

5-1-2013

Alcoholism on the American Stage: De-Stigmatizing Socially Constructed Depictions of the Alcoholic through Performance

Thomas Michael Campbell

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, tcamp714@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/dissertations>

Recommended Citation

Campbell, Thomas Michael, "Alcoholism on the American Stage: De-Stigmatizing Socially Constructed Depictions of the Alcoholic through Performance" (2013). *Dissertations*. Paper 666.

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

ALCOHOLISM ON THE AMERICAN STAGE: DE-STIGMATIZING SOCIALLY
CONSTRUCTED DEPICTIONS OF THE ALCOHOLIC THROUGH PERFORMANCE

by

Thomas Michael Campbell

B.F.A., University of Wyoming, 2003
M.F.A. Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2007

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Speech Communication
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2013

Copyright by THOMAS MICHAEL CAMPBELL, 2013
All Rights Reserved

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

ALCOHOLISM ON THE AMERICAN STAGE: DE-STIGMATIZING SOCIALLY
CONSTRUCTED DEPICTIONS OF THE ALCOHOLIC THROUGH PERFORMANCE

By

Thomas Michael Campbell

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Speech Communication

Approved by:

Anne Fletcher, Chair

Suzanne Daughton

Elyse Pineau

Mary Bogumil

J. Thomas Kidd

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 5, 2013

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

THOMAS MICHAEL CAMPBELL, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in SPEECH COMMUNICATION: THEATER presented April 5, 2013, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: ALCOHOLISM ON THE AMERICAN STAGE: DE-STIGMATIZING SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED DEPICTIONS OF THE ALCOHOLIC THROUGH PERFORMANCE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Anne Fletcher

This dissertation seeks to address the societal problems associated with alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency in relationship to problematic depictions that have appeared on the American stage. It examines plays that perpetuate stigmas as well as plays that seek to subvert stigmas and stereotypical depictions as a means of creating avenues for discourse. This study asks how we, as practitioners of the theatre, can use the theatre and the act of storytelling to initiate empathy and compassion toward what is still considered a marginalized topic of discussion.

Cultural misconceptions regarding the development of and (mis)understandings of alcohol abuse/dependency are perpetuated in our everyday lives, and theatre too often falls into the trap that perpetuates false ideas, which only furthers the stigmas and stereotypes associated with alcoholism. Preceded by a brief Introduction that sets the tone for this study, Chapter One offers medical information to delineate terms associated with alcohol use/abuse. UNIT TWO, presented in two chapters, offers analyses of seven plays: Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Christopher Durang's *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, Theresa Rebeck's *The Scene*, Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*, Tracy Letts' *August: Osage County*, and Stephen Adly Guirgis' *The Motherfucker With the Hat*. Chapter Two focuses on the first four plays of this list and how each presents a particular problematic and/or stereotypical depiction of an alcoholic character(s) and/or alcohol use/abuse; Chapter Three

focuses on the three remaining plays, which offer depictions and/or characters that trouble/complicate the stigmas associated with alcohol abuse/dependency. UNIT THREE is also cast in two chapters: Chapter Four looks at practices and theories used to enhance audience engagement and introduces companies who are using theatre to directly confront issues of alcoholism. Lastly, Chapter Five is a preface for my own full-length play (provided in Appendix A), which acts as my contribution to the ongoing conversations and efforts to diminish the stigmas and stereotypes within alcohol abuse/dependency. The dissertation concludes with a summary and a look at how open conversations regarding alcohol abuse/dependency can lead to empathy and understanding, bringing the topic out from the shadows in an effort to humanize the topic and the individuals and families who are struggling and suffering from alcohol abuse/dependency.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of Delbert and Helene Premer, who now know more than I could have asked.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Getting to this point has been a long road, and I have been honored by numerous teachers to whom I owe so much. Two teachers in particular have been instrumental in opening doors for me and have been consistent in their unending love and support in my theatrical development. To Gavin Mayer, who as a teacher turned mentor turned friend, saw something in me that I never recognized in myself. Gavin, you opened the door, and in doing so, gave me a direction for a life's work that fulfills me beyond measure. To Bill Downs, who not only gave me the necessary foundations in which I have built my work, but gave me the precious gems of wisdom of what it means to be a playwright. Bill, your encouragement and knowledge, your dedication to the craft and insistence that I explore my own voice, are tools I attempt to instill in my own students.

I would also like to acknowledge the advice, feedback, and guidance from Jacob Juntunen. Jacob, while we have only known each other a short time, what you have given me this past year is gratefully appreciated.

To the Heads of Graduate Studies in the Department of Theater, Ronald Naversen, and Communication Studies (formerly Speech Communication), Ronald J. Pelias, I thank you both so much. Dr. Naversen, your knowledge of theatre and its practices is beyond admirable, and I owe you for your aid in helping me navigate the systems and policies of academia. Dr. Pelias, I am indebted to you for your constant words of encouragement. Your wisdom as an instructor and your gravitas as a person are traits I can only hope to strive for in my future endeavors.

To Faculties and Staffs of the Departments of Communication Studies and Theater, your work is the bedrock on which I build, and your everyday presence and dedication to community fosters an environment that brings a harmonious balance where theory meets practice.

To my friends and colleagues, my cohorts, and my confidants, each of you are precious to me:

- Devin Shallow, a friend for so many years, you were instrumental in the initial development of *Descartes...*, and I thank you for your keen sense of dramatic structure, a willingness and desire to work on this play with me, and for always being a true friend full of encouragement.
- Dave Whitfield, you are an individual of such great value who can so genuinely and completely give compassion and empathy to anyone in need, and I am honored to call you a dear friend.
- Erin Zimmerman, I feel I can tell you anything, but in this moment I think simply saying, “Thanks for the pen,” will suffice.
- Molly Cummins, thank you for your ear, your support, the sharing of sly looks with me, and necessary sense of reality (a precious commodity).
- Diana Woodhouse, to you, I owe so much. Your willingness to listen to me, to ask the questions that I needed to be asked, and to ultimately say, “I am so proud of you,” are only a few of the things that set you apart. I owe you, and likewise, I am so proud of you.
- Laramie Dean, I wish you could have shared this journey with me in person, a journey you took yourself, which acted as a monumental inspiration to me. Your help with *Descartes...* in its early stages was pivotal, and I am grateful to you for your help and friendship. I am so happy for the life you have, and I know we will one day be working together again.

- Becca Worley, you have been a rock of support, an anchor, and a vital port-in-the-storm that I have been able to find refuge with time and time again. I have no doubt that you will surpass all expectations in the coming year and years to come.

To Jaclyn Renée, who took a leap of faith and continues to do so every day and in the days to come. Jackie, your charity, your love, is a beacon for me. I am looking forward to seeing what the future holds.

To my parents, my first-responders (in so many ways), how can I possibly say what is in my heart? How can I express my gratitude to you? My gratitude *for* you? We know the lengths that you both have gone for me, and the only way I can think to speak my thanks is to live my hopes, my promises, and my commitments with conviction and self-reflection, knowing that you can watch with loving eyes and tenacious support.

To my sister, Caroline, whose work as a scholar and dedication as an educator is not simply a vocation, but an embodied experience she takes with her into every moment of every day. Like Mom and Dad, I can only hope to illustrate my gratitude to you for a lifetime of the faith and care you have given me. Cari, my admiration for you is second only to my love, and I will be your Daphne any time.

Lastly, but certainly not in the least, I express my gratitude and admiration to the members of my committee who represent decades of experience that spans across the disciplines of Theatre, English, Communication, and Performance Studies. Here, I thank my committee for their combined wisdom and dedication to scholarship in rhetoric, dramatic literature, theatre history, performance, and theatre praxis. My saving grace during the times where I was most hesitant has been to know that my committee, above everything, has been a source of unwavering support, understanding, and inspiration:

- To Dr. Mary Bogumil: You have given me so many tools not just for this dissertation, and not just as compatriot who loves to read plays, but to witness so many years ago the ability to be fearless in showing the love you have for literature in your classroom has been a remarkable inspiration. Thank you!
- To Mr. J. Thomas Kidd: Your understanding of theatre from the perspective of a seasoned practitioner is beyond invaluable. You have given more dedication to my work than I could have ever hoped, and I am honored to have you be involved in this final leg of my education. Springsteen forever!
- To Dr. Suzanne Daughton: Compassion personified, empathy embodied, yet unafraid to push back when I needed it the most. Without you, my work here would have been incomplete as you gave me the tools to ask why this work matters. In my moments of doubt, in your classrooms and since, I still tell myself, “Suzanne has my back!”
- To Dr. Elyse Pineau: We both know that my apprehension has, at times, been palpable. Yet, through your continued grace, guidance, and faith, the many words you have spoken to me, including, “You have no excuse not to identify as a performer,” shattered my preconceived trepidations. For this, and so much more, I owe you.
- And of course, to the chair of my committee, to my advisor, Dr. Anne Fletcher: To study with you, to learn from you by standing on the foundations of what you have given me, has been a gift that I will never be able to sufficiently repay. Your experience is invaluable. Your strength is untouchable. Your hope is inspiring. And combined together, you have given me more than I could have ever asked. I am humbled by you, Anne, and indebted to you forever.

* * *

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT.....	i
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
UNIT ONE: Alcoholism: Perceptions, Performance, and Psychology	
INTRODUCTION: The Three Things I Know	1
CHAPTER 1 – Definitions, Stigmas, and Stereotypes Associated with Alcohol	
Abuse/Dependency	12
UNIT TWO: Stage Depictions of the Alcoholic	
CHAPTER 2 – Contextualizing the Alcoholic on the American Stage.....	38
CHAPTER 3 – Humanizing the Alcoholic in Contemporary American Drama	86
UNIT THREE: Using Theatre to Open Dialogues and De-Stigmatize Alcohol	
Abuse/Dependency	
CHAPTER 4 – Storytelling as a Method of De-Stigmatization	127
CHAPTER 5 – <i>Descartes à la Mode</i> : Coming to Terms with Self-Deception (a preface to the play)	164
CONCLUSION: Moving Forward	182
REFERENCES	193
APPENDICES	
Appendix A - <i>Descartes à la Mode</i> (the play).....	203
VITA	308

* * *

UNIT ONE:

ALCOHOLISM: PERCEPTIONS, PERFORMANCE, AND PSYCHOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

THE THREE THINGS I KNOW

American society is a drug-oriented society, an addiction society, a society preoccupied with drugs, alcohol, their consumption and social control. Two-faced in its attitudes, American society encourages alcohol consumption, but does not want alcoholics.

-Norman K. Denzin, *The Alcoholic Society*

“He’s sick.”

“She’s weak.”

“He can’t be trusted.”

“She’s suffering a spiritual malady.”

“He lacks strength of character.”

“S/he is a drunk.”

These six statements are statements of stereotyping; statements denoting stigma and judgment. Statements like these are synonymous with phrases that marginalize an individual identified as an alcoholic. The statements send a particular message, not only with the chosen words, but also through the underlying implications that these phrases elicit. Traveling from the speaker to the listener, an idea is sent forth which initiates a symbolic interpretation

influenced by the context that the person in question is someone who is (at best) suffering and troubled and (at worst) cannot and should not be trusted because of his/her inability to “control” his/her consumption of alcohol. Phrases like the ones above are only a sampling of statements that use a particular word choice combined with a specific tone to relay a coded message that combines illness with moral judgment. This tone has inherent rhetorical uses, (un)intentionally maligning a person and subsequently placing her/him into the category of *alcoholic* where s/he, as an individual, is to be doubted, casting her/him as outsider, as Other.

Regularly, we hear these or similar phrases and words in our daily conversations, on the television programs we watch, in the songs we listen to and at the theatre we experience. The general stereotype is that alcoholics are untrustworthy, unreliable, weak individuals who lack a particular moral fiber, preventing them from being productive members of society. Sadly, this stereotype frequently stems from our personal experiences of dealing with an alcoholic who has, time and time again, made promises that were not kept, manipulated someone or a situation for personal gain, and/or has (after numerous attempts) continued drinking in spite of detrimental outcomes. When we discuss these behaviors we express sorrow, frustration, bewilderment, even anger that someone could be “so irresponsible,” and while we may know that alcoholism is a disease, we pass judgment on the alcoholic’s behaviors—judgment that we do not pass on to somebody suffering from a disease that is more socially acceptable.

For example, a close family member who has been recently diagnosed with a serious heart condition is met with compassion. We do not expect that the heart condition is brought on because this person is “weak.” We recognize the myriad of factors that have brought us to this point, and that the person needs our compassion and understanding to live a happy and

healthy life. We recognize that this person did not ask to have a congenital heart defect, and understand that to blame her in any way would be ridiculous. However, when it comes to the alcoholic, understanding and compassion are absent and/or, more often, fleeting, because we connect the disease with the series of erratic behaviors with which we are forced to deal on a regular basis. The “disease” is essentially forgotten because we are forced to deal with the behaviors and the consequences of negative behaviors brought on by the disease.

Dealing with an alcoholic who is in the midst of her/his addiction is a cyclically frustrating situation, and we look for outlets to purge our frustrations. We gravitate towards those who will listen, empathize, and show support. However, because issues surrounding substance abuse are so pervasive in our culture, we may find ourselves in a bind when we believe we have found an individual who, we assume, understands, only to discover their genuine compassion is matched with confusion or mixed with a series of misconceptions about the topic. Additionally, as we express our own inability to understand and vent our sadness, rage, and/or fear, we may be surprised to discover a person we chose to talk to identifies as somebody in recovery. The person to whom we are talking might identify as an alcoholic, but because alcoholics are told to maintain their anonymity in order to protect themselves from such stigmatizations, they hide out of self-preservation...and shame. Alcoholism is indiscriminate; regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, access to education, class, or level of intelligence alcoholism can and does affect a vast array of people, and even though we may find ourselves unapologetically talking about an alcoholic’s behavior, we are not always aware that we may be talking directly to an alcoholic or a survivor of alcohol-induced abuse.

The word *alcoholism* carries many connotations and interpretations, reflecting personal biases and cultural experiences not of what alcoholism *is* but what alcoholism is *made out to be*. In other words, we may say that alcoholism is both something quantifiable as well as interpretable—we may be able to mark behavior patterns brought on by dangerous and/or continued use of alcohol, but it is how we perceive these behaviors and interpret them that lead us to classifying a person as an “alcoholic.” Many people (including me), have intimate relationships with what we commonly refer to as alcoholism, but whether our experience with alcohol abuse/dependency stems from personal struggles or knowing a partner, family member, friend, neighbor, or co-worker who currently suffers or has been able to find relief through abstinence and/or recovery programs, open discussions remain uncomfortable. Personal connections can often be associated with negative emotions (pain, sadness, anger, fear and/or shame, to name a few), therefore making it uncomfortable to converse about how alcoholism affects (or has affected) our lives. Be it directly or indirectly, alcohol is present in our everyday lives. Even as ancillary issues, alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency are everyday occurrences. Many of us, as individuals, refrain from vocalizing our experiences because of the pain we associate with the disease; complications come with specific, personal, and emotional connotations, which we have been conditioned not to talk about unless we are in the confines of socially constructed “safe” places. However, freely sharing our personal experiences regarding alcoholism and feeling safe in doing so can break stigmas, establish areas of discourse, create atmospheres for healing, and release us from our shared discomfort.

This is where the power of the theatre can come into play to lend a helpful hand. The dramatic, emotional connections and intricate use of words combined with the deep display of pain and the desire to overcome hardships make alcoholism a prominent topic in American

dramatic literature. In fact, alcohol and the stage have had an intriguing union dating back to early rituals where libations and mood-altering beverages were used to enhance the experiences of religious ceremonies. During the height of Greek theatre (circa 450 BCE), wine flowed at performance festivals where participants and audiences honored Dionysus (the God of the Vine) who, like wine itself, caused some people to act irrationally.¹ Across the centuries, ideas about the use of alcohol on and off stage have transformed, and while previous generations may have viewed alcoholism as a familial or private issue, contemporary playwrights have begun examining alcoholism as a cultural and social issue. For some playwrights and theatre practitioners, alcohol and/or substance abuse is a central point in their writings, and the topic can be found in many genres, styles, and forms of performance and dramatic literature.

Traditionally, dramatic literature requires and depicts particular conflicts that drive the dramatic action, which audiences can understand intellectually and feel experientially. The use of alcohol and the topic of alcoholism are worthy of exploration on the stage because of the inherent dramatic conflict characters undergo in combating alcoholism (directly or indirectly) and the dynamics which stem from the “real-life” connections involving the uncertainty and fear of sobriety that plague an afflicted individual. Unfortunately, some depictions of the alcoholic and alcohol abuse on the stage too often focus on stereotypical characterizations, making grand generalizations, effectively reducing the role the theatre could have in initiating productive dialogues about the disease.

¹ As Edith Hamilton states in her 1942 tome *Mythology*, Dionysus and drinking held “a power which sometimes made men commit frightful and atrocious crimes,” and no Greek was safe when “he” was “frenzied with drink” (Hamilton 72).

Although alcohol abuse/dependency is a complicated topic for the stage to explore, theatre can be a powerful venue to open up and converse about this societal issue. Alcoholism and its relationship with the American stage are the focus of this dissertation, and here I preface and underscore my intentions with three basic positions that this dissertation takes, which I have come to casually refer to as *The Three Things I Know*. The first position is that alcoholism is a societal issue because it is a disease. Skeptics may argue that alcoholism lacks a definitive cause, thus prohibiting its classification as a “disease,” but the medical community has classified alcoholism as such, and research shows alcoholism’s influence on American culture. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, “17.9 million Americans (7.0 percent of the population) were dependent on alcohol or had problems related to their abuse of alcohol in 2010; this has been a consistent statistic since 2002” (*N.I.D.A.* Aug. 2012). What this statistic does not show is that there is no way of knowing how many individuals hide their drinking and/or live their lives as “functioning”² alcoholics, nor do these numbers indicate how many people are indirectly affected by alcohol abuse (i.e. families, friends, co-workers, etc. dealing with an alcoholic). Likewise, statistics on underage drinking and fatalities associated with alcohol use are alarming in spite of being at a twenty-year low. My position is not intended to convince anybody that alcoholism is a disease, but rather to show how alcoholism is a pervasive societal issue. It will never go away, but we can challenge ourselves to indict our cultural affiliations³ with alcohol

² The term “functioning” is in reference to an individual who has a psychological dependency on alcohol but is able to maintain her/his day-to-day living to a seemingly unknowing public – i.e. the individual is able to hold a job, have a family, pay her/his bills, etc.

³ In defining “cultural affiliations” I am including social and cultural activities, as well as economical means of producing jobs and business manufacturing opportunities.

that inhibit open conversations, leading us to being more open in how we converse about this detrimental disease

The second position is that dramatic literature that uses alcoholism as a backdrop or “plot-device” without explicitly addressing a particular trait of the disease perpetuates the *Othering* of the alcoholic and therefore stigmatizes alcoholism. The intricacies of alcoholism cannot *all* be contained within a single piece of dramatic literature because the issues are vast—from personal to medical to cultural—therefore, the manner in which the issues are presented becomes reductive. Playwrights who address alcoholism by featuring a specific issue within their plays are more effective in challenging stereotypical portrayals of the disease.

The third position in this dissertation is based on my belief that theatre can be a means to overcome stigmas and initiate off-stage and post-performance dialogues. The audience is a vital aspect to the performance process as we, the practitioners, invite audiences into our venues to act as the final component, to act not simply as passive observers but as performers themselves who are actively engaged in the story that is unfolding before them. Audiences are active witnesses who respond to the performances enacted before them directly or indirectly. Traditional theatrical performances are produced with many intentions, one of which is to be conversation starters for those who are audiencing the performance. Audiences have the opportunity to witness portrayals of social issues on stage, and thus, have an opportunity to carry the concepts, visions, and themes set forth by production and artistic choices beyond the walls of the performance setting and voice their reactions. Most social constructions will dissipate as open dialogues are carried out, and in performing plays that indict stereotypical depictions of alcoholism, the stigmas associated with alcohol abuse/dependency are abated through an act of

de-mystification. Through open dialogues, beyond the final curtain of plays that indict stereotypical depictions of alcoholism, the stigmas associated with the disease can/might dissipate.

The challenge, however, is encouraging dialogues to take place and providing forums where we may discuss (even in small, interpersonal ways) the difficulties that arise, the emotional challenges that occur, when approaching these sensitive topics. Currently, open conversations regarding alcoholism and the challenges of recovery are on the rise compared to previous generations, but it has been my experience that a collective misunderstanding exists in that this subject is best discussed in “safe” places such as twelve-step programs and/or private counseling. Through the use of the theatre, we may provide a new avenue where critical thinking may occur, which in turn, opens up the possibilities of establishing new forums for open dialogues about alcoholism.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach and incorporating literature and techniques from performance studies, script interpretation, rehabilitation, and playwriting, this dissertation takes a critical look at how alcoholism is portrayed in contemporary American dramatic literature. Through the analysis of seven different plays from different eras, this dissertation analyzes a variety of components that lead to problematic portrayals of alcoholic stereotypes. Conversely, this dissertation also examines plays and stage practices that can subvert and trouble the stereotypes and stigmas. In doing so I ask for the discipline to take a progressive, personally reflexive, and socially conscious approach to using theatre to aid in de-stigmatizing the topic of alcoholism and dismantling the cultural misrepresentations and generalizations that are often found on and off the American stage.

This dissertation is divided into three units, each of which has subdivisions within the units' respective chapters. The first unit (which includes this introduction) looks at "Perceptions, Performance and Psychology" in relationship to alcoholism in order to establish a vocabulary for subsequent discussions. The first chapter (*Definitions, Stigmas, and Stereotypes of Alcohol Abuse/Dependency*) outlines and discusses how contemporary medicine has classified alcoholism as a disease, and using literature from medicine (specifically neurobiology), modern psychiatry, and psychology, illustrates why alcoholism is a social issue. It is in this chapter that I offer readers a "nuts-and-bolts" breakdown of what alcoholism is and how it is understood in the medical field as well as how alcoholism is approached in select recovery programs. Additionally, I incorporate literature from a sociological perspective to supplement the contention that contemporary American culture is not averse to talking about alcoholism, but rather, we lack the appropriate tools and understanding to initiate productive and healing conversations.

Unit Two focuses on "Stage Depictions of the Alcoholic" and is separated into two chapters. Chapter 2 (*Contextualizing the Alcoholic on the American Stage*) analyzes problematic portrayals of alcoholism in dramatic literature while placing each play and playwright in her/his cultural context to show how understandings of alcoholism and cultural acceptance (or lack of) can and has influenced the plays. Analyzing Thornton Wilder's 1938 play, *Our Town*, and Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (first published in 1955), I provide commentaries on how Wilder and O'Neill's respective time periods viewed alcoholism. Additionally, I look at Christopher Durang's 1985 play, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, and Theresa Rebeck's 2007 play, *The Scene*, to show that in spite of the medical community's evolving understanding of the intricacies of alcoholism, stage plays have continued to use alcoholism as a "plot-device," inadvertently perpetuating negative stereotypes and stigmas.

Chapter 3 (*Humanizing the Alcoholic in Contemporary American Drama*) provides textual analysis of three contemporary American plays that feature alcoholism or alcoholic characters. These three plays are Paula Vogel's 1997 play, *How I Learned to Drive*, Tracy Letts' 2009 play, *August: Osage County*, and Stephen Adly Guirgis' 2011 play, *The Motherfucker with the Hat*. Each focuses more succinctly on specific aspects of an alcoholic's life, and is thus able to complicate stereotypical characterizations. My analytical approach in this chapter involves looking at specific characters through the use of archetypes to illustrate the intricacies involved for an alcoholic negotiating her/his identity.

The third unit of this dissertation focuses on "Using Theatre to Open Dialogues and De-Stigmatize Alcohol Abuse/Dependency" and includes three chapters. Chapter 4 (*Storytelling as a Method of De-Stigmatization*) incorporates literature from alcohol-recovery programs to illustrate how discourse (using the stage and theatrical productions as springboards) can de-stigmatize alcoholism and humanize the alcoholic. Here I look at personal narratives, autoethnographies, and examine performances from the theatre production company Outside the Wire and a recent production of *Long Day's Journey into Night* performed at the Mayo Clinic to show how stories and post-performance discussions are pivotal for audiences to un-pack the rhetoric and emotions connected to alcohol abuse and dependency. Chapter 5 features a preface to my own full-length play, *Descartes à la Mode* (provided as an appendix), to illustrate how the influence of my research has informed my own writing as I have come to incorporate a more complicated characterization of the alcoholic. With this play, I offer a vehicle to initiate recovery dialogues within traditional theatre practices and model a proposed method of character development that humanizes a character struggling with his tenuous sobriety. Chapter 6 (*Moving Forward*) concludes the dissertation by highlighting how the collaborative nature of theatre—the

many aspects within a theatre community, from the individual performer to the storyteller/playwright to audience members—can benefit from a deeper understanding of alcoholism, thus establishing a new “safe-space” where dialogues regarding the process of recovery may occur.

Ultimately, these chapters build from one to the next, coming together to offer an overview of methods and practices—some to avoid, others to embrace. Essentially, this dissertation is a pedagogical tool that can aid practitioners and audiences in approaching and unpacking the topics surrounding alcohol use, abuse, and dependency. While there may be no *cure* for alcoholism or substance abuse, there are many methods, theories, and dialogues that take place (or need to take place) so families, friends, and communities can come together to aid each other in our collective desires to understand these issues further. Theatre can be one of many means that can benefit those suffering from and affected by the devastating effects of alcoholism and alcoholic individuals.

CHAPTER 1
DEFINITIONS, STIGMAS, AND STEREOTYPES ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL
ABUSE/DEPENDENCY

Myths in addiction science, medicine, and public understanding are severely damaging to the proper perception of people with chemical-dependence disease, to their acceptance by society, and to the resources available for treatment...An accurate understanding of what drugs do and what they don't do as well as what "addiction" is and what it is not, is therefore critical in overcoming drug problems.

-Carl K. Erickson, *The Science of Addiction*

When talking about addiction, we have a tendency to employ language in a casual manner that lacks universal definitions. Stemming from a myriad of reasons, from generalized misunderstandings to allowing our personal biases to cloud our communication, the words we use to discuss substance abuse and addiction are deficient in clarity. Thus far, I have been using "alcoholism" as a catchall term to refer to somebody who has lost the ability to self-manage her/his consumption of alcohol, making the assumption that this is the foundational understanding of what the term means. This is not true. *Alcoholism* and *addiction* are subjective terms used to describe a complicated, interpretable condition that is widely misunderstood. *Addiction* lacks clear definition.

Casual uses of important words diminish their power and lead to vague identifications of the messages and concepts attempting to be conveyed. For example, consider somebody saying,

“I love that play.” While we understand that this person may have a high level of respect for the play to which they are referring, we also understand the multiple interpretations of love and are able to distinguish that this phrase (typically) does not imply that the person has the same feelings for a play that s/he would have for a living person. We love our romantic partners differently from how we love our parents. We love our material goods differently from the way we love a good night’s sleep. While, “If you love it so much, why don’t you marry it?” is a question we often hear coming from a child, consider the fact that children interpret specific definitions of love. Another example is our casual use of the word “hate.” When I tell somebody, “I hate fried zucchini,” there is an unwritten understanding that zucchini does not satisfy my desires as an enjoyable source of food. We understand that I do not hold some sort of deep-seated emotional disdain for a vegetable—I do not despise a squash because it has never done anything to me to warrant hatred. While these are rather reductive examples, they illustrate that a lack of specificity and/or a lack of understanding can lead a listener to interpret our words in a manner we had not intended, potentially furthering miscommunications.

Addiction is equally vague and requires an interpretation for someone who may lack the tools to interpret the intended meaning. Recently I heard a student state, “I’m totally addicted to my phone.” My immediate thought was, “What does she mean?” Is she saying she has a psychological preoccupation with her phone? Is she confessing a physical dependency to an inanimate object? Is she saying she must be constantly holding her phone at all times, and when she is not she begins to exhibit a series of physiological reactions that are detrimental to her overall health? What does she *mean* when she says she is “addicted?”

An individual’s dependency on alcohol is a complicated topic of study because of the contested understandings of what alcoholism is, how abuse differs from dependency, and how

dependency develops within the human body. Whether defined through neurobiology, psychiatry, behavioral or cognitive approaches, or even spirituality, precise causes that lead to an alcohol dependency (or any chemical dependency) remain largely mysterious. The mysterious origins and lack of a clear “cause” result in cultural suspicion as to what alcoholism is and how this disease affects an individual. It would be impossible to provide a comprehensive review of the volumes of literature from various disciplines that look at alcoholism; however, here I provide some basic concepts as foundations for my interdisciplinary approach.

This chapter outlines foundational information from the medical community as to why chemical (drug) abuse/dependency has been classified as a disease, and using literature from the fields of neurobiology, psychiatry, and rehabilitation/treatment programs, illustrates why alcoholism is a social issue. The information provided here is intended to alleviate questions and miscommunications regarding the terminology used to discuss substance abuse and dependency, thus providing the linguistic foundations for subsequent chapters. It is also useful for anybody looking for information on how the medical field and recovery programs speak about “addiction” as a “disease.” This is a pedagogical chapter to lay the groundwork and introduce the theories and concepts that will put forth definitions of addiction and alcoholism to be used throughout subsequent chapters. Additionally, this chapter explains the scientific rationales as to what alcohol abuse and dependency *are*, as well as how an alcoholic’s brain functions during drug use.

Defining Addiction

To start, we must come to a clear definition of addiction that moves us away from the series of pejorative generalizations. Carlton K. Erickson indicts the language surrounding

substance abuse at the outset of his 2007 book, *The Science of Addiction* by stating, “I admit up front that I don’t like the word ‘addiction,’” citing that the word is “unscientific” (1). He goes on to show that in addition to news media and casual conversations, even scientific literature struggles to clearly define the multiple meanings and connotations of the word *addiction*.

However, Erickson does cite the joint effort of the American Society of Addiction Medicine, the American Pain Society, and The American Academy of Pain Medicine to establish a common definition of addiction, which states, “Addiction is a primary, chronic, neurobiologic disease, with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors...it is characterized by behaviors that include one or more of the following: impaired control over drug use, compulsive use, continued use despite harm, and craving” (5). Dennis L. Thombs offers a similar definition in his 2006, *Introduction to Addictive Behaviors* by offering that addiction is, “an operantly conditioned response whose tendency becomes stronger as a function of the quality, number, and size of reinforcements that follow each drug ingestion. Each addict experiences his/her own set of multiple reinforcers [which include]: (1) euphoria, (2) social variables, and (3) elimination of withdrawal sickness” (141).⁴ Thombs’ definition adds behavioral components to Erickson’s definition, which acknowledges neurobiological, genetic and environmental factors, thus incorporating an individual’s personal decision making skills into the equation.

The fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (heretofore referred to as the *DSM-IV*), the manual used by the American Psychiatric Association (last revised in 2000), never uses *addiction* as a classifiable diagnosis (Erickson 15). Instead, the

⁴ Here Thombs is citing W. E. McAuliffe and R. A. Gordon’s 1980 chapter “Reinforcement and the combination of effects: Summary of a theory of opiate addiction” as featured in *Theories on drug abuse: Selected contemporary perspectives*.

DSM-IV uses criteria for *Drug Abuse* and *Drug Dependence*. Again, Erickson provides an analysis and commentary on the *DSM-IV*'s classifications of Abuse and Dependence, summarizing that, “*abuse* is intentional, ‘conscious,’ or voluntary. *Drug dependence* is pathological and unintended” (14). Unfortunately, abuse and dependence are subjective terms used to diagnose an individual and require deeper understanding.

Abuse

Defined by the *DSM-IV*, “*Chemical (Drug) Abuse*” is “a maladaptive pattern of drug use leading to impairment or distress, presenting as one or more of the following in a 12-month period: 1. Recurrent use leading to failure to fulfill major obligations, 2. Recurrent use which is physically hazardous, 3. Recurrent drug-related legal problems, 4. Continued use despite social or interpersonal problems...” (Erickson 15). Essentially, abuse is defined as intentional use of a substance at the personal expense of the individual. While the individual may lose the ability to manage her/his intake during use, s/he is making a decisive choice to partake in the act of use. Their choice is voluntary.

Someone who falls into the category of “abuser” is typically seen as somebody who uses drugs too often, too much, or over a prolonged period of time regardless of consequences or potential hazards (and in spite of the criteria’s vastly open window of time). Binge drinking falls into this category, and while we may see or hear of college students (for example) who devote their weekends to drinking and/or using drugs, we do not qualify them as *addicts* or *alcoholics*. Somebody who qualifies for the *DSM-IV*'s criteria of Chemical (drug) Abuse is usually somebody who may find relief through less invasive forms of treatment. Through education on the effects of drugs and alcohol and/or dedication to moderation or abstinence, somebody who

has been classified within the abuse category may one day, through their own choice, return to use without exhibiting the problematic behaviors listed by the *DSM-IV* (Erickson 17). It is important to note that *abuse*, while potentially dangerous to the individual and those around her/him, is a category that explains behaviors less hazardous than behaviors found in the category of *dependence*.

Dependence

Unlike abuse, chemical dependency takes chemical abuse and incorporates the loss of choice. Dependency indicates an individual with a compulsive need to use the drug of choice and who will expend a great deal of time and effort to obtain the drug, sacrificing personal and professional responsibilities, obligations to her/his health, and even endangering those around her/him to maintain use. The *DSM-IV*'s definition of "Chemical (Drug) *Dependency*" is characterized as:

A maladaptive pattern of drug use, leading to impairment or distress, presenting as three or more of the following in a 12-month period: 1. tolerance to the drug's actions, 2. withdrawal, 3. drug is used more than intended, 4. there is an inability to control drug use, 5. effort is expended to obtain the drug, 6. important activities are replaced by drug use, Drug use continues despite knowledge of a persistent physical or psychological problem. (Erickson 15)

It is at this stage that the body begins to conform to the user's levels of consumption and the brain's mesolimbic dopamine system reacts through a restructuring of neurotransmission. This is because "addiction" is a progressive disease, and this development occurs in what Thombs refers

to as the “adaptive stage,” in which he identifies “the chief characteristic” as increasing tolerance to the drug, citing the fallacious belief in not experiencing negative side effects. However, changes are occurring on a physiological level of which the drinker is not aware (Thombs 45). Erickson credits increased tolerance in differentiating between abuse and dependence, defining tolerance as “a reduced response to a drug’s action, [which] can be inborn...or it can be acquired...” (14). Another way to conceptualize tolerance is as resistance. The individual in the abuse phase continues to consume alcohol, and over time s/he begins to need more and more and more to achieve the euphoria brought on by previously smaller amounts. As tolerance builds, the body begins to adapt, therefore the abuser drinks (or uses) more. This act of combating tolerance, the “adaptive stage,” leads to a physical dependence to alcohol, eventually resulting in the key symptoms that define Chemical (Drug) *Dependence*: physical withdrawal.

By the time an individual has reached the phase where her/his body begins to react negatively to the absence of the drug, s/he has reached the dependence phase. A person who is alcohol dependent uses alcohol to “effectively” abate the symptoms of withdrawal, which include, but are not limited to, tremors, cold sweats, fatigue, restlessness, irritability, and/or flu-like symptoms (i.e. fever, vomiting, etc.). Drinking allows the body to return to the new normal to which it has been conditioned, and the withdrawal symptoms seemingly disappear. However, during this phase, alcoholics can fall into “maintenance drinking” (Thombs 45). Unfortunately, this, too, is a deceptively cyclical phase, and over time, more of the drug is required to keep withdrawal symptoms at bay. If an alcohol dependent drinker reaches this phase, and is not willing or able to receive treatment, s/he will eventually fall into a stage of “physical deterioration,” where “various organs are damaged...the liver, the brain, the gastrointestinal tract, the pancreas and even the heart” (Thombs 45). It is also important to note that the concepts

of dependency involve a long-term development, but there are rare occasions where individuals jump phases, stay stagnant in a particular phase, and/or revert to previous phases.

To effectively define addiction it must be viewed on a spectrum, and we must understand that an individual moves along and throughout this spectrum. Definitions need to take into account the individual's personal state of cognitive competency, frequency of use, as well as her/his possible genetic and developmental associations. In other words, because addiction affects an individual in unique ways and develops in individuals based on various different factors, the term addiction is not a "catch-all" term, thus requiring definitions to be individual-centric, leading to a comprehensive diagnosis appropriate for treatment.

Defining Probable Causes

Theories as to what causes substance abuse/dependency rest in neuroadaptation (dependence on a substance through prolonged exposure), genetic susceptibility, and/or a combination of the two (Erickson 51-2). Two models (the Susceptibility Model and the Exposure Model – both outlined below) show how an individual can fall into substance abuse and dependency through variables that create high-risk probabilities. Allen A. Tighe's 1999 workbook, *Stop the Chaos*, is used by recovery programs to help incoming patients understand what is happening inside their brains, and also tells those who use the workbook that the disease they have can be treated (though not cured) through daily management (ix). However, some, as presented by Lance Dodes, question the "disease" classification. In his 2003 book *The Heart of Addiction*, Dodes calls attention to the traditional approach that alcoholism (for example) is a disease and exposes how standard treatment plans do not allow for alterations or personalization for individual alcoholics—a what-works-for-one-works-for-all approach. Therefore, because

there cannot be a standard treatment, alcoholism cannot be classified as a disease (Dodes 8). Even Thombs acknowledges some controversy surrounding the concept of addiction as a disease, citing that some (criminologists and legal experts) view the use of drugs and alcohol as a voluntary act, and he also quotes philosopher Herbert Fingarette's belief that the "disease myth" is limiting to those who seek treatment (Thombs 18). Defining substance abuse/dependency as a disease requires quantifiable findings that can be measured by others through empirical, objective testing.

Admittedly, while researchers and specialists such as Erickson and Thombs believe that addiction is "the result of an underlying disease process," the evidence occurs on a microscopic (i.e. cellular) level and/or has to do with social/cultural/behavioral factors, which are difficult (if not impossible) to concretely measure (Thombs 6). While the evidence of substance abuse/dependency as a disease is debated, the science that has been proven provides avenues for deeper understanding. The following sections look at what happens in the brain through the intake of chemical substances as well as two models that increase the probabilities of an individual becoming psychological preoccupied and physiologically dependent on mind-altering substances.

The Susceptibility Model

The Susceptibility Model argues that genetics and environment play a large part in the transmission of substance abuse/dependency. The arguments also state that genes, while an important factor, are not absolute; the identification of a mother or father with an alcohol dependency does not guarantee that her/his child will also be alcohol dependent, but rather establishes a predisposition. Environment also plays a large part in the development of

abuse/dependency, emphasizing the importance of understanding the difference in one's *genotype* and her/his *phenotype*.

While the genotype is the make-up of our genes (the 50/50 mixture inherited by our parents), our phenotype is our genetic make-up combined with post-natal experiences. A child born with fetal alcohol syndrome does not have a genetic disorder, but rather, has been altered by the environment during gestation. Therefore, while the child's genotype has not been altered by the mother's use of alcohol during pregnancy, the child's phenotype has, thus increasing a predisposition to alcohol abuse/dependency.

Diagnosis of a parent or relative as an abuser or dependent is not needed for a child to be at risk and develop an advanced dependency on alcohol or other drugs. This is because the child's environment plays a large part in how the genetic predispositions will surface. For example, a child with a genetic predisposition to alcohol abuse who also happens to have a mild mood disorder (such as depression or mild form of bi-polar) has a genotype that is at high risk to develop a substance dependency. However, if this child is never exposed to an environment where alcohol or mood altering substances are regularly in use or abused, and the child is educated on the nature of her/his susceptibility, the child may in fact never develop an affinity for alcohol or narcotics. But what causes this susceptibility?

As Arpana Agrawal and Laura J. Bierut state in their 2012 *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews* article titled, "Identifying Genetic Variation for Alcohol Dependence," three major projects from the past decade have opened new doors into understanding the Susceptibility Model on a genetic scale. The first is the Human Genome Project, which laid the groundwork on which modern genetic studies are now basing their research; the study determined the sequence of the 3 billion building blocks of the human genome. The second is the International HapMap

Project, which was a project across several countries that identified and catalogued cultural differences and similarities on a genetic level; it was this study that found that 99.5 percent of DNA in any human being is identical to any other; the remaining .5 percent is what makes us unique. The third is the 1000 Genomes Project, which is seeking to catalogue genetic variations more clearly to track genetic diversity within specific populations (Agrawal and Bierut 274). Agrawal and Bierut go on to say how alcohol abuse/dependency is higher when one or more of any genetic variants that affect how alcohol is metabolized are absent. These variants affect the enzymes within the stomach lining that aid in breaking down alcohol more efficiently.

Tatiana Foroud and Tamara J. Phillips' article from the same issue of *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*, titled, "Assessing the Genetic Risk for Alcohol Use Disorders," supports Agrawal and Bierut, but also notes the problems in the limited offerings of control subjects to the body of research, claiming that while genetics may be tracked, tracking environmental factors is next to impossible. Foroud and Phillips state, "...it is clear that the genetics of alcoholism and alcohol-related traits are complex...it also has become clear that some inherited characteristics cannot be attributed to specific gene sequences but must be related to epigenetic effects—heritable modifications that are not based on difference in DNA sequence" (272). The genetic research on alcoholism put forth by Agrawal and Bierut as well as Foroud and Phillips is summarized in Howard J. Edenberg's overview from 2012, also found in *Alcohol Research*. In his overview, titled, "Genes Contributing to the Development of Alcoholism: An Overview," Edenberg states:

There is no one gene (or several) whose particular variants 'cause' the disease [alcohol dependency]. Instead, variation in many, and perhaps hundreds, of genes likely have a small but measurable influence on disease

risk that ultimately adds up to a substantial impact. Moreover, the impact of any one gene variation depends both on the individual's genetic background (i.e., other genetic variations the person carries) and on the environment. (336)

Ultimately, each of these articles alludes to an exciting optimism that future, more conclusive studies will further our collective understanding of how alcohol abuse/dependency works and is influenced on a genetic level; however, also duly noted is the overwhelming influence of an individual's environment. Again, while a person's genotype may influence her/his susceptibility to alcohol abuse/dependency, the influence of an individual's environment is monumental as well, which is where the second model, the Exposure Model, gives us more to consider.

The Exposure Model

The Exposure Model illuminates how the cells within the human brain (neurons) become dependent on the external chemicals being introduced into the body over time. While Tighe's *Stop the Chaos* may be presented in a somewhat reductive manner, the workbook proves its value as individuals who enter recovery are met with a nuts-and-bolts introduction as to what is happening inside their brain as well as their body. Tighe concisely articulates the complexities of brain structure and neurobiology as laid out (in much deeper detail) by Erickson and Thombs, stating:

Addiction is not about willpower or weakness. Research has shown that the addiction process is connected to how our brains are 'wired.' Powerful chemicals called neurotransmitters control brain activities. These neurotransmitters carry messages from one brain neuron to another...The

process of addiction takes place in the limbic system, which is located in the brain stem [and] stimulates our sense of smell, motivation, sex drive, and complex emotional responses... Located in the limbic system, the pleasure center responds to pleasurable stimulation and learns to repeat it. Neurotransmitters, including endorphins and dopamine, activate the pleasure center. Alcohol and other drugs increase the activity of neurotransmitters, resulting in the high—our feelings of euphoria. (14-15)

This euphoria is the initial attraction that brings a user back to using again because the neurons become accustomed to functioning symbiotically with external substances.

Neurons communicate with each other through neurotransmitters, which are the chemicals that travel across the spaces between neuron's *dendrites* and *axons*. Dendrites carry messages toward neurons, whereas axons carry messages away from neurons; however, there is a small space (or gap) between the axon of one neuron and the dendrite of the next; this space is called the *synaptic cleft* (Erickson 35). Healthy neurotransmitters communicate clear messages from one neuron to the next. Healthy neurotransmitters are necessary to this messaging system because this is how dopamine is released from what is commonly referred to as the brain's "reward pathway," which occurs in the brain's mesolimbic dopamine system (MDS).

In a healthy transmission, neurons communicate with each other to release dopamine so we feel good when we, for example, eat food so we are encouraged to continue eating in the future. The use of alcohol or other drugs tricks the brain into rewarding our body's use of substances by dumping an excessive amount of dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, endorphins and other neurotransmitters when neurons would not typically choose to do so. This depletes the storage of natural brain chemicals and in order to feel good, we replace the natural chemicals

with drugs to simulate the effect, essentially tricking and conditioning the neurons to believe messaging between other neurons is functioning properly. In other words, the neurons are inebriated and unaware that they are making poor choices.

This is a theory that suggests this is the area of the brain where an alteration of the messaging system occurs, which can lead to chemical dependence. This is called *neuroadaptation*. Essentially, this theory suggests that over a period of time, the use of external chemicals replaces the brain's naturally producing chemicals and therefore becomes reliant on external supplements.

Deceptions within “Alcoholism”

The previous sections provide a framework of basic terms and concepts that allow for general discussion regarding chemical (drug) abuse/dependency. As we move forward, I begin to focus primarily on alcohol—its use, abuse, those who become alcohol dependent, as well as looking at general perceptions of “alcoholism.” Like *addiction*, the word *alcoholism* is problematic due to the various interpretations and connotations of the word. As a result, and before going forward, we need to understand some of the individual and cultural deceptions surrounding alcohol, “alcoholism,” and the “alcoholic.”

Alcohol is a drug. Pharmacologists and the medical community classify alcohol as a drug due to its lack of physiological necessity. While some may claim the caloric nutrients in alcohol may classify it as a food, the simple fact is that the human body does not need alcohol for sustenance. Alcohol is a foreign substance that the body responds to as a drug, which is why our bodies react to it in the ways that they do (i.e. It causes inebriation because our bodies recognize that alcohol is not a natural substance that should be in our bodies).

Alcohol is absorbed into and metabolized by the body in particular ways and affects certain organs differently. As Erickson points out, “[alcohol] has a more destructive action on the liver than on the kidney. It also acts more on some nerve cell components than others. This may be due to the higher sensitivity of these components to ethanol, for unknown reasons” (Erickson 117). He goes on to point to several factors that influence alcohol’s absorption from the stomach into the blood-stream, such as, the amount of food in the stomach, rate of consumption, the amount of alcohol dehydrogenase (a metabolizing enzyme in the stomach), and the form of alcohol (i.e. beer has a lesser alcohol content percentage or “proof” than wine, which has a lesser “proof” than distilled liquors) (Erickson 118). The more a person drinks, the more work the body has to do to metabolize the intake, but the stomach and the liver’s ability to produce alcohol dehydrogenase to combat intake is limited. As consumption increases, metabolizing of alcohol plateaus—the body becomes overwhelmed and cannot effectively respond—resulting in inebriation.

An individual who becomes enamored with the effects that come with inebriation (the euphoria initiated through consumption) can move through the spectrum of “addiction”— from social use, to moderate use, to heavy drinking, to problem drinking, and into unhealthy use, which is where dependency develops. Unlike other drugs, the abuse category for alcohol also includes infrequent to regular binge drinking—a common term to label an individual’s choice to drink alcohol for the purpose of getting drunk. It is here that misconceptions and differences between clinical definitions of “alcoholism” and personal and/or cultural definitions of “alcoholism” become more apparent.

Literature is at a crossroads when it comes to the usage of “addiction” in spite of the word’s problematic interpretations. While some see the term as vague and unscientific, the term

itself is still used especially when speaking to the general public and nonprofessional audiences. Likewise, Erickson states “‘Alcoholism’ is as poorly understood as ‘addiction,’ as the word itself is used differently among those who attend 12-step meeting and among scientists who study it” (Erickson 19). The significance of this statement is grounded in the ideologies behind (in this case) these two groups. Whereas scientists may view alcoholism in gradations as interpreted by alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency, 12-step groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous, i.e. A.A.) allow “alcoholism” to be self-determined. A.A. states that any person who is struggling to maintain control over her/his alcohol consumption can identify her/himself as an alcoholic.

A.A. does not diagnose those who enter their programs, nor does the organization distinguish between alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency. While some see the self-identified acceptance of being an alcoholic as a benefit to their program, there is some discussion within A.A. as to whether or not alcoholism is a disease. This small rift stems from the lack of distinction between abuse and dependency because some members are able to “quit” drinking on their own whereas others require medical assistance. What is interesting here is that even in a program designed by, run by, and used by people who are self-identified alcoholics, there are discrepancies as to what alcoholism is and what alcoholism does (to the body as well as to the individual’s brain, relationships, psyche, etc.).

What makes “alcoholism” unique from other forms of chemical abuse/dependency is that there is a general acceptance of alcohol. Unlike illegal/controlled substances (such as heavy narcotics), alcohol is legally marketed (albeit regulated) and readily available. Alcohol is not only culturally acceptable, but culturally encouraged as it is intertwined with our social atmospheres. The United States encourages responsible drinking, and it is nearly impossible to

go one day in the United States without being presented with the picture that the addition of alcohol will increase the enjoyment in one's life.

Turn on your television and time how long it takes for alcohol to appear or be referenced. How is the alcohol presented? Is it a commercial advertising top-shelf liquor? If so, there is a good chance that this commercial is marketing a high-class aesthetic, essentially saying that by drinking the marketed liquor you will illustrate your evolved taste, and you too will appear as a sophisticated, classy (even "sexy") person. Or perhaps the liquor is being marketed as a robust, masculine drink that only the strongest of people can handle. Beer commercials typically promote community and good times with close friends, enjoying lazy afternoons or weekend barbeques, or relaxing on exotic, tropical beaches. Wine commercials advocate for you to explore the world of wine culture, and with [product X], you can project your educated, global knowledge of "good" wine. Even Sally Casswell's 2012 article, "Alcohol Brands in Young Peoples' Everyday Lives: New Developments in Marketing," featured in *Alcohol & Alcoholism*, acknowledges and puts forth models used by advertising and marketing firms that specifically target the sale of alcohol to younger demographics, because, "There has been an increase in the value that youth culture attaches to brand labels and symbols. Alcohol beverages play an important role in this, with brands of alcohol communicating social status and aspirations" (Casswell 471). How many times are we shown the good times people are having at graduation parties, weddings, birthdays, and tailgate parties while holding alcohol infused drinks in their hands? How often are we reminded of "TGIF" or Friday Afternoon Clubs?

American culture is entwined with alcohol in potentially hazardous ways that we do not, or choose not, to address. As for myself, I receive an email over the Graduate Student list-serve every week (usually late Wednesday night or sometime on Thursday), informing all list-serve

subscribers which bar will be hosting that week's "Happy Hour." Happy Hour is tradition in this community and something for many people to look forward to as a means of shaking off the rigors of the week, spending time with friends and building community, venting and networking about proposed and current projects, and of course, "kicking-back" and "relaxing" with "adult beverages." Recently, a new "Latte Hour" has been introduced. However, unlike Happy Hour (which has the association of being devoted to socializing), Latte Hour is a mid-week, afternoon event for people who want to do homework with one another. While I think each of these holds their own valuable social necessities, I wondered why Latte Hour had to be devoted to homework. Are we not allowed to socialize if we are drinking coffee mid-afternoon on a Wednesday? Why can't Latte Hour be at the same time as Happy Hour? Could we alternate weeks between Latte Hour and Happy Hour? When I asked these questions to a cohort, her response was simply, "What would the point be in that? People wanna drink."

Drinking alcohol is perfectly acceptable; it is okay for us to choose to drink alcohol. Drinking alcohol is socially acceptable, and it is important for me to note that in no way am I advocating for or agreeing with any sort of new-temperance movement. People are allowed, and should have the right, to drink alcohol. But the unwritten caveat to this is that we must *drink responsibly*. Even at the end of all of the commercials that we see that are marketing alcoholic beverages, we hear "Please drink [product X] responsibly." In short, it is perfectly okay for you to drink alcohol as long as your consumption does not lead you to becoming something socially unacceptable. Those who lose their way and become the social pariah that is an "addict" or an "alcoholic" are faced with a series of moral (hypocritical) judgments that label them, categorically, as degenerate. To reiterate the epigram from the introduction of this dissertation, Norman K. Denzin succinctly states in his 1997 book, *The Alcoholic Society*, that, "American

society is a drug-oriented society, an addiction society, a society preoccupied with drugs, alcohol, their consumption and social control. Two-faced in its attitudes, American society encourages alcohol consumption, but does not want alcoholics” (xxvii).

As a society, chemical abuse and dependency has been at crisis-level highs in the past decade. In his 2007 book, *High Society*, the chair and president of The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, Joseph A. Califano cites the findings of a 2004 national survey conducted by the Office of Applied Studies, stating that:

Chemistry is chasing Christianity as the nation’s largest religion. The millions of American, who *daily* take some kind of mood-altering, pain-killing or mind-bending prescription drug, abuse alcohol and illegal drugs, and smoke cigarettes likely exceeds the number who weekly attend religious services... From its low point during the last quarter century of 8.5 million in 1992, the number of Americans twelve and older who use illicit drugs more than doubled to 19.7 million in 2005... In 2006, the financial bill was moving toward \$1 trillion in health care, low productivity, disability, welfare, fires, crime and punishment, property damage from vandalism, interest on the federal debt, legal and court costs, family breakup, child abuse, and the array of social interventions, public and private, to deal with the ravages of this epidemic of addicts and abuses, their families and friends. (1-6)

What Califano is referring to is a societal epidemic where we combat our ills through a masking of symptoms—an alleviation of pain through the use of readily available escapes in the form of chemical substances. Alcohol consumption that reaches the level of “inappropriate” is seen as

intolerable; yet is there a greater social ill at work? One dedicated to good-times and a heightened sexualized view of self through the use of substances? Is the use of alcohol in this country not encouraged?

An individual who is identified as an “alcoholic” asks these questions. Alcoholics are positioned in a social space where, in their mind(s), they do not have a problem because society has told them that it is okay to drink. Obviously, there is a serious, confounding, and (admittedly) fascinating disconnect here in the rationale and logic of this line of thinking, which brings us to the next section which focuses on the crucial theme of the rest of this dissertation: the self-identity of the alcoholic and the inherent stigmas and stereotypes associated with alcoholism.

Stigmas, Stereotypes and Performing “Normal”

We are all members of an interactive society. While we each have our own personal identity, we do not exist in a vacuum. In spite of our desires to spend some quality time alone, we, for the most part, need interaction with others to help us through our lives. Even the most isolationist individual can crave the attention of another human being to obtain a satisfied sense of belonging. Interaction with others establishes a series of complicated, interpersonal negotiations that ask us to adopt a series of malleable personae to interact with a diverse and evolving culture. Each of us has our own conceptions of self; we see our individuality, what makes us unique, as a composite of many aspects working with each other simultaneously and symbiotically. Yet, while we have our own conceptions of self, we also have an awareness of how we may be viewed by others. Who we are mixes with not only how we wish to be viewed by others, but also with the reality of how others actually view us—and these three perspectives may not always be synched in a harmonious agreement. Essentially, who we are is only one

aspect of our identity as our culture influences our actions, behaviors, values, and how we perceive the facets of our composite identity.

As he explains in his foundational 1959 text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman elaborates the everyday life performances we all depict as members of an interactive society. Goffman states that as societal participants, we live on an interactive stage as performers with those around us being our audience(s). It is through this interaction that we come to project a particular story of our lives and ourselves as the performative-stage of life provides “a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation” (Goffman, *Presentation of Self* 238). As outlined in Goffman’s 1963 text, *Stigma*, the concepts of visibility and personal identity are key factors in how an individual navigates in and through a surrounding culture and presents her/himself in everyday interactions. These everyday life performances can be seen in what Goffman calls “visibility” or “perceptibility,” defined as, “how well or how badly the stigma is adapted to provide means of communicating that the individual possesses it” (Goffman, *Stigma* 48). For example, blindness is easily identified by others whereas mental illness is not as easy to identify, therefore blindness has a higher perceptibility than many other, less perceptible markers. For alcoholics who are drinking, their presentations of self vacillate as they attempt to manage their addiction while projecting “acceptable” behaviors. This results in, for example, attempts to hide drinking habits and to “pass” as non- or *normal* drinkers. In this example, the image that is being sent is not the image received because the alcoholic’s continued use of alcohol alters his or her perceptions and leads to behaviors that are deemed unacceptable and even harmful to self or others.

These behaviors defy what *normal* people believe are acceptable conceptions of “life-activity” because the alcoholic’s dichotomous behaviors stigmatize her/him as erratic,

dysfunctional, “crazy” and/or dangerous, subsequently disqualifying her/him as a healthy member of a community (Goffman, *Stigma* 48-50). Everyday life performance is pertinent to the discussion of the alcoholic because of the “always-on” performances taking place within aspects of the alcoholic’s personal life. For the alcoholic who is “active,”⁵ this presentation of self is complicated by an inability to recognize that his/her behaviors are not acceptable. For the alcoholic in recovery, a performance is maintained to project that negative and destructive behaviors of the past have been brought under control even though the recovery process is delicate and susceptible to failure at any given moment. While drinking or while in sobriety, the alcoholic is seen as a violator of the rules of “the (social) stage” and becomes stigmatized as a result. In order to combat these issues, the alcoholic (when active in her/his addiction or while in recovery) gravitates towards atmospheres where s/he has a sense of belonging, a sense of feeling “normal” as a means to mitigate the negative associations of being labeled an alcoholic.

As it is with most labels associated with a disease, the label of *alcoholic* denotes a categorization into a group of selected individuals. However, unlike most diseases, the label of alcoholic is synonymous with negativity and mistrust. Granted, an individual who has led a life of self-abuse and abuses others (be it verbal abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) cannot avoid inherent negative connotations being placed on her/him. The alcoholic, whether self-identified as such or labeled by others, must carry the weight of this label, which leads her/him to feeling alone, marginalized, outside the norm, and/or worth less than “normal” people. These feelings stem from both internal and external factors. Internally, the alcoholic is either aware that her/his behaviors are destructive or oblivious to how her/his choices affect her/himself as well as

⁵ “Active” in this sense refers to an individual, who has been or does identify as an alcoholic, yet is currently drinking.

those around them (external). Either way, the ramifications of such a thought process can be detrimental once s/he comes to reintegrating into mainstream social and cultural circles. The personal or self-identity of an identified alcoholic is paramount in feeling as though s/he belongs to society.

Margaretha Järvinen's 2001 interviewing of fifty-four "alcohol abusers" showed a discrepancy in how the identified alcoholic viewed her/himself. Järvinen's findings, published as an article in *Symbolic Interaction*, titled, "Accounting for Trouble: Identity Negotiations in Qualitative Interviews with Alcoholics," showed how the individual's use and/or abuse of alcohol related to their respective life histories, how they narrated these histories, and was influenced by their own self-identifications as addict, abuser, alcoholic, and/or as someone "unable to control their drinking" (264). In the study, Järvinen explains how "interviewees with extensive and stable contacts with the treatment system more consistently described themselves as alcoholics than did interviewees with short or unstable contacts" (264). Järvinen explains the participants' awareness that such associations are a part of the healing process, stating, "accounting for action is a form of remedial work, aimed at reestablishing the social order of the group, by way of reclaiming respect for oneself as a moral person" (268).⁶ Järvinen insightfully states:

The story of a person's life is never seamless and absolute; it continues to make and unmake itself according to the shifting perspectives of the present. The past is a construction...continually created in terms of causes and conditions. What our interviewees construct is a past from which the

⁶ Järvinen also uses Goffman's essay, "On Face-Work" (1972) to support this association.

present naturally follows, a specific version of their life histories, created through their current frames of reference. (280-81)

The ways in which the alcoholic views him/herself are dependent upon subjective points of view, many of which they (mis)remember through the faulty lens of inebriated, fallible memory constructions. As a result, the alcoholic seeks out communities where s/he feels welcomed and where feelings of judgment have vanished and unadulterated membership can be obtained.

The most commonly known of these communities are in twelve-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous. The necessities of community and having a sense of belonging are elaborated on by John Ratliff in his 2003 article, "Community Identity in an Alcoholics Anonymous Group," featured in *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*. Ratliff provides an overview of some of the tenets and traditions adhered to by Alcoholics Anonymous. Among them are the fact that "A.A. sees itself an intentional community of mutual support," committed to healthy living through abstaining from alcohol, while simultaneously being, "organizationally antihierarchical, decentralized, and suspicious of institutional or personal concentrations of power" (42). While mostly holding A.A. in high regard, Ratliff provides insights from members who note problems with the organization through the insular nature of specified meeting groups staying isolated from other groups and psychology-based treatment programs, which is potentially hazardous to newcomers looking to join a community (43). In their 2007 article, "The Perceived Role of Others in Facilitating or Impeding Healing from Substance Abuse" featured in the *Canadian Journal of Counseling*, Roma S. Palmer and Judith C. Daniluk outline the need of others to be present in the recovery process, stating, "Although the literature suggests that social interactions play a role in the process of healing from addiction...very little is known about what specific interpersonal interactions facilitate or hinder an individual's progress from substance

addiction to health” (199). The article provides a comprehensive look at how attachments formed during the recovery process influence the afflicted individual’s desires to maintain sobriety. In anonymously interviewing participants of A.A., Palmer and Daniluk articulate that:

...elements of the AA program addressed [participants’] need for connection with other people and also provided a connection with the spiritual in terms of a higher power...Connections with others, as well as a belief in a higher power, reportedly gave participants new meaning, a sense of support, and hope in their lives. Knowing that they were not alone in the recovery process—in terms of other members who had walked and were walking the same path, and in terms of putting their faith in something bigger than themselves—facilitated a change in the way they thought about themselves and about their addiction. (208)

Through these topics, we are able to see that there are subset communities that protect their fellowship from outsiders. This need-to-protect-from-the-outside comes from the fact that the “outside,” or the culture of “normies,” has marginalized the alcoholic so significantly, that they are wary of losing the comfort they have found in their communities.

Summary

The continued marginalization of identified alcoholics, whether intentional or not, is rampant within American culture due to the collective inability to recognize the complicated nature of addiction, abuse/dependency, and alcoholism. However, the act of marginalization is not a consciously malicious act, but rather stems from a lack of understanding of foundational principles regarding alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency, resulting in not knowing how to

address the issues. Understanding that addiction is a generally misunderstood and misused term is the first step in de-mystifying the nuanced rhetoric employed when discussing the topic.

Therefore, we must understand that addiction is not a term that should be used as a catchall phrase. Specificity is the key to understanding, so we must be specific when discussing addiction—specifying substance abuse or dependency within our discussions. Additionally, we need to be clear in breaking down the intricacies associated with probable causes, noting the risk factors that lead to heightened susceptibility as well as the dangerous long-term effects of prolonged exposure that leads to neuroadaptation. Also, we need to be conscious of the problematic nature in labeling for the sake of categorizing for the sake of understanding; it is in our nature to understand, but we cannot fall victim to the idea that generalizations equate with accurate demarcations. Lastly, we must view these topics with compassion, move past our frustrations, let go of our anger, and employ a concerted effort to empathize with a victim of a deceptively dangerous disease, a disease that affects us all.

In order to accomplish these heavy tasks, we need to find commonly shared devices that offer us pathways to deeper understandings of alcohol abuse/dependency. The theatre can be one such venue. Subsequent chapters look at some plays featuring alcoholism as its topic, the playwrights who authored these plays, the cultural context of when the plays were written, as well as offering more theories and current models that will show how theatre can be used as an act of purgation and healing.

UNIT TWO:

STAGE DEPICTIONS OF THE ALCOHOLIC

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZING THE ALCOHOLIC ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people must have depth and weight. In nearly all cases, their ideals must be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to re-create their lives.

- William D. Silkworth, M.D., *Alcoholics Anonymous*

When Dr. Silkworth wrote these words (circa 1938), the concept that alcohol abuse/dependency was an issue of “moral failing” was just beginning to be criticized by the medical community. However, public opinion regarding an individual’s inability to control her/his drinking still saw the individual as exhibiting a weakness of character. Today, we know that alcohol abuse/dependency is far more complicated than Silkworth imagined, yet his words carry weight, and while his definition of “power greater than themselves” is referring to a spiritual presence, the universal message is that in order for an alcoholic to find relief, s/he must feel a sense of self-worth.

With this in mind and taking the information set forth in Chapter 1, I now turn to the theatre to show how our discipline’s unique ability to speak directly to diverse audiences can act not only as an avenue to deeper understandings of substance abuse/dependency, but also how the

theatre has been used to perpetuate stigmas and stereotypes. In this second unit, textual analysis of seven American plays that feature alcoholic characters and/or use alcohol abuse/dependency as a topic is provided. The seven plays analyzed in this unit illustrate problematic depictions of the alcoholic and/or alcohol abuse/dependency versus plays that challenge stereotypical depictions and indict stigmas.

This chapter focuses on the former— four plays, which, regardless of their financial success, audience appeal, and/or critical acclaim, have the unfortunate distinction of featuring stereotyped characterizations of the alcoholic and/or perpetuating stigmas and stereotypes of alcohol abuse/dependency. By no means am I saying that these four plays are “bad” plays, merely they have problematic depictions of characters and situations involving alcohol. My method of selection focused on plays and playwrights that are recognizable to broader audiences, where each play has had numerous productions, resulting in publication of the work.⁷

I approached each character through the use of archetypes.⁸ These archetypes are applied to major characters in the texts/plays with the understanding that diverse characters exhibit various archetypes in any given moment to achieve objectives or avoid obstacles. While many of the plays exhibited repetitive archetypes, and many characters invoked others, the archetypes of Architect, Dreamer, Conniver, Bon-Vivant, Martyr, and Oppressor were the most recurrent and are applied to the following plays in this chapter and the next. I do not consider the selections in

⁷ I have selected these plays after an independent study in the spring of 2011 where I looked at some two dozen plays that feature alcoholic characters or use alcohol abuse/dependency as the subject matter.

⁸ This method is derived from an approach to play analysis established by Dr. Mary Bogumil in English curriculum at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. In this method, Dr. Bogumil provides students with a list of twenty-one archetypes to apply to the plays read in her classes.

this chapter to be comprehensive, but rather, are plays that epitomize, respectively, highly problematic depictions of characters and/or perpetuate cultural misconceptions.

More specifically, they depict explicit issues that can be found in numerous other works as well as our cultural and social media. An analysis of alcoholism as depicted in Hollywood films, Norman K. Denzin's *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, shows how surface level depictions of alcoholics focus on the individual as having personal problems which develop "occasions for moralistic, didactic discussions of alcoholism and its destructive effects on the person and society," ultimately leading to, "fractured reflections of the American concern for its 'alcoholism' problem... While alcoholism films presumably speak to the alcoholic's presence in contemporary American life, they do so by creating a very specific type of discourse, [focusing on] the alcoholic as a 'diseased,' sick, often insane, violent person who violates the normal standards of everyday life" (xiii). For example, too many characters from both film and live performance who are identified as alcoholic fall into three categories which I term: The Loveable Lush (a carefree comedian, rarely taken seriously by others who provides a comedic break or the formulaic and/or appropriately-timed song and dance—literally or figuratively—to alleviate tension within the play); The Despondent Drunk (who takes on a darker tone as this characterization illustrates an apathy towards a life not going according to idealized and expected plan; in this form, the alcoholic is personified hopelessness; depression, apathy and bitterness embodied in a character); and the Violent Villain (often found in the journey story or tales focusing on family structures, and in these cases, the alcoholic is a character whom a protagonist must overcome and defeat). While many plays feature these stereotypes to various extents, I use a specific play (i.e., *Our Town*) to dissect the portrayal of one of these stereotypes (i.e., the Despondent Drunk).

My analysis begins with Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* to provide two examples to show how the rhetoric used to discuss alcohol abuse/dependency has been deployed in plays from the past. I locate the plays in the cultural frameworks in which they were written. Subsequently, I use the same method of examination to look at Christopher Durang's 1985 play, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, and Theresa Rebeck's 2007 play, *The Scene*. In doing so, I show how that even though cultural understandings of alcohol abuse/dependency have become more informed from a medical standpoint, stereotypical representations of the alcoholic and alcohol abuse/dependency are still perpetuated on stage. These last two plays show how problematic representations of alcohol use and abuse continue to perpetuate stigmas and stereotypes of this societal issue.

Our Town: Pitying Simon Stimson, the Social Leper

Dr. William D. Silkworth is credited for being the driving force behind legitimizing Alcoholics Anonymous. Providing his own observations on the organization's growing effects from a medical perspective, Silkworth's words of encouragement open up the foundational text used by Alcoholics Anonymous. This text, simply titled *Alcoholics Anonymous*, features Dr. Silkworth's opinions and current approaches to the treatment of alcoholism as they were seen during the organization's tenuous founding (circa 1935). The text also features Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill W. and other self-identified alcoholics telling tales of how their lives have become, in their words, "unmanageable." Originally published in 1939, this text (which is the main source material for the A.A. twelve-step program and is commonly referred to as *The Big Book* by members), features stories of how the alcoholic displays a series of erratic behaviors when actively engaged in her/his addiction.

The second chapter of *Alcoholic Anonymous*, titled “There is a Solution,” states that the alcoholic can be seen displaying a “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” personality which results in doing “absurd, incredible, tragic things while drinking” that negatively affect the personal, professional, mental, social, and even spiritual development of the alcoholic (21). This is an example of what Dennis L. Thombs lays out in his 2006 text *Introduction to Addictive Behaviors*, which some stage depictions of alcohol use to illustrate the still-predominant societal belief that “addiction represents a refusal to abide by some ethical or moral code of conduct. Excessive drinking or drug use is considered freely chosen behavior that is at best irresponsible and at worst evil” (4-5). These highlighted behaviors can be seen to different degrees within the three stereotypes of Loveable Lush, Despondent Drunk, and Violent Villain. Although the author highlights these stereotypical behaviors, the book offers the reader (who would be a self-identified alcoholic) hope. Though the book illustrates the daily struggles and constant battles the alcoholic endures to maintain sobriety and fight against the damage caused by his or her drinking, it is considered a guidebook on the pathway to a better life.

Alcoholics Anonymous is overt that the stigma towards their group is a powerful, debilitating stigma, and in order to protect themselves, their loved ones, and the well-being of their livelihood, silence and anonymity must be maintained at all costs because the “normal” people of the world will not and do not understand the nature of alcoholism. The epigram, while part of a much larger and more encouraging letter, illustrates the confounding nature of what was more simply thought of at the time as a “moral failing.” As Alcoholics Anonymous was beginning to gain legitimacy amongst the medical community, and gain even more appeal to those seeking relief from alcohol related problems, some playwrights were also beginning to

show more awareness of the layers of alcohol abuse/dependency and were more conscious in their depictions of what was more and more known as “alcoholism.”

A year prior to the publishing of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town* debuted and would come to be known as a revolutionary play in its time, subsequently earning a spot in the American theatrical canon. Over the past seventy-five years, *Our Town* has been unfairly categorized as a sentimental, nostalgic piece of Americana; however, when it debuted in 1938, the play was an insightful look at small-minded notions of community at the expense of global understanding and personal awareness of life’s everyday gifts. Additionally yet not always highlighted is *Our Town*’s call for empathy towards marginalized members of society. In his forward to the 2003 Perennial Classics release of the play, Donald Margulies wrote, “Anyone who dismisses *Our Town* as an idealized view of American life has failed to see the impieties and hypocrisies depicted by Wilder’s vision” (xvi). Stemming from one-acts written in 1931, Wilder began to construct *Our Town* in the summer of 1937 (Tappan Wilder 117), and while *Alcoholics Anonymous* was proclaiming the need for anonymity due to the public’s misunderstandings surrounding alcoholism, Wilder was indicting the issue of alcohol abuse, albeit by illustrating the stereotypical depiction of “Despondent Drunk” in the character of Simon Stimson.

Simon Stimson is the church organist of the fictional New Hampshire town of Grover’s Corners. Guided through the narrative by a character known only as The Stage Manager, the play incorporates a hybrid of presentational and representational elements to tell the stories of Grover’s Corners, and specifically, the lives of the Webb and Gibbs families, the relationship and burgeoning partnership between Emily Webb and George Gibbs being the main focus. The play is structured in three acts: the first taking place in 1901 and is subtitled “Daily Life,” the

second takes place in 1904 and is subtitled “Love and Marriage,” and third act is set in 1913 but has no official subtitle as the Stage Manager ominously states, “I reckon you can guess what that’s about” (Wilder 48). Wilder purposefully moved away from the traditional conventions of representational theatre that were popular at the time by giving the Stage Manager the role of an omniscient storyteller who is both outside the action of the scenes as narrator and commentator as well as being someone who adopts roles within them when it is necessary.

Grover’s Corners is small, it is quiet, and it is a community where everyone knows each other and is related (by blood, marriage, or association) in some way – except for Simon Stimson. Stimson is out of place in Wilder’s play, not just as an individual within the fictive world, but also as a character in comparison to the others created by the playwright. While Wilder’s more prominently featured characters share similar cultural ideologies and moral philosophies, Stimson is an outsider who represents the darker corners of American culture.

Barnard Hewitt discusses in his 1959 *TDR* article, “Thornton Wilder Says ‘Yes’,” that not everything is always optimistic in Grover’s Corners, which is revealed through Stimson’s presence. Hewitt states, “The ugly side of American small-town life is not entirely missing from *Our Town*... Wilder keeps Simon close to the wings... To have given more prominence to Simon Stimson and his like would only have distracted from Wilder’s purpose” (Hewitt 114-15). Margulies also notes that Stimson “...is not a stumbling town drunk designed for easy laughs; rather, he is a tortured, self-destructive soul whose cries for help are ignored by a provincial people steeped in denial... Wilder illustrates the failure of society to help its own and the insidiousness of systematic ignorance” (xvi). Statements such as these support that Stimson is an outsider within the small town of Grover’s Corners and is inundated by a culture that views him as “other” resulting in his actions and behaviors being perceived as deviant. However, note that

Margulies states Stimson "...is not a stumbling town drunk designed for easy laughs..." essentially stating that Stimson is a town drunk, but not present to elicit laughter. In other words, Margulies is legitimizing that Stimson was in fact designed as a "stumbling town drunk," designed as a stereotype, yet does not exist to be funny. But what is the purpose of placing Stimson into the seemingly placid world of Grover's Corners?

Most playwrights who are diligent in their work make character choices a part of delicate deliberation and purposefully placed into a text for specific reasons. Therefore, we can conclude that Stimson's inclusion has a very specific purpose. Wilder was a master of his craft. Stimson's presence in the world of *Our Town* is to acknowledge the despondency of marginalized identities at a time where, according to Wilder, people chose to stay isolated in their own personal affairs. As a result, Stimson is pitied, shunned, and talked *about* but never talked *with*.

In Act I, Stimson stands before the church choir, conducting them, when he stops the rehearsal to state:

SIMON STIMSON: Now look here, everybody. Music come into the world to give pleasure.—Softer! Softer! Get it out of your heads that music's only good when it's loud. You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to. Now again. Tenors! (Wilder 34)

Later, after asking his choir who will be able to attend an upcoming wedding, he states:

SIMON STIMSON: —Now we'll do: "Art Thou Weary; Art Thou Languid?" It's a question, ladies and gentlemen, make it talk. (Wilder 36)

Stimson is an artful musician, an individual who appreciates the beauty and subtle nuances that music brings. Yet he is not seen as a musician or as individual who appreciates beauty. In fact, Stimson's behavior as a drinker overshadows any other aspects of his identity.

Following the choir practice Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Soames, and Mrs. Webb converse about the "troubles" Stimson has been through:

MRS. SOAMES: Naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others, but now we're alone—really, it's the worst scandal that ever was in this town!

MRS. GIBBS: What?

MRS. SOAMES: Simon Stimson!

MRS. GIBBS: Now, Louella!

MRS. SOAMES: But, Julia! To have the organist of a church *drink* and *drunk* year after year. You know he was drunk tonight.

MRS. GIBBS: Now, Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Dr. Ferguson knows too, and if Dr. Ferguson keeps him on there in his job the only thing the rest of us can do is just not to notice it.

MRS. SOAMES: Not to notice it! But it's getting worse.

MRS. GIBBS: No, it isn't, Louella. It's getting better. I've been in that choir twice as long as you have. It doesn't happen anywhere near so often... My, I hate to go to bed on a night like this. (Wilder 39-40)

The play tells us little about Stimson as an individual aside from his involvement with the church and his drinking; therefore, the rest, as far as audiences or anybody in Grover's Corners is

concerned, is left to speculation. This conversation gives us more about Stimson than all of Act I and II combined, and from this conversation, we see the group consensus that Stimson drinks too much, he was drunk at that evening's practice, that his behavior has been reported to his supervisor (Dr. Ferguson), and that at least the members in the choir (and presumably others) are fully aware of Stimson's behaviors as well. The only disagreements in this conversation is whether or not Stimson is getting better or worse, and while Mrs. Gibbs proclaims Stimson to be better than he used to be, she is abrupt in her assertion and quickly changes subjects. Is this to mean she doubts what she is saying? Is she trying to convince herself that Stimson is getting better? Or does she simply want to put an end to the conversation?

It is not until the third act of the play that we come to see and hear about Stimson's beliefs from Stimson himself. Act III shows the purpose of Stimson's inclusion into Wilder's play and that Wilder uses Stimson not to simply show somebody attempting to "make-it" through an unfulfilling life, but rather as an individual who is masking his emotional pain and his depression by using a substance. Stimson cannot escape his pain even after taking his own life, and even more unfortunately, his association with alcohol is remembered by those who remain in the realm of the living.

Act III of *Our Town* is mistakenly said to be about death; however, it is more appropriate to say that Act III of *Our Town* is about taking life for granted—a call from Wilder to be mindful of the precious time we are given. The Stage Manager opens up this act, giving us an overview of the changes to Grover's Corners in the nine-year gap between acts. The audience is told that the third act takes place in a graveyard, and the individuals sitting in the chairs on the stage have died, Stimson being among them. Almost immediately in this act we see that Stimson, even in death, has not lost his disdain for the living as he states, "I'm always uncomfortable when *they're*

around” (Wilder 90). In an exchange between the undertaker Joe Stoddard and a wayward former resident of Grover’s Corners who has returned for the funeral of his cousin (Emily Gibbs), we see that Stimson has left behind a memory of himself connected to his drinking:

SAM CRAIG: (*reading Simon Stimson’s epitaph.*) He was organist at church, wasn’t he?—Hm, drank a lot, we used to say.

JOE STODDARD: Nobody was supposed to know about it. (Wilder 91)

Yet, we know this is not the case. As we learned in Act I, *everybody* knew about Stimson and his drinking, and in fact, little was done by Stimson to hide his actions; however, it was choice by others to not talk about the situation. Not talking about it (even though they obviously did) was also not a decision made because the people around Stimson had established some sort of boundary or were attempting to show Stimson a version of “tough love,” but rather, they chose not to discuss the matter because they felt it was inappropriate, it was none of their business. Even after hanging himself, Stimson is left with drinking as his legacy, and in spite of the Stage Manager telling us that the dead lose their interest in the living, Stimson’s anger and bitterness remains, illustrated in the following exchange with his dead cohorts:

MRS. SOAMES: Childbirth. (*almost with a laugh*) I’d forgotten all about that. My, wasn’t life awful—(*with a sigh*) and wonderful.

SIMON STIMSON: (*with a sideways glance*) Wonderful, was it?

MRS. GIBBS: Simon! Now, remember! (Wilder 93)

Still chided by Mrs. Gibbs for sharing an opinion that is contradictory to the norm, Stimson takes his anger even further towards the conclusion of the play, when, upon Emily’s return from a spiritual re-visiting of her twelfth birthday, he derides Emily for electing to return for one last look at life:

SIMON STIMSON: (*With mounting violence; bitingly*) Yes, now you know. Now you know! That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of those... of those about you. To spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. Now you know—that's the happy existence you wanted to go back to. Ignorance and blindness. (Wilder 109)

Stimson views the living as a selfish group of people (as he did before passing away), unaware of their lives and unable to see beyond them. Isolated in life and bitter in death, Stimson projects a bitter awareness in Act III that the living are self-centered and ignorant, and he is given an opportunity to articulate his feelings, an opportunity apparently not offered to him in life.

Grover's Corners is depicted as a Protestant/Christian town where the people attend church regularly, sing in the choir, get married by an ordained minister, and are given a Christian burial, but in death, there is neither Heaven nor Hell. These Christian conceptions are not present in Act III. In fact, the lives led by the dead characters in the graveyard seems to be irrelevant to Wilder as he places them all on an equal plane of existence. Or does he? Stimson was an isolated individual when living, who ultimately succumbs to his perceived pressures and takes his own life. In the case of Stimson-as-The Despondent Drunk, we see the personification of hopelessness, depression, apathy, and bitterness embodied in a character. However, it is disturbing to see how, in this situation, these emotions are not resolved in death.

Each character in this Act (save Emily, who is in the process of coming to terms with no longer being alive) is seemingly content with her/his graveside presence, passively watching and commenting on a life long gone, having come to terms with their current positions. But, Stimson

is not peacefully content. While he may have come to terms with his situation, he still holds a high level of resentment toward the living. There is no evidence that the conversation between Sam Craig and Joe Stoddard regarding Stimson is a secret conversation in spite of Joe's claim that "nobody was supposed to know." In fact, we are privy to two conversations between residents of Grover's Corners where Stimson's drinking is at the center of how he is discussed. Stimson is the topic of a conversation, yet he is not allowed to participate in the conversation, nor is there a desire by others to include him. The residents of Grover's Corners do not think of Stimson with fondness; at least, Wilder does not allow us to see any complicated views regarding Stimson. Not only is Stimson still feeling what he felt in life, but others remember him only as the church organist *and* the drinker. Unfortunately, Wilder diminishes the usefulness of Stimson by keeping him trapped in his bitterness and disdain. Likewise, even though we may see a slightly deeper more nuanced side to Stimson than shown in previous acts, this side is also diminished as Stimson is told to be quiet by Mrs. Gibbs and continues to be denigrated by Joe Stoddard, Sam Craig, and presumably anybody else who remembers Stimson not as the church organist, but as the church organist *and* Grover's Corners "town drunk."

It is important to note that *Our Town's* use of Stimson illustrates the alcoholic as Despondent Drunk in that he is a troubled individual attempting to drown larger problems (his "troubles"), and while we may apply the archetypes of Architect, Dreamer or perhaps Martyr, the character is not allotted enough stage time for us to get to know Stimson beyond how others view him and react to his behaviors; thus, he remains a stereotype.

There is no way of knowing whether Wilder was familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous at the time he was writing *Our Town*, but the timeline and the slow beginnings of A.A. make it hard to suggest that such a connection existed. Wilder lived in a period of time before clearer medical

understandings informed public opinions, and the vast majority of the American population perpetuated an ideology that vilified “drunkards,” sending the message that these individuals were weak and immoral. Seeing Simon Stimson through the eyes of the other characters illustrates a disdain for the alcohol abuser, and by extension, Wilder effectively portrays the Despondent Drunk stereotype as an irredeemable individual who takes his self-loathing and bitterness with him everywhere he goes, even into death. In this case we are offered a possible message from Wilder (one of many), which is saying, “If this is how you behave in life, this will be your fate in death.”

Long Day's Journey into Night: Biography and Public Shaming

Admittedly, the inclusion of Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* into this chapter has nothing to do with the construction of the play itself. In fact, O’Neill was able to craft some of the most nuanced characters who are dealing with substance use and abuse to date, and his play is considered to be one of the greatest plays in American dramatic literature. While we can apply each of the general stereotypes to all four of the main characters, O’Neill is able to give us multiple aspects to their respective identities, which can be seen through various archetypes. The reason *Long Day’s Journey into Night* is included in this chapter has to do with the cultural context in which the play was written and with O’Neill’s own autobiographical connections with the text, both of which come together to show that public opinion about O’Neill’s content and the public display of this content elicited a fear in O’Neill that prevented the play from being produced until after his death. Essentially, O’Neill’s fear of public shaming and displaying such intimate material is at the core of *Long Day’s Journey into Night* both in the content of the play as well as with the play’s history of production.

Long Day's Journey... was written in 1940, only one year after *Our Town* debuted, yet O'Neill's play was not published until 1956, three years after his death. *Long Day's Journey...* puts the pervasive debilitation of substance abuse at the forefront of the story, and like Wilder's *Our Town*, explores the problematic nature of how the disease is perceived and discussed. However, unlike *Our Town*'s depiction of a single character that is experiencing a negative relationship with alcohol and how this person is viewed by others from a distance, *Long Day's Journey...* takes us inside the Tyrone family to give us a look at the disease as the entire family struggles with their own respective associations with substance abuse.

Long Day's Journey... takes place in August of 1912 and looks at the Tyrone family: James (the father), Mary (the mother), Jamie (the elder brother), and Edmund (the younger brother), an upper-middle class family living off the proceeds of James' successful career as an actor. The play is constructed in four acts, with Act 2 divided into two scenes, its action all taking place in a single day spanning from 8:30 a.m. to around midnight. At the top of Act 1, the family appears to be a jovial, loving family, yet quickly we learn that Mary has recently returned from the sanitarium in attempt to treat her morphine addiction. Additionally, we find that James is a drinker, proud of his Irish roots, and disdainful of his elder son, Jamie, who he sees as lazy and as somebody who has lost control over his ability to drink. In his younger son, Edmund, James sees a bright boy, full of potential, yet sickly and a dreamer in need of direction. Throughout the course of the day, we watch as each member of the Tyrone family falls deeper and deeper into their "fog" of substance use/abuse, until at the end of the play, each of them is inebriated and despondent, disconnected from each other in spite of physically occupying the same space—isolated in spite of their proximity.

Long Day's Journey... requires a different approach from *Our Town* in that the play explicitly focuses on a family unit's struggles with substance abuse/dependency, with each person in the Tyrone family struggling to overcome their own levels of use/abuse. Approaching this piece requires an understanding of the cultural context and O'Neill's trepidations about the misconceptions regarding substance use/abuse at the time and how these misconceptions led to a perceived (and at times literal) public shaming towards afflicted individuals. Therefore, we need to look at not just how the characters are depicted, but also what the characters say as well as infer about how they are being perceived. For example, consider the opening line from James to Mary:

JAMES: You're a fine armful now, Mary, with those twenty pounds
you've gained? (O'Neill 14)

As they discuss her size and weight for the following beats, a series of questions are raised: Why has Mary gained twenty pounds? Was she underweight to begin with or does James simply desire her to be of a particular body type? Was she sick? Is she now healthy?

The exchanges continue and illustrate a relationship between Mary and James that has a genuine love as they banter back and forth about food, James' failed real estate endeavors, and his unpleasant taste for cigars. For all intents and purposes, this appears to be a loving couple. It is not until Mary mentions their younger son, Edmund, that the tone of the scene shifts. When Mary expresses concern about Edmund and that he is not eating due to a summer cold, James tells her not to worry (obviously hiding something about Edmund from Mary), because he wants her to "Keep up the good work," to which she responds:

MARY: (*has turned her head away*) I will, dear. (*She gets up restlessly and goes to the windows at right.*) Thank heavens, the fog is gone.

(She turns back.) I do feel out of sorts this morning. I wasn't able to get much sleep with that awful foghorn going all night. (O'Neill 17)

Two things occur in this statement. First is the confirmation that something has indeed happened to Mary that has caused James to worry, and while she is doing better, she is “working” on staying better. The second is the introduction of the fog. Throughout the play, O'Neill uses the encroaching fog coming off the water as a metaphor for the clouded thinking of substance use/abuse. For Mary, the fog is gone in the sense that it is morning and has dissipated from the water, but also the fog has lifted from her mind. The lighthearted nature of the scene continues as the Jamie and Edmund enter, laughing, and the entire family joins in teasing each other, and more importantly, noting Mary's grand, healthy nature and how well she is doing. This is a happy family...apparently.

As Act One continues, we slowly see cracks in what was once a strong foundation as James makes jabs at Jamie and his “socialist anarchist sentiments” as the two slowly start to devolve into something reminiscent of dueling swordsmen circling in a ring (O'Neill 25-27). When Edmund's health returns as a topic of conversation, James mentions how Doctor Hardy believes Edmund to have “malarial fever” to which Mary responds:

MARY: *(a look of contemptuous hostility flashes across her face.)* Doctor Hardy! I wouldn't believe a thing he said, if he swore on a stack of Bibles! I know what doctors are. They're all alike. Anything, they don't care what, to keep you coming to them. (O'Neill 27)

This outburst too sends multiple messages, such as Mary's contempt for medical professionals, that she is prone to erratic thinking when upset, and that she is concerned for Edmund's welfare were he to continue going to Doctor Hardy. When Edmund and Mary leave, we are privy to one

of the few exchanges between James and Jamie where the two are not at odds with each other as they share concern for Mary and Edmund:

JAMIE: [...] I was with Edmund when he went to Doc Hardy on Monday.

[...] He thinks it's consumption, doesn't he, Papa?

JAMES: (*reluctantly*) He said it might be.

The congeniality between James and Jamie is short lived, and the two are soon at odds over the value of doctors, and a new layer is added to the developing relationships when James turns to his eldest son to yell at him for his disrespect:

JAMES: (Stung.) That's enough! You're not drunk now! There's no
excuse—

More and more of James and Jamie's relationship is unveiled as we see how James has always had what Jamie felt were unrealistic expectations for him, and when James attacks his son for his arrogance:

JAMES: [...] The only thanks is to have you sneer at me for a dirty miser,
sneer at my profession, sneer at every damned thing in the world—
except yourself.

JAMIE: (*Wryly.*) That's not true, Papa. You can't hear me talking to
myself, that's all. (O'Neill 33)

Jamie's response to his father may be delivered "wryly," but the sentiment stems from James, Sr.'s indictment of Jamie as selfish and thinking he is above and better than the people around him. Jamie's response is an indication that Jamie is more self-analytical than his father gives him credit. Essentially, this statement illustrates that the general disdain Jamie feels towards everyone around him extends even to himself. It is a moment where Jamie reveals a sense of self-loathing.

Of all the nasty, dismissive ways in which Jamie addresses other people, here it seems he talks to himself in the same demeaning manner—but nobody ever hears the conversation he has with himself. James has, apparently for too many times, attempted to control his eldest son’s drinking habits. At this point, resentfully stating the obvious has grown into the modus operandi for Jamie and his father’s communication about Jamie’s out-of-control drinking. James has given up on Jamie, thus labeling him as a *lost-cause* or *having less will power* than a *normal* person would have. Jamie is different in his father’s eyes, he is “other” and “outsider,” and James, Sr. has no problem pointing this out to his son. James acts as Violent Villain, admonishing Jamie for his inability to drink “appropriately,” while simultaneously claiming that his own overabundant drinking is never an issue.

The fight continues, and eventually subsides as the two turn their attention back onto Edmund and Mary. Both are in agreement about very little aside from the fact that they both want their mother to remain in her current state, and not regress into her morphine induced haze. Additionally, they are averse to letting others know of their precarious situation (with Mary or Edmund) as they each agree to keep things as seemingly “normal” as possible. However, consumption in 1912 was a virtual death-sentence, and they are also concerned as to what effect the news would have on Mary.

JAMES: Yes, this time you can see how strong and sure of herself she is.

She’s a different woman entirely from the other times. She has control of her nerves—or she had until Edmund got sick... Yes, it will be hard for her. But she can do it! She has the will power now! (O’Neill 37)

In an effort to keep Mary calm, James and Jamie keep this information from her, consequently only exacerbating her concern as she becomes more and more paranoid that people are talking

about her behind her back. In spite of James' initial excitement and optimism and his eldest son's willingness to help his mother, the Tyrone family is plagued by small misfortunes, which lead Mary to a state of worry. In fact, she seems to be more aware of the precariousness of her situation than anybody else as she foreshadows the looming relapse:

MARY: ...I mean, take advantage of the sunshine before the fog comes
back. (*Strangely, as if talking aloud to herself.*) Because I know it will.
(O'Neill 41)

Mary is right in being wary, because by the end of the act Mary has confided that the night has left her in an uneasy state, and tensions are high as James awaits news from Dr. Hardy regarding Edmund. Jamie attempts to keep the atmosphere light, but by the time the act concludes, we get a sense that the fog is moving back in around the entire family.

Events of the play move forward and references to fog become more and more frequent throughout *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The fog (i.e. substance use and abuse) is a natural element in this environment that at the beginning of the play is distant yet impending, encroaching on the family as the play unfolds, finally enveloping the family's home with each of its members stuck inside. O'Neill's use of fog as a metaphor for addiction is both romantic and, at the same time, tragic, which can be seen in Mary's above statement. There is a comfort within the fog, but it is an illusion as the fog is merely an ethereal mask covering the ground only temporarily. Also, the fog presents a danger to people (in this case the Tyrone family), and they become more and more lost as the fog thickens and grows.

Later in the play, Mary sees the fog as a comforting blanket, but in actuality, it is a net, which has been able to catch her entire family. The metaphor of the fog as a net connects because Mary is not alone in her abuse of substances as each character in the play exhibits traits

of addiction to varying degrees. Hypocritical in the views they have of themselves, they place blame on each other for adding undue stress onto Mary, not realizing that they are each in just as much trouble as she.

JAMES: (*with a worried look at him – putting on a fake heartiness*) Come along, then. It's before a meal and I've always found that good whiskey, taken in moderation as an appetizer, is the best of tonics. (*Edmund gets up as his father passes the bottle to him. He pours a big drink. Tyrone frowns admonishingly.*) I said, in moderation. (*He pours his own drink and passes the bottle to Jamie, grumbling.*) It'd be a waste of breath mentioning moderation to you. (O'Neill 68)

Again, we see how the characters perceive the abuse of substances as a weakness within the moral fiber of an individual, as can be seen in the following exchange between Mary and Tyrone, Sr.:

MARY: (*He walks slowly to where she stands in the doorway. He walks like an old man. As he reaches her she bursts out piteously.*) James! I tried so hard! I tried so hard! Please believe—!

JAMES: (*Moved in spite of himself—helplessly.*) I suppose you did, Mary. (*Then, grief-strickenly.*) For the love of God, why couldn't you have the strength to keep on? (O'Neill 72)

This combination of sadness and anger is common when seeing a loved one relapse. In the case of James Tyrone, his love for Mary does not diminish, but he is not able to understand why she would choose to return to such a destructive behavior. Mary denies that she has returned to use, and James, indignant and defeated, closes the scene with a futility and anger that carries through

the rest of the play. As a result of Mary's use, the characters each begin a downward spiral into their own respective cycles of substance abuse. By the end of the night, all four members of the Tyrone family are intoxicated as their family dysfunction (screaming insults and jabbing blame at one another) is displayed for a viewing audience to witness.

The abuse of substances is ever-present in the lives of the Tyrone family yet the characters do not openly discuss the matter beyond snide remarks or judgmental statements. In fact, it is evident that they are unable to even understand how the issues should be addressed. Furthermore, the overall themes within O'Neill's play speak to the pervasiveness of addiction. In the following line, Mary speaks metaphorically to Cathleen (the housekeeper) regarding the approaching fog, and we see Mary's desires to embrace her impending return to morphine:

MARY: It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you anymore. (O'Neill 100)

Ultimately, O'Neill paints a picture of a frustrated family, a directionless unit of people, forever tied to each other, yet unable to communicate their fears and inability to understand what is happening. These are characters crying for help, yet unable to vocalize their desires.

The rhetoric used in *Long Day's Journey...* is similar to that found in *Our Town*, mostly because the plays were written only two to three years apart from each other; however there is a nearly twenty-year separation in their respective debuts. Understanding the playwright's personal experiences when looking at the texts under consideration is an important task and provides additional insight in the case of O'Neill and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Granted, autobiographical analysis is problematic in that it is dangerous to assume that everything a writer

commits to the page is autobiographical, but it is equally dangerous to assume that a playwright is not personally invested in the work s/he creates.

O'Neill wrote *Long Day's Journey into Night* in 1940. Writing to preeminent critic George Jean Nathan on June 15, 1940 after finishing *The Iceman Cometh*, O'Neill intimated that he had started another play he was calling "Day's Journey into Night" (O'Neill, *Selected Letters* 506). On November 29, 1940, O'Neill wrote to friend and critic Kenneth MacGowan expressing his pleasure at his most recent writing, stating that *Long Day's Journey into Night* was "among the very best things I've ever written" (O'Neill, *Selected Letters* 514). This sentiment was repeated in a letter to his son nearly fourteen months later, when he wrote, "I'm glad you continue to remember *Long Day's Journey Into Night* with fine appreciation. As I told you when you were here, it and *The Iceman Cometh* are to me the most completely satisfying things I have written" (O'Neill, *Selected Letters* 526). So why did O'Neill write to Robert Sisk (a close friend and the publicity agent for the Theatre Guild) in February of 1943, "About *Long Day's Journey into Night*, I still have no script I could send. No one has read it... Besides, it is certainly no play for now, for many reasons, so why bother?" (O'Neill, *Selected Letters* 542). Why, in a letter to Random House dated November 29, 1945, did O'Neill mandate that his deposited script not be opened nor published until twenty-five years after his death—a sentiment repeated to Bennett Cerf in June of 1953 when O'Neill added that he wished the play to never be produced (O'Neill, *Selected Letters* 575, 589)? Probable answers to these questions may lie in O'Neill's autobiographical connection to the play and the potential fear of what might happen in sharing such intimate material with the general public.

Travis Bogard writes in his 1972 biography of O'Neill, titled *Contour in Time*, that the parallels between O'Neill's life and the events in *Long Day's Journey*... are extensive (110).

Other scholarship has not shied away from the connections either, noting most prominently O'Neill's own battles with alcohol and his erratic behaviors when drinking. Sadly, some of the scholarship on O'Neil shows a negative bias that illustrates the cultural stigmas O'Neill (and others) would/could have been faced. For example, in the 1974 special issue of *Yale French Studies*, which focused on intoxication and literature, Stephen R. Grecco's "High Hopes: Eugene O'Neill and Alcohol" provides a unique summary of the connections between O'Neill and *Long Day's Journey...*, stating:

...O'Neill began drinking—and getting drunk—at a very early age.

In retrospect, it seems he had little choice in the matter: becoming intoxicated by one means or another was almost a family ritual. His brother Jamie was a confirmed alcoholic at twenty and predictably died a drunkard's death; his mother became addicted to morphine shortly after (and because of the difficulty of) Eugene's birth and spent most of the remainder of her life in a semi-narcotized state; and his father, who normally started the day with a pre-breakfast cocktail, became so possessive about his liquor that he decided to lock it up in the cellar out of reach of his perpetually thirsty sons. (Grecco 142)

While commentaries such as these may have been written well after O'Neill's death, the character judgments imbedded in such reviews mirror public opinions that have been pervasive for generations, as evidenced by A.A.'s mandate that members remain anonymous. These judgments could easily have been a contributing factor as to why O'Neill was hesitant in releasing *Long Day's Journey...* during his lifetime. Grecco's language epitomizes biases towards alcohol abuse/dependency. Grecco's words lack compassion or clear understanding of

the nuances of emotional and mental turmoil O'Neill endured. In fact, Grecco seems to relish the drama of O'Neill's unfortunate circumstances.

It is a fact that O'Neill and *Long Day's Journey into Night* are viscerally connected, not simply through biographical similarities, but also in message and legacy. So much of *Long Day's Journey...* is connected to perceptions of addiction. Each person of the Tyrone family looks at another member and perceives her/his behavior as deviant. Culturally, the behaviors enacted by an individual suffering from chemical (drug) abuse/dependency are seen as deviant as well, but also entertaining if seen from a distance.

So while Grecco may be admonishing O'Neill and his family, judging them from a position of hindsight and external (delusional) omniscience, his critique has been legitimized by others who also see alcohol abuse/dependency as entertainment. Critiques such as Grecco's make harsh, judgmental connections, which perpetuate cultural misrepresentations that certainly marginalize the voices of those already struggling—voices that have something to say yet are silenced due to public shaming. Consider the shift in tone in my re-write of Grecco's words:

O'Neill began drinking to the extent of inebriation at an early age, which, in terms of our culture, means early enough for him to not be fully cognizant of the long-term consequences or potential hazards of his actions. This behavior eventually led to a neuroadaptive manipulation during his developmental years. In retrospect, O'Neill was met upon birth with various genetic and environmental factors that increased probable susceptibility factors. His family environment was occupied by substance abusers (although it is unclear as to whether or not anybody was physiologically dependent). His brother Jamie identified as an alcoholic at

the age of twenty and unfortunately lost his battle with alcohol abuse and died. His mother self-medicated with morphine due to a probable combination of depression and chronic pain, resulting in abuse of the drug as well as a psychological preoccupation. His father was noted to start drinking in the early morning, which initiated a pattern of paranoid delusions, one of which was exhibited by the fact that he would hide liquor from his sons out of fear that they would become their father.

Current approaches to recovery dialogues are using *Long Day's Journey into Night* to initiate dialogues about alcohol abuse/dependency (which is the focus of Chapter 4), so what would have happened to O'Neill and for O'Neill had he been surrounded by a culture that welcomed his unique perspective on this topic? How would have dialogues regarding substance abuse/dependency shifted had O'Neill been encouraged to share his story earlier in life?

The fact is that the culture in which O'Neill lived saw the abuse of substances as a moral weakness, and as a result, conversations on the topic were subjugated to stereotypical portrayals and associated with negative stigmas. Even though O'Neill created what is considered by most to be one of the best American plays ever written, the play itself was not allowed to speak for the playwright until after O'Neill died. Today, we see O'Neill's insights into the complicated nature of substance abuse/dependency, but at the time, he was shamed into silence, unable to provide his work in way that would have benefitted him, and possibly others.

In both *Our Town* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the issue of alcoholism and addiction are openly acknowledged, but purposefully *not* discussed in ways that, by today's standards, would offer relief to the individual or families. Alcohol abuse/dependency is seen as an issue that should be ignored or addressed behind closed doors with the hopes that the

individual's willpower can grant her/him the necessary strength to become a productive member within the family and community. Even though Wilder and O'Neill are reflecting a cultural ideology of their respective time periods, contemporary playwrights are still addressing the issues of alcoholism in their work by using unfortunate character depictions which result in the afflicted character(s) being portrayed as morally weak, socially stigmatized, and vilified.

The Marriage of Bette and Boo: Satirizing the Serious

By the 1960s the medical community and treatment programs had begun to recognize that substance abuse/dependency was a multifaceted issue where individuals were classified along a continuum that included the infrequent problem drinker, to a drinker with consistent problems, to somebody in advanced psychological and/or physiological abuse/dependency on alcohol. During the 1970s, in spite of some social science theories that denied the disease model, legislation was passed that mandated federal assistance to alcohol treatment programs and required insurance companies to aid in the financial burden of treatment programs. By the 1980s, behavioral treatment programs based on methods developed in Great Britain began to focus on levels of controlled drinking to aid the recovery process. This method not only embraced the disease model, it did so to an extreme, which prolonged the problem drinking behaviors of individuals while simultaneously absolving them of any personal responsibility. (Denzin, *Alcoholic Society* xiv-xvi)

It was in this age that Christopher Durang wrote his morbidly absurdist comedy, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*. The play is included in this chapter to illustrate that while stereotypical depictions of the alcoholic may be more applicable within comedic genres, the topic of alcohol abuse/dependency within comedic genres is problematic. Comedy is used to

make light of topics and/or to indict situations (for example, through satire and/or parody), and we as audience members find value in comedy because we can relate to characters yet take solace in that we do not have to endure the ridiculous events that are taking place. Yet alcohol abuse/dependency is a serious issue, and was considered so even by the medical community of the 1980s, and it is difficult to find the humor in dealing with an individual who is abusing or dependent on alcohol. This section looks at how the use of comedy diminishes the seriousness and severity of alcohol abuse/dependency, and ultimately reifies that stereotypes are useful to comedy, but ultimately perpetuates the false idea that it is okay to laugh at alcoholic behavior, even when somebody is being abused.

Premiering at Public/Newman Theatre in New York in 1985, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* was met with high praise for its ridiculously funny portrayal of what most reviewers saw as tragic events. As stated by Frank Rich in his 1985 *New York Times* review of the original production:

Once more [Durang] is demonstrating his special knack for wrapping life's horrors in the primary colors of absurdist comedy. In Mr. Durang's world, there is no explanation for misery: Even if one sifts through 'the endless details of everyday life' hoping to 'order reality,' nothing will make sense. In 'Bette and Boo'...the playwright lays out the loony facts of a boy's grotesque childhood, hoping the utter comic insanity of it all will somehow ease the pain. (Rich)

Likewise, John Beaufort's review for the *Christian Science Monitor* (also on the original production) states, "Along the way, the author engages in playful nonsense, lampoons of everyday bourgeois life, literary allusions, and occasional vaudeville set pieces. His caricatures

are typified by [characters performing comically]. In other words, ‘The Marriage of Bette and Boo’ might be described as a cartoon strip by a very bright child who grew up to be Christopher Durang” (Beaufort). Durang is known for his satirical representations of life on the stage, and *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* was seen as play that followed in this vein.

The play is a two-act dark comedy told to us in thirty-three scenes (some of which are monologues) and focuses on the relationship of Bette and Boo from their nuptials and the birth of their son Mark, who acts as both a narrator of and character within the action of the play, through the demise of their marriage. Following the opening scene, the marriage begins to sour as Boo’s drinking increases and becomes more of a concern for Bette. Additionally, Bette is unable to conceive a child other than Matt and is met with a series of stillborn births, tormented by Boo’s abusive father, forced to manage the tribulations of her stroke-ridden father (who eventually dies), and deal with her sisters, each of whom bring their own set of baggage that tests Bette to her emotional limits. Ultimately, Bette and Boo’s marriage dissolves, in spite of Bette’s efforts to get Boo to stop drinking (with the help of an inept Catholic Priest, Father Donnally). In the three decades that the play encompasses, we see a myriad of issues that focus on how Boo is unable to face his problems because he is inhibited by his abuse of alcohol and how that behavior effects his relationship with not only Bette, but also with Mark.

We are guided through the action by Matt (originally played by Durang himself), who allows the audience to jump with him through time and space. Matt comments on and acts within scenes involving his parents, both of whom come from troubled families, suffer through a series of miscarriages, passive aggressive communications regarding Boo’s increased abuse of alcohol, and a general cornucopia of mental, physical, and emotional problems that lead to compounding low self-esteem and disturbing self-destructive behaviors. An autobiographical play based on the

marriage of his own parents, using dark-comedy as a means of alleviating tension, ...*Bette and Boo* attempts to comment on various social and familial fallacies that disrupted Durang's youth. Matt is Durang's voice directly and metaphorically, and with the playwright performing Matt in the original production, the lines between realities and biased memories are increasingly blurred. Matt's opening monologue sets the tone for what we (as audience members) should be tracking across the play:

MATT: If one looks hard enough, one can usually see the order that lies
beneath the surface. (Durang 8)

While the play focuses on a series of situations about family dysfunction and personal responsibility (or lack of), the core of each scene, and therefore the overall story, is the relationship between Bette and Boo. Bette is an abused young woman, dismissed by others and credited more for her looks than her spirit. While she loves Boo, and hopes that he overcomes his drinking, she is at a loss as to how to help him deal with his increasing use of alcohol. In Scene 6, Bette has a conversation with her mother-in-law (Soot), illustrating her growing concerns, only to be met by feigned ignorance and interrupted by her father-in-law (Karl):

BETTE: (to Soot) I think Booeey drinks too much. Does Mr. Hudlocke
drink too much?

SOOT: I never think about it.

KARL: Soot, get me and Bore another drink. (Durang 13)

Karl is a dastardly abusive, misogynistic bully who consistently forces his son (Boo) to drink. He verbally abuses Soot, objectifies Bette, and manipulates Boo throughout the play. Even though Boo attempts to stay strong, he always makes excuses for his father and succumbs to his father's pressures, usually resulting in drinking alcohol.

There is little accountability for Boo's drinking, and we only see him regret his actions when he is forced to meet with a priest, who Bette enlists to help her fight against Boo's alcohol abuse. As a result of Boo's drinking, Bette and Father Donnally intervene (again) to force Boo into changing his behavior. According to Bette, Boo is out of control and is unwilling to change what she sees as his evil ways. Therefore, she has no choice but to make Boo contractually agree to stop his drinking in attempt to save their marriage:

BOO: (*reading*) I pledge in front of Father Donnally to give up drinking in order to save my marriage and to make my wife and son happy, and this time I mean it. (Durang 36)

BETTE: Read the other part.

BOO: (*reading*) And I promise to tell my father to go to hell.

Durang's priest, Father Donnally, is hapless and provides little help to Bette or Boo; he apathetically blesses Boo as they head home. Father Donnally (and the Catholic dogma he represents) is the sole means of treatment that is given to Boo, but it is unwanted help and forced onto to him because Boo's behavior is unacceptable and needs external intervention to be remedied. Unfortunately, Boo sees this as yet another attempt for Bette to rein him in and try to control him even more through the guilt provided by "God's-eye." However, Boo's abuse of alcohol escalates as he becomes more and more psychologically dependent.

In a later scene where Bette has again returned to the hospital to have another baby (who is stillborn and yet again unceremoniously tossed onto the stage from the wings—dead), she adds a new complication to her deteriorating relationship with Boo by admitting that she no longer loves him. As Boo is presented with this situation of dueling-deaths (death of child and death of relationship), he immediately shifts his focus to his addiction.

BOO: Why do they never have a bar in this hospital? Maybe there's one
on another floor. (Durang 56)

He is looking for not just a physical escape but also an emotional and mental escape. His desire to flee from the heightened tension of the situation is expressed by his desire to drink, not because he's thirsty, but because he cannot deal with the intensity of the emotions in this moment. At his core, Boo's fanaticism to escape from uncomfortably emotional situations is even more detrimental than his physio/psychological dependency to alcohol.

In a scene where Matt states it is twenty years later (even though this is one of the earlier scenes in the play), Boo and Bette are no longer together, and we see how the compounding effects of Boo's drinking have caught up with him. He has become a conniving, manipulating individual who distorts reality to suit his own needs:

BOO: I miss your mother. I'd go back with her in a minute if she wanted.
She's not in love with her family anymore, and I think she knows that
drinking wasn't that much of a problem. (Durang 16)

With this scene taking place at the early part of the play (approximately fifteen minutes from the opening), we are provided with the information that the marriage is doomed to begin with. Therefore we must be watching this play for another reason, the reason being that the play is not about the marriage, but rather about the relationships surrounding the marriage. For example, in this scene between Boo and his son, we are shown how Boo's addiction has altered his way of thinking, and he attempts to convince Matt of how past events "really" took place. Boo's attempted manipulation of Matt is also an attempt to convince himself that the results of his past actions are not his responsibility. Boo is attempting to absolve himself of any wrong doing while

simultaneously manipulating Matt—hoping to recruit his son to Boo’s way of looking at past events.

As an outsider to his parents’ marriage, Matt occupies a privileged vantage point from which to see that his father’s alcoholism is only one of many problems within the marriage. Matt sees and has experienced the detrimental ramifications brought on by his father’s drinking, but he is also quite aware that after years of dealing with Boo as an abusive drinker, his mother has become desperate and rigid in her overall perspectives:

BETTE: (*to audience and/or herself.*) I’m going to pretend that I’m sitting in this chair. Then I’m going to pretend that I’m going to have another baby. And then I’m going to have another and another and another. I’m going to pretend to have a big family. They’ll be Skippy [Matt]. And then all the A.A. Milne character. Boo should join A.A. There’ll be Eeyore and Pooh Bear and Christopher Robin and Tigger... My family is going to be like an enormous orphanage. I’ll be their mother. Kanga and six hundred Baby Roos. [...] (Durang 20).

In the short scene following this monologue, the Doctor comes out to tell everyone that the latest baby has died (adding to the long list). The deaths are due to the fact that while Boo has “Rh positive blood,” Bette has “Rh negative blood,” therefore:

DOCTOR: And so the mother’s blood fights the baby’s Rh positive blood and so: the mother kills the baby.

EMILY: (*rather horrified*) Who did this??? The mother did this???

KARL: You married a winner, Bore. (Durang 21)

Bette and Boo are both mentally and emotionally unable to take care of their respective problems, and as a result, blame the other for the apparent deficiencies in their marriage.

MATT: As to emotional dangers, one should always try to avoid crazy people, especially in marriage or live-in situations, but in everyday life as well. Although crazy people often mean well, meaning well is not enough. On some level Attila the Hun may have meant well. (Durang 51)

In his statement, Matt calls attention to a series of beliefs he has towards his parents: that although he does not doubt his parents' love, he in no way views them as sane, and as a result, his parents are very dangerous to him and others.

Unfortunately, the problem with satirizing something like alcoholism and family dysfunction is that the audience may not always be “in” on the “joke.” Rich points out some internal conflict about the message of the play in his review as he states, “What remains unclear this time is whether Mr. Durang is easing the pain or merely papering it over” (Rich). When it comes to *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, are we laughing at the situations because they are poignant situations where we reflect on our own behaviors, or are we laughing as a nervous reaction to the depravity being shown to us? Are we laughing because we get the jokes or to alleviate our own discomfort? Are we laughing with the characters or at their expense?

When it comes to alcohol abuse/dependency and comedy, these are important questions to ask. As Norman K. Denzin points out in *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, connections between comedy and alcohol are tenuous, because while alcohol can be seen to loosen inhibitions, allowing for a character to become funnier, the use of alcohol taken to an extreme can be seen as an aggressive attack against authority (21). The use of alcohol in comedy acts to increase

comedic devices (such as satire, physical comedy, and/or verbal witticisms). Whether a story is a comedy or not, audiences expect resolutions to the complications brought up in stories they are shown. Denzin notes, “By joining alcohol with comedy, the popular (and high) culture displaces alcohol’s negative effects into the pleasurable regions of experience historically and traditionally given over to comedy, good times, fun, and nondestructive ‘drunken comportment’” (23). To have an alcoholic character within a comedy diminishes the seriousness of the alcohol abuse, denigrating the destructive behaviors to (and the identified alcoholic as somebody) outside the norm, essentially sending the message that being drunk is funny.

While Durang uses his personal life as inspiration for the play, the choice to use the style of comedy does a disservice to our ability to see the detriments of Boo’s actions. In the author’s notes to the acting edition of the play, Durang says that “Boo is at core very sweet, and he probably loves Bette very much” (Durang 79). This statement is problematic for two reasons. The first reason is that this sentence is part of twenty-two pages of notes that range from Durang’s understanding of the characters to the development of the play to notes on pronunciation, direction, settings, and several other topics. As a playwright, I read these notes in two ways: 1) Durang is uncertain as to what the play is communicating to potential readers, therefore needs ancillary qualifications for it to make sense, and 2) He is unwilling to accept others’ interpretations of the play, which may conflict with his own conceptions—a fear felt by many playwrights, but collaboration is naturally a part of the business.

The second problem with Durang’s statement is the use of the word “probably.” Does this indicate that he is not entirely certain how Boo really feels about Bette? Is this more of a subconscious slip of the tongue where he is really confessing that he does not know how his own father felt about his mother? The answers are actually irrelevant because the point is the

uncertainty. Uncertainty is an overwhelming issue within the play and how audiences have received the play. Theatre critic Mel Gussow, who reviewed several of Durang's plays for *The New York Times* in 1985, noted the recurrent situations as set forth in Durang's plays:

[Durang's] beginnings and middles are rife with some of the most devastating jibes at the society that happens to be concurrent with the life and rude times of Christopher Durang. With his chilled scalpel, he has committed surgical mayhem on Catholic education, sibling rivalry, sempiternal maternalism, country club snobbery, the movie images that shaped our youth and the myth that, in Mr. Durang's eyes, masquerades as modern marriage. On the psychoanalyst's couch, his plays would reveal a love-hate relationship with mother, father, sister, brother, babies and self, but with the saving grace of deep, black humor. Mr. Durang causes laughter at our, and at his, expense. [...] Whether it is "Titanic," "Sister Mary" or "Bette and Boo," or parts of any other of his comedies, Mr. Durang is most amusing in short dosages, and...he is one of our deftest writers of satiric sketches. Longer Durang need not wear out its welcome. The playwright simply has to find a subject, story and characters that can hold his interest as well as ours for the long comic journey. (Gussow)

Gussow is trying to make sense of Durang—so careful in some aspects, yet so unclear in others. These sentiments are echoed over twenty years later when the Roundabout Theater Company staged *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* in 2008.

Of the production, *The L Magazine* reviewer Mary Block stated, "It's a good idea to tell people, before they see a Christopher Durang play for the first time, that it's ok to laugh. The

stroke-victim father with the partially paralyzed face, the stillborn babies dropped with a thud on the floor by the obstetrician — it’s all part of the fun” (Block). The same production led *New York Times* reviewer Charles Isherwood to write, “As it was, I found myself squirming in discomfort more often than I would have liked, not laughing but wincing and sensing a desperation in the play that the production keeps at bay, that perhaps Mr. Durang could not bring himself to confront” (Isherwood). Block even concludes her article with the statement, “*The Marriage of Bette and Boo* is a decadent tangle of black comedy and true tragedy, and it falls on the actors to guide their audience through it” (Block). These statements bring me back to my original questions: What exactly are we laughing at when it comes to *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*?

Obviously, the answer to this question is variable, and I cannot speak for anybody other than myself. So I will say that I share Isherwood’s feelings as *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* makes me squirm, and not because I find it funny. I am uncomfortable with the portrayals of verbal and emotional abuse in satire. It is one thing to have a Chaplin-esque character (or Three Stooges, or Looney Toons) portraying a slapstick laden scene due to inebriation, but the stage is different. We are occupying a space with live people and dealing with a serious issue, to which (as has been mentioned) we may have deep, personal connections. When it comes to alcohol abuse/dependency and comedy, the severity of the topic is diminished, and a detriment to overcoming stereotypes and stigmas.

The Scene: The Unnecessary Employment of Alcohol

When reading Theresa Rebeck’s 2007 play *The Scene*, I found myself asking why the use of alcohol was necessary to the dramatic action, to the themes/messages of the play, and to the

overall development of the characters, and unfortunately, I was not left with satisfying answers. As previously stated, playwrights seek to achieve a mastery of their craft and devote months, sometimes even years, to crafting a play. From the workshop process that helps solidify the text, to staged readings, to the weeks and/or months spent in rehearsals, previews, and production, it is safe to say that by the time a play is published, the playwright has made clear and conscious choices as to why a word is spoken, a phrase uttered, an action employed, and/or a particular device warranted. However, in the case of *The Scene* (as an example of other works), the use of alcohol and choosing to make a character an alcoholic is, for lack of a better word, unnecessary.

Consider the play's description on the back-cover of the Samuel French edition, which states, "A young social climber leads an actor into an extra-marital affair, from which he then creates a full-on downward spiral into alcoholism and bummery. His wife runs off with his best friend, his girlfriend leaves, and he's left with... nothing" (Rebeck). At first read, I was struck by the immediate association with "alcoholism" to "bummery," an obvious association that denotes one is tantamount to the other. On second read, I highlighted the obligatory use of "alcoholism" as descriptor. On subsequent reads, I was struck by a confusing message that was only compounded the more I read the synopsis—is this play about the young social climber or the actor? Has he always been somebody who has struggled with alcohol abuse or is this a play about how it develops? Is he left with nothing because of his drinking, or are there other factors? Ultimately, I concluded that the play I was about to read was about an actor who has an affair, drinks a lot as a result of it, and then loses everything because he is so out of control. Sadly, I was right.

The Scene is a play about Charlie, a seemingly talented actor who is in-between projects, sought after by some while seeking out other projects that peak his interests. At the opening of

the play, Charlie is at a party with his best-friend, Lewis, and the two of them are conversing with Clea, a young aspiring actress who has just arrived in New York to pursue her career. The three converse about the party, when Clea opens up about herself and her apprehension of being at parties:

CLEA: No no, I don't drink. My mother was an alcoholic. I mean, she was a wonderful woman and she really loved me but it's like alcohol is so deadly, I mean at these parties sometimes when I'm at a party like this? To stand around and watch everyone turn into zombies around me? It really triggers me, you know? You go ahead. I mean, that's just for me, I don't impose that on people or anything.

LEWIS: I mean, it's not like, I'm not like a huge drinker, or –

CLEA: Oh good, because you, I was at this party last week it was such a scene, there were so many people there. [...] ...it was this wild party, like surreal, and then at one point in the evening? I just realized, that everyone was just totally shitfaced. I mean I don't want to be reactive in situations like, that, I like to judge people on a really superficial level or anything but it was kind of horrifying. I mean, not I – you know, drink, you should drink! Enjoy yourselves!

(Lewis and Charlie look at their drinks.)

CHARLIE: Yeah, well, I think I'm gonna head out. (Rebeck 8-9)

Even though Clea claims to have some level of awareness to alcoholic behavior and drops coded words and phrases (i.e., “triggered,” “reactive” not wanting to “judge”) she is passively aggressively perpetuating a lot of judgment in a very reactive manner. Charlie's response is

perceived by Clea as a slight, and even though they leave this scene at odds, in scene three, not only do we find out that Clea does in fact drink, but by the end of the scene, she and Charlie begin their affair. This drastic shift is initiated by Charlie entering the third scene (which takes place in Lewis' apartment – where Clea and Lewis are on a “date”) and proceeds to drink vodka straight from the bottle that is being shared by Clea and Lewis. The more Charlie drinks, the more passionate he becomes in his various tirades, and Clea quickly forgets that she was making out with Lewis right before Charlie entered and moves on to being with Charlie.

Sandwiched between scenes one and three is scene two, featuring Charlie and Lewis drinking shots of tequila with Charlie's wife, Stella. The three of them talk over each other about who had the worse day, who has to deal with the worst kind of people more, and how terrible Clea was (even though Lewis found her to be attractive). As they pass the bottle around and continue to take shots, Stella and Lewis attempt to convince Charlie to speak to a writer about an upcoming pilot in which, they believe, Charlie would be perfect. Charlie refuses because he does not like the writer nor does he believe the pilot actually exists. The scene ends with Charlie shouting at Stella for asking him to speak to the writer.

These three scenes set the tone of the play. Not only does each scene feature Charlie and other characters drinking in excess, but the introduction of Clea's statements regarding alcohol abuse show an awareness that alcohol can lead to dangerous behaviors. Yet what is portrayed is a surface level depiction that is never critically indicted. In short, Charlie is made to epitomize the stereotypical alcoholic, moving from somebody who likes to drink (Loveable Lush), to somebody who displays disturbing, erratic, and destructive behaviors (Violent Villain), to be left alone and miserable (Despondent Drunk); he is shown as self-centered, egotistical, irresponsible, destructive, and abusive—unredeemable because of his inability to “control” his drinking.

However, the use of alcohol is not needed to see these aspects in Charlie, yet alcohol is employed to heighten Charlie's less endearing qualities. Whereas he is first seen by Clea as an edgy intellectual as he is able to charm her with prophetic diatribes about art, society, philosophy and the like, the incorporation of alcohol takes him into behaving "like" an alcoholic would—like a stereotype. Initially, Charlie's passionate use of words and ability to go on his rants are an attraction to Clea. In an early rendezvous, Charlie eloquently states:

CHARLIE: Let's be precise. What's surreal, if anything is one's internal state in a situation like that. Everyone acts like surreal is some sort of definition, an image can be surreal, water or or or air, how can that be surreal? Water and air, that's the definition of real. Surreal is more the connection. Or not. (Rebeck 20)

This is also a moment of foreshadowing that shows the inevitability of Charlie's descent. He is an intelligent individual with a keen understanding of philosophy and human behavior, and while the alcohol he is consuming does not change who he is, it enhances him, dampening his inhibitions, making him believe that his actions and his own responses to those actions are justifiable.

Charlie's apparent passion is also his downfall as his superior attitude becomes infused with a sense of invulnerability. In a return to his disdain for the writer with the pilot (Nick), Charlie verbosely supports his (distorted) perspectives:

CHARLIE: But he's still the object of desire, isn't he? Him and that fucking pilot. He could be shooting kiddie porn as far as anyone's concerned and I still have to suck up, don't I, that's how degraded this whole fucking planet has gotten, SUCK UP to assholes like Nick

because they have something you must want even though you don't, you don't want it, everyone just thinks, God, it's like we don't even know how to have a real DESIRE anymore! (Rebeck 39)

He cannot understand how talking so terribly bad about somebody who has the potential to further his career could be damaging. Charlie's need to be heard results in the fact that he IS actually heard by Clea, Stella, Lewis, and eventually, the never seen Nick who wants nothing to do with an "unstable" Charlie.

When Stella catches Charlie having sex with Clea (in Stella and Charlie's home), Charlie starts off apologizing before turning the situation around on Stella, claiming the affair was her fault, and that he needs to feel "something," to which Stella states:

STELLA: Are you kidding me? I mean it. You don't like your life so you honestly think that screwing that girl—that girl who can hardly speak—who has no character or substance or anything—that that is going to do something, for you, make you whole, make you understand who you are in the world—

CHARLIE: I don't want that. Don't you understand?

STELLA: This is just, it's just self-loathing, Charlie! You're projecting your self-loathing all over the rest of us and destroying everything so you can destroy yourself—

CHARLIE: Thanks, Stell, that's really, this is a thrilling moment to be psychoanalyzed—

STELLA: What else am I supposed to do?

CHARLIE: Don't do anything! And don't explain this because I don't want to understand it! I just want to feel something. Remember when you felt things? (Rebeck 57)

Charlie views the situation into which Stella walks as her fault and illustrates his disconnect from how his actions impact others and his inability to accept responsibility for his actions. He is blinded by pride and arrogance as he quickly shifts from accepting wrong-doing when first caught by Stella, to blaming Stella for being cold and unwilling to understand him. Charlie's actions are a violation of his marriage, and his inability to see that he has done anything wrong illustrates that he is living in a deluded sense of reality.

Later, when Charlie is challenged by Clea, he perceives a threat and turns on her as well. His verbal abuse becomes irrational when he feels the slightest sense that he is losing control:

CHARLIE: You look like that, you screw like a bunny, and you have no soul! Seriously. It is awe inspiring. That no soul thing? You make it quite, it's very seductive. (Rebeck 71)

His attempts to demean Clea are a vain attempt to re-possess her. Charlie is attempting to right a wrong, but he cannot understand that the real wrong was his creation due to his "out of control" behavior. Ultimately, his attack on Clea is what leads into the conclusion of the play, when Clea confronts Charlie on his behavior:

CLEA: Get it together, would you? God, you're a mess, you're really just a total wreck and there's a party going on in there, Charlie! Get a clue! [...] Honestly, you are so much work, I'm going to have to have a massage for a week to get over this. I mean it. It's a party! Okay,

Charlie? It's a party. (*she pushes by him, back into the party. Charlie watches her go, then looks out over the water.*)

CHARLIE: It is surreal. That's exactly what it is. (*He leans back, looking into the doorway, considering whether or not he will re-enter the fray. Blackout. End of play.*) (Rebeck 79)

In the end, the audience is left with Charlie, staring out over the waves, alone, with nobody to blame except for himself. Charlie's descent into an alcohol infused downward-spiral is apparently a morality tale on the evils of drinking. Surprisingly, this may not be the intentions for which Rebeck wrote the play.

In spite of the fact that the characters initiate the unfolding drama because they get drunk time and time again, there is no chance for us to see Charlie other than as the stereotypical alcoholic, nor do we have an opportunity to understand the true meaning of the play because we are distracted by Charlie's repetitive and impulsive behaviors. In an overwhelmingly positive review of the original production, Charles Isherwood concludes his *New York Times* piece by calling Charlie a "former good guy" who is a rarity and among the many men who have given up on aspiring for personal fulfillment and satisfaction, "but are seduced instead by the empty blandishments that have become the brands signifying success and worldly happiness: the hot blonde, the stratospheric paycheck, the limo and the access to the V.I.P. room" (Isherwood). But Isherwood's interpretation of Charlie is skewed.

At what point do we see Charlie behaving as a "good guy"? He says terrible things about the people with whom he works, he lies to his friends, he cheats on his wife (and blames her for his infidelity), and shifts all accountability for his troubles onto Clea, for in Charlie's mind, she is seductive and manipulative. Charlie is a stereotype, a sketch of a character that

believes the image he has of himself, yet illustrates an equally powerful (to use Stella's words) "self-loathing."

The Scene is structured in a traditional manner (i.e., a linear, cause and effect plot that adheres to representational characteristics), and in choosing this style of play, Rebeck is also accepting the inherent elements that are associated with this structure. One of these elements is that we, as audiences, should see a dramatic change or shift in the protagonist character. One of the oldest elements of the traditional structure is that we are with the protagonist throughout the journey of the play, and as this individual pursues her/his objective and is met by obstacles, in the end, whether they are able to achieve/obtain their objective, they have learned something great that the audience learns as well. For good or bad, the protagonist is a new person internally *and* externally, and the plot, story, and journey have changed this person forever.

So the question for *The Scene* becomes, how does Charlie change? In the beginning, he is a verbose, arrogant, elitist jerk who drinks too much. In the end, he is a verbose, arrogant, elitist jerk who drinks more than he did at the beginning and no longer has a wife, best-friend or mistress. So while Charlie's relationships have been altered and circumstances connected to his vocation and physical well-being have changed for the worse, Charlie himself is essentially still the same, with the same problems, the same outlooks on life; *internally*, he is the same person.

Additionally, Rebeck relies on the use of alcohol to fuel Charlie's poor decisions, dropping topical buzz-words that indicate an awareness of the detriments of alcohol abuse, yet Charlie never grows. From beginning to end, he is the same person, only he becomes more "alcoholic" and "bum[ish]." Every choice he makes that ends up having negative consequences occurs because he is drunk, but it is not until the end, when he has lost everything that Clea tells him he needs to take care of himself. As a result, Rebeck leaves us with a message that warns us

to be wary of the youthful temptress, as opposed to staying accountable for our own actions. Yet, if Rebeck's intentions are to indeed warn us about the overzealous manipulations of those around us (which is not the message received upon my own reading), then employing the use of alcohol detracts and distracts from Clea's apparent machinations. In this case, the use of alcohol acts as an excuse, a scapegoat employed to destabilize Charlie; had the use of alcohol been removed from the play, we would see a character who makes choices (albeit poor choices) of his own accord, not through the distorted lenses that alcohol creates. Charlie's decent is demeaned, the supposed tragedy of him falling from grace is never experienced because we never see Charlie do, say, or be anything other than the stereotypical alcoholic, which is a stereotype with whom it is very difficult to understand or feel for with any lasting, significant compassion. Charlie is fueled by alcohol and his fall from being a "former good guy" is actually never seen because we never see a Charlie make rational decisions. Therefore, we are forced to ask ourselves, "Do we ever really know Charlie? Who is this stereotype and why should I care if he succeeds?"

Summary

Alcohol abuse/dependency is a social and cultural issue that is commonly misunderstood and reified through the rhetoric used to discuss alcoholism and marginalized through the actions taken to confront the disease. Examples include placating the Loveable Lush, dismissing and avoiding the Despondent Drunk, learning to hate the Violent Villain, or a combination of any of these courses of action. These characterizations do a disservice to the social issues represented by oversimplifying and supporting reductionist perspectives of alcohol abuse/dependency, and problems arise when the stage is used to characterize the alcoholic as a stereotype.

The plays in this chapter are representations of larger issues found in the vast body of American dramatic literature. While *Our Town* and *Long Day's Journey into Night* make valiant attempts to understand and depict the complications regarding alcohol abuse/dependency, they were both limited by the respective cultures in which they were written. Wilder's depiction of Stimson is an attempt to show the darkness in the world, and O'Neill's Tyrone family is an insightful effort to show the destructive power that substance abuse has on families. However, each play (and in the case of *Long Day's Journey...*, the playwright himself) was confined to social stigmas, and for O'Neill, the play indicates the fear an individual (or a family) endures when faced with those stigmas.

Christopher Durang's *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* illustrates a playwright who is less fearful of associating himself with his autobiographical work, yet Durang perpetuates stereotypes due to his inability to disconnect from comedy. Likewise, and in spite of the increased awareness of alcohol abuse/dependency being a disease, Theresa Rebeck's *The Scene* is an example of a larger genre of work that continues to focus on alcoholism as a means to reach for entertaining dramatic action. The alcoholic is no more than a character to be feared, eschewed, pitied, and ultimately pushed away for the safety of the majority.

When Dr. Silkworth wrote his letter supporting the efforts of Alcoholics Anonymous, he was speaking from a place of inclusion and advocating for a deeper understanding of those suffering from alcohol abuse/dependency. The stage has a potential to make inclusion of marginalized alcoholics (active or recovering) happen as well as initiate critical thinking regarding the topics of alcohol abuse/dependency. However, dramatists must approach these topics cautiously and with an understanding of hazardous, stereotypical depictions. In this day and age, there are far too many conversations in our daily lives that focus on the overt use of

stereotypes as a means of entertainment and the detrimental results that can occur from such actions. Stage and theatre practitioners have an obligation to elevate the standards of their work and eliminate these destructive depictions and practices.

The following chapter turns the corner to move past and through the problematic structural and character designs featured in this chapter. In the next chapter, three plays will be analyzed to model a specific method of analysis, but to also look at more complicated depictions of the alcoholic character.

CHAPTER 3

HUMANIZING THE ALCOHOLIC IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN DRAMA

Condemnation by category is the lowest form of hatred, for it is cold-hearted and abstract, lacking even the courage of a personal hatred. Categorical condemnation is the hatred of the mob. It makes cowards brave. [...] This can happen only after we have made a categorical refusal to kindness: to heretics, foreigners, enemies or any other group different from ourselves.

- Wendell Berry

Author, essayist, and 2010 National Humanities Medal recipient Wendell Berry offered the above statement regarding same-sex marriage in his address to a convened council called “Following the Call of the Church in Times Like These” at Georgetown College on January 11, 2013 (Allen). Even though Berry was addressing the issue of marriage equality, his words resonate with the broader issue of why we, as a culture, need to address the rampant categorization of demographics. Categorization is often arbitrary and imposed by the top-tier of a hierarchical structure. The arbitrarily sanctioned categorization of people leads to condemnation of those perceived to be different, on the fringe of the norm, potentially concluding with discriminatory practices.

In cases of individuals and families suffering from alcohol abuse/dependency, feelings of being wrong, or bad, or evil are common. Those afflicted feel badly about their actions, but also about whom they are as individuals, which stems from cultural misconceptions perpetuated in

our daily lives—from what is shown on the stage to what is discussed in interpersonal conversations. Cultural awareness of the delicate nature of alcohol abuse/dependency and recovery programs is on the rise. I am encouraged by the growing calls to shift the tone of our conversations, to be open to new conceptions so we may discuss our perceptions of alcohol abuse/dependency and the alcoholic more effectively; however, as shown in the previous chapter, the theatre has and continues to perpetuate stigmas and stereotypes.

Fortunately, some plays and playwrights offer us examples that call attention to more complicated depictions that move beyond stereotypes. This chapter focuses on three such plays. As with the previous chapter, the plays featured here are not considered “good” or “bad” plays, nor do they solve all of the problems set forth by generations of reductive, rudimentary, and/or stereotypical depictions of alcoholic characters. However, these plays offer characters with a deeper dimensionality that creates a more dynamic characterization, a more complicated characterization of a person suffering from alcohol abuse/dependency. In this chapter, I look at Paula Vogel’s 1997 play *How I Learned to Drive*, Tracy Letts’s 2009 play *August: Osage County*, and Stephen Adly Guirgis’s 2011 play *The Motherfucker With the Hat*. As I draw pertinent information from Erving Goffman, Norman K. Denzin, and neurobiological and social/psychological principles of addiction, I analyze these three plays to illustrate how the use of archetypes as a method of analysis can further illuminate the topic of alcohol abuse/dependency and negotiations of identity faced by the alcoholic characters in these plays.

I use archetypes as metaphors in the same vein as Christopher Vogler does in his 1998 book, *The Writer’s Journey*, in which he states that archetypes can be used “...not as rigid character roles but as functions performed temporarily by characters to achieve certain effects in the story...as masks...” (30). Erving Goffman’s work illuminates how we all perform particular

roles for specific situations—a symbolic wearing of an appropriate mask to suit a specified environment or event. This is not to mean that we walk through life adopting a series of deceptive identities that hide who we are—a *true* version of our overall self. Rather, we recognize that certain environments require us to adopt particular modes and methods of conduct based on cultural mores and values. We adopt specific traits as needed simply to navigate through the various environments of our everyday lives, using specific traits suited to specific situations (For example, I may perform in a particular way when I occupy a classroom as a student as opposed to how I perform in that same classroom when I am the instructor.). This role-adoption is exponentially magnified for an identified alcoholic as s/he is aware of her/his label and affiliation with a group who has been marked as being on the fringe of cultural norms, and in order to “fit in” or to “pass”—either as sober or as “normal”—the alcoholic adopts traits as a means to navigate in a world that may see her/him as different.

When it comes to stage depictions of alcoholic characters, the roles/traits that they adopt can be examined through selected archetypes, which act to illuminate the identity politics an alcoholic undergoes in negotiating her/his day-to-day living. Another way of looking at identity politics is in terms of self-identity, which, when looking at dramatic literature, can be derived from extrapolating information based on what characters say or how other characters speak to or speak regarding the character(s) in question. In looking at the extrapolated information, the identification of a particularly appropriate archetype can be chosen based on the archetype’s definition and applicable uses. This is a delicate process as applying a single archetype to analyze a character is just as problematic as employing a blanket, generalized stereotype. To say that an alcoholic is more nuanced simply because s/he exhibits the traits of an Architect or

performs as Martyr yet nothing else, still illustrates a two-dimensional characterization—a one-note character without nuance or depth.

The use of archetypes only works when we are able to apply multiple archetypal depictions to a single character. We need to be able to approach the alcoholic character as we do any other, understanding how the alcoholic depicted employs various tactics that exhibit layers of identity, which can be analyzed in more depth with the added application of particular archetypes. Through the use of archetypes as the lens to analyze characters, we see playwrights moving past marginalized depictions of the weak-alcoholic or the lacking-a-moral-center-alcoholic and avoid the pitfall of alcohol-as-agent of chaos to further dramatic action, thus, illustrating the complicated and dichotomous negotiations of identity the alcoholic endures during active addiction and/or upon entering recovery.

Using the plays by Vogel, Letts, and Guirgis as examples of works that contain nuanced depictions of alcoholic characters, the application of archetypes to these characters then becomes a method to psychologize the characters' respective desires, their behaviors/actions, and acts as a means for deeper understanding as to how they perceive their respective self-identity(ies). By following this model, practitioners (directors, performers, designers, etc.) can take the characters and further and deepen the presentation or performance to audiences. By extension, this practice can potentially broaden the audiences' understandings of alcohol abuse/dependency, thus, opening dialogues about the issues of alcoholism use and abuse. These three dramatic depictions of alcoholic characters transcend previous stereotypical depictions, illustrating how playwrights imbue alcoholic characters with varied personality traits and identity markers, offering practitioners an opportunity to present an even more complicated/nuanced performance of the

alcoholic, giving audiences an opportunity to access broader conversations regarding alcohol abuse/dependency.

Troubling the Stereotype/Humanizing through Archetypes

It would be impossible to provide a comprehensive review of the volumes of literature from various disciplines that look at alcoholism and addiction from varying perspectives. However, here I provide some basic concepts as foundations for my interdisciplinary approach. Alcohol abuse/dependency is a complicated and controversial topic of study, and it is necessary to lay out the basic theories from which I will draw prior to entering the analyses of the plays. As outlined in Chapter 1, the mysterious origins and lack of a clear “cause” result in some of the cultural suspicion as to what alcoholism is and how this disease affects an individual. Even though Carlton K. Erickson discusses in *The Science of Addiction* how theories as to what causes alcoholism rest in neuroadaptation or genetic susceptibility or a combination of the two (51-2), the generally-accepted understanding of alcohol abuse/dependency as a disease seems to be forgotten as the societal stigmas associated with alcoholism take precedence over scientific understandings.

In his analysis of alcoholism as depicted in Hollywood films, Norman K. Denzin’s *Hollywood Shot by Shot* shows how surface level depictions of alcoholics focus on the individual as having personal problems that develop “occasions for moralistic, didactic discussions of alcoholism,” which are ultimately destructive to the person and the culture and lead to “fractured reflections of the American concern for its ‘alcoholism’ problem” (xiii). Topics of alcohol abuse/dependency that are featured in contemporary forms of art and entertainment supposedly speak to the presence of the alcoholic in our everyday lives, but “they do so by creating a very

specific type of discourse, [focusing on] the alcoholic as a ‘diseased,’ sick, often insane, violent person who violates the normal standards of everyday life” (Denzin, xiii). Even though these depictions might lead to negative stereotypes, stereotypes as a device to develop a character or understand a person may not always be considered negative.

As detailed by Ronald J. Pelias in his 1999 book *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*, some stereotypes can be useful in broader contexts. Pelias emphasizes that when an individual defines her/himself based on social or cultural positions, an onlooker is led to understand the individual based on “adoptive stereotyping” which “rests on the belief that by classifying people according to some category, we gain some understanding of them” (94). Anne Bogart provides a deeper explanation of the usefulness of stereotypes in her 2001 text *A Director Prepares* as she recalls a conversation with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki in which he expresses his condemnation of a native Japanese actress being cast in the title role of *Medea*.

Bogart recalls how Suzuki’s concern came from a place of fear that the actress’s Japanese heritage would be used at the expense of the performer; the company would use the performer’s ethnicity to project the otherness of the character without challenging what this practice may do to the performer. Bogart takes this story a step further talking of how stereotypes can be useful when a “fire” is put under them and “in the heat of interaction, they transform” (93). Bogart wrestles with the use of stereotypes finally stating that she desires a positive deployment of stereotypes that would challenge assumptions: “If we embrace rather than avoid stereotype, if we enter the container and push against its limits, we are testing our humanity and our wakefulness” (Bogart 111). The use of even adoptive stereotypes is problematic when categorizing leads to over generalizing and/or grossly simplifying an individual’s self-identified social/cultural affiliations.

When playwrights deal with character development, the oversimplification of a character's many self-identified connections leads to a lack of variation and individuality. As Paul C. Castagno states in his 2012 book *New Playwriting Strategies*, "stereotypical characters are uninteresting because they lack variation or individuality [...]. The stereotypical character functions as a thematic extension of the playwright's bias. It conforms to a standardized mental picture shared by a specific interest group" (111). The problem with adoptive stereotyping occurs when the broad categorization of a group (or an individual's identification with a group) becomes the norm, becomes the recognized definition of that group (or person). Instead of using adoptive stereotyping as a starting point to access understanding of a particular demographic, the broad understandings transform into *the* definition and are commonly recognized as the "truth." In effect, *adoptive* stereotyping, then, becomes *stereotyping*. Adoptive stereotyping is best employed as means to identify group characteristics, not as a means for defining what a group represents. Stereotyping stems from broadly categorizing and/or assuming that definitions represent the identities of an entire group. When playwrights or performers employ stereotyping the result is unimaginative, underdeveloped characters.

The alcoholic character requires that a "fire" be put under her/his presentation because of the overall negative associations connected to their role as an alcoholic. To simply state that a character is an alcoholic is not enough because of the many connections and influences that are in constant flux and negotiating with the character's surroundings. The character of the alcoholic is complicated by the many unseen influences and experiences s/he negotiates within her/his environment. Oversimplification of a character's self-identified connections leads to a lack of variation and individuality, and as a result, stereotypes must be pushed against, challenged, and troubled, just as identity itself is fluid merging/melding amalgam of numerous traits.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Erving Goffman's 1959 text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, states that as societal participants, we live on stage in our everyday lives, interacting with others as our audience(s). These interactions allow participants of a given culture opportunities to project stories of themselves and their lives and the varying conceptions of self to a constantly changing audience. Goffman's theories have become widely accepted over the past fifty years to the point that they barely need mentioning, yet everyday life performance is pertinent to the discussion of the alcoholic because of the always-on performances that influence the alcoholic's personal life.

To put it simply, those under the influence of alcohol have altered their brain chemistry, and somebody who has altered their brain chemistry over an extended period of time has effectively altered the way they perceive their actions and the ramifications of their actions. Understanding basic consequences can be difficult for the alcoholic, who finds it challenging to comprehend why their actions and thought processes are destructive to them and to those around them. Alcoholic behavior is dangerous in that alcoholics are unable to see the actions in a cause-and-effect manner. They can deny that what they do is hurtful or harmful, project various fears or emotions in unwarranted directions, and/or rationalize that the pain caused to others is justified in spite of facts or sound reasoning to the contrary. The erratic and often dangerous behaviors exhibited by an alcoholic can result in verbal and/or physical abuse and cause(s) those around the alcoholic to be in a constant state of uncertainty and apprehension, which is a symptom as a result of emotional abuse.

For the alcoholic who is in active addiction, the presentation of self is not only complicated by this series of unpredictable and abusive behaviors, which are rightfully deemed inappropriate by mainstream ideals of social decorum, but also by the necessity to hide these

behaviors (for example, through rationalizations to her/himself, or by withdrawing from social interactions in general). The reasons that the alcoholic's behaviors are deemed inappropriate are valid, because alcoholic behavior is irrational and hazardous. Yet for the alcoholic in recovery, there is no guarantee that these past behaviors have subsided or are gone forever. Therefore a performance is maintained to project that negative and destructive behaviors of the past have been brought under control even though the recovery process is delicate and susceptible to failure at any given moment. While drinking or while in sobriety, the alcoholic is seen as a violator of the rules of the stage of life and becomes identified as potentially dangerous. While this may seem like an unfair label to those who have found relief and/or made efforts to embrace a life of sobriety, and while the alcoholic may feel stigmatized and stereotyped, the reality is that it takes years of illustrating interpersonal, social, and cultural behaviors that are generally regarded as acceptable before the feelings of being "marked" can subside.

Theories of self as they pertain to social decorum and alcohol abuse/dependency are the tip of the proverbial iceberg that is the complicated, dichotomous mind of the alcoholic. The following plays feature small insights into the nature of alcoholism as it relates to the multi-faceted layers of identity and the depiction of alcoholism as "the result of an underlying disease process" (Thombs 6). For these analyses I draw from the previous theories as well as literature authorized by the Alcoholics Anonymous organization and literature intended to be used during the recovery process. Lastly, the archetypes of Architect, Dreamer, Conniver, Bon-Vivant, Martyr, and Oppressor are applied to selected characters in the texts/plays studied with the understanding that diverse characters exhibit various archetypes in any given moment to achieve objectives or avoid obstacles.

Uncle Peck: The Temporal Self and Supplementing

Paula Vogel's 1997 play *How I Learned to Drive* demonstrates the issues an alcoholic, in this case the character of Uncle Peck, has in rationally comprehending and dealing with his/her surrounding reality. This is a coming-of-age story told as memory play through an episodic structure (i.e., non-linear progression of time) from the perspective of Li'l Bit. The play uses learning to drive as a metaphorical through line showcasing the parallels between driving, growing up, and learning how to live one's life. Li'l Bit, a nickname delegated to her at birth referring to her genitalia (all members of her family are known by aspects of their bodies), is precocious as we watch her detail moments, memories, and scenes at various ages of her development from her early teens to her middle to late thirties. At the core of the play, and at the core of her becoming an adult, is her relationship with her Uncle Peck, who at times is a strong paternal figure (the only one Li'l Bit has) as well as the first person with whom Li'l Bit has a sexual relationship.

Although Peck does not drink at the outset of the play, he exemplifies what Alcoholics Anonymous literature refers to as a "dry drunk"—an individual who does not drink, yet rationalizes inappropriate and destructive behavior for their own motives. At the outset of the play, we find a seventeen year old Li'l Bit in a car with Peck, and with the two of them already entwined in foreplay, Peck introduces his pride about not drinking, yet uses it to his advantage:

LI'L BIT: Don't go over the line now.

PECK: I won't. I'm not gonna do anything you don't want me to do.

LI'L BIT: That's right.

PECK: And I've been good all week.

LI'L BIT: You have?

PECK: Yes. All week. Not a single drink.

LI'L BIT: Good boy.

PECK: Do I get a reward? For not drinking? (Vogel 11)

In the midst of this moment of intimacy, Peck is using his sobriety to get what he wants, which is an intriguing way of illustrating the complicated nature of the alcoholic and what Norman K. Denzin explains as *temporality* as laid out in his 1997 text, *The Alcoholic Society*. Denzin presents the alcoholic as dealing with an altered conception of time, called the “Temporality of Self,” in which the alcoholic has a series of internal and external negotiations of self which are dichotomous and unpredictable and can be demonstrated in how the alcoholic associates her/himself with conceptions of time (97-101). In short, the alcoholic uses alcohol to escape time, reminiscing or attempting to re-live the past at the expense of being responsible for present actions, which impact the future. In this initial greeting of Peck, we are not only introduced to him as a pursuer of Li'l Bit's virginity, but also her Uncle, as well as an individual who has identified himself as having problems with drinking too much alcohol. Later, we find that Peck is planning and strategizing about how he will meet up with his niece:

LI'L BIT: [...] ...I'm a big girl now, Uncle Peck. As you know. (*Li'l Bit pantomimes refastening her bra behind her back.*)

PECK: That you are. Going on eighteen. Kittens will turn into cats.

(*sighs.*) I live all week long for these few minutes with you – you know that? (Vogel 12)

Peck, a sober Peck, is still dealing with what is referred to as preoccupation, a sense that while not drinking, an alcoholic is preoccupied with the time when drinking will commence, yet in this

sense, Peck is supplementing his former use of alcohol with his using of Li'l Bit – both as a sexual object, and living vicariously through her own hazardous use of alcohol:

LI'L BIT: [...] Canadian V.O. A fifth a day. [...] and as long as I had gasoline for my car and whiskey for me, the nights would pass. Fully tanked, I would speed past the churches and trees on the bend... [...] – I never so much as got a ticket. He taught me well. (Vogel 16-17)

Even if we were to take Li'l Bit's age and her familial connection to Peck out of the equation, what Peck does to Li'l Bit is manipulative in that we see he cares for her, but he cares for her as something to be possessed and controlled. In a scene where the two characters share a meal at a restaurant, Peck orders drinks for Li'l Bit:

PECK: A drink for a woman of the world. – Please bring the lady a dry martini, be generous with the olive, straight up.

(The Male Greek Chorus anticipates a large tip.)

MALE GREEK CHORUS: *(as Waiter.)* Right away. Very good, Sir. *(The Male Greek Chorus returns with an empty martini glass which he puts in front of Lil Bit.)*

PECK: Your glass is empty. Another martini, madam?

LI'L BIT: Yes, thank you. (Vogel 19)

The complicated and admittedly disturbing relationship between Li'l Bit and Peck has layers that unfold throughout the play, and surprisingly, as the play concludes, we are left with an odd affinity for Peck in spite of his dastardly behavior. How is this possible?

In his 1997 *New York Times* review of the play, Steven Drukman states, “Vogel...began writing plays 20 years ago, concentrating on subjects that she says ‘are taboo’ -- not openly

discussed ‘but prevalent in the culture.’” (Drukman). The issue Vogel refers to here is Peck’s pedophilia. In addition to being a “recovering” alcoholic, he is also sexually pursuing his niece throughout the play. However, Vogel also tells Drukman that this play is more about power and the “eroticizing of children,” inspired by Vladimir Nabokov’s book, *Lolita* (Drukman). These ideas are conveyed to the audience in an episodic structure as Vogel moves backwards and forwards in time to suggest what *New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley says are “the ways memories attack by stealth and out of sequence,” thus making it more difficult “for the audience to form conventional judgments... Ms. Vogel is too intelligent to present this simply as a study in victim versus villain or to fail to acknowledge that what's happening is, in some appalling way, a real love story” (Brantley). Also citing Vogel, Brantley states that she “intended the play ‘to get the audience to go along for a ride they wouldn't ordinarily take, or don't even know they're taking.’ And it's true the work begins with a comic blitheness and detachment that immediately disarm. Then before you're even aware of it, you've fallen into dark, decidedly uncomfortable territory, and it's way too late to pull back” (Brantley). Essentially, Vogel is cautious and blatant that her construction of Uncle Peck hinged on the fact that he be a multi-faceted, complicated character; he is more than what the surface depicts, and what lies beneath the surface is more nuanced than we may initially believe.

New York Times reviewer William Grimes returned to the New York production nearly a month after the play’s opening. In his article, we hear more about Uncle Peck from the actor portraying him, David Morse, who was receiving consistently glowing reviews for his humane portrayal of the pedophilic Peck. In this article, Grimes enumerates the challenges facing Morse as he points to the difficulty in making Uncle Peck approachable and sympathetic (Grimes). Morse is even more helpful in providing insight into Peck:

If the audience is not attracted...then I'll have failed. You have to feel how [Li'l Bit is] attracted. My job is to be in love. We know from comments by Peck's wife that he's materially successful, but he's not successful at living comfortably in the world... He's torn apart by his history, which is something we only get little glimpses of in the play.

(Grimes)

The ultimate goal, for Vogel and for Morse, is to humanize Peck, to show that he is not the vicious villain, or the scary monster, but rather, somebody who believes in the genuineness of his feelings towards another person. In Peck's mind, it is incidental that the feelings he has are directed towards his young niece, and while we can universally abhor the act of pedophilia, it is challenging to like a character who is doing awful things. This creates a dilemma for the viewer/reader who is witness to behavior identified as morally culpable, yet we cannot ignore the fact that Uncle Peck is also a seemingly nice person who cares for Li'l Bit. We are left with an internal complication where we, as audience members, are challenged in our position as objective witness as well as in our position as subjective member of society.

This duality can also be experienced by those who are forced to deal with alcoholics who also exhibit abhorrent behavior; yet we can simultaneously identify an alcoholic as a "nice" person. The alcoholic is also negotiating a similar duality as explained by Denzin's "Temporality of Self." Denzin states "...alcohol alters the flow of time in [the alcoholic's] inner stream of experience. By drinking, the alcoholic alters his relationship to himself, to time, and to the passage of time" (Denzin, *The Alcoholic Society* 97). Drinking disconnects the alcoholic from the evolution of time as a non-drinker experiences it. Denzin explains this notion of Temporality of Self, which shows how the "alcoholic know[s] himself only through time and the temporal

structures of experience that alcohol produces for him” defining the alcoholic’s sense of Self as “a drinker or a nondrinker” causing a “master identity [that] overrides all other conceptions the alcoholic has. The Self, accordingly, is attached to the world through an interactional circuit that includes drinking or not drinking as pivotal activities that define and shape who she is to herself and to others” (Denzin, *The Alcoholic Society* 97). In this case, the alcoholic experiences time in a drinking/not-drinking binary—there is no in-between—leading to an overall understanding of time perceived as *normal-time* and as *alcoholic-time*.

For Denzin, “normal time” exists in moments of interaction with others without the influence of substances; a “purposive [*sic*] social action” where the individual does not see time as being “oppressive, threatening, or anxiety producing” allowing the individual to live in the present as a reflexive being associating with those around her/him (Denzin, *The Alcoholic Society* 100-01). Conversely, Denzin’s ideas for “alcoholic time” reflect the negative interpretations of normal time as the alcoholic focuses on issues of the past or possibilities for the future at the cost of necessities within the present (Denzin, *The Alcoholic Society* 100-01). For example, time, or the perceived lack of time, can induce feelings of increased anxiety (obsessing about when the next drink will come, being preoccupied with an end-of-shift cocktail at the expense of work-related tasks, etc.), panic (feeling uncertain that a drink will be found at all), or obsessing about events from the past that the individual has not come to terms with or has been unwilling to let go. In addition to the comprehension of time, the alcoholic is also a human being, and therefore, confronted with human emotions, which can be difficult to process due to her/his distorted understandings of time.

Vogel’s play uses time as a cross section where flashbacks occur as moving forward while reflections on the past from the protagonist’s (Li’l Bit) perspectives are given in reverse.

As we see Li'l Bit reflecting backwards, we see her Uncle devolving in a pastiche of memories. Peck jumps in, out, and around through time, as Li'l Bit highlights his struggles with sobriety; he has substituted drinking for a lustful romance with his young niece. Peck is chasing a high, the high he gets from Li'l Bit. While he chases what he believes to be his true feelings, we as outsiders are privy to Peck's distorted thinking and faulty logics and see his broken emotional comprehension—his inability to understand exactly what he is feeling and why he is feeling it.

Addressing emotions, Denzin again provides useful insight as in his 1984 text *On Understanding Emotion* in which he discusses a pivotal concept associated with addiction and recovery: expectations for pleasure. An alcoholic continues to drink to recapture the euphoria alcohol provides. This leads to a cyclical attempt to recapture a specific pleasure, which is inevitably out of reach due to the body's ability in building a tolerance to substances. "Chasing a high" is common to any addict, but, never able to recapture what was once pleasurable, they continue drinking/using. Denzin correlates emotions with time because "emotions are temporal phenomena" belonging to the inner and outer experiences in the sense that our emotions "appear to have beginnings and ends [but actually] occur as a succession of events within the continuity of time in the ongoing stream of experience." Emotions are, then, "circular, internally self-reflective, and encased within its [*sic.*] own experiential boundaries. What is felt now is shaped by what will be felt, and what will be felt is shaped by what was felt" (Denzin, *On Understanding... 79*). This results in an "emotionally divided" self, a self that has been "trapped within its own bad faith, as a self without objective existence, as a self that is torn apart internally, as a self that feels emptiness and nothing" (Denzin, *On Understanding... 201*). With all this as a basis for understanding Uncle Peck, the first archetype in Peck's analysis comes into view.

In his role as the archetype of Architect, defined as an individual yearning to leave a lasting legacy and desiring to be remembered for a particular achievement, Peck makes a choice to impart knowledge onto Li'l Bit in the form of driving. Peck's intended legacy is shown as he states to Li'l Bit:

PECK: You're going to learn to think what the other guy is going to do before he does it. [...] I don't know how long you or I are going to live, but we're damned sure not going to die in a car. So if you're going to drive with me, I want you to take this very seriously" (Vogel 35).

The only thing more important to Peck than Li'l Bit as a person to control is her safety on the road. Peck sees driving as a rite of passage and a privileged opportunity. It is also a metaphor for life: as one is in control of the vehicle, one is also in control of her/his life. Careless driving leads to needless destruction, on the road and off. Peck's desire for Li'l Bit to be a strong, confident, and comfortable driver illustrates his desires for her to be strong, confident, and comfortable in life. If he cannot be with her physically, he can at least give her the legacy of "safe-driving."

Additionally, he admires Li'l Bit in her own right for her intelligence and maturity, so for Peck, the use of driving as a life lesson is to enhance her already formidable attributes as a person:

PECK: The boys in school are little Neanderthals in short pants. You're ten years ahead of them in maturity; it's gonna take a while for them to catch up. (*Peck clicks another shot; we see a faint smile on Li'l Bit on the screen.*) Girls turn into women long before boys turn into men. (Vogel 42)

Admittedly, Peck's desires to educate and build up Li'l Bit's confidence is seen by outsiders as additional manipulations, yet for Peck, his care and concern are genuine and warranted. So while we see Peck's ideas as manipulations, Vogel complicates the matter by allowing us to hear from Peck's wife, who is not a fan of Li'l Bit:

FEMALE GREEK CHORUS: (as Aunt Mary.) [...] I'm not a fool. I know what's going on. I wish you could feel how hard Peck fights against it—he's swimming against the tide... [...] And I want to say this about my niece. She's a sly one, that one is. She knows exactly what she's doing; she's twisted Peck around her little finger and thinks it's all a big secret. Yet another one who's borrowing my husband until it doesn't suit her anymore. (Vogel 45)

Here, we are able to see the machinations of Peck's actions as they affect somebody other than Li'l Bit. Here, we see Aunt Mary as an individual fighting an internal fight as well as an external situation—she is coming to confront her husband's infidelity, aware of Peck's failings, yet also shifting a portion of responsibility to Li'l Bit. Aunt Mary's monologue leads into a scene where we see Peck, inebriated and washing dishes after the family's large Christmas dinner. In this scene, Li'l Bit is fourteen:

LI'L BIT: Uncle Peck? (*Very carefully.*) Please don't drink anymore.

PECK: I'm not... overdoing it.

LI'L BIT: I know. (*beat.*) Why do you drink so much? (*Peck stops and thinks, carefully.*)

PECK: There are some people who have a... a 'fire' in the belly. I think they go to work on Wall Street or they run for office. And then there

are people who have a ‘fire’ in their heads—and they become writers or scientists or historians (*He smiles a little at her.*) You. You’ve got a ‘fire’ in the head. And then there are people like me.

LI’L BIT: Where do you have... a fire?

PECK: I have a fire in my heart. And sometimes the drinking helps.

LI’L BIT: There’s got to be other things that can help.

PECK: I suppose there are.

LI’L BIT: Does it help – to talk to me?

PECK: Yes. It does. (*Quiet.*) I don’t get to see you very much.

LI’L BIT: I know. (*Li’l Bit thinks.*) You could talk to me more. [...] As long as you don’t drink. I’d meet you somewhere for lunch or for a walk – on the weekends – as long as you stop drinking. And we could talk about whatever you want.

PECK: You would do that for me?

LI’L BIT: I don’t think I’d want Mom to know. Or Aunt Mary. (Vogel 46-7)

This seemingly innocent conversation between a young girl, reaching out, and her uncle, who is hurting, is the incident that incites Peck’s association of Li’l Bit as a savior to his problems. Thus she becomes the supplement—the replacement—to alcohol. Additionally, by her wanting to keep her and Peck’s conversations secret (especially from her mother and her aunt) we also see that Li’l Bit may have very clear intentions that might confirm what Aunt Mary was saying.

Peck’s short monologue from this selection also initiates the second archetype to define him. Peck can be seen in the role of Dreamer, an individual who is happier in a state of make-

believe but who also has disconnected from a rational or logical way of thinking. When he discusses his “fire,” he is not only justifying his drinking, he is justifying his philosophies towards life in general. This shows Peck has a sense of self that helps him to justify his choices, but deep down, he always wants what he is unable to obtain. He is unhappy with the luxuries in his life and dreams about how “good” things would be if he could only have more. In this statement, Peck reveals that his heart is on fire—an allusion to romantic intentions—and rationalizes his drinking as a necessity and/or an aid. Simultaneously, Vogel shows how manipulative Peck can be in his relationship with Li'l Bit.

Ultimately, Peck can best be understood in his role as Conniver when Li'l Bit confronts him on the nature of their relationship:

LI'L BIT: You know. It's not nice to Aunt Mary.

PECK: You let me be the judge of what's nice and not nice to my wife.

(beat.)

LI'L BIT: Now you're mad.

PECK: I'm not mad. It's just that I thought you... understood me, Li'l Bit.

I think you're the only one who does. (Vogel 23)

The Conniver is an individual who uses people and situations in ways to get what they want. The Conniver is a selfish and self-centered person who places her/his own needs ahead of the needs of others. Peck has supplemented his addiction to alcohol with Li'l Bit, and he will stop at nothing to control and manipulate her into staying present in his life—again, chasing a high, a high that is inevitably out of reach. His “love” for Li'l Bit is as genuine as his love for alcohol. He may truly believe he loves his niece, but the difference between love and dependence are skewed in the alcoholic mind. For Peck, both Li'l Bit and alcohol play necessary parts in his life,

and he is incapable of seeing beyond his own wants and desires. He is consistently manipulating Li'l Bit into staying with him by using a variety of tactics (guilt, bribery, flattery, inebriation), but ultimately, Peck's love for Li'l Bit is nothing more than his latest debilitating addiction.

In the closing moments of the play, as Li'l Bit talks of the maintenance of her car, of her destinations, and the importance of treating the vehicle respectfully, we as audience members are shown that Peck's ghostly presence is in the back-seat of her car. As Li'l Bit drives away, she states:

LI'L BIT: I've got five hundred miles of highway ahead of me – and some
back roads too. I filled the tank last night, and had the oil checked.
Checked the tires, too. You've got to treat her... with respect. (Vogel
58)

Driving is a rite of passage for Li'l Bit—in the physical sense that she is growing up as well as the metaphorical sense that she is sexually active. Peck uses the car as an expression of life, and when Li'l Bit reveals that he eventually lost his license because of his drinking, we also learn that he lost his battles in life. Driving unites these two individuals as they are forever intertwined within Peck's legacy of teaching Li'l Bit the “right way” to conduct an automotive endeavor.

Vogel uses learning to drive as a metaphor for learning how to live as the play's foundation. The character of Uncle Peck displays a particular set of roles that situate him as a man with lofty ideas and a love for the main character Li'l Bit, while simultaneously showing him as conniving, manipulating Li'l Bit to suit his own desires. Peck's alcoholism manifests in deceptive ways—deceptive in the sense that he as a person is deceptive, but he is not overtly evil. Vogel is able to use *How I Learned to Drive* to complicate the stereotypical depiction of the alcoholic in that we see Peck (an alcoholic pedophile) as a man who displays sadness, hope, a

desire for a better future, and a genuine love for another person (although we see the perversions in his interpretations of “genuine”). Peck’s pedophilia and manipulation of Li’l Bit are dastardly deeds, yet he projects a kindness to Li’l Bit that she feels is lacking in her other relationships. As a result, Peck leaves a lasting place in Li’l Bit’s psyche that she (literally/figuratively) takes with her as she sets off on the road. With Peck eventually succumbing to his addiction, Vogel illustrates the lasting effects an alcoholic can have on an individual even after they have gone, leaving a legacy of emotions—good as well as bad.

Beverly Weston: Addictive Thinking and the Family

The lasting effect an alcoholic individual has on others is put in the forefront of Tracy Letts’s 2007 play *August: Osage County* as he illustrates how alcoholism is a familial disease which affects interpersonal relationships and family structures. This section focuses on the character of Beverly Weston who, while only appearing in approximately five percent of the play (the prologue), offers a more complicated portrayal of somebody in the final throws of his addiction than other plays in which the alcoholic characters appears across the entire text have been able to depict. *August: Osage County* is a family drama that focuses on members of the Weston family coming together after the disappearance of the family’s patriarch, Beverly. As the family struggles with what could have happened to cause Beverly’s departure, they are forced to face a series of family secrets that have been repressed and/or never divulged for years, even decades. In addition to Beverly’s disappearance, the family must confront their individual relationships with him and how his actions have had lasting effects on each family member.

The opening scene, the only scene to actually feature Beverly, takes place in his study. Beverly sits, drunk, as he interviews Johnna Monevata, who he hopes will take up the day-to-day

care of the house and of his wife, Violet. As Beverly attempts to meticulously put all of his affairs in order, we are introduced to man who feels that he has come to his twilight years as he speaks to Johnna:

BEVERLY: “Life is very long...” T. S. Eliot. I mean... he’s given credit for it because he bothered to write it down. He’s not the first person to say it... certainly not the first person to think it. *Feel* it. But he wrote the words on a sheet of paper and signed it and the four-eyed prick was a genius... so if you say it, you have to say his name after it. “Life is very long”: T. S. Eliot. Absolutely goddamn right. (Letts 10)

Beverly, forlorn and tired, rambles on to Johnna about the foresight of Eliot as a poet and his admiration for his work, eventually confessing:

BEVERLY: [...] I don’t know what it says about me that I have a greater affinity for the damaged. Probably nothing good. I admire the hell out of Eliot the poet, but the person? I can’t identify.

Within two minutes, we are able to see an intelligent, well-read, sad man, who is sitting in the dark with a young girl who is watching him drink excessively.

Charles Isherwood’s review of the original production at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago is indicative of many of the reviews that the 2008 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning play received. Isherwood states that the opening scene sets a tone for the remainder of the play, “[The scene] is practically the only gentle one, as the paterfamilias Beverly Weston...By the next scene this genial, mordantly funny, T. S. Eliot- and John Berryman-quoting gentleman has mysteriously disappeared, leaving his new employee to perform the aforesaid duties for an increasingly crowded household” (Isherwood, “A Matriarch...”).

Denzin's 1987 text *Treating Alcoholism* likens the journey of the alcoholic to that of two different three-act plays: the first play focusing on the three-act structure as the alcoholic is in her/his active addiction; the second play on the three-act structure of the alcoholic during the recovery process. For Denzin, this first three-act play is "The-Merry-Go-Round-Named-Denial" and centers on the chaos surrounding the perceptions of reality the alcoholic and her/his family endures (Denzin, *Treating Alcoholism* 48-65). Denzin positions the alcoholic's journey in direct relation to a dramatic structure which illustrates the levels of psychological and interpersonal conflicts that work their way into the lives of those dealing with alcoholism. Letts's patriarch of the Weston family, Beverly, exemplifies the alcoholic as featured in Act I of Denzin's play "The Merry-Go-Round-Named-Denial" in that Beverly disassociates himself from a temporal reality resulting in his suicide after the opening scene.

In this Act of the Denial play, Denzin calls attention to how the alcoholic believes that s/he is able to control her/his destiny through drinking, showing that alcoholics' perceptions of their surroundings are distorted—physically damaging and emotionally incomprehensible to the afflicted individual (Denzin, *Treating Alcoholism* 50). Another way of looking at the alcoholic's perceptions of time and how they comprehend their emotions is presented by psychiatrist and chemical dependency counselor Abraham J. Twerski in his 1997 text *Addictive Thinking: Understanding Self-Deception* when he states:

The addict [thinks] only in terms of moments, not years. When drinking or using other drugs, addicts do think about the consequences: the glow, a feeling of euphoria, relaxation, detachment from the world, and perhaps sleep. These consequences occur within a few seconds or minutes after drinking or using, and these few seconds or minutes are what make

up 'time' for the addict... [Long term effects and damage] do not exist in the addict's thoughts. (Twerski 29)

For a character that only appears in the prologue to a three-act play (He commits suicide after the prologue fueled, in part, by a imbibing a significant amount of alcohol), Beverly's actions set in motion the unfolding events of the rest of the play, affecting each of the remaining characters in various ways. Actions taken by an alcoholic affect those around her/him, challenging family, friends, and the numerous other people that make up a network of people, and these people need to be able to unpack their own torrential sets of confusing emotions and thoughts.

Al-Anon is the twelve-step program for the families and friends of alcoholics and mirrors the program of Alcoholics Anonymous in much of its literature and philosophies. The 2008 edition of the text *How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics*, explains the importance of understanding alcoholism and addiction as a family disease. Like most diseases, alcoholism is not isolated to the individual who is struggling with alcohol; the disease affects the entire network of friends, family members, and others due to the ripples caused by the alcoholic's continued self-destructive behaviors. In a telling and emotionally self-reflective passage, the text states:

We who have been affected by someone else's drinking find ourselves inexplicably haunted by insecurity, fear, guilt, obsession with others, or an overwhelming need to control every person and situation we encounter...although our loved ones appear to be the ones with the problems, we secretly blame ourselves, feeling that somehow we are the cause of the trouble, or that we should have been able to overcome it with

love, prayer, hard work, intelligence, or perseverance. (*How Al-Anon Works... 6*)

Issues of insecurity, fear, and the need to control are repeated themes throughout Letts's play, each of which stem from the environment established and perpetuated by Beverly and his wife, Violet.

The first role for Beverly is that of the Bon-Vivant, which typically refers to one who loves good food, is defined here as an individual who has come to believe that life is meaningless, therefore reverts to a self-subscribed hedonism. We see this role in the prologue when Beverly tells the newly hired Johnna:

BEVERLY: ...The reasons why we partake are anymore inconsequential.

The facts are: My wife takes pills and I drink. And these facts have over time made burdensome the maintenance of traditional American routine: pay of bills, purchase of goods, cleaning of clothes or carpets or rappers. Rather than once more assume the mantle of guilt...vow abstinence with my fingers crossed in the queasy hope of righting our ship, I've chosen to turn my life over to a Higher Power... (*Hoists his glass.*) ...and join the ranks of the Hiring Class. (Letts 11)

This role is a challenging role due to the inherent duality at work; essentially Beverly is masking his feelings that his life has become meaningless. This duality also plays within the line itself as Letts uses the term "Higher Power" (a term associated most significantly with twelve-step programs) to indicate that Beverly has turned his life over to drinking. In this moment he comes across as disdainful towards the remedies of twelve-step programs, whose ideologies he appears to be mocking. In fact, in twisting the words in this manner, he has managed to embrace and

justify his hedonistic attitude. With the realization that he is going to end his life comes a sense of hedonism. He has given over to his drinking (his own interpretation of “Higher Power”). Beverly’s loss of hope is accompanied with the idea that he’s going to go on one-last-wild-ride which will ultimately be his end:

BEVERLY: It’s not a decision I’m entirely comfortable. I know how to launder my dirty undies...done it all my life, me or my wife... but I’m finding it’s getting in the way of my drinking. [...] Y’know... a simple utility bill can mean so much to a living person. Once they’ve passed, though... after they’ve passed though, the words and numbers just seem like... otherworldly symbols. It’s only paper. Worse. Worse than blank paper. (Letts 11)

In spite of his new outlooks on what little remains of his life, Beverly is still kind to Johnna; he jokes with her, asks her questions about herself and her heritage, the origins of her name, and even offers her his own handkerchief to wipe the sweat from her brow. When Beverly’s wife enters into the conversation, she is in the midst of her own pill-induced inebriation, making little sense, yet Beverly stays calm, introduces Johnna to Violet, and reassures his wife that all is well.

The second role for Beverly is that of Martyr, which here distinguishes the alcoholic as believing the world would be better off without her/him. Beverly’s Martyr role actually occurs simultaneously as he exhibits traits of the Bon-Vivant. Going back to Beverly quoting John Berryman’s poem and his confiding to Johnna, we see the dichotomy in thought processes:

BEVERLY: “The world is gradually becoming a place where I do not care to be anymore.” I don’t know what it says about me that I have a greater affinity with the damaged. (Letts 10)

An intelligent person, a poet and former professor, literate and insightful, Beverly also fashions himself as misunderstood and alienated by the general populace. Although he appears in this scene with Johnna as a man with seemingly “everything” (house, wife, kids, etc.), Beverly is unhappy, despondent, and fed-up. He identifies with the “damaged,” and in this moment, takes a certain amount of pride in that fact. Beverly ultimately takes his life to make a statement to his family that they did not really know him nor were they able to see how completely lost he had become.

Ultimately, we come to know Beverly as a Dreamer through the words of his daughter Barbara. In one of the final scenes of the play, Barbara sits where her father sat in the prologue, drinking and confiding in Johnna—also as her father did in the prologue:

BARBARA: One of the last times I spoke with my father, we were talking about... I don't know, the state of the world, something... and he said, “You know, this country was always pretty much a whorehouse, but at least it used to have some promise. Now it's just a shithole.” And I think now maybe he was talking about something else, something more specific, something more personal to him... this house? This family? His marriage? Himself? I don't know. But there was something sad in his voice—or no, not sad, he always sounded sad—something more hopeless than that. As if it had already happened. As if whatever was disappearing had already disappeared. As if it was too late. (Letts 91)

In this moment as Barbara recalls how her father believed his world had become a “shit-hole,” we see that, at one time, Beverly had dreams and aspirations. As Barbara expresses that her father had given up prior to giving in, she also inadvertently illustrates that he, at one time, had

hope. In this moment, Barbara states that her father had fallen deeper into a place beyond sadness—a place of hopelessness and despair. The pain Barbara feels over the possibility that her father could not hold on to his dreams is devastating, and Johnna attempts to comfort her to no avail:

JOHNNA: He talked a lot about his daughters... his three daughters, and his granddaughter. That was his joy.

BARBARA: Thank you. That makes me feel better. Knowing that you can lie. (*beat.*) I want you to stay on. Don't worry about your salary. I'll take care of it. (Letts 92)

While perhaps an odd response, Barbara's thanks is genuine, knowing that even as an outsider, Johnna has been able to fit right into the family's dysfunctional habit of not being able to tell the truth. And in actuality, Beverly's last act of hiring Johnna is one of his few actions that has a lasting, positive effect.

In the short time in which we actually see Beverly bodily present on the stage, he expresses so much of who he is and what he believes. His descent into hopeless futility is nearly complete as he outlines Johnna's new job. Additionally and due to the structure of the play, we have the luxury of hearing the un-edited opinions of his family members as to who he *really* was prior to his suicide. For Beverly Weston, being a husband and a father, having responsibilities that he felt he was unable to progress in and succeed at, compounded feelings of guilt and a lack of self-worth.

Much like the women on the street-corner in Grover's Corners, the attitude that issues of an uncomfortable nature should not be discussed is pervasive throughout Letts's play. However,

unlike Wilder, Letts confronts this line of thinking, directly indicting the issues of avoidance as a major motif in lines such as Violet's to Barbara:

VIOLET: Oh, sure. I never told them I knew. But your father knew. He
 knew I knew. He always knew I knew. But we never talked about it. I
 chose the higher ground. (Letts 100)

Barbara's reaction to her mother's confession is Letts's moment to show how the avoidance of open communication has led the Weston family to exhibit a collection of psyches and behaviors that could be viewed (at best) as being on the fringe of the norm. But again, these issues are not talked about, not discussed. The characters are aware that the family has serious problems, and everybody knows everything about everybody else, except nobody is willing to say anything because it would be uncomfortable and disrupt the status quo—even if the status quo is dysfunctional.

Jackie and Recovery

In Steven Adly Guirgis's 2011 play *The Motherfucker with the Hat*, the challenges an alcoholic faces when coming into a life without alcohol are portrayed through the character of Jackie, a recently released convict who is attempting to rebuild his relationship with long-time partner Veronica, all the while attempting to find fulfilling employment and attending Alcoholics Anonymous. Although Jackie is finding aid in the help of his A.A. sponsor, Ralph D., he quickly discovers that Veronica is having an affair, which leads to a downward spiral of events.

Denzin's second three-act play as featured in *Treating Alcoholism* is the follow-up play to "The Merry-Go-Round-Named-Denial," and is simply titled "Recovery." The three-act play "Recovery" looks at the constant daily battles the recovering-alcoholic faces when entering

into a life of sobriety, the necessary approaches to treatment, and the negotiations of self the alcoholic endures in the initial months and years upon embracing sobriety (Denzin, *Treating Alcoholism* 77-87). By saying “no” to alcohol, the alcoholic is faced with the overwhelming challenge of accepting that they need help and choosing a course of action, which alters their life. However it is important to note that the absence of alcohol in the life of an alcoholic does not automatically mean that the alcoholic is *sobber*. As previously noted with the analysis of Uncle Peck, the experiences of a “Dry Drunk” are common, and people can be in a recovery program such as A.A., be committed to not drinking, yet still exhibit destructive patterns of behavior that inhibit them from reaching *sobriety*. People of this nature are found in the rooms where A.A. meet, and as Denzin notes, “Any alcoholic can stop drinking for a day or more, but not to drink, under any circumstances, [is] the challenge of recovery...Until the alcoholic accepts alcoholism and accepts that fact that he or she cannot control dinking, sobriety will not be obtained” (Denzin, *Treating Alcoholism* 79). Essentially, not drinking is just one of many steps in the long road of recovery, and in addition to facing personal crises during sobriety, the alcoholic is also faced with society’s views on alcoholism and alcoholics in recovery.

As outlined in Goffman’s 1963 text, *Stigma*, the concepts of visibility and personal identity are key factors in how we can track how the alcoholic navigates in and through the surrounding culture and presents her/himself in their everyday life performances. This stems from what Goffman calls *perceptibility* due to the evident appearance of unacceptable behaviors that the alcoholic displays. Behaviors of high perceptibility, such as public intoxication, defy cultural norms of what people believe are acceptable conceptions of “life-activity for which an individual’s particular stigma primarily disqualifies him” (Goffman, *Stigma* 48-50). For the alcoholic, this presentation of self is complicated by her/his behaviors that are deemed

inappropriate by mainstream ideals of social decorum. The life that Jackie knew prior to his incarceration has changed, resulting in anxiety where he no longer feels comfortable drinking or using but is not comfortable with being sober. This liminal existence and the battles Jackie faces are compounded later with the discovery that Veronica's affair began while Jackie was in prison, and the person with whom Veronica is having sex is Ralph D.

Within the opening moments of the play, Jackie is expressing his excitement about the possibilities of his new job. In doing so, we see him in his first archetype as a Dreamer. Like Uncle Peck, Jackie is developing an ideal future while missing the obvious realities before him.

JACKIE: ...I started thinkin', Veronica, ya know, and I started makin' plans, you know? Like—grown-up plans, like 'you and me' plans, happy plan, like; 'next step plans, Veronica, you know, like how you been saying? (Guirgis 10)

As Jackie talks to Veronica he is explicit about “making plans” only to discover moments later the mysterious hat left behind by Veronica's yet-to-be-identified lover. This observation breaks Jackie's idealized notions of what life is going to become for Veronica and him, and as he is forced to deal with this reality, he falls back into negative and destructive ways of thinking and behaving:

VERONICA: How about my apology now? You got any interest in that?

JACKIE: The bed.

VERONICA: The bed what?

JACKIE: AquaVelva and dick. Why the bed smells like AquaVelva and dick? Huh?! Why?! (Guirgis 11)

Initially a happy, uplifting scene, the tone takes a dramatic shift at the discovery of the mysterious hat, and even though Jackie's frustration and hurt at discovering Veronica's affair may be warranted, he immediately falls back into irrational behaviors, accusing her and demeaning her:

JACKIE: My sponsor told me you were a little fuckin' whore and I didn't believe him.

VERONICA: Fuck your sponsor!

JACKIE: I told him, "Nah, man, we got a special thing going down between us" – [...] You wanna flip the script on me like a textbook fuckin' cokehead alcoholic streetwalkin' skank-ass trick, dass fine – but I strongly suggest that you don't underestimate my capacity for violence! (Guirgis 12)

A dreamer whose dreams have been suddenly dashed, Jackie returns to what he knows, what has been ingrained into his brain after years of use, and that is to attack—attack as a perverted form of defense.

The language and approach Jackie employs in this scene also illustrate a second archetype that is being portrayed conjunctly with his role of Dreamer, and that is the archetype of the Oppressor. The Oppressor is an individual who needs to be feared and uses intimidation and violence to achieve this end. Jackie's pain stems from his dreams being so short-lived, so while he is railing at Veronica for being unfaithful, he is, in actuality, speaking from a place where his optimism at a new life, a life that is within his grasp, is pulled away from him.

Guirgis's play incorporates tenets from Alcoholics Anonymous, citing passages from the literature used in group meetings as well as ideologies such as increasing one's self-awareness:

RALPH D.: [...] Anyway, where were we?

JACKIE: ... 'Acceptance.'

RALPH D.: That's right. 'Acceptance' what?

JACKIE: Acceptance—it's the answer.

RALPH D.: No. It says, 'Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today.' And what day are we concerned with here?

JACKIE: Ralph, man, I understand that shit, like in theory.

RALPH D.: It's not a theory. 'The Lone Gunman,' that's a theory.

'Dinosaurs invented waterfalls' – that's another theory. This program, Jackie, it's a practice – not a theory... (Guirgis 15).

Recognizing and acknowledging destructive behavior patterns is an important stage in the recovery of an alcoholic and one which requires the mentoring to guide the newly recovering alcoholic back to a commonly rational way of thinking. This mentorship is built on trust and, at times, tough-love between sponsor and sponsee as we see with Jackie and Ralph:

JACKIE: All due respect, I'm a little offended you don't believe me.

RALPH D.: Offended?

JACKIE: A little bit. Yeah.

RALPH D.: Put it in your journal.

JACKIE: Oh, I will.

RALPH D.: Yeah, put it in right after the part where I said, 'No bullshit, no guns,' and you said, 'Oh, absolutely, I'm going to a meeting.'

[...]

JACKIE: It's just: Trust, it's a two-way street, bro.

RALPH D.: It's funny: My sponsor used to annoy the fuck outta me too –
until the day I realized maybe he knew something I didn't.

Allen Berger calls attention to self-awareness in his 2008 book, *12 Stupid Things That Mess Up Recovery*, as being “the first step toward dealing with unreasonable expectations. Because we have the ability to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are reasonable and that it is everyone else who is unreasonable, we are often unaware of how truly outrageous we are” (Berger 105). Yet self-awareness is a struggle for the alcoholic entering recovery. For Jackie, his struggle is can be viewed through his Oppressor archetype. Looking at the previous tirade directed toward Veronica, we can see both roles (Dreamer/Oppressor) working simultaneously and at odds with each other:

JACKIE: You know what? You wanna flip the script on me like a text
book fuckin' cokehead alcoholic streetwalkin' skank ass trick, dass
fine – but I strongly suggest that you don't underestimate my capacity
for violence! (Guirgis 12)

Jackie may be working on healing, as evident in his conversations with Ralph D., but he is struggling with dual, conflicting personalities. There is not only anger directed at Veronica, but there is an overwhelming expression of self-loathing as Jackie uses words that could easily be directed toward him. Jackie's old life as a drug dealer required him to lead a particular life and employ particular behaviors that he has difficulty letting go of (past behaviors rearing their head), which is a topic he has been working through with the help of Ralph D.

In subsequent scenes, Jackie attempts to deal with the fallout from his response to discovering the hat, turning to Ralph D. and sleeping on his couch. Later, Ralph D. accompanies Jackie to Julio's (Jackie's cousin) house where Jackie confesses to his cousin that he, too, was

unfaithful in his relationship with Veronica. His justification leads to illustrating another archetype, that of Conniver. The Conniver is an agenda driven individual who manipulates people and information to suit her/his needs. In this case, as Julio confronts Jackie on his hypocritical double standards, Jackie proclaims that although he had sex with another woman, it was not as bad as Julio was making it sound:

JACKIE: Technically! And that's my cross. But in reality, Julio – in the fuckin' dimension outside of temporary insanity – IN MY HEART??
 In my heart – YOU GOTTA BELIEVE ME – dat shit never happened!
 (Guirgis 32)

Jackie continues to justify his behaviors throughout the play, coming up with excuses in spite of those around him pointing out the faults in his rationalizations. It is not until Jackie discovers Ralph D. is “the motherfucker” who owned the hat that he stops to see the errors in his thinking.

The discovery that Ralph D. is the owner of the hat is the final straw for Jackie, and believing that he has met his match, he returns to behaving in the manner he has come to find comfort—he drinks. His relapse is extensive and results in him having to stay with Julio (his cousin), and even though they are family and Julio does his best to care for Jackie's hangover, Jackie is disdainful towards his cousin and the help he is receiving. Julio confronts Jackie:

JULIO: That's – that's startling. You startle me with bad manners and stupidity and ego.

JACKIE: Well it's the fuckin' truth, ain't it?

JULIO: (*Re: Jackie.*) ...Some people, they just refuse to be loved. That's your problem, not mine. I love being loved. I love loving. I love life.

JACKIE: Well that's good.

JULIO: It is good. You should try it sometime. (Guirgis 42)

As the two argue, Julio recounts a time when, as children, Jackie gave Julio marijuana for the first time. In Julio's account, he reminds Jackie about a group of Jackie's friends (which included Veronica), and how they invited Jackie to join them for a game of spin-the-bottle. Julio recounts how Jackie left him, stoned for the very first time, alone in the street. As the story goes on, we actually find out that Jackie did not leave Julio for a sexual rendezvous with Veronica:

JULIO: I was stoned, yes, but I truly felt my life was over. Gone. And then, after five minutes, I hear; "Yo, *stupido*." And there you were. With a Welch's Grape and a 25-cent juicy and a little red back of barbeque potato chips. How old were we?

JACKIE: Eleven. Twelve maybe.

JULIO: How did my eleven-years-old cousin have the sensitivity to pass on being with the girl whose name he wrote in all his notebooks, and the cool crowd [...], in order to waste his first high eating potato chips with his faggot cousin and talking about, what, speed boats? Loni Anderson?

JACKIE: That was a long time ago.

JULIO: Yes. It was a long time ago. And it was yesterday. [...] (Guirgis 43)

Relapse is a reality of recovery, and a reality that can be met with disappointment from some, compassion from others, and as a matter-of-fact from a few. Often alcoholics who relapse experience a series of emotions ranging from denial to shame, and the shame they may feel is compounded when those around them meet relapse with shock, sorrow, anger, and/or

disappointment. In this scene, Guirgis provides a compassionate take on an alcoholic who is dealing with not just the relapse, but also the emotions associated with guilt and sorrow for not being “able” to maintain sobriety. Julio’s love and compassion toward Jackie, reminding Jackie that he is a human being capable of deep, lasting affection for others, are ultimately the tools Jackie uses to move forward in his confrontation with Ralph D.

Jackie is representative of the difficulties facing an individual entering a life of sobriety. Ralph D.’s betrayal of Jackie is not just a personal betrayal but also a betrayal of the institution in which Jackie has placed his faith. In Hilton Als’ review of the play, featured in *The New Yorker*, “Guirgis isn’t anti-A.A. or anti-N.A., but he doesn’t shy away from the reality that exists offstage, as it were, in a world that isn’t protected by anonymity and trust. He knows enough about life to ask the right questions: What is recovery? And who, if anyone, can recover from the brutal high of a love hangover?” (Als). As laid out in the 2006 edition of the A.A. text *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, “[t]he unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our Society has. Our lives, the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. We stay whole, or A.A. dies” (129). For a member of A.A. to commit an act like Ralph D. has committed against Jackie, for a sponsor to enact such a personal violation to his sponsee is reprehensible by A.A. standards and speaks volumes about Ralph D.’s own recovery—or lack thereof. An act such as this is tantamount to an assassination of the sponsor-sponsee relationship, and the act creates a hole in the unity of the entirety of A.A.’s group identity.

Guirgis is also clear in his indictment of Alcoholics Anonymous by lampooning Ralph D.’s words of wisdom while simultaneously establishing him as a person whom Jackie should have never trusted. In the final confrontation with Ralph D., Jackie comes to the realization that what he wants cannot be quantified or qualified, but he knows he wants nothing to do with

Ralph. As he exits, removing himself from Ralph D.'s toxicity, Jackie points out the major difference between him and his "sponsor":

JACKIE: Your –whaddayacallit—your world view? It ain't mine. And the day it is, that's the day I shoot myself in the head. I didn't get clean to live like that. I don't pass on the Heinekens and 8-balls and the hydro so I can live some empty shit like that. That's you. It ain't me. (Guirgis 77)

While Guirgis presents Jackie's experiences and struggles in a darkly comedic manner, the overall message of the play is that recovery can be derailed at any moment for any issue, and a newly sober alcoholic is fragile, relying on those around him for support and guidance. Yet Guirgis takes this philosophy a step further by illustrating Jackie's personal desire to change, accepting his faults and coming to terms that he (Jackie) needs to take action. Guirgis illustrates that it is Jackie's responsibility to enact lasting change and that the process of recovery comes from inside the individual, not from an external "cure" or outside solution.

Summary

The dominant approach to alcoholism and addiction represents how these issues are culturally understood; however Letts, Vogel, and Guirgis use the stage as they attempt to shine a light on alcoholism, and in doing so, challenge the stigmas associated with the disease. For the three plays discussed in this chapter, the playwrights provide a more complicated, nuanced, and dynamic telling of how alcohol abuse/dependency is characterized in order to move past the idea that alcoholism is a chosen behavior with an immoral connotation or that an alcoholic lacks willpower. In doing so, Vogel, Letts, and Guirgis portray the alcoholic in a way that display

Norman K. Denzin's concepts of the three-act plays as these concepts intersect with the societal stigmas outlined by the work of Erving Goffman.

The intentions of this chapter have been to call attention to and trouble the stigmas and stereotypes that depict the alcoholic on the American stage and offer a new means of analysis and understanding. For a dramatist who is developing an alcoholic character, this chapter offers you a means to consider how you are depicting these complicated identities. For those who are called to interpret a role in which the character is dealing with alcoholism, this chapter offers you tools to apply in the interpretation of performances and productions. For the educator who introduces these topics in a classroom, this chapter allows your students to explore the underlying issues of the alcoholic and how the issues speak to us as social beings. For all of us, I caution that we proceed with conscious awareness; consider the fact that this chapter scratches the surface of a vast ocean of complicated, confusing, dichotomous, maddening concepts, which, at times, leave us with the seemingly hopeless feeling of being unable to find the bearings to successfully navigate.

As stated, the subjects surrounding alcoholism are challenging not just in our collective, societal (mis)understandings, but in the personal associations we may carry: the pain we have felt; the dashed hope we were promised; the longing to help, knowing there was nothing we could do; the continuous damage we caused those we love the most. There is no justification for the destruction alcoholism causes, and there is little comfort any single person can offer to those who have suffered at the hands of this destructive disease. It is hard to discuss the things that have hurt us; however, healing cannot begin until the monsters are brought out from the shadows. The stage is a powerful venue and one that offers us the opportunities to face the

difficult tasks of tackling societal problems, which is the focus and illustrated in the following unit.

UNIT THREE:
USING THEATRE TO OPEN DIALOGUES AND DE-STIGMATIZE ALCOHOL
ABUSE/DEPENDENCY

CHAPTER 4
STORYTELLING AS A METHOD OF DE-STIGMATIZATION

Let there be no doubt: Aristotle formulated a very powerful purgative system, the objective of which is to eliminate all that is not commonly accepted, including the revolution, before it takes place...it is designed to bridle the individual to adjust him to what pre-exists. If this is what we want, the Aristotelian system serves the purpose better than any other; if, on the contrary, we want to stimulate the spectator to transform his society, to engage in revolutionary action, in that case we will have to seek another poetics!

- Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*

My undergraduate playwriting professor was a Hollywood television writer who had worked on several sit-coms throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. After years of success, he left that profession to return to the theatre where, as a professor, he was adamant that we (as theatre practitioners in training) understood the efficacy of entertainment and art. His philosophy, as he frequently told to us, was that entertainment reinforces the values of the audience while art challenges them. While each category has its own merits, these delineations are broad as art and

entertainment are not mutually exclusive, not isolated from each other. Art can very easily be entertaining as we find pleasure in the aesthetic values of a particular piece, and popular entertainment can certainly challenge cultural norms, institutional ideologies, and personal beliefs.

Theatre has deep roots in both the worlds of art and entertainment, which, throughout the theatre's long history, have grown together, intertwining in some areas, amalgamating in others, and fluctuating back and forth depending on the genre, style, form and structure of any given text or production. Therefore, we as theatre practitioners need to understand that while there is nothing wrong with embracing our roots as entertainers, we have an obligation to honor the traditions and principles that elevate our discipline beyond entertainment and move us into the media of art and artistic expression. The collaborative art that is theatre is one that requires us to take notice of our artistic intentions, make deliberate choices, and challenge (at times through entertainment) those who elect to partake in our productions.

The act of storytelling has its own inherent power; therefore, there is power in the process of theatre. Telling a story can initiate not only fantastic imaginative opportunities for a listener, but can challenge preconceived notions of the world, others, and/or even the self—stories can challenge what has been previously known. To hear the words of another individual, to listen to her/his story, to picture the worlds that unfold before us, to watch characters emerge who we love, hate, hate to love and love to hate, to walk away from these stories with the benefits of the trials taken, journeys traveled, and/or lessons learned without the personal dangers, all can be a powerfully transformational experiences. Storytelling relates particular cultural norms, conveying sets of morals and values, and illustrates a selected snapshot of the human condition seen through a very specific pair of eyes. Stories, at their height of effectiveness, tell us

something about ourselves that perhaps we had not previously seen, or have convinced ourselves not to see. Contrarily, stories can also relate biases, prejudices, flawed opinions, and/or misconceptions. Stories, at their most ineffective, reinforce the opinions we have of ourselves, do not challenge us to examine our role(s) in society, and sadly, can perpetuate socially constructed misconceptions through stereotypical portrayals and further social stigmas that continue to malign an already marginalized individual or group.

Aristotle's *Poetics* laid the groundwork of principles for dramatic construction, and his lessons have been used, expanded, argued, altered, and misinterpreted for over two thousand years. While great value can be gained through the elements given to us by Aristotle's work, Augusto Boal is right in indicting the purpose of *Poetics* when it comes to our own artistic intentions—forcing us to be cognizant of not just how the stories we tell are *effective*, but also how they are *affective*. Stories of a traditionally tragic nature (in the Aristotelian sense) have their own purpose, as do the stories of a traditionally comic nature (also as defined by Aristotle). Taking an idea, we create a story, couch the narrative into a particular genre, adding onto it form and structure, multiplying it by the various perspectives of protagonist(s), antagonist(s), secondary characters and/or ensembles, each of whom contain multiple identities within their outward appearances. All of this is housed underneath an umbrella of thematic intentions and messages for those viewing/reading. Ultimately, the stories we tell can become incredibly insightful lessons, but equally important is *how* we tell them—and the possibilities are endless.

Previous chapters have laid a foundation and deepened our understanding of how alcohol abuse/dependency develops in the body and brain of an individual. Additionally, these chapters have illustrated how depictions of alcohol use and characters identified as alcoholics have been presented on the American stage. This final unit focuses on modes and models of audience

engagement, which, in practice, use the theatre as a means of directly confronting the issues of alcohol abuse/dependency in an effort to not only understand the topic, but also to initiate off-stage and/or post-performance discussions. Essentially, this chapter is about modes, models, effect, and affect—understanding that the choices we make as storytellers impact those who are listening.

This chapter is a guide, a call for reflexivity, a call to think critically about the stories put before audiences, and central to this chapter is the importance of the audience. Through theatre we may use the stage as a means of communicating directly with audiences about the complicated topics surrounding alcohol abuse/dependency. This chapter begins by looking at what theatre is and the potential theatre holds in inspiring dialogues between and within audiences. To do this, I offer a broad definition of theatre to illustrate the many styles and forms of theatre that can be used to encourage and facilitate conversations regarding alcohol abuse/dependency with audiences. I then provide theory on audience involvement and engagement before juxtaposing Aristotle's theories on initiating audiences' emotions with Augusto Boal's notions of empathy within the theatre and the use of theatre as a political act that propels social change, illustrating the theatre as a political practice that can be applied to advocate for social de-stigmatization of the alcoholic. To do so, linkage is provided through the application of theories set forth by Jacob Moreno's psychodrama, where theatre is also positioned as a tool that can be used in the recovery process as well as a means of encouraging compassion towards those suffering from alcohol abuse/dependency.

This chapter also looks at storytelling as a mode of access—a deceptively subversive method (though not in a negative or malicious manner) that is quite powerful in initiating critical self-examinations. Here I provide several short, published narratives from various people

involved in the recovery process, detailing their beliefs on substance use and abuse. I then discuss how reading these stories has informed my own conceptualizations of the alcoholic and alcohol abuse/dependency. In doing so, I introduce how the performance of personal narratives, autoethnographies, and traditional plays allows for others to un-pack these oft-perceived complicated, frustrating topics. Here theatre is conceptualized as a socially engaging, effective, and affective form of communication and a venue that promotes activism, inherently asking audiences to see the world not through their own perspectives, but through the eyes of the performer/storyteller. It is here that I conclude the chapter by looking at recent productions of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* at the Mayo Clinic as well as with the production company Outside the Wire to show how these productions are explicitly addressing the topic of alcohol abuse/dependency—directly engaging audiences in this topic—for the purpose of generating a deeper understanding of substance use and abuse.

What Theatre Does/Can Do

The Audience

As a graduate student in the Department of Theater at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, I have had the opportunity of teaching our introductory theatre course, THEA 101: Theatre Insight. This is a survey course on the fundamentals of theatre production, play analysis, design, and broad historical contextualization of the material (which is geared towards each semester's departmental productions and events), accommodating upwards of fifty non-major students each semester. Students enrolled in THEA 101 have varying degrees of experience with the theatre; I have had students who have never seen a play and other students who have performed in plays in high school or community theatres. I even had a student who had a ten-

minute play published. Suffice to say, coming to a common understanding of basic principles to build on for the semester is a task we start on day one.

On the first day of the semester, instructors (who teach from a common syllabus) posit the question “What is Theatre?” and ask students to list as many people, places and items they believe are needed to make theatre happen. The initial lists start off large as students shout out everything from “techies,” “make-up,” and “programs” to “creativity,” “quality,” and “entertaining.” A master list is created from all the suggestions, and then, as a class, we begin parsing the list, challenging students on what items are absolutely necessary, asking questions such as, “Yes, I know we’d like to have scenery, but do we *need* scenery?” The answers are usually obvious, and eventually we are able to bring the list down to four basic necessities: *performers*, an *idea*, a *space*, and *audience*. From here, the answer to “What is Theatre?” is defined as an idea being conveyed by at least one performer to an audience within a designated space. Granted, this is broad, and we discuss how an idea can come in the form of a script or a play, but, for example, can also be an abstract concept conveyed through an improvised dance or pantomime; a space can be a stage within a building, but this does not mean we are limited to always performing on stages (or even inside buildings); performers can be a large ensemble, a single person, a duo, or any mix of bodies; and while it is always nice to have a full house of patrons, really all you need is a single person to receive the idea that is being presented.

This may seem like an obvious definition of theatre to some, reductive to others, but to the THEA 101 students (and me), this definition introduces the multiple aspects of performance that can be occurring around them or at any given time or in more structured performance events. I appreciate this definition for two reasons: one, it is accessible; flexible and interpretable to suit the needs of an artist or production team and approachable to virtually anybody regardless of

their affiliation with theatre or performance; and two, it is balanced. In this definition, idea is just as important as a space, but more importantly, audience is just as important as performers.

Theatre can be conceptualized and defined in many ways, but when the balance across these four elements becomes disproportionate, the nature of a production/performance can potentially be harmed. We have all seen wonderful productions that have been moved to larger venues to accommodate audience demand, only to find that the production loses its intimacy. Or perhaps we have been a part of a production that was beautifully performed, but the idea of why the show was being produced was vague and audiences left confused.

For me, the most unfortunate theatre experiences occur when the audience is made to feel (either inadvertently or not) irrelevant or demeaned in some way. Whether a spectacle driven, well-funded, Broadway musical, or a low-budget, college production written and directed by eager (yet overly zealous) students, the result is always the same *if* the audience is made to feel as though they are an afterthought: at best, the audience leaves unfulfilled and/or apathetic, perhaps wishing for a greater impact; at worst, the audience feels unwanted or frustrated by their own confused interpretations. In some tragic cases, audiences are treated as if they are stupid, unable to comprehend the intricacies of the “advanced” thought processes of the writers/directors/performers. These travesties dishonor the nature of the theatre, alienate a key component to what makes the theatre unique, and are counterproductive to the potential benefits theatre holds.

But what are those benefits? In this day and age, why is theatre still relevant? Why is live performance still so strong in the face of movies, television, and even the growing market of web-based series or web-projects? Why, oh, why have we decided to go into the art of performance making in spite of the dangers and hardships? How can we possibly use this

discipline to eliminate stigmas perpetuated by our own practitioners? How can we use theatre to educate audiences on the nature of alcohol abuse/dependency?

There are many different answers to these questions, and I cannot and will not speak for anybody other than myself, but I will say that I am a firm believer that the audience matters. After all, having a live audience occupy the same space as a performance is what makes theatre unique. As actress Blanche Yurka⁹ wrote in her 1959 book, *Dear Audience*:

Theatre isn't like any other art form, which can exist alone, unseen or unheard. A masterpiece of painting can hang in a gallery, loftily indifferent as to whether you see it or not. It can afford to wait. A great book can collect dust on the library shelf; it too can wait. But an actor's performance cannot wait. In its very essence it is living communication. Its life is of the moment and then it is gone. Gone, except for the effect it has on you. (Yurka 98)

Yurka's statement illustrates the performer's reliance on audience. Likewise, as the audience watches, there is an equally important reliance on the performer as articulated by J. L. Styan in his 1975 text *Drama, Stage and Audience*:

We do not go to the play merely to have the text interpreted and explained by the skills of the director and his actors. We do not go as in a learning situation, but to share in a partnership without which the players cannot work. In his *Réflexions sur l'art*, Valéry believed that 'a creator is one who makes others create': in art both the artist and the spectator

⁹ Yurka is best known as an actress in both stage and film. Her book is a memoir of her reflecting on her career and the knowledge gained during her professional studies.

actively cooperate, and the value of the work is dependent on this reciprocity. (Styan 224)

The audience, the *live* audience, who occupies the same space *while* the performance is taking place, is a magical component that symbiotically plays within and into a production. The audience is not just merely watching, not just passively observing, but actively listening, empathically learning, and performing as a body made up of individual witnesses. To ignore the audience through ambivalence or indecisiveness is to embrace an imbalanced definition of what theatre *is*. Therefore, we as practitioners (writers, directors, performers, technicians) have an obligation, especially when dealing with delicate subject matter such as substance use/abuse, to be clear in our intentions for audience responses before production, during production, and after production in order to honor the presence of those in attendance.

Audiences have particular expectations when presented with a form characterized in a particular genre. In his 1990 book, *Theatre Semiotics*, Marvin Carlson points to the fact that throughout theatre history these characterizations, classifications, and/or genres denote specific connotations when he states, “the designation of a play as a comedy or a tragedy alerted the spectator to expect a certain emotional tone, certain types of characters, certain themes and a certain structure of action” (15). At the very core of theatre is the inevitable and necessary reliance on the audience. Regardless of the genre, the style of production, or the intentions of the message, it is vital that at least one individual is able to hear and receive the message being sent, and in return, allow for an interpretation to be made and sent back.

In the 1983 issue of *Literature in Performance*, Kristin M. Langellier and Robert B. Loxley weigh-in on their understanding of the performance/audience relationship in their respective articles, “A Phenomenological Approach to Audience” and “Roles of the Audience.”

These two articles elevate the audience from passive receptacle of story to active participant and cooperative partner to the performance. In her article, Langellier takes a phenomenological approach to understand and communicate the audience's journey. According to Langellier, looking at audiences phenomenologically allows for a deeper comprehension that audiences live through a performance as opposed to analyzing the literature being presented, and thereby "the audience of literature is controlled by the text which likewise invites and even requires a response, but response from a distance," essentially asking the audience to function "as a group around a text without experiencing alienation" (35). Langellier concludes that the "[p]henomenological analysis of the audience reveals its double experience of being situated simultaneously and ambiguously 'outside' the text as performer and 'inside' the text as witness" and clarifies that as performers are situated with audiences as being simultaneously "outside" the text while, at the same time, "inside" because of the ability to see the text from multiple perspectives (i.e. the points of view within the text), culminating in an amalgam of fluid viewpoints, choosing which perspective to emphasize based on the need of the message (Langellier 37-8). Langellier's value of the audience is that of active participant and respected member of her performative collaboration. Within this philosophy, Langellier's understanding of how she positions audience or how she watches the watchers, increases her value of the experience, and by extension, increases the value of the experience for the audience.

In his accompanying article, Robert B. Loxley holds a similar value to audiences stating that the role of the audience "is to become a part of the work of art" (41). However, unlike Langellier's phenomenological approach, Loxley specifies the symbiotic relationship between audiences as they experience performances aesthetically as well as socially. Of the two, Loxley states that the "aesthetic experience arises from the interaction of the participants with the

literature, while social experience arises from the interaction of the participants with each other” (42). Yet these categories of experience are not mutually exclusive as each feeds off the other—the aesthetic is social because people come together for the experience, and by adding people to the process, the aesthetic shifts to accommodate the audience’s presence—a contact with the performance as well as connecting to the content of what is being performed. Loxley states that the social aspect is losing its value as audiences are taught to behave in prescriptive ways—clapping appropriately, sitting quietly, laughing courteously, etc., and he opposes the loss of social interactions within performance settings, valuing the audience as a cohort in the creative process. As support, he cites seminal director/theorist Peter Brook’s *The Empty Space* who, “suggests the role of the audience is to assist the performer by becoming fully involved in the performance and by lending its presence to the performance situation” (43). In *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*, Pelias states, “Participation in an aesthetic transaction, however, demands some competencies. The speaker carries the obligation to fashion an aesthetic form, to create an aesthetic text. The audience has the burden of response. Audiences must recognize what the speaker is asking of them” (107). In this sense, audiences need to understand what is being asked of them, and too often can become lost in what they are supposed to do because they are uncertain as to how they are supposed to engage. Styan further illustrates this by stating:

Creating drama is most obviously a social act. Susanne Langer insists that art is made for other people, not personal reverie, and its social intent gives it its value. Measures of value, therefore, can only be truly made with reference to what a play says, not what it is trying to say. A profound idea only partly communicated is as nothing against a shallow

one wholly communicated: content, form and medium cannot be judged apart. (Styan 239)

Ultimately, audience resistance stems from a misunderstanding of expectations due to an inability and lack of *audiencing* awareness. As a practitioner and participant of theatre, I have seen audiences cheer for productions as well as having been witness to the slow burn of disengagement and even the devastating occurrence of outright resistance. As an audience member I have experienced all three of these reactions and everything in between. In other words, audiences disengage and become resistant because of uncertainty as to what role was being cast upon them, and in searching for understanding of a “partly communicated” idea, witnesses disconnect from the performance in an attempt to decipher what it is they are supposed to do.

When it comes to the delicate issues surrounding and within alcohol abuse/dependency (or any social issue that is marginally discussed), audiences may have pre-established perceptions and/or experiences, which act as barriers that need to be challenged in order to move conversations forward, yet honored through the acknowledgement of their perspectives and positions. This is a challenging task, and in order to open up and/or establish dialogues regarding alcohol abuse/dependency these barriers need to be softened, made more flexible, and hopefully, in time, vanish through the expansion of learning, thinking, and understanding. Subsequent sections to this chapter illustrate methods that aid in this process, but these conversations are moot if audiences cannot understand their role as a member of the production. If the reason the audience is present is too vague, we run the risk of the audience feeling that their own experiences, their being present, is not fully respected.

Initiating Empathy: Aristotle and Boal

The importance of the audience has been recognized for as long as performance has been critiqued. Aristotle's *Poetics* is one of the earliest records where the value of the audience is not just acknowledged, but reiterated throughout the text. While modern practices may view *Poetics* as a dated, prescriptive interpretation of theatre, the text has laid a valuable foundation for nearly twenty-five hundred years. Aristotle's work is not only relevant to this chapter but also to this entire dissertation because of his level of respect for the role of the audience. Essentially, Aristotle holds the belief that even though dramatic art and literature holds immeasurable value, it is irrelevant without an audience.

More importantly, Aristotle discusses the importance of "poetry" (the term used at the time to denote forms of dramatic literature) by stating, "Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars. The universal is the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance with probability or necessity; this is what poetry aims at, even though it applies individual names" (16). Aristotle is talking of instances constructed by a playwright for a text and applied to characters, and he goes on to say that these instances are universal—recognizable by those watching the performance. In watching, audiences then become invested in the characters, identifying with them or arguing for them to choose a different path (Consider horror movies, when we collectively shout to a character who cannot hear us, "Don't go in there!"). In stories of a tragic nature, these instances and our responses to them are "events that evoke fear and pity" (17). This emotional evocation initiates a process where the audience is brought to a state of wonder. This state is most often confused with, and has been mis-interpreted as "catharsis," which, in the Greek context, means that an audience is brought to empathize with another without having to experience the traumas depicted. However,

as stated by Aristotle historian Joe Sachs, “the word *catharsis* drops out of the *Poetics* because the word wonder, *to rhaumaston*, replaces it... [Aristotle] singles out wonder as the aim of the poetic art itself... You have witnessed horrible things and felt painful feelings, but the mark of tragedy is that it brings you out the other side...” (Sachs, *Aristotle: Poetics*). Aristotle’s ultimate goals for the poet/playwright is to inspire the audience to feel for and feel with the characters, to empathize with them as a means of educating audiences to become more outstanding, upright Greeks.

The idea of using theatre to engage an audience member’s social awareness is nothing new, as Aristotle illustrates; nor has this form of advocacy diminished over time. Social activists consistently use the theatre to communicate their ideas to others, and no person epitomizes the use of theatre for activist ideals more than Argentinian director/artist/theorist Augusto Boal. Boal’s 1979 manifesto, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, has seen a recent resurgence in popularity as contemporary practitioners and students have become more and more enamored with Boal’s work and the idea that theatre can be used to insight social action. Unlike Aristotle, Boal is anti-catharsis and views audience members as active members within the production, not calling them spectators, but *spect-actors*. In his 1995 book, *The Rainbow of Desire*, Boal states, “[Aristotelian] form of theatrical production... seeks, by means of catharsis, to adapt the individual to society. For those who are happy with the values of that society, obviously this form of catharsis is useful” (Boal, *Rainbow*... 71-2). Boal advocates for the use of theatre to instigate audience members into changing systems of oppression (as opposed to feeling a sense of relief for not being a part of such systems, or feeling pity/sorrow for those who are), in his words, “...not then to create calm, equilibrium, but rather to create disequilibrium which prepares the way for action. Its goal is to *dynamize*...destroy all the blocks which prohibited the

realisation [*sic.*] of action as this. That is, it purifies the spect-actors...” (Boal, *Rainbow...* 72-3). Aristotle believed theatre to be a useful tool for audiences in the sense that they would find relief through a cathartic, *distant* purgation, whereas Boal argues theatre provides the spark that moves a marginalized group into action, and the action is where they find relief.

While Aristotle and Boal may differ on their respective end games, they both are proponents for using theatre to initiate empathy and compassion. Boal’s analysis of Aristotelian principles acknowledges that, “Empathy makes us feel as if we ourselves are experiencing what is actually happening to others...an emotional relationship between character and spectator” (Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* 35). However, empathy is not the goal for Boal, but rather a means to incite the passions of those viewing, which instigates change.

Theatre is political practice for Boal, as he states in his 1998 book, *Legislative Theatre*. In this text Boal offers several examples of how he and his company have used theatre to enact change, thus making their performances political activities. Of these experiences Boal offers models for practices, essentially giving methods for others to use to create political change, which he offers as tested field research, stating, “the most important aspect of all theatrical research resides in the means by which it can be extrapolated to other realities” (Boal, *Legislative Theatre* 88). It is here that theatre merges with my goals for the de-stigmatization of alcohol abuse/dependency and to use theatre as a potential means of healing for those affected by and dealing with what we commonly refer to as alcoholism.

Emotion as Political Action: Boal and Moreno

As put forth in Chapters 2 and 3, Goffman and Denzin’s theories on self as they pertain to social decorum and alcohol abuse/dependency speak to the complicated, dichotomous mind of

the alcoholic as it exists in the off-stage world. For a performer, understanding these negotiations of identity is vital to theatrical practices as the performance of a text requires an empathic understanding of what a particular character is going through. For an audience, an ability to see (through words and actions) why a character makes certain decisions informs the act of bearing witness, influencing evaluations and responses. The psychology involved in all participants leads to a synthesis of the messages/themes/ideas put forth by the production. For the text/performance that is focusing on alcohol abuse/dependency, the audience is asked (overtly or inadvertently) to make sense of characters and situations as they are put forth. Theatre, because of its storytelling and aesthetic/social relationship, is a means for audiences to see the thought processes of an alcoholic unfold, manifest, and influence her/his beliefs and actions as well as the beliefs and actions of others. Also, theatre can be a method to explore the whys, the possible (ir)rational reasons that bring an individual influenced by alcohol abuse/dependency to make the choices she/he chooses to make.

Tian Dayton's 1994 text *The Drama Within* addresses the use of psychodrama and the science of sociometry. Psychodrama and sociometry were made popular in the late 1930s by Dr. Jacob L. Moreno as methods of understanding the psychology of individuals and group dynamics. For Moreno, the psychodrama measured the daily "drama" of an individual whereas sociometry measured the "drama" of a group. Somewhat of a precursor to Goffman's everyday life performances, Moreno defined drama as choices made by individuals (either on her/his own or within group situations), which are performances based on reactions to personal experiences and that a person is a performer of many roles (Moreno xiii). Dayton takes the work established by Moreno to offer a means of healing to alcoholics and their families through structured role-play. Dayton uses the compounding and lasting feelings of guilt and shame caused by or as a

reaction to alcoholic-induced chaos to propose a therapeutic strategy stating, “Psychodrama offers the opportunity both to mobilize shame through direct enactment and to watch the enactment of others, so that shame can be brought from the inner depths to the surface of the mind where it can be seen and felt in the present” (215). While this is a debatable strategy for therapy and personal healing, what it does offer is the opportunity to separate from subjective understandings and move toward objective analysis of a scene that we (as audience, performer, and/or writer) are required to witness. To experience strong feelings within a safe space (as performer on stage or as audience bearing witness) is healing for all participants because we may be more tolerant due to the controlled environment (Dayton 206). In other words, watching and/or performing constructed texts asks participants to critique why the content *needs* to be said/performed/witnessed, thus allowing all participants the opportunity to *feel* what is presented, leading to the intended empathic understanding and, thus, a way to enrich healing.

However, as Dayton suggests, the act of feeling to enrich healing is an *opportunity*. If we are to use theatre as a means of healing with the goal of de-stigmatizing alcohol abuse and/or dependency, freeing the alcoholic from social condemnation, we must take cues from both Moreno’s work and Boal’s to move our opportunities into action. Looking at Boal’s practices of Forum Theatre, we are able to see how Moreno’s theories can be applied. Articulated in his contributing chapter to *Playing Boal* titled, “Augusto Boal and Jacob L. Moreno: Theatre and Therapy,” Daniel Feldhendler states that “Boal and Moreno share a fundamental conception of theatre and its healing effect and, even further, of human kind” (89). While Boal may have been anti-catharsis, he was a proponent of using theatre to liberate those oppressed by society’s institutional hierarchies. As Feldhendler points out (and as previously mentioned), Boal argued for the emotional impact felt by audiences to lead to action, but Boal was not opposed to the use

of theatre to make audiences empathetic towards a particular situation, individual, or cause. For Moreno, felt emotions lead to audience and performers' liberations, which they can take out into larger cultural contexts. This is a "revolution of healing," which was shared by Boal who declared in 1991 that "politics is the therapy of society, therapy is the politics of the person," thus, as Feldhendler concludes, "interactive possibilities of healing and social action have no limit" (Feldhendler 99). These ideas can bridge gaps between alcoholism, therapy, and theatre through a structured framework which focuses on the system of writers, performers, *and* audiences. This unit goes on to explain how the uses of psychodrama (the theories of Moreno) and Boal, can act to heal those suffering directly and indirectly from alcoholism.

Depictions of the alcoholic and alcohol use/abuse/dependency are widely featured in a variety of ways on the American stage, and there are opportunities to use the stage to initiate the audience in conversation. Using theatre to engage audiences in direct conversations regarding topics of alcohol is a difficult step and one that has only recently been overtly approached. While we value the empathy received by others and are thankful to and for those who participate in our productions/performances, we have to be prepared to move our ideas into the realm of political performances in order to enact social change. These steps require taking what has been discussed in this chapter and previous chapters and incorporating our intentions into the conceptions and constructions of our work (as stage performers, dramatic writers, theatre practitioners).

Storytelling as Access Leads to Theatre of De-Mystification

The ways in which to construct stories are vast, and the ways in which to tell stories are equally as vast. For the purposes of this section, I am using the term *story* synonymously with

any narrative that has performative possibilities or could be staged for an audience. Additionally, I have organized stories into two broad categories: non-traditional and traditional.

As far as theatre is concerned, non-traditional storytelling techniques commonly incorporate non-linear or episodic components, typically using presentational elements to call attention to the fact that what is being presented is not real. No effort is put forth by the storyteller(s), performer(s), or the overall production to hide the fact that what is being shown is a piece of theatre—the piece is presented to the audience whose presence is acknowledged and, in spite of possible reflexivity and critical self-evaluation, the stories are subjective and dramatized. Non-traditional storytelling for the stage comes in many forms and incorporates a variety of techniques to *tell* the audience a story.

Conversely, traditional storytelling for the theatre is to *show* the audience a story. Traditional storytelling for the theatre is linear in its structure, unveiling a narrative that is told in a cause-and-effect manner where the audience is allowed to track the events and characters through a linear progression of events from beginning to end. Also, traditional storytelling practices for the theatre rely on representational tenets, which attempt to maintain the illusion of the production, maintain that what is being produced on the stage is, in fact, actually happening even though the audience is aware that the events on the stage are not real.

While each of these methods have their own sets of benefits (and detractions), they are not mutually exclusive as the imagination, those building the stories, and those who witness the staged results do not think compartmentally and are able to track stories that incorporate elements of traditional and non-traditional structures. In fact, when dealing with personal issues that have a social stigma attached to the topic and/or attempting to show politically charged messages, many authors/performers incorporated multiple techniques as a means of engaging

audiences as well as protecting themselves from potential harm. This is to say that sometimes a story may be too personal to tell, so creating a fictional drama to show the story allows the storyteller to dissociate her/himself as an effective way to maintain anonymity or protect against vulnerability. Likewise, some stories have such a personal connection that they need to be told directly to an audience by the individual whose experience is being performed. Even though there is no “correct” way of telling a story, certain structural techniques result in specific effects and affects, and it is up to the storyteller and her/his vision and intended message(s) to elect what methods/modes of storytelling are to be employed.

Non-traditional

Non-traditional storytelling can, in fact, be the seemingly simple act of talking to another person and recounting to her/him an event. However, to do this apparently simple task in a performance setting, in front of an audience, is to embrace a particular set of structural techniques loosely labeled as non-traditional.¹⁰ I define non-traditional as any form of staged performance that directly acknowledges the audience *as* an audience and/or does not follow a linear plot structure.

As established, storytelling can act as a means of healing, and often, what needs to be healed is the lasting, unseen damage caused by something from our past (or present), caused by the actions we take ourselves or a result of the actions of another. The damage has been left to mend itself, yet for some, the damage is viscerally and constantly felt, remaining as open

¹⁰ Non-traditional is a broad categorization that encompasses an array of texts and storytelling methods, including but not limited to, the performance of non-linear plays (such as *How I Learned to Drive*), as well as personal narratives and autoethnographies.

wounds, whereas others feel forced to keep their already hidden scars a secret. Either way, the damage is there, invisible to most unless pointed to, and whether exhibited by fresh wounds or old scars, the damage is immune to any form of external-modern-Western medicine. For some, we seek constructive outlets as avenues of healing to alleviate the pain we feel and fix the wounds, and for many of us, this medicine comes in the form of writing. However, sometimes the act of writing is only the beginning of the healing process, and in order to capitalize on our means of recovery, we take what has been written and share it with others.

In her 1989 *Text and Performance Quarterly* article titled “Personal Narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research”, Kristin Langellier elaborates on the importance of the personal narrative, stating, “Studying the communication and performance of ordinary people invites researchers to listen on the margins of discourse and to give voice to muted groups in our society” and defining personal narratives as “the prototypical discourse unit...and a paradigm of human communication...a part of the study of everyday life, particularly performance in everyday life and the culture of everyday talk...” (Langellier 243). This is to say that the importance of an individual’s story is priceless. To hear an individual tell their tale, share their story, entrust their failures and lessons learned, and their wisdom to another, is a powerful experience to witness and experience. The use of personal narratives in the theatre is not as common as fictional, linear plays; however, the use of the personal in plays produced creates a different atmosphere and a different experience for audiences.

Exploring the humanity within a story from the individual who experienced it is vital within the recovery process. Author Augusten Burroughs has established himself as insightful voice to the topics of alcohol abuse/dependency in his books that chronicle his own struggles with alcohol abuse. In his 2003 book *Dry: A Memoir*, Burroughs recounts with remarkable detail

the inner workings of his brain as he struggles with sobriety, vacillating between thinking rationally and irrationally. He provides vivid (and at times horrific) insights into how he felt at various times in his recovery process:

In the middle of the night I understand that I am in alcohol withdrawal [sic.] and that it is serious and that I need to be in a hospital. But I cannot walk across my apartment, even to pee. I must pee in bed, sober, not asleep. I must pee in bed because I am too sick to walk. When I stand, I become massively dizzy and begin to black out. My legs itch and I have caused them to bleed. My throat feels like it has narrowed. Like I have hives inside my throat now. They feel like hands around my neck.

(Burroughs 287)

These often unheard details of recovery are myths to some who have not been privy to seeing them with their own eyes, and the stories of struggling to recovery are too often trapped in the minds of those who fear to share them. Yet they provide hope in their decrepit detail because they are the stories that can lead to solidarity. As Beverly Conyers states in her 2003 book, *Addict in the Family*:

Individuals who are ‘in recovery’ are not just the same people with different habits. They are people who have experienced an inner enlightenment, people whose new choices and behaviors spring naturally from a transformed inner self. It’s a lofty concept that has its roots in myths and religious teachings that speak to the power of human beings to reinvent themselves and being anew. (Conyers 86)

Again, to hear the words of others can provide insight, and to hear the insights of an individual who has experienced an event beyond comprehension is not only a teachable moment, but an opportunity for those who have similar experiences to say, “Yes. I’ve been there too. I am not alone.” In her 2008 tragic yet uplifting, funny yet heart-wrenching, enlightening yet baffling book, *Don’t Let the Bastards Grind You Down*, Georgia W. offers fifty chapters of short-stories, anecdotes of her experiences navigating through her recovery within Alcoholics Anonymous. Georgia W. never offers readers her last name, which is a common practice with people in recovery who attempt to avoid the stigmas associated with being an alcoholic. Imagine writing a book which is helpful to others in a similar situation as yourself, yet feeling uncomfortable identifying yourself publicly, essentially “coming-out” of the shadows to illustrate your words of wisdom within your everyday life. In the ninth chapter, titled “Fuck Your Feelings,” Georgia W. offers the following narrative:

Once, in a recovery meeting, I mentioned I was feeling miserable. I wasn’t really expecting a response, but I got one anyway. From the other side of the room came the word that inspired this chapter: ‘Fuck your feelings.’ As you might have guessed, my first instinct was to walk over to my vocal new friend and show my appreciation with a swift punch to the face. Instead, though, I just listened as he went on to explain what he meant by it. [...] I realized he had just be trying to tell me that I didn’t need to react immediately to my feelings and that I could in fact ride them out...It didn’t mean that my feelings weren’t important; it just meant that I couldn’t afford to get caught up in the extreme ups and downs that inevitably happen to all of us early on. (31-32)

At first read, this story reminded me of a similar moment in my own life when I was told, “Tom, has it ever occurred to you that no matter what you’re feeling, you’re absolutely right? In other words, it’s okay for you to feel what you feel. Everyone has feelings.” Reading Georgia W.’s narrative and linking with another moment in my life; I suddenly had great empathy for Georgia. I felt what she felt because she offered me a story that I could stand back from and say, “Yes, I have experienced something similar.” The use of the word “story” has a heavy, nearly spiritual connotation in recovery programs because of the ritualistic power connected to the act of “reaching out,” the empathic exchange when an individual states, “Let me tell you my *story*.”

These ideas are extended into the performance realm when the telling of a personal narrative occurs on stage, such as within autoethnographic performances. Tami Spry’s re-printing of “Skins: A Daughter’s (Re)construction of Cancer” from her 2011 text *Body, Paper, Stage* answers the question, “Why Do Performative Autoethnography?” The answer comes through Spry’s performance of “Skins,” “[t]hrough this performance,” she states, “I was able to understand and articulate deeper complexities surrounding my mother’s passing. Moreover, following this performance, audience members were anxious to tell me about their own experiences with family members, grief, and healing” (49). This introduces what Spry calls *practiced vulnerability*,¹¹ a methodology employed by performers that challenges their comfort zones, moving away from what is familiar in order to push the performer into a purposeful state of liminality where the performer can embrace and navigate the *performative-I persona* (Spry 167). The performative-I persona is Spry’s conceptualization of the performer/persona hybrid; performer being the individual in the act of performing, persona being the embodied engagement

¹¹ Practiced vulnerability is a methodology developed by Spry over fifteen years of what she states as “trial and error pedagogy” connected to her instruction of critical performative autoethnography.

of the constructed individual displayed before the audience (174). It is here that Spry states the “process is one of continual becoming where we learn more about ourselves and others through embodying the language chosen to represent experience” (174). Much like Langellier’s inner/outer relationship, Spry is talking about an ongoing duality within the performer. The performance of the text initiates the performative-I persona and leads to the enactment of a practiced vulnerability, allowing for the performer “to move deeper into reflecting upon what happened,” examining sociocultural expectations, the perpetuate norms, moments of silence or inhibited speaking (Spry 169). Essentially, practiced vulnerability is an intentionally critical examination of the self, and when incorporated into non-traditional performances enables performers to offer a more rounded critique of memories and personal experiences, thus enhancing and nuancing the messages sent forth from the performance.

While the performer is going through her/his own deepening of understanding, the audience is privy to the narrative unfolding before them, seeing the effects and results of performative-I persona and the practiced vulnerability taking place, and because writer/performer and audience are housed within a space designated for performance, mutual allowances are made (stemming from the theatricality) where learning is taking place intentionally yet subversively. This subversive learning/teaching is caused by the dual construction undertaken by the writer/performer. The text being performed has been literally constructed—word choices have been selected, phrasing incorporated, structural elements employed, messages/themes identified—but there is also a metaphorical construction taking place in that what is being presented has purpose beyond the text or the performance. The writer/performer has something to say, is saying/performing this message, and is relying on the

audience to receive the message and (hopefully) walk away from the performance with a new/enlightened understanding of the experience.

For the alcoholic telling her/his story, this non-traditional approach incorporates the direct speaker-to-listener relationship and has pedagogical intentions. A.A. advocates for the sharing of stories as a means of expressing experience, strength, and hope—a symbolic and literal practice that is at the core of the program. The added implication is that the audience (be it one listener or many) takes what has been learned and shares it with others to aid in the recovery process. The stories told within the recovery process have an efficacy that ripples out and beyond the person sharing. Stories are told with the purpose of not just purgation, not just to initiate empathy or understanding, but to instigate others into the act of healing, to perpetuate the lessons and experiences further and further so others who *need* to hear them *can* hear them.

Traditional

When addressing social/cultural/political content or the content of the personal within a traditional (i.e., linear, representational) text, writers/performers do not have the luxury of directly addressing their audiences; however, they have the ability to show, to illustrate, a particular situation. Even though the use of traditional playwriting elements and structures leaves the audience to interpret messages and themes more abstractly, this is by no means a bad thing as audiences are allowed to form their own respective opinions as to what the play is *about*. Yet to attempt to tackle the topic of alcohol abuse/dependency on the stage in a traditional manner, with the intent of encouraging or initiating social/political change requires a production to take the audience engagement a step further. Recently, production companies have begun using traditional plays, such as O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, to address the problems with

and repercussions of stigmatizing alcoholic behaviors. Some companies are not stopping when the actors take their bows—the conversation continues in post-performance dialogues and/or talk-back sessions with audiences.

The Brooklyn-based theatre company Outside the Wire identifies themselves as a “social impact company that uses theater...to address [among other social issues] the de-stigmatization of the treatment of substance abuse and addiction” as part of their *Addiction Performance Project*. In this project, the company reads the third act of O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* which acts “as a catalyst for town hall discussions about the disease of addiction as it touches patients, families, and health professionals who work in the fields of primary care, nursing, and clinical bioethics.” This reading is then followed by a panel discussion led by “community experts, culminating in a facilitated town hall discussion about the complex ethical and professional challenges posed by screening for, and treating, patients who are abusing drugs and/or struggling with addiction.” Their website also states the usefulness of the discussions as a “unique participatory event [which] raises awareness of addiction as a chronic disease” (*Outside the Wire, About*). The intentions for Outside the Wire are to meet the stigmas associated with substance abuse head-on in order to promote healthy forums where discussions among diverse communities (made up of representatives from the medical community as well as people in recovery and their families) can take place.

Outside the Wire initially focused on post-traumatic stress disorders for Veterans in their Theatre of War project. In November 2009, Bryan Doerries¹² told *New York Times* reporter Patrick Healy that his intentions for staging Greek war plays, such as Sophocles’ *Ajax*, act as:

¹² Doerries was one of the original writers and the founder of Theater of War. He is currently the Artistic Director of Outside the Wire.

...a public health project to help service members and relatives overcome stigmas about psychological injuries by showing that some of the bravest heroes suffered mentally from battle “Through theater we’re trying to offer some ideas and experiences for our troops and veterans to think about when they don’t feel comfortable opening up about their private thoughts,” said Mr. Doerries, whose work grew out of an earlier effort, the Philoctetes Project. (Healy)

Doerries goes on to say that “By performing these scenes, we’re hoping that our modern-day soldiers will see their difficulties in a larger historical context, and perhaps feel less alone” (Healy). While not addressing alcoholism specifically, Doerries and Theatre of War use the power of plays to promote healing and generate conversations about the issues of post-traumatic stress disorder and personal traumas. One of the most important aspects of Theatre of War comes in the company’s post-performance discussions with the audience, led by a panel with representatives from the military as well as therapists and veterans who “spoke about their own sleepless nights, drug addictions and isolation from family members” (Healy). Healy’s article concludes with Iraq combat veteran Sgt. First Class Tony Gonzalez, recalling the aversions to PTSD discussions at the time of his joining the Army, but in this venue he was able to describe his own experiences, “And he praised the use of theater to help put a spotlight on trauma. ‘I’ve been Ajax,’ he said. ‘I’ve spoken to Ajax.’” (Healy). What Theatre of War does is provide a venue for open discussions between a wide range of people that have an association (directly or indirectly) with the topic at hand.

While this speaks to the expressed desires and resulting effect/affect audiences felt in response to Theatre of War, *Outside the Wire* went a step further and began to address other

social relevant topics using theatre as a means to engage with audiences. One such topic was alcohol abuse/dependency, which Outside the Wire established The Addiction Performance Project (APP). Their use of *Long Day's Journey...* allows for a variety of people, all of whom have different associations with alcohol abuse, to approach the topics and see relatable situations unfold, while maintaining a safe distance, a somewhat objective perspective, to the material being performed. The APP is designed to raise awareness and encourage screening and early addressing of growing alcohol abuse.

The APP is not just for those dealing with alcohol abuse/dependency first hand as “the town hall discussion also creates an opportunity for medical providers to examine their own biases toward patients struggling with addiction by empowering these professionals to share their responses to the dramatic portrayal of addiction in O’Neill’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play, as well as to the remarks of community panelists” (*Outside the Wire, Addiction Performance Project*).

Press for the APP has opened some exciting doors and response has been broadly encouraging as the projects has used various celebrities to perform in the readings as well as bringing professionals within the treatment community together. Oscar nominated actress Deborah Winger not only performed in one of the many readings of O’Neill’s play in 2011, but in an interview with the National Institutes of Health’s *MedlinePlus Magazine* stated that her involvement with the APP is because she shares the project’s desires to break the stigmas associated with alcohol abuse/dependency. Winger states:

Drug and alcohol use has become part of the fabric of American life. My connection is partly from my family experience and a little bit from the world at large. Everyone is touched by addiction in one way or another...Let’s talk about what’s going on around [the individual] and the

family. Basically, this is what we're trying to do here, bring humanism back into medicine... The message [to medical professionals] is, listen carefully. There are two people in the room, you and the patient, so listen carefully. The healthcare professional must be ready for the full picture: what family life is like, the level of education, money issues; everything needs to be considered. (*Actress Deborah Winger...*)

In her 2011 *American Psychological Association* snapshot of the APP, Bridget Murray Law provides an overview of the project along with connecting the play to O'Neill's biography while highlighting the project's relevance to today's conversations regarding alcohol related stigmas:

O'Neill's shame about his family's troubles ran so deep that he couldn't stand to see the play performed during his lifetime... More than 50 years later, at APA's 2011 Annual Convention, a cast of actors and an audience of psychologists used the play to examine the issue of addiction-related stigma head on... In a discussion following the performance, panelists noted how the scene portrays patterns of denial, blame, anger and bitterness that are typical in families affected by addiction. Certainly there are positive reinforcing effects of the drugs—pleasure and relaxation, for example—but there also negative reinforcing effects, said NIDA Acting Deputy Director David Shurtleff, PhD. "Family members take it not just to feel better but to escape pain, which then affects parts of the brain related to coping, emotional regulation and judgment. So this makes the family dysfunctional in relation to each other, and they escape into the drug even more to cope. It's a vicious cycle..."

Of the play itself, panelist and psychiatry professor Dr. Kathleen Carroll asks, "Why is it so hard to talk about addiction? The family in this play was always talking around it ... I see the same patterns in my psychotherapy tapes—brushing over it, dancing around it" (Murray Law).

Likewise Murray Law quotes another panelist, Dr. Carlo DiClemente, a psychology professor at the University of Maryland who has "noted that facing addiction is uncomfortable and that, at times, watching the play made him want to leave the room" (Murray Law). Essentially Murray Law sums up the intentions for the APP including medical professionals in the talk-back sessions and panels as an opportunity to provide them with tools to take into their own practices:

Ask patients directly about past and present alcohol and drug use...Draw patients out on addiction issues by asking follow-up questions...Choose less stigmatizing words, such as "person with addiction or alcohol problems," rather than addicts or alcoholics. "Stigma itself is a stigmatizing word," said one audience member. Work on empathizing with people with addiction problems and withholding judgment. "We psychologists are guilty of stigmatizing our own colleagues who have struggled with these disorders," said DiClemente. Understand that relapse is part of this disease, just like it is part of any chronic disease. Teach patients with addiction problems alternative coping and social-interaction strategies." This is where psychology and cognitive-behavioral therapy can play a great role," said Shurtleff, "not just in treating the individual addict but in helping them come back into the family and society, helping to restructure and bring back that family unit.

This direct address to medical professional not only indicts problematic behaviors found in various health organizations, but also provides a new way of framing the issues themselves. Likewise, Maiken Scott's 2012 *newworks* article, "Dramatic reading spurs discussion of addiction at psychiatric conference in Philly," directly contrast the APP with other ways of discussing health related issues, "It's usually Powerpoint slides, statistics and pie charts at professional conferences -- but those attending the American Psychiatric Association's national conference in Philadelphia were treated to a star-studded performance Tuesday: a dramatic reading exploring issues around addiction" (Scott). Scott goes on to quote University of Pennsylvania psychiatrist and addiction expert Charles O'Brien, who says, "Everyone in the audience will have something that hits home to their personal experience when they see this play... Most people still believe that if you get the drugs out of people's bodies, you have cured their addiction... That is barely a beginning" (Scott). O'Brien's statement of the APP being a beginning, a starting point of initiating dialogues is matched by audiences, who have expressed hope that the work done by the APP will continue, and their hope seems to be validated as other companies are beginning to follow suit.

This past winter, the Minneapolis based Guthrie Theatre, who was producing *Long Day's Journey...*, teamed with the Mayo Clinic where a performance of the plays was used as a vehicle for discussing alcohol abuse/dependency. On January 26, 2013, the Mayo Clinic hosted a medical education program for health professionals and opened the continuing-education program to the public. Dr. Timothy Lineberry, a panelist and speaker at the event, was interviewed by Susan Perry of *MinnPost*, where they discussed the efficacy of the O'Neill's play. The following is an excerpt from that interview:

MP: How accurately does the play depict addiction?

LINEBERRY: It's really remarkable. It speaks to issues that we're struggling with now, like opioid dependence and the prescription opioid epidemic, as well as the issues with alcohol dependence. It's probably even more relevant today than it was in the 1950s.

MP: What do we know about addiction today that we didn't know all those decades ago when this play was being written and first produced?

LINEBERRY: It's interesting because the play is set in the early 1900s, before World War I. There really weren't options related to effective treatments then. In fact, there was a stigma associated with treatment. Nor was there an understanding of the biological framework and the other issues associated with substance abuse and addiction.

MP: Addiction was often considered a character flaw.

LINEBERRY: Yes. And I think even at this time, frankly, there are a number of issues with stigma and lack of understanding.

MP: Do you think playgoers will come away from this play with a better understanding of addiction?

LINEBERRY: Yes, particularly in the context of understanding the family impact and struggles with addiction. There is a part [of the play] that's fictionalized, but, obviously, this is very autobiographical as well. It does a nice job of illuminating the personal impact that addiction has on individuals and on families.

MP: What do you hope health-care clinicians will take away from the play?

LINEBERRY: It's kind of a combination of things. It's really about identification, treatment and understanding. For clinicians, the hope is that the emotional content of the play may help them remember and improve their understanding of addiction.

MP: Are clinicians doing a good job with recognizing and getting help for people with addictions?

LINEBERRY: Our data does not reflect that. In terms of quality of care for screening and identifying substance disorders, we have significant room for improvement.

MP: What about the general public? What can individuals be doing to help with the country's addiction problem?

LINEBERRY: Our hope with [Saturday's program] is to help people understand the impact of addiction. I think that's what makes this play so powerful. But people also need to understand that there are treatments available. There are things we can do to make a difference. Hope is a significant aspect of people getting better. I'm impressed in my clinical practice with how persistent people are. If you can get people through situations and inspire hope, they'll recognize that there is a chance that things can be better. Then you can do good things.

MP: Anything else people should know about Saturday's program?

LINEBERRY: I think it will be fun. I don't want people just to think, "Oh, my gosh, a play on addiction." Events like this are really a chance to raise how we remember and think about things like addiction. If you get down

to the scientific aspect of it, emotional experiences — the arts, music — those things have a powerful impact in terms of memory and association. So, if we can combine a very emotionally powerful and easily understood story with knowledge, people are much more likely to retain and use that knowledge.

Lineberry's comments echo those of the APP and other participants who see the potential benefits held by dramatic works. *Long Day's Journey...* is a part of our canon of American dramatic literature, but the play also speaks to a particular human condition, a societal problem that, in the past, has been relegated to the shadows. Yet the play is offering an avenue for burgeoning dialogues which humanize the issues connected to substance abuse and de-mystify the stigmas with the intentions of breaking socially constructed stereotypes.

The traditional play, while powerful in its affect, is made even more effective when coupled with open, post-performance discussions. These discussions act as a bridging mechanism that takes the affect of the play and capitalizes on the emotions to move the play into a political practice with the intent of enacting social change. By incorporating the discussions, the play, while a traditional (linear) play, becomes a piece of political theatre.

Summary

Theatre can be groundbreaking for many reasons. Whether through the incorporation of new, innovated techniques in the construction of text, the implementation of new media to enhance the aesthetic appeal, or possibly through the content of the plays themselves, theatre holds a myriad of potential avenues that can be used to break socially constructed misconceptions. The practices and techniques in this chapter are tools to not only bring the topic

of alcohol abuse/dependency to the forefront, but to also act as a means of de-mystifying and de-stigmatizing problematic interpretations and depictions of alcohol use. These techniques are not the ultimate solutions to the societal problem of alcohol abuse/dependency, but rather an additional approach to the ongoing conversations of how to combat the issues faced by individuals and families every day.

The use of theatre to address societal problems such as the marginalization of those suffering from stigmatization due to problematic alcohol use can be a powerful tool that will allow the topic to step out from the shadows; enabling those who deal with this problem on a daily basis to have a means to tell their stories. The act of storytelling can be more than an illustration of events. Storytelling can act as a call for action, a means of establishing community and solidarity, and initiate empathy.

However, we, as a culture, need to take our collective empathy, what we learn from the stories we are given, and push our emotions into action. Taking cues from Boal, we can translate emotion into an agenda which will result in social change, thus making our stories political practices. The use of non-traditional storytelling techniques on the stage allows for us to use direct-address to an audience of witnesses, and the use of more traditional plays can do the same, yet as practitioners, we have an opportunity to move the conversations forward, as can be seen in the practices of Outside the Wire's Addiction Performance Project as well as the Mayo Clinic's willingness to use theatre to initiate empathic understanding.

Results do not have to be overt, we do not necessarily have to have structured talk-back sessions to make our points, yet we must not allow fear or uncomfortable associations to dissuade us from action. Live audiences are interactive members of the collaborative process that is theatre, and the final and most vital component to our discipline that sets us apart from other

forms of artistic production and expression. We must honor the presence of the audience by acknowledging not only their presence, but their intelligence and willingness to join us as co-partners in the storytelling process. Lastly, while audiences may be resistant to the subject, or have pre-conceived notions of the alcohol abuse/dependency stemming from a myriad of personal or societal biases, we have to keep in mind that “all you need is one.” One audience member who walks away with a greater awareness of or a critical re-examination of or a self-reflective shift in opinion of alcohol abuse/dependency is an indication that what we say on the stage (and off) matters and make significant, lasting change to that individual and those they meet.

CHAPTER 5

DESCARTES À LA MODE: COMING TO TERMS WITH SELF-DECEPTION(Preface to the Play)¹³

But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

-Renee Descartes, *First Meditation*¹⁴

To be blunt, I do not consider *Descartes à la Mode* to be *about* alcoholism. Too often when I ask students to discuss what a play is about, they have a tendency to jump to plot points and/or begin by explaining what happens to specific characters. My intention in asking them to define what a play is about is always to initiate their critical thinking skills and to have them look deeper into a text for the themes, motifs, messages, and ideas put forth by a playwright. Therefore, in the case of this play, it is important for me to distinguish that while alcoholism is a major factor within the plot and the overall narrative, I do not consider the play to be *about* alcoholism. For me, *Descartes...* may have some of my personal feelings and ideas on the ongoing social and cultural commentaries regarding alcohol abuse and alcohol dependency, but to be specific, there are two thematic through-lines that illuminate what the play is *about*: first, the play is about boundaries, and second, the play is about perceptions.

¹³ The play, in its entirety can be found in Appendix A, page 203 of this document.

¹⁴ While many translations of Descartes' "Meditations" exist, I am using the translation as featured in Baird and Kaufmann's *Modern Philosophy (third edition)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000. 22.

In terms of boundaries, the play looks at institutional, moral, ethical, and personal boundaries that are, in theory, clearly defined by particular social codes of conduct or an established set of rules enforced by hierarchical standards; yet upon closer inspection, a quagmire of indeterminate, mutable grey areas appear that are less easy to define. These grey areas are situations where the lines of “good versus bad” and “right versus wrong” are flexible and present questions with undefinable answers, which lead us to ask “what would you do if you were in this situation?”

This connects to perceptions in that what one person sees as the *right* course of action is debatable or could be contradictory to the course of action somebody else might take if placed in the exact same situation. Perception also has another meaning in the vein of self-awareness and being able to be self-reflexive (or being inhibited in self-evaluative practices). In this vein, the play indicts the personal choices made by a man in recovery who is placed in situations that have ambiguous or interpretable courses of action. In other words, one of the questions put forth in the play is, “how does one make the perceived *right* choice when there is no commonly accepted *right* answer?” Additionally, the play takes perception as a means of looking at self-delusion and how a person, specifically a person in recovery from chemical abuse/dependency, can convince her/himself that she/he is making rational decisions. Admittedly, these thematic through-lines have been developed as I have gone through the writing process. Since the original inception of this play, the kernel that is now over four years old, the play has evolved to reveal these topics to me, which I have then used to strengthen the overall messages.

This preface is meant to illustrate not only the development of the play and to show how I have come to this stage in the play’s development, but also to illustrate how my

research on alcohol abuse/dependency has influenced the construction process. The draft that appears in this dissertation is a pre-production draft, and while I have had the opportunity to hear the play in informal staged readings, the play continues to grow and change. Ultimately, I view the version of the play featured here to be incomplete as it has not had the benefits of a fully staged production, and until it does, I consider it to be a play under construction.

Inception and Conception

I had a thought rolling around inside my head for almost a year before I sat down to write the first draft of *Descartes à la Mode*. This thought was, “I only *think* I know what I know.” This was the fall of 2008, and a period of great personal transition in my life. I had left my job as a part-time high school teacher the previous spring to pursue my development as a playwright. I was working odd jobs and earning modest wages as a writer-for-hire, but consistently met with the realities of being a full-time playwright—in other words, things were not going well. I was disillusioned by my inability to find a home within the theatre community where I was living, and was constantly in a place of self-doubt, and as a result, was heavily reflective on what I believed was a mistake in leaving my teaching position.

While I was teaching (I was the technical director at a public high school with an arts/humanities pilot program), I was struck by the connections students made with their instructors. In this program, between classes, in after school rehearsals, and during weekend set-construction workshops, we would spend a remarkable amount of time with students, and often, I was the only adult in the building, responsible for what could have been thirty to fifty students ages fourteen through eighteen, and because of the sheer amount of time spent with students, bonds were formed that went beyond those of simply student-teacher. In other words, I often felt

that my role as teacher/instructor was second to the role of confidant, mentor, and even friend. And because of my naiveté and lack of experience at the time, I had a hard time finding my own identity as an educator.

The social codes that were designed to establish personal boundaries, codes stressed by the administration during our first-year teacher orientations, began to devolve as I spent more time with students in venues that cannot be qualified as “traditional classroom settings.” During rehearsals and weekends where we would build sets, clean costumes, and/or hang lights, we would also be listening to music, eating pizza, and discussing movies, television shows, and yes, celebrity gossip (It was a high school after all.). However, in doing these seemingly innocent activities, personal barriers began to slowly ebb and wane, especially with the seniors, who had not been in my classroom (They had already taken the tech courses in previous years.); therefore they had no experience in seeing me in the role of “teacher.” As a result, these students would often converse with me about college and graduate school programs, my experiences as a performer and playwright, and ask my opinions about art and even the role of theatre in our culture, which admittedly, were wonderfully topics to discuss with enthusiastic, optimistic youths eager to leave high school and take the theatrical world by storm.

The breakdown of traditional student/teacher barriers started small; students who started off calling me “Mr. Campbell” began referring to me as just “Campbell.” Where they began asking me questions about specific tasks, they eventually began asking me about my plays, my life, my ideas, opinions, even joking and teasing me as I became more of, what they perceived as, a member of their community. Granted, these are warm memories, and I consider my time at that school a truly remarkable experience and one I value a great deal. But the fact was, the majority of the students that worked with me never saw me as an authoritative “adult” or even an

“experienced” teacher, but rather, they saw me more as a guy who came in to help the teachers, as somebody they could talk to. Simply, they saw me merely as “Campbell.”

In spite of my awareness to establish a set boundary of me-as-teacher, my relationship with the students became something more personal over an extended period of time. There was nothing conscious or any decisive moment that initiated this evolution, but rather a gradual melding of me-as-multiple identities came to the surface. This, combined with the students’ inadvertent ability to influence my personal space led me to wonder of a dangerous situation where somebody in a position of power, such as a teacher, was unable or unwilling to maintain control over her/himself. What would happen if somebody perceived to be “an adult” acted in wildly dangerous ways that endangered him/her and others? What if a student and a teacher were to develop a friendship that other’s perceived to be inappropriate?

This was a frightening thought as it illuminated not only the necessity of certain boundaries, but also the pliability and fragility of personal boundaries that are already in place. My fear of this dangerous premise combined with the thought, “I only think I know what I know,” evolved into me conceiving of a two scenes: the first of which was a scene between a student and a teacher that showed a personal relationship that appeared to be in violation of the traditional student-teacher relationship; the second scene was about said teacher packing up his desk because his job had been terminated due to said relationship. These two scenes stayed in my mind for nearly a year before I committed them to the page.

In the fall of 2009, it was René Descartes himself who jumped in to help me find the necessary vehicle to develop my story. One night, I awoke thinking, “It’s only a table because we’ve applied meaning to it.” As I rolled around in bed, attempting to go back to sleep, the thought remained, and I eventually got up to flesh it out. In doing so, I was reminded of my

undergraduate Modern Philosophy class, and in going back to my notes I was reminded that my thought and experience were both similar to Descartes' dream experiences which led him to his now famously invaluable *Meditations*. My mind was racing with a variety of anxious emotions. Finally, I concluded that I had been bouncing the two scenes around my head for long enough, that I had broken down my nihilistic disillusionment for long enough, and now, having this new component staring me in the face, I was ready to sit down to work on a new play with the intention of merging these elements.

I was intimidated. Not only was this play my first new work in over two years, but the content of my sketchy story was uncomfortable to me. I did not like the idea that my main character had potentially predatorial tendencies, not to mention that aside from the ending of (what would become) the first scene and the conclusion of this story, I had very little knowledge of what I wanted to write. Additionally, while Descartes' *Meditations* were a valuable component, I was lacking a story beyond what I had already conceived. At this stage, I had two scenes, a character I did not particularly care for, Descartes' *Meditations*, and absolutely no idea where to begin.

Development

As a playwright, the characters in my stories are what drive me. I have to be able to identify with my protagonist as I want her/him to succeed, and above all, I must like my protagonist. In the case of this play, my initial design of the protagonist left me with an uncomfortable mix of feelings. Almost immediately, I knew that my teacher could not have a sexual relationship with his student, because there would have been little chance for me to want to work with this person. While I admire and applaud Paula Vogel for creating a character in

Uncle Peck with whom I sympathized, I knew that I did not have the compassion necessary to live with a character who I felt was consciously taking advantage of another human, no matter the circumstances. In order to combat this, I began to think of situations where people meet and build relationships only to be forced to redefine their mutual roles when they cross paths in different social contexts.

As mentioned, I have personal experience in seeing the detrimental effects alcohol abuse/dependency can have on the lives of people. Likewise, I have witnessed on numerous occasions the detrimental loneliness an identified alcoholic feels when entering recovery and how their ability to connect with “normal” people is diminished as a result of social and cultural marginalization. Roma S. Palmer and Judith C. Daniluk’s 2007 *Canadian Journal of Counseling* article, “The Perceived Role of Others in Facilitating or Impeding Healing from Substance Abuse,” discusses how an individual who identifies as an alcoholic needs to feel welcomed in a community to aid the recovery process, stating:

On the whole, when interactions were experienced as inclusive and welcoming, particularly when they came from a source not involving drugs or alcohol, the interactions were reported as facilitative in participants’ healing journeys. Sharing their stories and lives in a supportive context with other addicts, often within AA or NA, gave [self-identified alcoholics] the feeling, sometimes for the first time in their lives, of belonging to a group. (205)

Considering this fact, I came to the conclusion that defining my teacher and student as individuals in recovery would give them a bond that reached beyond their classroom setting as

well as giving them a relationship that had deep, emotional connections but avoided a sexual connotation.

Palmer and Daniluk also note the potential harm in associating with fellow self-identified alcoholics during the recovery process as they cite interviewees' shifts in perceptions, stating, "Interactions involving other users were retrospectively experienced as hindering for [interviewees], although they were perceived to reflect a common understanding at the time" (204). This is to say that while individuals in recovery may see fellows as cohorts, confidants, and/or allies in their collective recovery process, in time, individuals come to see how the continuing detriments of being an alcoholic can affect aspects of their lives outside of treatment, effectively distinguishing between other alcoholics that are aiding or hindering recovery. This concept directly influenced my conceptions of the relationship between two of my characters: Malcolm Barron (my protagonist and the teacher) and Evie Price (the student). I decided that Malcolm (also called Mal in the text) became a teacher who met Evie in an alcohol treatment program before knowing that she was a student at the school in which he taught.

Having this framework was a vital breakthrough as I began to write, and two weeks later I had constructed a draft of *Descartes à la Mode*, a story about a twenty-eight year old high school teacher, Malcolm Barron, newly in recovery from his addiction to alcohol, and trying to figure out what he wanted his life to be. Mal's journey is one of self-discovery, but unlike other stories with this foundation, Mal shares the traits of an unreliable narrator in that we (as audience) see the story through his eyes, yet his perceptions are skewed by the lingering effects of his alcohol dependency. Mal is healing, and as the story unfolds, we come to see how he continues to make questionable choices that a "healthy" person would not necessarily make.

Mal's story unfolded before me quickly. Within two weeks I had a draft of a full-length play that featured Mal's struggles in his new, sober lifestyle, and incorporated a rough understanding of the troubled issues with identity a person such as Mal might endure. Mal's story also held four other characters: Evie Price (the student), Warren Waxell (friend and co-worker to Mal), Karen Rosenberg (a new teacher and love interest to Mal), and Mal's mother. Except for the character of Mal's mother, each character has remained through the most recent draft, and while I had hoped to feature Mal's mother to illustrate the trials endured by the family of an alcoholic, she ended up representing action that was outside the main story, and was therefore unnecessary to what I wanted to say. Additionally, I was able to incorporate excerpts from Descartes' Meditations One and Two to shadow Mal's journey of self-discover and the careful, deliberate indictment of his beliefs.

Throughout 2010, this draft of the play had three separate staged readings: two of the readings occurred in private reading sessions in May of 2010 by volunteer directors and performers; the third reading was a self-directed public reading at SIUC in October of 2010. What I discovered most from each of these readings is that my intentions of showing Mal as wayward, as somebody looking for a direction in a new and unfamiliar reality, actually ended up in making him passive—a reactive character who, unfortunately, came off as not wanting little from life except to be left alone. Additionally, the lecture portions of the text which featured Mal talking to the audience as though they were his students (learning about Descartes' philosophies) were too disconnected from his own journey. The philosophy did not mirror or inform the action that was taking place, which created a rift in what the message was supposed to be—audiences were confused as to whether the play was about the philosophies of Descartes, or about the ambling journey of a recovering alcoholic in search of a direction.

Following the third reading, which confirmed (again) the audience's reactions from the previous two readings, I felt I needed to walk away from the play as I had no idea where to take Mal. Actually, I found myself identifying with Mal's lack of direction. Neither Mal nor I had any idea what the other wanted or how to proceed. To be honest, we both needed some space.

Revising and Incorporating Research

It was not until the summer of 2012, after completing an independent study and having taken my preliminary examination (where an essay was the precursor to chapters two and three of this dissertation), that I decided to return to *Descartes à la Mode*. The work over the past six months has resulted in the draft featured here, which has been directly impacted by my research. This draft is my attempt to incorporate alcoholism rhetoric and feature the complicated thought processes of the alcoholic's negotiations with identity. Most importantly, this is my own attempt to fold these aspects into a linear-structured, representational play¹⁵ to further humanize the alcoholic.

As the play now stands, Malcolm's journey has shifted to show how he is a character that believes his recent sobriety has solved all of his problems. Five months after leaving treatment, he is approaching his job and life with a new found optimism and clarity... or so he thinks. Even though Mal believes his problems are on-the-mend, his perceptions of a rational reality are still forming. He is "foggy" in how he juggles his job, a rocky friendship, a burgeoning relationship with a co-worker, a potentially harmful relationship with a student, all while coming to terms

¹⁵ Admittedly, I cheat around classifying Mal's monologues as "presentational" because, even though he is addressing the audience, they are cast in the role of Mal's students, therefore maintaining the illusion that what is being performed is "real." If anything, I would classify Mal's monologues as presentational-esque.

with the rigors of his day-to-day, moment-to-moment sobriety. Using Descartes's meditations as a vehicle of self-discovery, Mal finally grasps his true beliefs and embraces the uncertainty in his life and his tumultuous sobriety.

In addition to using the time away from the play to ruminate on solidifying Mal's journey, I also had the luxury of spending time with many great writers whose own writings on alcohol abuse/dependency informed my interpretations of what Mal wanted from life and who he wanted to be. In addition to the nearly two dozen plays read for my independent study, I have been able to spend time with texts written by physicians, sociologists, performance studies scholars, Taoist and Buddhist philosophers, all geared toward substance abuse recovery as well as literature from specific recovery programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Many of these writers and their works have informed me in ways that are ingrained, felt, and difficult to articulate, yet the ones who stand out are as follows. Augusten Burroughs' memoir *Dry* helped me to see the deceptions brought on by complacency and over confidence to those new to sobriety. Kevin Griffin's semi-autobiographical work *One Breath at a Time: Buddhism and the Twelve Steps* uses the Eastern philosophies of Buddhism and weaves them beautifully with the tenets of Alcoholics Anonymous while offering a deeply personal story of recovery. Norman K. Denzin's copious amounts of work from a sociological perspective helped me to form how others perceive and/or conceive of those in recovery. Even Pema Chodron's conceptions of the warrior-bodhisattva as featured in her text *Comfortable with Uncertainty* ended up being quoted in the text of the play.

The most influential text that aided in my development of Mal came from the text *Alcoholics Anonymous*. As Dr. William Silkworth's introduction ("The Doctor's Opinion") explains, the cyclical nature of an alcoholic who drinks, feels remorse, and vows to change

forever, only to return to drinking can be baffling and devastating, confounding to the drinker as well as to those around her/him, and this behavior “is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery” (xxix). The idea of an “entire psychic change” is reminiscent of what Descartes experienced during his meditations. Silkworth’s “psychic change” is repeated in the text’s second chapter, “There is a Solution” as it states, “When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed” (25). Even though Western conceptualizations of God (or religion in general) intentionally make no appearance in the play, the abstract concepts of change and enlightenment, of an individual “being rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence” are profoundly intriguing, and again, reminiscent of Descartes’ pursuit of absolute certainty. The most profound passage from *Alcoholics Anonymous* that correlates to Mal’s journey and the messages of the play comes from the sixth chapter, titled “Into Action” where there is an affirmation about vigilant work leads to relief, included here in its entirety:

As God’s people we stand on our feet; we don’t crawl before anyone. If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are halfway through. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and

outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them. (83-84)

Mal's desire for clarity and certainty, to understand himself and have faith in a structure of beliefs may not be a religious journey, but it is certainly a spiritual journey, a journey that requires Mal to ask himself what he believes and be critical of his past beliefs as well as to take daily measures to ensure his personal safety and build towards a future he can see as optimistic.

The concepts in A.A. and the information from other texts were vital components to my continued formulation of Mal's character, and eventually, through these texts and my own desires to complicate stereotypical depictions of the alcoholic, I was able to see Mal not as wayward or apathetic or passive, but as afraid. Mal is unclear in his perceptions of self and unwilling to see that his choices, while not influenced by alcohol, were still being inhibited and manipulated by a lack of self-reflection, a lack of understanding, and that he was still trapped by the shadows of his former life. Suddenly, Mal became someone willing to embrace change (or, at least, express a willingness to change). He faces what is presented to him and stops dismissing or avoiding the issues that made him uncomfortable or that he did not understand. Finally, I discovered that Mal's personal strength comes from his willingness to admit his own ignorance, his ability to convince himself that he was moving forward when in reality he was rationalizing his behavior(s), and he eventually takes responsibility for his choices—a simple thing so many of

us take for granted, yet a potentially life altering step forward to somebody in recovery, a step which could initiate a complete “psychic change.”

Mal’s psychic change evolves over the course of the play. Initially, we see Mal as an individual who has already made significant changes in his life by not drinking, entering rehab, continuing to attend A.A., and attempting a consistent self-examination of himself and his belief structures. However, he is new to recovery, and recovery is a process that develops over a lifetime and takes constant work. Mal may be open to challenging himself, but his perspectives are still clouded by the remnants of his past. For Mal to continue his recovery, he needs to challenge himself and be challenged by those around him, even though the outcomes may not be ideal. The supporting characters in the play (Warren, Karen, and Evie) each offer a particular challenge to Mal.

Warren Waxell first appears as an individual who knows of Mal’s past, and reminds him that he is an alcoholic. Warren is not an antagonist in the sense that he is inhibiting Mal’s objective, nor does Warren act as a hindrance to Mal, but Warren does reflect and remind Mal of a past that is seen as destructive. Warren’s presence offers insights into Mal’s destructive past, his poor decision making skills, and he serves as a reminder to Mal (and the audience) that Mal is on-the-mend, but far from being fine. Warren is crass, ill-informed on etiquette that may help Mal, but he is not bad. Acting more as a foil to Mal than an antagonist, Warren is a voice of reason and responsibility in spite of his lack of tact.

Karen Rosenberg is also a complication for Mal. She is a voice of logic. She is encouraging and hopeful to Mal in the beginning, representing a clinical understanding of what alcohol abuse/dependency is from a scientific understanding, yet her opinions of Mal change

when she see how Mal's past is still relevant to his current state. Karen is realistic in her viewpoints, but she is thrown off by the emotions and distortions with which Mal is still dealing.

Evie Price, the student at the school, is an old soul who has had to face some terrible life lessons in a very short span of life. For Mal, Evie represents hope—hope that he can become a better man, hope that he can make it in his new life of sobriety. Additionally, Evie comments on Mal's overall behavior from an informed, embodied understanding of what he's going through, because she has been there herself. Mal does not see Evie as a student, but rather as a cohort, a comrade in a battle that they are both fighting every moment of every day.

Mal's relationships with each of these individuals is also informed and influenced by a fear of social stigmas. Mal lives in fear, constantly believing that he is being scrutinized by individuals and by the culture he inhabits. Mal does not trust the societal misconceptions of who he is made out to be and is constantly aware of and speaking against the judgmental gaze he perceives is being placed on him. Mal's fear borders on paranoia as we are only privy to his recounting of judgmental evaluations, yet we do not see the experiences he talks about. Yet the fact that Mal feels that he is being judged informs most of his decisions throughout the play, even making a seemingly self-sacrificing move to save Evie from the negative judgment of other he feels.

The inclusion of ice cream has also been a metaphorical anchor from the beginning, but as the writing process has progressed, I have been able to enhance the presence of ice cream with nuanced significance. Originally, the play was titled "Descartes and Ice Cream," but was changed after the initial draft to "à la Mode," for two reasons. The first is that the title made the play about Descartes and ice cream at the expense of being about Mal and his journey. The second is that "à la Mode" has two distinct meanings for me that speak to the themes of the play:

“à la Mode” commonly means ice cream on top or on the side, but literally translates as to what is fashionable at a given time. For the play, I use “à la Mode” because ice cream is a side-topic, something that Mal uses as a supplement to keep from drinking, a check of sorts—as long as he is eating ice cream, we know he is not drinking. “À la Mode” is also more appropriate in terms of the latest or most current fashion as it is more fashionable for Mal to eat ice cream than to drink.

Ice cream also has multiple metaphorical applications. Ice cream comes in different flavors, serving sizes, and is made with a variety of ingredients (some more natural than others depending on the manufacturer’s recipe). Ice cream is also temporary, ephemeral in the sense that it must be consumed before it melts, but to eat it too quickly might cause brain-freeze, and too much ice cream too often could lead to high cholesterol and or an unhealthy diet. For Mal, ice cream is comfort as well as a supplement. As it is stated in the text, nearly all alcohol (specific hard liquors and beer) metabolize into sugar. Many alcoholics are met with an increased craving for sugar upon their early recovery, and Mal’s massive intake of alcohol left his body with a sugar deficiency that he, unknowingly, supplements by eating ice cream (he also has a bag of candy in his classroom desk-drawer). Ultimately, the use of ice cream acts as a means for the audience to track Mal’s sobriety. They can see that ice cream is good for Mal and he uses it as a means to stay sober.

These breakthroughs allowed me to capitalize on the connections with Descartes, yet not necessarily to his published work. Instead, in an almost serendipitous move, I allowed for Mal to talk to “the students” about why Descartes mattered to him, which allowed Mal to express why he admired Descartes not just as a philosopher but as a man who faced hardships head-on. Here, I was able to connect Mal with Descartes in their mirrored desires to courageously confront their

personal demons. Each of these people, these fallible humans, faces their issues with the necessary fortitude required to stand upright, with self-respect, not in spite of his problems, but because he has problems that he's willing to combat in order to make himself a better person—a person he can look at in the mirror with pride.

The Evolving Conversation

I do not consider *Descartes à la Mode* to be *the* solution to the problems featured in previous chapters, nor do I believe that this play epitomizes the “right” way of structuring a traditional play that uses alcohol abuse/dependency. Instead, this play is a starting point. This play is not designed to justify the actions of an alcoholic character, but rather to illustrate the negotiations with identity associated with new-found sobriety. Its design is to push back on the socially constructed stigmas associated with alcohol abuse/dependency by offering a character that is aware of the stereotypes, uncomfortable with them, yet is unaware that his health is still a work in progress.

As stated in Chapter Four, audience plays a major role in the collaborative process of theatre. I embrace this with *Descartes à la Mode* by casting the audience into the action of the play, acknowledging the presence of the audience to emphasize that while the play focuses on Mal; their presence is vital to the process. While I would love to have and would encourage a panel discussion following the play (a kin to the APP), I am equally proud of any production or reading where a single audience member walks away with a deeper understanding of alcohol abuse/dependency, or the dichotomous thought processes of a self-identified alcoholic.

My hope is that this play challenges all participants to see the complications involved when a person must face her/his damaging use of alcohol. I do not expect this play to be a

revolutionary play, but an addition to burgeoning conversations, a place of access for those willing to see this complicated topic from various perspectives. Ultimately, I present this play as my contribution to what I hope will be an ongoing, evolving conversation on the how the alcoholic (recovering or active) is depicted in dramatic literature.

MOVING FORWARD: SOME CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation asks for all of us to accept what some may think are hard truths. For me, as I have developed this over the past twenty-seven months, I have been met time and time again by overwhelming doubt and despair, because this dissertation, really, is asking for us, as a culture, to re-conceptualize our thought processes, to think, examine, and change the ways we view alcohol abuse/dependency and alcoholics. The work that is being asked of us is daunting, and I have found myself questioning whether or not anything can initiate lasting change.

I know in my heart that change can happen, and it will, but moments of doubt exist all the same. Last week (four days ago at the time of this writing), I was feeling some particularly powerful trepidations about the vastness of cultural ideologies and the immeasurable amounts of work required to enact what this dissertation requests from all of us. As I sat in front of my computer, tired, hungry, worn down, and not quite sure how I was going to proceed, I was met with a fortuitous moment of validation and encouragement.

As I said, I was hungry, so I decided to take a break from writing to eat lunch. It was a Wednesday, and on Wednesdays I have the luxury of working from home, so I turned on my television (MSNBC) so I could listen to the mid-day punditry (not because I always agree or even “like” what pundits say or how they speak to each other, but I do enjoy knowing the conversations that are taking place). On this day, I was met with *Now with Alex Wagner*, a “hip” panel discussion show moderated by MSNBC contributor Alex Wagner, whose guests included Dr. Richard Rosenthal of St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital, *Politico*’s Maggie Haberman, *thegrio.com*’s managing editor, Joy Reid, and New York City Deputy Mayor, Howard Wolfson.

The topic of their discussion at the time I tuned in was “‘Neurodiversity’: the next frontier for civil rights?” Wagner introduced the topic of how a private school in New York, called The Ideals School, is approaching full inclusion of children with developmental disabilities into classrooms as an effort to initiate compassion, self-empowerment, and to move away from the stigmatization of students with disabilities. After a short video of Wagner interviewing students at the school, the panel began to parse the benefits of the school and the overall benefits that such a school can provide. “This school is really quite a remarkable,” stated Rosenthal, “and somewhat unique in the fact that it offers the diversity sort of in your face, and I love the focus on compassion, because what that does is it reduces interpersonal distance and it allows people to really be friends, to connect...”¹⁶ This segment moved into the next, titled, “States still struggling to find funding for mental health,” for which I provide a transcript here in its entirety. The reason I include the whole transcript of the piece is two-fold: 1) to illustrate an encouraging example of how dialogues and conversations among informed participants can take place, and 2) to illustrate the growing concern within our culture to de-stigmatize issues that marginalize members of our culture:

ALEX WAGNER: Earlier this month in a *USA Today* op-ed, Health and Human Services secretary Kathleen Sebelius *issued a call to bring mental illness out of the shadows* [emphasis added]. Her plea did not exaggerate the severity of the problem. The latest report from the Kaiser Commission found a staggering 60% of Americans and 70% of children with mental illness are not being treated. Richard, that is a staggering statistic. We

¹⁶ Quoted material is provided from the transcripts of this discussion; a feature offered at the msnbc.com *Now with Alex Wagner* website.

have been talking a lot about mental health in this country in the wake of Newtown, but when it actually comes to putting one's money where one's mouth is, we look at resources for mental health across the country, and they are not great. Why is that?

RICHARD ROSENTHAL: Well, *the National Survey on Drug Use in Health that comes out of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2011 data showed that of the people who, for example, for substance use disorders, wanted to get treatment, 45% of those folks couldn't get treatment because they couldn't afford it, and that includes those with insurance and still could not afford that treatment* [emphasis added].

AW: We do know the affordable care act, I think, is adding several millions of dollars to mental health services, but overall state mental health spending from 2009 to 2012, which is only a three-year period, is down 12%.

RR: Of course, it is, because *they have no voice, right? We think about constituencies with a political voice. Who's the group that's least likely to be able to support itself and advocate for its cause? It's people with severe mental illnesses, substance use disorders, et cetera [sic.] developmental disabilities* [emphasis added].

AW: To some degree, *it's the way we talk about mental illness in this country, whether or not it's severe mental illness or, you know, there's, obviously, a spectrum in terms of sociability and so forth. But at the end of*

the day, we showed that video from the Ideals School, the notion of compassion and empathy. That's almost the most powerful takeaway from the school is the idea you can have an entire generation reared on the idea these people are no different [emphasis added]. Having Asperger's is no different than being left handed.

MAGGIE HABERMAN: Which is if it is practiced consistently and effectively is fantastic. The problem is, the budget cuts are a big, big issue. As a parent with two kids who at various points needed assistance, the availability of therapy was much greater several years ago. In every state, it has really come down a lot. With the way we talk about mental illness tends to be, as you said, a very broad umbrella. I'm loathed to talk about Adam Lanza or sort of speculate on his condition, because there is no way and his mother can't speak to his history now, but I do think it's very important when you are dealing with mental illness to not use the word mental illness repeatedly when you're talking about kids with Asperger's or the autism spectrum. That becomes stigmatizing and a big part of the education process in this country.

AW: when we talk -- also on that note, as Maggie mentions, as far as Newtown, the N.I.H. reports less than 5% of violent crimes are committed by individuals with mental illness, *but there is a question of how we embrace people different than us [emphasis added]*, Joy, and we talk about this being the next civil rights frontier. That's a powerful thesis to be working from, we should be pushing for equality, and I think that means

engaging people. But people who don't have Asperger's and people who do have Asperger's.

JOY REID: Look, there are already children with developmental disabilities and mental illness of various kinds and they are already mainstreamed in our classrooms and schools. They're just undiagnosed, untreated, but they are already there.

MH: Feeling isolated.

JR: Stigmatized, bullied, and we look at the pathologies in poor communities with more homicide, more suicide, kids that can't pass standardized tests. I bet if you did some care and found origins of problems that emanate from the school, community, on and on, have to do with untreated, undiagnosed mental illness and people who just need care.

RR: In any year if you look at folks over the age of 18, any year 11% of the population has an active anxiety disorder, about 9.5% have a substance abuse disorder, and about 9.2% have a mood disorder. Those are the three most prevalent classes of mental disorders in the United States. *Millions and millions and millions of people and the truth of the matter is, there isn't proper screening because this is in the closet, because mental illness is still stigmatized, because we think about superstitious and hocus-pocus kinds of ways to get things out on the table and get dealt with early on* [emphasis added]. As I've often told people, if you try to sail your boat to Great Britain and are leaving New York harbor, it takes less effort to

course correct when you're off New York harbor than off the coast of Africa.

AW: It's worth noting, Howard, the president has launched an effort to map the human brain this week, and, of course, that is getting decried on some corners as not a great use of our resources, but when you think about where we've come since we've begun mapping the human genome, pardon the pun, but seems a no-brainer and something we should be dedicating resources to.

HOWARD WOLFSON: I don't know why we wouldn't spend money to learn about our bodies and our minds and how they interact and how they work. I don't know who's critical of that, but it seems an awfully strange thing to be critical of.

AW: I would also say, we have to go, but Richard, *we mention the words compassion and empathy and how much would those two qualities change the current political debate?*

RR: *Oh, oh, absolutely.*

AW: *If people could be more empathetic and sympathetic.*

RR: *Being able to stand in someone else's shoes would change a lot*
[emphasis added].

Granted, the emphasis of this discussion was on the broader classifications of mental illness, but I was elated to hear this conversation on a nationally broadcast television show. In fact, I became quite emotional.

In spite of the saddening statistics, the hurdles facing the medical community and the culture, the excessive amount of work that needs to take place, it was as if, in this moment, someone had turned to me and given me a gift of overwhelming corroboration—an endorsement that what I was saying was being felt by others. Again, I know these conversations are taking place, from the Addiction Performance Project to the Mayo Clinic joining with the Guthrie Theatre to medical conventions regarding the future trajectories of recovery programs, I know these conversations are going on around us all of the time, and people, regardless of their affiliation, are clamoring for solutions and frustrated that discussions are hampered by personal, societal, and cultural discomfort. So when I hear a medical doctor state on national television, “Being able to stand in someone else’s shoes would change a lot,” my immediate response, which I stated out loud, was “That’s what theatre can do.”

The work before us is vast as we come to terms with our collective (mis)understandings of alcohol abuse/dependency. As we battle against the continued marginalization of identified alcoholics, we have to remember that *addiction* is a generally misunderstood and misused term that should not be used as a catchall phrase. We need to be vigilant in specifying between substance abuse and dependency within our daily discussions. Clarity must be provided delineating probable causes, noting risk factors for susceptibility and neuroadaptation. We have to avoid labeling for the sake of categorizing. Above all, we must view these topics with compassion, move past our frustrations, let go of our anger, and employ a concerted effort to empathize with the victims of a dangerous disease, a disease that affects us all.

Theatre can be a powerful venue to enact these calls for action; however, caution must be taken to avoid problematic stereotypes. Wilder’s depiction of Stimson is an attempt to show the darkness in the world, and O’Neill’s Tyrone family is an insightful effort to show the destructive

power that substance abuse has on families. However, each play was confined to social stigmas, and for O'Neill, indicates the fear an individual endures when faced with those stigmas.

Durang's *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* illustrates a playwright who is less fearful of associating himself with his autobiographical work, yet he perpetuates stigmas due to his employment of satire, diminishing the seriousness of the issue. In spite of the Twenty-first Century's increased awareness of alcohol abuse/dependency being a disease, Theresa Rebeck's *The Scene* represents a larger body of work that continues to focus on the drama within alcohol abuse/dependency as a means of entertainment.

The dominant approach to alcoholism and substance abuse/dependency represents how these issues are culturally understood; however some playwrights, such as Letts, Vogel, and Guirgis, use the stage to illuminate the problems, and in doing so, challenge the stigmas associated with the disease. In their three plays the playwrights provide a more complicated, nuanced, and dynamic telling of how alcohol abuse/dependency is characterized in order to move past the idea that alcoholism is a chosen behavior with an immoral connotation or that an alcoholic lacks willpower. In doing so, Vogel, Guirgis, and Letts portray the alcoholic in a way which displays Norman K. Denzin's concepts of the three-act plays as these concepts intersect with the societal stigmas outlined by the work of Erving Goffman.

The potentially groundbreaking nature of theatre is one of its many virtues, and the practices and techniques laid out in chapter four are tools to not only bring the topic of alcohol abuse/dependency to the forefront, but to also act as a means of de-mystifying and de-stigmatizing problematic interpretations and depictions of alcohol use. While these techniques are not the ultimate solutions, they offer an additional approach to the ongoing issues faced by individuals and families every day.

The use of theatre and the act of storytelling can be more than an illustration of events. Storytelling acts as a call for action, a means of establishing community and solidarity, and initiating empathy. We, as a culture, need to take our collective empathy and push our emotions into action. Taking cues from Boal, we can translate emotion into an agenda that will result in social change, thus making our stories political practices. Lastly, we must honor the presence of the audience by acknowledging not only their physical presence, but their intelligence and willingness to join us as co-partners in the storytelling process. While audiences may be resistant to the subject, or have pre-conceived notions of the alcohol abuse/dependency stemming from a myriad of personal or societal biases, we have to keep in mind that “all you need is one.” One audience member who walks away with a greater awareness of or a critical re-examination of or a self-reflective shift in opinion of alcohol abuse/dependency is an indication that what we say on the stage (and off) matters.

My own work is not *the* solution to the matters at hand, but rather, *Descartes à la Mode* is a starting point, an addition to burgeoning conversations, a place of access for those willing to explore a series of emotions connected with somebody negotiating recovery. This play is designed to illustrate the negotiations with identity associated with new-found sobriety. Its design is to push back on the socially constructed stigmas associated with alcohol abuse/dependency by offering a character that is aware of the stereotypes, uncomfortable with them, yet is unaware that his health is still a work in progress. My hope is that this play challenges all participants to see the complications involved when a person must face their damaging uses of alcohol. I do not expect this play to be a revolutionary play, but as my contribution to what I hope will be an ongoing, evolving conversation on the how the alcoholic (recovering or active) is depicted in dramatic literature.

The intentions of this dissertation have been to call attention to and trouble the stigmas and stereotypes that depict the alcoholic on the American stage and to offer a new means of analysis and understanding. For a dramatist who is developing an alcoholic character, this dissertation offers a means to consider the depiction of these complicated identities. For those who are called to interpret a role in which the character is dealing with alcoholism, this dissertation offers tools to apply in the interpretation of performances and productions. For the educator who introduces these topics in a classroom, this dissertation allows for students to explore the underlying issues of the alcoholic and how the issues speak to us as interactive, social beings. Ultimately, the hope for this dissertation is to caution all that we proceed with conscious awareness; consider the fact that this dissertation scratches the surface of a vast ocean of complicated, confusing, dichotomous, maddening concepts which, at times, seems hopeless, leaving us unable to find the bearings to successfully navigate.

The subjects surrounding alcoholism are challenging not just in our collective, societal (mis)understandings, but in the personal associations we may carry: the pain we have felt; the dashed hope we were promised; the longing to help, knowing there was nothing we could do; the continuous damage we caused those we love the most. There is no justification for the destruction alcoholism causes, and there is little comfort any single person can offer to those who have suffered at the hands of this destructive disease. It is hard to discuss events and occurrences that have hurt us; however, healing has no way of starting until the monsters are brought out from the shadows.

Yet, with the mountain of tasks before us, I remain hopeful. In spite of my moments of doubt and of continued sorrow for my own share of past wrongdoings, I am filled with optimism that today was a good day, and if I keep doing what I did today, then tomorrow should be a

pretty good day as well. No one person can beat the demons of alcoholism on her/his own, so we must all be able to do what we can when we can and to the best of our ability, even if all we can muster is willingness: to hope, to advocate, or to listen can be remarkably transformational acts. And so I am left with one final message, a message I wish for us all to send with our continued efforts of bringing the issues of alcohol abuse/dependency into the light: stay strong, listen carefully and with your heart, and sometimes, when it is necessary, get out of your own way.

REFERENCES

- “Actress Debra Winger: ‘Everyone is Touched By Addiction’.” *NIH MedlinePlus*, 6.3, (2011): 17-18. Web. 26 Jan 2013.
 <<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/fall11/articles/fall11pg17-18.html>>.
- Agrawal, Arpana and Laura J. Bierut. “Identifying Genetic Variation for Alcohol Dependence.” *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*, 34.3, (2012): 274-81. *Google Scholar*. Web. 23 Sept. 2012.
- Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism (fourth edition)*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2001. Print.
- Allen, Bob. “Wendell Berry expounds on gay marriage.” *Associated Baptist Press* 14 Jan. 2013. Web. 20 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.abpnews.com/culture/social-issues/item/8130-wendell-berry-expounds-on-gay-marriage#.URRrFWeurB3>>.
- Als, Hilton. “War Games: Battles at home and abroad.” Rev. of *Motherfucker with the Hat*, by Stephen Adly Guirgis. *The New Yorker*, 25 April 2011, Arts & Culture. Web. *Google*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. Malcolm Heath. London: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.
- Baird, Forrest E. and Walter Kaufmann. *Modern Philosophy (third edition)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000. Print.
- Beaufort, John. “Durang’s new black comedy lampoons bourgeois life; The Marriage of Bette and Boo.” Rev. of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, by Christopher Durang. *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 May 1985, Arts and Leisure: 27. Web. *LexisNexis*. 12 Jan. 2013.

- Berger, Allen. *12 Stupid Things That Mess Up Recovery: Avoiding Relapse Through Self-Awareness and Right Action*. Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2008. Print.
- Block, Mary. "The Marriage of Bette and Boo – Roundabout at Laura Pels Theatre, 111 W 46th St." Rev. of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, by Christopher Durang. *The L Magazine* 20 Aug. 2008, Theater Reviews. Web. *Google*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Boal, Augusto. *Legislative Theatre: Using performance to make politics*. Trans. Adrian Jackson. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- . *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. Trans. Adrian Jackson. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- . *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. Print.
- Bogard, Travis. *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. Print.
- Bogart, Anne. *A Director Prepares: seven essays on art and theatre*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Brantley, Ben. "Theater Review; A Pedophile Even Mother Could Love." Rev. of *How I Learned to Drive*, by Paula Vogel. *The New York Times* 17 Mar. 1997, late ed.: C11. Web. *LexisNexis*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Califano, Joseph A., Jr. *High Society: How Substance Abuse Ravages American and What to do About It*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2007. Print.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. Print.

- Casswell, Sally. "Alcohol Brands in Young Peoples' Everyday Lives: New Developments in Marketing." *Alcohol & Alcoholism* 39.6, (2004): 471-76. *Google Scholar*. Web. 23 Sept. 2012.
- Castagno, Paul C. *New Playwriting Strategies: Language and Media in the 21st Century (second edition)*. London: Routledge, 2012. Print.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Alcohol and Public Health*. 10 May 2012. Web. 10 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm>>.
- Conyers, Beverly. *Addict in the Family: Stories of Loss, Hope, and Recovery*. Center City, MN: Hazeldon, 2003. Print.
- Daniels, Robert L. "How I Learned to Drive." Rev. of *How I Learned to Drive*, by Paula Vogel. *Variety: Legit Reviews* 24-27 Mar. 1997, 42. Web. *LexisNexis*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Dayton, Tian. *The Drama Within: Psychodrama and Experiential Therapy*. Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1994. Print.
- Denzin, Norman K. *The Alcoholic Society: Addiction & Recovery of the Self*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997. Print.
- . *Hollywood Shot by Shot: Alcoholism in American Cinema*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991. Print.
- . *On Understanding Emotion*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1984. Print.
- . *Treating Alcoholism: An Alcoholics Anonymous Approach*. Newsbury Park: Sage, 1987. Print.
- Dodes, Lance M. *The Heart of Addiction: A New Approach to Understanding and Managing Alcoholism and Other Addictive Behaviors*. New York: Harper, 2002. Print.

- Drukman, Steven. "Theater; A Playwright on the Edge Turns Toward the Middle." Rev. of *How I Learned to Drive*, by Paula Vogel. *The New York Times* 16 Mar. 1997, late ed.: 2.6. Web. *LexisNexis*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Durang, Christopher. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1985. Print.
- Edenberg, Howard J. "Genes Contributing to the Development of Alcoholism: An Overview." *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*, 34.3, (2012): 336-38. *Google Scholar*. Web. 23 Sept. 2012.
- Erickson, Carlton K. *The Science of Addiction: From Neurobiology to Treatment*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. Print.
- Estrin, Mark. W. Ed. *Conversations with Eugene O'Neill*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990. Print.
- Feldhendler, Daniel. "Augusto Boal and Jacob L. Moreno: Theatre and Therapy." *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism*. Eds. Mady Schutzman and Jan Gohen-Cruz. New York: Routledge, 1994. 87-109. Print.
- Foroud, Tatiana and Tamara J. Phillips. "Assessing the genetic risk for Alcohol Use Disorders." *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*, 34.3, (2012): 266-72. *Google Scholar*. Web. 23 Sept. 2012.
- Gardner, Elysa. "'Mother----- With the Hat': Fittingly great." Rev. of *Motherfucker with the Hat*, by Stephen Adly Guirgis. *USA Today*, 11 April 2011. Web. *Google*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1959. Print.

- . *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon and Shuster, Inc., 1963. Print.
- Grecco, Stephen R. "High Hopes: Eugene O'Neill and Alcohol." *Yale French Studies*, 50, (1974): 142-49. Web. *JSTOR*. 5 Feb. 2013.
- Grimes, William. "Theater; Creating a Pedophile Who is Sympathetic." Rev. of *How I Learned to Drive*, by Paula Vogel. *The New York Times* 6 April 1997, late ed.: 2.4. Web. *LexisNexis*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Guirgis, Stephen Adly. *The Motherfucker with the Hat*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2011. Print.
- Gussow, Mel. "Stage View: Less may be more for Christopher Durang." Rev. of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, by Christopher Durang. *The New York Times, Late City Final Edition* 26 May 1985: 2.3.1. Web. *LexisNexis*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942. Print.
- Healy, Patrick. "The Anguish of War for Today's Soldiers, Explored by Sophocles." *New York Times* 11 Nov. 2009. Web. 20 Sept. 2012. <http://theater.nytimes.com/2009/11/12/theater/12greeks.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>.
- Hewitt, Barnard. "Thornton Wilder Says 'Yes'." *The Tulane Drama Review*, 4.2, (1959): 110-20. *Google Scholar*. Web. 12 Dec. 2012.
- How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics*. Virginia Beach: Al-Anon Family Groups, 2008. Print.
- Isherwood, Charles. "A Matriarch After Your Attention, if Not Heart." Rev. of *August: Osage County*, by Tracy Letts. *The New York Times*, 13 Aug. 2007, Theatre Reviews. Web. *Google*. 12 Jan. 2013.

- . "All About Ego, Showbiz and a Little Black Dress." Rev. of *The Scene*, by Theresa Rebeck. *The New York Times* 12 Jan. 2007, Theatre Reviews. Web. *Google*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- . "Do You, Bette, Take Boo for a Life of Misery That We'll Laugh At?" Rev. of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, by Christopher Durang. *The New York Times* 14 Jul. 2008, Theatre Reviews. Web. *Google*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- . "Mama Doesn't Feel Well, but Everyone Else Will Feel Much Worse." Rev. of *August: Osage County*, by Tracy Letts. *The New York Times*, 5 Dec. 2007, Theatre Reviews. Web. *Google*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Järvinen, Margaretha. "Accounting for Trouble: Identity Negotiations in Qualitative Interviews with Alcoholics." *Symbolic Interaction*, 24.3, (2001): 263-84. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 Sept. 2012.
- Langellier, Kristin M. "Personal Narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9.4 (1989): 243-76. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Oct. 2011.
- . "A Phenomenological Approach to Audience." *Literature in Performance*, 3, (1983): 34-39. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Oct. 2011.
- Letts, Tracy. *August: Osage County*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2009. Print.
- Loxley, Robert B. "Roles of the Audience: Aesthetic and Social Dimensions of the Performance Event." *Literature in Performance*, 3, (1983): 40-44. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Oct. 2011.
- Margulies, Donald. Foreword. *Our Town*. By Thornton Wilder. New York: Perennial Classics, 2003. Print.
- Moreno, J. L. Ed. Jonathan Fox. *The Essential Moreno: Writings on Psychodrama, Group Method, and Spontaneity*. New Paltz, NY: Tusitala, 2008. Print.
- Murray Law, Bridget. "Outing addiction." American Psychological Association, 42.9, (2011). 55. Web. 26 Jan 2013. < <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/10/addiction.aspx>>.

Nakken, Craig. *The Addictive Personality (second edition)*. New York: MJF Books, 1996. Print.

National Institute on Drug Abuse: Drug Facts: Nationwide Trends. August 2012. Web. 12 Sept.

2012. <<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends>>.

“‘Neurodiversity’: the next frontier for civil rights?” *Now with Alex Wagner*. MSNBC.com, 20,

Feb. 2013. Web. 20 Feb. 2013.

O’Neill, Eugene. *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

Print.

---. *Selected Letters of Eugene O’Neill*. Eds. Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer. New Haven:

Yale University Press, 1988. Print.

Outside the Wire. 2011. Web. 13 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/>>.

Palmer, Roma S. and Judith C. Daniluk. “The Perceived Role of Others in Facilitating or

Impeding Healing from Substance Abuse.” *Canadian Journal of Counseling/Revue*

canadienne de counseling, 41:4, (2007): 199-212. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 Sept. 2012.

Pelias, Ronald J. *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*. Dubuque:

Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1999. Print.

Perry, Susan. “May Clinic enlists ‘Long Day’s Journey Into Night’ as a teaching tool about

addiction.” *Minnpost*. 23 Jan. 2013. Web. 26 Jan. 2013. <

<http://www.minnpost.com/second-opinion/2013/01/mayo-cinic-enlists-long-days-journey-night-teaching-tool-about-addiction>>.

Ratliff, John. “Community Identity in an Alcoholics Anonymous Group.” *Alcoholism Treatment*

Quarterly, 21:3, (2003): 41-57. *Google Scholar*. Web. 23 Sept. 2012.

Rebeck, Theresa. *The Scene*. New York: Samuel French, 2007. Print.

- Rich, Frank. “‘Bette and Boo’ by Durang at the Public.” Rev. of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, by Christopher Durang. *New York Times, Late City Edition* 17 May 1985: C3.1. Web. *LexisNexis*. 12 Jan. 2013.
- Sachs, Joe. *Aristotle: Poetics – Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, a peer-reviewed academic resource*. 27 July 2005. Web. 10 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/aris-poe/>>.
- Scott, Maiken. “Dramatic reading spurs discussion of addiction at psychiatric conference in Philly.” *Newsworks*. 8 May 2012. Web. 26 Jan 2013. <<http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/item/38182>>.
- Spry, Tami. *Body, Paper, Stage: Writing and Performing Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011. Print.
- “States still struggling to find funding for mental health.” *Now with Alex Wagner*. MSNBC.com, 20, Feb. 2013. Web. 20 Feb. 2013.
- Styan, J. L. *Drama, Stage and Audience*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975. Print.
- Thombs, Dennis L. *Introduction to Addictive Behaviors, third edition*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2006. Print.
- Tighe, Allen A. *Stop the Chaos: How to Get Control of Your Life by Beating Alcohol and Drugs*. City Center, MN: Hazelden, 1999. Print.
- Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2006. Print.
- Twerski, Abraham J. *Addictive Thinking: Understanding Self-Deception (second edition)*. Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1997. Print.
- Vogel, Paula. *How I Learned to Drive (revised edition)*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1997. Print.

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers (second edition)*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1998. Print.

W., Georgia. *Don't Let the Bastards Grind You Down: 50 Things Every Alcoholic and Addict in Early Recovery Should Know*. Denver: Ornerly Tiger Press, 2008. Print.

Wilder, Tappan. Afterword. *Our Town*. By Thornton Wilder. New York: Perennial Classics, 2003. Print.

Wilder, Thornton. *Our Town*. New York: Perennial Classics, 2003. Print.

Yurka, Blanche. *Dear Audience: A Guide to the Enjoyment of Theatre*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1959. Print.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DESCARTES à la MODE

A full-length play

By Thomas Michael Campbell

Contact:
Thomas Michael Campbell
305 Robinson Circle, Apt. BH
Carbondale, IL 62901
tcamp714@gmail.com



CAST OF CHARACTERSMAL BARRON

A Humanities teacher at a large public high school.
28 years.

EVIE PRICE

A Senior at the school. 18 years.

WARREN WAXELL

Teacher and co-worker to Mal. 35 years.

KAREN ROSENBERG

New science teacher at the school. 24 years.

TIME

Early fall, 2009. Before the Homecoming Dance, during, and a bit after.

PLACE

A public high school and surrounding area.

ACT ONEScene One

SETTING:

The stage is divided into three suggested areas: MAL'S classroom complete with desk and chalkboard adorned with fliers for various school events; His apartment, which consists of a large recliner (or perhaps a small, worn-out sofa) as well as an old stereo and amplifier – the area is adorned with cassette tapes, CDs and vinyl albums; and lastly, a courtyard.

AT RISE:

It's early fall and we're in the classroom of high school teacher MALCOLM BARRON.

MAL stands in front of the chalkboard writing the following: “*The Table only exists because we've applied meaning to it.*’ *Read Descartes’ Meditations 1 & 2 and discuss this statement in relationship to his theories.*”

He stops, looks at what he's written, and then adds “*Cogito ergo sum*” in large letters. He takes a step back, stares, and then erases the Latin phrase.

The lights shift as Mal turns to the audience and addresses them as his students.

MAL

Ok, let's get going. Today we're going to shift gears. I had some ice cream right before I went to sleep, and a few hours later I woke up with a single thought blaring in my mind like a freight train. So instead of looking at yet another Shakespearean text, we're starting a new unit. Today we are going to start talking about dreams, Descartes, and why I shouldn't have had that *Blizzard* before I went to bed. The thought that broke my restful slumber was this:

(he turns to the chalkboard.)

“*It's only a table because we've applied meaning to it.*” I tried to ignore it and go back to sleep, but the phrase stuck. I couldn't shake it. Finally, I had to get up and write it down. And as I'm writing it down, a series of ideas came to me. And I'm thinking about this phrase and the overall dream and today's lessons and what we might be able to accomplish with a little foray into philosophy. Granted, this is not a philosophy class, but I think we can afford deviating from the curriculum for a week or two, because—Billy, put your phone away—because we need to talk about change. Philosophy can be intimidating for some due to its rejection of what is traditional. People like their routines—their patterns—they become complacent. And complacency is dangerous because uncertainty keeps us on our toes. Being comfortable, accepting a state of

(MORE.)

MAL cont'd

contentedness can lead to apathy. Challenging what is comfortable, or the status quo, causes conflict. Which is what the study of philosophy gives to us. We are allowed to challenge what we have come to believe as the norm. Philosophical thought takes a topic and says, "I see something different." It challenges our values and makes us think, makes us question. And that's what I'm asking you to do with this project. Think. Question. Look at what is presented to you and wonder.

(The lights shift as WARREN WAXELL enters and reads the board.)

WARREN

You're gonna make 'em read both Meditations?

MAL

I don't *make* them do anything.

WARREN

Too bad, huh? It'd be nice if we could.

MAL

I'd prefer that they have a desire to learn what we teach. As opposed to forcing them to learn.

WARREN

Not to be all negative Nancy, but don't you think this may be a bad idea?

MAL

It's only a two week project.

WARREN

Yeah, but messing around with the curriculum may not be in your best interest.

MAL

Thanks, Warren.

WARREN

Well, if you're gonna do it, you may as well just go to the extreme. Fuck the whole curriculum, turn this into a philosophy class, talk about all the modernists. Bacon, Spinoza, Leibniz.

MAL

I could go for some bacon right now. Or ice cream...

WARREN

You kidding?

MAL

I could really go for some ice cream.

WARREN

Mal... This is... This is a great idea, but you're on thin ice already. Screwing with course content is just—it's gonna end badly. You should be off radar right now. Like fuckin' invisible. Besides, kids this age can't handle Descartes or intense philosophical meditations. Stick to Shakespeare.

MAL

They can handle more than we might think. And this is important. Self-discovery, being critical of their choices. We could all use a little more of that.

WARREN

It's nuts. Noble, but nuts. You're asking for trouble.

MAL

C'mon, man, aren't you tired of the status-quo? Doing the same boring crap every year and getting the same apathetic responses? Hell, I'm apathetic. I sit here and it's like, "Oh, yeah well story structure, grammar, mechanics..." There's no—no substance. We talk and say nothing. We can do more. Push them. Challenge them.

WARREN

Like I said... "Nuts!"

MAL

Did you need something, Warren?

WARREN

...I took a look at your proposal.

MAL

And?

WARREN

The administration is never going to go for it. Too much time. Too many man hours. Too much—everything.

MAL

It's a long shot, I know. But I think it's doable.

WARREN

You're talking about a massive overhaul of the curriculum standards. We all know that the standards are out of date, but nobody has time for this. Not now.

MAL

There's always time for improvement. Isn't that what all those assessment workshops are about?

WARREN

Yeah, but those are for their assessments. Not yours, not ours. Those are about funding and budgets and numbers. Budget's too tight. If you want to pursue it, go ahead. But I wouldn't waste your time without administrative support. Which you, of all people, are not likely to get.

MAL

...yeah... Thanks for looking at it.

WARREN

No problem, buddy. Sherry says you need to come over for dinner. It's been months since she's seen you. And, yes, I know enticing you with Sherry's cooking isn't the greatest move to make, but it's better than nothing.

MAL

I'd like that. I would.

WARREN

But?

MAL

It's stupid, but I'm scared. You know. I don't want you guys to feel uncomfortable.

WARREN

It's funny that you'd be uncomfortable now, but you weren't uncomfortable when you'd show up half-in-the-bag. Mal, you're our friend and we miss you. Don't read in to it too much.

MAL

I'll think about it.

WARREN

Hey, you seen the new teacher?

MAL

What?

WARREN

Science teacher. Life science if you know what I mean.

MAL

I haven't met her.

WARREN

Seriously man. Name's uh, Kristy? Kristen? Maybe Karen. Beautiful.

MAL

I'm sure I'll run into her.

WARREN

Yeah, run into her rack!

MAL

Warren...

WARREN

Oh settle down, it's just a joke. But you know... she's, like, nice! Check her out man. It'd be worth your time. Two years, right? Since you...

(He thrusts his hips a couple of times.)

...you know.

MAL

More like a year and a half and why you're keeping track is beyond me.

WARREN

No wife. No kids. You should be out there, man. Don't get me wrong, I love Sherry and I love being married. But sometimes, ya know, I just wanna cut loose, go to a bar and just— bang, bang, bang!

MAL

You're crude. And I don't want that life anymore.

WARREN

Look, just some friendly advice, live it up while you still can.

(Silence.)

MAL

Something else?

WARREN

I'm trying to figure you out.

MAL

Good luck.

WARREN

You're young. You're a good looking guy. I don't understand why you've embraced this weird, isolated, *celibate* lifestyle.

MAL

I've been busy.

WARREN

Right! Oh, yeah. Diving into your work. That's you. The devoted educator. Reclusive hermit is more like it.

MAL

That's redundant.

WARREN

We're gonna start calling you Howard Hughes.

MAL

I need to be by myself right now.

WARREN

God, man. You used to be fun. You don't even Happy hour with us anymore.

MAL

You know why.

WARREN

You're right.

(Mal raises an eyebrow to him.)

No, you are. You're right. You've made some amazing strides since the spring, and I am so proud of you. Sherry too. You're allowed to have a life. You're allowed to have fun.

MAL

I moderate my fun...

WARREN

Humans are social creatures, Mal. Isolation is only going to bring loneliness.

MAL

I'm not lonely... I need to finish this up before the bell rings.

WARREN

Fuck... Descartes? Really?

MAL

It's not about Descartes. It's not. Not really. They need to... Every day, they're decisions are reinforced without any sort of accountability. They're never asked to look at themselves. Just feed them the information and give them the exams so they can move on to the next thing. They need to look at who they are and why they do what they do.

WARREN
“They” do, huh?

MAL
Yes.

WARREN
“They”?

MAL
Yes, what?

WARREN
Think you might be projecting yourself a bit? Maybe, pushing your shit onto them?

MAL
No. That’s not it.

WARREN
You’re a glutton for punishment is what you are. They’re gonna start bitching and whining. Mine are always, “Mr. Waxell, this is hard.” “Mr. Waxell, I don’t get it.” Blah, blah, fucking, blah.

MAL
What are you doing with your classes?

WARREN
The Juniors have their papers on *Candide*, so they’re just watching a movie this week. The Seniors are working on their research papers and have a draft due on Friday.

MAL
A movie?

WARREN
Candide, Mal. It’s a little challenging for them and it’s a huge part of their grade. I don’t want to bog them down. I want them to focus on their papers.

MAL
What movie?

WARREN
Last of the Mohicans.

MAL
Right. I can see how those two are relatable.

WARREN

Judge all you want, but that's a great movie. "I *will* find you!" Agh! So good! And I'm not wasting my time trying to change a workable system.

MAL

Workable, yes. Relevant, no.

WARREN

Can I read your lesson plans?

MAL

Not if you're going to be a critic.

WARREN

I just want to see what you're saying.

(Mal glares at him.)

I'm curious!

MAL

I'll email my notes to you.

WARREN

Cool. Well, I guess I'll leave you to your pointless endeavor. Let me know how the flames feel when you crash and burn. Oh, and uh... I'm gonna bring the new girl down here. And you will be nice. And cordial. And not moody or brooding or angsty or any of the other woe-is-me bullshit you might be feeling. Just be you and you won't be so weird.

(WARREN exits. MAL returns to the chalkboard and picks up a piece of chalk to write more. He stares at the Latin quote. He tosses the chalk down and sits at his desk.)

(EVIE PRICE enters and stands in the doorway.)

EVIE

Hey.

MAL

Hey...

EVIE

I'm gonna go get some coffee. You want something?

MAL

(Still looking at the board but quickly snapping out of it.)

Wait, what?

EVIE

Geeze, welcome back. You look tired. You want something?

MAL

A shot of whiskey.

EVIE

Fresh out. And not funny.

MAL

Kinda funny.

EVIE

Joking about your sobriety isn't very amusing to some of us. So do you?

MAL

Do I what?

EVIE

Coffee. You want some?

MAL

No. But thank you.

(She remains.)

What's on your mind?

EVIE

I should be asking you that.

(She steps into the room.)

What's going on?

MAL

Just... reflecting.

EVIE

You look tired.

MAL

I'm fine.

EVIE

When was the last time you went to a meeting?

MAL

This morning. I hit the Early Risers. I had to duck out a little early so I could make it here, though. Caught a few looks as I left. Like I was being disrespectful 'cause I had to get to work.

EVIE
You went. That's the important thing.

MAL
Yeah...
(Catching her continued stares.)
Stop staring, I'm fine.

EVIE
I can tell.

MAL
I haven't been sleeping well. My new place... it's small.

EVIE
I wouldn't know.

MAL
We've been over that.

EVIE
I'm just saying—

MAL
If the admin—

EVIE
Yeah, yeah. I know. The administrators...
(beat.)
My mother called.

MAL
No kidding?

EVIE
She's trying to get in touch with my dad. Said she has some kind of paperwork he needs to sign.

MAL
So why call you?

EVIE
'Cause she's ridiculously manipulative.

MAL
Evie—

EVIE

She is! This is one of her games. Since my birthday she's been calling me up 'cause there's no legal contract telling her she has to stay away.

MAL

She's sick.

EVIE

Yeah, she is. She knows where I'm at with everything, and that I don't wanna talk to her. I can't talk to her. She's inserting herself as a ploy. And, yeah, that's sick.

(beat.)

Do you have any candy?

MAL

In my drawer.

(She crosses to his desk and takes out a bag of Starbursts.
She pops one in her mouth without unwrapping it.)

EVIE

Mmm...sugary...

(She pulls the wrapper from her mouth.)

Like that? Just imagine what else I can do.

(He smiles but they remain silent.)

MAL

I need to get back to work.

EVIE

You weren't working.

MAL

Fine, I need to get to work.

EVIE

You're not working. You're brooding.

MAL

I'm not brooding.

EVIE

Moping?

Thinking. MAL

Wanna go to the art museum this weekend? EVIE

Again? MAL

I'm obsessed with surrealism. Or maybe possessed would be more appropriate. EVIE

Hey, how many surrealists does it take to change a lightbulb? MAL

How many? EVIE

Spoon. MAL

You're a dork. So do you? EVIE

I have to grade the *Othello* papers. MAL

I can help. EVIE

No, you can't. MAL

I can provide moral support. EVIE

We'll see. MAL

Do me a favor? EVIE

Sure. MAL

EVIE

The draft of my research paper for Mr. Waxell is due on Friday. Look at it for me?

MAL

Now?

EVIE

Please. It's a huge part of my grade.

MAL

I'm sure it's fine. You're a good writer.

EVIE

I want it to be perfect. He hates me.

MAL

He doesn't hate you.

EVIE

You know that for sure?

MAL

He thinks you're not using your potential.

EVIE

Did he tell you that?

MAL

Yes. So, see? He doesn't hate you.

EVIE

Big diff.

MAL

There is a difference. He's trying to motivate you.

EVIE

He's a dick.

MAL

Don't say that.

EVIE

You think he's a dick, too. 'Cept you wouldn't call him a dick. You're probably, like, "Hmm, quite the malcontent, that one is." Or "Such an arrogant socialite."

MAL

How about just a douchebag? He's—He's Warren. Or Mr. Waxell...

EVIE

I don't think it's fair that you talk about me with my teachers.

MAL

I don't.

EVIE

All of you sitting in the office. Talking shit about your students.

MAL

We don't do that.

EVIE

Bullshit you don't.

MAL

Not all the time... Fine. Give me your paper.

(She smiles and reaches into her bag for her paper. She hands it to him but plays a little tug-of-war before letting go.)

MAL cont'd

Come back after seventh.

EVIE

You're the best, Mal—I mean, "Mr. Barron."

(The bell rings.)

MAL

You better go.

EVIE

Thank you.

MAL

You're welcome.

EVIE

No, Mal. Thank you!

MAL
For what?

EVIE
Tell you later.

(She crosses to the door and turns back.)

EVIE cont'd.
Hey.

MAL
What?

(She blows him a kiss and exits. MAL picks up Evie's paper only to put it down again. Pause.)

MAL cont'd
Fuck...

(Lights shift.)

End Scene One.

Scene One point Five

SETTING: MAL'S classroom.

AT RISE: MAL shifts his focus as he jumps back into his lecture discussion with his students. Again, he addresses the audience as his students.

MAL
Descartes grew up privileged. Highly gifted and extremely well educated, Descartes lived a life of ridiculous leisure, waking up at noon, socializing when he felt like it, traveling to wherever and as it suited him. It wasn't until later in his life that Descartes actually began to contribute anything to society. His despondency finally broke and he began to use his considerable gifts as a mathematician to solidify a foundation of certainty. But Descartes was cynical towards his education. He looked at everything he had been taught as fallible lessons. Lessons taught because they were taught to his teachers and their teachers and their teacher and their teachers. Descartes saw all of this and finally, FINALLY asked, "What is true here?" And one day he sat down to figure it out, beyond all doubt, beyond certainty. But he makes some interesting discoveries along the way which were published in what we call "The Meditations."

(Beat.)

(MORE.)

MAL cont'd

His first meditation, titled What Can be Called Into Doubt, starts off by saying, "*Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood...*" Now think about that 'cause it's not as difficult as it may seem. Have you, at any point in your life, changed your mind about something because you no longer believed what you previously believed? I have. Man, have I! And so did Descartes. He came to a point in his life where he wanted to hit the reset button on everything he knew, demolish everything he had ever been taught in order to build it back up. Stronger. More stable. Lasting. Which is what we're going to do also. We're going to break it all down until we are nothing but our minds. And then, if we feel it's important to do so, build ourselves back up...

(The lights shift.)

End Scene One point Five

Scene Two

SETTING: MAL'S classroom.

AT RISE: The final bell of the day rings. Mal is loading up his bag to go home. WARREN enters with KAREN ROSENBERG, who, as Warren described, is quite attractive.

WARREN

Mal, I'd like you to meet Karen Rosenberg. New Life Science teacher. Karen, this is Malcolm Barron.

(They shake hands, exchanging pleasantries.)

WARREN cont'd

From this classroom, Mal is gonna change the world.

KAREN

Aren't we all?

WARREN

Mal's a big-picture-kinda-guy, gets these crazy notions of bigger and better in spite of his efforts to take it "a-day-at-a-time."

MAL

You're exaggerating. Again.

WARREN

Am I? How'd they take your little experiment?

MAL

Project's still going on. I won't know until the end of next week.

KAREN

Is it this Descartes stuff?

MAL

I'm trying something new.

WARREN

Trying to fail at something new.

MAL

Can't fail if you don't try.

KAREN

Can't succeed either.

WARREN

True. True... Oh, you know, I just realized I'm meeting with a student. I'll have to catch you guys later.

MAL

Yeah, what student?

WARREN

Oh... new kid. Just transferred in.

MAL

Where from?

WARREN

I gotta go, Mal. Karen we all so a Happy Hour thing on Fridays if you're interested.
(to Mal.)

Well, most of us do anyway.

KAREN

Let's see how the week goes.

WARREN

Great! Friday, four o'clock at the Hoffbrau. Talk to you later.

(Warren crosses to exit, but before leaving he waves to Mal, thrusting his hips again, and pointing to Karen. He exits, leaving Karen and Mal alone. There's a long silence.)

KAREN

He's not really meeting a student is he?

MAL

I doubt it. Warren's a good guy. He just— Well, he's Warren.

KAREN

Odd man...

(beat.)

I think it's neat what you're doing. Most schools don't even touch on this stuff. Mine didn't. Guess that's why I'm a science geek.

MAL

We'll see if it works out.

KAREN

I hope it does. The humanities fascinate me. Puzzle me actually.

MAL

Really?

KAREN

The curriculum is so open. I mean, I know it's not. I know you have your own teaching standards and objectives. But it seems a bit grayer in terms of the material you can cover.

MAL

I'm not really following the curriculum on this one. Sorta goin' outside the box.

KAREN

Hope you don't get in trouble. I mean it's admirable, but be careful. Wish I could do something similar.

MAL

Feeling a bit confined with the sciences?

KAREN

No, not really. I like our curriculum. It's what the students need to learn. I just feel, only at times, that there's more out there. But the sciences are sooo big. There's so much life to try to understand.

MAL

Descartes did his meditations in order to solidify his interpretations of math and the sciences beyond certainty.

KAREN

I know.

MAL

Oh.

KAREN

"But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once."

MAL

Nice.

KAREN

I don't know much. I only took one philosophy class in college. Got a 'B'—But only because the professor hated undergrads.

MAL

At least something stuck.

(KAREN, perusing the board, looks at one of the fliers.)

KAREN

You going to this?

MAL

Absolutely not.

KAREN

Yeah, they're kinda silly...

(beat.)

Warren said you're a local.

MAL

Born and raised. I went away to college, but I came back after my Master's program.

KAREN

Is it weird teaching at your own high school?

MAL

It was a little bizarre to walk by the locker I had for four years and see some other kid using it. But it's not bad. For the most part.

KAREN

You sound disappointed.

(KAREN moves to his desk, picks up a small picture frame.
MAL watches intently.)

MAL

No, I love it. The teaching. But the system is a little hard to navigate sometimes.

KAREN

(holding up the frame, reading.)
“Free me from the soft suck of self.”

MAL

Just a reminder.

KAREN

Good to know. I’m still getting butterflies. Even having a few weeks under my belt, ya know? They’ll be times when I’m standing in front of them going, “Shit!” First year jitters, I guess.

MAL

It’s a good school. You’ll like it here.

(KAREN crosses back to the board, again pointing to the flyer.)

KAREN

You should go to this.

MAL

Are you?

KAREN

Yes.

MAL

Thought you said they were silly.

KAREN

They are. But I said I would chaperone. Good way to get involved.

MAL

Yeah, they say that every year.

KAREN

It’s good for the students to see us there. See that we’re not just teachers. See us as people.

MAL

They're too wrapped up in themselves to make that connection. It's nothing bad. They're just at that age. Besides, you're here to be their teacher. Not their friend.

KAREN

So you're not going.

MAL

I didn't like high school dances when I was in high school.

KAREN

I went to all of them. They were all the same. Every year. Just different music. And now that I say that, I'm not even sure if that's true 'cause I don't really remember the music.

MAL

I could never get a date.

KAREN

Really?

MAL

I always waited too long. By the time I got up the nerve to ask somebody, she was inevitably already taken.

KAREN

You seem like that guy.

MAL

"That guy?"

KAREN

Nice guy. Shy. A little uncertain.

MAL

Wow, I give off great first impressions.

KAREN

No, no. I'm sure you're sweet. But-- God, I'm really sounding like an awful person.

MAL

No, please continue.

KAREN

(She smiles. Takes a deep breath.)

...Preston Wilkes. Sophomore year. I wanted him to ask me so badly. He was cute in an

(MORE.)

KAREN cont'd

Anthony Michael Hall sort of way. Funny in-- well, an Anthony Michael Hall sort of way. *Sixteen Candles* Anthony Michael Hall not *Breakfast Club*. Always had his work in on time, and got As on everything. Three days before the winter formal, I still had no date, and there was no way I was going to ask anybody. That would have been social suicide. I finally ended up going with a friend only to find out that Preston was going to ask me that afternoon.

(beat.)

I suppose there's a lesson there somewhere...

MAL

Maybe, "Don't get your hopes up"?

KAREN

Or that sometimes you have to push to get what you want. Pursue what is important to you.

MAL

So why didn't you just tell your friend you wanted to go with Preston?

KAREN

He knew. But he also had a thing for me. I don't know...thought he might have some sort of fairy-tale, magical evening and I'd forget all about Preston or something. Love triangles, ya know?

MAL

Sounds like he was trying to push to get what he wanted.

KAREN

There're also probable outcomes versus fantasies. Life's not a fairy tale.

MAL

Oh, I'm aware of that. But there is a universal notion that two people who are attracted to each other should be together.

KAREN

In spite of realistic obstacles?

MAL

Like?

KAREN

Person A and Person B are attracted to each other. But Person B is already in a relationship. There may be a mutual attraction, but it's moot.

MAL

So why doesn't Person B break up with his or her partner to be with Person A? True love conquers.

KAREN

Spoken like a romantic.

MAL

And that's the response of a cynic.

KAREN

No. It's reality. You don't always get what you want. Romanticism is dead.

MAL

There are reasons stories of romance and connecting with another person on some sort of mystically intimate level stand the test of time.

KAREN

Is that a good thing? To have fantasies about something unobtainable.

MAL

Wow, you must have really gotten hurt by someone.

KAREN

Why would you say that?

MAL

'Cause you're being dismissive.

KAREN

And you're arrogant. You're assuming that because I'm not in to romantic literature that I must have some past damage. Poor little girl got hurt so she's bitter?

MAL

No—

KAREN

Why not assume that I've come to the conclusion that romance is a myth?

MAL

I didn't mean to upset you.

KAREN

I'm not upset. Simply pushing back.

MAL

I meant no disrespect.

KAREN

That's the problem. You made a point without even thinking about what you were saying. Why jump to a conclusion about my personal life without knowing me? If you're jumping to conclusions, why jump to that one? Why not assume I've concluded, through my own experiences, that it is biologically silly for humans to be with any one, single person? Maybe carnal physical passion is more natural than institutional bondage? Why not assume that after years of dating I've come to see relationships as something I simply do not want?

(Mal is silent.)

Well?

MAL

I think it may be best if I stay quiet.

KAREN

How about you just think before you speak.

MAL

Okay...

(Silence.)

KAREN

So?

MAL

I apologize for making assumptions about your personal life.

KAREN

Thank you, Malcolm. Apology accepted.

(Silence.)

MAL

You really believe all that?

KAREN

Romance, finding "the one"... It's a nice idea. But it's flawed.

MAL

It doesn't hold up to scientific analysis?

KAREN

I don't have the luxury of living in a world of imagination.

MAL

Don't assume the humanities aren't analytical. Capturing human nature, the irrational... that takes heavy analysis. A highly critical reading of why we behave the ways we do. Without analysis in the creative process you end up with shit. Like, fuckin', Nicholas Sparks kinda shit.

KAREN

Be nice.

MAL

I'm merely defending my discipline.

KAREN

I think we're both saying the same thing, we're just saying it differently. I teach Life Science, Malcolm. Everything is broken down to certainties. We can thank our friend Descartes for that.

MAL

Call me Mal. And you lost me.

KAREN

Your world is what it ought to be, mine is what is. You're talking about love as a passion of the heart. Something mystical floating out in the ether that people think they grasp if they wish for it hard enough. I'm talking about sexual attraction as a reaction in one's brain chemistry. Something primal, pheromonal. I ask you about love and you can talk romance, poetry and sonnets. Ask a scientist about love and they'll talk to you about endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine released into the limbic system.

MAL

So I'm a hopeless romantic because I don't know of science? I know of science. And believe me, I can be just as critical as the next person.

KAREN

Everyone knows of science. At least to an extent. I'm saying that there is what our hearts desire, and what science can define as absolute.

MAL

That's bleak. You're saying a world of passion is less significant than a world of science.

KAREN

No, I'm saying they're different. Not that one is necessarily better than the other. I'm offering a different viewpoint. Thought a philosopher such as yourself would appreciate that.

MAL

So all the little doofuses going to the dance aren't going because of romance, or hope of romance, they're not going for a chance to grasp that fantasy. It's something more scientific. Some chemical attraction. They smell sex in the air and dopamine is released into their brains, and they're all, "Yeah, gotta get me some of that!"

Basically. KAREN

There's more to it than that. MAL

Fine, let's find out. KAREN

What? MAL

Come to the dance with me. KAREN

No. MAL
(beat.)
I mean, I'm not turning you personally down.

Sounds like it. KAREN

It's nothing personal. I just don't want to go. MAL

Why? KAREN

Well... because. MAL

Are you single? KAREN

...yes. MAL

Are you or not? KAREN

I am. MAL

KAREN

Then let's go together. For the sake of science. You'll be there to see if they're attending for romantic notions of poetic ecstasy, and I'll go to see if they're there for pheromonal euphoria.

MAL

How do you see if someone is experiencing a pheromone?

KAREN

I'll have to think about that.

MAL

I don't know...

KAREN

C'mon. It'll be fun.

MAL

Hanging out with a bunch of horny teenagers for a night doesn't sound like fun.

KAREN

No, you'll be hanging out with me. Come on, if nothing else we can make fun of everything from the music to the outfits to how they dance.

MAL

You're right about the music. We can make fun of their music.

KAREN

Descartes would want you to challenge your preconceived notions of what this dance represents.

MAL

Oh, he does?

KAREN

Yes, challenge what you *think* you know.

MAL

(thinks about it.)

One hour. I'll go for one hour.

KAREN

The dance is only four hours. You can handle it.

MAL

An hour and a half.

Three hours. KAREN

No way. MAL

Fine. Two. Give me two hours. KAREN

One hour. MAL

You just said an hour and a half. KAREN

Why is this so important to you? MAL

Because-- I don't know... Because I don't know anybody here. I'm tired of sitting at home on Saturdays. I just— I thought it might be fun. KAREN

...I'll give you two hours but you have to buy dinner. MAL

Dinner? KAREN

Well... yeah. 'Cause, you know...it's a dance... MAL

So, like a date? KAREN

Is that okay? MAL

Sure. I guess. KAREN

I mean, if you don't want to— MAL

No, no, no. I think that sounds like fun. Are we allowed to do that? KAREN

We're adults. MAL

Then, I guess it's a date. KAREN

Looks like it. MAL

(EVIE enters. MAL and KAREN immediately shift back into "professional" mode.)

Evie? MAL

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. EVIE

You're not. What can I do for you? MAL

Um, well... EVIE

Oh, yeah. Your paper. MAL

I need to get going. Gotta plan for tomorrow. KAREN

It never stops, does it. MAL

It was good talking with you, Mr. Barron. KAREN

Take care, Miss Rosenberg. MAL

(KAREN exits. MAL starts going through his bag.)

MAL cont'd
It's here somewhere. I liked it. I think you're in good shape. I just had a few comments.
(He discovers her paper.)
Here we go.

EVIE
(She takes the paper.)
She's cute.

MAL
What?

EVIE
Her. The new teacher.

MAL
We were just talking.

EVIE
Looked like flirting.

MAL
Oh, come on.

EVIE
I've seen flirting before. I've even done it myself once or twice. I'm not stupid, Mal.

MAL
Hey. I told you—

EVIE
Oh, fuck formalities. Nobody's here.

MAL
The moment we start to think that—

EVIE
You going after her?

MAL
No.

EVIE
I mean it's okay if you are. I don't care. Okay, which isn't true. But whatever.

MAL
Evie—

(Evie goes to his board and leans on it, imitating Karen in an exaggerated 'sexy' manner.)

EVIE

“Hey, hot teacher, can I talk to you about science?”

MAL

That’s not at all accurate.

EVIE

“Hey, hot teacher, do you want to know about pheromones?”

MAL

If you were eavesdropping you’d know that it wasn’t like that.

EVIE

“Hey, hot teacher, you want to talk about the philosophy of mating?”

MAL

Stop it. We were just having a conversation.

EVIE

Serious?

MAL

Yes. She’s a co-worker. It’s bound to happen.

EVIE

So... Homecoming? You two are...

MAL

Going to chaperone.

EVIE

(Beat.)

You hate those things.

MAL

I thought I’d give it a shot.

EVIE

So, you two are, what, going out now?

MAL

It’s a stupid dance, Evie. That’s it.

EVIE

You’re right, it is stupid. Ugh!

What? MAL

...Mal... EVIE

What? MAL

About earlier. EVIE

When you unwrapped the Starburst with your tongue? MAL

Don't be cute. Not when I find you irritating. EVIE

Sorry. Continue. MAL

When I thanked you... EVIE

Yeah. MAL

It wasn't so much a thank you as much as— I don't know. I mean, you're like, not where I'm at, you know? So, sometimes it's... it's hard for me to tell people stuff. EVIE

Example? MAL

Like how I feel. I mean, I'm better, you know? At expressing. It's work, but we're both working on our own shit. So, I don't know... EVIE
(beat.)
There's this kid in my French class. Jordan. He said he liked my laugh, and I was shocked. I was like, thanks, but what're you complimenting me for. He said, "You should laugh more."

Laughing is a good thing. MAL

EVIE

I was laughing at your joke. At you, like, in my head.

(beat.)

It's hard for me to tell you how I feel.

MAL

I know how you feel.

EVIE

No, I don't think you do. I mean, I know you know that I like you. That I respect you. Not just as a teacher. But as a person. When you first showed up in recovery—

MAL

I don't want to talk about this here!

EVIE

It matters! You were a wreck. Jaundiced. Tremoring. Hardly able to talk. On the verge of losing your job. Puking, like, fuckin' every five seconds, garbage cans, the drinking fountain.

MAL

On your shoes.

EVIE

Yes... that was gross. "On the journey of the warrior-bodhisattva, the path goes down, not up..."

MAL

I am no warrior-bodhisattva.

EVIE

Not yet. But you fight. You fight every moment of every day from going back there. We both do.

MAL

What's your point?

EVIE

Five months later you're chaperoning dances. You're introducing Descartes to teenagers. Writing proposals to improve the standards. It's amazing. It's admirable. It's... I love it. I... I love you, Mal.

MAL

No, you don't.

EVIE

Fuck you.

MAL

You don't. You don't know me. You're so young, you don't—

EVIE

I have done more shit than a hundred other eighteen year olds, so if you're about to dismiss me 'cause I'm a "kid," I will punch you in the dick.

MAL

I'm not dismissing your age. I'm not dismissing anything, okay?

EVIE

I've told a lot guys I've loved them, Mal, and a couple of times, it might've actually been true. But you're different. In a good way.

MAL

This is one of "those" conversations.

EVIE

God, just when I think you're gonna act your age you start acting like— Well, one of them. We sat in that hell-hole together, ya jerk! I was going insane before you showed up, and even in your train-wreck-of-a-life, you were kind. You listened.

MAL

I didn't have anything to say.

EVIE

That doesn't stop some people. You were compassionate and you didn't talk to me like I was a kid. And funny. Even in your misery, you were funny. Do you have any idea how important humor is in a place like that?

MAL

Ignorance isn't funny.

EVIE

Creating a dialogue with finger-puppets to explain the marginalization of identified alcoholics wasn't ignorant. At the least, you helped us understand the significance of marginalization. Not to mention facets of identity, rhetoric—I mean, shit, Mal, you didn't say much, but what you said mattered. To me. So yeah when you came in, I was, like, "finally, fucking *finally*, this place just became a bit more bearable." But now—you're distant. We talk about everything under the sun except us. And every time I try to bring *us* up, you get all weird.

MAL

Okay, I get weird.

EVIE

I need you to help me figure this out. I need to talk to you about this.

MAL

You're navigating.

EVIE

I mean this is not an ordinary situation.

MAL

You're frustrated.

EVIE

Stop doing that. Stop confirming everything I say like we're in Group. Just talk to me like you're my-- I don't know. Fuck! What are you? What are we doing?

MAL

Look, I'm gonna hit a meeting. Come with me.

EVIE

I can't.

MAL

It'd be good for both of us.

EVIE

No, seriously, I can't. I have too much homework.

MAL

Then why don't you call me later?

EVIE

I want to talk about this now.

MAL

No. Not here.

EVIE

Then let's go somewhere. Let's go to that park. Or coffee. Or ice cream, that always calms you down. Down near your place so nobody will know us.

MAL

I'll be home by eight. Call me.

EVIE

This isn't a phone conversation.

MAL

We're gonna have to put this on hold. I'm sorry, Evie. Final word.

EVIE

"Final word"?

MAL

Yes.

EVIE

Fine. Whatever, "Mr. Barron"!

(She exits. Mal turns to the board again. He stares at it for a moment.)

MAL

"Free me from the soft suck of self."

(Lights shift.)

End Scene Two.

Scene Two point Five

SETTING:

Mal's classroom.

AT RISE:

Mal continues with his lecture.

MAL

It was the dreams. Three dreams that rocked Descartes out of his complacency. Rocked the way he perceived his own senses. And because of the dreams Descartes concluded there is little difference between the sleeping world, and the world that exists while we're awake. Descartes states, *"I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep."* So having the thought about the table while I was asleep and having it carry over into the waking world makes perfect sense, because both worlds are the same... they're in my mind. As of right now, what is in my mind is the only certainty I can hold on to.

(beat.)

This idea of certainty connects to belief. Sometimes we have a set of beliefs so deeply rooted that we don't think it's necessary to define them because it's safer to just say, "Well, that's what I believe." But Descartes *had* to know. He had to understand his beliefs beyond certainty. He took the risk of destroying everything he had come to believe up to that point in his life. And that took courage. But look at what he was able to give to us.

(Lights shift.)

End Scene Two point Five.

Scene Three

SETTING: Mal's classroom.

AT RISE: Mal grabs his bag and begins to exit, but is stopped by the entrance by WARREN.

WARREN

You outta here?

MAL

Yeah, I, uh... have some place I need to be.

WARREN

Going to one of your classes?

MAL

They're not classes.

WARREN

(sitting down, making himself at home.)
So how'd it go?

MAL

The assignment?

WARREN

No, with Karen. Nice, huh?

MAL

She seems... yes, nice.

WARREN

I could tell there were some sparks there.

MAL

In the two seconds you were in the room before you bailed?

WARREN

Yeah, definitely sparks. What'd you two talk about?

MAL

Philosophy. Science. The curriculum.

WARREN

Oh, man. You didn't bore her with your proposal did you?

MAL

No.

WARREN

You get her number?

MAL

No.

WARREN

Hmm... Well, we can get that off the faculty directory. What else?

MAL

...we're going to chaperone the dance.

WARREN

Really? Young grasshopper got a date?

MAL

It's a school dance. We're going as chaperones.

WARREN

You taking her out to dinner?

MAL

She's taking me.

WARREN

That's what I'm talking about!

MAL

Look, I really need to get going.

WARREN

Right, to your class...

MAL

They're not classes.

WARREN

Do those things really help? I mean why're they so important?

MAL

I'd rather not talk about it, Warren.

WARREN

Dude, it's okay. I'm proud that you go to those things. If it works for you man, keep doing it. Better than, oh I don't know, say, passing out in your car in the parking lot.

MAL

Right...

WARREN

I mean, getting drunk on a school night is bad enough. Showing up the next morning, still drunk enough to pass out in your car. Jesus... I can't believe they never noticed. You may have thought you were being clever, but you can't fool the people closest to you.

MAL

They knew. They all knew.

WARREN

It's in the past. So if this whole "I'm not drinking" phase you're going through is what you need, then go for it, man.

MAL

It's not a phase. The next time I drink, I will die.

WARREN

Yeah, okay melodramatic.

MAL

I wouldn't come back from it. The next time I go out, it'll be the end of me. I— I don't know if I'd be able to handle detoxing again...

WARREN

You're really serious?

MAL

Yes. That was the worst, the withdrawals. I had to be here, I had to maintain, or I thought I did. But I was going through withdrawals, so I drank to get rid of 'em.

WARREN

Kinda dumb.

MAL

You said it. I was a mess. Financially. Physically. Emotionally. It got so bad that I was—
Never mind.

WARREN

No, what?

MAL

It's fine, I just don't want to share some things. Some stuff... I need to keep some things pretty
close to the chest. It keeps me vigilant.

WARREN

You sound funny when you talk like that.

MAL

I should get going.

WARREN

Yeah, yeah... You're in the shop.

MAL

What?

WARREN

You were a wreck. Now you're in the shop. 'Cause, you know you're being fixed for the—

MAL

Yeah I get it thanks.

WARREN

I'm serious when I say that I'm proud of you.

MAL

I know.

WARREN

Nuff of this lovey-dovey shit. Get outta here, I'll do the same.

(They begin to cross when Karen enters.)

KAREN

Your light was still on so I thought— I didn't know you were both here.

WARREN

Chicken legs has to get goin', but I'd love to talk with you.

I don't have chicken legs...

MAL

Mal, I uh... do you have a minute?

KAREN

Is this about your date?

WARREN

Thank you Warren for being the Giant Elephant in the room.

MAL

Oh, come on. It's cute.

WARREN

I wanted to give you this.

KAREN

(She hands him a sheet of paper.)

WARREN

Love notes already?

KAREN

Directions to my place. If I'm paying, you're driving.

WARREN

Sounds fair.

KAREN

And uh, I'm wearing black. If that means, um... matters to you.

MAL

Sure.

WARREN

Mal likes black. Johnny Cash has got nothing on Mal.

MAL

Weren't you leaving?

WARREN

I thought you were the one that had to go.

MAL

Warren...

WARREN
 You know, “to a meeting.”

MAL
 Warren!

WARREN
 Oh, chill out.

KAREN
 Do you two need a minute?

WARREN
 Mal doesn’t like talking about the fact that he’s a—
 (he takes his thumb and tips his hand to his mouth like a bottle.)
 —you know.

MAL
 Warren! God dammit!

WARREN
 What? She doesn’t—

MAL
 Get the fuck out of here.

WARREN
 I thought she knew.

MAL
 You think I just open up conversations with that shit? Get out!

WARREN
 I’m sorry.

MAL
 Think before you open your damn mouth, you shit head.

WARREN
 I’m sorry.

MAL
 No shit, you’re sorry. You’re a sorry case for a friend!
 (He begins to push Warren out.)
 Out. Now.

(Warren is almost out.)

WARREN

(As he goes.)

Okay, bye Karen. Mal, hey, you know at least it's out in the open.

MAL

Bye Warren.

(Warren is gone.)

MAL cont'd

...fuckhead...

(beat. He tries to say something but stops. beat.)

I uh... I'm not sure what to say...

(beat.)

I guess— I mean, if you don't want to go with me anymore... I don't know.

KAREN

So you're a...

MAL

Yeah...

KAREN

How long— That's the wrong question. Are you still...?

MAL

I've been sober a few months. Five, actually.

KAREN

Oh... Congratulations? Is that what you say?

MAL

Yeah, I don't know. Thanks?

KAREN

Yeah...

MAL

(after a long silence)

I should get going.

KAREN

Wait.

What? MAL

...I... I don't care. KAREN

...yeah? MAL

Yeah, I'm sitting here, and I'm thinking... Nobody's perfect. KAREN

Really? MAL

Really. KAREN

You don't care? MAL

No. I mean, I'm curious. I have questions. But... I had a neighbor in college who was—was one. A uh... KAREN

An alcoholic? MAL

Yeah, but he was still a nice guy. KAREN

Yeah, 'cause you're not allowed to be a nice person and a drunk. MAL

You're right, that was a stupid thing to say. Sorry. KAREN

It's fine. MAL

What I mean is, it's not a big deal, right? KAREN

MAL

Yes and no. It's one of those things where it's not a big deal until it becomes a big deal, then it's a big fuckin' deal.

KAREN

I don't think it bothers me.

MAL

It should.

KAREN

It doesn't.

MAL

This is an issue for people. I mean it has been. One of the great things about me being me is that I get to live in a society that loves alcohol but fears alcoholics.

KAREN

Kind of a generalization.

MAL

Maybe... Most of the people that know— They treat me differently. I am viewed differently. Halfway between something to fear and something to pity.

KAREN

People don't care about that.

MAL

Really? People leave the room when I enter, blatantly turn away from me and leave. They look at my face before scanning me up and down. Usually with a raised eyebrow just to let me know that I'm being examined. Or I get the gentle hand on the shoulder or the elbow with the furrowed brow and the "How are you, Malcolm?" But what they're really saying is, "Are you still sober, you poor thing?"

KAREN

You might be reading too much into it.

MAL

Warren's the worst. He goes out of his way to make sure everything is normal, that I'm fine, I'm not an embarrassment. He goes so far that it makes everyone even more uncomfortable. You know how many times I've been told that I'm weak? That I'm immoral? That, really, I need to "get a hold" of myself? That I'm sick, not in a disease way, but in a disgusting, broken sort of way? Not just here either. It's everywhere—on the street, TV, movies. Everywhere I go I am told that alcoholics are to be feared and avoided, and cannot, under any circumstances, be completely trusted.

KAREN

Nobody's said anything about you to me.

MAL

Wait for it.

KAREN

Maybe you should let me make up my own mind.

MAL

...You're serious.

KAREN

You're obviously fine right now, right?

MAL

What do you mean by "fine"?

KAREN

Sober.

MAL

At the moment.

KAREN

Do you want that to change?

MAL

Not any time soon.

KAREN

I assume you do stuff to stay healthy. Eat right.

MAL

I try. I eat too much ice cream.

KAREN

Really.

MAL

It's better than the alternative. As long as I'm eating ice cream instead of drinking, I'm doing okay.

KAREN

And therapy, like 12 step or something.

Every day.

MAL

And it's a disease, right?

KAREN

Depends on your definition of disease.

MAL

It's not as though you asked for this to happen to you, right?

KAREN

Yeah, but—

MAL

So does it matter?

KAREN

I don't want your reputation to take a hit 'cause you're friends with me.

MAL

You think people care about this more than they do, Mal. The vast majority of people are too self-centered to give a crap about you.

KAREN

I feel it. I feel their judgment.

MAL

That's on you.

KAREN

Karen, I don't know...

MAL

I don't care, Mal.

KAREN

You will. At some point, you will care.

MAL

(Long pause.)

MAL cont'd

You wanna go get some ice cream?

KAREN

I thought you had some place to be.

MAL

Shit, you're right...

KAREN

Rain check?

MAL

Definitely. But I'd much rather go get some ice cream with you.

KAREN

Tomorrow?

MAL

Okay.

(KAREN moves to exit and stops.)

KAREN

It's the sugar.

MAL

What?

KAREN

Your ice cream cravings. Alcohol, some alcohols, metabolize into sugar. Accounts for your sweet tooth. Your body is looking for a supplement.

MAL

Good to know. Thanks.

(KAREN exits. Mal looks to the board.)

MAL cont'd

"From time to time I have found the senses deceive."

(The lights fade.)

End Scene Three

Scene Three point Five

SETTING:

Mal's Classroom.

AT RISE: Mal, back in lecture mode.

MAL

Descartes was educated by the Jesuits and a devout Catholic. His unwavering faith in Catholic conceptions of God never faltered while he was going through his meditations. In fact, his faith was strengthened. You find it a little puzzling that Descartes would doubt an experience that occurred right before his eyes yet never doubted the idea of a magical-man living in the clouds, but it's true. Descartes' understanding and belief in God strengthened his faith. Descartes also states that his God *"is said to be supremely good."* And therefore makes the supposition *"that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me."*

(beat.)

If we had time, we'd go into this in more detail. Also, if this weren't a public school... but, c'est la vie. So skeptics and overachievers, look into his third meditation for extra credit if you want to understand the existence of God.

(beat.)

So now we know that the process of thought defines our individuality and that a supreme being of goodness also exists. Therefore, if a being of pure goodness exists, the doubt he is experiencing must be coming from a being that is not good at all. So thanks, Descartes. We can now say that I exist, God exists and a demon of pure evil exists.

(beat.)

There's good. There's bad. And there's me.

(The lights fade.)

End Scene Three point Five.

Scene Four

SETTING: Mal's apartment. The only thing we see is his worn-out furniture, stereo and scattered music collection.

AT RISE: MAL enters his apartment with a heavy sigh. He looks around at his surroundings (it doesn't take long). He sighs again, and places his bag down next to the recliner. He turns on the stereo, adjusting the levels and starts searching through his music, picking up and putting down albums and cassettes, looking for something specific. He selects a cassette tape and places it onto the stereo. He plops down in his chair. He listens to the music coming from the amplifier.

There is a knock at the door. He ignores it.

The knock returns. Finally, Mal stands to face the knocking. EVIE enters the space and is still pissed.

EVIE

I wrote you a poem.

MAL

What are you doing here?

EVIE

(Holding out the poem.)

Read.

MAL

You shouldn't be here.

EVIE

You shouldn't let yourself be found so easily. Read.

MAL

I asked you to call me.

EVIE

You ordered me to call you. And I rejected that idea.

(Long pause.)

MAL

Well, get in here before someone sees you.

EVIE

Thanks, dick. Didn't know you're so ashamed of me.

MAL

Get in here.

(She moves more into the space.)

EVIE

Is this it?

MAL

I told you it's small.

EVIE

Here.

(She hands him a bright, purple-ish piece of stationary with a hand-written poem on it.)

MAL

It's purple.

EVIE

It's lavender. A friend saw me writing in my journal and she gave me a bunch of colored paper.

MAL

Very nice of her.

EVIE

I thought so.

MAL

Do I have to read this now?

EVIE

Now or later, I don't care. But I'm not leaving 'til you do.

MAL

I was in the middle of something.

EVIE

You were probably just sitting here listening to... what is this?

MAL

It's a mix-tape.

EVIE

A tape? That's... archaic. But kinda wonderful.

MAL

You could have at least brought some ice cream or something.

EVIE

You don't deserve ice cream. And I bet you've got five different kinds in your freezer right now anyway.

MAL

Maybe...

EVIE

Maybe, nothing. I'll bring you ice cream when you're nice.

MAL

(Holding up the poem.)
Is this an “I love you poem” or an “I hate you poem”?

EVIE

You know, I’m really pretty pissed at you so just shut-up and read the damn poem.

(Evie crosses to his chair and sits.)

EVIE cont’d

This is comfortable.

MAL

You’re going to ruin my molded ass groove.

(She points to the poem. Mal begins to read.)

MAL cont’d

You wrote this in iambic pentameter?

EVIE

Read.

(He goes back to the poem.)

MAL

(under his breath)
Nobody writes in fucking iambic...

EVIE

What?

MAL

Nothing.

(He begins. The moments pass as Mal reads. He’s put-out at first, but as he reads he becomes more invested. Evie steals glances around her, surveying Mal’s apartment. Mal finishes reading.)

EVIE

Well?

MAL

Nobody’s ever written me a poem before.

Ever? EVIE

MAL
I've gotten letters. Some good, a few bad. And the bad were—were bad. But I never got a poem.

EVIE
So I took your poem cherry?

MAL
I suppose you did.

(Long pause.)

EVIE
I have a date for homecoming.

MAL
Okay...

EVIE
I don't know why I got so mad. I mean, it's not like we can go together.
(beat.)

Why you'd want to go to the stupid thing is beyond me. But it's your choice. I just wanted to let you know that it bothers me.

MAL
What would you have me do?

EVIE
Stay here. Right here, in this room. Never leave. Be mine and only mine and never go anywhere unless I tell you it's okay.

MAL
That's not very reasonable.

EVIE
No, it's not.

(Silence.)

MAL
Who?

What? EVIE

Who are you going with? MAL

Matt Long. EVIE

The soccer player? MAL

Yeah. EVIE

He ask you? MAL

He called about an hour ago. EVIE

...Matt Long, huh? MAL

Yep. EVIE

I hear his name is very appropriate for his... size. MAL

You want me to find out? EVIE

No. MAL

Good. 'Cause I don't want to. EVIE

I do hope you have fun. MAL

We'll see. EVIE

MAL
You should at least try.

(Silence.)

EVIE
Do you like her?

MAL
She seems nice.

EVIE
Are you attracted to her?

MAL
...Yes.

EVIE
Not surprised. She's pretty. The bitch...
(Pointing to the poem.)
Did you like it?

MAL
...No.

EVIE
What?

MAL
Don't get me wrong, it's good. I just don't like poetry.

EVIE
You truly are an asshole.

(She gets up to leave. He stops her, and they kiss.)

MAL
You should go.

(She kisses him. The lights fade.)

End Scene Four

END ACT ONE

ACT TWOScene point Five.

SETTING: Mal's Classroom.

AT RISE: The Lecture continues. Mal is absent-mindedly getting ready for the dance. He is wearing a classy suit, and looks quite handsome.

MAL

By the time Descartes reached his second meditation he was an emotional wreck, stating, "*So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday's meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them.*" He was a mess.

Troubled. He had come to certain conclusions that were quite disturbing. But he persisted. He knew the road he was going down was a disturbing one, but he was too invested. He couldn't stop himself. He had to know, damning the potential consequences!

(beat.)

Moving forward he set aside anything that had the slightest flaw or resulted in any doubt, stating "*I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain, or if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty.*"

(beat.)

He concludes that uncertainty, embracing uncertainty, defines his own existence. If he is able to doubt, whether that doubt is his own or from the great deceiver demon or his God, the doubt, the thought exists. And for the thought to exist, his mind must exist. He challenges the demon to continue his deceptions because try as he might, the deceiver will never convince Descartes that he is nothing as long as he believes he *is* something.

(Mal crosses to the board and writes "Cogito Ergo Sum", while saying...)

"At last I have discovered it – thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am. I exist – that is certain." And here, Descartes gives us his most famous philosophical wisdom. Cogito Ergo Sum. "I think, therefore, I am." He exists.

(He sighs.)

Finally... relief.

(beat.)

He comes to the conclusion that the mind is certain, because it has thought. The table, being inanimate, has no thought. Even if a product of my own mind, the table itself is but an object. Objects, by their nature are products of the mind; objects in space, floating in a field outside "the self." Anything outside "the self" must be called into question and uncertain. Therefore, the table does not exist, and is only what it is because I say it is. It exists only in my mind as a construct of its meaning.

(beat.)

As a result, it's only a table because I've applied meaning to it.

(The lights shift)

End Scene point Five

Scene One

SETTING: A courtyard outside the Homecoming Dance.

AT RISE: A thumping beat is heard far off in the distance.

It's the night of the dance and MAL has stepped outside to sneak a cigarette. He looks about, crossing to a large flower-pot nearby. He sits.

He cautiously looks around to see if he is alone before reaching into his jacket and removing a cigarette. He is about to light it when EVIE enters. They both look nice in their attire. In fact, they look good... as though they planned their outfits to match.

EVIE

Better not let Waxell catch you.

MAL

You're not going to stop me?

EVIE

If you want a cigarette, nothing I say will stop you. But if Waxell sees you, he's going to flip.

MAL

Mr. Waxell. And fuck him. You out here for a reason?

EVIE

I saw you sneak out. Figured you'd be—

(She motions smoking a cigarette.)

MAL

(Holding out the cigarette.)

You want one?

EVIE

No. I don't want to smell like smoke.

MAL

Good point.

(He puts the cigarette back into his jacket pocket.)

Having fun?

EVIE

It's okay. We have a large group. Takes some of the pressure off... How's your date?

MAL

The experience of the date or the date herself?

EVIE

Both.

MAL

Good. I suppose. I'm trying to have fun. You?

EVIE

He's funny.

MAL

Good. Not like whoopdie-do, but I'm happy for you. I am. Just not jumping up and down.

EVIE

She looks very... nice.

MAL

You look very nice, too. Didn't think black was your thing.

EVIE

It's blue actually. I mean in the light it's more blue... Guess you have to see me under the lights.

MAL

I saw you in there. Just your face though.

EVIE

Oh...

(beat.)

You liking the music?

MAL

Not really. Although, they did play that Jim Carroll song I like.

EVIE

I requested that for you.

MAL

Thank you.

EVIE

And then I did my running man.
 (She imitates it for him.)
 Did you see me?

MAL

Yeah, it made me smile.

(She continues to do 'running man' and dances all the way
 over to him.)

EVIE

I did what you said. I gave the DJ fifty bucks. He said I have priority for the rest of the night.
 (She stops 'dancing.')

Come on, we could do some Yo La Tengo? A little Ramones? The Pixies? Journey?

MAL

Journey?

EVIE

Dude, I own the DJ! So hell yeah, Journey!
 (Singing. Gesturing to herself.)
"Just a small town girl--"

MAL

That's so overdone.

EVIE

C'mon don't be such a puss. *"Don't stop!"*

MAL

No, please, stop.

EVIE

(She then proceeds to play the air-drums.)
"Ba-da-doom-ba-da-doom-ba-da-BAM BAM!"

MAL

They need us for crowd control.

EVIE

Party pooper...

MAL

Enjoy your night.

(He moves to exit.)

Mal?	EVIE
Yeah.	MAL
Nothing...	EVIE
...Okay...	MAL
Mal?	EVIE
Yes?	MAL
About the other night?	EVIE
...yeah, we should probably talk about that.	MAL
It changes things.	EVIE
It certainly does.	MAL
So yeah... we should probably talk about it.	EVIE
Now?	MAL
No, not now. But soon. Tomorrow?	EVIE
Call me.	MAL
Can I come over?	EVIE

MAL

That's not a good idea. The last time you came over is the reason we need to talk.

(Long pause.)

I really should get back.

EVIE

I like your place.

MAL

You seemed unimpressed.

EVIE

I was surprised. But I like it. It suits you.

MAL

Messy and cramped suits me?

EVIE

Quaint and lived in. It's uh... minimalistic.

MAL

Thanks...

EVIE

You can go. I just wanted to say 'hi.'

MAL

Oh. Hi.

EVIE

Hi.

(Long pause.)

Well, if you're not going to go then I will.

MAL

Wait.

EVIE

Yeah?

MAL

Um... Okay, fuck, I got you something.

EVIE

What?

(Mal reaches into his pocket and hands her a can of mace with a small bow on it.)

EVIE cont'd

Mace?

MAL

Just for, you know... whatever.

EVIE

Um, thank you?

MAL

Be careful getting home. Don't let Captain Big Dick take advantage of you.

EVIE

I'm going home with the girls. We're having a slumber party.

MAL

Those are two things I never thought I'd hear you say.

EVIE

I'm making friends. And I like having them.

MAL

You deserve that.

EVIE

So do you. You should try it.

MAL

...I'll talk to you later.

EVIE

I'll call you.

(holds up the mace.)

Thanks again.

(She exits. Mal stands alone. He shakes his head and reaches back into his jacket, removing the cigarette.

He stares at the cigarette.)

MAL

(to the cigarette.)

This is a craving. I am having a craving. I am stronger than my cravings... You are merely a fleeting desire. A moment of ill-perceived want... You do not control me...

(beat.)

Fuck...

(He places the cigarette in his mouth and goes to light it.
Karen enters. She too looks quite nice and matches Mal's attire.)

KAREN

There you are. What are you doing?

MAL

Uh... nothing.

KAREN

Are you smoking?

MAL

No.

KAREN

Mal...

MAL

I'm not. I was going to. But now I'm not.

KAREN

God, I'd kill for a cigarette.

(He holds the cigarette out for her.)

No. I don't want to smell like smoke.

MAL

Good point.

(Again, the cigarette goes back into his jacket pocket.)

Sorry. I kinda ran out on you. I was getting a little claustrophobic.

KAREN

I figured it was something like that.

(beat.)

You're being really sweet about this whole thing. Humoring me.

MAL

To be honest, I'm not having as bad a time as I thought I would.

KAREN

Thanks.

MAL

That came out wrong. I'm having a good time, and I wasn't expecting to. It's surprising to me is all.

KAREN

It's what you make of it.

MAL

What?

KAREN

It's a situation. A moment in time. Situations are what you make of them. If you're having fun it's because you're allowing yourself to have fun.

MAL

What if just certain parts are fun?

KAREN

If you have fun for even a moment, I think that's good.

MAL

Then success.

KAREN

So what do you have so far?

(Mal reaches into yet a different pocket and pulls out a pad of paper. Karen reaches into her purse and pulls out a similar pad. They begin to compare notes.)

MAL

John Korn and Cindy Shelby are definitely not feeling the pheromonal experience, but I have three other couples who are almost certainly gonna get freaky later.

KAREN

Wait, let me guess, um...

(looking at her own notes.)

Janice Moore and Todd Elkers, Mary Roberts and Bruce Miller, and Sharon Waters and Mike Jacobs.

MAL

Um... yeah, actually... weird...

KAREN

Not really, it's pretty obvious. Besides, Sharon Waters is handing out condoms in the bathroom.

MAL

I didn't wanna know that.

KAREN

What else have you got?

MAL

Terry Schmidt and Amanda Whales haven't even touched each other yet, but that's to be expected. Sally Haring and her girlfriend can't keep their hands off each other, but I think it's great they're so open about their relationship.

KAREN

What about Jenna Friedman and Walter what's-his-name?

MAL

Donovan. I don't know about that one. Walter wouldn't know what to do with a girl if she were naked and on top of him.

KAREN

Oh, I love this couple. Evie Price and Matt Long. Definitely pheromonal.

MAL

...You think?

KAREN

Oh, yeah. She's playing like a shy little thing, but I bet you ten-to-one that she's going to find out if the rumors are true.

MAL

Huh... That's... That's gross.

KAREN

And then there's you.

MAL

What?

KAREN

You started off all uncomfortable and reserved. Now you're much more calm. I think the environment is getting to you.

MAL

You're crazy.

KAREN

Oh, thanks. It's always nice to have the crazy people think you're nuts.

MAL

Not everyone gets to have a team of professionals saying they're clinically...on the fringe.

KAREN

Lucky you. But c'mon, at one point, I saw you smile. Like genuinely smile.

MAL

No, I didn't.

KAREN

Yes, you did. I saw it. Like you were almost enjoying yourself.

MAL

You're not supposed to be analyzing me.

KAREN

Handsome man at a dance, who happens to be my date, and I'm not supposed to notice if he's having a good time?

MAL

Yes.

KAREN

You puzzle me.

MAL

I'm a mystery like that.

(beat.)

Handsome?

KAREN

Yes. You look handsome.

MAL

You look very nice yourself.

(The music in the distance shifts and is slightly more audible.)

Huh... MAL cont'd

What? KAREN

Nothing. The song. MAL

Yo La Tengo? KAREN

Yeah. MAL

KAREN
At least somebody in there has good taste. I saw them in concert in high school. I was the only one there under twenty-five.

MAL
I saw 'em in college. One of the few concerts I've actually attended.

KAREN
Not a big concert goer?

MAL
Crowds kinda freak me out.

KAREN
Right. 'Cause you're weird.

MAL
Only clinically.

(Long pause.)

KAREN
Would you— God... Do you want to dance?

MAL
Here?

KAREN
It's a good song.

(Awkwardly, Mal goes to her and takes her hand, then places one hand on her hip.

They dance.

The awkwardness fades.

NOTE: the performers should NOT sing the quoted lines.)

KAREN

It's funny. The lyrics to this.

MAL

Appropriate for the moment. "The music is great for dancing."

KAREN

"I don't really dance much. But this time I did."

MAL

"I was glad that I did."

KAREN

"And the song said lets be happy. And I was happy."

MAL

"It never made me happy before."

KAREN

"The song says don't be lonely."

(They dance.)

MAL

Are you? Lonely?

KAREN

...yes.

(beat.)

Are you?

MAL

No.

KAREN

Must be nice.

MAL
Not really.

(They dance.)

KAREN
Was it bad?

MAL
(beat.)
You mean...before?

KAREN
Yeah.

MAL
Yes.

KAREN
How bad?

MAL
Bad.

KAREN
There are levels, right?

MAL
I suppose. It was bad enough I couldn't stop on my own.

KAREN
But, how bad? I'd like to know.

MAL
The, uh...

(Takes a deep breath.)
...the average wine bottle holds about seven hundred and fifty milliliters of liquid. Alcohol has gradations, too, you know like, there's beer which has the lowest alcohol content, then wine, the hard liquor.

(Beat.)
Before rehab... I was living in a Motel 6. Shitty little thing with a double bed that took up ninety percent of the room. But, uh, I was drinking about twelve to maybe fourteen hundred milliliters of hard liquor every day. Vodka. 'Cause it was supposedly odorless. Which isn't true, by the way. In rehab we figured that at any given time, my blood alcohol content was around a point one-eight or maybe a one-seven. And that was just to maintain. Just to keep my body from going into withdrawals...

KAREN

Yeah. I'd say that would be pretty bad. But that's not you anymore.

MAL

It's who I am every day. I just fight it.

KAREN

But you fight it. You're a fighter. A warrior.

MAL

I'm just me.

(They dance.)

KAREN cont'd

They say alcoholism is a symptom to deeper problems.

MAL

They say a lot of things.

KAREN

So that's not you?

MAL

Karen...

KAREN

I'm sorry. I'm nervous. I'm curious.

MAL

I get that, but... a lot of this stuff is still pretty raw... and I'm ashamed. I'm hanging on to a lot of guilt.

KAREN

You didn't ask for this—

MAL

No, no. It's okay. I need the guilt. I need to feel bad for what I've done.

KAREN

That's awful.

MAL

It may not make a whole lot of sense, but... I need to feel the guilt for the pain I've caused.

KAREN

For what, like, ever?

MAL

I hope not. But for now, yeah. Hopefully, someday, that will change. But for right now, yeah. I need it.

(They dance.)

KAREN

What happened to make you get help?

MAL

That's a long story.

(She stares at him.)

There was day, a specific moment when everything I had come to know, everything I believed, everything I felt right down to my bones, turned out to be...perverted. For a brief, fleeting second I saw through the fog and...and I knew I was going to die. Soon. That night. And in that moment I saw how everything I had believed to be true was wrong. I saw how angry I was. How much fear I had. I lost my way.

KAREN

What happened that broke through to you?

MAL

Story for another time.

(She nods. They dance.)

MAL cont'd

What's your favorite song?

KAREN

Can't do it. Too many. You?

MAL

Same. Book?

KAREN

I don't know, I haven't read 'em all yet.

MAL

Movie?

KAREN

Grosse Pointe Blank. Followed closely by about a thousand others.

Color? MAL

Blue. What's with all the questions? KAREN

Just trying to get to know you? MAL

Can I play? KAREN

Of course. MAL

First kiss? KAREN

Time, place, or person? MAL

All three. KAREN

Niki Foster, the playground, fifth grade. MAL

Ha-ha. Mine was in third grade. KAREN

You're bragging that you're easier than I am? MAL

I'm glad I know you're an asshole otherwise I might be offended by that. What's your favorite quote? KAREN

You know, if I tell you all this stuff we're gonna run out of things to talk about. I only know so much. MAL

Yeah? What else do you know? KAREN

I only know three things. MAL

Three? KAREN

Yep. Three. MAL

Tell me. KAREN

No. MAL

Why not? KAREN

Because if I tell you my three precious pearls of wisdom I'll expose my well of knowledge. I won't be able to tell you anything else. MAL

I doubt that. Please? KAREN

Okay... One, people are by nature selfish, but, for the most part, strive for improvement, and I find that admirable. Two... Radiohead will always be popular among college kids. And three... relationships are really hard work. MAL

Are you sure about that? KAREN

About Radiohead? Yeah, but I don't know if they're popular because or in spite of their incessant whininess. MAL

No, about relationships. KAREN

Yes. Because they're always complicated. But worth it. For the most part... MAL

(They dance.)

KAREN

So... I guess we've run out of things to talk about.

MAL

I guess so.

KAREN

We're gonna have to come up with something else to do.

MAL

I guess so...

(They dance.)

KAREN

I think we can safely say there is a pheromonal vibe in existence.

MAL

You think?

KAREN

I'm certainly picking up on something.

MAL

I still say the experiment is faulty.

KAREN

Do you?

MAL

There's no definitive proof. Unless, you want to call all the kids on our lists tomorrow and see if they got lucky.

KAREN

'Cause that's not a violation of the teacher-student relationship.

MAL

Yeah...

(They dance.)

KAREN

You okay?

MAL

Yeah.

You just went to a dark place. KAREN

Did I? MAL

Not dark. Distant. KAREN

I tend to drift in and out of reality sometimes. MAL

Where do you go? KAREN

Somewhere where they know me. MAL

Sounds like fun. KAREN

Only if you're welcome. MAL

Are you welcome there? KAREN

Most of the time. MAL

You're only partially welcome in your own fantasy world? KAREN

I know, it's very frustrating that I can't get my fantasies to do what I want. MAL

Am I welcome in this world? KAREN

Oh, yes. They like you much more than they like me. MAL

Good to know. KAREN

(They dance.)

Mal? KAREN cont'd

Hmm? MAL

Still want that cigarette? KAREN

Yes. MAL

Then let's go have one. They don't need us here. Let's go. KAREN

I told Warren I'd help him clean up. MAL

There are tons of parents inside. Besides, it'd be funny to leave Warren to clean up everyone's mess. KAREN

So you want to get out of here? MAL

I do. With you. KAREN

Where do you want to go? MAL

You drove. It's your call. KAREN

I know this great ice cream place. Not far from here. MAL

No, Mal. KAREN

What? MAL

KAREN

God, I'm gonna have to kick you upside the head, aren't I?

MAL

Not in that dress.

(She kisses him. The dancing stops. Mal pulls away only to go back and reciprocate the kiss.

They both break away.)

KAREN

You wanted definitive proof.

MAL

Is this how all science experiments end?

KAREN

Can we go?

MAL

Absolutely.

(Karen and Mal exit the stage.

After they've gone, Warren enters looking after them, having watched them the entire time.

The lights fade.)

End Scene One.

Scene One point Five

SETTING: Mal's Classroom.

AT RISE: Mal is starting to wrap-up his lecture.

MAL

Here's the thing... For all the respect we have for Descartes and the philosophical and mathematical gifts he's given to us—as flawed as they may be—we seem to ignore Descartes as a human—a sad, lonely human... His mother died when he was a child. His father, who was very hard on him, sent him away to be taught by Jesuit priests. Estranged from his siblings, his father, even the nurse who took care of him in his youth, Descartes became alienated from a

(MORE.)

MAL cont'd

world that he couldn't make sense of. He was a disenchanted, apathetic, rich-kid who had no desire to be a part of a society that saw him as intelligent, but socially awkward. He was seen as flawed—a misfit. So he withdrew from society and lived alone, not really giving a damn about anything. Until his subconscious reached up and rocked him out that apathy. What makes Descartes special is that he accepted the challenge. He took it upon himself to sit down and figure out what was going on inside his own mind. Descartes gave the world some amazing gifts, but that only happened because he took the time to reflect on who he was—to critically examine himself and his beliefs.

(Beat).

So as your final assignment for this unit, I want you to talk about yourselves. Are you? Or aren't you? Talk about your beliefs of self. Beliefs of family. God. Faith. Bugs. Food. Morality. What is the nature of good and evil? Is it circumstantial? Are the concepts of good and evil merely based on the ideals surrounding a particular situation? I ask you to be courageous in your self-examinations. Critical of your belief structures. Wipe away the un-truths and rebuild a foundation of certainty that you can be proud of and take out into the world to make it better. Think. Question. And remember: *"I am. I exist – that is certain."*

(Lights fade.)

End Scene One point Five

Scene Two

SETTING:

Mal's apartment.

AT RISE:

During the previous monologue, Mal has removed his outfit and stands in a t-shirt and underwear. He sits in his recliner as Karen runs in and jumps on top of him. They've just had sex and she is minimally dressed as well. They kiss.

KAREN

So, that whole thing about you being uncertain...?

MAL

Yeah?

KAREN

I take that back.

MAL

Thanks.

(She kisses him again and stands.)

I have a favor to ask.

KAREN

I need to chill out for a bit.

MAL

Not that. I wanna look at your albums.

KAREN

Why?

MAL

I want to see the collection of a music snob.

KAREN

I'm not a music snob.

MAL

No?

KAREN

I like all sorts of music.

MAL

So you don't think your taste in music is better than anyone else's?

KAREN

Everybody thinks they have great taste in music.

MAL

Can I look or not?

KAREN

Go for it.

MAL

(She goes to the floor next to the record player. She begins to flip through his record albums.)

This is, uh... varied. I've never listened to half of these.

KAREN

Good. That just means you have a lot to learn.

MAL

KAREN

Not that I'm ignorant?

MAL

No, absolutely not. It's an opportunity for me to manipulate you into liking my music.

KAREN

Right, 'cause, you know, looking for a means to manipulate someone is really rational...

(holding up a record.)

Can we listen to this one?

MAL

Sure.

(He rises and puts the record on. Music plays.)

KAREN

This reminds me of my dad. He would play this for me when I was in my crib.

MAL

Is that what he told you?

KAREN

Yeah, but I think I remember it too. Vaguely. Like a dream. But probably not.

MAL

I don't know. I think the brain records everything. From the moment it develops thought it's a recorder. But birth is so traumatic it takes years for our brains to get back on track.

KAREN

You're so full of shit.

MAL

Are you close with him? Your dad?

KAREN

I used to be.

MAL

Not anymore?

KAREN

Not anymore...

(She picks up another record and a purple-ish piece of stationary—Evie’s poem—falls to the floor. Karen picks it up.)

KAREN cont’d

What’s this?

MAL

(Attempting to grab it away.)

Nothing.

KAREN

No, no, no. What is this?

(She begins to read.)

It’s a poem. A love poem. Awww, someone loves you.

MAL

Can I have it back?

KAREN

No.

(She reads more.)

Is this in... um...

MAL

Iambic pentameter.

KAREN

Who’s it from? It sounds—so teenagery. Forgot it was down there? It’s what, like, ten, fifteen years old?

(She continues reading.)

God, I used to write to boys all the time. With the little hearts, just like these. Even sprayed some perfume on it.

(She smells the poem.)

Still fragrant. Really fragrant actually.

(She stops.)

How long have you had this?

MAL

...not very long.

KAREN

This—Is this from a student?

MAL

I don’t even know why I still have it.

KAREN

Don't tell me you're boinking a student?

MAL

No, don't be ridiculous. She gave it to me and—And I was flattered. God, I say it out loud and it sounds so stupid. But—it was nice. I was going to throw it away and it must have fallen down there.

KAREN

Mal, you have to be careful about stuff like this.

MAL

I know.

KAREN

You should give the administration a heads up. Cover your ass in case she tries anything.

MAL

Nothing's going to happen.

KAREN

This is a serious poem, Mal. Trust me, girls don't say some of these things unless they've got it bad for you.

MAL

Can we change the subject?

KAREN

Who is it?

MAL

I can't tell you.

KAREN

Sure you can.

MAL

I know I can. But I'm not going to.

KAREN

Why not?

MAL

It—It wouldn't be fair to her.

KAREN

I won't say anything.

MAL

Honestly, it's a complicated situation, and you don't need to get involved.

(Karen stares at Mal. Long pause.)

KAREN

You are. You're having sex with a student.

MAL

No, I'm not.

KAREN

Holy shit!

MAL

I'm not! Look, I won't tell you a lot about this, but I can tell you that I am not sleeping with a student.

KAREN

I can't believe I'm hearing this. How fucking nuts are you?

MAL

Karen, please--

(He takes the poem.)

--you have to trust me.

KAREN

You're screwing a student. And on top of it, you're cheating on her.

MAL

What?

KAREN

You're cheating on the poor thing with me! She's all young and impressionable and you're cheating on her.

MAL

Oh Jesus, would you shut up for a second.

KAREN

I need to go.

(She stands, and begins to gather her things.)

KAREN cont'd

I cannot believe I fell for this. For you. My god, what a monumental asshole you—

(Mal stops her and pushes her into the chair.)

—are.

MAL

Look, I—some people, they... Okay, it's like—Certain things, situations, when you're in them, seem fine. But in hindsight, you're like, "oh that was really dumb." But you—fuck... There's more to this than what you think. And a lot of it may seem really fucked up right now, I can see that. But it's not what you think. Nothing has happened. You have to believe me.

(There's a long silence between them. Mal doesn't stop looking at her, but Karen can't force herself to make eye contact with Mal. Finally, she does.)

KAREN

Nothing happened?

MAL

Nothing happened.

KAREN

You didn't sleep with her?

MAL

No.

KAREN

Promise?

MAL

Yes.

KAREN

...I don't believe you.

MAL

I can't control what you believe. But I am telling the truth.

KAREN

How do I know that?

MAL

You don't.

KAREN

She's a student.

MAL

Not to me.

(She rises and pushes past him.)

KAREN

See, that doesn't help. That makes me think something is going on. That makes me think you—

MAL

She's in recovery. With me. That's how we met. We went through a rehab program together.

KAREN

Bullshit. She'd be a minor.

MAL

She was eighteen. She turned eighteen right before she got help.

KAREN

I want to know who she is.

MAL

And you're not going to find out.

KAREN

No?

MAL

No, because that's not how we do things. That's not how I do things. I'm not going to sell her out just to save my ass.

KAREN

I just want a name.

MAL

It's called Alcoholics *Anonymous* for a reason. The anonymity part is for our protection, and you don't break it.

KAREN

I think this is a special circumstance.

MAL

No. No, I will not tell you. For once, I am going to honor some goddamn principles. So please, please, Karen, do not ask me again.

(Long silence.)

I don't like this.

KAREN

I can't tell you anymore.

MAL

I'm kinda creeped out by this.

KAREN

I know it seems weird, but I won't say anymore. Other than I am not sleeping with her.

MAL

I want to know who—

KAREN

Anonymous, Karen! Anonymous!

MAL

(They stare at each other, silently. Moments pass.)

I would like you to take me home now...

KAREN

...If that's what you want.

MAL

Yes. I'm tired.

KAREN

Are you okay?

MAL

I want to go home.

KAREN

(She moves to exit.)

You know that look I told you about? The one that makes me feel different?

MAL

Yeah.

KAREN

MAL

You're giving me that look now.

KAREN

People look at you differently because you are.

(beat.)

I'm getting my stuff.

(Karen exits. Mal stands as the lights fade.)

End Scene Two

Scene Three

SETTING:

Mal's classroom.

AT RISE:

It is some time later and Mal's assignment with his students has come to an end. He is at the board erasing what was written. He looks at the board. After a moment he writes, "*Next Lesson...*"

Warren Waxell enters.

WARREN

"Next Lesson"? Little optimistic don't you think.

MAL

Just some last minute thoughts.

WARREN

I warned you. I should've been more persistent, especially after reading the notes you sent...

MAL

I know you think I should stop.

WARREN

The thin ice you've been on is melting.

MAL

I know...

WARREN

What time is your...thing.

MAL

Tomorrow at three. They said I should bring the Union rep. Or a lawyer. Thought that was a bit excessive...

WARREN

Karen... Man, who woulda thought.

MAL

She did what she thought was right.

WARREN

Yeah, but why not talk to you? Why go straight to the brass?

MAL

It's her first year. She's looking out for herself.

WARREN

It's insane. Everyone knows it's crazy.

MAL

Everyone? With my reputation?

WARREN

Well... some people... maybe...

MAL

What about you?

WARREN

I knew something was up with you and Evie Price. Seeing you two at Homecoming confirmed some things.

MAL

So you think we... Me and Evie.

WARREN

I'd like to think that if you had something to get off your chest you'd tell me. The old you would have.

MAL

The old me... Like I'm magically some new person.

WARREN

We're friends, right? I mean not just co-workers or drinking buddies—formerly. We'd hang out. You've eaten at my home. You slept on my couch for half the summer after you got out of...

(Mal starts to interject but stops. He is speechless.)

MAL

She's eighteen...

WARREN

She's also a student. Details are kinda irrelevant.

MAL

She's not one of my students. I didn't even know she went here until—

WARREN

Until what, she wore her cheerleading outfit for you? Student, Mal. She's a fucking student! God, I have done some stupid shit in my day, but this?

(beat.)

I don't see how you're gonna get out of this one.

(beat.)

They pulled me in. They know we're close. Asked me about a bunch of stupid shit—your behavior and did I talk to you this summer, blahblahblah...

MAL

And?

WARREN

I told 'em the truth. That you're on-the-mend. But that I was worried.

MAL

I'm not drinking.

WARREN

That doesn't mean you're fine. Fuck Mal, it's not a light switch where one minute you're a mess and the next everything is okay. You're still doing weird shit. And I don't think you're aware of it.

MAL

I know what I'm doing.

WARREN

Do you? You've cut yourself off from everybody except for an eighteen year old girl. Regardless of what you two went through together, she's fucking eighteen. She doesn't have the life experience to understand what the fuck is going on. You're supposed to be the adult. You're supposed to be the responsible one. Setting boundaries. Being the professional. Can you say you've done that?

MAL

...yes. No. I don't know...

WARREN

Kind of my point.

MAL

No. I'm better. I am. I have done so much work, Warren. I am better.

WARREN

Better, yeah, sure. But that's relative. A hurricane leaves a path of destruction that takes years to clean up.

(Long silence.)

WARREN cont'd

What're you doing with this Descartes stuff, Mal? Seriously, why are bothering with this?

(Mal sits, defeated. He stares at Warren for a long time before answering.)

MAL

I got my hand stuck in a vending machine.

WARREN

What?

MAL

I was in that motel, out of money, so I was trying to shake stuff out of the vending machine. And I was close to getting this bag of chips, but it just wouldn't shake loose. So I reached up in there, and I... I got stuck. I got my hand wedged in there and then the cuff of my shirt got snagged, and I'm just sitting there, like, "okay, now what?"

(beat.)

And I look over, and there's this kid standing there. Like, I don't know, ten or eleven, and he's just lookin' at me like, "What's wrong with this guy?" And we just stared at each other for a bit. Felt like a long time, but I don't know how long it really was. And he walks off, shaking his head.

(beat.)

I got out and went back to my room. Passed out for a while, and when I came to I was, uh, my back was hurting. Later found out that it was the pancreatitis and my kidneys weren't working right either. But my back was hurting so bad. And I was shaking. So I reached over for a drink, because I knew, I just knew that I had to get my B.A.C. back up or I'd end up having a seizure. I'm standing in front of the mirror, taking a drink, and I look at myself, holding a bottle, and I think of that kid. The way he was looking at me. With pure disgust. And he was right. I was disgusting. And I thought, "This is it. Congratulations." You know, like, *this* is my life? This

(MORE.)

MAL cont'd

is my legacy? My purpose in life is to end up dead at twenty-eight in a Motel 6? Cool life.
(beat.)

I didn't want that. I didn't want anybody to ever experience that. And everything fell apart. Everything I ever thought I knew just crumbled. But all through rehab, I couldn't stop thinking about where I had gone wrong. How could I have believed so many things so thoroughly, so completely, only to be so, so very wrong?

(beat.)

So I started over. Questioned everything. Went back to analyzing what I believed, even what it meant to "believe". And I concluded that the only thing I really knew, was that I didn't know shit about anything.

(Warren nods, thinking. Long silence.)

WARREN

Did you get the chips?

MAL

...no.

(Long silence.)

WARREN

And Evie?

MAL

It just— It just happened.

WARREN

"It just happened"? Is that what you're going to tell them? Do you realize the shit-storm you've created? "Mr. Barron, have you required your students to write an essay about the nature of religious belief?" Well, it just happened. "Mr. Barron, are you now or have you ever been drunk around your students?" Well, it just happened. "Mr. Barron are you having a sexual relationship with any students currently in attendance at this school?" Well, it just happened? Seriously, Mal?!

MAL

It's not sexual.

WARREN

What?

MAL

Me and Evie. We've never—It's not about sex.

WARREN

Right! Okay. People are really going to believe that. Besides, this day in age, you even touch a student, it's sexual. Look at it from their viewpoint, you're not teaching to the curriculum, you're having an inappropriate relationship with a student, and you're a drunk. What are you possibly going to say that will save your ass?

MAL

We're just friends. Me and Evie... we thought—I thought, that maybe there was something there. But...

WARREN

Is she worth it? Worth your career? Your reputation?

(Mal thinks about this for a long time.)

MAL

She's my friend.

WARREN

You're an idiot.

MAL

Warren—Every choice I've made in the past five months has been mine. Free choices. Clear choices. I've made them all with a clear mind. And for that reason alone, I'd do every single thing all over again.

WARREN

But they're not "clear", Mal! Even your interpretations of Descartes are skewed.

MAL

No—

WARREN

Yes! You're not seeing things "clear"ly! You're looking at all this shit and you're seeing what you want to see instead of seeing what is right-the-fuck in front of you! All this "what-does-it-mean-we're-nothing-but-our-minds" crap is a way for you to rationalize and justify what you're feeling. You have every right to feel what you feel, Mal, but you at least need to understand why you're feeling it.

(Warren pauses before standing and moving to exit.)

I'm going home as soon as the bell rings. But call me tonight. Better yet, come over for dinner. Sherry's cooking stroganoff or some shit, and—and I just can't face that alone.

(Warren exits. Mal remains.)

The lights shift.)

End Scene ThreeScene Three point Five

SETTING: Mal's classroom the following morning.

AT RISE: Prior to his meeting with the administrators, Mal stands before his class. He is dower and not as excited about this lecture. It's not only the final lecture of the unit, but may very well be his final lecture as a teacher.

He addresses himself as much as he addresses his students.

MAL

Exploring philosophy challenges our way of thinking. It has the power to strip away biases and broaden our understanding. But that's hard, right? To challenge what we hold on to, what we are feeling. We can't control what we feel, all we can do is understand our feelings. Or try to understand them? It takes constant effort. Fighting all the time. And—and I am no warrior-bodhisattva...

(beat.)

It is okay for me to feel what I feel. A very simple concept like that can be hard to accept. Certainly it's something I've had to learn late in life... So I just add to the pile and cautiously move forward...

Which is what I do now—proceed with caution.

Which has resulted in me feeling alienated.

Which increases my everyday discomforts so I push further away.

Which is really just a retreat.

Which makes others wary of approaching me.

Which I embrace, because it's easy to be alone.

Which is an attitude I perpetuate to maintain my defenses.

Which is really just a rationalization to keep me emotionally safe.

Which I justify as being a pretty okay philosophy to hold,

because I tell myself that isolation is easier than chaos.

Which isn't at all true, and I know this from experiencing both...

(Mal is almost completely disconnected from his students. Fluctuating back and forth between verbalizing his thoughts to himself and absent-mindedly speaking to the audience)

MAL cont'd

At least, this is what I have come to believe. My beliefs, for me, are true. Subjectively. Constantly in flux, but I'd like to believe that I believe in many things. So who am I? Can I admit that, on a fairly regular basis, I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing? Because let's be honest, kids, it's all just fucking bullshit.

(He reconnects with his students.)

So what do I believe?

(MORE.)

MAL cont'd

(beat.)

I believe the simplest story has profound meaning.

(beat.)

I believe in craft as well as creativity, because

I believe craft cultivates the gift of imagination.

I believe craft can be taught, but

I believe it is far more difficult to teach creativity.

(As he continues, he speaks faster and faster, more and more passionately.)

I believe anything is possible, because

I believe nothing is ever as it seems.

I believe in the romantic, but

I believe Romanticism as a genre to be a bit silly.

I believe in the pliability of masks and the mobility they provide, because

I believe concealing can be comforting, but

I believe hiding is oppression's shadow.

I believe subversive assaults are slow stabs of change.

I believe unchecked ambition is dangerous, because

I believe ambition needs to be tempered by compassion and understanding.

I believe in the epic battles of the Super-Hero and the Super-Villain, and

I believe heroism and villainy to be subjective.

I believe silence can make someone's voice stronger.

I believe ignorance combined with arrogance leads to a lot of pain, but

I believe awareness is the crack in the foundation of hate.

I believe understanding your intentions solidifies the path in which you walk.

I believe in myth but not rumor.

I believe we are allowed to make mistakes, and

I believe in not repeating mistakes, and

I believe in *not* repeating mistakes, and

I believe I can be wrong, but

I believe sometimes I can be the first to admit it.

I believe the universe needs balance, and

I believe right now it is seriously outta whack.

I believe the enigmatic paradox is acceptable, because

I believe chaos exists to keep us from complacency.

I believe too much deconstruction,

too much intellectualization,

diminishes the magic of the mundane.

I believe allowing my anger and frustration to define me

will lead to my destruction,

because it has happened before and can happen again.

I believe I am sentimental which

will lead to my destruction,

because it has happened before and can happen again.

I believe fear is the driving force of every choice we make, but

(MORE.)

MAL cont'd

I believe fear can be motivational, and
 I believe overcoming what we fear is what makes us great.
 I believe a thought is a thing, because
 I believe in the tangibility of the metaphysical,
 the existence of the mystical,
 and the physicality of the ephemeral.
 And... I believe tomorrow holds the possibility of me believing in something new that I didn't
 believe in today.

(The bell rings. Mal stops, realizing he has revealed far more than he had intended.

The lights shift.)

End Three point Five.

Scene Four

SETTING: Mal's Classroom.

AT RISE: Mal is packing up his desk, filling a box with his things.

EVIE enters, and she is not in a good mood. She stops
 when she sees Mal packing up his things.

EVIE

So it's true.

MAL

Word spreads fast.

EVIE

Did you tell your class that life is bullshit?

MAL

If that's all they're saying then I got lucky.

EVIE

Well, there's also the rumor that you got into a fist fight with the administrators 'cause you were
 drunk. The rumor that they're placing you on administrative leave because of the Descartes
 project, something about God. You're quitting because you and Miss Rosenberg want to be
 together and they're not letting you. You're being fired for sleeping with a student...

MAL

At least we know that last one's not true.

EVIE
What about the rest?

MAL
Nails in the coffin.

EVIE
Were you going to tell me?

MAL
It's not like I could've pulled you out of class.

EVIE
So just quietly bowing out was your next option? Hope that I or anyone else wouldn't notice you were gone?

MAL
I'm a small cog in a big machine. All they need to do is make a replacement.

EVIE
Don't minimize this. C'mon, talk to me.

MAL
What do you want, Evie? Do you want me to get upset about this? What would that solve? Besides, you're leaving at the end of the year anyway.

EVIE
I'm graduating. It's a little different. And that's seven months away. Jesus, Mal, you're quitting.

MAL
No, I'm being fired. Oh, wait, no. Sorry. I'm being placed on Administrative Leave for—
(He grabs a piece of paper and reads from it.)
—“insubordination” and “gross negligence of standards and objectives as laid forth in the state approved curriculum mandates.”

(He places the piece of paper in the box.)
Nice, backhanded way for them to fire me because I wouldn't admit to sleeping with a student.
(beat.)
They're right, I don't belong here.

EVIE
No, no, I don't belong here. I'm the one who's supposed to be leaving to go do something else. You— You're... Can you tell me what happened?

MAL

I should finish packing.

EVIE

...I know about you and Miss Rosenberg. I know you two spent the night together.

(He turns to her.)

I saw you leaving with her at Homecoming.

(He doesn't respond.)

...I don't blame you... I don't. She's closer to your age. You two probably have more in common. You and I— We can just chalk us up as a big giant whatever...

MAL

Don't do that. We both know how much you and I have in common. For some reason the universe decided to put a decade's worth of time between us. God's joke or something. Pretty funny, huh? Reminds me of another joke. Two guys walk into a bar. They say, "Ouch." Here's another one... I actually thought I was doing okay. Ba-dump, bump! There's not really a punch line to that one—the joke is the situation.

EVIE

It's not very funny. Not to me.

MAL

A lot of jokes aren't funny. Which, *that's* kinda funny if you think about it...

EVIE

You're in shock.

MAL

I'm fine. I'm great. Really. All this time I thought I've been seeing through the fog. Now I know I'm just seeing deeper into it. And that's okay.

EVIE

You're going nuts.

MAL

Yeah, well... Doesn't matter anymore. At least I don't have to put on a happy face. I don't have to pretend.

EVIE

What are you going to do?

MAL

I'm gonna go home.

EVIE

And after that?

MAL

I don't know yet...

(He stops packing, turns to Evie.)

Come with me.

EVIE

What?

MAL

Come with me. Meet me at my place and we'll— We'll just go. Go somewhere only we know about.

EVIE

Mal—

MAL

That was stupid. I know you're not going to. But you have to wonder what you're even doing here? You're a hundred times smarter and wiser than any of these kids. You could drop out, get your GED, emancipate yourself. And just-- Just fucking go, man. Get the fuck out and run!

EVIE

'Cause it's that simple. You hear yourself right now? Are you listening to the shit coming out of your mouth?

MAL

Of course I am. I'm not stupid. I know I'm being ridiculous, but it feels good to say what I want.

EVIE

I... This isn't you. You sound like you've given up. On your job. Us. Where have you gone?

MAL

...somewhere where they know me...

(beat.)

This was a nice life experiment. But I failed, so it's time to move on.

EVIE

You're being selfish.

MAL

Alcoholic, Evie. That's what we do.

EVIE

Is that it? You're leaving so you can justify going back out?

MAL

I've been sober for five months. I have no desire to change that now.

EVIE

You're going to go out. I've seen it happen a hundred times. So have you! Something bad happens and we drink, Mal. That's what's going to happen.

MAL

Then that's my choice! You think I need something bad to happen to justify having a drink. I'm breathing, Evie. That's as good an excuse as any.

EVIE

Don't screw around with this.

MAL

What do you know?

EVIE

Let's not forget who has more sobriety here.

MAL

Ten days. You've got ten days on me. Besides, you're just a kid. You don't know.

EVIE

Fuck. You.

(beat.)

Why are you being such a dick? Jesus, tell me what the hell happened this morning? They're firing you? For what? What do they have on you?

MAL

I made a deal.

EVIE

To get fired?

MAL

Administrative leave. Six weeks paid leave, then a hearing where I will lose my license for being a danger to students—ya know, 'cause I'm a dangerous drunk, and thanks to my little outburst earlier, radically unstable. Those are their words, not mine. That will be compounded by my "expressed" disinterest in teaching to the standards. After that, I will officially be unemployed.

EVIE

How is that a deal?

MAL

The deal was... I agree to that, and they'd drop the student-relationship thing. No inquiries or attempts to find out who the student is.

EVIE

I'm gonna key that bitch's car for this.

MAL

Karen was looking out for you. I mean, she doesn't know it was you, but she... She was protecting the student. She did her job.

(beat.)

They wanted me to identify the student—you. I refused. They said that if I told them who 'it' was, they would work something out with me. So I proposed another deal.

EVIE

Why? We haven't done anything wrong. Tell them who I am. Let me support you in this.

MAL

If I tell them about you then you're going to have to disclose everything. Everything about recovery. How we met? Who you are?

EVIE

I'm fine with all of that. With who I am.

MAL

I've already lost my anonymity. That was my mistake, but I can still protect yours. I don't want you having to deal with the looks, or the fucking awkwardness, or the god-damn compassion, or the judgment,. Not here. Not even for a second. This should be a safe place for you, and I will not allow for you to be stared at. Pointed at. Sneered at.

EVIE

It's my anonymity. It's my choice.

MAL

I am begging you to hang on to it. Do not let yourself be outted.

EVIE

But I can help you. I'm going to help you.

(She quickly crosses to exit. Mal, almost in a panic, cuts her off.)

MAL

(Stopping her.)

Whoa, whoa, whoa.

EVIE

Let go of me!

MAL

Look at me. Hey! Look at me!

(Finally, she does. He lets go.)

I need to protect you in this. If I fail at everything else, that's fine. As long as I can protect you. I will not let them look at you the same way they look at me!

EVIE

...we... We haven't done anything wrong. We're... We're just us. And we... we never...

MAL

It was wrong, Evie. We should've stopped this a long time ago.

EVIE

I can go to them. Tell them that we never—

MAL

We never what? Had sex? So what, they don't care. They know that there was something between me and a student. That's all they care about. If you go to them, Evie— I don't know what would happen to you. Just protect your anonymity.

EVIE

That's not fair.

MAL

Fair?

EVIE

Yes. It's not fair.

MAL

What does "fairness" have to do with anything? Is it fair for us to be fucked up? Is it fair that we met because we're fucked up? Is it fair that for the first time in ten years I get a little bit of clarity only to find out that I'm still fucked up, just a different kind of fucked up? We can list all the things that are fair and not fair until the end of time. It doesn't change anything. Karen was right...

EVIE

Don't bring her up.

MAL

Well, she was right. There is what is, and there is what should be. One's a fantasy. The other is reality. Certain. Undeniable. *"All men are liable to error; and most men are, in many points, by passion or interest, under temptation to it."*

More Descartes?
 EVIE

John Locke.
 MAL

This isn't philosophy, Mal. This is life.
 EVIE

You're right. You're absolutely right.
 (beat.)

Evie... I don't know if I can explain this, but— I'm proud of me. This fog I'm in, it exists. But you know what they say about the fog?

It's an acronym. "Fucking Opportunity for Growth."
 EVIE

"The path goes down, not up." Right? And I gotta find my own way through it. But these past few months, with you, with everything, it's been... not as dense. A little clearer. And I'm proud of that. And I'm going to keep pushing through it. I'll be okay.
 MAL

You're martyring yourself. Falling on your sword. Fight back!
 EVIE

I fight every day! I'm fighting all the time! I can't stop fighting! Ever! But I can choose my fights and this one? This one is over.
 MAL
 (beat.)

Life on life's terms. Something has happened. Now it's time for me to move forward.

(Evie is at a loss for words. Mal places a lid on his box.)

Right now, I think it'd be best if I just feel this. Feel what I'm feeling. Not run away from it or avoid it or drown it. I feel— I feel like buying some ice cream. Something new. Something I haven't tried before, a big tub of it. And I'm gonna go home. And I'm gonna enjoy it.
 MAL cont'd

(Mal looks at what he had previously written on the board. He leaves the board blank and crosses to his desk, picking up his box of things.)

Mal... please. I don't want you to regret this.
 EVIE

(He is about to exit the room, but stops, turning back to her. He crosses past Evie and returns to the board. He picks up the chalk and in large letters he writes, "BLANK SLATE," and takes a step back. Turning to Evie, he goes to her and gently kisses her on the forehead.)

MAL

It's only a regret if I don't learn anything.

(He turns. He exits.

Evie is left alone.

The lights fade.)

END OF PLAY

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Thomas Michael Campbell

tcamp714@gmail.com

University of Wyoming
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Theatre and Dance, August 2003

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Master of Fine Arts, Theatre, Playwriting specialization, May 2006

Dissertation Title:

Alcoholism on the American Stage: De-Stigmatizing Socially Constructed Depictions of
the Alcoholic Through Performance

Major Professor: Anne Fletcher