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Document A

David Lodge, *Small World*, Penguin, 1984.

It was cold and growing dark. Persse turned up the collar of his anorak, thrust his hands into his pockets, and set off in the direction of the city centre. By the time he found the Repertory Theatre, a large futuristic concrete structure near the Town Hall, the performance of Puss in Boots was well under way, and he was ushered to his seat while
5 a man, dressed apparently as Robin Hood, was coaching the audience in hissing whenever they saw the wicked Baron Blunderbuss appear. There followed a duet for the Miller's son and the princess with whom he was in love; a slapstick comic interlude in which two incompetent decorators, who were supposed to be papering the King's parlour, covered each other with paste and dropped their implements repeatedly on the
10 King's gouty foot; and, as a finale to the first act, a spectacular song and dance number for the whole company, entitled "Saturday Night Fever", in which Puss in Boots triumphed in a Royal Disco Dancing competition at the Palace.

The lights went up for the Interval, revealing to Persse the bemused countenances of his fellow conferees. Some declared their intention of leaving immediately and looking for
15 a good film. Others tried to make the best of it – "After all it is the only genuinely popular form of theatre in Britain today, I think one has a duty to experience oneself" – and some had obviously been enjoying themselves immensely, hissing and clapping and joining in the sing-songs, but did not want to admit it. Of Angelica and Dempsey, however, there was no sign.

20 Searching for them in the crowded foyer, Persse encountered Miss Maiden, who presented a striking figure among the drab provincial throng, wearing a fox-fur stole over a full-length evening dress, and wielding opera glasses mounted on a stick. It struck Persse that she must have been a very handsome woman in her prime. "Hallo, young man," she said. "How are you enjoying the play?"

25 "I'm finding it very hard to follow", he said. "What is Robin Hood doing in it? I thought Puss in Boots was a French fairy tale".

"Pooh, pooh, you mustn't be so literal-minded", said Miss Maiden, tapping him reprovingly with her rolled-up programme. "Jessie Weston describes a mumming play performed near Rugby in Warwickshire, of which the dramatis personae are Father
30 Christmas, St George, a Turkish Knight, the Knight's mother Moll Finney, a Doctor, Humpty Jack Beelzebub and Big-Head-and-Little Wit. What would you make of that?"
"Nothing very much I'm afraid".

"It's easy!" Miss Maiden cried triumphantly. "St George kills the knight, the mother

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35 grieves, the Doctor brings him back to life. It symbolizes the death and rebirth of the
crops in winter and summer. It all comes back to the same thing in the end: the life-
force endlessly renewing itself. Robin Hood, you know, is connected to the Green Man
of medieval legend, who was originally a tree-god or nature spirit”.

“But what about this show?”

40 “Well the gouty King is obviously the Fisher-King ruling over a sterile land, and the
miller’s son is the hero who restores its fertility through the magic agency of Puss in
Boots, and is rewarded with the hand of the King’s daughter.”

“So Puss in Boots is equivalent to the Grail?” Persse said facetiously.

Miss Maiden was not discomposed. “Certainly. Boots are phallic, and you are no doubt
familiar with the vulgar expression ‘pussy’?”

45 “Yes, I have heard it occasionally,” said Persse weakly.

“It is a very ancient and widely distributed metaphor, I assure you. So you see
the character of Puss in Boots represents the same combination of male and female
principles as the cup and spear in the Grail legend”.

50 “Amazing,” said Persse. “It makes you wonder that they allow children to see
these pantomimes”.

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Document B

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), *Seven Discourses on Art*

A Discourse Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes, December 10, 1774, by the President.

5 For my own part, I confess I am not only very much disposed to lay down the absolute necessity of imitation in the first stages of the art, but am of opinion that the study of other masters, which I here call imitation, may be extended throughout our whole life without any danger of the inconveniences with which it is charged, of enfeebling the mind, or preventing us from giving that original air which every work undoubtedly ought always to have.

I am, on the contrary, persuaded that by imitation only, variety, and even originality of invention is produced.

10 I will go further; even genius, at least what generally is so called, is the child of imitation. But as this appears to be contrary to the general opinion, I must explain my position before I enforce it.

Genius is supposed to be a power of producing excellences which are out of the reach of the rules of art—a power which no precepts can teach, and which no industry can acquire.

15 This opinion of the impossibility of acquiring those beauties which stamp the work with the character of genius, supposes that it is something more fixed than in reality it is, and that we always do, and ever did agree, about what should be considered as a characteristic of genius.

20 But the truth is that the degree of excellence which proclaims genius is different in different times and different places; and what shows it to be so is that mankind have often changed their opinion upon this matter.

When the arts were in their infancy, the power of merely drawing the likeness of any object was considered as one of its greatest efforts.

25 The common people, ignorant of the principles of art, talk the same language even to this day. But when it was found that every man could be taught to do this, and a great deal more, merely by the observance of certain precepts, the name of genius then shifted its application, and was given only to those who added the peculiar character of the object they represented; to those who had invention, expression, grace, or dignity; or, in short, such qualities or excellences the producing of which could not then be

30 taught by any known and promulgated rules.

We are very sure that the beauty of form, the expression of the passions, the art of composition, even the power of giving a general air of grandeur to your work, is at present very much under the dominion of rules. These excellences were, heretofore, considered merely as the effects of genius; and justly, if genius is not taken for

35 inspiration, but as the effect of close observation and experience.

He who first made any of these observations and digested them, so as to form an

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invariable principle for himself to work by, had that merit; but probably no one went very far at once; and generally the first who gave the hint did not know how to pursue it steadily and methodically, at least not in the beginning. He himself worked on it, and
40 improved it; others worked more, and improved farther, until the secret was discovered, and the practice made as general as refined practice can be made. How many more principles may be fixed and ascertained we cannot tell; but as criticism is likely to go hand in hand with the art which is its subject, we may venture to say that as that art shall advance, its powers will be still more and more fixed by rules.

45 But by whatever strides criticism may gain ground, we need be under no apprehension that invention will ever be annihilated or subdued, or intellectual energy be brought entirely within the restraint of written law. Genius will still have room enough to expatiate, and keep always the same distance from narrow comprehension and mechanical performance.

50 What we now call genius begins, not where rules, abstractedly taken, end, but where known vulgar and trite rules have no longer any place. It must of necessity be that even works of genius, as well as every other effect, as it must have its cause, must likewise have its rules; it cannot be by chance that excellences are produced with any constancy, or any certainty, for this is not the nature of chance, but the rules by which men of
55 extraordinary parts, and such as are called men of genius work, are either such as they discover by their own peculiar observation, or of such a nice texture as not easily to admit handling or expressing in words, especially as artists are not very frequently skilful in that mode of communicating ideas.

60 Unsubstantial, however, as these rules may seem, and difficult as it may be to convey them in writing, they are still seen and felt in the mind of the artist, and he works from them with as much certainty as if they were embodied, as I may say, upon paper. It is true these refined principles cannot be always made palpable, like the more gross rules of art; yet it does not follow but that the mind may be put in such a train that it shall perceive, by a kind of scientific sense, that propriety which words, particularly words of
65 unpractised writers such as we are, can but very feebly suggest.

Invention is one of the great marks of genius, but if we consult experience, we shall find that it is by being conversant with the inventions of others that we learn to invent, as by reading the thoughts of others we learn to think.

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Document C



Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in Joseph L Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963).
Photograph: Kobal Collection.