

Ravenshead, staged monodrama for tenor/actor, violin, tenor sax., bassoon, keyboard synth., mallet kat synth, electronic drums, electric guitar(1998), libretto by Rinde Eckert, Boosey & Hawkes, 1998.(95')

Ravenshead synopsis

Suggested by a true story:

The name of the opera's main character is Richard Ravenshead. His story was inspired by an actual historical event involving Donald Crowhurst.

In 1969 Donald Crowhurst set off from England to sail non stop and unassisted around the world for fame and fortune in a race sponsored by several major newspapers. Eight months later his boat was found ghosting along in the mid-atlantic with no one on board. At some point, he decided to cheat by hiding in seldom navigated waters and sprinting to the finish. He falsified the log books to describe the circumnavigation that was intended but, compulsive sailor that he was, he also kept a set of accurate log books. When the boat was found the two log books were found side by side on the table. The discrepancy had driven him mad; he plunged to his death off the back of his boat.

It is not as though he were a simple, righteous man who had no experience with the odd gap between curriculum vitae and life. In fact he was a brazen braggart quite successful at rationalizing the discrepancies of his daily life to himself and others. On the other hand he often made good on his brags even if the order of deed and tale were reversed from time to time. Crowhursts actual, verifiable, accomplishments are at least as impressive as his fraudulent ones. He was an incredible extrovert - -the life of the party - - and I could imagine him not wanting to let his friends down by being anything short of unbelievable. For some reason, I don't interpret the log book dissonance as simply the straw that broke the camels back. It is not hard for me to believe that the rigor of keeping the log book provided Crowhurst, for the very first time, with the opportunity to witness two accountings, by one man, for one life - - he could no longer live with himself.

Most of us have at least two sets of "log books" that represent our lives and ourselves. This story is a compelling metaphor for how we invent the truth and for the gray area between "the power of positive thinking" - - challenging oneself with a self image that is not yet verifiable - - and "going off the deep end" with a self image that is un-verifiable.

I see the story as tragic and hilarious. with Crowhurst and his BIG personality at center stage. He is likeable, arrogant, admirable, sleezy, and the proverbial " too smart for his own good."