

I Am My Own Wife

by Doug Wright

a National Arts Centre English Theatre/
CanStage (Toronto) coproduction

Study Guide

**THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE
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This Study Guide was written, researched, and compiled by **Deborah James** and **Martina Kuska** for the National Arts Centre, English Theatre, October 2005. It may solely be used for educational purposes.

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About This Guide

This study guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages. They may be used separately or in any combination that works for your classes. The three photos are meant for classroom display but may also be photocopied for students.

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About *I Am My Own Wife* (page 1 of 3)

The Story (and the Story Behind the Story) (page 1 of 2)

I Am My Own Wife recounts American dramatist Doug Wright's personal and artistic preoccupation with the life and times of a truly remarkable person: Charlotte von Mahlsdorf (1928-2002). Born in Berlin as a biological male named Lothar Berfelde but self-identified as female from an early age, Berfelde corrected what he considered to be a "mistake of nature" at the age of 15 to become Charlotte when he publicly adopted female dress and deportment as a cross-dresser*.

Despite the dire risks involved, Charlotte von Mahlsdorf openly flouted rigid gender norms by dressing as a woman under two of the most repressive totalitarian regimes in history--Nazism, and the Soviet-style Communism of East Germany prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. In addition, Charlotte went on to turn her passion for collecting gramophone records, antique clocks, and furniture from late 19th-century Germany (the *Gründerzeit* or "founder period") into a museum of her own in her large stone house in the Berlin suburb of Mahlsdorf. She even managed to acquire and preserve in the basement of her home the last surviving cabaret from the Weimar period (1919 to 1933), the Mulack-Ritze. In 1993 the reunified German state bestowed its highest honour upon her, the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* (Order of Merit), for her work as founder and curator of the *Gründerzeit* Museum.

In his introduction to *I Am My Own Wife*, Wright tells how he was first alerted to this astounding story in the summer of 1992 and was "mesmerized" by it:

"I'd long held a casual interest in gay history, and Charlotte seemed like a veritable treasure trove. There are only a handful of books about gay life in Germany during the Second World War, and even fewer about the plight of the homosexual under Communism. Charlotte's story, I reasoned, might help to fill in the considerable blanks. Furthermore, her quiet heroism -- maintaining an unwavering sense of herself during such repressive times -- could be a boon to gay men and women everywhere.

*"In an age where politicians still routinely decry homosexuality on the evening news and "fag" remains the most stinging of all playground epithets, Charlotte's dogged insistence on her own sexuality could prove downright curative, an antidote for a community too often besieged by public condemnation and internalized self-loathing. She was a bona fide gay hero."***

**Cross-dressing* means to wear the clothing of the opposite sex. There are many reasons people cross-dress and many different labels are used to describe these people. There isn't a strong consensus on usage for many of these terms. The term *transvestite* was originally coined to describe men who cross-dressed strictly for sexual gratification. Some people prefer to maintain this distinction between the terms *transvestite* and *cross-dresser*. *Transgenderists* live in the opposite of their physical birth sex. *Transsexuals* take this a step further and seek to align their biological gender identity with the identity they truly feel themselves to be, often taking hormones and having genital reconfiguration surgery. While Charlotte refers to herself as a transvestite, the cross-gender identification she describes suggests a transgendered person.

Adapted from "Is Someone You Know A Cross-dresser?" a brochure intended for public education published by The Alpha and Omega Society, a support organization for heterosexual cross-dressers and their families and friends http://www.aosoc.org/printable_brochure.html

***I Am My Own Wife: Studies for a Play About the Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf*, by Doug Wright. (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2004), introduction, p. xi.

About *I Am My Own Wife* (page 2 of 3)

The Story (and the Story Behind the Story) (page 2 of 2)

Wright visited Charlotte several times over a two-year period, eventually compiling over 500 pages of interview transcripts detailing her experiences. Excerpts from these transcripts, as well as letters, media sound bites, commentary from and interaction with a wide range of characters drawn from life, were to form the basis for his script. But the project ran aground when Wright had a look inside the file that the much-feared East German Secret Police (the Stasi) had maintained on Charlotte during the years of Communist rule.

Much to his chagrin, Wright found in Charlotte's Stasi file damning evidence that clashed with the idealized image of her he had come to believe in. Documents in the file suggested that she had been a willing informant, working for the secret police as a spy in order to preserve her own safety and that of her museum, even going so far as to turn over to the authorities a close friend who was sent to prison. Now the play Wright had envisioned as a tribute to a gay cultural icon could only be written if he decided to ignore the altogether-less-flattering images of her evoked in her Stasi file. Unable to reconcile his image of Charlotte the gender-bending heroine with that of Charlotte the unscrupulous betrayer of her friend, Wright abandoned the project for six years.

An exchange with a colleague at a writers' retreat in 2000 gave Wright insight into an approach to Charlotte's story that freed him to proceed with it: "*For the first time, the play's structure dawned on me. It wouldn't be a straightforward biographical drama; it would chart my own relationship with my heroine. I would even appear as a character, a kind of detective searching for Charlotte's true self*" (Wright, p. xv.). By making his own process of discovery just as much a part of the drama as the events in the life of his enigmatic subject, Wright highlights the notion that the meaning of an individual life -- in truth as well as in fiction -- depends on who's telling the story. No collection of stories, no matter how exhaustive it may appear, is ever enough to capture the elusive essence of individual identity; hence the provisional element in the play's subtitle -- not "The Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf" but *Studies for a Play About the Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf*.

About *I Am My Own Wife* (page 3 of 3)

Cast, Setting, and Costumes

I Am My Own Wife was written to be “a one-woman show performed by a man.” (Wright, p.xix). In this production, Stephen Ouimette will play Charlotte von Mahlsdorf and nearly 40 other characters, including SS and Stasi officers, American soldiers, a TV talk show host, reporters from all over the world, and a host of Charlotte’s friends and family members. The play takes place on a fixed set that represents a room in Charlotte’s *Gründerzeit* Museum. An Edison phonograph with a large, flower-like metal horn and a box containing a collection of miniature furniture figure prominently. The basic costume for Stephen Ouimette is a black skirt and blouse in the German-peasant style, sensible black shoes, and a string of pearls. The only other costume in the production will be the prison uniform and glasses worn by Ouimette at the beginning of Act Two.

Themes

The unique style in which *I Am My Own Wife* was developed, combined with the exceptionality of the life it recounts, makes for a theatrical experience rich in meaning. Here’s a brief look at some major themes in the work:

“I’m curating her now, and I don’t have the faintest idea what to edit and what to preserve.” (Wright, p. 76)

--an examination of the preservation of history, especially of how and why the details are recorded, who decides what to include and what to ignore, and what motivates these decisions; the partial and conditional nature of what we think of as truth.

“But I need to believe in her stories as much as she does!” (Wright, p. 76)

--“necessary fictions” and the need to believe in the truth of the stories we tell about our heroes/heroines and ourselves in spite of our knowledge that such stories are always highly selective.

“Things were so ghastly with my father... But the music would pour through the horn and make things better.” (Wright, p. 46)

--the role of art in repressive regimes (as an escape, as a protest, as a repository of human experiences that are officially ‘forbidden’).

“A play about a transvestite; how theatrical!” (Wright, p. xvii)

--identity as performance (implicit in Charlotte’s status as a transgendered person); self-conscious theatricality (a man in a dress playing a man in a dress playing a woman; multiple characters with multiple perspectives all embodied by one person); seeming versus being.

“Be as smart as the snakes; it’s in the Bible.” (Wright, p. 44)

--the moral costs of survival; the mystery of Charlotte’s survival, and success as a very visible member of a marginalized and frequently reviled minority.

Biographical Note on Charlotte von Mahlsdorf

NB: As *I Am My Own Wife* makes clear, the veracity of many of the details of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's life is uncertain. Some details in her autobiography -- *I Am My Own Woman: the Outlaw Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, Berlin's Most Distinguished Transvestite* -- were refuted by a brother, and we will never know for certain just how willing and effective a Stasi informant she was. The details below are drawn from Doug Wright's text and the chronology of Charlotte's life that appears on the website for the original Broadway production.

March 18th, 1928, Lothar Berfelde (later to become Charlotte von Mahlsdorf) was born. By the age of six, Lothar had already begun collecting phonograph records and clocks. Despite the disconnect he felt from the gender of his birth, Lothar, like all German youth after 1938, was compelled by the Nazi government to participate in the Hitler Youth movement, an organization established to toughen and indoctrinate youths between the ages of ten and 18.

Lothar's childhood years were difficult ones — his father Max Berfelde was a rabidly militaristic Nazi and an alcoholic who brutally abused Lothar's beloved mother. Lothar's only escape from the horror of his domestic life was listening to his collection of recorded music. The threat of air raids on urban centers led to the evacuation of mothers and children from Berlin in 1942. Lothar and his mother went to live in Bischofsburg with his Tante (Aunt) Luise. A lesbian and open cross-dresser, Tante Luise discovered young Lothar experimenting with female attire and gave him a book - *Die Transvestiten* (The Transvestites) — that helped him understand his sexual difference. In 1945 Lothar was charged with murder for bludgeoning his father to death with a rolling pin and was sent to a youth prison for four years but escaped during a Russian air raid.

For the majority of his adult years Lothar lived openly as a cross-dresser under the repressive Communist regime in East Germany where he focused on restoring his large house, filling it with furniture from the *Gründerzeit* period and his extensive collection of antique phonographs and records. In 1963 he acquired the Mulack-Ritze Cabaret and installed it in the basement of his museum where it was to continue its history as a meeting place for East Germany's gay community. During these years Lothar worked as an informer for the East German Secret Police (the Stasi) -- as did a great many others in both East and West Germany -- and is implicated in the imprisonment of Alfred Kirschner, a friend and fellow collector of antiques.

By 1971 Lothar permanently assumed the identity of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf. With the reunification of the German state after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Charlotte was initially lauded as an ambassador of culture for her achievement in establishing the *Gründerzeit* Museum, receiving her country's highest honour in 1993. She toured widely within Germany and attracted international attention. When her Stasi file was made public, Charlotte was engulfed in a storm of controversy. Her museum had come to be recognized as a bastion of gay culture and was attacked by neo-Nazi skinheads in the early 1990s. Charlotte moved to Sweden in 1995. She died on April 30th, 2002, while visiting Berlin.

Adapted from the on-line interactive Chronology of the Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf
http://www.iammyownwife.com/explore_chronology.asp

About Playwright Doug Wright

Doug Wright won an Obie Award for outstanding achievement in playwriting and the Kesselring Award for Best New American Play from the National Arts Club for his play *Quills*. He went on to write the screenplay adaptation, marking his motion picture debut. The film was named best picture by the National Board of Review and was nominated for three Academy Awards. His screenplay was nominated for a Golden Globe Award and received the Paul Selvin Award from the Writers Guild of America. Wright's stage work has been produced at New York Theatre Workshop, Lincoln Center, the WPA Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, Wilma, Woolly Mammoth, the McCarter Theatre, and La Jolla Playhouse. His previous works include *The Stonewater Rapture*, *Interrogating the Nude*, *Watbanaland*, *Buzzsaw Berkeley*, and *Unwrap the Candy*. Wright has been published three times in the Best Short Plays series, and his work has appeared in *The Paris Review*. He's a member of the Dramatists Guild; the Writers Guild of America, East; and the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. He serves on the board of the New York Theatre Workshop.

Discussion Questions

1. The motif of recording and listening to both music and the human voice runs throughout *I Am My Own Wife*. What makes this a particularly apt technique to use in a literary work about Charlotte von Mahlsdorf?
2. *I Am My Own Wife* is intended to be “a one-woman show performed by a man.” How does a male actor communicate to an audience that the character he is playing is female?
3. Charlotte von Mahlsdorf described herself as a transvestite, a biological male who dresses in women's clothes. What stereotypes do you associate with men who dress up as women? Under what circumstances is it perceived to be okay for men to dress as women? What unspoken assumptions about gender are cross-dressers challenging?
4. Stephen Ouimette will play almost 40 different characters in this show. What does the actor's chameleon-like ability to change personalities at will suggest about the nature of identity? What unspoken assumptions about “the self” are called into question by this multi-character/single actor aspect of *I Am My Own Wife*?

Historical Background (page 1 of 3)

The Berlin Wall

The end of World War Two conferred on the city of Berlin a unique status. At the Potsdam meeting in July of 1945 the Allied leaders agreed to divide the newly conquered German state into four zones to be occupied by the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France. The city of Berlin, which was entirely surrounded by the Soviet zone, was also divided up among the conquering nations.

As tensions between the Soviet Union and the Allied nations pre-dating the start of WWII escalated, cooperation among the occupying nations quickly broke down. Despite the protests of the Soviets, the democratic Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was founded in the Allied occupied territories in May of 1949; the Soviet zone became the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in October of the same year. Initially the citizens of Berlin were allowed to move freely among all the sectors. However, as the Cold War developed movement became restricted.

Between 1949 and 1961 more than two and a half million East Germans fled to West Germany, which led to the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, a long and heavily fortified barrier that separated West Berlin from East Berlin and the surrounding territory of East Germany. Before it came down in 1989, 192 East Germans would be shot by their own government while trying to get beyond the wall to start a new life in the west.

The Treatment of Homosexuals in Germany under the Nazis and Post WWII

Between 1933 and 1945, the Nazi government arrested approximately 100,000 men for the “crime” of homosexuality. Roughly half of those arrested were sentenced to prison, with an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 men sent to concentration camps. Historians assess the death rate of homosexual prisoners in the camps to be as high as 60 percent.

Nazi policy against homosexuals was more than an assault on individuals. The regime destroyed the world’s first equal rights movement for homosexuals and lesbians as well as the openly gay social world that thrived in pre-World War II German cities. It would take decades for a new gay rights movement in Germany to emerge, and even longer for the truth about Nazi persecution of homosexuals to be uncovered. Many now know that the Nazis arrested gay men and forced those in concentration camps to wear a pink triangle as identification. But few are aware of the ongoing persecution that many gay internees faced in postwar Germany. The Nazi law against homosexual acts remained in force even after liberation. Some survivors were actually re-arrested after the war and re-imprisoned. The East and West German governments not only excluded all homosexuals from reparations but also deducted time spent in concentration camps from their pensions. Marriage, escape by suicide, or retreat into isolation were common responses.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the number of convictions for homosexuality in West Germany nearly equaled the number under the Nazi regime. East German arrest records are unknown.

Excerpted from the *Paragraph 175 Study Guide* by Sharon Wood (see full citation on page 14).

Historical Background (page 2 of 3)

The Stasi

The *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (German for Ministry for State Security), commonly known by the abbreviation Stasi, was the main security (secret police) and intelligence organization of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Widely regarded as one of the most effective intelligence agencies in the world, it was modeled on the Soviet KGB. The Stasi's influence over almost every aspect of life in the German Democratic Republic cannot be overestimated. Until the mid-1980s, a civilian network of informants (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* (IMs), or unofficial collaborator) grew within both Germanies, East and West. By the East German collapse in 1989, it is estimated that the Stasi had 91,000 full time employees and 300,000 informants. This means approximately one in 50 East Germans collaborated with the Stasi, one of the highest penetrations of any society by an organization. When the East Germany government fell, the final figure for all political prosecutions was somewhere around 300,000. In every case, the Stasi was involved either in the initial arrest or in pretrial interrogations during which "confessions" were usually extracted by physical or psychological torture, particularly between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s.

Excerpted from the full-length article in *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stasi>

"The Stasi was much, much worse than the Gestapo (the official secret police of the Nazis), if you consider only the oppression of its own people," according to Simon Wiesenthal of Vienna, Austria, who has been hunting Nazi criminals for half a century. *"The Gestapo had 40,000 officials watching a country of 80 million, while the Stasi employed 102,000 to control only 17 million."* One might add that the Nazi terror lasted only 12 years, whereas the Stasi had four decades in which to perfect its machinery of oppression, espionage, and international terrorism and subversion.

To ensure that the people would become and remain submissive, East German communist leaders saturated their realm with more spies than had any other totalitarian government in recent history. The Soviet Union's KGB employed about 480,000 full-time agents to oversee a nation of 280 million, which means there was one agent per 5,830 citizens. Using Wiesenthal's figures for the Nazi Gestapo, there was one officer for 2,000 people. The ratio for the Stasi was one secret policeman per 166 East Germans. When the regular informers are added, these ratios become much higher.: In the Stasi's case, there would have been at least one spy watching every 66 citizens! When one adds in the estimated numbers of part-time snoops, the result is nothing short of monstrous: one informer per 6.5 citizens. It would not have been unreasonable to assume that at least one Stasi informer was present in any party of ten or 12 dinner guests.

Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police by John O. Koehler. Oxford: Westview Press, 1999.
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/k/koehler-stasi.html>

Historical Background (page 3 of 3)

Daily Life Under Communism

There existed a dichotomy between the philosophy and the practice of communism in Germany. In theory everyone was supposed to be equal. Yet in practice there was a huge division between Communist party members and nonmembers. Property was confiscated from non-Communist individuals and given to the state. Supplies of food and household items were scarce and difficult to purchase by nonparty supporters yet party members often had extravagant supplies of imported goods. Party members were also given priority for educational and career opportunities, whereas nonmembers often felt powerless against the bureaucratic process. Freedom of speech was against the law under Communist rule; consequently, the work of artists was often edited or censored and the public was denied a voice or opinion. Individuals who spoke out against this injustice were often imprisoned. The arbitrary power of the government was evident as laws and regulations were often manipulated according to the government's needs. The public often lived in constant fear, uncertain of what was permitted or prohibited. As a result of the lack of freedom and meager living conditions many persons felt the only means of obtaining a comfortable lifestyle were either emigration (arriving in the new country as political refugees) or communist party association (a moral sacrifice).

See also: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist>

A Production Who's Who
Creative Team

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Director | Robin Phillips |
| Set/Props Designer | Hisham Ali |
| Lighting Designer | Louise Guinand |
| Costume Designer | Susan Benson |
| Composer | Laura Burton |
| Sound Designer | John Lott |

Cast

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Charlotte von Mahlsdorf and all other characters | Stephen Ouimette |
|---|-------------------------|



Stephen Ouimette, Stratford Company photo, 2005

Stage Management Team

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Stage Manager | Larry Copeland |
| Assistant Stage Manager | Jane Vanstone Osborn |

Pre-Show Activity:

Web-based Research into Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer Issues and Homophobia

Objective and Description:

The following activity is designed as a jumping off point for student discussions around the sensitive issues of sexual difference and homophobia. It is recommended for a mature senior high school group or for the college/university classroom. This is a jigsaw-style activity where students begin their work in home groups and share the results of their research as resident experts on their topic in a jigsaw group.

Time: Approximately two class periods (one for research, one for work in expert groups).

Procedure: Day 1--Divide the class into four home groups and assign each a website (A, B, C, or D) to explore from the list below. Allow 30 to 50 minutes for each group to produce a page of jot notes that summarizes the information their site contains. All group members will need a copy of this page to take with them to their jigsaw group.

Day 2--Separate the students into jigsaw groups by assigning one member from each home group to a new group; each new group will contain a member from home groups A, B, C, and D. Each student in the jigsaw group will then present the information on his or her topic and take questions from the other group members until all have shared their research. Allow time for each jigsaw group to come up with an answer, based on their combined research, into the following question: What does this information suggest about the origins of homophobia in society? Share each group's answer in whole group discussion to conclude the activity.

A. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer--Defining the Terms

This is a page from Deal.org magazine, an online publication sponsored by the RCMP. It provides definitions, statistical research, and advice on diversity.

http://www.deal.org/DefaultSite/index_e.aspx?DetailID=1355

B. Marc Hall v Durham Catholic School Board

Can a student take his boyfriend to the prom?

Egale Canada website: <http://www.egale.ca/index.asp?lang=E&menu=72>

C. Jer's Vision

The Jeremy Dias Foundation, home of Canada's first national Anti-Discrimination scholarship for youth. The scholarship seeks to reward youth who have demonstrated a commitment to their community in addressing issues of discrimination, especially those affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) community.

<http://www.jersvision.org>

D. The Laramie Project

A must-visit website with detailed resources and activities developed by Time Magazine in conjunction with HBO for classroom work with the film version of *The Laramie Project*, an adaptation of the groundbreaking play on the hate-crime murder of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man from Laramie, Wyoming. The play was the work of Moisés Kaufman, director of the original production of *I Am My Own Wife*.

<http://www.time.com/time/classroom/laramie/>

Glossary of German Words and Phrases

from I Am My Own Wife (page 1 of 2)

Gründerzeit--founder; used to describe the period in Germany from 1890 to 1900 that is the focus of Charlotte's antique furniture collection

Bundesverdienstkreuz--cross of merit, like a German *Prix d'honneur*

ein Plattenspieler--a record player that uses a turntable, as opposed to the earlier phonographs that played wax cylinders

fünfzehntausend--fifteen thousand

Die Sopranistin--the soprano (female)

wie soll ich sagen...--How should I say...?

wie sagt man...--How does one say...?

Folgen Sie mir bitte, ja?--Please, follow me, yes?

eine alte Anrichte--an old sideboard

und dieses Möbelstück--and this piece of furniture

ein Tischlermeister--a master carpenter

achtzehn hundertfünf und neunzig--1895

auf Deutsch--in German

“Wanduhr,” oder “Freischwinger”--“Wall clock”, or “Freeswinger” (to describe the movement of the pendulum, which is not enclosed in a cabinet)

Nicht phonograph, Sondern gramophone.--Not phonograph, but rather gramophone.

eine Spende--a donation

Titelbild--cover image, frontispiece

tante Luise--Aunt Louise

Die Transvestiten: Und ich spürte eine Gänsehaut ...über meinen Rücken Kriechen--The Transvestites: And I felt goose pimples run down my spine.

Möchten Sie ein paar Spritzekuchen?--Would you like a couple of pastries?

Kaffe und Kuchen--Coffee and cake

Freiwild--Free game or wild game; something one might hunt

Die Kettenhunde--the chain dogs (slang for infantry police)

Heute habe ich einen Spitznamen für dich.--Today, I have a nickname for you.

sich scheiden lassen--to leave to someone to decide

Glossary of German Words and Phrases

from I Am My Own Wife (page 2 of 2)

Eins! Zwei! Drei! Vier! Fünf!--One! Two! Three! Four! Five!

töten, tötete, hat getötet--kill, killed, have killed

Guten Abend, Charlotte. Und wie geht es Dir heute? Wie geht es Ihnen heute?--Good evening, Charlotte. And how are you today (familiar 'you')? And how are you today (formal 'you')?

Ich habe Deutsch gelernt, um Dein phantastisches Leben besser zu verstehen.--I have learned German to better understand your fantastic(al) life.

Jetzt sollen wir Deutsch sprechen, ja?--But we should speak German, yes?

Ein bisschen, ja. Ich habe mit Berlitz studiert.--A little, yes. I studied with Berlitz. (use of verb "studiert" rather than "gerlernt" in this context is a beginner's mistake)

Als das Ende des Kriegs kam, waren Sie noch im Gefängnis?--Once the war ended, were you (formal you) still in prison?

Sie haben die Wohnung von John Marks erreicht. Bitte hinterlassen Sie eine Nachricht nach dem Pfeifton.--You have reached John Marks' apartment. Please leave a message after the tone.

das Geheimnis--a secret, a mystery

mit einem Blumentrichter--with a gramophone horn

alle gegessen--all eaten

Kunsthändler--art dealer

Sammler--Collector

Schlag--Cream

Autsch!--Ouch!

Die Brutalität, Solche Brutalität--The brutality! Such Brutality!

Niemals--Never

Wir müssen diesen Autobus inspizieren.--We must inspect this bus.

Grossmutter--grandmother

Lottchen--diminutive for Lotte (Charlotte)

Quatsch! Du bist zu dramatisch!--Nonsense! You are too dramatic!

Das ist nicht möglich. Das können sie nicht tun.--That's not possible. You can't do that!

selbstbiographie--autobiograph

Resources (page 1 of 1)

photos of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf as an adult by Burkhard Peter.

books:-

I Am My Own Wife: Studies for a Play About the Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf by Doug Wright. New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2004.

I Am My Own Woman: the Outlaw Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, Berlin's Most Distinguished Transvestite by Charlotte von Mahlsdorf (translated by Jean Hollander). San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1995.

website: *I Am My Own Wife* of the original Broadway production is an excellent resource that includes an interactive timeline of the life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf and a selection of photos from the original production.

<http://www.iammyownwife.com/>

film: *I Am My Own Woman*, by German director Rosa von Praunheim. Cinevista Inc., 1994. Running time: 1 hour and 31 minutes. In German with English subtitles.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer Education and Advocacy Websites

Global

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Committee tracks current attacks on homosexuals and lesbians worldwide and provides information on advocacy issues.

<http://www.iglhrc.org>

International Foundation for Gender Education

IFGE advocates for freedom of gender expression for all people and offers a wide range of programs and resources.

<http://www.ifge.org/>

National

Egale Canada is a national organization that advances equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-identified people and their families across Canada.

<http://www.egale.ca/index.asp?lang=E>

PFLAG Canada is a nation-wide organization that deals with sexual orientation and gender identity issues from a family perspective, providing support, education, and resources.

<http://www.pflagcanada.ca/>

National Capital Area

Pink Triangle Services

Non-profit registered charity and social service agency providing peer support, educational, research, and advocacy services primarily for gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals around the Canadian National Capital Region.

http://www.pinktriangle.org/pts_site/Eng/pty-suspend.html

Our Whole Lives. Sexuality education training for youth ages 15 – 19 (grades 10-12) in the Ottawa area.

<http://www.owlinottawa.blogspot.com/>

Resources (page 2 of 2)

Relevant History Resources

United States Holocaust Museum, special exhibit on Nazi persecution of homosexuals
http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/homosexuals_02/

The File: A Personal History by Timothy Garton Ash. Toronto: Vintage Books, 1998.

Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police by John O. Koehler. Oxford: Westview Press, 1999.

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/k/koehler-stasi.html>

Stasiland by Anna Funder. London: Granta Publications, 2003.

Websites of Particular Relevance to Issues Raised in *I Am My Own Wife*

“The Trans Biography Project: Stories from the Lives of Eleven Trans People in BC.” Written by Kathleen Cross in collaboration with the Women/Trans Dialogue Planning Committee and Trans Alliance Society.

<http://www.transalliancesociety.org/education/documents/01transbio.pdf>

Paragraph 175

Paragraph 175 is a documentary by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman on the treatment of gays and lesbians in Hitler’s Germany and in the years following the war. Produced by Telling Pictures in association with Home Box Office and Channel Four Television, 2000. The site provides a link to a detailed discussion guide written for Telling Pictures by Sharon Wood.

<http://www.tellingpictures.com/films/5.html>

Study Guides on *The Danish Play*, *simpl*, and *Tiger of Malaya*, recent NAC English Theatre presentations that touch on the real-life struggles of individuals whose lives were irrevocably altered by WWII. Available on-line at the Arts Alive web address

<http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/activities/>

Additional NAC Resources for Teachers

ArtsAlive.ca (English Theatre): A comprehensive, lively and interactive web-based educational resource for Dramatic Arts and English teachers. Find information on theatre superstitions, Great Canadian Plays, interviews with Canadian theatre artists, definitions of “Vomitory” and “Gobo”, links to a host of exciting theatre-related sites and more.

www.ArtsAlive.ca (English Theatre)

The Skills Shop — puts theatre professionals and students together for hands-on, in-school, group workshops.

Workshops Plus! — offers pre-student matinee workshops that allow for a full-day visit to the NAC.

Teachers Play! — offers one- and two-day workshops for teachers in areas like: Lighting, Voice, Movement, Acting Technique, and Design. See the ArtsAlive publication, available through the NAC, for more information, or contact NAC Outreach Coordinator Janet Irwin at (613) 236-2502 or jjirwin2502@rogers.com.

Classroom Activity:

Citizens and Spies

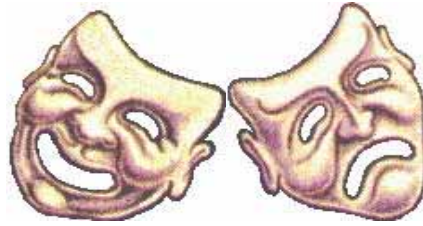
Ask students to prepare a character (they should think of both mental and physical characteristics) and come to class dressed in character. Give each student a small piece of paper on it write *Stasis spy* or *Citizen*. Make sure the class is divided 20% spies and 80%non spies. Each spy should be given three to five questions that they try to answer, such as characters age, profession, hobby, address, shoe size, sisters name etc. If they succeed at finding out the information they need the *Stasis Spy* will give the *Citizen* a firm handshake whereby they squeeze their hand (a secret signal to let the *Citizen* know they have been found out), the *Citizen* then goes to prison which is a designated place in the classroom. Continue the game till everyone is in prison. If two spies shake hands they cancel each other out and can both continue playing the game.

Discuss:

How did it feel to be a spy or citizen?

What were your conversations like?

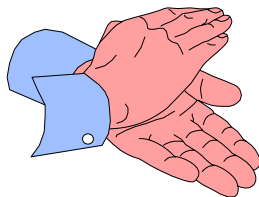
What was the atmosphere like in the class?

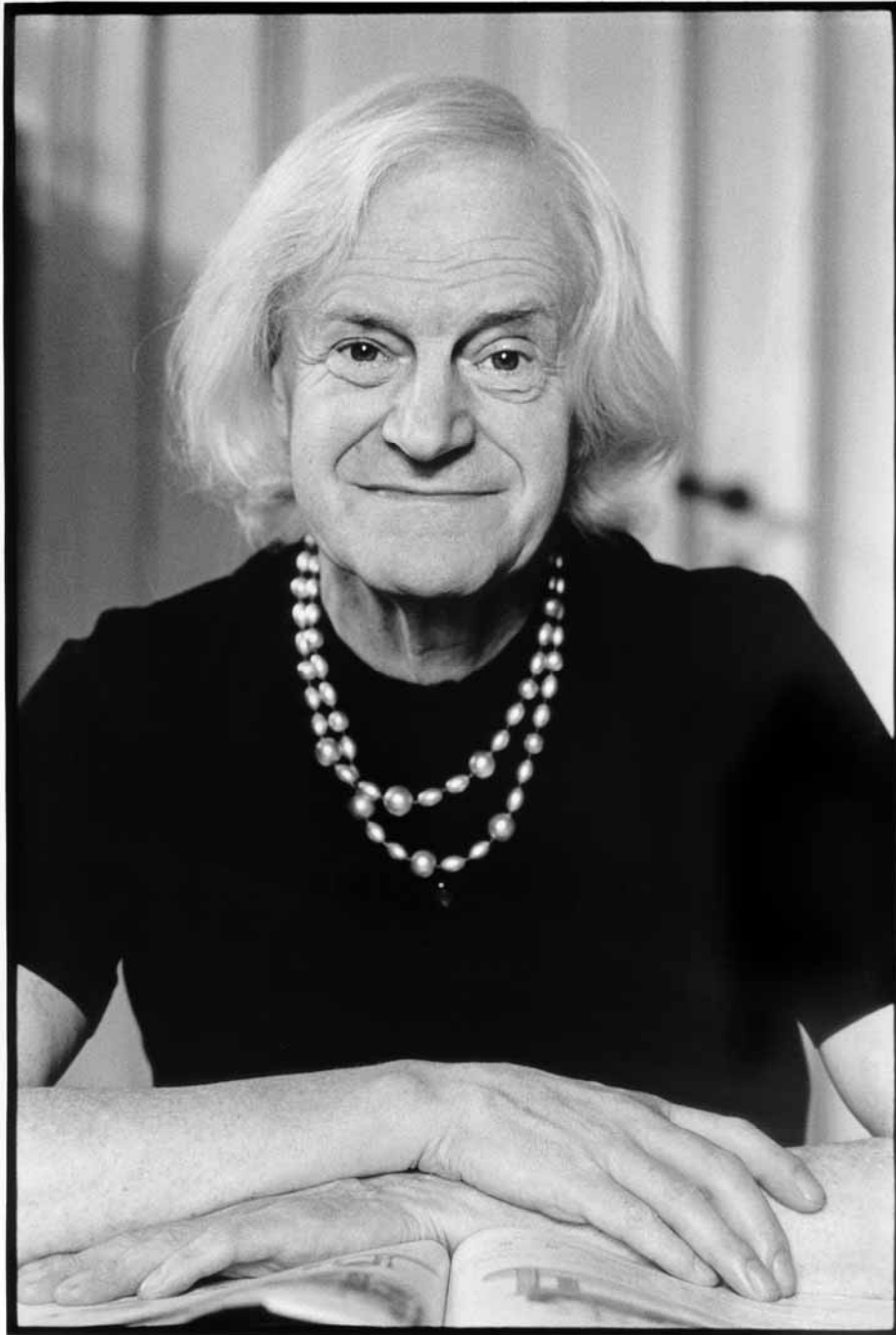


Theatre Etiquette

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre by explaining good **Theatre Etiquette** which will enhance the enjoyment of the play by all audience members:

1. *I Am My Own Wife* will be performed in the Theatre of the NAC. Matinées at the NAC are for students and the general public. It is important for everyone to be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance so others do not lose their immersion in the “world of the play”. Unlike movies, the actors in live theatre can hear disturbances in the audience and will give their best performances when they feel the positive involvement of the audience members. The appropriate way of showing approval for the actors’ performances is through laughter and applause. For the enjoyment of all, people who disturb others during the show may be asked to leave the Theatre.
2. It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted and others are not disturbed. Cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps must be turned off. Cameras and all other recording devices are not permitted in the Theatre.
3. Unlike at a movie theatre, seats in the NAC Theatre are assigned to patrons according to row and number. It is important to find the seat indicated on the ticket rather than moving around and disturbing others. It might be wise for teachers to pass out the tickets before arriving at the NAC so students can make sure in advance that they are sitting beside the friend of their choice. Remember that in the NAC Theatre, all odd numbered seats are on one side and all even are on the other, so, for example, seats 12 and 14 are actually beside each other.
4. The play is performed in four scenes with one 15-minute intermission. Anyone leaving during while the play is in progress may unfortunately not be allowed back into the Theatre.

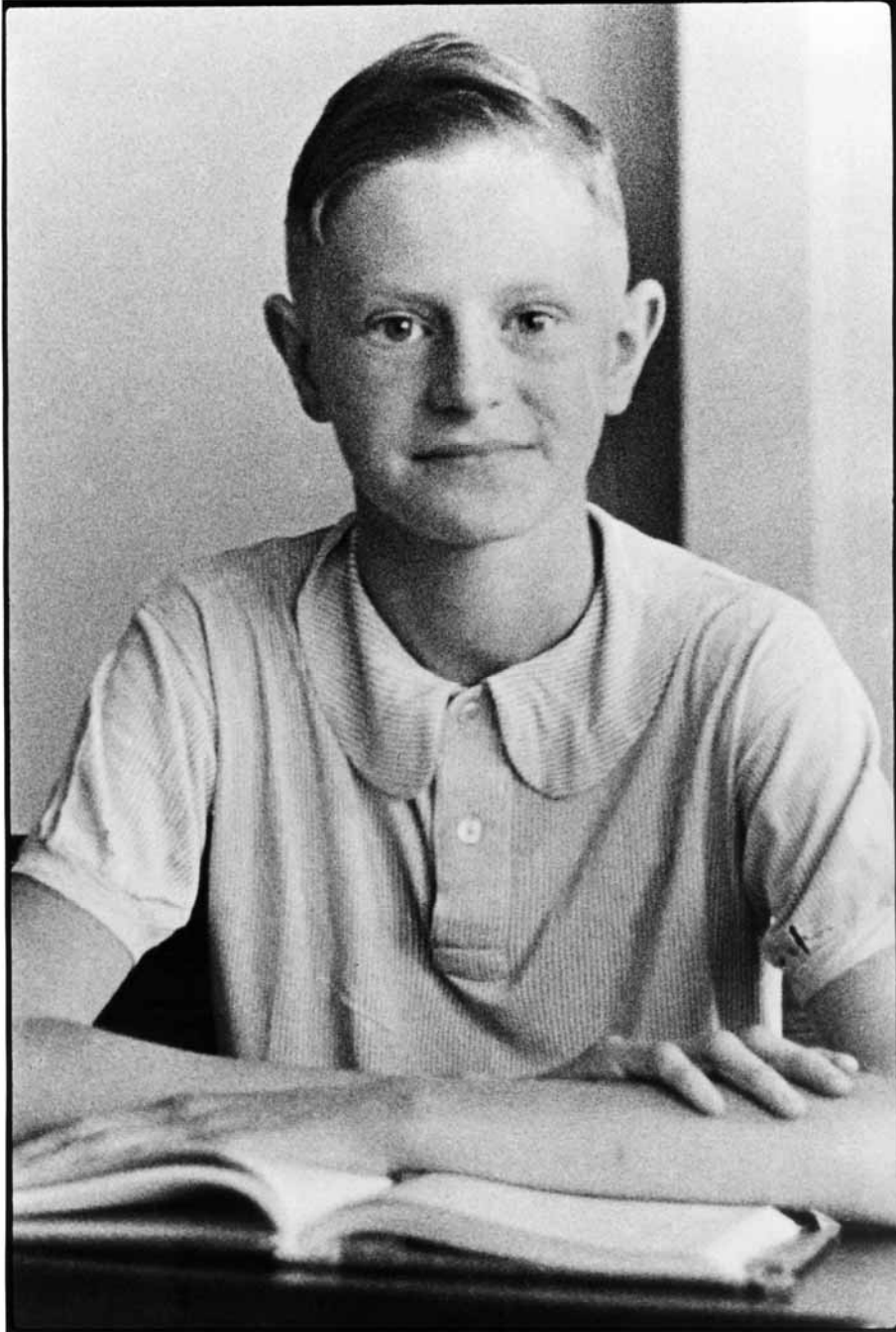




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