

Spinstren Text

Text by Jools Gilson-Ellis

SECTION 1

(ARACHNE)

Arachne Scream / Spider Mouth **[Trio]** **(choreography only)**

[blackout]

Writing Tops **[recorded]**

These were tops wise in languages. They were tall, with only a whisper of roundness. They had to be spun quickly to whip up enough energy for them to write. At this speed they would write a rapid writing with their turning tip; scriptures of immediacy, hot with presence. Their inks would never dry, and like mercury would bubble off the page a few minutes after being read.

Arachne anchor **[Trio]**

Arachne hid the spindles of self-silk, but loved making them

[cross-fade: trio move diagonally up stage left, with little shadows of Arachne Anchor. Cindy goes offstage, leaving Carla & Jools for The Trouble with Arachne]

The Trouble With Arachne **[CARLA & JOOLS]**

The trouble with Arachne, mused Athena, kicking one of the spindles under the loom, was that she was too cocky for her own good. The fact that she was better at spinning than herself, was hardly the point.

Interlude (Arachne vertical text)

SECTION 2

(CARLA)

Grieving Tops

[recorded]

During the weeks of grieving, the Spinstren kept special tops spinning continuously. The waking tops were administered only by those who had witnessed the intricacies of their power, and knew what should be kept burning in their bells. Such tops could be spun for twenty minutes at a time, and their strange hollow sound and airs, brought a gently moving comfort to those who were letting go.

Enchantment

[CINDY & JOOLS]

Enchantment. Here is a story about a girl who steals a top. A wooden top, precious to its owner, who had carved it by hand. This is a story about a girl who fell in love with spinning, not because of movement, but because of stillness. This is a story about a girl who stole spinning, because she thought she could possess it. This is a story about a girl who learnt a difficult difference between stealing stillness and stealing movement. This is a story about a girl.

Almost Sounds

[CARLA]

They were calling her. She could hear it in her deep sleep. Gentle almost- sounds, in harmony.

(Carla walks off backwards, then turns to exit up stage left, cross-fade. Jools & Cindy glance at each other to begin Geometries)

Geometries

[CINDY & JOOLS]

Carla studies geometries when she should be reading Byron. She likes the warmth and movement of poetry, but the mechanics of spinning have her ensnared. Freshly enamoured of the little top, she uses it to test her theories. There are diagrams and explanations of centrifugal and centripetal force. How one is outwards, and another inwards. She has taken to peering at plugholes and timing the top. She is angry at not being haunted, and all her energies pour instead into explanations, into understanding along a trajectory, into rulers and compasses and keys and order. But there is no graph for singing. No formula for the unlikely stumblings of memory. No diagram for loss. And Carla's pleasure in her mathematical skill will be short-lived, unless she can find the heat of poetry in a straight line, or the longing of a fraction.

(Carla returns to stage for last phrase of text / choreography, so that outbreath becomes a trio, into blackout)

Carla anchor

[TRIO]

Carla turns the top in her pocket again, like a talisman

Interlude (Carla vertical text)

SECTION 3

(SLEEPING BEAUTY)

Ice Tops

[recorded]

The ice tops were spun to dislodge certain kinds of bitterness. They were brittle, brilliant and violently short-lived. Sometimes they shattered at the shrillness of their own sound. Spun quickly during frost, the ice tops shocked a shift in holding patterns, so that griefs kept nurtured for half a lifetime, might briefly intensify, forming into a shrill scream, before thawing into a few drops of water moving in trails down a quiet face.

Breezes

[CARLA]

The Spinstren are a breed of magical women, who use beautifully carved spinning tops to whip magical breezes into being. The spinning amulets are characterised by their balance – carved and conjured from hard woods and polished to smoothness. After skilled spinning, they would appear to be not moving at all, so perfectly balanced were they. The best never fell down at all, but loosed their spinning gently, like a slow seduction.

Princesses & Kissing & Happiness **[JOOLS]**

This is a story about a girl. This is not a story about princesses and kissing and happiness. This is a different story. This is a story about knowledge. This is not a story about spinning wheels, but about where they can take you. This is not a story about waking, but about sleeping. This is not a fairytale. Sleep with me, here in the amber light, come sleep me into knowing. Come sleep with me.

(cross-fade; Jools moves across stage, beginning SB anchor text, to join other two down stage right)

Sleeping Beauty anchor

[TRIO]

You're beautiful when you sleep.

Interlude (Sleeping Beauty vertical text)

Not a Good Time

[TRIO]

Once upon a time there was a prince. He was riding along on his horse, when he saw an island out in the middle of a lake. It looked wildly overgrown, but he felt sure he could see spires rising above the dense forest. He shifted into a gallop, and led his horse down to the shore, where he knew that the fisherman kept their small boats. He borrowed one, pulling it towards the water. He hopped in, and rowed across to the island. As he got closer, the trees on the island seemed to grow taller, as if they were bracing themselves for his arrival. He jumped out

of the boat and dragged it up the shore, and looked around. Now he was here, he could see that not only was the forest dense, but between the trees grew a fierce tangle of thorny branches. The prince drew his sword out of its sheath and set to work. It was difficult work. His sword was the most powerful in the kingdom, but still the thorns tore at his clothes. By noon, he could see the walls of the castle. Somehow, he found the great old door, and slid inside, relieved to be free of the terrible briars. He leapt up the nearest staircase, running up its curving steps. At the top, he opened a silver door. Inside was a young woman, peacefully sleeping. The prince tumbled towards her, and gently lifted her head, so that he could brush his lips against hers. As he kissed her, her eyes fluttered, and slowly opened. The prince laid her head back down on the pillow, and said quietly "Now's not a good time to start anything."

SECTION 4

Conceiving Tops **recorded]**

These were tops of possibility spun on the belly of a woman hoping to become pregnant. They were orange or dark green, and smelt of earth. They invited souls to come into the world; a clearer invitation than sometimes nervous parents were able to muster. They brought calmness and a grammar of lovemaking in the present tense.

Definitions **[CINDY]**

Spin. *v. spun.* Archaic *span, spinning, spins.* [-tr] 1. To draw out and twist (fibres) into thread. 2. To form (thread or yarn) in this manner. 3. To form (a thread, web, cocoon, or the like) by extruding viscous filaments. 4. To make or produce by or as if by drawing out and twisting. 5. To prolong or extend. Used with *out*. 6. To relate, especially imaginatively "fellows who spin interminable yarns" (Melville). 7. To cause to rotate swiftly; twirl. [-intr] 1. To make thread or yarn by the drawing out and twisting of fibres. 2. To extrude viscous filaments, forming thread. Used of an insect. 3. To rotate rapidly; whirl. 4. To seem to be whirling as from dizziness; to reel. 5. To ride or drive rapidly. 6. To fish with spinning tackle. [-n] 1. The act of spinning. 2. A swift whirling motion. 3. A state of mental confusion. 4. *Informal.* A short excursion in a vehicle. 5. The flight condition of an aircraft in a nose-down, spiraling, stalled descent. 6. *Physics.* (a) The intrinsic angular momentum of a subatomic particle. (b) The total angular momentum of an atomic nucleus. (c) A nonnegative integral or half-integral quantum number that specifies the value of such momenta in units of Planck's constant divided by 2π .

[Carla entersup stage right at "5. The flight condition" and mirrors Cindy's movement. Cross fade to Carla, so that Cindy & Spinning wheel can get off stage. Carla walks slowly off-stage, through video of Underworld]

Underworld **[CARLA]** **[recorded text over video]**

Carla is caught staring at a thousand webs in the field beside the well house. Carla is caught. Where the field is, there is an underworld of tiny spiders, who rise to the surface, and weave another fabric to lay across the grass. She knows that if the light shifts she'll not see it again. So she stands stock still, with her back against the well house door. In wonder. Carla is caught.

[Jools comes on as Carla leaves the stage, and then crosses to centre stage]

The Red Top **[JOOLS]** **(choreography / singing only)**

[Jools sings last section close to top, and then picks it up, and walks off down stage right, Carla and Cindy enter for Spinning Choreography upstage left]

Spinning Choreography **[CARLA & CINDY]** **(choreography only)**

[blackout: small table on]

Theft **[JOOLS]**

She stuffs it in her pocket quickly and runs. In the lamplight up in the small room, she tries it for balance. She's nervous, breathless from the run, and she can't get it to work. Dust and sweat mix under her finger tips. When it spins properly, its calm sinks into her. And then a light snaps on in the hall, and the wooden top is clasped once again in her palm.

[Cindy enters down stage right, and Jools mirrors her movement to exit up stageleft]

Cat's Cradle **[CINDY]** **(choreography only)**

Spinning Top Chess **[CARLA & JOOLS]** **(choreography/singing)**

[Singing Departure: *all three exit up stage right singing]*

SECTION 5

Birthing Tops

[recorded]

The Spinstren were busy during birthing. Trays of birth amulets were brought out. Unlike the others, birth tops were rotund and span slowly. Three of them removed the heavy tops, whilst the others gathered threshold herbs. As the tops turned, spinning airs drew the chamomile mixture around the fierce waves of birthing; ribbons of ease amongst the sweat of beginning.

Today is the Day

[CARLA]

Today is a day when the fog horn will follow her up the boreen. Today is a day when her spirit lags behind her. Today is a day when the lighthouse winks beyond dawn, and strange mists meet her heels. Today is a day when she will reach the cottage, and find that mist has followed her, so that all she will see is the piggery at the bottom of the garden. And then the aching mournful rhythm of the foghorn, keening its warning across still waters. The fog seems to move inside her, haunting her into spirals. She's warm with the steep walk up from the sea, but something drags her into the breath of mist. The foghorn moans like a lonely heifer in batches of three. The aching sound curves across the water, up the boreen, through the cottage gate and door, past the bathroom, and into the bedroom, where it moves across Carla's sleeping face into her ear. The mournful sound makes her eyelids flutter, but it doesn't waken her. Somewhere Carla is out in the mist, lost on still waters. Somewhere Carla is held in the centre of song. Somewhere Carla curls back inside the sound of the foghorn and follows its trail out of the bedroom, past the bathroom, out of the cottage gate and down to the sea, where she swims, naked and strong out to the island, rising dripping out of the water, striding up the white road to the lighthouse, black as a fairytale, still winking its red light, where she will find the mournful thing that cries in triplicate, and lift it up, and hold it to her, and softly sing a harmony to meet the sound. Softly calm a grief too tenderly nursed. Softly sing a song of three between the two of them. And outside the black walls, mist peels away from paint and recedes across the waters, so that light can turn in the waves again. (*pathway of tops*)

(Carla picks up tops, and exits down stage right. Jools & Cindy begin Funky Princess)

Funky Princess

[CINDY & JOOLS]

(choreography only)

(bring Funky Princess down to serious ;Jools & Cindy exit up stage right))

Damask

[CARLA]

Carla's cheeks flush a damask almost-red. When she reaches the cottage she's sweating in the space between her breasts.

Water Tops**[recorded]**

The water tops are all kinds of deep and rich blues, azures, turquoises and indigoes. Storm essence binds the spinning waters into the tops. Made from such a powerful spell, the water tops were used to lull deep yearning. They were spun at night with deft fingers from the prows of boats, so that the slow turn of aching could become a watery thing and flow away.

Spider Cunt**[CINDY]****(choreography only)**

(Jools enters up stage right, and begins Distaff; Cindy does choreography with her)

Distaff**[JOOLS]**

She told me that if I bathed the distaff with blood, strange alchemies would come upon me. She told me that if I span and pricked my finger, I could exchange blood for knowledge. She told me this gently, holding me close to her.

SECTION 6

Heart Tops

[recorded]

The heart tops were palest pink and warm to the touch. They were used by the Spinstren to bring the heat of love to those whom joy had somehow left. Kept in pairs in oval boxes, the heart tops could only be used by Spinstren who were themselves in the heat of love. The tops had to be spun at the same time, one in each hand. Spinning together in the breeze of love the heart tops turned in double air. This was a beautiful thing to behold – they gathered speed and deepened their colour, until they shone a brilliant red and released a scarlet air that smelt of freesias. This red mist caused blood to flow more boldly, risks of the heart to be taken, and love to be a possibility.

Beyond

[CARLA & CINDY]

Out in the hinterlands things are different. Out beyond the rocks, beyond the birds, beyond the waves – even beyond the blackness of the lighthouse on its island, and its red wink. Beyond all that. Beyond the patina of living things. Beyond terrified bunnies sprinting, arse bouncing skywards. Beyond sheep and soot and ordinary things. Beyond rain in the afternoon. Beyond wet blackberries and aching sloes. Beyond rocks, purple and otherwise. Beyond sea-ridden plastic and other ocean ephemera. Beyond moving clouds. Beyond wind and hawks and all the seabirds she doesn't know the name of. Beyond lichen and beach herbs, she also doesn't know the name of. Beyond fingers picking up driftwood kindling. Beyond the hundreds of strange blue jellyfish that landed here in August. Beyond coldness. Beyond tripping on the rocks and looking into the hole in her leg. Beyond swimming in the cold sea to stop it from bleeding. Beyond lobster pots and carrageen and falling sheep. Beyond twilight. Beyond all tides. Beyond weeping and singing out to sea. Beyond fishing boats and passenger ferries and cargo ships. Beyond caravans. Beyond erosion. Beyond the smooth grey armchair rock at the head of the swimming beach. Beyond dancing. Beyond any photograph. Beyond unsteadiness. Beyond all this. Beyond. Beyond.

Purple Pink

[CINDY]

Strange purple pink sea lichen lines the pools left on the rocks, and in them delicate feather weeds move in the heartbeat of the ocean.

Voice Tops

[recorded]

The voice tops were for the hearing of unheard voices; hidden voices, and voices lodged deep in flesh. They were inlaid with silver filagree which allowed air and song to pass through the spirals they span in the air. The voice tops moved people with their quiet spinning, until cries emerged from forgotten places, unearthly sounds that made the listeners weep.

Bloody Spindle**[CARLA, JOOLS & CINDY]**

Enchantment. Here is a story about a girl who span with a glistening in her eyes, even as the goddess watched her. This is a story about a girl who lies on the floor beside a bloody spindle. She stirs then, in her own blood.

(Carla lifts Jools in pieta, and places her on the table. Cindy suspended under table: all three Arachne Scream)