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Retranslating Strindberg: adaptation, (re)location and site-related performance

Dr Rachel Connor

Abstract

This essay offers a practitioner's perspective on the experience of adapting, devising and co-producing *A Dream Play* for a northern British audience at an art café during the Manchester Festival Fringe in 2015. It explores how the process of re-versioning *A Dream Play* provides insights that might be of relevance to the fields of adaptation and translation studies. Starting from the position that translation is 'rewriting' — an 'active form of interpretation whose cultural impact is extensive' (Loffredo and Perteghella) — the essay argues that the adaptation of August Strindberg's text to a devised, site-related performance amplified that 'cultural impact' through its 'retranslation' to a non-traditional theatre site. In shaping the responses of cast and audience to the physical performance space, the production created a 'poetics of the collective', which permitted a new engagement with Strindberg's canonical text. The piece concludes with some reflections on the constraints of the writer-adaptor in the re-visioning, particularly in an iconic text such as *A Dream Play*.

Key words:

Adaptation, translation, devising, site-related performance, Strindberg

A summer evening in central Manchester, UK; a crowd of theatre-goers gathers in the street, waiting to see an adaptation of August Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (1901). A car brakes, the rear door opens and a woman falls out, apparently unconscious, onto the pavement in the middle of the crowd. This opening to a performance — one I adapted from a translation of Strindberg's original — is a long way from the production the writer would initially have conceived. Yet, as Robert Allen acknowledges, 'if you are staging a Strindberg play you will need to find a way into the play other than the current, generally accepted method for doing plays' (Allen, 2012, p.417). This essay explores my experience of adapting, devising and co-producing *A Dream Play* for a northern British audience with theatre group Déjà Vu Ensemble. Working from Michael Meyer's translation of the text into English ([1964]; 1991), we staged a run of performances at Manchester Festival Fringe in 2015 at Nexus, a basement art café situated in the city's Northern Quarter.

In what follows I offer a practitioner's perspective, a critical discussion that examines how my process of re-versioning *A Dream Play* offers insights relevant to adaptation and translation studies. Any dramatic performance — whether adapted, translated or not — relies, as we know, on the complex, inter-connecting practices of multiple collaborators: the writer(s), director(s), actors, set and costume designers who are involved in its final production (Krebbs, 2014, p.4). When the source text has also been translated by a writer other than the playwright or adaptor, and when the work is a canonical one that has been adapted for a devised performance in a non-traditional theatre site, the interconnections between those practices become more complex still. These complexities raise questions not just about the adaptation of the text but how, in its transposition to performance, it harnesses both the characteristics of the physical space and the collaboration of cast and audience.

As Anna Birch and Joanne Tompkins note, the critical history of site-related theatre is still relatively new (2012: 5), and there is even less discussion of adaptation in site-related performance.ⁱ Considerations of site were paramount in our conceptualisation of *A Dream Play*. The spaces available to us at Nexus Art Café — the pavement outside the entrance, the steps into the basement, corridor, foyer, the serving counter and seating, the courtyard garden and the 'nook' (a tiny side room) — shaped the development of the piece as a promenade production.ⁱⁱ This, we felt, would be the best way to emphasise the play's movement through a series of interlinked scenes, like the journey of a dream into the interiority of the psyche. The portability of the audience through the café also meant that, like the audiences of the site-specific theatre discussed by Keren Zaiontz, they became part of the performance 'as their movement occur[red] within the shared space of art' (2012, p.170).

As a theatre practice, devising is 'traditionally sensitive to context and audience' (Govan et al., 2007, p.11). Like translation it is 'already always collective' (Venuti, 2013, p.99). Translation is, of course, an act of *rewriting*: 'an active form of interpretation whose cultural impact is extensive' — perhaps *the* most influential type of rewriting given its ability to 'project' the work(s) 'beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin' (Loffredo and Perteghella, 2006, p.4). I suggest here that in our work on *A Dream Play* the 'cultural impact' of Strindberg's text was amplified through its 'retranslation': that is, our adaptation of the translated text into a devised, site-related performance. Our production created a poetics of the collective, an engagement with text and context that was shaped by responses of both cast and audience to the physical spaces in and around Nexus Café.

'You're a writer. It's your duty to find the light': cutting, amplifying and adapting Strindberg's text

Given Strindberg's resistance to linearity and finality, the reduction of *A Dream Play* to any kind of 'plot' might seem contradictory, especially given its attempt to emulate the random associations of a dream. Nevertheless, for those unfamiliar with the text, and for the purposes of my discussion here, a brief overview of events might be useful: *A Dream Play* follows the story of Agnes, daughter of the god, Indra, who takes on human form and is sent to earth to witness suffering. There she encounters characters who teach her what being human is all about: an Officer who spends his life perpetually waiting for the appearance of his bride-to-be, Victoria; a stage-door keeper who sits guard over the theatre entrance, refusing to allow entry to unauthorised visitors. The door becomes a central metaphor in the play, the focus of a search — especially for the Officer — to know what lies behind it. The answer, as it turns out, is nothing: Strindberg's statement, perhaps, on the insatiable nature of desire and the futility of quest.

Continuing her journey, Agnes meets the Advocate, a lawyer who defends the downtrodden and defeated, whose stories are plastered over the walls of his office. Travelling together, they discover Foulstrand (in which all the occupants are in quarantine for cholera) and its opposite, Fairhaven, where everyone is on a perpetual holiday but remains fundamentally unhappy. Agnes meets the Poet, who wants her to petition the gods with questions about why people suffer. At the end of the play, she returns to her place in the heavens, with the realisation of how difficult life can be for human beings.

As Richard Hand notes, when adapting for performance — especially when working with a piece in translation — ‘one embarks on a process of compromise and negotiation at each stage of a ... symbiotic journey between source text, adapted script and eventual performance’ (2014, p.159). The difficulties in deciding what to cut and what to amplify are compounded when working with a well-known or canonical text like *A Dream Play*, which may have been adapted or recreated many times. Playwrights and producers have been reworking Strindberg’s piece for over a hundred years and yet, in Manchester in 2015, we could not predict what would be our audience’s knowledge of it. Even if the audience is acutely familiar with the text and not wedded to notions of fidelity, adapting is a challenge because, as Frances Babbage points out, today’s spectators ‘have come to accept — to expect — ever more inventive dramaturgical strategies from [the performance’s] creators’ (2009, p.13).

Our intention was not to innovate ‘for the sake of it’ but to look for a means of expression that would be fresh to our specific audience. It might be useful here to draw on Lawrence Venuti’s discussion of retranslation. Retranslations, he suggests, ‘are doubly bound to the receiving situation’, taking in, not just the values of the source text but of those that have gone before it (Venuti, 2013, p.96). In a sense, we did feel ‘doubly bound’, acutely aware of the weight of Strindberg’s legacy and the play’s performance history through the decades. In a European context alone, productions by such practitioners as Ingmar Bergman, Robert Lepage, Robert Wilson and Mats Ek exemplify a range of responses with varying degrees of innovation in content or staging (see Sczalczzer 2011). Caryl Churchill’s version, directed by Katie Mitchell and staged at the National Theatre in London in 2005, has undoubtedly been the highest-profile adaptation in the UK. In a piece for *The Guardian*, Mitchell discusses the directorial challenge of creating a framing device in the act of ‘put[ting] a dream on stage’ (Mitchell, 2005). More recently, *Earthbound* (2012) — a multi-media inspired re-imagining of the play by American theatre director Robert Allen — deployed digital technologies as a ‘new solution to Strindberg’s own vision for the play as evidenced in his stage directions’ (Allen, 2012, p.413).

The adaptation of any text, as we know, involves both cutting and ‘adding, supplementing, improvising [and] innovating’ (Sanders, 2006, p.12). In our production, limitations on resources (in terms of cast size and running time) dictated the need to reduce both the play’s textual content and the characters. Our adaptation process began with several ensemble readings of Meyer’s translation to identify what we should cut and retain. But what also emerged from our discussions was a sense of what we wanted to amplify: we were fascinated with the ways in which *A Dream Play* explores the relationship between entrapment and freedom. This dualism, for us, was focused

through numerous instances of characters being stuck in the habitual rut of their lives, mostly failing to attain their desires and, even if those desires appeared to have been achieved, experiencing spiritual and emotional emptiness.

Strindberg's vision in *A Dream Play* is arguably nihilistic, but we wanted to use our adaptation to explore more redemptive possibilities in the story. If, following Jerome Bruner, we concede that stories 'take for granted that their protagonists are free unless ensnared by circumstances' (2002, p.89), then the journey through a narrative becomes a mediation between confinement and liberation. Our aim was to dramatise the loss of psychological freedom that occurs when we fail to take responsibility for the stories we tell ourselves and, by implication, the agency afforded us when we reclaim or reshape those stories. The desire to explore notions of constriction and freedom had a direct bearing on our process and practice. The next step was to experiment with ideas that would accentuate those thematic concerns we had identified in the text. In an early scene, for example, I depicted the Officer as a writer trapped by his experience of writer's block. 'You're a writer,' Aggie (Agnes) tells him, as he sits naked and desolate in a bath full of books, his self-expression having failed him, 'it's your duty to find the light' (Connor, 2015).

Like Emma Reay's adaptation of *A Dream Play* for the Oxford Playhouse in 2011 (directed by Griffith Rees), the version I adapted for *Déjà Vu* put Agnes centre-stage. In our version, Agnes became the urban and feisty Aggie (we had initially envisaged her as a street-wise beat-boxer). Our aim was to make the play 'speakable', as Louis Nowra puts it, to the contemporary audience of a northern British city (cited in Hand, 2014, p.144). It felt important to do this not just through textual content and dialogue but in relation to characterisation and *mise-en-scene*. The programme notes for Reay's version frames Agnes' journey as a 'coming of age story', in which the action is 'dreamed by a compassionate goddess staring at the Planet Earth night-light dangling above her bed' (Courtney, 2011). In my adaptation, Aggie not only embodies the consciousness of the dreamer, she is the audience's point of reference through the narrative and, in our promenade performance, acted as their guide through the physical space. I began by cutting Indra's place in the story altogether, placing the emphasis firmly on Aggie. With Aggie's dramatic fall from the car in the opening scene, we hoped that the audience would be engaged from the start. Our aim was that this opening would incite fear and uncertainty — or curiosity, at the very least — not just establishing her as the key protagonist whose journey we would follow but prompting the audience to think about their own relationship to the city.

Some scenes (including some set at the theatre stage-door and in Fairhaven) were condensed or omitted entirely. It was also necessary to pare back language and dialogue. Churchill used a different translation of *A Dream Play* when working on her adaptation; nonetheless, she discusses a similar need to cut the text, ‘tighten[ing] the dialogue’ and ‘updating’ some of the material (2005, p.v).ⁱⁱⁱ Like Churchill, I cut the expositional and overly-formal language of the translated source text, again with the idea of making it more contemporary and ‘speaking.’ In the source version, Indra’s first line addresses Agnes directly: ‘you have lost your way, child/Take care you are falling./How did you come here?’ (Strindberg, [1964] 1991, p.183). I replaced this with a question from the Advocate, who we brought into the play at an earlier point than in Strindberg’s version: ‘where the fuck did you come from?’ (Connor, 2015). Part of the intention was to prompt the audience to reflect on where *they* had come from. But I also wanted to play with the notion that arrivals (and perhaps, by implication, departures) can be unexpected and sometimes unintentional. Aggie’s first speech is meant to suggest that she has just come from a festival, is high on drugs and in a state of altered consciousness:

AGGIE:

I followed the lightning flash. I swear, one minute I’m in a field full of tents. And then I’m - it was like, like riding on a cloud. And the cloud started to fall and I fell with it. But where –

ADVOCATE:

You’re in the Northern Quarter.

AGGIE:

God. I thought I’d left the second world [...] I thought I’d left the second world and entered the third. It felt like I’d gone past the morning star. It’s a long way. And now I’m in this place and it’s just - earth. I didn’t think it’d be so gloomy. (Connor, 2015)

The astrological vocabulary here is intentional. In an act of creative rewriting, I borrowed key phrases from Indra’s opening speech in Strindberg’s text — ‘you have left the second world and

entered the third' (Strindberg [1964] 1991: 183) — as a starting point for Aggie's. This reformulation is meant to convey Aggie's confusion and shock at being transposed to new surroundings ('it was like, like riding on a cloud. And the cloud started to fall'). It also reinforces the contemporary and specific context in which the play was being performed ('one minute I'm in a field of tents...and now I'm in this place'), a point which is reaffirmed by the Advocate's response: 'You're in the Northern Quarter.' It's notable that this line prompted laughter from the audience during each performance, as though in recognition of the specific transposition of the text to their home city.

The written text, as we know, is only the beginning — just one element of theatre's wider network of 'auditive and visual signs' (Bassnett, [1980]; 2014, p.139). Martin Puchner argues that in adaptation the text is the 'art object', which requires 'the development of a whole new theatrical vocabulary' to enable its performance (2011, p.300). Puchner makes the point that, even in an adaptation where the performance replicates the script word for word, there is a creative freedom. The piece itself assumes an autonomy, which rests 'in the act of *transforming a textual artwork into a theatrical one*' (Puchner, 2011, p. 305; my emphasis), thereby enacting a 'translation' that renders visible the process of performance. Read in the light of Puchner's model, my work on Strindberg's text required me to be both adaptor *and* translator. As adaptor, I cut and amplified the translated original — in effect, inserting myself into the text as its collaborative co-author, a creator of another (although related) textual 'art object.' However, my adaptation also constituted a starting point for Déjà Vu's devising process and the translation of the text into a site-related piece.

The very adaptation process itself, then, raised issues of freedom and constriction, which we wanted to explore more fully in the devising sessions. Our focus was the 'Foulstrand scene', in which Agnes and the Officer find themselves isolated in quarantine against cholera. While Strindberg's scene contains some serious political critique — a scathing attack on the excesses of the wealthy at the expense of the poor — there is also a good amount of black comedy. Two characters, seeking an escape from life's suffering, end up impounded in a place with furnace-like temperatures, agonisingly close to their longed-for paradise across the shore. We aimed to expand this humour, injecting colour and life through musical performance and comedy. In the Déjà Vu version, the character of the Quarantine Master, played by a female actor, developed into an old-style, music hall cabaret singer. Bawdy, ageing and sentimentally nostalgic about her life on the stage, the Quarantine Master evoked the world of the Moulin Rouge, of faded grandeur and easy sexuality. This new cabaret sequence stood in direct opposition to the serious issues explored in the Advocate scenes, and in the unbearable waiting of the Officer for his bride, Victoria. Exploring themes of loss and regret that paralleled the representations of suffering elsewhere in the text, our aim was to

throw them into relief, both through comedy and the active engagement of the spectators. At various points during this scene, for example, the soundtrack of the Can-Can became a cue for the audience to stand and wave the yellow 'quarantine flags' that had been given as entry tickets for the show — and even to join the cast in dancing. Our belief is that theatre, as Babbage suggests, is not simply 'a sealed object displayed for, but separable from, its audiences' (2016, p.50). In staging *A Dream Play*, we aimed to embed the audience's experience *into* the performance, creating for them a 'vitaly creative' role (Babbage, 2016, p.50).

During the Quarantine Master's monologue, in which she riffs on her days of glory, grandeur and past lovers, the audience was encouraged, through her improvisations, to relax, laugh and respond:

QUARANTINE MASTER:

(To trumpeter) Strike it up! *(To audience)* Come in darlings, take a seat – don't go on the sofas or your arse will spread... *(Improvised banter)*.

(Once audience seated, listening to trumpet) Good isn't it? Well I couldn't fucking do it, could you? No, well enjoy it then. *(After a while)* OK, wrap it up. We've had enough. Now, it's time for peanuts. Peanuts anyone? Come on, it's a fucking cabaret, relax! Let your hair down – eat those at your own risk darling, they're out of date. Like everything else here, including me. And talking of me, time for a song.

Play the music! (Connor, 2015)

The 'music' called for by the Quarantine Master was a rendition of *The Windmills of Your Mind*, with an accordion melody that evokes the old Parisian vaudeville theatre. Notably, the lyrics of the song – with its references to 'a circle in a spiral' and a 'wheel within a wheel' – echo the play's wider concern with psychological entrapment and the mundane, soul-destroying repetition of everyday life.

This devised scene necessitated the 'corporeal, imaginative and ... textual authorship' not just of the actors but of the audience (Radosavljevic, 2013, p.61); it had the effect of 'opening up both the dramatic text and its context' in a piece where the contexts for Strindberg's play (having been both translated and adapted) were already plural (Radosavljevic, 2013, p.61). As I'll come to

suggest, the staging and timing of the cabaret scene — its placing in relation to the other scenes — were crucial to the audience's perception (and physical experience) of freedom and confinement. In the remainder of the essay then, I want to explore in more depth our use of the performance space, concluding with some thoughts about how theories of translation might illuminate the processes of our site-related adaptation.

'I open a way out for you': location, space and site-related performance

A café is at once domestic and public. As a social and meeting space, one that encodes everyday habit and ritual and provides a place for interaction, Nexus represented what we explored in our performance: the human quest for connection, sustenance and pleasure. If part of the vision of our adaptation was the creative involvement of the audience through the play's content, it was also inextricably linked to the site-related nature of the production. Mike Pearson suggests that site-specific theatre potentially brings with it multiple resonances for the audience, 'an enhanced kind of creative agency, in that [their] knowledge of the place and its history may well be deeper than that of the performance makers' (Pearson, 2010, p.10). We were also interested in how we might enable the audience to see both the play and the place differently: to evoke a form of 'social agitation' and the release of 'inertia' through 'experienc[ing] the surprise effect of space transformed' (Govan et al., 2007, p.132). This recalls Babbage's point, above, about 'inventiveness' (2009, p.13). In part, the innovation of our site-related adaptation was to free up those spectators familiar with *A Dream Play* by facilitating a different perspective on a well-known text. Using a non-traditional theatre space also allowed us to 'make strange' the location, enabling a relationship to the site that might 'educate, inspire and politicise' (2007, p.122).

Given that we wanted to explore metaphors of entrapment, the café was an ideal venue. The courtyard garden provided a setting for key scenes in the play; it backed onto fire escapes, was bordered on all sides by walls and included a fenced area with a wooden door that functioned as the enigmatic, and un-openable, theatre stage door. But it was in the section of the play we called 'the pasting scene' that we were most able to fuse exploration of thematic content with the corresponding use of space. In this scene, which occurs in the middle of the play, Aggie and the Advocate are now cohabiting. They find domestic life suffocating. They are also the parents of a young baby and as the scene opens they are instructing their housekeeper, Kristen (in what was presumably a late nineteenth century Swedish tradition) to paste over the windows of their house

with paper to insulate it and prevent the winter draughts. The nook — a tiny side room of about five square metres with a sliding door, off the main café — was ideal for staging this scene. Herding in an audience of around thirty at each production into the enclosed space, we hoped to facilitate the emotional and psychological claustrophobia that plays out in the scene itself; indeed, some of the spectators were visibly discomfited by the lack of air and the crush of bodies. This aspect of our production has parallels with the site-specific production *Ten Thousand Several Doors* at Brighton International Festival in 2006, an adaptation of *The Duchess of Malfi*. In her essay ‘Embodied Presence and Dislocated Spaces’, Jane Collins reflects on the significance of the production and its effect on the audience:

Site-specific performance, in which the embodied presence of the audience is a component of the scenography, collapses distance and physical boundaries. There is no fixed-stage edge; the line between the fictional space and the real is fluid and unstable. The audience becomes dislocated in the sense of not knowing their proper place, position or relationship to the events depicted. (Collins, 2012, p.54)

Collins’ description of ‘embodied presence’ and the collapsing of boundaries is precisely what we sought to achieve for *A Dream Play*. As a way of further incorporating audience members into the pasting scene, we used Post-It notes (on which were written mini love letters), which the actor playing Kristen stuck to the walls and furniture, and onto the spectators themselves. In being posted *upon*, the spectators ceased to be spectators; they were brought into the production, their bodies (in this part of the play, at least) becoming part of the set and the play’s physical location. This physiological response of the audience is evident in one of the reviews:

The interactive piece doesn’t just take advantage of the unique space of Nexus Art Café but the audience within. During the play we got pushed out of the way, made to dance, flirted with and shouted at. It wasn’t the kind of forced interactions from the world of panto that leave you uncomfortable and awkward; instead it kept the audience (literally) on our toes. (Jones, 2015)

The experience described in Jones' review resonates with what Collins terms the 'psycho-spatial play' between actors and audience (2012, p.54). Like the site-specific theatre of Prodigal Theatre Company in the Brighton Festival, our production afforded new readings of a canonical text. It permitted a visceral response to the experience of entrapment, a way of making corporeal the 'Strindbergian pessimism' identified by Eszter Scalzer (2011, p.172). To borrow again the terminology of translation studies, staging the scene in this way allowed the audience to 'project beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin' linguistically and culturally (Loffredo and Pertheghella, 2006, p. 4). But it also expanded upon Strindberg's vision of theatrical form: a new 'way into the play other than the current, generally accepted method for doing plays', to recall Robert Allen (2012, p.417).

Our decision to situate the cabaret scene immediately after the pasting scene was not coincidental. It enabled us to manipulate the audience's experience of the space in moving from a place of confinement to one of freedom. After ten minutes or so of being, like Aggie, 'held captive' during the pasting scene, the audience was freed. This was signalled by the Advocate's speech to Aggie as he slid open the door: 'when I shut this door, Aggie, I open a way out for you' (Connor, 2015). The audience followed the actors through the door, out of the nook into the comparative spaciousness of the central café area — into the characters' longed-for freedom, 'light and air' (Connor, 2015). This shift was accompanied by the horn music that heralded the beginning of Quarantine Master's improvised cabaret. Again, we might draw parallels with the staging and use of space in *Ten Thousand Several Doors*, when the production 'contained the audience in [a] small intimate space and opened outwards onto expansive public worlds', in which 'an integral component of the scenography was ... to let in light and to enclose in darkness' (Collins, 2012, p.55). Like our adaptation of *A Dream Play*, Collins' discussion suggests ways in which 'performers, audience, space and site colluded' to permit new understandings of the subtleties of a well-known play (2012, p.55).

The process of adapting and/or translating a text brings with it, of course, an acute awareness of the confines of the text itself. Lindsay Bell touches on this issue in an account of her cross-media, cross-cultural adaptation of Jimmy McGovern's screenplay *Priest* for the Canadian stage. Outlining the struggle to 'own the work', Bell outlines the necessity, in the writing process, to mediate between freedom and constraint. Her discussion of agency in the practice of adaptation is also, I would argue, relevant to translation (indeed, to writing in general). 'Is it inherent in the process of adapting,' she asks, 'that the end result inevitably fails to capture, to translate the original whole - as though it were a chemical reaction where something is lost in the process?' (Bell, 2000,

p.75). The untranslatability of the 'original whole' is, however, the point for me — precisely because it offers the audience freedom; it is that very 'chemical reaction' which permits collaborative participation, embodiment and creation.

This open-endedness was enacted in the closing scene of our *Dream Play*. Sidestepping the visual drama of Strindberg's version in which Agnes disappears into a chrysanthemum-shaped fire, we opted for something quieter and more ambiguous. The final moments of my adaptation, in which Aggie takes her farewells from those she has met on her journey, plays out like this:

AGGIE:

Goodbye. This is the end. Goodbye, my poet. You dreamer. You know how to live well, soaring through the sky, plunging now and then into mud and shaking it from your feet. When it's time to go you feel – loss. Sadness at leaving and regret for what you've done and more for what you didn't do. You feel torn – you want to stay and you want to go. Goodbye. Tell people I won't forget them. Where I'm going – I'll tell the gods what it is to be alive. Because I – I'm sorry. Goodbye.

Aggie leaves (Connor, 2015)

While it would be wrong to deny that constraints (I use this word deliberately) of budget and space affected our staging of this last scene at Nexus, the decision to end the piece in this way was predominantly an artistic one. We wanted to prompt the audience to reflect, once again, on arrivals and departures, beginnings and endings. In the final few minutes, the actor playing Aggie simply left, quietly and unostentatiously, climbing the stairs after the delivery of her last line, and pausing at the long glass window at the café's entrance. She stood for a moment or two – with the audience observing her from inside, from the bottom of some steps — before disappearing into the street where the play began.

The ambiguity of the ending reflected the uncertainties prevalent throughout the piece, as another review indicates:

By the end of the play, a lot of big philosophical questions had been asked: Why does making ourselves happy hurt others? Why do we spend so long waiting for things to

be different? Why are we never satisfied when things do change? But the answers were left open for the audience to ponder over. (Poole, 2015)

The words of this review recall Allen's discussion of *Earthbound*, in which he points to Strindberg's tendency to always 'keep the ball in play, keep the experiment going' (Allen, 2012, p.417). One could argue that our ending was 'in the spirit' of Strindberg's vision — but this was not our main concern. What we wanted was to blur the boundaries, even for a short while, between the dream-like and the real, between the psyche and the body; above all, we hoped the audience would actively question the experiences they had had in the preceding hour. Poole's review of *A Dream Play* continues: 'there was no curtain, bow or applause. The performance ended with [the musician] Klas Jerfvors leading everyone out [of the café] to the tune of his horn and, like a dream, we were back where we began, left on the pavement trying to recall the details of what we'd seen' (Poole, 2015). Indeed, on the final night, audience members followed the Swedish horn player all the way down the street, uncertain as to whether they were being led to one final scene. It was only when Klas turned into a pub that the audience realised the performance had ended. In our devised production, then, we were interested as much in physicality as textuality, in 'experimental ways of working that emphasise[d] the creative freedom and spontaneity of both performers and spectators' (Govan et al., 2007, p.8). By ending on this final note, we hoped to 'open a way out' for the audience, just as the Advocate set Aggie free as he opened the door from the claustrophobic domestic sphere into the open, performative space of the cabaret.

Bell regards the adaptation process she undertook with *Priest* as more akin to opening windows than doors. She talks about seeking 'windows of opportunity', those spaces in the work that represent freedom for a writer to create, play and discover (Bell, 2000, pp.82-83). Her discussion underscores a major predicament of the translator, as well as the adaptor: the question of 'how to deal with the suppression of notions such as creativity and inspiration ... if the activity is reduced to a reworking of cultural and generic voices' (Loffredo and Pertheghella, 2006, p.6). How do we, as practitioners, walk the line between confinement and freedom — formally, as well as thematically? How far, as a writer-adaptor, am I confined by the framework of the original story? Just as the Officer in his bath of books suffers from writer's block, how is it possible to wrest my ideas free from Strindberg's text to dramatise freedom, whilst also borrowing structure and shape from that source text?

There are, of course, no answers — other than, perhaps, to look for freedom in what is created in between those versions of text and performance; to innovate through exploring what the text does and does not represent for the new target audience; in other words, to proactively build windows and doors — transformative spaces that allow for multiple authorship, for creativity and play. In the process of devising *A Dream Play* for site-related performance, the act of adapting — of ‘retranslating’ Strindberg — became, in a sense, perhaps, more like Loffredo and Pertheghella’s definition of self-translation: a continuous process, ‘a privileged, exploratory space in which many voices converge[d] and reshape[d] each other’ (2006, p.7).

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ⁱ I use the term ‘site-related’ deliberately here. As Birch and Tompkins note, there is often a slippage in the terminology used in the field — from ‘site-specific’ and ‘site-responsive’ to ‘site-sensitive’ as well as those identified by Kwon (2002). Our use of Nexus café for *A Dream Play* was somewhere between site-specific (in which the piece was written especially to be produced in that space) and site-responsive (in which our devising and rehearsals in the space fed into its rewriting and production).

ⁱⁱ It is worth noting that our experimentation with the physical space of the café led to us winning the Manchester Festival Fringe award for ‘Most Innovative Use of Space.’

ⁱⁱⁱ Notably, Churchill’s adaptation was criticised for being too pared back. For example, in his review in *The Guardian*, Michael Billington (2005) said the play demonstrated ‘technical virtuosity shorn of emotional content.’

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