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# “Moon Change”: Night Scenes and the Collision of the Personal and the Political in Tony Kushner’s *Caroline, or Change* (2004)

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## Introduction

- 2 When Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori’s musical, *Caroline, or Change*, opened at the Public Theater (Off-Broadway) on November 30, 2003, theater critics immediately noticed the musical’s uncommon austerity through its subtle analysis of class and race divides in 1960s Louisiana. Charles Isherwood even reported in a *New York Times* review of the Off-Broadway performance that “you may get the uneasy sense that *Caroline* simply doesn’t belong in this musical—maybe in any musical”, reflecting this play’s unusual status among Broadway productions. This two-act, sung-through musical mostly deals with the subterranean changes happening in 1963, in the small town of Lake Charles, Louisiana, where Tony Kushner himself grew up. The play centers on the relationship between Caroline, a bitter and angry Black maid with four children who works for a Jewish family (the Gellmans), and the motherless, eight-year-old Noah Gellman. The play alternates between the reception of political events of the era and the aftermath of domestic intrigues centered around Noah’s pocket money and playing on the polysemic nature of the word “change”: Rose Stopnick, Noah’s stepmother, decides to teach him a lesson about money and tells Caroline that she can keep whatever pocket money she finds in Noah’s pockets when she does the laundry. This seemingly mundane gesture provokes a crisis when Caroline finds a \$20 bill that was offered to Noah as a Hanukkah present, which culminates in an exchange of racial slurs from both Noah and Caroline. By the end of the play, the conflict, though smoothed

over, is not resolved. A secondary plot involves Emmie, Caroline's impetuous and revolted daughter, who resolutely embraces change by joining Civil Rights activists and participating to the toppling down and decapitation of the statue of a Confederate Soldier.

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*Caroline, or Change* is definitely a "nightly" play, insofar as night scenes are not only numerous, but they also play crucial staging and narrative roles throughout the play. In *Caroline*, night scenes are watched over by the Moon, an anthropomorphized figure who sings of and embodies the ineluctable nature of change. Night scenes therefore become locales in which the play's most conflicting issues collide: the great unfolding of History with the play's characters' intimate and individual trajectories; other characters' desire for change with Caroline's adamant resistance to change. This primary observation leads me to argue that, through the analysis of the motif of the night, the musical's conflicting discourses emerge. But this motif also provides an unusual and fruitful perspective on the *genre* of the musical. Musical numbers are usually the occasion to express a character's unspoken dreams or desires, in a gesture of sublimation that echoes the psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams. And in this musical, night is definitely the site of a collision between lost dreams and grim reality: this questions the musical's capacity to resolve said conflicts and provide the enchantment that is supposedly the genre's trademark. This article will look at the static and liminal quality of night in *Caroline* as a means to understand how night scenes become a site of collision of the personal and the political. What space is then left for dreams throughout the musical, especially for the many female characters who express their resistance to change or embrace it willingly?

## Night scenes and the experience of liminality

- 4 I have already mentioned the odd and somewhat marginal status of *Caroline* amongst the Broadway repertoire. In a musical that is eponymously about change and upcoming transformations, the characters undergo a rite-like transformation, much akin to anthropologist Victor Turner's analyses of the liminal phase of the ritual, that acts as a moment of estrangement. During the numerous night scenes, the liminal quality of space, time, and characters themselves is particularly enhanced. Liminality is one of the phases that the initiate has to cross before being aggregated with the *communitas*: "Van Gennep has shown that all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation" (Turner 47). For Turner, liminality is to be understood "as a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation" (Turner 46). In *Caroline*, the motif of the night represents a threshold, an in-between moment before an upcoming transformation—either personal or political. Moreover, the musical stages characters who can be understood as liminal entities, lingering on the margins of 1960s American society, because of their skin color, religion or family situation. Caroline, as a Black maid, not only symbolically represents the marginalized portion (female and Black) of an already marginalized workforce<sup>1</sup>: she is a liminal being, who only evolves in spaces of transition. She is found sitting on her porch on several occasions, but we never see the inside of her house. She works in a basement "sixteen feet below sea level" (Kushner 12), described in the opening number as "Torn tween the Devil/and the muddy brown sea" (Kushner 12).

This also points to Caroline's invisibility, once again highly reminiscent of Turner's definition of the liminal being (or "persona"), who is partially made invisible by the community or society:

Since [liminal beings] are not only structurally "invisible" (though physically visible) and ritually polluting, they are very commonly secluded, partially or completely, from the realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses. [...] They have physical but no social "reality, hence they have to be hidden [...]. (Turner 49)

5

During the liminal phase of any ritual, as Turner explains, the ritual subject 'passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state' (Turner 47). Alluding to the unfamiliar and uncanny dimension of the environment highlights the process of estrangement characters go through, especially at night. Indeed, in *Caroline*, night is an unfamiliar space and time. The Moon herself sings of this defamiliarization process in the number 'Moon Change':

Moon change, moon change,  
Glowing bright, light up the night,  
make your dress of spotless white  
turn to purple, turn to gleam... (Kushner 33)

6

Her allusion to Caroline's white maid uniform (which remains her trademark throughout the play, setting her apart from the other characters) poetically invokes this moment of transfiguration, that might also affect the characters and the spectators' perception. The figure of the Moon, suffused in her pale light that transfigures colors, objects and spaces, is the embodiment of this process of defamiliarization. "[L]a lumière de la lune a également des aspects fantastiques et inquiétants"<sup>2</sup>, Alain Montandon explains in the "Moon" entry of his *Dictionnaire littéraire de la Nuit* (665). This fantastic dimension erodes regular perceptions and normality, as the "Fantasy" entry develops:

l'absence de lumière entrave les activités humaines, change la perception de l'espace et du temps, suspend les conditions ordinaires de la vie quotidienne ; c'est la 'normalité' toute entière qui entre en crise pendant les heures qui séparent le coucher du soleil et l'avènement des ténèbres, de l'aurore et du retour de la lumière.<sup>3</sup> (Montandon 505)

7

By turning Caroline's "spotless" uniform into a gleaming purple dress, the nightly presence of the Moon estranges mundane objects and endows them with a magical and strange dimension. Night scenes also participate to the estrangement of the space of the stage. Indeed, most of the original production's staging created patches of darkness on stage while spotlights illuminated at the same time separate spaces (Caroline's front porch, Noah's bedroom, and Stuart's, Noah's father, office). This light design created an unlikely dialogue and continuum between these different spaces, between the inside and the outside, between Caroline's world and the Gellmans', while the interstices between the different spaces remained dark and unlit, as if the night were constantly lingering on stage. Theater critic Charles Isherwood remarked in a 2003 *New York Times* review that "the sets [...] leave plenty of dark space for the world of the imagination, where some of the musical's more emotionally potent encounters occur." As sites of encounter, these patches of night onstage represent liminal spaces, whose very presence estranges the performance space. This spatial estrangement builds on musical spaces as well. Jeanine Tesori's music builds heavily on harmonies: voices are

interwoven and juxtaposed, which creates eerie melodies that fill up the aural space and resonate within the shadows that remain on stage.

8

Not only does the liminal quality of night build upon the idea of defamiliarization and estrangement, but it also endows the musical with a static quality. Throughout *Caroline*, night scenes are moments of stasis, actual thresholds before the narrative embarks the characters and spectators "towards what lies ahead" (Kushner 35). This process of defamiliarization is particularly visible in the fourth scene of the play, in which an anthropomorphized bus sings an aria to announce that President Kennedy is dead. It also illustrates the play's static quality: indeed, *Caroline* is deprived of the expectedly numerous and lavishly choreographed numbers that usually punctuate Broadway musicals. Instead, the musical offers long moments of stasis, especially during night scenes, in which characters are often found waiting or pausing. Just before the bus arrives, a disgruntled Caroline sings:

You wait forever  
 Fore that damn bus come.  
 [...]  
 Moon gone change and change  
 again fore that damn bus take me home... (Kushner 33)

- 9 The political event recounted in the "Bus Aria" is indeed seized in its immediacy, illustrating both stasis and upcoming movement. The rhythm of the song somehow mimics the stasis that engulfs time and characters in an a-temporal moment: the rhythm is stretched by the singer's ability to hold notes for a long time, and the recurring use of the present perfect through the lyric "The earth has bled" (Kushner 34) fixates the event in an a-temporal moment. As he announces that "Now come the flood", anticipating the upcoming consequences of this momentous political event, he pauses to apologize "for being late,/making everybody wait". The singer's "apocalyptic voice", as the stage direction reads, puts the unfolding of History on hold, as if the world had stopped turning for a moment. It is only at the very end of the song that the main information—Kennedy's death—is given:

The president  
 Oh blight November winter night  
 The president is dead. (Kushner 34)

- 10 The final line of the song insists on this a-temporality, as the notes sung on "is" and "dead" are held for several long seconds by the singer, demonstrating an impressive mastery of key change. The interruption of the announcement, with the line "Oh blight November winter night", demonstrates the difficulty to enunciate the momentous event. Precisely, this a-temporal momentum seems to present a culmination, which offers a brief moment of pause before

News come slow here,  
 Change come slow,  
 Light gone out now, darkness come,  
 Step on board;  
 Time for departing...  
 [...]

Into the nighttime,  
 Toward what lies ahead. (Kushner 35)

- 11 Interestingly enough, at the end of the song, nighttime is no longer just a moment of stasis, but a part of this transformative process, a suspended moment that announces and prepares the consequences of political events.

## Colliding (Hi)stories

- 12 "News come slow here/Change come slow": as these lines sung by the Bus suggest, there is a definite discrepancy between the rhythm of political events and History and the characters' individual perception and reception of these events. Night scenes not only contribute to the estrangement of space and time: they also shed light on this discrepancy and highlight the collision between the personal and the political that result in confrontational dynamics. In this musical, History collides with mundane and seemingly trite events, enhancing this same discrepancy: it is no coincidence that, on the same night that the Bus announces Kennedy's death, Rose Stopnick triggers a domestic conflict in order to teach Noah a lesson about the value of money. Kushner himself insisted on the inherently syncopated rhythm that pervades the play's depiction of 1963 American society through the lens of a small southern community and its individuals:

I wanted to write about race relations, the civil rights movement, and African-Americans and southern Jews in the early 1960s, a time of protean changes sweeping the country—and to write about these things from the perspective of a small, somewhat isolated southern town. I grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana, during this period. Change was taking place in Lake Charles, of course, but in a more subterranean fashion, and at a different pace, than elsewhere in America. (Kushner xi)

- 13 Change is not just metaphorical in *Caroline*: it is first and foremost political. The political turmoil of 1960s America pervades the whole play, as early as the paratextual information which reads "The play takes place in Lake Charles, Louisiana, November-December 1963" (Kushner 10). The mention of Vietnam, where Caroline's son, Larry, is stationed is another distant reference to the political context: "The handsome boy./The navy man./Larry now in Vietnam..." (Kushner 80), as well as the exclamation from Rose's father: "May Bull Connor roast in hell" (Kushner 85), a reference to the infamous Alabama politician.
- 14 Being so anchored in this political context, *Caroline* ought to represent the transgressive political acts that came to illustrate the political struggles led by Civil Rights activists, especially in the segregated South. Precisely, the secrecy of nighttime becomes the privileged space in which political acts of transgression happen in *Caroline*, such as the toppling down of the statue of a Confederate Soldier that is later found in the bayou, headless. The episode remains both a mystery and an unresolved issue until the end of the play, when Emmie reveals in an epilogue entitled "Emmie's Dream" that she was part of the group:

Just one thing left unsaid:  
Who was there when that statue fell?  
Who knows where they put his head?  
That ol copper Nightmare Man?  
Who can say what happened that night at the courthouse?  
I can.

I was there that night; I saw,  
 I watched it topple like a tree.  
 We were scared to death to break the law! (Kushner 125-126)

- 15 The in-betweenness nature of nighttime allows for a reversal of social order, during which Emmie and her fellow activists dismantle and unscrew, literally and symbolically, the dominant order of 1963 Southern America. The musical's exploration of the night's fantasy-like dimension also allows norms to be eroded, even dismantled:

la nuit érode les règles valables pendant le jour, le fantastique bouscule les certitudes de la raison et de la science ; dans les deux cas, une norme est remise en question—voire déconstruite, délégitimée, renversée.<sup>4</sup> (Montandon 505)

- 16 By being removed from the public space, the "Nightmare Man" has left a void, which somehow becomes, through the evocation of a "nightmare", a space for possible dreams. It might also be an underlying reference to Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" speech, which was delivered in August 1963.

17

But the discrepancy and sometimes violent collision between the personal and the political is also revealed through the characters' reaction to change and to political events. Once again, nighttime proves a particularly decisive moment for the characters to confront the way they experiment change. The "Moon Trio", featuring Dotty (Caroline's friend), Caroline and the Moon is a perfect illustration of that encounter between History and the mundane, between politics and personal stories. The "Moon Trio" scene alternates between Dotty and Caroline arguing about how the other one has changed, and the Moon's eerie variations on the line "Change come fast and change come slow/But change come, Caroline Thibodeaux" (32). The tutelary figure of the ever-changing Moon, who is described as a "gibbous moon" (31) at the beginning of the play, before appearing as "a new moon, dark" (96) in the second half of the play, also emphasizes the a-rhythmical and syncopated transformations that occur on a political and a personal, more intimate level. Indeed, whereas Dotty seems to interpret the disappearance of the statue as a good sign ("Things change everywhere, *even here*" [emphasis is mine]), Caroline refuses to even *hear* about change ("It just mean trouble on the way,/Don't want to hear that..."). The night provides the characters with a pause during which they voice their personal reception of the events, as they stand with or against these cultural and political transformations. Kushner himself mentioned in a *New York Times* interview that the confrontation between the two characters in this scene was a moment of collision between the personal and the political:

Change doesn't move all people, even people in like circumstances. I've always been interested in people in revolutionary or protean times, when a lot of shifting is happening, who get left behind by that moment. It's a collision of the political and the personal. (quoted in Paulson, "Topple a Confederate Statue? This Broadway Musical Already Did")

- 18 Here the term "collision" is particularly important, as what the musical does is much more than a blurring or an interweaving of the personal and the political: both are violently confronted in the play, resulting in fragmentation. Following a commentary by Frank Rich in a December 2003 *New York Times* review of the play entitled "'Caroline', Kennedy and Change", one might also say that "Caroline [...] is about that sensation of history cracking open." The collision between the personal and the political at night also sheds light on the fragmented society and community the musical stages. The

Confederate Soldier statue is twice alluded to, causing Dotty and Caroline, and later Caroline and Emmie to fight. Moreover, the conversation is constantly framed by Dotty's questions "You seen on the TV?" (Kushner 31) or "You see the TV news last night?" (86), to which both Caroline and Emmie successively respond that they "ain't got a TV" (31, 86). To that extent, the event also reflects the discrepancy and syncopated reception of events among the individuals themselves. The making of collective memory is therefore only fragmentary: the cracks remain open, as a result of this collision. To some extent, the patches of night left onstage also become metaphors of these lines of fracture between the characters, who dialogue but remain isolated, separated by nightly lines of fragmentation.

## Impossible dreams in *Caroline, or Change*?

- 19 This fragmentation, as well as the conflicting dynamics that frame the characters' take on political transformations question the possibility of dreams in *Caroline*. One may get the impression that *Caroline* purely and simply states an impossibility for dreams to be performed, contrary to musical theater's long tradition of dream ballets and happy endings in which dreams come true. Some critics, such as Ben Brantley, have even underlined the musical's voluntary refusal of idealization:

*Caroline* steadfastly resists easy opportunities to work its audience into a lather. [...] Ms. Tesori's deliberately fragmented sung-through score avoids the usual anthems of uplift and self-empowerment, while Mr. Kushner's libretto refuses to sentimentalize or exalt its heroine.

- 20 However, there are references to dreams throughout the play. For instance, Noah is the childlike and imaginative voice of the musical, as his dreams often get confused with reality, such as when he dreams himself as a member of Caroline's family in the number "Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw". His lively imagination allows for endearing moments of comic relief that contrast with the play's otherwise serious tone. On several occasions, the anthropomorphic Radio, Washing Machine, Dryer, Bus and Moon, become symbolic expressions of Caroline's unspoken desires that emerge from the shadows left on stage. Moreover, it is at night, while sitting on the threshold of her home in the number "Gonna Pass Me a Law", that Caroline interweaves her unspoken dreams with the political:

Gonna pass me a law  
Larry come home from Vietnam,  
wherever that is.  
[...]  
Gonna pass me a law  
say Nat King Cole gotta come over my house  
[...]  
come out every night  
and stroke my soul. (Kushner 45)

- 21 In this number, which delves into Caroline's intimacy, Kushner's lyrics also enable us to catch a glimpse of Caroline as a desiring and sensuous body, something which participates to the musical's deconstruction of the stereotype of the "mammy", a stereotypical trope long prevalent in Broadway and Hollywood representations of Black women, as Aaron C. Thomas very efficiently shows in his article "Engaging an Icon: *Caroline, or Change* and the politics of representation" (2010). Indeed, Caroline differs



from the stereotype of the Black mammy in several ways, especially because her sadness and anger counters the joviality usually associated to this stereotypical figure, but also because "Kushner has also given Caroline both a sexual past and a sexual fantasy life" (Thomas 205), such as when she remembers her absent husband's touch later in the play:

Even now your hand can summon  
 how his neck, his belly feel,  
 shoulders, what his breath was like.  
 Hands burn then with happy fire,  
 every inch of you, desire,  
 longing set your skin aflame. (Kushner 70-71)

- 22 Allowing a Black, female character to perform her dreams and desires debunks instead a fabricated dream emanating from the entertainment industry, providing the play with a great variety of female performances that deconstruct stereotypical racial tropes.

23

However, Caroline's dreams are violently suffocated during the "eleven o'clock number" "Lot's Wife." The function of this number in the general structure of the musical is particularly relevant in that case: "The 'eleven o'clock number'—so called because it is usually placed strategically late in the show—is designed to elicit extended applause and (usually) encores" (Knapp, Morris and Wolf 334n7). A lasting convention of the Broadway musical, the eleven o'clock number is not only a moment dedicated to the sheer pleasure of performance (and in that case, of female performance), but it also signifies a character's growth and becomes, in most cases, a performance of the self. And in *Caroline*, most night scenes allow for strong performances of the self, particularly by female characters. Interestingly enough, "Lot's Wife" is supposed to happen during the day as Caroline and her family get ready to go to Church. However, throughout the performance, the stage is plunged into darkness, except for a white spotlight on Caroline's face, and in the background the shadows of the tree branches on which the Moon is usually seated invoke her subdued presence. Earlier in the play, Caroline mentions that night is her "own time" (Kushner 46) and that she "[wants] the night to stay/nighttime forever/so [she] can sit smoking here, so [she] never/[has] to get up, go to work, be polite" (Kushner 47).

- 24 In that passage, night becomes a refuge, but also a "space and time of her own" that allows her to voice her dreams and desires. Thus, it only makes sense that the angry, bitter cry of self-expression that "Lot's Wife" is should happen in a nightly setting. This number violently resists the possibility of dreams, as Caroline asks God to "murder [her] dreams", and symbolically annihilates herself by mimicking the iron slamming down on her body, flattening it until she disappears:

SLAM go the iron  
 SLAM go the iron  
 FLAT!  
 FLAT!  
 FLAT!  
 FLAT!

[...]

Murder me God down in that basement,

murder my dreams so I stop wantin,  
murder my hope of him returnin,  
strangle the pride that make me crazy.

[...]

Caroline. Caroline.

From the evil she done, Lord,  
set her free  
set her free

set me free. (Kushner 118)

- 25 In this powerful and heart-wrenching number, Caroline seems to wish for an eternal night, embodied through the darkness of the basement, that will free her from the unstoppable and dreary cycle of life. The demand, formulated both through an anaphoric imperative form and a desperate plea sung in a tearful and plaintive voice at the end, cancels the possibility of dreams. On the other hand, the power needed to accomplish such a technically and emotionally demanding performance fulfills the audience's expectation of an eleven o'clock number: Caroline's cry buries her dreams but allows the performing female body to emerge as a powerfully grounded force and presence, that embodies the sunset of dreams and desires.

26

But *Caroline* does allow for nightly female performances that elicit hopes and dreams. Caroline's daughter, Emmie, embodies a completely different perspective, and perhaps is the only character who is allowed to perform her dreams. The fact that she concludes the play in a number entitled "Emmie's Dream" plays a crucial role in the final understanding that one may have of *Caroline, or Change*. Staging her performance at night echoes the movement of both the play, History, and this small community plunging "into nighttime, towards what lies ahead": Emmie's fierce embrace of change, which she expresses in an earlier number "I Hate the Bus". In this number, she reemploys the stasis provided by nighttime to express her desire for independence and her longing for the future:

The day come soon, I'll pack up the nothin I own.  
And I'll live in my house, and I'll make it OK,  
by myself, all alone. (Kushner 96)

- 27 This number, as well as most of Emmie's interventions, thoroughly builds upon her refusal of the liminal state she finds herself in: what she expresses is a desire for her dreams to be actualized. "Emmie's Dream" is supposed to take place before dawn: the Moon sings "World awaken to prepare/for the consequence unforeseen" (Kushner 125), an in-between moment which also symbolically gestures towards the promise of a tomorrow. In that perspective, Emmie's performance of the self echoes Jill Dolan's concept of utopian performance, as developed in her 2005 book, *Utopia in Performance. Finding Hope at the Theater*. As Dolan explains,

Utopian performatives persuade us that beyond this "now" of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we're seared by the promise of the present that gestures towards a better later. (Dolan 7)

- 28 Analyzing nighttime as a liminal space-time proves particularly fruitful in "Emmie's Dream" because her performance, as Dolan characterizes, becomes "a crystalline

moment of past-present-future 'now' time" (Dolan 168). As Dolan herself acknowledges, this idea is highly reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's concept of "messianic time" and History's irrevocable anchorage in the present that he develops in *On the Concept of History* (1940): "L'histoire est l'objet d'une construction dont le lieu n'est pas le temps homogène et vide, mais le temps saturé d'"à-présent""<sup>5</sup>.

- 29 Nighttime, in Emmie's performance, becomes a "now-time" that allows for past, present and future to collide and generate a sense of hope. When Emmie sings of a better tomorrow, she is still firmly anchored in the present, while looking at the past and being pulled towards the future. This is particularly striking in the way she maps her own identity. She first starts by acknowledging her filiation to her mother, in a gesture that links her to the past: "I'm the daughter of a maid,/In her uniform, crisp and clean!" (Kushner 126). Using the metaphor of her mother's blood, she sings that it flows "Under ground through hidden veins" (127), in what seems to be a reference to the underground railroad used by slaves to cross the Mason-Dixon line in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She maps the trajectory and territory of Caroline's blood, "down the plains, down the high plateau,/down to the Gulf of Mexico" (127), and then ends her performance by mentioning her brothers and herself, who are embodiments of the future: "Down to Larry and Emmie and Jackie and Joe./The children of Caroline Thibodeaux." (127). Coming back to the etymology of the verb "to enchant", Emmie's performance re-enchants the musical through song and reintroduces the utopian dimension that is at the heart of the entertainment provided by the musical, as Richard Dyer argue in *Only Entertainment*. However, I may also argue that *Caroline*, as a contemporary musical that seeks to explore different themes than those commonly associated with musical theater, reworks the utopian elements that usually operate in musicals. Dyer explains that

Entertainment offers the image of "something better" to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes —these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized. (Dyer 31)

- 30 If *Caroline*, especially by ending on Emmie's hopeful performance, alludes to "something better" to escape into", it does not seem to provide any form of escapism. By shedding (moon)light on the lines of fragmentation that permeate the community, *Caroline* does not smooth over nor resolve the conflictual dynamics that collide on stage, against Richard Dyer's idea that "[w]hat musicals have to do, then, [...] is to work through these contradictions at all levels in a way as to 'manage' them, to make them seem to disappear" (Dyer 38). Similarly, Emmie's fierce acknowledgment of her filiation to her mother, as well as the mapping of her Black identity within an actual territory, seem to anchor her performance, and therefore the tone of the play, within a historical reality that does not negate the lines of fracture constituted around notions such as race, class and sex.

## Conclusion

- 31 Throughout the play, the motif of the night remains a continuous and structuring feature, both visually and conceptually, that sheds light on the conflicted dynamics the musical seeks to expose. The liminal and in-between dimension of nighttime in this

play enlightens *Caroline, or Change*'s most conflicting issues, between change and stasis, between the personal and the political. The musical becomes the site of a collision (if not many), that only seem to be revealed in the eerie and uncanny light of the night. The idea of a collision, rather than a blurring, expands on the potentially violent and confrontational dynamics it translates on stage. Caroline's final performance in "Lot's Wife" is particularly striking in that respect, as the music only enhances the self-oriented violence of the number, instead of glossing over it.

32

Both a space and a time, the night in *Caroline, or Change* allows for the characters to redefine or assess their selves in a context of political turmoil, between the twilight of an era and the dawn of another. Once again, the in-betweenness does not remove the play from its historical context and political implications. Precisely, the night's in-between quality becomes a metaphor for the political state of 1963 America, caught between two eras and coming to violent collisions and confrontations that shaped the following decades. When looking at the way the musical stages the collision between the personal and the political, one may also bear in mind 1960s and 1970s feminist concerns and discourse that sought to expose the links between the personal and the political, in order to move from individual to collective action while emphasizing the idea that the political infuses the individuals' situations.

33 Night scenes in *Caroline* also provide an extremely interesting point of entry into the way contemporary American musical theater expands and redefines its entertaining and enchanting potential, especially since the play was followed in 2005 by the adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* to the Broadway stage, in which a poor Black woman is also the focus of the play and which depicts the violence and oppression she is confronted to. In that perspective, *Caroline* is part of a larger 21<sup>st</sup>-century wave of musicals that seek to explore the musical's ability to tackle political issues, political bodies and political stances. Some of its most recent examples include another of Jeanine Tesori's musicals, *Fun Home* (2015), an adaptation of Alison Bechdel's cartoon which deals with sexual identity, queerness and the complex, or Lin-Manuel Miranda's take on the American Revolution with *Hamilton* (2015) through a decidedly color-conscious casting, in which the Founding Fathers are interpreted by a cast of Latin-American and African-American descent. By exposing rather than obscuring America's conflicts, especially through powerful female performances, *Caroline* pertains to this definite move away from the escapism usually provided by Broadway theater, while providing the audience with thoroughly enjoyable musical numbers. Female performances do influence and shape this change, first and foremost through the feminine figure of the Moon, both an embodiment of change and of female performances' capacity to transform the genre.

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## NOTES

1. This echoes Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, a term she coined in her 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". In this article, she argues that most feminist and antiracist discourse uses a "single-axis framework" that does not take into consideration the intersection of race and gender. Because of that, Black women are often marginalized in these discourses: "Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. [...] Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (140). It is therefore of particular importance to consider *Caroline* as an intersectional character in order to analyze her liminal dimension.
2. "Moonlight also possesses fantastic and uncanny aspects" (my translation).

3. "The absence of light prevents all forms of human activity, modifies one's perception of space and time, and momentarily suspends the ordinary conditions that preside over daily life. 'Normalcy' as a whole undergoes a crisis during the moment that separates sunset and engulfing darkness from dawn and reappearing light" (my translation).
  4. "Nighttime provokes the erasure of the rules that apply during daytime, whereas fantasy upsets the certainties of logic and science; in both cases, a norm is called into question—or even deconstructed, overthrown and made illegitimate" (my translation).
  5. "History becomes the subject of a construction whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time saturated by 'now-time'" (transl. Michael Winkler).
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## ABSTRACTS

The sung-through musical *Caroline, or Change*, written by American playwright Tony Kushner with music by Jeanine Tesori, garnered much critical acclaim when it first opened on Broadway in 2004. Set in 1963 Louisiana, the play tells the story of Caroline, a Black maid, and her interactions with eight-year-old Noah, the young son of the rich Jewish family she works for. An unlikely subject for a genre mostly considered as the epitome of mainstream theater, the political context of the Civil Rights movement nonetheless seeps through the show tunes and permeates the personal story of Caroline. Such interweaving is echoed through the many night scenes that punctuate the play, and during which the personal and the political, the intimate lives of the characters and the great unfolding of History collide. Therefore, this article approaches the staging of the night in *Caroline, or Change* as the creation of an in-between temporality that sheds light on these conflicting dynamics. Often watched over by a Moon-like figure who acts as an antique chorus set to blues and Motown music, night scenes indeed seem to confront the individual temporality of the characters and the implacable temporality of historical events that have shaped contemporary America. The title of the musical itself plays on this unlikely collision: a pun on the word "change", it refers both to Noah's pocket money that Caroline finds when she does the laundry and to the stream of political events happening in the background—or sometimes, in the foreground. Both a revelatory moment of stasis which allows for powerful performances of the self, and the manifestation of the unstoppable change Caroline so adamantly resists, night in *Caroline, or Change* offers a particularly fruitful point of entry into this particular musical, as well as into contemporary evolutions of the genre.

Écrit par le dramaturge Tony Kushner, sur une musique de la compositrice Jeanine Tesori, *Caroline, or Change* (2004) est un musical nocturne, dont le sujet inhabituel n'a pas empêché la critique de se montrer particulièrement élogieuse. S'éloignant des sujets de prédilection du genre, la pièce se déroule dans la petite ville de Lake Charles, dans la Louisiane de 1963. Elle met en scène Caroline, domestique noire au service d'une riche famille juive, les Gellman, et ses interactions avec Noah, le petit garçon de la famille. Le contexte politique de la lutte des droits civiques infuse la musique de toute la pièce de même qu'elle vient bouleverser la vie des personnages, et notamment celle de Caroline. C'est au cours des nombreuses scènes de nuit qui ponctuent le musical que le spectateur voit s'entrechoquer le personnel et le politique, le déroulement intime de la vie des personnages et l'inéluctable marche de l'Histoire. Cet article se propose donc d'aborder la mise en scène de la nuit dans *Caroline, or Change* comme l'avènement d'un entre-deux spatial et temporel. Souvent placées sous la figure tutélaire d'une Lune

anthropomorphisée qui prend le rôle d'un chœur antique sur fonds de blues et de Motown, les scènes nocturnes font entrer en collision la temporalité individuelle des personnages et celle, implacable, des événements politiques et historiques qui ont façonné l'Amérique contemporaine. Le titre du musical, qui joue sur la polysémie du mot change, fait également allusion à cette superposition inattendue, en faisant référence à l'argent de poche que Caroline trouve dans les poches de pantalon de Noah en faisant la lessive, mais également au courant de transformations sociales, politiques et culturelles qui se déroulent en fond de scène – ou parfois même à l'avant-scène. Dans *Caroline, or Change*, la nuit se fait moment de stase qui permet l'expression de soi, tout en faisant advenir ce changement auquel Caroline se refuse tout au long de la pièce. De ce fait, la nuit dans *Caroline, or Change* offre un point d'entrée particulièrement fructueux sur les enjeux de cette pièce, de même que sur les évolutions du musical américain contemporain.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** *Caroline, or Change*, Tony Kushner, Jeanine Tesori, contemporary American musical theater, 1960s America on Broadway, night on stage, female performance

**Mots-clés:** *Caroline, or Change*, Tony Kushner, Jeanine Tesori, comédie musicale américaine contemporaine, mettre en scène l'Amérique des années 1960, mise en scène de la nuit, performance féminine