**Audience feedback and notes on *Creditors* -16th November 2012**

* We touched briefly on the issue of **time**; time running out and catching up with the trio. >> It is also interesting to consider what the passage of time does to memories, which are themselves encapsulations of a lost time, and to individuals and their interrelationships, as they both change and stay the same to varying degrees.
* We spoke about how we **approached working on this play** in a naturalistic way; with rehearsals centring mainly on intimate character work: understanding motives, thinking about characterisation and psychology, and less on the autobiographical elements of Strindberg’s work. We had spoken with Peter Graves prior to the performance who had highlighted the significance of the names of the characters in the play in relation to Strindberg’s life, but we took this as interesting additional information and didn’t try to do further research into this in order to incorporate this into the characterisation. Thus to the gentleman who enquired whether we had allowed our knowledge of Strindberg’s private life to colour our interpretation/ performance, we answered that we had not, and the general agreement on the power of our three actors’ performances seemed to indicate this was just as effective an approach as any.
* Which of the characters is more deserving of our **sympathy**? It was generally agreed that none of them were especially likeable, and all were tragically, deeply flawed. Adolph was weak and impressionable and Gustav eaten up by bitterness. Perhaps Tekla was the most sympathetic character – it was suggested she was more **mature** than any of the males, although this too is debatable. Tasmin, who played Tekla, indicated little sympathy with her character though she admitted she came to respect her more as the rehearsal process went along (words such as ‘abnormal’ and ‘strong’ were used here.) Graham, who played Gustav, indicated more sympathy for Tekla. The director had worked with the actors to ensure that they all liked their own characters, but this didn’t extend to them loving them!
* An audience member mused on how like **Tennessee Williams** the language of the play was. Ornate, striking and set with evocative images.
* **Mirroring**: this was to be found in the characters echoing each other, the words they used, the emotions they felt for one another, the conflation and similarities of the memories (displayed on the projector). In the end, the three characters were not dissimilar; they could be seen to have almost assimilated into one another. And yet their **difference** was also fundamental – for example, the warmth and idealism of the memories that were played versus the stark realism of the play’s live action.
* **Distrust** was a key concept that was raised – none of the characters trusted each other and the audience did not trust any of them either. An audience member commented how Gustav, manipulative, oily and convincing, lost our trust (if he ever had it in the first place) very quickly. Adolph could not be trusted as he never could trust himself. Again, perhaps Tekla was the most accessible character in this way too.
* We debated the **humour** of the piece. *The Creditors* is a tragicomedy and although at the read-through there were certain parts that naturally struck us as funny, it was by no means enough to delineate as a strong feature – the humour being neither easy or consistent. We did speak about how sometimes, a line or expression given by a character would be so ridiculous as to be hilarious e.g. Gustav’s diagnosis of Adolph as an epileptic.
* Siobhán, the director, had talked about the timeless relevance of the piece, and how its themes are still very much relevant today. One of the actors from the Glasgow group asked a very pertinent question about **updating** the text. Was the text really relevant in its original form in the modern age and did we truly update it at all? Did we have trouble especially aligning the play’s misogynistic ideas with contemporary issues? Misogyny is a criticism often levelled at Strindberg and certainly modern audiences might have great trouble identifying with a play that is pitched on such a level, but **gender issues** will never be far from the forefront of our cultural landscape. The misogyny that may occur in modern works may be less clumsy relative to that which occurs in Strindberg. Possibly it would be resolved in a way Strindberg does not really do in *The Creditors* – Tekla may be the strongest character, but does she ever respond to the male characters’ attempts to place her firmly in her gender? We may think about sexism and how it has evolved/ stayed same since Strindberg’s time, also about its institutionalisation and ingraining in the modern mind (therefore invisibility).
* A point was raised about the **interchangeability** of the two leading male roles. Could Harshad (Adolph) and Graham (Gustav) have swapped roles? Quite possibly. Harshad’s characterisation ended up being quite strong, impassioned, and could have transferred well to Gustav. We briefly discussed how either was chosen for their respective roles. Graham had excelled at getting across an unsettling feel, and Harshad had a innocent, benevolent countenance, but they had both auditioned for the other male part too, and would have been capable of doing well with either. We did not discuss the casting of Tekla (Tasmin), but Siobhán and I had thought her immediately engaging and professional in her manner. Going even further, it was wondered whether perhaps each of the characters could have played each other. Perhaps our emphasis on the blurring of traits between the trio, had prompted this suggestion.
* We spoke briefly about the **character arc**, which was served through backstory and the videoed memories. Graham spoke about Gustav’s own: clearly content years ago in his marriage with Tekla and otherwise; then following the divorce increasingly extremely bitter, which hardened itself into a generalised disdain for women in general. Gustav talks about having the first mortgage on Tekla, and of playing a chess game, rather than in loving terms – betraying a desire to claim her as his property, win her as a trophy for his embattled manhood. Harshad spoke about how differently it could have all turned out if Gustav, the catalyst, had not appeared. He believed Adolph would never have gone as far as he did, as he needed that push himself.
* The duality and contradiction of **attraction and opposition** in the piece. All three characters are attracted and repelled by one another, sometimes clearly one and not the other, and sometimes a mixture of the two. This fluidity of the push-and-pull forms a large part of why *Creditors* is so compelling.
* The function of the **videos** we explained as an illustration of time (see above); and as was more immediately obvious, a marked, and cruel, **contrast** between the past and present. The nature of memory and nostalgia possibly would have compromised objectivity and trustworthiness of the memories shown. Siobhán explained that the digital elements were there to enhance only; the story could stand alone. That it was a conference pertaining to the digital age, it was good to give a nod to this in the performance itself, but it was done in such a way that should the projector have been removed, nothing would have been lost of the understanding of the play, making the digital element a welcome, but necessarily vital, enhancement of the piece.
* Discussion also turned to the **title**. We admitted we had not given this much thought. The notion of **debt** – who owes whom? Could the different things in credit and in debit between Tekla, Gustav and Adolph be tallied and weighed against the others? An audience member mentioned how *The Creditors* had erroneously once been translated as merely a singular noun, which would transform the reading of the play as a whole.
* Alan Macniven asked whether the play would have worked if, instead of being painters and writers, the characters were plasterers and builders? The play would have sounded very different, and perhaps even more humour could have been mined out of the situations. An interesting proposal.
* The director of the Glasgow performance group spoke about **clowning**. He mentioned complementary roles in physical theatre of the red (Auguste) and the white clown. Who is playing the joke on whom? Who is the victim (red clown)? I discussed with him briefly afterwards and we thought Adolph, in this production certainly, could only have been the red clown, because he is ten steps behind the other characters and is too dense to be able to escape his inferior position. However if Adolph had been played differently, e.g. less childlike, more eventually Gustav-like, it could have very well been that he occasionally took on the role of white clown, in at least his interactions with his wife in Scene Two in any case.
* The Glasgow group also asked us about **voice**. In relation to their performance of *The Stronger,* who would have been **the silent one** in our production? We could not decide. Initially we were tempted to go with Adolph, eternally cowed and clueless, but then again had to recognise that he does display the most impressive vocalisation of the trio. Adolph finds a voice when squirming under Gustav and confronting Tekla properly for the first time, and is particularly strong in his non-speaking role in the denouement. Furthermore, the characters could not be tied to any particular place since the three actors used their natural accents, being variously from Northern Ireland, the States and India.

**The Conference – 17th November 2012**

* Peter Graves posed an excellent question of **authorship** during one of the talks the following day. This pertained to at which point the text ceased to belong to Strindberg and became the actors’/directors’/audiences’, and moreover whether this even mattered. This was a difficult question which yielded no easy answers. Indeed for our production, as aforementioned, we certainly did not let Strindberg the man overshadow Strindberg the writer and originator of the text.
* We also began to learn of the extent to which Strindberg’s **personal life** seemed to resurface in his work. He himself was a painter and photographer besides. He also had troubled relationships with woman. It was interesting to learn how he viewed patriotism as a developed form of some kind of property awareness, a subjective and illogical superiority – especially when considering this in light of Gustav’s consideration of Tekla.
* Franc Chamberlain’s talk on **acting** threw up a few interesting points that were skimmed on the previous day: if the actor is not an artist but a labourer, this casts the professions of Adolph and Tekla in a different light. Gustav says something illuminating about Tekla lack of experience in thinking, and some experience in acting – just as it is uncertain to what extent who owes whom, who is the practical joker and who is the victim, it is uncertain how much acting is going on and how much honesty/truth is present.