All they say
Is "Trust in What Is Written."
Wars are made,
And somehow that is wisdom.

Thought is suspect,
And money is their idol,
And nothing is okay unless it's scripted in their Bible.

But I know
There's so much more to find—
Just in looking through myself, and not at them.

Still, I know
To trust my own true mind,
And to say: "There's a way through this . . ."

The realization of how our story should begin led us to construct an entirely new opening scene for our young rebel—the Latin Class—which does not exist in the original. This scene allowed us to see the boys in school. It allowed us to introduce a world of repression, where students are struck for giving the wrong answers. It let us see Moritz floundering. Most important, it showed us Melchior standing up for his friend and defending him.

In contrast, we were clear from the beginning about how to launch Wendla's story, and "Mama Who Bore Me" was one of the first songs Duncan and I wrote. I always felt our show should begin with this determined young woman asking her mother how babies are born, only to be rebuffed, coddled with bourgeois evasion.

In the original, this classic scene falls in Act Two. Wendla has already met Melchior, has indeed already been beaten by him. Moving the scene to the top of the show allowed us to make a political point right from the start: the seeds of the entire "children's tragedy" are sown by this one willful act of silence—a parent failing to talk honestly to her child about sex.

I saw Wendla as a girl with a mission—a nineteenth-century teen with a quest that could also feel contemporary. Thwarted by her mother, she keeps looking for answers: she wants to

know the world of her strange new body. Disturbed but also darkly intrigued to learn Martha's father beats her, Wendla turns, searchingly, to Melchior. In the original script, when she asks him to beat her, he is dumbstruck; all she can offer is that she has never been beaten, her entire life. When our Wendla asks Melchior to beat her, he demands: "How can you even want such a thing?" And she responds: "I've never felt . . . *anything.*"

As Wedekind scripted it, the hayloft scene is brief—startlingly brief. With next to no acknowledgment of the horrific beating Melchior has inflicted on her, Wendla kneels beside him in the hay, and he begins kissing her. A moment later, he forces himself on her. We worked hard to flesh out a fuller scene between them, to let our would-be lovers struggle to make sense of what they have so brutally done—to offer one another forgiveness, before they fall into each other's arms.

From the top of Act Two, we wanted to see Wendla confusedly awakening to her own womanhood, owning her love-making, claiming her part of the pleasure. Where Wedekind gives her an Ophelia-like morning after, our young heroine celebrates in song the sweet unknown world she's just discovered. The final arc of her journey, however, came late in the process. Our producer Tom Hulce felt, and repeatedly warned, that we were letting our sometime-fearless young woman conclude her story as a "victim," lamenting the incomprehensible news that she was with child. The problem was, we all loved her sad song, "Whispering." One day, Michael proposed we try intercutting that song with the scene between Melchior's parents that follows it. As Wendla discovers the consequences of her night with Melchior, the more progressive Gabors, hearing the same news, give up on their son and send him to a reformatory.

It was an inspired idea. Somehow, in cutting those scenes together, it became plain that, over the course of her song, Wendla could undergo a transformation. Her song would then play in counterpoint with their scene: as Frau Gabor bows to her sense of duty and condemns Melchior, Wendla sets aside her grief and trusts what her heart found with him. And so I rewrote the words of "Whispering"—what had been, from near the beginning, my favorite lyric: