard Eyre, 2004)

Cyrano De Bergerac (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990)

Staircase (Stanley Donen, 1969)

The History Boys (Nicholas Hytner, 2006)

Sleuth (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1972)

Deathtrap (Sidney Lumet, 1982)

Twelve Angry Men (Reginald Rose, 1957)

The Petrified Forest (Archie Mayo, 1936)

Rope (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948)

Wait Until Dark (Terence Young, 1967)

Disturbia (DJ Caruso, 2007)

Good Night And Good Luck (George Clooney, 2005)

Syriana (Stephen Gaghan, 2005)

Hidden (Michael Haneke 2005)

Sweeney Todd (Tim Burton, 2007)

Titus (Julie Taymor, 1999)

Dancer in the Dark (Lars Von Trier, 2000)

Lola Montes (Max Ophuls, 1955)

At Land (Maya Deren, 1944)

Meshes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren, 1943)

A Study in Choreography for Camera (Maya Deren, 1945)

Ritual in Transfigured Time (Maya Deren, 1946)

The Very Eye of Night (Maya Deren, 1958)

Meditation on Violence (Maya Deren, 1948)

Les Maitres Fous or *Mad Masters* (Jean Rouch, 1955)

Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)

Moses Und Aron (Danielle Huillet, Jean Marie Straub, 1973)

The Magic Flute (Ingmar Bergman, 1975)

Don Giovanni (Joseph Losey, 1979)

Carmen (Francesco Rosi, 1984)

La Traviata (Franco Zeffirelli, 1983)

U-Carmen E-Khayelitsha, (Mark Dornford-May, 2005)

Berlin Alexanderplatz (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1980)

Avatar (James Cameron, 2009)

Moulin Rouge (Baz Luhrman, 2001)

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (Alfonso Cuaron, 2001)

The Lady and the Duke (Erich Rohmer, 2001)

Perceval (Eric Rohmer, 1978)

Hamlet (John Gielgud, 1964)

Appendix 8 - Plays Cited

(in order of citation - title, writer)

The Total Immersion of Madeline Favorini, Frank Gagliano

Big Sur, Frank Gagliano

Father Uxbridge Wants to Marry, Frank Gagliano

The Spurt of Blood, Antonin Artaud

The Emperor Jones, Eugene O'Neill

The Shaughraun, Dion Boucicalt

The Octaroon, Dion Boucicalt

Amadeus, Peter Shaeffer

No Exit, Jean-Paul Sartre

Conerico was Here to Stay, Frank Gagliano

The Night of the Dunce, Frank Gagliano

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Edward Albee

Cyrano de Bergerac, Edmond Rostand

Deathtrap, Ira Levin

Driving Miss Daisy, Alfred Uhry

Hamlet, William Shakespeare

Long Day's Journey Into Night, Eugene O'Neill

Porgy and Bess, Dubose Heyward, Dorothy Heyward

Quills, Doug Wright

Sleuth, Anthony Shaffer

Staircase, Charles Dyer

The History Boys, Alan Bennett

Sweeney Todd, Stephen Sondheim, Hugh Wheeler, Christopher Bond

Titus Andronicus, William Shakespeare

Twelve Angry Men, Reginald Rose

Wait Until Dark, Frederik Knott

The Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare

Appendix 9 - Lawsuit citing Marie Laveau

LAWSUIT

July 27, 1959

In the Matter of the Complaint That

MARIE LAVEAU, and AFRO-INDIA IMPORT COMPANY, also known as AFRO-INDIA IMPORT CO., INC., At Los Angeles, CA, (hereinafter called Respondent), is engaged in conducting a scheme for obtaining money through the mails in violation of 39 U. S. Code 259 and 732 P.O.D. Docket No. 1/121

INITIAL DECISION OF HEARING EXAMINER

Leonard Broady is the President of Afro-India Import Co., Inc., a corporation located in the City of Los Angles, State of California. Mr. Broudy also conducts business under the names of Marie Laveau and Afro-India Import Company. All of the names stated above except that of Mr. Broudy are Respondents in this case.

The General Counsel for the Post Office Department, the Complainant, alleges that in the conduct of this business the Respondents are engaged in conducting a fraudulent scheme in violation of Section 259 and 732 of Title 39, United States Code.

A complaint was issued, an answer was filed and the case was heard in Washington, D. C., before Hearing Examiner Edward Carlick on May 5, 1959. At the hearing both parties were represented by counsel who participated in the examination and cross-examination of witnesses and who have filed proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law in behalf of the parties they represent.

After the hearing had been held Hearing Examiner Carlick became incapacitated by reason of illness to continue work on the case, and the case was then reassigned to the undersigned Hearing Examiner because it was known that Mr. Carlick would be unavailable to the agency for an extended period of time.

In the complaint it is alleged that the Respondents are violating the cited statutes by obtaining remittances of money through the mails by falsely and fraudulently making the following representations:

a. That all persons who 'Need a new lover…Need friends…Want more of the better things in life…Want to attract and influence others…Need more money' will be able to satisfy such needs and desires and 'can be LUCKY in love…in money…always!' by purchasing from Respondent certain 'occult Louisiana and India goods, incenses, candles, herbs, roots [and] oils' and using them as directed;

b. That any person will be able to solve problems in 'Finance' and 'Love Affairs,' will be able to 'Control Enemies, Get Rid of Cross Conditions, Control Loved Ones, Attain Power of Attraction, Promote Peace, Get Lucky, Hold and Secure Jobs [and] Get Rid of Evil Influences' by purchasing from Respondent the book entitled 'Black and White Magic' and following the directions given therein.

In their answer the Respondents admit that they are engaged in the mail order business under the names set forth above and that they have utilized the placement of advertisements and have circulated certain advertising material. Respondents deny that they are, or ever have been, obtaining remittances of money through the mails, or otherwise, by means of false and fraudulent pretenses, representations or promises.

At the hearing the only witness was Post Office Inspector Charles E. Dunbar. Mr. Dunbar testified that an advertisement by Respondents came to his attention in the course of the performance of his duties. This advertisement (Dept. Exhibit I) appeared in the Richmond, Virginia, Afro-American of September 20, 1958, and reads as follows:

You can be LUCKY In love…in money…always! Need a new lover? Lost your old one? Is your business bad? Need more money? all alone…Need friends? Unlucky at cards? Want more of the better things in life? More happiness? Want to attract and influence others? If any of the above apply to you, send now for our free catalogue and complete list of occult Louisiana and India goods, incenses, candles, herbs, roots, oils and books of ancient and modern practices…No cost…No obligation.

AFRO-INDIA IMPORT COMPANY

Marie Laveau POST OFFICE BOX 35176 – LOS ANGELES 35, CALIFORNIA

AFRO-INDIA IMPORT COMPANY Post Office Box 35176, Los Angeles 35, California

Please send me absolutely free and without obligation your complete catalog.

NAME___________________________________

ADDRESS________________________________

CITY________________ZONE_____STATE_____

Responding to this advertisement Mr. Dunbar initiated test correspondence with the Respondents under the name George Marston, Scottsdale, Arizona. In a letter dated January 16, 1959 (Dept. Exhibit A-1), the Respondents were asked to 'Kindly send me information and literature about how I can be lucky in money, business, love, etc.' In response to this request and in an envelope which was received in evidence as Department Exhibit B-1, bearing the return address Box 35176, Los Angeles 35, California, there were received two circulars, as follows:

Department Exhibit B-2 – a circular containing a list of merchandise offered for sale by the Respondents. The merchandise is listed under the following headings – Powders, Roots and Herbs, Perfumes, Incenses, Oils, Candles, Books, Number and Dream Books, and Miscellaneous.

In this circular there is a 'Special Notice' which reads as follows:

'We wish to call special attention to Spiritualists, Mind Readers, Clairvoyants, Yogis, Phrenologists, Fortune Tellers and all those interested in Magics, Occult Science and Psychic Phenomena, to the fact that the Book called 'Black and White Magic' will help them to learn how to use most of the articles contained in this price list, and also assist in searching the ways and systems used by Old Timers in solving problems such as Finance, Love Affairs, Control Enemies, Get Rid of Cross Conditions, Control Loved-Ones, Attain Power of Attraction, Promote Peace, Get Lucky, Hold and Secure Jobs, How to Dress Homes and Business Places, Get Rid of Evil Influences and many other features. We will mail this wonderful book postpaid upon receipt of Two Dollars ($2.00). Its regular price is Three Dollars ($3.00).

Covering one-third of the back of this advertising circular is the following statement: 'NOW! You can learn how to use most of the articles listed inside in the 'correct' ways. Order your copy of the book called 'BLACK AND WHITE MAGIC' today!

Marie Laveau.'

Department Exhibit B-3 – This is an advertising circular relating entirely to the book 'Black and White Magic' and containing, among others, the following statement:

'If you want assistance in searching the ways and systems used by the OLD TIMERS in solving problems of finance – love affairs – luck in games – power of attraction – promote peace – hold and secure jobs – how to dress homes and business place – get rid of evil influences and more…SEND FOR THIS BOOK TODAY!'

This circular contains an order blank addressed to the Respondents and requests that a copy of the book be sent to the remitter and indicates that the purchase price of $2.00 is enclosed.

The inspector conducted other test correspondence under the name of F. L. Doncho, Box 199, Dexter, New Mexico. Exhibit C-1 is a letter dated September 26, 1958, addressed to the Respondents over the name of Doncho in which the writer says 'Please send me particulars and free catalog about your items as advertised.' Exhibit D-1 is an envelope similar to B-1, except for the address and date of postmark, in which were contained Exhibits D-2 and D-3, which, respectively, are identical to Exhibits B-2 and B-3. On October 11, 1958, the inspector, over the name of Doncho, ordered from the Respondents the book 'Black and White Magic,' for which he remitted the sum of $2.00. In due time this book (Dept. Exhibit F-2) was received from the Respondents. Other test correspondence written by the inspector, over the name of O. J. Dans, Seligman, Arizona, and the reply thereto constitute Department Exhibits G and H. This correspondence took place in February, 1959, and in response to his inquiry the inspector received from the Respondents additional circulars which are identical with Department Exhibits B-2 and B-3.

The book 'Black and White Magic' is divided into the following sections: (1) various so-called magical procedures to be followed by persons in various circumstances; (2) 'Outstanding Significance of Candles'; (3) 'Devotion'; (4) 'Significance of the Cards'; (5) a purported character reading for persons born under each sign of the zodiac; and, lastly, a list itemizing appropriate anniversary gifts for various wedding anniversaries from the fist through the seventy-fifth years. In the first part of this book each of the magical steps prescribed to be followed by persons in any of the various situations described contains frequent mention of the items offered for sale in the circulars used by the Respondents, of which Department Exhibit B-2 is an example. A short illustration of this statement appears on page 37 of Department Exhibit F-2, as follows:

THE BEST GAMBLING HAND

(Toby)

You will take the Nutmeg of India. In it you will drill a hole in which you will pour the pure Mercury and seal it with pure wax. After this take a Chamois Bag. In this bag you will put a piece of Highly Magnetic Green Lode Stone, Lucky Hand, Silver Magnetic Sand, Gold Magnetic Sand, John the Conqueror Root, Devil Shoe String and the Five Finger Grass, then on top of this you will place the prepared Nutmeg of India. This done seal the bag by sewing it all the way around so that none of these articles may fall out. And on the outside of this bag you shall sprinkle three drops of Jockey Club Perfume once every week. Keep this bag on your person at all times and allow no one to touch it.

The Respondents sell all the types of candles which are listed under the second section of the book which appears on page 40. Under the next section, 'Devotion,' appearing on page 41 the use of candles is again recommended and, or course, the Respondents offer these candles for sale. The use of candles is again recommended under the various signs of the zodiac.

From the foregoing, it will be seen that the Respondents call attention to their business by means of the newspaper advertisement; to the persons who write in to inquiry is sent the list of merchandise which the Respondents have available for sale, and they are also advised that in order to use the articles contained in the price list the book 'Black and White Magic' should be purchased; and, finally, after the book has been purchased the remitter is told just which of the Respondents' products to use in applying a particular magical procedure to his own situation.

It is clear to me, and I hold, that in the advertising material used by the Respondents, the representations set forth in the complaint are made. To begin with a reader of the newspaper advertisement is told that if any of a number of specified circumstances apply to him that he should send to the Respondents and obtain a free catalog of merchandise. The catalog, which in reality is a price list, contains the representation that the book 'Black and White Magic' will tell 'the ways and systems used by the Old Timers in solving problems' such as were mentioned in the newspaper advertisement. Upon ordering the book the purchasers are told which of the various items of merchandise should be used in solving particular problems. The scheme of the Respondents consists of dangling a chain before gullible prospects and having the prospects swallow the chain one link at a time.

Only a very few minutes of time are required in reading any of the material issued by the Respondents to determine that the representations found to have been made are false. (Gottlieb v. Schaffer, 141 F. Supp. 7; Reilly v. Pinkus, 338 U. S. 269). The fact that these representations are so patently and grossly false to some readers of the material does not necessarily mean that their falsity will be apparent to all persons who read them. As it was stated in Gottlieb v. Schaffer, supra, at page 15 'The advertisements here make patently absurd claims which could only appeal to the superstitious, the ignorant and the gullible…'

'The purpose of mail fraud orders is not punishment, but prevention of future injury to the public by denying the use of the mails to aid a fraudulent scheme.' (Donald v. Read Magazine, 333 U. S. 178, 184) It is undoubtedly known by the Respondents that 'the superstitious, the ignorant and the gullible' constitute a part of the public to whom their advertising matter is addressed.

Concerning the intent to deceive on the part of the Respondents, it is believed to be sufficient simply to repeat the statement by the Court in Gottlieb v. Schaffer, supra, at page 17 that 'An intent to deceive is rarely capable of direct proof, since this involves what is in a man's mind. It is hornbook law that this subjective element may be established by circumstantial evidence. It is not any single element segregated from the whole by which the determination is to be made but from the totality of all the acts, conduct and surrounding circumstances and the inferences which may reasonably be drawn from a combination of acts and circumstances. The type of publication in which the advertisements were inserted with their obvious appeal to a susceptible and easily influenced group, the nature of the advertisements, their combination and use in connection with other advertising media issued by the plaintiff, the focus of the advertising campaign, are all relevant on the issue.'

The facts in the present case fit squarely within the four corners of the Gottlieb case. Upon the basis of the entire record in this case I make the following findings of fact and conclusion of law.

1. The Respondents, Marie Laveau, Afro-India Import Company, and Afro-India Import Co., Inc., are engaged in a mail order business in Los Angeles, California.

2. In the conduct of their mail order business the Respondents are obtaining and attempting to obtain remittances of money through the mails upon the basis of the representations set forth in paragraph (3) of the complaint in this case.

3. The representations found to have been made by the Respondents are false.

4. The representations found to have been made by Respondents are fraudulently made.

CONCLUSION OF LAW

The Respondents are conducting a scheme for obtaining money through the mails by means of false and fraudulent pretenses, representations and promises in violation of the provisions of Sections 259 and 732 of Title 39, United States Code.

Respondents' first and second proposed findings of fact are adopted. Respondents' proposed finding of fact number 3 is denied for the reasons stated herein. Concerning Respondents' proposed finding number 4, it is denied that the hearing should have been held in Los Angeles, California, for reasons appearing in Hearing Examiner Carlick's order dated April 16, 1959. Respondents' proposed finding of fact number 5 is denied for the reasons stated herein. Respondents' proposed finding of fact number 6 is neither adopted nor denied for the reason that the undersigned Hearing Examiner is unable to predict the time at which Hearing Examiner Carlick will be able to resume his duties.

Respondents' proposed conclusion of law number 1 is denied for the reasons herein stated. Respondent's proposed conclusions of law numbered 2, 3, 4 and 5 raise Constitutional questions which are not within the province of Hearing Examiners. Engineers Public Service Corp. v. S.E.C., 138 F.(2d) 936. Respondents' proposed conclusion of law number 6 is denied for the reason that Hearing Examiner Carlick is at this time unavailable to the agency and it is not known at what time Hearing Examiner Carlick will be able to resume his duties in this Department. Furthermore, since there is not involved any question as to the credibility of the witness who testified, Gamble-Skogmo, Inc. v. F.T.C., 211 F.(2d) 106, is not controlling.

There is attached hereto for execution by the Judicial Officer the appropriate order for the suppression of the fraudulent enterprise.

William a. Duvall, Hearing Examiner

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Endnotes

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