“I am the Baron,” the company’s reimagining of the 18th century book “The Surprising Travels & Adventures of Baron Munchausen,” full of comedic tall tales of fantastic escapades. It’s a visionary spectacle about the power of theater, stories and magic. Performances continue at the troupe’s farm in Ashfield, Massachusetts, through Aug. 18.

Left: Traveling to the moon in Double Edge Theatre’s “I am the Baron,” Ashfield, Massachusetts, Aug. 10, 2019. (Greg Cook)
“One of the things we’re growing here is vision, stories and vision,” says Matthew Glassman, co-director and co-author of the show. (The performers also contributed to their characters’ stories.) “It’s an essential part of survival, seeing new ways. Baron Munchausen, in the best sense, is about seeing new possibilities.”

“It’s a reclaiming of something because there’s a really fine line here between the weaponizing of lies and people telling their own truth,” says Jeremy Louise Eaton, designer and co-director. “…When truth doesn’t matter then imagination also somehow doesn’t matter.”

At the show’s beginning, before the first Baron Munchausen interrupts, the vaudevillian master of ceremonies tells the audience gathered in the circle: “Tonight we gather up the cosmos. In spite of our sad landscape we will invoke the spirit of dreams.”

Once the Baron intrudes, the master of ceremonies asserts, “He seems to have lost his grip on reality.” Munchausen professes to have visited a cucumber forest, ridden a cannonball and “traveled through the center of the earth to have tea with Gog and Magog.”

“Lies!” the master of ceremonies shouts. “They aren’t lies if they actually happened,” Munchausen counters. The Baron is a loudmouth and a buffoon, but charming in his way. He leads the audiences off on a journey—literally: the spectacle roams across the rolling farm countryside with the audience walking along behind.

The Baron travels to the bottom of the sea, where he swims through the sky (suspended on wires), before being gobbled up by a (puppet) leviathan. He lands along a narrow, winding creek with wedges of “cheese” set atop poles in the tall grass.

“The impossible is always possible on the Island of Cheese,” Munchausen proclaims. The place is inhabited by performers costumed as a curious tall bird, llama and some sort of horned bear. “It took me almost 50 years to gain their trust, but now they treat me as one of their own.”

But Munchausen warns, “The Great Forgetting reaches far and wide. Even the island of these charming creatures has been decimated.” He pledges a war against the Great Forgetting, shoots himself out of a (fake) cannon “to vanquish it forever,” and, well, the show now needs a new Baron.
Eaton tells me afterward, “The first idea was to have multiple Barons. That idea for me split open the whole thing.” Glassman didn’t want just another old white colonizing male Baron. “It felt like an opportunity to decentralize and ask a question: Who is our larger self? How do you create that persona? It is about heroism in that sense as well.”

In the show, as the vaudevillians endeavor to come up with a new script and a new Baron, they dance high-kicking chorus lines on a stage before a shed. The slapstick comedy of the beginning fades, and the show turns serious and dreamy.

“The Great Forgetting is a threat to us all,” the master of ceremonies says. (The Forgetting, Glassman says, is inspired in part by The Nothing that’s devouring the fantasy realm in “The Neverending Story.”)

“Of course, we didn’t notice at first when the stars started disappearing,” a woman says.

“The Great Forgetting dimmed the skies,” the master of ceremonies says. “My friend, all is lost! Go!” Most of the vaudevillians dash off.

She arrives at a sort of café scene, where Death brings her a book. “The heroes in the past, their glory is written in the sky,” she muses. Characters appear from behind her, including Don Quixote, who says, “The stars will help us remember.”

But the woman remains and tells of her grandmother from Bulgaria: “She always used to say there’s no hero without a wound. … I wonder what will happen to the Baron’s story? I think I will write it and make it my own. … I am here and life exists and the play goes on and this is my verse. … It begins with I am the Baron and I shall light our way.”
Barons—lead the audience on, singing the spiritual, “It’s the old ship of Zion! Hallelujah!” that will carry all to the Promised Land. They lead the audience inside a barn-theater, where the Barons ride a makeshift sailing ship to the moon and sun (embodied by costumed acrobats doing circus aerial work).

The latest Baron offers his life to the sun and moon as a sacrifice: “I am responsible for all the atrocities of my people.” Death leads him into an afterlife of scrims and shadows before taking the audience outside to a field of tall grass and then a still pond that mirrors a magical library perched in the trees beyond.

“The first word I had in my mind was an archive,” Eaton explains afterward. A sort of library of life stories. “This idea of a place that you can’t travel to physically. . . . The story is each person had to claim their own life.” The Barons row across the pond, toward the audience, in a boat lit by a torch. Then the cast leads the crowd to the final scene, a tent where the vaudevillians sing a raucous, high-spirited, New Orleans-style brass band rendition (in German?) of “Ode to Joy.”
Traveling to the moon in Double Edge Theatre’s “I am the Baron,” Ashfield, Massachusetts, Aug. 10, 2019. (Greg Cook)

Double Edge Theatre’s “I am the Baron,” Ashfield, Massachusetts, Aug. 10, 2019. (Greg Cook)

The library/archive in Double Edge Theatre’s “I am the Baron,” Ashfield, Massachusetts, Aug. 10, 2019. (Greg Cook)