Anger Management: Creating the role of Coleman Shedman in Romulus Linney's 'Holy Ghosts'

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Anger Management:
Creating the role of Coleman Shedman
In Romulus Linney’s *Holy Ghosts*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Theatre Performance: Acting

by

Patrick J. McKinnie

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"A good actor is working on at least three levels at all times: lines, thought and awareness of the audience. A great actor has this and more. He is always waiting to pounce at the slightest opportunity, wanting to get at the audience’s jugular...there is something feline about him. But then, perhaps he is more subtle than that, more capable of disguise - a serpent. That's it: a serpent."

~Sir Laurence Olivier
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# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. vi

Romulus Linney and his Holy Ghosts .................................................................................................. 1

Analyzing Coleman Shedman .............................................................................................................. 2
  Physiology .......................................................................................................................................... 2
  Sociology .......................................................................................................................................... 4
  Psychology ......................................................................................................................................... 5
  Coleman’s Anointing: A Movement Study ....................................................................................... 12

Rehearsal and Performance Journal ................................................................................................... 16

Self Evaluation ..................................................................................................................................... 51

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................................... 54

Appendix ............................................................................................................................................... 56
  A- Scored Script ................................................................................................................................. 56
  B- Rehearsal/Run Schedule .............................................................................................................. 113
  C- Poster .......................................................................................................................................... 115
  D- Program ....................................................................................................................................... 116
  E- Production Photographs ............................................................................................................... 122
  F- Student Critique Agreement ......................................................................................................... 126
  G- Student Critiques .......................................................................................................................... 127

Vita .......................................................................................................................................................... 139
Abstract

The following is the written product of an actor's journey, intended to chronicle and define the process of creating the role of Coleman Shedman in Romulus Linney's *Holy Ghosts*. Discussed will be the actor's method for bringing the role to life; employing the use of physical actions and in-depth analysis and preparation to achieve a real and honest interpretation of the part. Obstacles faced during this creative process will also be discussed. Supplemental materials are included to further chronicle the actors’ process. This production of *Holy Ghosts* was presented by the University of New Orleans' Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts program as part of the 2011-2012 theatre season, in the Robert E. Nims theatre. The play ran from Tuesday, February 7th, to Sunday, February 12th, with evening performances at 7:30pm and the Sunday matinee at 2:30pm.

Keywords: Patrick J. McKinnie, P. J. McKinnie, University of New Orleans, UNO, Coleman Shedman, Romulus Linney, Holy Ghosts
Romulus Linney and his Holy Ghosts

Romulus Linney was an American playwright born September 21, 1930, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He spent the first four years of his life in Boone, North Carolina then moved with his father to Madison, Tennessee. While attending the Yale School of Drama, Linney changed his major from acting to directing, though later remarked, "I kept trying to make the plays look like I wrote them, and decided to be a writer, instead" (Herrington, 54). He wrote more than thirty plays, the more notable of which are: *A Lesson Before Dying*, *True Crimes*, *Childe Byron*, *The Sorrows of Frederick*, *F.M.*, *Heathen Valley*, *Holy Ghosts*, *Klonsky and Schwartz*, and *The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks*, which was performed on Broadway (Bacalzo). A number of his most produced plays are rooted in Southern culture. Plays like *Holy Ghosts* and *Heathen Valley* are "laced with primal themes of sex and religion set in quasi-mythic Appalachia" (Fleming, 134). Linney's *Holy Ghosts* is profoundly religious in nature. The play seems to show two sides of a long-standing argument between staunch, religious practitioners and skeptical or more privately spiritual people. Linney replies when asked about the role of religion in his work:

I'm profoundly uninterested in religion itself...but people under the stress of religion are brought to a pitch of human passion and emotion rather more quickly. There is almost nothing that makes people face themselves and all sorts of things more quickly than religious issues. (Fleming, 135)

*Holy Ghosts* is Romulus Linney's most produced play (Fleming, 135). It was first produced in 1971 at East Carolina University. It was published in 1976 and staged by a number of prestigious theatres across the United States. A production opening on April 29, 1983 at the famous Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas was directed by the playwright (Linney, 3).
Analyzing Coleman Shedman

Coleman Shedman is an incredibly thought-provoking and profoundly human character; rich in psychoses and inner conflict. It is easy to see he is a product of what he has learned and experienced throughout his life. It is almost as if all the other characters in Holy Ghosts exist to show Coleman some aspect of his life that has been meaningful in some way - either for good or bad. It is for these reasons the "Bone Structure" of Lajos Egri was used to identify and qualify this actor's attempt to analyze the character of Coleman Shedman. In Lajos Egri's book, The Art of Dramatic Writing, the prevailing theme or message is that all theatrical characters, in fact all humans, are simply products of what they have experienced in their lives. Egri seeks to demonstrate that what drives or motivates characters to do the things they do, their wants and needs, and how far they will go to attain them, can be determined by closely examining what sort of life they have lived. Systematically breaking down a character's make-up into several sub-sets of three main categories can provide insight on how a character may react to the given circumstances of a play. An actor can then use this information to achieve a sense of inner truth in the character and deliver an appropriate, honest, and hopefully moving performance. The three main categories of Egri's "Bone Structure" of a character are: physiology, sociology, and psychology.

Physiology

Most of Coleman's physical attributes are determined and limited to the actor's own make-up and appearance, as well as any imaginative interpretations brought forth by the actor or director. Coleman is a white male. No other description of Coleman is given in the text except for stage direction on page five of the script describing his entrance, "She does not see a young man come quietly into the house." We assume he has never married before Nancy. We know his mother died when he was "a boy" and his father has recently passed. Coupling these facts
with the actor's own age-range capabilities, Coleman's age can be said to be somewhere in the late twenties to possibly mid thirties. He stands at five feet, eight inches tall and weighs approximately one hundred and sixty pounds. Not exactly a formidable height. However, the addition of stocky work boots to Coleman's costume gives the actor the ability to tower over Nancy and present an indomitable adversary for many of the other cast members. The heaviness of the boots also helps to give Coleman a very lean, supported, and deliberate posture. Each step toward or away from another actor is intentional, almost as if Coleman's steps themselves are the subtext of what he is trying to say. His mannerisms and gestures are lively and youthful in nature. Coleman can be just as quick to intimidate or demonstrate with his body as he can with his mouth. His appearance is too clean cut. Coleman is the hard-working owner/manager of a fish farm. His costume, in this actor's opinion, does not convey this. It is difficult to really get into the meat of this character when Coleman does not resemble at all an unhinged, drunken, back-woods fish farmer. Coleman has no deformities or physical defects that would cause him to be hindered in gait or speech. We know both of Coleman's parents died of cancer: his mother when he was a boy and his father two years prior to the events of the play. Coleman's father was a demanding, intolerant man. He was probably an alcoholic. Children of an alcoholic parent can sometimes have up to a fifty percent greater risk for developing alcohol-related problems and dependencies than children born of non-alcoholic parents. This risk is even higher for sons of dependant fathers (Moelker). Coleman also has adapted a rather hateful and intolerant view of others and the world around him. He learned a lot of this from his father: "Fruits ain't always like girls. They can look like truck drivers, and be queer, my daddy always said" (Linney, 45).

Coleman's accent provides a challenge. The director was specific in saying he did not want any accents at all and that the actor's natural southern accent would be substantial for
creating a believable character. The challenge is that quite a few textual demands call for a significant southern accent: "You got a growed up son, Reverend Daddy. Well, sort of growed up son", "He ain't kindly faced. He ain't nothing faced" and "Well, god-a-odd-damn" (Linney, 36, 14, 18). This actor has also worked a very long time to learn to speak naturally in the standard American dialect (without any regional inflections) and no longer has much of a southern accent. The choice was made for Coleman to have a very slight rural, Appalachian mountain/Memphis, Tennessee drawl layered over the actors’ standard American speech. It is hardly noticeable. The potential problem with this approach, however, is possibly sounding as if the actor is going "in-and-out" of an accent. This is a textual problem that cannot be avoided.

**Sociology**

Romulus Linney gives clues to Coleman's sociology (upbringing, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, education, et cetera) in the text of *Holy Ghosts*. He is the owner and manager of Shedman Fish Farm, which was left to him after the death of his father. The business must be at least a decent establishment if not one of the better fish farms in the area: "...I breed the finest lake stock in the south" (Linney, 12). He has many prized valuables that carry either significant monetary or sentimental value, such as: family heirlooms, family furniture, and a pick-up truck. Even though he coordinated a strictly "no frills" honeymoon, Coleman is at least wealthy enough to provide for himself and his wife, and afford to purchase the alcohol necessary for his drinking habit. Coleman has probably lived a lower-middle to middle-class lifestyle most of his life. He describes his job as *miserable*.

Coleman is somewhat of an educated man. In all likelihood, he has a high school diploma. This is based on textual observations of his quick-witted banter and knack for humor. He must watch the televised daily news or read the periodicals, as he is briefed on current events:
"I did read something about a man just last -" (Linney, 30). He must know enough about several different denominations of religion, including Pentecostal, to be able to mock or distrust them so. He has a working knowledge of rattlesnakes, i.e. different species and potential threat levels. He knows of the incredible dangers involved in handling venomous serpents. He fears them.

Both of Coleman's parents are deceased. Both died tragically from bouts with cancer; his mother when he was a boy and his father, fairly recently (two years prior to the events of the play). No background information is given about Coleman's mother except that he must love her deeply (which will be explained in greater detail in the following section on psychology). His father was probably demanding and not good at communicating his feelings or teaching Coleman to communicate his. Organized religion was probably never an important factor in Coleman's life, especially after his mother died. However, it is likely Coleman does believe in the Christian deity and afterlife, and in all likelihood, fears it. Textual evidence shows he could have at least been attending church services regularly; often enough to at least know the schedule of church events. In Nancy's second-act monologue about the life she dreamed of with Coleman, she says: "...you are right about that Sunday School picnic, Coleman - it was a trap I laid for you with my perfume and lace," suggesting the two may have met at church or during the picnic.

There is little joy in Coleman's life. A few of his interests are fishing, drinking alcohol (most likely solitarily and not socially), and possibly reading, i.e. his morning newspaper. There is evidence to suggest none of these give him real pleasure anymore. Fishing would remind Coleman of his father, and his general negativity would cause disdain and disapproval for anything worthy of news.

Psychology

Romulus Linney states in his contribution to the book Playwrights Teaching Playwriting:
Plays rest on basic emotions. The first emotions that we feel, you know, before our birth and in the first year of life - fear and rage are the first - that's what you feel. And that is the basic, underlying lava of plays. That is what erupts. When you get too far from that and from the things that build up later out of them - love and desire and then jealousy and envy and all those things - then you're awfully far from what plays are really about. (Herrington, 59)

Linney's character, Coleman Shedman, is lacking in neither fear nor rage. His life experiences have made him an angry, resentful, and hostile person. His own fears and insecurities are the cause. Coleman is fraught with neuroses that present as almost nothing but negative tendencies toward himself and others. He hates himself. He feels that he has always been dealt nothing but the worst luck and blames everyone else, including God, for his misfortune. He is involved in only two relationships prior to the events of the play, one his wife and the other his lawyer, and treats both of these individuals with incredible hostility and an utter lack of respect. Coleman is tasteless, tactless, demanding, intolerant, uncompromising, and controlling. His disposition is choleric. However he is no idiot. Coleman is shrewd and clever enough to discern what he believes are facts and uses them to get under someone's skin to win any argument. He is an abusive husband. He has hit Nancy once during the course of their short marriage. When asked when Nancy decided to leave him, she replies: "I decided lots of times. One night, you hit me" (Linney, 48). Coleman has severe emotional problems. He is not good at processing his feelings and therefore lashes out vocally and physically to compensate, shifting blame for his lack of understanding to others. Coleman was probably never encouraged as a young man to express his feelings. His father was a hateful bigot who was probably equally bad at expressing his thoughts.
and feelings in a healthy way. Coleman is an alcoholic. He is likely suffering from a depressed mood.

Chronic alcohol misuse can cause direct neurotoxic effects that compromise mood-regulating [serotonin] and [dopamine] systems. Alcohol misuse can also cause mood problems indirectly, through inadequate nutritional intake or absorption of certain vitamins that may compound the deleterious effects of heavy consumption. (Kelly, 626)

Coleman's chemical dependency on alcohol is the only way he can cope with his problems. "The disinhibiting pharmacological properties of alcohol can lead to behaviors that result in psychological distress often characterized by feelings of sadness, remorse, self-blame and self-loathing" (Kelly 627). Though Coleman will use humor throughout to defend himself or gain the upper hand, he is actually a very sad man. He is an extremely frustrated man. He displays a negative attitude and general hatred for anything or anyone different, or contrary to how he was raised.

The type of relationship Coleman had with his mother is not known; neither is there much background on his relationship with his father. He must have loved his mother. After hitting Nancy in act two, Coleman is ashamed. He realizes his mistakes and how he has ruined his life. In a torrent of rage he cries out for his dead mother and father, and begins thrashing about and overturning furniture. What is very interesting is that Coleman calls for his mother first. He has only mentioned her once till this point. Coleman does not like to talk about his mother. He loved her very much. Losing his mother at such a young age scarred him for life. Coleman also loved his father though he resents him for the way he raised Coleman. It is because of his father that Coleman is unable to deal with his intimacy issues and feelings toward
himself and others. What makes matters worse for Coleman is that he was never able to tell his father how he felt before he died. Coleman is missing the closure that could have come from having the reflective talk with his father he was never able to have. Coleman's repressed anger and difficulty dealing with his feelings cause him to behave aggressively toward Nancy.

It has been shown that abusive men are unassertive and because they lack the skills and confidence to express their needs, they use intimidation and aggression to obtain what they want. Additionally, male batterers appear to be unable to communicate in the emotional context of intimate relationships and seem to lack the verbal skills to express power and emotional needs. In other words, batterers are unable to verbally articulate their feelings, thoughts, needs, and emotions in a nondestructive way. (Winters, 256)

Coleman knows he is a terrible person. He sometimes revels in being terrible if it means winning an argument. He knows Nancy knows he is a terrible person. Coleman has admiration for Nancy but knows she deserves to be with someone better. And he hates this idea. He knows Nancy is the best thing in his life and is too good for him. "Male batterers are insecurely and fearfully attached to their intimate partners" (Winters, 257). Coleman is not as concerned that his wife is leaving him as he is furious that it is for another man. Contrary to most of his lines, he does not actually want a divorce. He wants his wayward wife back. He uses fear and pity to prove to Nancy he is blameless, shifting the blame of their volatile relationship to her. "Because physically abusive men seem to lack reflective insight, they project their anger and fear onto their partners" (Winters, 257).

One wonders what is keeping Coleman in the church he seems to despise so much. He has to understand that Nancy would not be able to return his belongings, i.e. his furniture, family
heirlooms, and pick-up truck, there and then. He knows it would take some time to file for a proper divorce. If he were only there for his belongings or to torment his wife, he would leave much sooner when he realizes his efforts cannot bear fruit. These things are extraneous to Coleman's actual objective to get his wife back. The thing keeping Coleman in the building is Nancy.

What makes Coleman an interesting character to watch are the obstacles standing in his way. What makes his story dramatic is not only his motivation for doing the things he does but the forces of opposition keeping him from getting the things he wants.

A motivation not set against the energizing resistance of an obstacle results in words delivered slackly, automatically, slickly. No resistance means no dramatic conflict. That means no play, no matter what else the actor does. (Ball, 29)

What creates a fantastic inner conflict for the character of Coleman is knowing he cannot simply force Nancy to come back to him. This would be contrary to wanting to show her how much he actually cares for her. He has a short window of time to prove to Nancy she would be better off with him - whether it is by hiring a lawyer to scare her with a divorce, by threatening and humiliating her, or by unrepentantly slandering the church and its members. Nancy's fear of Coleman is an incredibly strong obstacle for him to overcome. Coleman must show his wife he can change for the better and never hit her again. He uses actions such as humor and leveling with her to get what he wants.

It is worth noting the fascinating relationship between the characters of Coleman and Cancer Man. Even more fascinating are Romulus Linney's statements about his own father in an interview with Mary Flinn of Blackbird:
My father died when I was thirteen, and I've missed him all my life. He loved the mountains; he just waited for the summer, when he could leave his practice and, for two weeks or three weeks, go up into the mountains and fish and hunt. I never became much of a hunter or fisherman, but I tried a little bit. (Flinn)

Cancer Man is a direct representation of Coleman's father. Romulus Linney even uses alliteration to hint at this fact in their names. Coleman's full name is Coleman Hannibal Shedman, Jr. He was given his father's name; hence the parallel between Cole-man and Cancer Man. Cancer Man also calls Coleman "son" throughout the play. The stage direction describing Cancer Man's entrance supports this parallel between Cancer Man and Coleman as father and son: "Enter Cancer Man. He is a sick man in late middle age. The sight of him reminds Coleman of his father, and it frightens him" (Linney, 21). The actor playing Cancer Man is far younger than Linney's intention. The choice was made for Coleman to see Cancer Man as a younger version of his father; perhaps as in a picture he may have seen of his father as a young man. Throughout, Coleman treats Cancer Man with hostility and becomes quite agitated with him. He struggles with wanting to figure out why this man reminds him so much of his father and if this man can give him closure in some way. It is also quite unnerving for Coleman that, throughout the play, it seems Cancer Man is on his side or at least protecting him from something. In a particularly tense moment in act two when the congregation is ganging up on Coleman, Cancer Man interjects: "He's a good boy. Strong, and good, inside. I can see that" (Linney, 37), which is contrary to Coleman's actions thus far and what everyone else in the church thinks. The character of Cancer Man creates an incredible source of tension for Coleman. It should be noted that any indication Coleman is affected on some profound, psychological level by Cancer Man's resemblance to his father is fleeting and hardly noticeable to an audience. This
particular psychoanalysis is meant strictly for the actors’ benefit of understanding the character and what Coleman would do in a given circumstance.

The perplexities of Coleman and Cancer Man's relationship suggest startling contradictions in Coleman's character. Coleman blames his father as the root of all of his problems. He hates his father for the man he has become. He hates that he was never able to tell his father these things before he died. Yet Coleman defends his father's guidance and judgment throughout the play. He quotes his father constantly. Coleman defends his father as some way of affirming that at the very least he can think of himself as a good son. Interestingly Coleman hates and yet defends himself, as well. It is an awesome responsibility to portray a character who despises himself, and yet, is desperate to fulfill his wants and needs. Lajos Egri states in *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, "It is only because a thing contains a contradiction within itself that it moves and acquires impulse and activity. That is the process of all motion and all development" (Egri, 53). The fact that Coleman and Nancy could carry on a relationship at all could be seen as contradictory. A compelling aspect of Coleman's character is that he must have hidden his true self from Nancy in order to make her fall for him.

The final and most thought-provoking of Coleman's contradictions is whether he is good or evil. Coleman is not evil. Evil is in the eye of the beholder. He does not do things that are good. However the actor creating the role of Coleman cannot "play" or presuppose him as "evil." Coleman has wants. He has desires that can only be assuaged through getting what he wants. He uses tactics, just like any other human being, to get the things he wants. The actor must play actions. Discovering what Coleman wants and how he goes about getting it will convey the nature of his character, the type of man he is, to the other actors and the audience.
Neither can Coleman "play" angry. The actor does not simply say all of Coleman's lines "angrily." David Ball expresses his thoughts on presupposing an emotional state in Backwards & Forwards. He describes why acting out the character of Hamlet as simply depressed does not cause Hamlet to take action: "An evening of depressed Hamlet is as untheatrical as an evening of actionless Hamlet, and as depressing" (Ball, 21). Coleman treats Nancy and the members of the congregation with hostility, yes, but there are reasons for this hostility. His actions are constantly being met with adversity. He is struggling to get what he wants. The instances that take Coleman from one moment to the next, coupled with the drive toward fulfilling his objectives, are what make him a dramatic character. Understanding his background is paramount for knowing how Coleman would react to a given circumstance.

**Coleman's Anointing: A Movement Study**

The author suggests, in the strongest possible terms, that the snakes be mimed by the actors, with sounds of rattles. Productions that use real snakes, or even rubber snakes, have not been as successful as those which use and trust the theatrical imagination. (Linney, 58)

When Coleman assumes he has lost everything and gives himself over to the possibility that he can find comfort and solace in the Amalgamation Holiness Church of God and its members, he faces his fear and takes up poisonous rattlesnakes. He is subsequently infused with the spirit of the Lord. This "anointing," as it is called, can look like anything; from a sweet moment of quiet reflection to a tumultuous and spasmodic eruption of bodily torrent and vocal hysteria. It is the latter version which would be closest to Romulus Linney's interpretation of Coleman's religious awakening. The stage directions for Coleman's anointing are as follows:
He reaches down into the boxes. He pulls out two rattlesnakes, and holds them up. He steps forward, staring at them, in stark terror. He turns about, holding them. Convulsions rack him. But when he turns to us again, his face is amazed. He looks up, past the snakes. Coleman cries out. He is converted...the people now begin to erupt within themselves. Some are seized by spasms, some shaken by convulsions, some sing, some dance. (Linney, 54)

It is as if the earthly sensation of how God's love must feel washes the person in the ultimate sensation of joy, pleasure, and enlightenment. The mind, body, and voice erupt into pure ecstasy. It was stressed by the director that it was important to not simply mimic the cacophonous body movements demonstrated by actual Pentecostals in archival footage or eye-witness account. The director wanted to be certain the actors would experience their own movements, dictated by the text, and achieve a sense of organic creativity. However some study is needed to understand these moments and give a truthful and accurate performance. Also, because the handling of snakes is pantomimed, a study of how to hold snakes in general is necessary for credibility. The short film by Al Clayton, *In Jesus Name: Taking Up Serpents*, has proven invaluable as a supplement for Coleman's snake-handling and anointing physicality.

Dance is a big element of the Pentecostal snake handlers’ celebration. Just as important is the music that precedes and encourages it. The people in the film seem to enjoy holding the snakes (Clayton). They show no fear (or mask it well). They stroke and sometimes kiss the venomous and nightmarish beasts. They dance and sing and hold the docile snakes up high for everyone to see, almost to within the bounds of unbelievably. It seems as though these people are trying to prove something. Perhaps they want to show the others of the congregation they are not afraid. This is out of line with Romulus Linney's intention for Coleman's "transformation" in
Holy Ghosts. Coleman is no dancer. He has probably never really danced a day in his life. Even if it can be assumed the anointing of the Holy Spirit causes one to dance, Coleman would not be able to dance well. Coleman's transformation comes as waves of orgasmic contortions and convulsions; first slowly and then steadily increasing in intensity. It is as if a child has just come downstairs on Christmas morning to find everything he's asked Santa for under the Christmas tree and is simultaneously told by his parents to pack a bag for a surprise vacation to Disney World! Pure, unbridled ecstasy. The current of emotion that begins in Coleman's belly, and works its way up and down and outward, awakens in him an unhinged bodily flail, lacking any inhibition or self-awareness. The actor must only then be just enough aware, with the use of only peripheral vision, of his proximity to furniture and other actors, for the safety of himself and others. Romulus Linney remarks about his own experiences viewing snake-handling ceremonies: "I felt connected to rituals going back to ancient times. I felt like I was watching a Dionysian revel" (Fleming, 134).

Holding imaginary snakes takes skill in order for the staging to appear believable to an audience. Many actors have never held a snake before. In the film In Jesus Name: Taking Up Serpents, it seems as though the snakes used by the congregation are young rattlesnakes, ranging usually from small to medium-sized rattlers; approximately three feet long with a girth about the size of a half-dollar coin (Clayton). This approximation of size is used when handling Romulus Linney's imaginary serpents. Coleman's snakes are alive and move and adjust to new positions in his hands. However they are quite docile; possibly lulled into a calmed state by the music of the congregation or the heat of Coleman's hands or the presence of God. The actor's hands and fingers remain open and are constantly changing heights to suggest to the audience which end of the snake is the head and which the rattle. It is difficult to maintain great care when holding the
imagined snakes while Coleman is caught in the throes of his passionate tantrum. The snakes themselves cannot be shaken or the illusion could be lost. Here the audience must suspend their own disbelief and accept that Coleman is experiencing a fantastic moment rather than being overly concerned the actor is properly holding venomous snakes.

...they will speak with new tongues (Mark 16:17)

The snake handling people of the Pentecostal faith take literally this passage from the book of Mark. They will often speak in a strange, nonsensical "language" that sounds more like the unintelligible tics of Tourette's Syndrome rather than any discernable human language. However it is the actor's choice to convey Coleman's anointing with a series of joyful screams and words and phrases he has heard before, i.e. "hallelujah," "thank you, Lord," "oh, my God," et cetera. It could potentially confuse the audience if Coleman were all-of-a-sudden really good at showing how the Holy Spirit moves him. Alternatively it could look as though Coleman's transformation is somewhat lacking in naturalistic credibility. Full commitment is necessary to achieve believability. The actors' interpretation will be honest, credible, and within the bounds of the playwright's intent.
Tuesday, January 10th, Day 1

Read thru. David offered insight about his ideas for the production which seem both challenging and incredibly exciting. He told the cast his underlying theme or through line for the show: "The power of need will find its out."; the idea that these characters struggle with their lives and have to find something that can help them to fruition or simply escape. I am very interested to see whether I will be convinced in the moment that these characters have found something so great in their lives, i.e. the Pentecostal church. I am eagerly anticipating some of our young actors performances and how much love and unbridled passion they can muster. I don't generally care for the "read-thru" but tonight was a blast. David asked that everyone commit while we read and "give it a little something". I appreciated this and added tone to my read that I would otherwise not give at a read-thru.

Overall it was quite a pleasant night. Everyone seems to fit their characters well. And it was an absolute joy seeing Peter again and listening to his read. I was worried about him as Canfield but any skepticism was laid to rest tonight. This is going to be an amazing show.

I had a great talk with David this afternoon about the true ensemble nature of this play. Coleman speaks and deals with every other character in the play. This doesn't happen often. My ultimate goal for this production would be to have every one of my fellow actors understand what I am trying to do in the moment and not only believe what I am saying to be true but give themselves over to the actions and tactics I am playing to achieve Coleman's goals. To quote Mr. Hoover, I will send my energy ever-forward in hopes that energy will be sent back to me. I plan to immerse myself in the role completely during rehearsal and performance and achieve a
level of such compelling simplicity that my fellow ensemble and the audience have no choice but to believe.

**Wednesday, January 11th, Day 2**

What a great night! So much fun getting this incredibly moving piece on its feet. And it feels really good to be mostly off book already! It's very frustrating trying to act with a script in your hands and I really enjoyed the freedom of already not being hindered by my binder. I was hoping to possibly motivate the other actors to get off book. Time will tell. My main goal for tonight's rehearsal is profound so I will try to explain. A misconception with acting is that we always have to try to be something we're not. I would amend that and add that every actor is especially different and brings his own very distinct tools to a role. A specific actor is chosen for a role (I like to think) because of what they can specifically bring to a part. I hope to show tonight and every night that although the others will see P. J. using P. J.'s tools, they can suspend their own belief and live realistically with me in the moment; potentially being uncertain at times where P. J. ends and Coleman begins. I cannot simply pretend to be someone else. A director has had me do this before and colored and cut my hair to look like the actor who portrayed the part in the film. What this means to me is that the director did not trust me or the way I wanted to interpret the role. I will play actions. I will understand the circumstance succinctly and judge for myself what tactics to play to get what I want from my partner. I was especially interested tonight to work with my director, David, and my fellow player, Caleigh, who know me so well. There were times, when in a heated moment with Caleigh, I could see intense focus and understanding in her eyes. The slightest changes in her face or demeanor made me believe that what I was saying (and how I was saying it) was appropriate, meaningful, and challenging to her. I like to think this connection also made it that much more fun for us.
I feel that David and I have such a great rapport when working together. There is almost an unspoken, harmonious understanding of give and take that is established from, what I feel, tremendous respect for one another. I was a little apprehensive or wary of David's instruction early in rehearsal. I sort of felt that he was maybe holding on to some of the past productions of the show or specific line readings too tightly. But I can easily see his love and passion for the piece and these thoughts were quickly cast aside when we actually started to play. David is incredibly generous and it comforts me that he trusts me enough to let me try things and have this much fun.

It is a little frustrating that some of the younger actors cannot maintain eye contact with me without breaking. I will continue to meet everyone's gaze.

**Thursday, January 12th, Day 3**

Tonight we blocked the remainder of act one. The entire cast is now on stage though we're still missing two actors. The conditions are cramped now but I think when the crew gets the raked stage in we will be fine. This show is really incredible in that everyone gets their moment. It was great seeing each actor enter for their scene and have a chance to take stage for a bit. I was especially moved when "Cancer Man" arrived. It was a great moment. I wanted to challenge myself physically tonight. I equate a slight problem I have with Coleman to a similar problem with my Angelo in Phil's class. I am not what you would automatically describe as *formidable*. I feel that sometimes I have doubts in my ability to intimidate or frighten my partners because I am not 6'2", 210 pounds. It would be much easier to intimidate Isabella if Angelo could tower over her. I must use other tactics. So seeing my growth spurts have seemed to slow of late, I came up with an idea: I wanted to challenge myself to get that much more comfortable at my height. I wore shoes with no soles for tonight's rehearsal. It felt strange at
first but very little time passed before I forgot all about my height or my footwear. I actually found a few new fun physical actions tonight. I noticed my intensity was bigger tonight than last. No one was safe from the icy-cold stare I would give for the slightest trifle that upset Coleman! I hung on to every word of what someone said to me and never broke focus. I like to think the other actors, at least, felt that tonight Coleman meant business. I know it doesn't sound like much, but I believe every actor can benefit from these little mind-body challenges. Begging forgiveness from a loved one with your hands tied behind your back would be difficult...but it's possible.

**Friday, January 13th, Day 4**

The temperature has dropped significantly over the last twenty-four hours. I've been suffering from post-nasal drip and it is taking its toll on my throat and voice. The role is taxing on my voice as it is. Coleman is a volcano of rage and passion and feels he must, at times, shout to get a point across. Tonight's goal was to see if I could pull back a bit on my decibel level but still deliver with intensity. As of late I have been taking very good care of myself. I wanted to be in the best physical shape possible for this demanding role. I have eliminated caffeine and alcohol from my diet and make sure to take my vitamins and drink lots of water every day. I have also taken up jogging and kickboxing, and stretch every day to prepare for the heated altercation between Orin and Coleman in act two. An actor should have mastery over their body and be able to use it to its fullest potential. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* states that an actor should have "a strong, supple body". (65)

I feel I am holding back in regards to Coleman's mental state when he first arrives and the subsequent scenes of act one. The intensity is there, but I still don't think I have reached the level of what I initially thought of Coleman when I read the script. I feel my partner, Caleigh,
not acting as if she is frightened of me as much as just throwing her own frustrations back at me. At this point Nancy is not at all afraid that Coleman may strike her. I am not giving enough. I feel a bit hindered by the piano. It lives just right of center and it's difficult to have the initial dealings with Nancy with the piano in our way. Perhaps getting the stage in will help. It is very crowded on stage and we are still missing two actors! I envisioned that Coleman would never be able to stand close to Nancy for fear of what he may do. However, because of the cramped conditions, Coleman and Nancy are often in close proximity. I was delighted tonight to work with Paxton, who plays Buckhorn Sr. I can see that he really loves his part and is having a good time. His level of commitment, even on-book, is inspiring. Looking forward to act two.

Saturday, January 14th, Day 5

Change in plans. Tonight we met our Virgil and Mrs. Wall. Instead of proceeding with blocking, we decided to fit them into the scenes we already blocked. Jan, the actor playing Mrs. Wall, adds incredible authenticity to the play. I am beginning to worry about space. I envisioned that Nancy would never come into very close proximity with Coleman, for fear he may hit her again. I imagine Coleman would never touch Nancy till the sweet moment just before he hits her in act two; so the moment is that much more special for the audience and ourselves. However I don't think there will be adequate room for this to happen. There are many times already when Nancy and Coleman are within very close proximity; even touching out of necessity. It's actually quite the challenge as it is changing the way Coleman must handle things. I feel I have to downplay his anger or it just wouldn't be believable. If Coleman is as wounded, and furious as the script implies, I would think he would resort to some sort of physical violence for invasion of his personal space. There is dialogue and stage direction in act two that imply Coleman and Nancy have not been close together thus far. Coleman asks Nancy
when she decided to leave him and he takes a step toward her. Nancy retreats, which leads Coleman to add: "I won't touch you." Perhaps once the rake is laid down and the stage is set, the space will open up a bit. Things get very much out-of-hand in act two. A rather rambunctious fight breaks out and Coleman erupts into a violent tantrum, smashing furniture and throwing things. I wonder where all this will happen in a safe way; or if everything will have to be severely restricted.

**Monday, January 16th, Day 6**

Work call for 9:00am to install the rake. Only a handful of us on an enormous project. Have the night off while the rest of the cast works music. I hope the sound is as pretty as what I imagine.

**Tuesday, January 17th, Day 7**

Tonight we continued blocking act two. There is a fundamental flaw in emotional recall, or drawing up past experiences and mimicking them to dictate your motives. What if you've never experienced anything like what you are needed to do for the role? (I should be able to play a war veteran with only childhood fisticuffs under my belt.) However, I am beginning to think that a person who has never lost control or been engaged in a fit of anger would have a difficult time playing Coleman. They would need to watch others flying off the handle for research; and then they are only mimicking what they saw rather than showing honest, organic expression. The more I act the more I delve into the psyche of myself and others and ask: "Am I sick?" Is this what the pros ask themselves? Can anyone have a normal conversation with Daniel Day Lewis anymore? I wanted to prove to myself tonight that even though the script is calling for blind, uncompromising rage, I am always in control and always remembering that *I am acting*. I feel one of my strong points is that I can commit wholeheartedly to the moment. I believe every
word of what I am saying to be true. If I don't, it usually means I don't really understand the line or possibly the circumstance and just need to figure things out. Everything else fades when I act and I am completely focused on my partner. Things like holding for laughs or coughs from the audience tend to play hell with this but they're nothing new. Actors are the fastest thinkers on the planet. We may not be the smartest but we are indeed the fastest thinkers. We think on the line, rather than between lines, while insignificant changes in tone or expression can be instantly countered with a different tactic altogether. All of this while still remembering that it's just a job. I realized tonight I am in control. I weigh every aspect of what is happening in the scene and try actions and tactics to get what I believe my character wants.

We worked the big brawl between Coleman, Orin, and Howard. I was pleased that there was adequate room to make it look really good and be safe. It still needs work as we just, sort-of, marked through the choreography, but I think it will come together well.

**Wednesday, January 18th, Day 8**

Was very much looking forward to tonight's rehearsal. We were meant to block the remainder of the show. Everything was going along quite well until the stage COLLAPSED! I will now always have that look of sheer terror from the ensemble burned into my memory as they saw their lives flash before their eyes. No one was seriously hurt, thank God, but everyone was quite shaken up and we called it an early night. It could have been a lot worse. Perhaps I should stay away from set construction. I was only doing what Kevin told me to do! Strangely enough, I feel this accident has brought the cast closer together.

Before the stage crashed, Caleigh, David, and I were doing some great character work. I actually had to connect with David physically and give him a "high-five" (something I never do) as he helped me with a revelation about Coleman in the last scene with Nancy. Instead of
Coleman using his passion, anger, and logic to win the argument yet again, David suggested that he is at the end of his rope by this time and defeated; I'll try instead to humbly *level* with Caleigh to win her back. This gives yet another level to Coleman to take the audience on the emotional rollercoaster ride. I actually wept tonight simply listening to Caleigh read her lines. This will be a fantastic scene. You will hear hearts breaking from the house.

I am a little afraid that now we are behind. And the most difficult part of this beast of a show has yet to be blocked. We will be fine. If there's one thing I've learned about the theatre is that everything always somehow comes together. I'm just glad everyone is alright.

**Thursday, January 19th, Day 9**

Stage reinstalled and (reportedly) much sturdier. Blocking complete. This may be the most gut-wrenching, passionate play I've ever done. Coleman is an emotional wreck at the end of the play and David has given me a lot of room to make big choices. I am already on pins and needles, eagerly anticipating rehearsing the final scene full-out.

I like to think I handle intimacy on the stage well. I have no reservations about touching someone or sharing a close moment with someone. My fellow actors undoubtedly saw this tonight. I touch at least four other cast members during the final scenes. There is something about this type of theatrical intimacy I believe builds trust and respect and even inspiration between actors. Without even waiting for direction, two actors would be embracing one another without hesitation. I feel that setting up this precedent early in the process will pay off exponentially during the actual run. I also like to think the other actors KNOW I am listening to their every word. I love David's thoughts on "sending your energy forward". What can be overlooked with this concept is that you don't need to be the one speaking to still send your energy forward. Whatever they may be thinking to test their actions on me, they know for certain I am
hanging on their every word; even if my back is to them. There is nothing greater than sharing an organic moment with another actor.

I have a difficult challenge to deal with when Coleman finally breaks down and in a rage, cries out, in vain, for his mother and father. With little space and other actors in close proximity, I need to be very careful following Mr. Linney's stage direction. Linney asks that Coleman throw and turn over furniture and then collapse. I have worked out a little pattern downstage I think will look good and still be safe. I am worried one of the chairs will fly off the stage. I am worried I will have to hold back in this moment; and I cannot and will not hold back. I am only planning to pick up and smash down one chair and I don't think it will fall off of the stage. I'm more worried the chair will break and pieces will fly everywhere. Will there be a "disaster zone" seating area in the house, I wonder?

I was given an extremely challenging note from David for Nancy and Coleman's final scene. I may have a shown too much aggression or hostility than David was wanting when Coleman is pleading for Nancy to leave the church and go back home with him. David suggested that even though the script may dictate that interpretation, to not forget he is at the end of his rope and is, in-fact, begging her to come home or trying to win her affections back. I agree but now I find I am holding back and not knowing why. Tonight I tried softer tactics such as leveling, or amusing my partner. There are moments in this scene where this could work. However Coleman has lines, such as, "We could have that woman if you would just shut up about it!" that indicate his aggravation with Nancy. I've thought about this scene a lot tonight and about adding yet another layer to this already fantastic moment. Coleman is somewhat beginning to understand the members of this church do make a strong argument against what he originally perceived as simply lunacy. He could possibly even consider here the allure of what
the church could do for him. I think there is a tremendous sense of urgency and desperation to get Nancy out of there, not only for her sake, but for his as well. Coleman is severely depressed, and depressed people usually want to continue to be depressed to prove to others that they are caught in the world's shit-storm and are, in-fact, really depressed. If Coleman is faced with the potential to finally have found something that would accept him for who he is and make him happy, this would scare the hell out of him. This all is an angle I had not considered fully until today. This is a chase scene; it needs way more urgency.

The thought of the stage collapsing again never entered my mind.

**Friday, January 20th, Day 10**

Tonight we ran the show in its entirety. Not bad for our first time! This show is hard. One of the hardest I've certainly ever done. I feel we're in good shape. I need to take excellent care of my voice. Our New Orleanian, schizophrenic weather patterns are difficult enough to endure. Screaming in the show on top of post-nasal drip is torture. Interesting things are beginning to happen as folks are now (somewhat) committing to their parts. I tested some new tactics. The more experienced actors, to my delight, were moved by my new explorations of character and line delivery. In the final scene of the play where Coleman begs Buckhorn Sr. to let him join the church, I tried some new body language and tears of joy to humble my partner. I was so happy to see Paxton noticed where I was going emotionally and was extremely nurturing as he caressed my face and head and gently helped me to my feet. I LIVE for this kind of unspoken connection between two actors. It is very rewarding. On the other hand, the younger actors have proven more difficult. For all intents and purposes, they seem completely immune to my experiments. In the scene when Coleman hits Nancy, Carl Specter walks over and tells Coleman to hit him, instead. My next line is: "I don't hit lunatics." To which Carl replies: "Just
your wife." I wanted to disarm him into feeling pity for me. It did not work. He said his next few lines the same as he always has and judged me for what I had done. This seems to be the same with most of the younger actors.

Pacing is difficult with Holy Ghosts. We teach actors to "pick up their cues" or be ready with their line after the other person has finished theirs; sometimes to even cut off the other actors line with your own in an attempt at a more realistic style of speaking. I do not feel this is working for this show. Every word of what everyone says is extremely important. We are discussing everyone's past in the play and there is a ton of storytelling. Some actors are beginning to move on other people lines and even worse, speak before their partner has finished their line. It's not a huge problem but what it looks and feels like to me is thus: how can you say your line if you don't listen to what the other person has to say? It looks like characters aren't listening to each other. This takes me back to what I was discussing before about the young actors not understanding my actions. Am I not clear, or are they not listening? I will continue to send my energy forward (even when listening) and try to force everyone to listen to me. I equate acting and storytelling with teaching. What I do in a classroom is similar to what actors do on stage. I ask my class or "audience", "Do I have your attention?" and then say, "good, because what I have to tell you is very important..."

Monday, January 23rd, Day 11

Start-and-stop work-thru of act one. Had a lot of fun tonight. This method of rehearsal is why I act. The work, practicing exchanges between characters for poignancy and timing, and getting to discuss matters of psychology with the director and other actors is my favorite part of the job. Some timing issues still exist when Coleman has to speak over the songs of the congregation but they'll be solved with practice. David gave me an good note about my energy
and sense of urgency at the top of the play...need more of both. No problem! I like to change things up a lot. I realized tonight I am constantly changing up delivery and even taking certain lines to different people to include everyone and keep everything as fresh and spontaneous as possible. A great friend and director, Frannie Rosenberg, will give a fantastic note to her casts, "Smile at someone new tonight!" This is what theatre, the lively art, is all about. I would imagine a standard, six-month, Broadway contract would become tedious, predetermined, manipulative, and downright BORING if an actor was to say every line, every night, EXACTLY the same way for six months. (Or is this exactly what happens on Broadway? I hope not.) I even like to change physical appearance when I can just to keep people on their toes. Maybe letting my facial hair grow out (as is the case now) and then come to rehearsal one night clean-shaven. Maybe wearing shoes with a different heel to change my height. I look and feel a LOT more formidable in my work boots than a pair of heel-less converse. Oby will not tower over me in the boots I am wearing for the show. This could change things for him, and thus, me. This may seem irrelevant but it's part of my process and all in good fun.

One of the "nine points to an action" as stated in A Practical Handbook for the Actor is that an action should not be manipulative. The question I ask myself tonight is, "am I being manipulative?" Trying to get a physical or emotional response from my partners by changing tactics and actions, or simply changing my physical appearance, for shock value. I do not think so. We are players. We play. Stanislavski once put chocolate icing from a cake on his face to practice a character study of Othello. I feel this need of mine to "play" with my fellow actors is no different than playing cowboys and indians (or in my case, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles) and is the fundamental component of making acting look intriguing to an audience. Inhibition is no good here. However, if for a second I am feeling like I am trying to manipulate someone into
doing what I want or what I think their character would do in the moment, I will change my actions and apologize. So far I don't think I've done any harm.

I am having a problem with the script that is leading me to have a problem with Coleman's arc. There is a moment I have yet to find. That moment is when Coleman gives himself over to the church and forgets about Nancy and why he was there in the first place. I am struggling. Yes, in the script, the stage directions say he is converted after he picks up the snakes and convulses. But at what moment does he start to believe? It has to come before Mr. Linney instructs. Now, I agree Coleman would suppress any feelings that he is wrong or of the church beginning to show appeal, until he receives the holy anointing. I am just struggling with when this transformation begins. My most recent evaluation of the script is that it is beginning to happen even before he hits Nancy. It would add an incredible sense of urgency to the scene if Coleman is not only trying to get Nancy back BUT ALSO wanting to get the hell out of there for fear he may become one of those bible thumping lunatics; potentially having to face his problems. Still not sure. Will continue to play with it.

**Thursday, January 26th, Day 12**

Something of a breakthrough tonight. I was struggling with when I wanted to show certain moments of clarity or when things would change direction for Coleman. I haven't figured out everything but something became clear tonight when working through act two that helped. After the confrontation and fight with Orin and Howard, Coleman is extremely angry and incredibly embarrassed. Before tonight, I would just sort of zone out and wait for everyone to finish their lines as if Coleman were really struggling inside with what to do next. I found motivation. After the fight, Coleman has had ENOUGH and is ready to get the hell out of there. Fear comes from not understanding. Coleman is scared for the first time. It was refreshing to
discover this tonight. I felt I could commit to something with more fervor than I had in previous
nights of being not quite certain what to do or how to react. Understanding what characters do in
a given circumstance is paramount; living truthfully under these circumstances is then that much
easier.

We continued a stop-and-start work-through of the rest of the show. We rehearsed and
fine-tuned some blocking to make things happen a bit easier. The majority of the ensemble are
beginning to commit but we are still far behind the level of cacophony we should be during the
anointing. I went full-out tonight when Coleman is quickened with the holy spirit, writhing and
violently contorting my body. This was intense and we need to be practicing this a lot. I was
absolutely exhausted by the end of the scene. Hopefully people will have seen me commit
tonight and throw themselves uninhibited into the madness.

I was a little worried about the stage combat between Coleman and Orin. But Romulus
Linney’s stage directions are actually quite helpful. The fight is pretty straightforward. I was
worried that Justin and I would have to cover most of it with a lot of improvisational pushes and
shoves. But we don't need any of this. We even fixed the grapple to make it easier and safer.

I feel with the true ensemble nature of this play, there is a lot of room to have meaningful,
respectful, give-and-take conversations with the other actors about the technical and
psychological aspects of the show. In fact this is a necessity. There are fifteen people on stage
at once doing fifteen different things and the director can't possibly fix everything. It's been fun
working things out with the other actors during breaks or otherwise. I am very proud of our
work and hope that it only gets better.
The power blew in the middle of a scene. Utter blackness in the theatre. I was very happy with the mature and professional way it was handled by the crew and cast. No one was injured and we safely continued the rehearsal once power was restored.

Friday, January 27th, Day 13

We will run the show from this point forward. I wanted to be very aware of my breathing tonight. Coleman is on edge and incredibly tense throughout act one. I am playing him as if he feels he needs to scream at others to get his points across. I need to be able to deliver my lines clearly and freely, and without getting choked up and potentially injuring my voice, so I wanted to work some internal body control tonight. Breathing is the key. I can even hear the sounds of my breathing bouncing back to me in the quiet theatre and I like it. I can sense the other actors in the scene can feel Coleman's impatience and frustration; I like this as well. Also I only sit once in the play. My lower back is taking a beating. I need to remember to support from my lower abdomen. This will take a lot of the pressure of standing for so long off of my lower back.

I noticed tonight I am closing myself off at times by folding my arms. Though I am aware when I fold my arms, I am doing it purposefully, and not just because I'm bored or tired. If it becomes a habit or I feel I'm doing it too often I will adjust.

I think David may have liked my breathing work tonight. He gave me a note about not being so bogged down by the blocking at the top of the play, as he wants to see more of the "caged animal" in Coleman. I agree. It's very difficult managing all of Coleman's wild mood swings. His emotions throughout the play run the gamut from violently angry, to sentimental and almost caring, to utter sadness and defeat...just to name a few. At one point tonight, I noticed I had given myself a headache with all of the "eyebrow acting" I was doing. I need to remember to find certain points in the play to relax or I won't make it through to the end.
I was absolutely exhausted after the anointing scene. In the midst of committing fully to the scene, David has us come to a screeching halt for a slow-motion sequence. I thought everyone was going to die. It forces you to abruptly change from panting and gasping for air to very slow, controlled breathing. This show is not easy. It was hard to see through all the tears but I need to be a little more aware of where I throw the chairs when Coleman has his tantrum. I think one of them might have come close to hitting someone or falling off the stage. This is difficult for me because I don't want it to look like a marked hissy-fit but rather unbridled passion and rage. David assures me, however, that it looks great. Caleigh, who is nearest my rampage on stage, also assures me everything is fine and no one was in danger.

**Saturday, January 28th, Day 14**

Today was exhausting. We had a costume parade. I was not happy that I have a rather clumsy jacket to wear but I found a moment near the beginning to take it off and stash it on the coat rack for the remainder of the play. I have begun using the jeans and boots for rehearsal that I’ll use in the show. My boots are very heavy so I need to be aware of not shuffling my feet when I walk. It’s also difficult to not make any sound when I enter. I am supposed to startle Caleigh and the floor boards make a lot of noise. It’s just a matter of simple, supportive breath control and walking “heel-toe”. Although the heavy footfalls work beautifully at other moments; especially when Coleman is pacing like a caged animal.

I need to start exploring even further…NOW. David is starting to come up with ideas about how to make Coleman look a certain way, and has even suggested CHEWING GUM as a way to make him seem more cocky or arrogant. The entire cast erupted to vocalize their disapproval. Not only do I think this would actually make Coleman look like quite the sissy, it could be dangerous. I can see myself drooling threw lines or, worse, choking in the middle of
some passionate speech. Perhaps David was going to extremes because of what he saw of my performance today. I will admit I was rather more subdued than the previous night’s performance. I was not “marking” anything. I simply chose different tactics that didn’t make me feel like my head was going to explode. Jan, the woman playing Mrs. Wall, even remarked to me she thinks I should be receiving a head massage and aroma therapy at intermission. I couldn’t agree more. She says Coleman’s ever-present scowl and furrowed eyebrows “break her heart”. Indeed, this role is starting to give me a nightly headache. As I’ve said before, I need to find some more moments to relax my whole body or I won’t make it to the end of the run.

I do feel I am not going to the extremes of finding little moments for myself to play in my surroundings. I still don’t know my lines as muscle memory yet and am still searching for them at times. Also, anytime I think of something clever that Coleman could do at a certain time, I tell myself, “Don’t do that. David won’t like it.” For example, a few nights ago, I was standing near the altar sharing a scene with Paxton and thought to myself, “It would be extremely irreverent right now to just take the cross off of the altar and play with it.” I could hear David in my head saying he wouldn’t like it so I didn’t give in to the urge. I need to stop thinking this way. David has accused me before of being too worried about audience and director perception. I will try this tomorrow night. Anytime I feel an urge to play, I will explore these feelings with rigor.

**Monday, January 30th, Day 15**

Had some fun tonight. I gave into all my urges to play. I found new moments like turning my pockets inside out to show that I couldn't give any money to the collection bucket. I had fun with finding a new way to get rid of my jacket. It gave me more of a sense of urgency to have to get rid of it the way I did. I am beginning to get a little frustrated because, try as I may to
pick up the pace in the opening scenes, Peter (Canfield) is not really solid on his lines and is stopping the momentum. This will get better with time.

I met some new faces for the first time tonight. I made it a point to look around more throughout and connected with some actors that I usually don't. It's like I'm creating all these little sub-stories between myself and the different characters. And I really LOVE the choice I made to connect with Muriel when she sings her song at the end of the play. She saw me making the choice to connect with her tonight and she went with it. It was as if she is singing the song *to me* at the end. We both smiled at one another. It was very moving because I don't really ever have any contact with Muriel and our new moment is that much more poignant. I hope David lets her keep it.

I cannot scream anymore. My voice is fried. I need rest. I have been taking very good care of myself but the stress of the show and the weather have finally taken their toll. I asked David for help, to possibly have the music played softer at one point in act one, and he refused. Even though he has been saying that things need to be sung and played softer, the music is still too loud. I am having to scream lines that textually aren't supposed to be. Part of my research will include finding information about whether or not actors voices in other productions of *Holy Ghosts* have been reinforced with body microphones. Unfortunately, the next few days are going to have to be somewhat of a vocal rest. As I type this I can feel my throat seizing up. My lymph nodes are palpable. I also have to take into account I teach nearly every day of our run and I talk a lot in my classes. I don't want to hold back vocally but my voice is the only thing I have. I don't want to hurt myself. If I would not have projected so much early on maybe the music would be softer now. I think I'm just going to have to accept the fact the audience isn't going to hear some of the great moments. I just cannot shout over the ensemble anymore.
Tuesday, January 31st, Day 16

Well, that was interesting. I changed everything tonight. I did not say one line the same way I've said it on any other night. I completely changed the way Coleman interacts with everyone. And the results were tremendous! I played Coleman tonight, not with so much rage and fury, but as just more of a giant JERK. I was a lot more subdued and delivered many lines with a softer approach than ever before. It freaked everyone out. People were dropping lines left and right and giving me the strangest looks. I've noticed this before in my acting class. Students will inevitably learn their lines as they want to deliver them rather than by rote. When asked to change something, an inflection here or there, they get a mental block on it and go off their lines. It was actually quite beautiful. The other actors were responding to my changes. It seemed like quite a few of the ensemble were also lowering their volume and striving to achieve a more honest and natural sounding tone rather than just shouting all their lines or painting over them with a brush called anger. I also picked up cues a lot faster and shortened the duration of some lines dramatically. I feel like I shocked some new life into the play tonight and at the very least, got the others to focus harder on what I was going to do next. I love keeping them on their toes!

I really worked hard tonight to pick up the pace at the top of the show. However, Canfield is still not ready. Nancy and Coleman have quite a lot of quick banter in the opening scene and Canfield is not anywhere near solid on his lines. No pressure, but we open in a week. If Coleman were actually as choleric and impatient as I am trying to show him to be, he would never be able to wait that long for Canfield to say his lines. Coleman would have just cut him off a long time ago.

I found lots of new moments for myself tonight and made some great new connections with the other actors. I can see instantly if the connection I am trying to make is reciprocated by
my partner. I think a lot of the ensemble are just so young. Some of them do see me seeing them and then want to become engaged with me or try things for themselves. I think the others just get freaked out. It's all in the eyes. I try to let them know it's safe for them to share a moment with me by giving them my undivided attention and firm eye contact. I love when I can share this level of intimacy with another actor. It also helps me get out of my head when I can look around at what the other actors are doing and keep myself involved. A trick I have used often is, if I find myself worrying too much about my performance, feel myself "acting", and get all in my head, I simply find something or someone else to focus on.

My back was beginning to hurt pretty badly tonight. I haven't been keeping up with my abdominal workouts due to time constraints. I need to maintain a strong core for the show. I don't want to sacrifice posture or my external awareness for sore muscles. I was very happy that David gave a quick speech about general health. A virus floating through the cast now would be devastating. ::knocking on wood::

**Wednesday, February 1st, Day 17**

Crazy night. We were missing two actors for the majority of the run so people weren't as committed. I almost fell off of the stage. The new benches are not balanced properly and when Canfield stood from a bench we were sharing, I tumbled off sideways. I was able to catch myself and escape, injury free. We need to run all of Canfield's lines before the show tomorrow. We lose all of the pace when he talks. I fear this may be a lost cause. Peter just can't physically get his lines out fast enough. It's ok, I can work with it. The guitar playing has become incredibly distracting. There are some beautiful moments that have become quite comical because of several loud pings from the guitar.
The ensemble has become quite sad. Literally. Everyone is crying. I don't understand. Is no one happy in this world? I thought the Holy Spirit was supposed to be anointing everyone. Why is everyone so sad? This is actually a big problem for my character. I thought this church was where everyone came to escape and feel good about themselves again. I thought it represented hope in the hereafter and the prospect of being bathed in the eternal love of Christ and living forever in utter bliss. Why are there no happy monologues anymore? If the church just makes everyone sad, why would Coleman want to join? This is a problem. It takes away one of the reasons Coleman wants to join the church at the end of the play. It lessens the credibility of Coleman's character arc.

Tonight I wanted to try to find a balance between things Coleman can laugh off with sarcasm and the things that really just piss him off. It will be tough to remember exactly what I did on previous nights of a performance but it's fun just knowing I can have those two different interpretations of lines at my disposal. I think I need these two tactics to take the audience on more of a rollercoaster ride. Coleman's arc will be that much bigger if I can find some places earlier on to lighten things up. His fall into suffering and hysteria will then be more moving and pitiful to the audience. This pity is what I want from the audience. Catharsis will come when they pity Coleman. I am reminded of two of my favorite characters, Angelo and Iago. I will make them love the bad guy!

I also had to apologize to David at the end of the night for my "superfluous potty-mouth". I can't help it! Coleman is such a jerk and uses such foul language that it overwhelms me at times. You can't just turn a roll like this on and off like a light switch. Ladies and gentleman, leave the kids at home for this one.
Beginning to get a lot more comfortable with the part. I am very familiar with the set now and blocking that I can really begin to hone in on the details of the performance. I am beginning to own it. That being said, tonight was sort of a mess. For one, the slap has gotten muddled. Caleigh and I both know what we want to do and how we're going to do the knap, but timing has gotten off. I think it's because we are both way more passionate about this section now that we've run it a lot. I may be rushing it. We just need to work it again to solidify the choreography. Also the fight between Coleman and Orin hurt my back and sides pretty badly tonight. Justin did not have me secure around the hips and was instead crushing my lower back. Not anyone's fault. I was okay after a few seconds of lying on the ground. We have gotten really good at "selling" the combat and we may be a little overzealous now. Also, Justin is contending with the rake to lift me. Because of the incline, I am actually lower than he is which means he must work that much harder to hoist me up. And the floor boards are now painted and they are twice as slippery than previous nights. It will be fine. It does look and feel really cool, though. Coleman's tantrum in act two, when he tosses and upends chairs, needs to be practiced. I don't practice this enough. Tonight, we almost lost one of the chairs over the edge of the stage. The only time I practice this is when we are actually running and that is not enough. I'm beginning to miss the furniture I intend to grab or kick and this throws off my blocking and timing. It's a difficult moment because Coleman is completely broken, and in his disgrace and wild mania, I have to make sure to contain myself. No matter how blinded by tears and anger, I need to take a moment to focus on my surroundings and do the choreography I have planned. I am having doubts though if I will ever do this "tantrum" perfectly. Then I ask, "should it be perfect?"
The guitar is distracting. The situation will probably not be resolved. Hopefully I can learn within the next three days to deal with it.

**Saturday, February 4th, Day 19**

First day of tech rehearsals. We ran the show first from light cue to light cue and added sound. The cue to cue went very smoothly with some minor sound hiccups, i.e. the magical fairy that was living in the rattlesnake crates this whole time! The show is going to look and sound beautiful.

I think all of the actors either really respect me or fear me. All I would need to do when they were talking too much was put my finger over my mouth in a gesture of childish "quiet game" time, and look at everyone with stern visage. Silence. It's a thin line between taking your work seriously but not taking it too seriously. I hope they all understand how much I love my work and all my serious ways are out of total respect and adoration for the craft and wanting to make the show the best it can possibly be. You simply cannot talk in a tech rehearsal.

We ran the show after a brief lunch break. I love act one. I just love it. It has a driving pace, quick-witted humor and underscored by tragic circumstances that I haven't read or played in a long time. I cannot say the same for act two. I am completely in my head. I am finding some new moments that are fun and interesting but overall I am just too distracted. Wanting to totally immerse myself in the ensemble nature of this play is proving disastrous. I look around and see people all the time not committed to their parts. David sees this too. One of the first things I was taught is that *someone is always watching you.* Meaning you need to be "on" all the time. As a matter of fact, you need to enter "on". You need to be in character *before* you step on the stage. I would wager the majority of these young actors have no preparation in mind except
what movie to watch after rehearsal or who's going to be at such and such bar later on. If I am wrong, then all evidence today is to the contrary.

Coleman's actions and reactions are directly related to what the other characters are saying to him. I discussed a problem I am having with David after rehearsal. The actor playing Carl does not yet comprehend the metaphor behind what his character represents in the play. His interpretation of his line after Coleman hits Nancy is a bit wacky. And it is the moment in the play where we first see Coleman give himself over to the church. An extremely important moment. I don't know how to react to what the actor is giving me. All my homework and meticulous character analysis is thrown out the window at this moment. I cannot be manipulative to try to get him to say the line appropriately, so I go with what he gives me. And it is not within the bounds of the playwright's intent or what I want to do. Perhaps in the next couple of days we will figure that moment out.

David assures us that the guitar playing is not distracting from an audience standpoint. Be that as it may, my performance in the final scene is suffering because of it.

**Sunday, February 5th, Day 20**

I felt the magic today. My favorite part of a production is the day we start adding lighting and sound. With the house lights down and stage lights up, it feels like we have a real show! That familiar feeling of palpable tension in the air crept into my thoughts today. The air is alive in the Nims theatre and I was basking in it today. It was a good run. I felt able to commit further today being in costume and working in actual show conditions. I went further than I ever have before during Coleman's anointing and snake handling. I just threw all caution to the wind and gave myself over completely to the jerking fit of religious ecstasy that wells up and explodes from Coleman. I didn't worry whether I was doing it well or if it looked cool. I let
everything go. I tell you, it felt GOOD. I experienced more joy, frustration, passion, and excitement in those few moments than I ever have before on-stage. Ironically, not worrying so much about the blocking or my lines made me feel even better about what I was doing. I hope our audiences are prepared. This show is NOT for the faint of heart. And Coleman Shedman will be a torrent of fiery passion unlike any they have ever seen before. I am so excited.

Working in show conditions helped me discover even more about character today, i.e. why Coleman cries out for his mother before his father in act two, which I will discuss in my character analysis. I reacted instinctively with new interpretations of lines and tried stronger actions than I have previously. I would flip from threatening to comforting in the span of a moment; and it paid off. My partners, Paxton and Caleigh, went right along with me on the emotional rollercoaster ride of the final scenes of act two. I was a broken man and everyone felt it.

Moreover I had a lot of fun. Today was the first time in a while I was able to enjoy myself in act two. I still don't understand why everyone is so sad in their monologues but I just have to go with it. The guitar was still quite the nuisance but not as bad as on previous days. Perhaps it will keep getting better. Tomorrow night, our last rehearsal, should help to solidify some things. But I am ready. I can honestly say I have given it my all in this role. I will show the audience everything I am as an actor next week. If someone disagrees with my choices, that is fine. But I have held nothing back. I am so thankful for this opportunity.

**Monday, February 6th, Day 21**

I must confess this log entry is actually being written retroactively. I was so upset after the run last night that I simply couldn't bear to think about the show anymore. I needed to sleep on it. The night seemed promising at first. I was trying some new things. I was more passionate
and wildly belligerent than ever. I was thinking yesterday that my partner, Caleigh, just wasn't afraid of me anymore. Her sense of defiance bordered on the comical, as if she didn't really believe that Coleman could strike at any moment. Coleman was furious in response to this. Even Peter could sense the change. He had to try harder to calm me down. Caleigh also picked up on my tactics and became a wilting flower of a woman before Coleman's eyes. This hurt my voice way too much, though. I had to dial it back a bit.

Then the frustrations began. Actors didn't seem as focused. Quite a few new technical elements were added. My voice was nearly shot. It became too difficult for me to focus. My resolve wavered and I gave in to just marking the rest of the show. I've spoken before in my entries about holding on too tightly and caring too much about a show. I guess I care too much. However, I feel that is the very nature of this beast. I am expected by Mr. Linney, the cast, director, and audience to give everything of myself to this role. I only have my own tools with which to play. I cannot so easily compromise or throw my cares out of the window. Everything affects me. Last night, it just got to be too much.

I am having chest pains and heart palpitations. I think this role and the stress of daily living are starting to take their toll. I will continue to practice my relaxation techniques and monitor my condition.

**Tuesday, February 7th, Day 22**

Opening night. I felt the excitement of getting to play for an audience. On the surface I looked calm and collected, but inside, I was screaming, "JUST GET ME ON THE STAGE!" The show was great. The mix of nervous laughter and genuine empathy for the characters was just what I was expecting. I could sense the audience members were totally enthralled with the story. My plan for tonight was to give this audience the same show I've been rehearsing for four
weeks. I didn't want us to take a step back because of nerves or having to hold for laughter. I focused on the other characters instead of the audience. I would go through lines and blocking in my head to always be prepared for anything that may throw us. Speaking of throwing things, I accidentally kicked a chair off the stage and into the house tonight. I guess it was bound to happen. Thankfully no one was even sitting remotely close to the area it had fallen. I need to be more careful. A "careful" rampage...this show is full of challenges.

There was quite a bit of weirdness, though, on the part of the ensemble. People were "acting" way more tonight than any other night. Focus was being pulled away from the essential action. The piano that usually underscores Nancy and Coleman's final scene cut out abruptly and things just got weird. The scene lost something without the lovely piano accompaniment. And I could see ensemble members moving in the middle of our lines where they had never moved before. I am hoping we can chalk this all up to opening-night hiccups. It's quite a relief to finally get this show on its feet.

**Wednesday, February 8th, Day 23**

I feel there was a heightened level of focus on stage tonight. Perhaps it was a result of getting over the opening-night jitters. The audience was a bit intrusive tonight. There were quite a few vocalizations of inappropriate laughter and discomfort from select audience members. At one point, a woman began unwrapping a piece of candy for what seemed like an eternity. Perhaps these distractions forced us to forget about the house and focus more on each other. I know this was the case for me. If I found myself worrying too much about our audience, I would just pick someone in the ensemble to focus on and ask myself character-related questions, such as, "Why are they here?" and "What do they want from me?" This is a great technique for letting go of audience-related stresses and getting back to business.
Pace is getting a little slower from some actors. Liberties are being taken where before they were not. This was bound to happen when adding an audience. We were getting more laughs and general response tonight and some actors were basking in it. They began thinking between lines rather than on the line, which slowed down delivery and overall pace. There were a few moments when I would notice this and pick up my own cues a bit snappier and hope to infect everyone else with a bit more rapidity. I doubt the audience ever picked up on any of this but it felt, at times, the show was getting a little too heavy; if that's even possible for this incredibly profound piece.

I am amazed and a bit unnerved (in a good way) at how much the ensemble committed to the cacophony that is the anointing scene. I think everyone is really beginning to experiment with their own levels of comfort now. I cannot really see what is happening behind me during this scene but it sounds a lot more intense that on previous nights. The anointing has become wildly passionate for (I hope) all involved. I could actually see physical reactions of pain and discomfort from audience members as I thrashed and shook.

I am beginning to experience something very strange with my acting partner, Paxton. We are getting to a point where we are both so committed to our roles we are manifesting some quite intense, organic, physical reactions. So intense in fact, that I'm not sure I am comfortable with it. We almost came to blows tonight as the reverend tells Coleman how he feels about his viscous slander of his church. It probably looked really good from the house, but I was a little freaked-out by it. Not because I wasn't ready for the challenge, but because when it happened, we didn't really have a way out of it to continue the scene. I feel we were out of line with the playwright's intent. If the reverend would have pushed Coleman to the point we went to tonight, Coleman would have just resorted to violence. Too much emotion here is actually taking away credibility
for both of our characters. There is a chapter in the John Barton series, *Acting Shakespeare*, about downplaying the emotional content of a scene to actually heighten the experience for the actor and audience. We need to be able to separate fact from fiction or we actually lose the name of *action*! I am a little worried that my partner may be too connected to some personal feelings from his own life and letting them affect his work. This is speculation, but as the actor playing Buckhorn never showed anywhere near this level of emotion during rehearsal, it does somewhat seem out-of-the-ordinary. I don't want to say anything to him for fear we would take too many steps backwards and loose some of the drama. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't say this is somewhat of an issue. Perhaps I will give it one more night and see what happens before discussing the issue with my partner (for whom I have incredible respect as an actor and a person).

**Thursday, February 9th, Day 24**

Another good show. The houses are really giving themselves over to both the comedy and tragedy of the piece. Tonight I got a huge reaction from the "Daddy? You gonna marry his daddy?" section of act one. The combat between Coleman and Orin, and the slap near the end, also got great reactions from the audience. I can hear them sympathizing with me. Which brings me to a great point, and something I have been hoping to achieve, all along. Coleman is a bad guy. He is. He is a miserable, angry, abusive alcoholic with a lightning-quick temper and general disdain for just about everyone and everything. And he hits his wife. However, not only do I feel I am making the audience understand why Coleman is the way he is, but also getting them to empathize with and pity him. I believe the audience is rooting for Coleman in the end. A smile comes to my face when I think of audience members driving away after the play and saying, "You know, I don't know why, but I really liked the guy playing Coleman. I know I
shouldn't but I just felt so bad for him." This fear and pity for the character is exactly what Aristotle was talking about in *The Poetics*; the emotions we need to extract from the audience to help will their suspension of disbelief and achieve catharsis. It would be very easy to just play evil and turn Coleman into some sort of contemporary Iago. This would be no good. Coleman does not think he is evil. He has a case; an argument. He has wants and needs that, though he has a very muddy past, he is struggling to have met. I hope that I am conveying to the audience and my fellow cast members not only Coleman's arc through the play, but why he has an arc in the first place. I am trying to show that Coleman is a product of everything that has happened to him up to this point, and through his own desires, he will make decisions that have consequences. These consequences force Coleman to react a certain way and my job is to convey these consequences in a clear, fun, prepared, and thought provoking way. I feel I am meeting these expectations. I am very proud of my work.

**Friday, February 10th, Day 25**

A bit different house than on previous nights. Audience members weren't so quick to laugh at some of the more humorous moments. I could feel, though, they were hanging on to every word. I find this happens a lot with Friday and Saturday night audiences. They aren't as vocal in their appreciation of the show. In fact I find Saturday night audiences are the quietest lot of all. We shall see.

The pace is slowing down. I think the actor playing Canfield is beginning to search for lines again. The play just isn't snapping along in the first act like it was on opening night. Some of the ensemble are beginning to go overboard with emotional investment and focus is being stolen, all around. I understand there are a lot of liberties to be taken in act two. Act two is where we learn about why these people do the things they do and it is only natural for the actors
to want to take their time and make their readings poignant and effective. This is an incredibly dramatic piece. But the show still needs to drive. The play is a chase scene to me. Coleman has to get himself and his wife out of this madness before something terrible happens. The stakes couldn't be simpler to define. I used to feel more of a sense of urgency about wanting to get the hell out of that "lunatic asylum". Now I feel like I am getting anxious because of everyone taking their sweet time rather than Coleman being on edge. I tried to pick up the pace by slightly changing the duration of some of my lines but no one seemed to follow my lead. We need to stay a step ahead of the audience and right now I feel they are right in step. I can even hear some of them finishing punch lines or guessing what we are going to say next. I will continue to try and drive the show.

I am also having a huge problem with some of the ensemble not understanding the playwright's intentions. Some lines make me wonder why Coleman doesn't just get up and leave. Coleman is being judged by the majority of the cast. I would think this would strengthen Coleman's argument against these bible-thumping religious fanatics. I am failing to see the appeal or the allure of what would entice Coleman to join this church. The majority of the ensemble look as though they are saddened by all of this. I thought the very reason these characters came to this church was because it made them happy? I am not seeing this. It looks to me like everyone hates it here. I am confused. I am having to justify why Coleman chooses this path with motivation I feel is out of sync with the playwright's intent. However I understand this is university/experimental theatre, and I am very appreciative of David for letting us play and explore our artistic creativity.
Saturday, February 11th, Day 26

I was correct about the Saturday audience...quietest house yet. We didn't get a single chuckle till the end of act one. I actually thoroughly enjoyed tonight's audience. I was able to drive the pace without having to hold for laughs or superfluous pauses. It was a great lesson in theatre training. Bad actors will start to force their performances or try harder to get laughs when experiencing a non-responsive house. It's only natural. I was careful not to do this. In an effort to remained focused and help my fellow cast members focus, I simply picked up the pace. I jumped on cues and changed some tactics. I focused my circle of attention to include only a small area of the stage. I forgot about the audience. What was great, though, was even though the house was quieter, I could tell they were engaged and enthralled in what I was doing. It was palpable. They were hanging on my every word.

There was a sound-cue malfunction tonight. The snake rattling cue, which usually happens at the end of act one when Coleman sits on the crates, sounded loud and clear early in act one when Nancy was explaining why she left Coleman. At first I pretended not to hear it. The sound, however, persisted, and I was forced to acknowledge it. I guess they just couldn't get it to turn off. Once I realized the audience and everyone on stage could hear it, I thought it best to justify it. I pretended like Coleman could hear the sound but couldn't make out where it was coming from or what it was. I think we all handled it well. I was happy this happened. It actually helped me to focus on my own intentions and forget about our unforgiving audience.

Something has begun happening that has made the final scene with Nancy and Coleman extremely difficult. When Coleman is pleading for Nancy to come home with him the ensemble is supposed to be up-stage by the piano and singing. After they finish the song, usually they slowly turn to look at us around the moment Coleman is praying with Nancy. I don't know why,
but the actor playing the Reverend Buckhorn has begun creeping slowly downstage to within a few feet of Nancy and Coleman before we even come close to the prayer moment. Not only is this completely pulling focus from what I think is one of the most important moments of the play, but I CAN SEE HIM. I can actually see the reverend standing there just beside us. I am now not able to just focus on my goals and intentions, but am trying to pretend that Coleman can't see him standing there. I have lines discussing Rev. Buckhorn and he has now intruded on this moment and can hear all the things Coleman is saying about him. I cannot justify this. The very thing that makes Coleman hit Nancy, or at least what I worked so hard for as my justification, is that the congregation is listening in on his conversation. If Coleman could see them listening to him earlier than Romulus Linney calls for, Coleman would stop the scene short and yell at them much sooner. This is especially heartbreaking for me when I have worked so hard for this moment and now it doesn't work the way it once did. I don't understand why this is not being addressed. If Coleman knew the reverend was standing there, the lines would be different, the scene much shorter, and quite possibly, he would not hit Nancy.

Sunday, February 12th, Day 27

Final performance. In my time of acting on the stage I have learned one incontrovertible fact: closing day is usually never a "good" run. Something usually happens that lets me down. I almost come to depend on this. It, sort of, makes it easier to close a show. Poetic justice and the "sweet sorrow" of parting. However, today was not a "bad" run. The audience seemed to really enjoy the show and no one in the cast, from what I saw, faltered in the least. I did have an epiphany during my warm-up before the show; it was that I don't believe any of this. I feel the writing in act two is just plain bad. I feel that Coleman's transition from angry, wife-beating jerk to "born-again" Christian borders on the extremely unbelievable and almost fantastical. There
are too many short-stories in the second act. The ensemble has to have these awkward moments of moving out of the way so someone else can deliver a lengthy monologue. I don't believe Coleman would wait around as long as he does. Perhaps this is all a product of simply staging the piece. Plays never seem to be as good as when I read them and get to use my own imagination of how characters should speak and interact with one-another.

I needed to protect my voice through the performance today. Caleigh and I had to sing for a benefit concert for Mrs. Nims immediately following the show; adding to the fact that today's performance was a matinee and those are always tougher on the actor's voice. Staying supported and using proper voice control during the performance helped me to get through the long day. And I made sure to drink plenty of water yesterday. A voice teacher once told me, "if your vocal chords could get wet, you would drown." I don't pretend to completely understand this but I think it has something to do with staying hydrated.

*Holy Ghosts* was a good show. We successfully freaked out the audiences. I don't really think this was Romulus Linney's only intention with the piece but, nevertheless, we did make the audience, at least, think something.

One of the most important reasons for acting training is so we *do not have to rely on a director* to make choices for us. We need to be constantly thinking outside of the box and understanding our characters so well we can use our honed intuition and make appropriate choices and decisions to achieve character goals. I submit that good actors don't say to themselves after finishing a project, "Aw, why didn't I think of THAT". They bring everything to the table and do their own homework so they can come up with all those ideas in rehearsal or during the run. As of yet, I have not thought of any posthumous ideas I could have tried with Coleman. I gave it my all. I accurately portrayed Coleman's desires and his reactions to the
other characters and circumstances of the play. I feel I was successful in creating a believable character.
Self Evaluation

I was required to bring to life the role of Coleman Shedman in Romulus Linney's *Holy Ghosts*. I feel I was successful in creating a believable, genuine, thought-provoking, and organic character. Though exhaustive measures were taken to delve deeply into the mind and thought processes of Coleman, I was much more concerned with moment-to-moment reality and the interaction with the other actors. The aforementioned analysis of character is simply meant as a tool for understanding the character's background to choose accurate responses to circumstantial factors. Talk is cheap in drama and actions always speak louder than words. I used the simplest of tactics and basic acting tools to achieve a sense of realism in every moment of Coleman's time on stage. I chose *testable* actions for every line of dialogue and sent them out clearly to the other actors in an effort to achieve my character's objectives. I could see my actions working in the faces of the cast and in their body language. There were completely improvisational and organic discoveries made in rehearsal and during performances of which I am very proud. I established completely believable relationships. Coleman's role in each relationship and how long the relationship had lasted could clearly be seen.

This was the most physically and mentally demanding role of my career. I trained very hard throughout the process to keep up with the extremely physical nature of the show; getting plenty of rest and exercise and drinking lots of water, and staying away from caffeine and alcohol. I am limited by my stature. My voice is not what one would call intimidating. Extra research and training was required to meet the vocal demands of Coleman's choleric and thunderously emphatic speech. Daily I would study Kristin Linklater's *Freeing the Natural Voice* and practice her method of "touching the sound" as a means of delivering my lines without restraint and protecting my voice through the rigors of rehearsal and performance (Linklater, 35). I worked diligently to speak from lower areas in my register to attain a sound I feel carried better
and added a gruffer, authentic, "mountain-man" sound to Coleman's voice. I am delighted to see my training has paid off, as I am now able to sustain notes several pitches below my previous abilities!

I feel I demonstrated a clear character arc. There are moments in act two that are problematic and extremely challenging to make believable. I feel I accurately displayed what I believe to be the most appropriate interpretation of the playwright's intentions. I have received very complimentary words on how well developed my character was and how well I conveyed his emotional journey through the play. *Holy Ghosts* is a very interesting piece because Coleman is on stage nearly the entire play and interacts with every other character. For all intents and purposes, every character is on stage the entire time. Coleman's actions and reactions are a direct result of what and how the other characters say and do. I never repeated patterns when looking around our imaginary world. I chose to look at someone new every night. Coleman has dialogue I was able to deliver to different characters on different nights. This allowed me to always maintain a sense of freshness with my performance, as well as, keeping myself involved and focused and out of my head. There are consecutive pages of text where Coleman has no lines, and would either be seated or standing out of the way. I never allowed myself to do nothing on stage. Every moment, even those that do not include Coleman, were filled with purpose and intention.

I am extremely proud of my work on the highly emotional content of the play. I was able to express limitless feeling and emotion freely without risk or worry of sacrificing diction or volume. I gave myself over to Coleman's anointing with unbridled fury and without regard for insecurities or bodily harm. I remember the first night of rehearsal when I completely gave myself over to Coleman's infusion from the Holy Spirit; it was one of the most awesome, fun,
and satisfying experiences of my theatrical career. There is one moment in the play where I was never satisfied with the circumstance or my performance. Coleman's tantrum just after hitting Nancy was far too tame for the playwright's intent. Romulus Linney suggests to directors in *Notes on Directing:*

> Everything on the set should be used up, burned up, blown up, destroyed, or otherwise completely chemically altered over the course of the story or else it didn't belong there to begin with. (Hauser, 60)

I could have erupted and thrashed about so much more convincingly if I were not hindered by the small space or my proximity to the audience. I wanted to tear the room apart, i.e. smashing crates, tossing chairs, and overturning altars. Instead the product was controlled and far more subdued than I at first imagined. It was too *safe.* However, the message was clear, and the audience understood and empathized with Coleman's situation. It was still a great moment.

The opportunity to portray this character has proven both challenging and rewarding. I made the audience fall in love with the bad guy. This is possibly my favorite contradiction in all of drama. I believe that not only was my portrayal convincing but that it moved the audience to feel for this man and empathize with the struggles he has faced that led him to this point. These facts are evident from the testimonials of students, peers, friends, family, and mentors.
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BY ROMULUS LINNEY

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HOLY GHOSTS was first produced in 1971 at East Carolina University, directed by Edgar Loessin, and in 1973 at the Garrick Theatre in New York, produced by Beth Grant. In 1976, after a production at the Cubiculo Theatre, it was published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and subsequently staged by theatres large and small across the United States, including the Alley Theatre, The Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Birmingham Festival Theatre, the Detroit Repertory Theatre, and the San Diego Repertory, whose production was brought to New York for the 1987 Joyce Theatre Festival. With the following cast, directed by the author, it opened at the Alley Theatre on April 29, 1983.

NANCY SHEDMAN ..................... Cynthia Lammel
COLEMAN SHEDMAN ..................... Brandon Smith
ROGERS CANFIELD ..................... Timothy Arrington
OBEDIAH BUCKHORN, JR. ..................... Blue Deckert
VIRGIL TIDES ..................... David Radford
ORIN HART ..................... John Woodson
HOWARD RUDD ..................... James Belcher
LORENA COSBURG ..................... Laurel White
MRS. WALL ..................... Jo Marks
MURIEL BOGGS ..................... Dede Lowe
BILLY BOGGS ..................... William Johnson
OBEDIAH BUCKHORN, SR. ..................... Bob Burris
CARL SPECTER ..................... Michael LaGue
BONNIE BRIDGE ..................... Robin Mosley
CANCER MAN ..................... Richard Hill

Directed by Romulus Linney
Setting by Keith Hein
Costumes by Ainslie G. Bruneau
Lighting by Sean Murphy
Sound by Tony Johnson
Production Stage Manager, Richard Earl Lester

David G. "The Power of Need
Will Find Its Out."
CHARACTERS
NANCY SHEDMAN
COLEMAN SHEDMAN
ROGERS CANFIELD
OBEDEIAH BUCKHORN, JUNIOR
VIRGIL TIDES
ORIN HART
HOWARD RUDD
LORENA COSBURG
MRS. WALL
MURIEL BOGGS
BILLY BOGGS
REVEREND OBEDEIAH BUCKHORN, SENIOR
CARL SPECTER
BONNIE BRIDGE
CANCER MAN

PLACE
A one-room wooden building in the rural South.

TIME
The present: an evening in early summer.
HOLY GHOSTS

ACT I

The interior of a one room clapboard house located off a highway in the modern south. Some battered folding chairs are stacked against one wall. Other furniture, including an old piano, is covered by sheets and canvas.

On one bench, a young woman, Nancy Shedman, sits reading the Bible. A broom leans against the bench. She is reading aloud, slowly.

NANCY. So then — after the Lord has spoken to them — he was received up into heaven — and he sat on the right hand of God — And they went forth and preached everywhere — the Lord working with them — and confirming the word — with signs following. Amen. (She stares at the Bible. She shakes her head, undecided about something.) I want to stay here. With him. Don't I? Yes, Lord! Thank you, Lord! (She closes the Bible and suddenly presses it fervently to her forehead. Then, briskly, she puts it down, picks up her broom, and goes back to work. She does not see a young man come quietly into the house. He watches her work. When she does see him, she lets out a cry, frightened.)

COLEMAN. Hello, Nancy.

NANCY. Coleman!
COLEMAN. Oh, you Jezebel! Where's the man?
NANCY. He's not here, Coleman. But he will be! *(Backs away.)*
He will be!
COLEMAN. *(Calling outside.)* Come on in, Canfield! We got her!
NANCY. Coleman, you can't come in here now.
COLEMAN. I'll do anything I want, Jezebel, after what you done
to me! Canfield!
NANCY. *(Upset.)* Oh, what did I do to you, Coleman? *(Enter Can-
field, and old man, cautiously.)*
COLEMAN. You know damn well. *(He moves toward her.)* I
ought to knock your head off!
CANFIELD. No violence, son! That was the understanding! I
have my heart condition. *(COLEMAN checks himself.)*
COLEMAN. All right. All right. *(Breathes deeply.)* I promised.
NANCY. Coleman, who's this man?
COLEMAN. My lawyer.
NANCY. Your what?
COLEMAN. My lawyer, god damn it! Who's going to defend me
against your, oh, your deceit, and your treachery, and your god
damned female bitchery!
CANFIELD. Son, that kind of language won't help.
COLEMAN. It'll help me, by God Almighty! Now lawyer, we've
tracked her down. You heard her admit there's another man. Ain't
that enough for a divorce?
NANCY. Divorce?
COLEMAN. What else, you flaming bitch?
CANFIELD. Well, not quite, son. It's just a little more com-
plicated. *(To Nancy, with shifty charm.)* Madam, allow me to ask, are
you Nancy Shedman, wife to Coleman Shedman?
NANCY. Yes, I am.
CANFIELD. Then let me say first, I regret the distress this meet-
ing must cause you. Yet I feel certain we will all conduct ourselves
here in a manner that can do credit to married ladies and gentlemen
in an orderly and lawful civilization.
COLEMAN. Oh, fuck that, Canfield! Get down to business.
NANCY. Oh, you are so coarse! Coarse, and just downright repulsive!

COLEMAN. Coarse, am I? Repulsive, am I? Didn't you run out of our house with a man you never saw before? Tell the truth, Nancy! You been having carnal intercourse with the son of a bitch or not?

NANCY. I have not, Coleman, been doing what you say to no man! It is your ugly eyes looking out of your ugly face that sees ugly things. I did find a friend. I have entered into a tender human relationship.

COLEMAN. She's fucking him, Canfield. It's an open confession.

NANCY. It is not! It's the laying down of an unbearable burden. (To Canfield.) I can't help the mistake I made marrying this clod, who blackens every sweet thing he sees with his dirty, dusty mind.

COLEMAN. You hear how she talks to me? You hear how my wife talks to me?

C. S. Yes, yes. Mrs. Shedman, would you consider discussing this other gentleman who has — ah — befriended you?

COLEMAN. That's it, Canfield! What's his name, Nancy?

NANCY. I'm not ashamed to tell you that, since he has asked me to marry him. His name is Obediah Buckhorn. He is a great preacher.

COLEMAN. I never heard of him.

NANCY. (Angry) Oh, Coleman, you are so dumb! You can't help it, and God have mercy on you, Coleman, but you are as dumb as a ditch! You are the fool of creation!

COLEMAN. Hear that? The fool of creation. Well, let me tell you this, Nancy. That preacher you ran off with, he ain't going to think I'm a fool, when I get my hands on him. I'm going to break his god damned neck. (Enter Oby. He is a huge young man, with enormous muscles. He is handsome, cheerful, and self confident.)

OBY. Good evening. God bless everyone here.

NANCY. Oby! (She runs to him, throws herself into his arms. He puts one arm around her, and holds her protectively.)
COLEMAN. See what I meant, Canfield? and me not even married to her a year. I'll be damned.

OBY. I hope not, Christian. I know you're Nancy's husband. You're angry now. I don't blame you for that.

COLEMAN. Wait a minute. How do you know I'm her husband? I never saw you before.

OBY. No, but I saw you Christian. That's why she's here, with us.

COLEMAN. Us?

NANCY. I been trying to tell you, Coleman. You won't listen, as always. There's more people involved! I am not going—

COLEMAN. Whoever's in on it! When I get through with you—

CANFIELD. No violence, son!

OBY. There won't be. I'm not a violent man, thank God. I don't like to fight, Christian.

COLEMAN. Maybe not, Christian, but you sure like to run off with other men's wives. And don't call me no Christian. I'm not one. Ain't Nancy told you what I think of that?

OBY. She has. I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt.

COLEMAN. Oh, you are? Well, all right, then, Christian! I beg everybody's pardon, I'm sorry to act up. No excuse for it. This man stole my wife, my furniture, my family heirlooms, and my Dodge pick-up truck. So praise God, Christian, what have I got to complain about?

OBY. (Upset.) Steal? Steal? (To Nancy.) Steal?

NANCY. We didn't, Oby.

COLEMAN. Steal, steal, steal, he's a parrot. He must be some stud, Nancy, to make up for it. Right?

NANCY. Coleman, you are the disgust of this world. Low down meaner than worms, you vile man. I will not talk to you further.

COLEMAN. That's why I got a lawyer. Canfield?

CANFIELD. Sensible young people. Let's sit down, and talk. Save everybody's time and money, and avoid going to court. Where I haven't been in so long anyway, I could make a lot of mistakes.
NANCY. Oby, do we have time for this now? I'll just get more confused.
OBY. Whether we have time or not, I don't want anybody thinking I stole anything.
NANCY. All right, Coleman, your lawyer is trying to be civilized. I will do the same and serve coffee or tea. Which do you prefer, Mr. Canfield?
CANFIELD. Why, tea, Mrs. Shedman. I thank you.
NANCY. Not at all, Oby?
OBY. Tea, please.
NANCY. Coleman?
COLEMAN. God damn.
NANCY. That'll be three teas then. I got it right here.
COLEMAN. Aw, never mind no god damn tea party—
OBY. (Firmly.) Sit down.
CANFIELD. Do that, son. Just do that. (Coleman sits, in disgust. Nancy fixes tea. Canfield takes out a pint bottle of whiskey.) And I'll need a little of this to go with it, I'm afraid. I'm getting tired. Next thing, I'll have chest pains.
COLEMAN. Just a little now!
CANFIELD. Son, if I'm to maintain my legal efficiency, not to mention my mortal life, I got to have it. It keeps the big arteries loose and clear. Now, you want a lawyer, or not?
COLEMAN. All right, all right. (Canfield takes a terrific snort of whiskey.) Canfield! You can't knock back straight whiskey like that! You're too damn old. I don't want a lawyer dying on me!
OBY. You need to drink whiskey, my friend?
CANFIELD. I do. And God bless it. It loosens my heart.
OBY. Sorry to hear you say that. My Daddy would be, too. A man with heart trouble needs religion and healthy food, not whiskey. I eat soy beans and wheat protein. And look at me. (Enter a young boy, Virgil Tides. He carries a wooden box. It is marked SHOTGUN SHELLS.)
NANCY. Hello, Virgil.
VIRGIL. Hidy. I got them.
OBY. Set them down over there, Virgil. Out of the way.
NANCY. Want some tea?

VIRGIL. No, ma’am. (He sets the box very carefully against one wall, and goes out.)

COLEMAN. What the hell kind of strange kid was that?

NANCY. A dear friend, Coleman. Not some kid. Here’s bone set tea for everybody. And sugar. And sugar spoons.

COLEMAN. My great grandmother’s silver sugar spoons! Nancy, you stole every single thing of value right out of our house!

NANCY. Nobody stole nothing, Coleman!

CANFIELD. Now, young married people—

COLEMAN. That was just plain wrong!

CANFIELD. You see, the way we do this—

NANCY. It was a fair division of property!

COLEMAN. The hell it was!

CANFIELD. If you’ll just listen in an orderly—

NANCY. And I earned every stick of it twenty times over!

COLEMAN. And I’m getting every stick of it back!

CANFIELD. There has to be some kind—

NANCY. Not one spoon! Not one shred of nothing, Coleman!

COLEMAN. All of it, Nancy! All of it!

CANFIELD. Hold it, youth! Just hold it! (They do.) Whew. There’s a better way to do this. Believe me. (To Coleman) Client, do you really want a divorce?

COLEMAN. I do.

CANFIELD. Mrs. Shedman, do you want a divorce?

NANCY. If he does. But I’m not giving him back—

COLEMAN. Oh, yes, you are!

CANFIELD. That comes later! Whew. First, we got to sort out the grounds for this action. Who did what to who and how, and so on.

COLEMAN. You sure you know what you’re doing?

CANFIELD. Just trust me, son. Now, Mrs. Shedman—

NANCY. Call me Nancy.

CANFIELD. Now, Nancy—

COLEMAN. Canfield, whose side you on here, anyhow?

NANCY. Stop fighting with your own lawyer!
COLEMAN. I'm not! I'm just making damn sure you don't--
CANFIELD. Listen, youth! Just listen. We have to sort it out.
Like this, now. (He gets up. He takes a deep breath.) My name is
Rogers Canfield.
COLEMAN. I know that!
NANCY. Hush!
CANFIELD. Attorney at Law. In retirement, for my health. I am
a widower.
COLEMAN. What the hell does that have to do--
NANCY. Just listen, Coleman!
CANFIELD. Procedure, son. Calm procedure. Thank you,
Nancy.
NANCY. Don't mention it.
CANFIELD. I live with my daughter, who never married. In a
little house. See, I've established these facts. Now, this
morning, I was sitting on the porch, with nothing to do, looking
at the road. Young Shedman came to see me. Clear so far?
NANCY. Yes, indeed.
COLEMAN. Yes, yes!
CANFIELD. He asked me if I knew a lawyer who could help him
in his marital distress. I said I might. See how the facts can fall?
Gently, and one at a time?
NANCY. I understand perfectly.
COLEMAN. So do I, so do I.
CANFIELD. Good. We're making progress. Mr. Shedman told
me he didn't have much in the way of a feef. About that time, my
daughter came out of the house, mad at me over something or
other, said so, and went back in. I said, Mr. Shedman, get me off
this porch today, and I'm yours. We made a deal. I'm out of legal
retirement to serve him faithfully. That understood?
NANCY. Absolutely.
COLEMAN. Of course! Of course!
CANFIELD. Then you see how easy and gentle it can go. It's so
simple. Just try it my way, young married people.
COLEMAN. OK. Fair enough. You first, Nancy.
NANCY. No, you first, Coleman.
COLEMAN. Nancy—
NANCY. You started this action, Coleman!
CANFIELD. She has a point, son.
COLEMAN. Fine. I'll do it. I mean to be fair, Nancy, and right and honorable, and speak the truth.
CANFIELD. And that's a point for you.
NANCY. I'm listening.
CANFIELD. You see, we're doing all right. Son? (Coleman gets up. He imitates Canfield.)
COLEMAN. My name is Coleman Hannibal Shedman, Jr. I own and manage — (Enter Virgil with another box. Coleman stares at him. He sets it carefully next to the first one, and exits.)
NANCY. He'll be in and out, Coleman. Don't worry about him.
COLEMAN. I own and manage the Shedman Fish Farm, left me by my father when he died. I breed the finest lake stock in the South. It was a good life until one year ago, when like a fool, I wanted to get married. I met this woman, who said she loved me. But she didn't love me, not even from the very beginning! (As Coleman talks, Nancy shows signs of acute distress. It is difficult for her to listen without breaking in.) Because, on our honeymoon, which I planned and planned to the last detail to please her, I took her all the way to Virginia! To camp there at beautiful Hungry Mother State Park! I bought us a brand new tent, planning for us to swim in the beautiful lake, and fish together, and I'd show her how to cook out, and then watch the sunset with my loving wife. But wrong again, Coleman. Because all she could say was, Hungry Mother is a stupid name for a State Park, and a miserable place for a Christian honeymoon, picking my plans all to pieces bit by bit, until there wasn't nothing left of what I tried to do for us but the inside of that tent, as black as blackest night. And it was more of the same almost for one whole year, until one week ago.
NANCY. All right, all right now!
COLEMAN. I come home that night. I was emotional, upset, full of misguided love. I took Nancy tenderly in my arms, and tried to tell her how much I cared.
NANCY. Oh, my God!
COLEMAN. But I was tired! Working and slaving to support my wife at the fish farm. I fell asleep. And when I woke up the next morning, wife, furniture, family heirlooms, and my Dodge pick-up truck, gone! Gone! In their place, a little note. "Dear Coleman. Last night I met a real man. Yours truly, Nancy." Well, all right. But god damn it, I want all my family furniture, and my family heirlooms, and my pick-up truck, and a divorce! My wife and Mr. Soy Bean can have each other, I'll live with Daddy's fish! They treat me better than she ever did! (He sits down. NANCY jumps up.)
NANCY. Oh boy, Coleman! Oh boy, Coleman!
CANFIELD. Gently, now! Sensible married people. Gently.
NANCY. My name may be Nancy Shedman, but I'm not yours no more, Coleman, you frog. Not in no way, shape or form!
COLEMAN. Is that a god damn promise?
NANCY. It certainly is, and has been, since that same night you have described out of the folly of your twisted mouth.
COLEMAN. Hear that? Twisted mouth.
NANCY. Because a lot more happened that night than you'll admit, Coleman, you horse-faced rat and rodent, you.
COLEMAN. Horse-faced rat and rodent. Hear that?
CANFIELD. Now, gently, sensible young—
NANCY. You come home, all right. Looking like you always do, puffed up mad at the world, and me in it. You weren't full of misguided love, you were full of beer and whiskey! You wouldn't say a word. Just mope around, and mope around, and then boom! All of a sudden grabbing me. Hauling me down on the sofa, like a sack of potatoes. Starting in on me until I myself, in spite of myself, was swept with carnal desire. When I finally managed to get my clothes decently off, you pawing and clutching, and finally got my desires decently ready for you, I said so. Because I wanted you, Coleman, because I want a baby, Coleman, a baby, and said so! Then, you climbing on top of me on that old sofa and just hanging there. Then passing out! Out, just plain out, boom! Like that. Me rolling humiliated out from under you, and letting you flop, boom! Your big stuffed head going down like a rock, hitting the coffee table, boom!
like that, splitting your lip, and me wishing you'd split your brains and broke your neck! Oh, Coleman. Oh, Coleman! You don't know what it's like, to be a mortified wife. I felt so bad. Dear Jesus, I prayed, give me a sign. And about that time, you snorted and rolled over on your back on the floor, flop! like that, with your pants down and that thing of yours sleeping just like you, flop! (Listening to this, Coleman has been going crazy. Now he sees a large, rough looking man, Orin Hart, enter. Hart is looking anxiously for someone he missed on the way, hoped would be there and isn't. Disappointed, he sits alone on a bench.)

COLEMAN. Who's that man?
NANCY. Oh, hush! There I was, naked in my own living room, with my husband passed out on the floor. Again. Because that's what always happens, since that campfire honeymoon of his. Instead of decent married relations, it's him get drunk, me want a baby, boom! and flop! It was such a mess. I wanted to die. I hadn't even noticed he'd left the front door open. Somebody was there. I turned around, crying. It was Oby.

COLEMAN. Doing what, preacher? Whacking off?
OBY. Now, hold on—
NANCY. Asking me politely, Coleman, if I had a kitchen match. So he could light his campfire down by the river. So understanding and polite about the fact I didn't have my clothes on, so gentle and kindly faced.

COLEMAN. He ain't kindly faced. He ain't nothing faced. He's so god damned dumb nothing registers there at all.

NANCY. I register there! Your wife registers there, and likes it a lot. (To Canfield) Oby waited while I put on my clothes. I got my matches. And I went with him to his campfire. And it was so different. A different campfire from any of yours, Coleman. I told Oby everything. He understood. And he told me things, about life, and Jesus our Lord, and the Bible, things I sure never heard before anywhere. And he took me in his manly arms, and said a prayer in my ear, and kissed me. And then, oh! what a difference, between (Pointing at Oby) day and (Pointing to Coleman) night! (Another rough looking man, Howard Rudolph, enters. He is not as big as Hart, but
he is just as rough."

OBY. (To Rudd.) Sit down anywheres. We'll be through in no
time.

RUDD. (Distracted.) Is Orin here? (Hart sees Rudd and Rudd sees
Hart. They rush to each other, and embrace.)

HART. I thought you wasn't coming!

RUDD. I waited half an hour at the pool room!

HART. Pool room? I thought you said meet here!

RUDD. No, no; we were supposed to meet there and come
here later!

HART. Who said that?

RUDD. You did.

HART. No, I didn't. What I said was— (Rudd grabs Hart.)

RUDD. Well, never mind! I'm sorry if I messed up.

HART. No, I did. Just so you're here.

RUDD. I am.

HART. It's all right, then. Everything's all right. (They kiss. A pale,
drag, very worried little middle aged lady. Lorena Cosburg, enters
timidly.)

LORENA. Oh, I'm sorry! I thought there was a church service
here. I don't mean to intrude. (She turns to go.)

OBY. You're not intruding, ma'am. Come right in and sit down.
It'll begin shortly.

COLEMAN. Wait a minute. Two men are hugging and kissing
each other back there.

NANCY. Just let me finish. I came back to the house with Oby,
happy for the first time in my woman's life. And you still passed out
on the floor. I said, "Listen, Oby, I have earned freedom, a fair divi-
sion of furniture, and transportation, too." So we loaded everything
I wanted over your head, out the door, and put it in your filthy old
truck, and drove off. To here. Where I stand now, defying you,
Coleman, you dog. By the way, I sold your truck. (A large woman
named Mrs. Wall walks impressively in. She waves to Nancy.)

Hidy.

MRS. WALL. Hello, Nancy. You sweet thing. Praise the
Lord.
COLEMAN. Now who for god's sake is that?
NANCY. Mrs. Wall.
COLEMAN. Mrs. who?
MRS. WALL. Wall! Wall!
COLEMAN. Two men hugging each other, and a woman named Wall. (Mrs. Wall removes a sheet, revealing a battered upright piano. She settles herself there.)
NANCY. She's a sweet Christian companion and friend. Never you mind about her name. So, Mr. Canfield, that is my story. Do you understand everything now?
CANFIELD. I fear I am beginning to, yes.
COLEMAN. (To Oby.) All right, Soy Bean. Your turn.
OBY. Me?
COLEMAN. We get to hear your story of what happened on that fateful night. (Looks at the people.) All fifty of us, or however the hell many people we got in here now. O my god! (A young man, Billy Boggs, with a guitar, enters. With him is his young wife, Muriel, with a baby in her arms.)
MURIEL. Hey, Nancy.
NANCY. Muriel! You brought the baby!
MURIEL. I sure did!
NANCY. (To the baby.) Why, he's just the sweetest thing! Hey, there! Hey, honey! Whoa-hoo! Buba-buba-boo! Oh, Lord, Muriel, he's nice.
MURIEL. Yes, he is. (Billy hits a note on Mrs. Wall's piano, and tunes one string of his guitar. Mrs. Wall joins Nancy and Muriel, looking at the baby.)
BILLY. (To Coleman.) Hi. (He moves away, tuning his guitar.)
COLEMAN. Elvis Presley. My god. Hey, Soy Bean! (Smiling, at ease, Oby goes to Canfield.)
OBY. You want to hear my story, here it is, cross my heart and hope to die. (To Canfield.) It started when I got laid off my full time job at the Skyrocket Bowling Alley. Couldn't get along with the manager. I went up in the mountains to think about it, and fish, and pray. I was camping by Caesar's Creek, just above Stone Mountain River. I went to cook my trout. I'd run out of matches. I'd seen this
little house up by the road. I went and looked, and there was a light
on inside. The front door was open. I looked in. There, without any
clothes on, was a fine young lady. (Oby smiles, and spreads his hands.
He appreciates the absurdity of the occasion.) I said, "Ah, hello. You
got a match?" And she said maybe she did. When I told her what I
wanted it for, she said if I could wait until she put some clothes on,
she'd not only give me a box of matches, she'd come down and cook
my trout for me. And she did. (To Coleman.) And told me
about you.

COLEMAN. What about me, Soy Bean?  
OBY. Enough. You want to know why she likes my campfire better
than yours? Because I know that God Himself is always the other
person around any fire. Any fire. She understands that now, too.
(To Canfield again.) She asked me what to do about her husband. I
said, "Go ask my Daddy. He preaches about men and women all
the time. He knows more than I do." She said that sounded like a
good idea. She had a pick-up truck and some furniture she wanted
take with her. Fine. Well, Daddy liked her right off. So much,
he offered her the back room over the kitchen in our house, for as
long as she wants it. Folks often stay with us from time to time. Ask
around, lawyer. You will find we are respected Christian people.
Nothing wrong has been done. And, since then, I've been looking
for a steady job. Today, I got one. I can't wait to tell my Daddy
about it. (Smiling with anticipation, he sits down.)

COLEMAN. How about it, Canfield? Read between the lines. If
that ain't enough for a divorce, what is? (Sounds of guitar, piano
chords. The people that with each other, moving about, friendly, but not
gushing. They are at ease but it is evident they are all here for a
serious purpose.)

CANFIELD. My goodness. Just look at these people.

COLEMAN. Listen, Oby. Are you trying to tell me that instead
of having carnal relations with my wife, when she was wide open, if
you can pardon the expression, you took her instead to see
your Daddy?

OBY. That's right.

COLEMAN. Then what the hell are you doing, pimping for

Property of

DAVID W. HOOVER
your Daddy?

NANCY. Coleman—

COLEMAN. And what kind of grown-up man lives with his Dad-
dy, anyhow? Great God Almighty, if my old man and me lived in
the same house one day after I hit sixteen, they'd buried the both
of us.

NANCY. Coleman—

COLEMAN. (To Oby.) But not you. You live with Daddy.

NANCY. Coleman—

COLEMAN. (To Nancy.) And so do you, now! When you marry
him, you still gonna live with Daddy?

NANCY. Coleman—

COLEMAN. Well, what is it, Nancy? Speak up!

NANCY. Coleman, you are the one who's insisted all this time I
am going to marry Oby.

COLEMAN. Huh?

NANCY. I'm not.

COLEMAN. Huh?

NANCY. Oby is my dear friend and brother in the Lord, but he is
not my happiness. He brought me to it, but he is not the thing
itself.

COLEMAN. Wait a minute. You said you was going to marry
Obediah Buckhorn.

NANCY. Yes. Obediah Buckhorn, Senior.

OBY. (Smiling) Daddy.

COLEMAN. Daddy?? You marrying his Daddy?

NANCY. Yes!! Finally, Coleman, whew!! That's it!

COLEMAN. Well, god-a-odd-darn! Daddy, eh? Canfield, my
fine young wife left me for Daddy. Well, where is he? Let's all have
a look at Daddy. Daddy! Yoo-hoo! Daddy? Where in hell is
he, anyhow?

BUCKHORN. Right here. God bless you, son. (He has just
entered.)

COLEMAN. Him?

NANCY. Him. (She goes to the Reverend Buckhorn, and stands beside
him.) At last you got here. It's my husband. (To Coleman.) The
Reverend Buckhorn will take care of everything now, Coleman.

COLEMAN. You going to marry this old man? (To Buckhorn.)
Daddy, I can put your ass in jail. For it seems you and your idiot son here have stole my wife.

BUCKHORN. I can see you mean to test me, son.
COLEMAN. And fucking how. This is my lawyer, and we got you dead to rights.
BUCKHORN. I understand how you must feel. Life is hard.
COLEMAN. You hear that son of a bitch say to me? I'm gonna—

CANFIELD. Son! No violence!
BUCKHORN. But your wife came to us of her own free will. And suffering, because of you. (To Nancy.) And her own ignorance.
NANCY. (Head bowed.) Yes, Lord.
BUCKHORN. All your questions, Mr. Sedman, will be answered. But we have a service to the Lord God to celebrate here tonight, and everything else must wait upon that. You will know everything you want to know. After the worship. Excuse me. (He brushes past Coleman and kisses Oby fondly, and then Nancy affectionately but with a gleam in his eye, too. Then he moves away, welcoming the others, who are all waiting to greet him.)

COLEMAN. Lawyer! What are we going to do about it?
CANFIELD. Well— (Enter Carl Specter. He is a very strange, rawboned country man. He sees Coleman, someone new, and goes to him, talking.)

CARL. She come into my life from nowhere, don't you see? I found her in the city dump, dying in a shoebox, with all her dead little brothers and sisters around her. But she was still alive. I took her home. I fed her cornbread and milk. And she lived. (He nods at Coleman, having said something tremendous.) She lived! (He turns to others, who nod protectively. Coleman shakes his head.)

COLEMAN. What was he talking about?
NANCY. About his phantom setter. That's Carl Specter, talking about his phantom setter.
COLEMAN. His what?

NANCY. A bird dog, Coleman, who died. He's a man haunted by his dog. Can't you understand that?

COLEMAN. Well, of course, Nancy. Sure. Hell, yes.

NANCY. Coleman, since I left you, and came to live with Reverend Buckhorn, I see how limited you really are. You can't tolerate nothing in the slightest human way unusual. You have got a lot to learn. (Enter Bonnie Bridge. In her early forties, she is very attractive. On the surface she is practical, efficient and cheerful.)

BONNIE. How are you, Nancy?

NANCY. Fine, Bonnie. How're you?

BONNIE. Doing all right, praise the Lord. (To Coleman and Canfield.) Hello. Welcome to our church. If you could give me your names, I'll see that you're properly introduced to everyone before we begin. (To Coleman.) What's your name, young man? Don't be shy.

COLEMAN. God damn it, Nancy.

BONNIE. (Understanding.) Oh, Nancy, it's your husband.

NANCY. I'm afraid so.

BONNIE. I should have known. (To Coleman.) You're not here for church, then.

COLEMAN. I'm here for a divorce. This is my lawyer. (Canfield quickly extends his hand.)

CANFIELD. My name is Rogers Canfield. Very pleased to meet you.

BONNIE. Mine is Bonnie Bridge. God bless you, sir.

CANFIELD. Thank you. God bless you, too. (She smiles at Canfield, and moves away to other people. Canfield stares after her.)

COLEMAN. Canfield!

NANCY. Mr. Canfield, can we finish, please?

CANFIELD. Well. (To Coleman.) I doubt if you could prove adultery, now. (To Nancy.) But if the wife admits desertion, the husband does have grounds for divorce, and is entitled to all his property.

NANCY. Wait a minute! Who admits desertion? I left this man by the right of suffering. I had to find some decent joy and beauty in
my life. Every woman has a right to that. I don’t owe this fool a thing more than what he owes me: one wasted year of our lives! I’m not giving him back nothing!

COLEMAN. That’s what you think, Nancy.
NANCY. That’s what I know, Coleman. Now you just get out of here. We’ve given you all the time we can.
BUCKHORN. I think we’re ready, now. Have you finished your talk?
OBY. Yes, sir.
NANCY. Yes, sir.
BUCKHORN. Good. Is Cancer Man here yet?
OBY. No, sir.
BUCKHORN. We’ll wait then, a few minutes. I wouldn’t want to start without him. (He moves away again.)
COLEMAN. Cancer Man?
NANCY. Yes, Coleman.
COLEMAN. Cancer Man?
NANCY. Yes, yes! Can’t you understand English? A man who has cancer. He comes here because it helps him. He don’t have no place else to go.

COLEMAN. If he has cancer, why doesn’t he go to a hospital?
NANCY. Coleman, you don’t know what you’re talking about. COLEMAN. Oh? (Hurt) Didn’t my Mama die of it when I was a boy? And didn’t I take my Daddy to the hospital with it not two years ago?
NANCY. Yes. I forgot. I’m sorry.
COLEMAN. Didn’t I see them waste away to nothing? Didn’t I watch Daddy die, not even know who I was? His own son? (Enter Cancer Man. He is a sick man in late middle age. The sight of him reminds Coleman of his father, and it frightens him.)

CANCER MAN. Hidy.
BUCKHORN. Hello, Cancer Man. We been waiting for you.
CANCER MAN. Have you? Waiting for me? God bless you for that. What would we do, if we couldn’t come to church? (He sees Coleman. He holds out a hand to him.) Hello, son.
COLEMAN. (Hushed.) You got cancer?
CANCER MAN. (Simply.) Yes. (Coleman turns away from him, abruptly.)
BUCKHORN. Now, friends. Let's start the worship. Begin. (The people move now, quickly. Mrs. Wall plays "Amazing Grace," and they sing it heartily, as they change the room about. A table is brought to the middle of the room. It becomes an altar. On it is placed a rough wooden cross. A mason jar of clouded liquid is placed very carefully by the cross. The wooden boxes are put before the altar. A large sign goes up:

AMALGAMATION
HOLINESS
CHURCH OF GOD
WITH SIGNS
FOLLOWING

While this is happening, Coleman follows Nancy, who helps with the setting up of the church.)
COLEMAN. Wait a minute, Nancy? What about the divorce? What about my property? What about this old man you're going to marry? You lost your mind? Bunch of lunatics in here. Two truck-drivers hugging and kissing each other? Another man talking to a dead dog? Another man dancing around saying he's got cancer? What kind of religion is this, anyhow? Nancy, what's happened to you? Nancy? (Nobody pays him any attention. They are all cheerfully singing "Amazing Grace," and getting ready for church.)
ALL. (Singing.)
Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved,
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come,
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise,
Than when we first begun.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

(They settle. Crude lights have been turned on. There is no formal arrangement of the congregation. They sit scattered informally about the room. In front of the altar however, a space is left open.)
BUCKHORN. Now, folks. Before any other thang, it is I myself must declare myself here to you! I would hold nothin' back!
CONGREGATION. Amen, brother.

COLEMAN. A-fucking men, and how, brother.
BUCKHORN. (Pause — deep breath.) You all do know the sunshine that has come into my life. This young and tender maiden—

COLEMAN. Maiden? Hoo!
BUCKHORN. (Pause — deep breath.) Who came to me lost and forlorn, ravaged by the brutality and the squalor of godless wedlock, her lovely womanly—

COLEMAN. Wedlock is right, brother. Wait til it snaps on you.

BUCKHORN. (Pause — deep breath.) Her lovely womanly spirit crushed, her gentle nature defiled, her trusting heart broken—
COLEMAN. And pissed off, in the bargain.
BUCKHORN. Came here to me, and to our church, and asked us
for help, for guidance, for love and faith, and you gave, and I
gave—
COLEMAN. And she gave—
BUCKHORN. And she was healed! Made whole! Sound!
Radiant with the spirit of the Lord! Is this any kind of lie? Speak, lit-
tle Nancy! Speak the truth!
NANCY. (Simply, sincerely.) I was lost, but now am found. Was
blind, but now I see. You have given me back my life.
BUCKHORN. Thank you for that. (To Congregation.) And it is no
secret here, that my feelings for this girl have become, in the way of
mortal men, matrimonial. Her youth and sunshine for me, my
strength and experience for her.
COLEMAN. God damn.
BUCKHORN. Here is her husband, come cursing amongst us.
You see the man. With rage, tight as a tick. Now, Mr. Shedman.
You may not believe this, but everybody here comprehends your
extreme married misery. Including me. Nobody belittles it.
Including me. As soon as I can, when service is over, I will have
everything out with you. But first things come first. 'Til church is
over, you are our friend and guest. We beg you stay, and be
welcome! (To Canfield.) And you are welcome, too. (To the con-
gregation.) Isn’t that right?
ALL. Why, yes! It certainly is! Yes, indeed. Welcome, friends.
CANFIELD. That’s very decent of you. Much obliged. (To Cole-
man.) Have a seat, son.
COLEMAN. What, listen to this?
CANFIELD. You have to. Don’t you want your settlement? Your
property back?
COLEMAN. Oh, yeah. Damn right I do. OK. (Music: Chords on
the piano, from the electric guitar. Perhaps a harmonica, a tambourine,
whatever they would play. Led by Billy and Mrs. Wall, they supply their
own music very well.)
CANFIELD. Just be patient.
COLEMAN. Oh, sure. (He slips the whiskey bottle from Canfield’s

24
pocket, and takes a quick drink.) **Want some?**

CANFIELD. No, thanks.

COLEMAN. Huh?

CANFIELD. Put that away, son. We're in church.

COLEMAN. **What about your heart condition?**

CANFIELD. I'll chance it. Now, hurry up. (They are seated to one side. Buckhorn is now walking about, listening to the music.)

BUCKHORN. (Easily) Well, what is real religion? One thing I know, it don't have no beginning, and it don't have no end. It is happening all the time, and tonight I hope it will happen to us. (He listens, and smiles.) That sounds good, Billy. Mrs. Wall. I hope we have good music tonight, to the glory of God. I think we will, Mr. Hart, Mrs. Rudd, Carl. God bless all of you, my friends. (He turns to Bonnie.) Miss Bridge?

BONNIE. Friends, the Kiley Haines family were burned out of their house last night. They weren't hurt, but their clothes went up with everything else. (Holding a piece of paper.) I have the children's sizes here. If you'll look at them later on, and bring in what you can, I'll see they get it. (People respond: they will.) We have three new faces with us tonight. First of all — where are you? (Looks.) Oh, there you are. Come on out. A new friend, Mrs. Lorena Cosburg. (Lorena steps shyly forward.)

ALL. Welcome. Hidy!

LORENA. Hello. (She moves back quickly.)

BONNIE. This gentleman is Mr. Coleman Shedman. He is Nanny's husband.

ALL. Welcome. Hidy!

COLEMAN. ( **A mock bow.** ) Oh, how do you do?

BONNIE. And last, but certainly not least, a distinguished lawyer, Mr. Rogers Canfield.

ALL. Welcome. Hidy!

CANFIELD. ( **Very pleased.** ) I'm happy to be here. (He smiles at Bonnie, who smiles back.)

BONNIE. And I have the latest about Gilbert Letty. He's out of the hospital. He's home now, with Martha. He's still in pain, but not in agony like he was. He'd welcome visits from comforting...
friends. And Reverend Buckhorn, may I say this?

BUCKHORN. Of course.

BONNIE. You all know what happened to me here. How sick I was over it for so long. Let me tell you, I appreciated your visits and your prayers. I know now how the sick and the needy feel. And — oh, Lord — now I want to pray!

BUCKHORN. Then do. (She prays aloud, fervently.)

BONNIE. Oh, Lord Jesus, I was so sick! I wanted to die so many times, and you heard my prayers and brought my friends to help me, and so, Lord, I pray now that you will send health and mercy to Gilbert Letty and his wife and children! And to all the sick and needy people in this world! (Others join her, each with his own prayer. In a moment, the whole congregation is praying aloud and with real passion, for the afflicted. Many are on their knees. With a look at Coleman, Nancy falls to her knees and prays for him.)

NANCY. Oh, Lord! Let me pray to you right now, for my husband, Coleman! Forgive my evil thoughts against him! You know I can’t stand him anymore, and he is a terrible mess, but maybe he can’t help that, Lord, and I pray that you will come into his life and do him some good and show him the way! Amen, Lord Jesus! (With another look, she gets up and walks away, to Oby. Coleman, staring at them all, throws up his hands. The prayers, a few at a time, end. When they are all quite finished, Buckhorn speaks again.)

BUCKHORN. Now folks, I see Muriel and Billy Boggs there with some good news, Billy? (Billy, the young man who plays the electric guitar; gets up, a little reluctantly.)

BILLY. Well, we had the baby, as you know. She’s got it with her. Muriel? (His pretty young wife stands up, happy. She holds her baby, who has been nursing at her breast.)

MURIEL. He’s only three weeks old. I wanted to bring him here quick as I could. Edward William Boggs. Billy has nicknamed him Wrinkle. That’s because the first day we had him home, Billy didn’t see him where I had him under a bedsheets, and almost sat on him. He said he looked like just another wrinkle in the sheets. And that’s what he was. You all know we never meant to have him this fast. But we’re happy about it, anyhow. Ain’t we, Billy?
BILLY. Yeah.
MURIEL. He already has a godmother. Elrita Moss, who won’t come here, I’m sorry to say. But he needs a godfather, for the years ahead. *(She goes to Cancer Man.*) Will you do that for us? I believe you will get well, and live for many years. He might need somebody like you, who is good and wise.
CANCER MAN. You people here. You are the best things in the world to me. *(Moved, he holds up his hands to take the baby, but very shyly.)*
MURIEL. Here. Don’t be afraid to hold him. You won’t scare him. He’ll know you love him. *(Cancer Man takes the baby in his arms.)*
CANCER MAN. I thank you, Lord Jesus. Little boy, I will stand by you, as long as I live. Bless you, child. All the days of your sweet young life.
BUCKHORN. What a fine thing. You know, Jesus was a baby like this, once. How we love that. Baby Jesus. Mrs. Wall, play us some Baby Jesus music. Billy, you proud Daddy. Sing, friends. *(Mrs. Wall plays “Fairest Lord Jesus.” The people gather around Muriel and sing it to the baby, and to her. Coleman stares at them, shaking his head.)*
COLEMAN. Canfield, there is something wrong about these people. I just feel it.
ALL. *(Singing gently.)*
Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.
COLEMAN. I mean, they’re not all right in the head. *(Looks around.)* And this place. I mean, what kind of church is this?
ALL. *(Singing.)*
Fair is the sunshine. Fairer still the moonlight.
And all the twinkling, starry host.
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
Than all the angels heaven can boast.
COLEMAN. What are they doing up there, pretending that
damn baby is Jesus? I tell you, something is dead wrong about this whole thing. (The song ends. Cancer Man approaches Coleman.)

CANCER MAN. Son?

COLEMAN. Oh, my god.

CANCER MAN. Don't you want to see the baby?

COLEMAN. No, I don't.

CANCER MAN. Why not? Pretty child. Don't you like children?

COLEMAN. What business is that of yours? What do you care if I like children or not?

CANCER MAN. I like you. I want to be your friend.

COLEMAN. Well, thank you, but I'm not interested. Look, it's too bad you're sick.

CANCER MAN. Don't worry about it. I don't.

COLEMAN. Of course not. Will you just please leave me alone?

CANCER MAN. All right. I am sorry I have troubled you. (Cancer Man goes back to the others. Coleman sees Canfield looking at him with disapproval.)

COLEMAN. What are you looking at?

CANFIELD. Nothing, son.

COLEMAN. By God, I don't see why everybody had to call me son around here. (He steps to the center of the room.) And I've had about enough of this! Nancy, there ain't nothing more happening in here until we get through! You can sing hymns til hell freezes over. I don't care! You can marry Obby, Daddy, or the milkman. I don't care! (He looks about, sees the boxes in front of the table, marches over and sits on them.) But I ain't waiting no longer. I'm here to get what's coming to me, and til I do, I'm gonna sit right here and yell about it! Come on, Nancy! My furniture, my family heirlooms, and a new pick-up truck! Until that's settled, here I sit!

NANCY. Well, I wouldn't sit on them boxes, Coleman, if I were you.

COLEMAN. Oh, you wouldn't, would you? (He sits there. He kicks them.)

NANCY. And I wouldn't kick them like that, neither.
COLEMAN. Oh, yeah? Well, who's going to stop me? (He kicks the boxes, hard.)
NANCY. Keep on kicking. You'll find out. (Coleman kicks the boxes, and bounces up and down on them, in a tantrum. Suddenly, from inside the boxes comes an unmistakable sound: the electrifying thrushing crackle, the sound of a rattlesnake. Coleman rockets up off the boxes. He looks through a crack in the side of one.)
COLEMAN. Snakes! Jesus Christ! (He looks again. The people watch him in a great silence.) There's rattlesnakes in these boxes! Diamond god damned backed rattlesnakes! And copperheads! Deadly serpents! They're poison! They'll kill you! (The people all stare at Coleman, and his discovery, saying not a word.) What are they doing in — (Pause. Silence. Realisation.) My god. You're Pentecostal Church Snakehandlers. (Coleman stares at the worshippers of Amalgamation Church. The worshippers stare at Coleman.)
BUCKHORN. Amen, son.
CONGREGATION. Amen.

(BLACKOUT.)
ACT II

As before. “Amen!”

COLEMAN. Pentecostal Church of God Snakehandlers. Maniacs, Canfield. (To Reverend Buckhorn.) You pick up them snakes? Hold them in your hands?

BUCKHORN. That has been known to happen.

COLEMAN. And you jump all around, and praise Jesus with rattlesnakes?

NANCY. Coleman, you’re getting it wrong, as usual.

COLEMAN. Well, what’s the trick? There’s got to be one. You drug them snakes? Or you milk them first? Or what?

NANCY. Coleman, they are the way God made them. Full of speed, fangs, and poison death. But that ain’t the point.

COLEMAN. Oh, don’t tell me those — (Pause.) Wait a minute. I did read something about a man just last —

BONNIE. Gilbert Letty. He almost died.

CANFIELD. And before that. Haven’t some people — its been in the papers —

BUCKHORN. (Soberly.) That has been known to happen. We don’t deny it.

BONNIE. They think they have faith. When the test comes, they don’t.

COLEMAN. Why, you’re breaking the law. There’s a state law against using snakes in church! Daddy, you’re just breaking the law every way you turn.

BUCKHORN. State law is not the last word, young Mr. Shedman.
The freedom of our religion is not something state governments care to trifle with. We are left alone, most of the time.

COLEMAN. But it is against the law? People have died?

BUCKHORN. (Nods.) Yes. (CARL, SPECTER, troubled by COLEMAN. tries to explain.)

CARL. You're confused. You don't understand. When something is real, then something is real. (Pause.) Like her. See, she was smart as a whip. She was swift as the wind. Always sad when I left her, and happy to see me home again. When she'd hunt, and lose sight of me in heavy brush, she'd jump! Jump! as she ran, jump! as she ran, like that. She always found me, too! What does the aw have to do with it?

COLEMAN. I'm confused?

BUCKHORN. (Softly) Bonnie. (Bonnie touches Carl gently on the arm. Dottie, he turns to her. She leads him away from Coleman.)

BONNIE. Not now, Carl. Come sit with me.

BUCKHORN. But you are right in this, Mr. Shedman. Many question us. Write articles in newspapers. But the truth is, we only do what God plainly told us to do. It is right here in the Bible, in the words of the Lord. Yet other churches say it isn't. Why they can't read, I don't know. But we can read. We know what we need, and what we want!

COLEMAN. Yes, and so do I. Here it comes, Canfield, right about now.

BUCKHORN. What's that?

COLEMAN. I know what you really want, preacher. And you'll use snakes, elephants, anything that moves, to get it. It is now time, friends, for the holy offering! That's what you want! Gimme, gimme!

NANCY. Oh, Coleman! Don't!

BUCKHORN. Are you saying what I think you are saying?

COLEMAN. I sure am. You ain't getting a thin dime out of me, Daddy!

BUCKHORN. See that bucket?

COLEMAN. What bucket?

BUCKHORN. Way back there against that wall. See it?
COLEMAN. What about it?
BUCKHORN. That's our offering plate, in this church. We leave it back there. Nobody even has to look at it, much less put money in it, if they don't want to. We'd rather have no church at all than one built on money.
ALL. Yes, that's right. Yes.
BUCKHORN. (To everyone.) Go out into the churches of this world! Whose high and mighty preachers say we are crazy. Why, they have people carrying money-plates stuffed with dollar bills and pledges and silver, and they stick it right up into God's face, and sing a hymn. It is enough to make you vomit on the cross! (To Coleman, mad.) Now, you put your thin dime in that bucket, or don't. In your own kind of talk, we don't give a flying fuck what you do with your money! (Furious, Buckhorn checks himself.) I swore at this man. Not his fault. I lost my temper, curse of my life. Help me, friends. Don't let me sink in the swamps of anger! (He lets out a tremendous, hair-raising scream.) OOOOOOOOOOOOOO HHHHHHHHHHHH! GOD! OOOOOOHIIIIIIII GOD!!
(He falls to his knees, at the altar. Oby jumps to his side.)
OBY. You all right, Daddy? (Buckhorn reaches up for his son's hand. Oby grips it hard, and steadies his father.)
BUCKHORN. Help me, son!
OBY. I'm here, Daddy.
BUCKHORN. Help me, friends! I'm lost! Lost in anger! (He holds out his arms to them, abandoning his service and role of preacher completely. They rush to him, grab his hands, press them hard.) Mrs. Wall! Sing something! Help me! (Mrs. Wall plays "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling." They all move to the piano and sing, while Nancy goes at Coleman.)
ALL. (Singing.)
Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling for you, and for me,
See on the portals He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home, you who are weary, come home,
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
Calling, O sinner, come home!  
NANCY. See, Coleman. You ain't the only one who gets mad.  
You ain't the only one who has troubles.  
COLEMAN. Nancy, listen. Come on with me. I'll get you out of  
this craziness. I want a divorce, but I don't want to leave you in no  
insane asylum.  
NANCY. (In sudden tears.) It's you who's in the insane asylum!  
(She moves away, hiding her feelings.)  
ALL. (Singing.)  
O for the wonderful love He has promised,  
Promised for you and for me,  
Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon,  
Pardon for you and for me.  
(As they sing, the congregation pulls at Buckhorn, and calls him  
home.)  
COME HOME, COME HOME, you who are weary, come home,  
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
Calling, O sinner, come home!  
(Buckhorn, restored, now takes over his service again. We can see now,  
under his calm, he is a fractured man, who must struggle against  
violent passions.)  
BUCKHORN. Thank you, friends, and praise God. When we ask  
him together, He takes away our hate. Don't we know, you can't  
get rid of it by yourself. It just grows. (To Coleman.) God bless you.  
If I anger you calling you son, you anger me calling me Daddy.  
COLEMAN. I won't do it again.  
BUCKHORN. Then, brother, let's put it this way. We are both  
equal creatures of God. You may not like that, and I don't reckon I  
do, neither, but that's the way God made us. (He looks at Coleman  
differently now, seeing something new in him.) It may seem strange to  
you, but I've seen you before. Yes, I can see my own eyes, years  
ago, looking out of your face. But never mind that now. (To his con-  
gregation.) What do we know about the mysterious ways of God?  
Nothing. We only seek Him, and we won't get scared by what  
we find.
ALL. No, we won’t. We won’t be afraid. Praise the Lord!
BUCKHORN. Now, glory to God! Praise his holy name. So the
spirit can move! Glory to God! (Mrs. Wall starts the chord of a hymn,
thens stops.)
MRS. WALL. Young man! You, young man!
COLEMAN. You talking to me?
MRS. WALL. Yes, I am. Reverend Buckhorn?
BUCKHORN. Go right ahead, Mrs. Wall. Friends, when you
have something to say in this church, you say it.
MRS. WALL. You’re just the kind of young person that caused
me — well, I’m just — oh! (She hangs a discordant chord on the piano.
Virgil moves to her, and sits on the piano bench with her.)
VIRGIL. Can I get you a glass of water?
MRS. WALL. No, Virgil. Thank you. (To Coleman.) Shady Lane
Methodist Church gave me a Timex watch and said goodbye. After
thirty-one years, I couldn’t teach Sunday School anymore. A young
preacher who looks something like you did it. He got a girl from the
Teacher’s College. She plays the flute, and makes beads, and talks
about children relating to each other, and that’s religion now. I was
just let loose. I thought I’d die. The only good thing I’ve ever done
in my life was with the Bible. Teaching miracles to children. Virgil
here was in my class, when he was a little boy.
VIRGIL. Yes, ma’am. I sure was.
MRS. WALL. But everybody knows better now. Young man, I
got desperate. I couldn’t find my religion anywhere. I went to a
baseball stadium, to hear about the Lord. But it was religion I wanted,
not baseball preaching. All empty smiles, and no power. So then
one day, I met Virgil again. He brought me here. To these people
you don’t think much of. Well, let me tell you they can keep their
powerhouse preachers and baseball religion. Let them play at Sun-
day School, with flutes and beads and the silly talk of college girls.
Because I don’t need to teach children miracles anymore. I found
the miracles here. I always believed them, and I was right. (She
plays a chord again, feeling better.) So you look down your nose all
you want to. You bothered me for a minute, but you don’t anymore.
I’m free of people like you. Glory be to God. (While she talks and

34
plays. Lorena Costner moves timidly toward the piano.)
LORENA. Mrs. Wall. That was a thrilling statement.
MRS. WALL. Thank you.
LORENA. I do so enjoy singing with you, and everyone —
I—
MRS. WALL. Thank you, kindly. (She plays, firmly, “I Love To
Tell The Story,” indicating for Lorena to join her. After the first verses,
she does. Singing.)
I love to tell the story
Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and his glory,
Of Jesus and his love.

I love to tell the story,
Because I know ’tis true,
It satisfies my longings,
As nothing else can do.
(Lorena joins her in a duet.)
MRS. WALL & LORENA.
I love to tell the story,
For those who know it best,
Seem hungering and thirsting
To hear it like the rest.

And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
Twill be the old, old story,
That I have loved so long.
(Mrs. Wall, Lorena, and now Virgil sing the refrain.)
MRS. WALL, LORENA & VIRGIL.
I love to tell the story,
Twill be my song in glory,
To tell the old, old story,
Of Jesus and his love.
(When they are finished, Lorena stands looking at everyone, very
moved.)

35
LORENA. Oh, I did — I want you to know — I don't know how—
BUCKHORN. (Gently) Speak, Mrs. Cosburg! We'll listen.
LORENA. Oh, I can't.
BUCKHORN. In your own good time, then.
LORENA. But I want to! (Pause) They don't know I'm here tonight. My husband, Frank. Or my children. They'll be hurt. They don't understand, like this young man. They look down on people like you. They make fun of you. I've driven past this church, alone, many times. I never had the courage to come in. I just parked, in the dark, and heard you singing. (Pause) My husband tells me what to do. My children tell me what to do. Delivery boys and clerks at the five and ten tell me what to do. The only time I ever crossed anybody in my life was coming here tonight. I want to know what you believe. Because in my life — in my own life —
(Wretched, she's unable to go on.)
BUCKHORN. Gather your forces, Sister Cosburg. Your life is all right. We're not afraid of it, if you're not. Speak when you please.
(She nods, grateful, and sits down. Buckhorn smiles at her.) You see, we observe no strict order of worship here. Worship don't have much order to it, not if it's real. No preacher can schedule the Holy Ghost; scarcely me. He will come, Sister Cosburg, all the same. The answer to that, is wait, and be ready. (He looks at Nancy.) As I am ready. For the Holy Ghost. For my little bride, and the joy of our union! As I have waited!
COLEMAN. Hold it, Waited how long? You got a growed up son.
Reverend Daddy. Well, sort of a growed up son.
NANCY. Coleman—
COLEMAN. How did you come by him? Santy Claus? Some-body knit him for you one day?
NANCY. Oh, my awful husband! I'm so sorry.
BUCKHORN. It's all right.
NANCY. No, sir. It's not.
COLEMAN. Sir? Sir, Nancy? You gonna call him sir when you get it the way you like it, and grab him by the—
NANCY. Throw him out! Just throw him out!
BUCKHORN. Now, hush! (Pause.) Throw him out? Young man out? Well, I'd like to. He attacks my church, and flaunts his carnal knowledge of my young bride in my face. I must confess, I am tempted. But friend, in forty-three years of Christian ministry, no human soul has ever been cast out of a church by me. (To Coleman, boldly.) Of course, there is a first time for everything!

CANFIELD. Come here, son, and sit down, for goodness sake. Nice people and good friends, you see how my client here, he has his problems.

HART. He just don't know what they are.

RUDD. Orn, ain't it the truth?

HART. Yep.

MRS. WALL. He likes playing bad boy in Sunday School.

That's all.

CANCER MAN. He's a good boy. Strong, and good, inside. I can see that.

CARL. (To Coleman.) If you could have seen her just once, you'd know what I mean. Thinking about her, you wouldn't get so mad all the time. She was so beautiful. I see her now, all the time, and I don't get so mad anymore. Don't you understand?

BONNIE. Carl. (She moves him away from Coleman, gently)

OBY. Daddy?

BUCKHORN. Yes, son?

OBY. I need to testify. It's about my new job.

BUCKHORN. Do you have to, right now?

OBY. I'd like to, yes, sir.

BUCKHORN. Well, all right. Make it short.

OBY. Friends, I want to tell you something about the religious nature of bowling. I don't know if you've ever seen the quality of hardwood they have now in a first class bowling alley. It's beautiful. That clear, pure wood, with just the balls rolling down, rolling down. And a clean strike, well, it's heaven. I got a steady job today.

Manager, now of the sixteen lane Bowl-O-Rama Bowling Parlour, off Highway 43, just out of Gardensburg. It's good Christian recreation, for the Glory of God and the health of your bodies, and you can get there easy from here. I hope you'll all come, and enjoy it,
like I do. Praise God. Thank you, Daddy. (He sits.)
BUCKHORN. Did you say manager?
OBY. Yes, sir!
BUCKHORN. Well, congratulations. But how can you be in church twice a week, too?
OBY. The owners agreed to that. I don’t know how to explain it, but they just go together, Jesus and bowling.
COLEMAN. (Shaking his head.) I told you somebody knitted him one day. And that is the man stole my wife for his Daddy. You ain’t got a Momma around for me anywhere, have you?
OBY. Now, don’t you talk about my Momma!
COLEMAN. Why not? She can’t talk for herself, evidently. What happened to her?
OBY. She died.
COLEMAN. Of confusion?
OBY. Of distemper! When I was the littlest boy. After the other one, and before—
BUCKHORN. Son!
OBY. Sir?
BUCKHORN. No need to go into all that.
COLEMAN. Whoa! After the other one? Other what?
OBY. Wife, of course. Daddy’s first. Before my Momma.
BUCKHORN. Son—
COLEMAN. And when she died, what? How many more?
BUCKHORN. There is no need at this time to go into—uh—these details!
COLEMAN. Oh, no? Just how many wives you had, Reverend Daddy?
BUCKHORN. That is none of your business!
COLEMAN. How many, Nancy? Do you know?
NANCY. (Shaken) I thought I did.
COLEMAN. Well, let’s see. One before Oby’s Ma, plus Oby’s Ma, that’s two. One after that, that’s three. Three? (No answer.)
Four? (No answer. Coleman beams.) Five? (Coleman raises his arms.)
Glory to God. Six?
BUCKHORN. (With dignity.) Taken by the Lord.

38
OBY. Except the fifth. She ran off, taken by Satan!
BUCKHORN. Hush!
NANCY. (Weakly.) Six?
COLEMAN. Didn’t he tell you that?
NANCY. Only about — two.
BUCKHORN. I would have, little bride. You know that.
COLEMAN. Sure. In the kitchen, after the wedding, while she’s chopping wood, cooking hot bread, and washing babies. (Pause.) Babies. — to whom.
OBY. (Grinning.) Been plenty of them.
BUCKHORN. Son!
COLEMAN. How many is plenty? How many children you got, Daddy?
BUCKHORN. My offspring number seventeen children, thirty-one grandchildren, and — a number of great-grandchildren.
COLEMAN. And six mommas in the cemetery, all wore out. Nancy, I know you wanted babies, but are you ready for this?
BUCKHORN. Little bride, you know I will treat you gently.
NANCY. (Stunned.) Six? I’m number seven?
BONNIE. Nancy, never you mind that. He is a good man. Life is hard for women, sometimes, yes. But it is better to marry. It is always better to marry.
NANCY. (Hushed.) But you never did.
BONNIE. Oh, yes, I did. But it took me too long, you see, to sort out my — carnal nature. I didn’t know what I was doing. (She looks at the rest, and testifies.) I had it all mixed up with everything else. You see, there was always my sister, Joanna. She was the real beauty. Not me. Now, Joanna never liked going to church. She said it was dull. So I did. I went to church all the time. And if any good Christian boy asked for it, up went my skirts for him every time. I did enjoy it. I always liked an enthusiastic Christian boy. And when Joanna would say, “Isn’t church dull?” I’d say, “Yes, Joanna. Of course, Joanna.” (She smiles, and remembers her sister.) Yes, Joanna. Of course, Joanna. But then, Joanna got married, to a boy going to be a doctor, and moved away, and there I was, still in church, still giving it out,
and giving it out, until nobody wanted it. The boys became men, and there I was, still in church, dressed like a little girl, ready to do anything anybody wanted. But the men got tired of me. So I found me another church, and another, and sooner or later, every church I joined, I had to leave. Everybody lost their enthusiasm with me, even the plumber husband I finally got, wherever he is now. And Joann married, her children growing up, telling me not to be such a churchmouse. (Pause.) Yes, Joann. Of course, Joann. (Smiles.) Well, I won’t tell a lie. I’ll still give it away, to a good enthusiastic boy. But I found something better than that, finally. A real church. Stronger than anything. That’s what I wanted to tell Joann. What happens here. (To Nancy.) You’re still so young, Mrs. (She turns away. Canfield jumps up.)

CANFIELD. That was deeply moving. I have a daughter I wish had half your sense.

BONNIE. Thank you. What’s your daughter’s name?

CANFIELD. Hester.

BONNIE. That’s a pretty name. Is she a pretty girl?

CANFIELD. She used to be. I used to be a smart looker myself.

BONNIE. I bet you did.

CANFIELD. Then I got my heart condition. Stopped shaving every day, and shining my shoes, after that. One thing led to another. Now I look like this.

BONNIE. You look all right now. You just need sprucing up a little bit. Somebody to wash a shirt for you now and then. Having a heart condition don’t mean you can’t use it anymore. You can still praise God, and have good times, with new friends.

CANFIELD. I think you’re right! Come sit by me. (She does.)

COLEMAN. Canfield, don’t forget about my divorce!

CANFIELD. Later. We’re in church.

COLEMAN. Church, hell. It’s a sideshow! (To Buckhorn.) When are you going to pull out them snakes?

BUCKHORN. That’s not for us to say.

COLEMAN. Well, who, then?

BUCKHORN. The Holy Ghost, Mr. Shedman. (Bothered, Ori...
Hart gets up and goes to Coleman.

HART. I want to tell this boy. Sonny, what you think you are, you ain't. I was that. Ain't that right, Howard?

RUDD. Yep.

HART. And if it hadn't been for this man, and these people, I would have — and I still get like that, when I see some young — ah, yet if I couldn't come here, I'd — ah. Howard! (He turns to Rudd, who grips him firmly by the shoulders. They embrace.)

RUDD. It's all right, Orin. It ain't going to happen. (He comforts him. Everybody is respectfully silent, except Coleman.)

COLEMAN. Fags, by god. Queers.

C ANFIELD. Well, son, so what?

COLEMAN. But what are they doing in church? Why ain't they in a bus station somewheres?

C ANFIELD. (To Bonnie.) What he don't know would fill a book.

BONNIE. Amen.

C ANFIELD. Lots of men love another man, somewhere along the line. I did, once. It didn't hurt nobody.

COLEMAN. Canfield? You?

C ANFIELD. Praise God, son. Shut up and listen. (Carl Specter who has been watching Coleman and trying to explain something to him, now erupts.)

C AR L. Yes, praise God! Praise God!! (He stands, shaking, staring at Coleman.)

B ONNIE. (Softly.) Oh, Carl.

B UCH HORN. (Quietly.) Let him be. (Carl has his say. Billy perhaps picks out simple chords on his guitar, for awhile.)

C AR L. I tell you again, she come into my life so easy, just like the sun shining down through some cloudy day, making this world bright, that was always dark, for me. From nowhere, out of that City Dump where I found her there in the shoe box with all her dead brothers and sisters around her, and I took her home, and fed her the milk with a hospital glass straw, and she lived. I brought her up. I come to believe there was great blood in her. I trained her. I entered her in the County Puppy Stakes, and she won. Then, in a
year, the State Wide Field Trial. Oh, god, could she hunt. They braced her with a lemon-eyed pointer. Right off, he found a covey. But the quail commenced to walk on him. He didn’t know what to do. Like a flash, she ran the absolute otherway. *What kind of bird dog is that, Carl?* all the rich hunters said, big sportsmen, in their jackets and shiny boots. But I had faith. In just a minute, back she came a-running, having circled them birds in the joy of her smart mind. She boxed them quail in between her and that pointer. The judges said, *She has it, Carl,* and I flushed the quail and shot, and got one, and she retrieved it so daintly, set it in my hand with not one feather missing. Looking up into my eyes, saying, *Well, Carl, I guess we showed them this time,* we saying, *Yes, my honey bee, I think we did.* Off she ran to the hunt again, and she won first place, the blue ribbon and the silver cup, and they poisoned her that night. (*Billy stops playing.*) Fed her ground-up glass in hamburger meat. All night long, she couldn’t even lie down. I was on my knees with her, every time she heaved and coughed. My baby. And she died. Why did they do that? We never done them hunters no harm. I didn’t think there could be anything else for me, but her. (*He nods at Coleman.*) I filled up with hate. Like you, Orin Hart brought me here. Nothing happened the first time, or the second, or the third. But then, I don’t remember just when, I saw her again. She come right in that door, looking for me. And when we pray to Jesus, and the serpents are taken up, she’s here. And so I live again, in the blood of Jesus, who conquers hateful men, and gave me back my darling in this church. I praise his name forever, Glory to him, for his goodness to me. (*Carl stands nodding at Coleman. There is a pause. Nobody speaks.*) Now I got to go outside, to the bathroom. Excuse me. (*He exits.*)

NANCY. Don’t you see, Coleman? Don’t you see?

COLEMAN. Yes, I see. And I ask you all, calm and sensible. *Is that man crazy, or is he not?*

NANCY. Not, Coleman, not!

CANNFIELD. Depends, son. Depends.

COLEMAN. He’s a lunatic. And you all know it.

CANCER MAN. Son, say you were him. Your dog you loved like

* IF COLEMAN WAS MOVED BY CARL’S SPEECH HE WOULD PROBABLY USE HUMOR TO DEFLECT THE SITUATION.
that, died like that. What would you do?
COLEMAN. I wouldn’t go to Jesus. I’d find out who poisoned my
dog, and my Daddy and I, we’d break his neck.
CANCER MAN. I thought you said your father was dead,
son.
COLEMAN. Yes, he is. I mean, I’d find out and I’d break his
neck.
CANCER MAN. Would that help anything?
COLEMAN. Sure, Me.
CANCER MAN. You just can’t get it, can you?
CANFIELD. Maybe I can. (To Buckhorn) May I?
BUCKHORN. Yes.
CANFIELD. Client, the man didn’t do what you’d want to do.
Does that mean he’s crazy?
COLEMAN. No.
CANFIELD. He came to church instead. Does that mean
he’s crazy?
COLEMAN. No.
CANFIELD. He believes he found his dog again.
COLEMAN. That means he’s crazy!
CANFIELD. It also means there is maybe one man less in the
world with a broken neck! Who’s crazy?
COLEMAN. You are, lawyer, if you think—
CANFIELD. Depends, depends! (Orin Hart moves in on Cole-
man, trembling with the rage that is always with him.)
HART. Broken necks, is it? That what you want?
COLEMAN. Look, don’t you mess with me.
BUCKHORN. Go ahead, Mr. Hart. Mess with him. What the
hell.
HART. (Pointing at Rudd.) See that man? We met fourteen years
ago, working the state roads. Mean, both of us. Hungover every
morning, standing around the fires, trying to get warm. First time I
saw him, I said, “Listen, mister, you going to hog all that fire, or am
I going to put you in it?”
RUDD. I said, “Just try it, mister. They’ll put us both out.”
HART. We didn’t fight each other. We got drunk that night.
RUDD. And took on four paratroopers.
HART. Howard was already married. I was too, soon after that.
RUDD. Orin had trouble with May, right off. He wasn’t drinking for fun no more. I’d get him home to her.
HART. And I did the same for Howard. One time Edna left him, and took their little girl Jean with her. Howard clamped a razor blade in a pair of pliers, and tried to cut his throat.
RUDD. No, let’s skip that, Orin.
HART. Razor in one hand, goodbye letter in the other. But he was drunk and crying. All he did was make a mess of his throat. See the scars?
RUDD. Orin, I said shut up about this!
HART. No, Howard, I’m going to tell him. And you ain’t going to stop me. Because without me, you’d have died.
RUDD. (Sighs.) Yep.
HART. I was the one who found him, wanting to die, but couldn’t. Suicide. I got him to the hospital. I was cool and calm. But in other times, in my domestic torments, sonny boy, it was Howard come to get me, me screaming, wanting to break to pieces any man come near me, and Howard cool and calm, the only man alive could take me home.
RUDD. Bad ass fighting men. Kill the world.
HART. Fighting all the time, since I was a boy. When I had my family around me, and Howard to hold me back, I managed. Then infernal things happened to me.
RUDD. His boy Wayne William got sick and died. His wife couldn’t stop drinking no more than he could. He was under the wheel.
HART. There was a man at the plant, named Jackson. He crossed me. I couldn’t stop thinking about him. I knowed I was going to kill him.
RUDD. I knew it, too.
HART. I took to hounding the man.
RUDD. I said, “Orin, don’t do it.”
HART. I said, "You try to stop me, I'll kill you, too." You see, bad ass? What we are from the beginning, it grows in us. It was growing in me. What I wanted all my life. A dead man. I commenced carrying the gun.

RUDD. I couldn't help him! I didn't know what to do!

HART. I showed Jackson the gun. He said, "Why are you doing this to me?" I said, "I don't know. I'm just going to kill you."

RUDD. I had to do something. I got him drunk that night, and stole his gun. I said, "All right. If it's dead men you want, you'll have two of them. Me and you. Because I can't live without you, Orin."

HART. I said, "Why, you fool."

RUDD. I said, "Move. I heard about a place where crazy people play with death, and rattlesnakes. If that's what you want, we'll do it there."

HART. He marched me in this room under my own gun, hidden in his pocket. I thought no other man could yell and scream like me. But when the serpents appeared, I'd never seen nothing like it. And the worship. I remembered my wife and children still alive. I thought about all the men I wanted to kill. And I said, "Oh, this torment will end, or I will!" In the music and the singing, I said, "Give it to me! Jesus Christ, you know my evil heart. Give me that snake, you know I want it!" And I took one up. I held my death here, in these hands. And of all the people in the world that night, the Lord appointed Orin Hart.

RUDD. And Howard Rudd. You see, bad ass? (They stare at Coleman, who stares back, unmoved.)

COLEMAN. Sure. I see Orin Hart and Howard Rudd. Ain't they pretty?

RUDD. What the hell you mean?

COLEMAN. I'll tell you. Fruits ain't always like girls. They can look like truck drivers, and be queer, my Daddy always said. I don't care about your damn story. You're fags, using a church to fuck each other. It wasn't no Holy Ghost that annointed you, it was—

HART. (Enraged) Son, if you want to get yourself cold cocked, that man or me, either one—
COLEMAN. (Furious) One at a time, or both together! Come on!
NANCY. Coleman, don't! Stop him!
BUCKHORN. Let them alone. (Hart moves slowly towards Coleman. Coleman faces Hart. He shoos him.)

COLEMAN. Come on, queer! I'll bust open your god damned —
(Hart seizes him swiftly, spins him around, holds him up in the air, arms crushing his chest. Coleman is a baby in his arms. Hart lays him on the floor, and holds him down.)

HART. Don't mock the Holy Ghost, bad ass!
RUDD. Bad ass, when we come in here, we felt the power! Not no foolishness with lead pipes and guns, not no beating and drinking and murder and vice, but the power! I tell you, I seen that roof up there split apart! My mouth dried up. My heart stopped. Down from heaven come the Holy Ghost and I mean he moved on us! That was the power! And we loved each other, freely, and said we didn't want to die. Because for the first time in all our miserable lives, we knew what a victory was!

HART. Saved! SAVED! Understand, bad ass? (They get up, leaving Coleman on the floor.) We had something new to think about.
RUDD. Glory to God. (They each stamp a boot by Coleman's head. Nancy rushes to Coleman.)

NANCY. Are you all right? Did they hurt you?
COLEMAN. (Hurt) I'm all right. (He gets up. Nancy tries to help him.)

NANCY. Do you need—

COLEMAN. (Shakes her off.) I'm all right! (He stands facing them all. Re-enter Carl.) So beat me up. I still say this is a sideshow. And I want my legal rights. (Shaken) I won't be put off by lunatics in a circus!

BUCKHORN. Friend, we've all lost our tempers with you tonight. We won't do it again. But after what you've heard, how can you call this a circus?

COLEMAN. (Almost crying) Because you're fakes. My Daddy would know. What you do with them snakes is a lie. Unless you want somebody to get bit, and die. You drug them, or something.
And then you go crazy in here.

BONNIE. *(Terribly upset.)* Want somebody to die? Did you say—

BUCKHORN. Just a minute. *(He slowly takes out a faded newspaper clipping from his pocket. He opens it and smooths it reverently, and shows it to Coleman.)* The white haired man on the floor was named George Hensley. In nineteen hundred and nine, on White Oak Mountain, he was the first to read in the Bible, "They shall take up serpents," and then go out and do it. He founded the Dolley Pond Church of God, With Signs Following, in Tennessee. He founded this church, in nineteen forty-eight. Yes, people have died. Laws were passed. And we are still here.

BONNIE. Oh, god! Don't I know that!

BUCKHORN. Tell him, Bonnie, if you want to!

BONNIE. Joann's happiness didn't last. My sister got desperate, too, just like the rest of us. I brought her here. I told her not to move without the power. But she did. She cried out and grabbed a snake and he bit her. She stood right here, his fangs in her arm, hanging from her. She said she'd never go to a hospital. Her faith in Jesus Christ would save her life. She would trust in Him. We prayed with her. She commenced to swell. Her color changed. We made her go to the hospital. But that night, Jesus took her. *(She weeps.)* She's with Him now, in heaven. Awful things were said about me. My own family tried to have me arrested. But I'm still here. I still worship in this church! *(She weeps.)* Some people say I killed my own sister! It's not so! I brought her to God! I brought her to God! *(She is touched by Canfield, and held and comforted by him.)*

BUCKHORN. We are persecuted. We are against man's law. George Hensley, who led us to his church finally died, and of snakebite. But he'd been bit and lived over four hundred times! *(Passionately.)* You don't believe it? All right, don't! Lots of people like you say we're crazy, to need this worship this strong this bad! But we do! That is our nature! The Lord Jesus understood us, and in his own sacred word, he told us what to do. *(He points to the altar.)* You see that jar? On the altar, by the cross. That is strychnine poison. If your faith in Jesus Christ is strong enough, you can drink
that, and live. That's what the Bible says. You can walk through
fire, and not be harmed. That's what the Bible says. You can take
up serpents, and not be harmed. That's what the Bible says, and
that's what we believe, whether you do or not! Stay here, if you
want. But don't let me hear you say anything more about a circus!
(Buckhorn mops his brow.) Mrs. Wall. Give us a hymn, in the name
of the Lord. Something quiet. To calm us down. And prepare us for
the worship, which I am not holding up no longer. Little bride, I
can see you wavering in the faith. Your husband has touched you
hard, and filled you with doubt. I never said life with a servant of
God is easy. I said it is life. You make up your mind about me and
about your husband, and do it now. (He turns to her and
Coleman and Obby. The congregation gathers around Buckhorn and Mrs.
Wall. They chat quietly, and then sing a gentle hymn.)
OBY. (To Nancy.) You're still worried by your husband, aren't
you?
NANCY. (Miserable.) Yes.
OBY. Well, talk to him. Maybe you best think again. (He moves
away, to the others. Coleman and Nancy are left alone.)
COLEMAN. It wasn't just that night, or that man.
NANCY. No.
COLEMAN. When did you decide to leave me? (He moves close to
her. She moves back.) I won't touch you.
NANCY. I decided lots of times. One night, you hit me.
COLEMAN. I'll never do it again.
NANCY. That's what you said then. And you stuck a little
snapshot of me in the frame of that big picture of your momma and
daddy and said, see, I love you.
COLEMAN. Well, I did.
NANCY. But I can't live in no picture frame of your momma and
daddy! If I'm going to be put in a coffin like that, I want my own
children to do it!
COLEMAN. I never said we wouldn't have children.
NANCY. You didn't have to. It was plain enough. (The congre-
gation sings softly. They sing hymns like "What a Friend We Have In
Jesus” and “In The Garden,” hymns old, familiar and quietly passionate, while Coleman and Nancy have it out.)

Coleman. I can see why you left me. I can see why you’re here. But this crazy religion is a lie, Nancy. It just ain’t true.

Nancy. How can you tell?

Coleman. Because I won’t lie to myself! With everything else wrong about him, my Daddy taught me to see life as it is! And it is mostly god-awful hard! That’s the truth. Never mind snakes and Jesus. We just have to grow up, and grit our teeth, and face it!

Nancy. Without nothing? No love, no children, nothing?

Coleman. We could have that, woman, if you’d just shut up about it!

Nancy. And that your Daddy taught you! Shut up, woman! When are you going to learn something for yourself?

Coleman. All right. Here I am. There they are. What is wrong about me, without something just as wrong about them?

Nancy. You drink whiskey and beer.

Coleman. Yes. But I don’t see dead dogs or roofs splitting open.

Nancy. You curse all the time.

Coleman. Yes. But I don’t whine, or cry, or beg help from Jesus, like a coward.

Nancy. You hate me.

Coleman. No, I don’t!

Nancy. And hate yourself!

Coleman. All right. Sometimes. And I work and slave at that miserable fish farm my Daddy left me, that I’m scared to leave. I admit that.

Nancy. And it’s work, drink, fish, drink, come home, drink, hit me, drink, and try to make love. That’s what you call facing life?

Coleman. It’s honest! (Shaken.) Life is hard!

Nancy. Too hard for me, with you. It’s not that I didn’t come to care for you. I did.

Coleman. Do you now?

* Repressed issues of anger at his father yet he continues to defend him. Coleman knows his father is responsible for making him this way but will not accept the responsibility of admitting he is wrong. Repeating patterns!
NANCY. (A great sigh) Oh, I don’t know. I thought I’d just walk out of my Momma and Daddy’s house and into my husband’s house, and have his babies, and it would all be like it was again. And instead of my sisters and brothers and Momma and Daddy, there would be my children and my husband, all around the fire, saying, “We love you, Momma. Welcome home.” But what a dream. (She smiles wanly at him.) So I picked my husband — you are right about that Sunday School picnic, Coleman — it was a trap I laid for you with my perfume and lace. You walked in it just like a rabbit, and I kicked it shut. But then, my husband was a man with his dreams, too, full of thorns, and so different from mine. So I cried. And this big angel appeared named Oby, and he led me to Reverend Buckhorn, who made me feel safe at home again, with him, and the church, and the serpents. So I trusted again. Most of the time.

(Pause.) Six wives? (Pause. Doubtfully.) I’ve learned a lot. I think.

COLEMAN. Nancy, I got you into this. I’ll get you out. You can’t marry that old man. You know what he is now. How many times you seen an old buzzard like that, wearing out his wives? He’ll work you to death. I can’t let that happen to you. Come home.

NANCY. What?

COLEMAN. We’ll talk. I promise I’ll never hit you again. Never.

NANCY. What about your divorce?

COLEMAN. We’ll talk about it first. Sort it out, like Canfield says. I’ll listen to everything you have to say.

NANCY. Coleman, you won’t. — Cut her off.

COLEMAN. Everything you say, I’ll treat you kindly, and gentle. I’ll be a good husband. I won’t drink. I won’t swear. I’ll try to quit the fish farm, and get another job. What else? I might even take you to church.

NANCY. What? (Behind them, the congregation has stopped singing, and has been listening to them.)


He never actually wanted a divorce. He wanted his wayward life back. Coleman uses fear and self-pity to make Nancy see the error of her ways.

Coleman didn’t really care to lose Nancy. He is just pissed that she ran off with another man.
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
CONGREGATION. Amen! Amen, brother! Praise the Lord!!
(Coleman wheels about. He sees they have all been listening to him.)

COLEMAN. (Emerged.) What the hell do you mean, listening in
on us? I ain’t praying in this place! I’m trying to talk to my god
damn stupid wife!! (And he hits her. Nancy sprawls onto the floor, and
Coleman leaps after her.) Ah, Nancy! (Nancy holds up her hand, keep-
ing both Coleman and the people away from her.)

NANCY. See, honey? What would be different? (She gets up by
herself.) You can have the furniture. I owe you a pick-up truck.
Goodbye, Coleman. (She moves away. Coleman stands shaking. Carl
approaches him.)

CARL. Hit me. Make you feel better.

COLEMAN. (Choking.) I don’t hit lunatics.

CARL. Just your wife. You think I’m crazy. But I heard you talk-
ing about your Daddy. I understand.

COLEMAN. (Bitterly.) Oh, yes? Who was yours?

CARL. God is my father. Everybody’s here, but yours. He is
Jesus’s father, too, and His right arm is the Holy Ghost. You’re still
praying to your mortal father, who’s dead. That’s bad. (He holds
open his arms.) I’m crazy. Hit me. (The people call Carl back. Canfield
approaches Coleman.)

CANFIELD. Your lawyer can’t help you. He’s converted. To
find friends like this at my time of life and in the condition of my
heart, is not something I’m going to hesitate about. (He turns to
Bonnie.) I’m leaving you, client. You can prove desertion now, by
your wife and your lawyer. I wish — well, good luck. (Canfield
approaches Coleman.)

CANCER MAN. They cut me to pieces. I’ll be dead, soon, like
your daddy. That’s all right. You don’t have to worry about that.
(Coleman breaks. He sobs, grabs a box or a chair, and sobbing, at the
same time filled with black rages, smashes it. He cries out and sobs:
“Mama! Daddy!” It is useless. He kneels amid his little ruin, trembling
and weeping.)

BUCKHORN. Yes. We wish we could tell you what to do. We
can’t. We’re in this trouble, too, and have to do for ourselves the

* Coleman’s Parents Died Before He
Could Tell Them How He Feels.
best we can. (He turns to the congregation.) Preachers talk. What can a preacher tell a soul suffering like that? What can they tell any of us? Nothing. We know it is hopeless. (He begins his service.) All we can do is worship. All we can do is turn to the Lord. Who understood us. Because when He rose up into heaven, He spoke, to them who believed in Him, to them He left behind. We turn to those words! What are they, friends? Read me the words of Jesus Christ! (Virgil Tides goes to the lectern. He reads from a Bible.)

VIRGIL. The Book of Mark. Chapter 16, verses 17 and 18. "And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils."

ALL. (Softly) Amen.

VIRGIL. "They shall speak with new tongues — "

ALL. (Stronger.) Amen!

VIRGIL. "They shall take up serpents — "

ALL. Amen! Glory to God!

VIRGIL. "And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them — "

ALL. No! Never! Amen!

VIRGIL. "They shall lay hands upon the sick — "

ALL. Amen! Praise God!

VIRGIL. "And they shall recover!"

ALL. Praise God! Amen! Glory to God! Praise the Lord! (From reading the Bible, Virgil in a furious rapture begins to speak in tongues. The strange syllables are pure emotion, erupting from him with great force, twisting his body.)

VIRGIL. Ah! Ah! Sha — gon — du — la! Sha — gon — du —

la! Ma — shall — a hon — du — lah! Gos — la! Gos — la!

(Possessed, Virgil speaks in tongues. He goes to the boxes of rattlesnakes, and opens one of them. We hear the snakes rattling. Virgil takes one out and holds it up. [The snakes should be mimed, not real.] He stares at it, crying out in tongues.) Ah — gall — a sonda! Ah — gall — a sonda! Eee — ma — nona! Eee — ma — nona! La — gall — la — sa! La —

gall — la sa!!! (He puts the snake back in the box. He collapses exhausted at Buckhorn's feet.)

BUCKHORN. I remember! I thought I would die. But the
heavens came open, and wave after wave of God's love broke over me! I held the serpent, and I spoke in tongues! (They embrace.)
God bless you, Virgil! God bless you, son! (Cancer Man is at the boxes. He takes out a serpent. He holds it up high, and approaches Coleman.)
CANCER MAN. You see! I'm still alive! They said my life was over! But I feel the power of the Lord. I hold the serpent! I defeat him! God gives me this victory! I feel wonderful! (He holds the snake out to Coleman.) And see. The snake is calm. (He turns, puts it back in the box. Nancy moves away from everyone. The people begin to sing, "Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus").
ALL. (Singing.)
Stand up, Stand up for Jesus
Ye soldiers of the cross,
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss!

From victory unto victory,
In this His glorious day,
You that are men now serve—
(Billy Boggs rips out a discordant chord on his guitar, and cries out. The singing stops. Billy goes to Coleman. He stares at him hard.)
BILLY. I didn't start out this way! You ain't the only one! I don't want my wife! I don't want my baby! That's the truth! You hear that, Muriel?
MURIEL. Yes. I do.
BILLY. All I meant to do was work in town during the day and play my guitar here at night. That's why I come. Then I met Muriel here. We got in trouble. I did what I thought was right. We got married. But it's not right now! (He shakes with rage.) I'm trapped! I can't stand it! Sometimes I hate her! Sometimes I hate — ah, how can I do that! I wouldn't hurt my own child!!! (The people move aside for him. He approaches the boxes.) Oh, god, they scare me.
BUCKHORN. Billy, you don't reach in every time. You wait for the Lord.
BILLY. I can be free. Lord Jesus, anoint me. Give me the power.
(He takes a deep breath.) I believe, I'm not afraid. (A hideous rattle. He takes out a huge rattlesnake. He holds it directly in front of his face.) Strike. Kill me, if you can. (He holds the snake, shuddering with terror.)

ALL. Praise God! Glory to God, Billy!
BILLY. There! There! Oh, Holy Ghost! (He puts the snake back in the box, and turns to his wife.)
MURIEL. God bless you, Billy. (They move aside together, with the baby, Coleman gets up.)
COLEMAN. Get out of my way! Get out of my way!
NANCY. No, Coleman! No!
BUCKHORN. There's death in that box!
HART. You'll risk your life!
RUDD. You'll put it on the line!
CANCER MAN. If you believe, you'll live!
BUCKHORN. But if you don't, you can die! Right here. (At the boxes, Coleman spreads wide his arms.)
COLEMAN. Then I'll die! Right here! (He reaches down into the boxes. He pulls out two rattlesnakes, and holds them up. They rattle loudly. He steps forward, staring at them, in stark terror. He turns about, holding them. Convulsions rack him. But when he turns to us again, his face is amazed. He looks up, past the snakes. Coleman cries out. He is converted.)
BUCKHORN. Praise the Lord! He made us! We are His! (The people now begin to erupt within themselves. Some are seized by spasms, some shaken by convulsions, some sing, some dance.) People say we're crazy! People say Jesus never meant us to do what he said! And we say, what do you know about Jesus and his ways! Nothing! Nothing! (Mrs. Wall has a snake in her hands. She and Bonnie face the terrified, but thrilled, Lorena.)
MRS. WALL. Sister!
LORENA. Yes, sister?
MRS. WALL. (To Bonnie.) Tell her! Tell her!
BONNIE. The first time I seen the snakes, I nearly died. I couldn't run. I couldn't move. I stood there, praying. Then the Holy Ghost gave me the power!
LORENA. What's it like? I want to know.
BONNIE. Your hands get numb.
LORENA. Yes?
BONNIE. Then they get cold.
LORENA. Yes?
BONNIE. Then they begin to itch!
LORENA. Oh, yes! I never felt like this before!
MRS. WALL. Do your hands itch now, sister?
LORENA. They do!
BONNIE. Then, if you have the power, grab him.
MRS. WALL. It's the best feeling you'll ever have!
LORENA. Give it to me! Give it — (They hand her a huge rattlesnake. All three hold it. They scream with pleasure.)
LORENA, BONNIE & MRS. WALL. Ah! Ah! AHHH!!! O, God in heaven! O, God in heaven!!! (Everyone now, except Nancy, handles serpents. She sits to one side, silent amid the singing and the shouting. The service reaches its climax. People move about, stamping and shaking the church. Some cry. Some laugh. Some scream and beat the floor. Some dance. Some sing. Some hold up the jar of poison. Some play with fire. They all release to their Lord the tensions and the sorrows of their lives, moving about as if in some tremendous storm. Then they stop. A light shines down on the threadbare altar cloth. A different music is heard: an organ, or perhaps some strange cosmic sound. They all simply look up, stilled, and for a moment, their great God himself comes into their church, and into them. For an instant, they are blessed, and delivered. Then the music becomes again what it was and they revert slowly back to their dancing and singing. Slowly, it subsides. Slowly, the snakes are put back in the boxes. The sobbing, the convulsions, the laughter, the singing and the music stop. They are all exhausted. Silence. Long pause. In a corner, by himself, Cancer Man sits, and kneels. Coleman kneels by Cancer Man. He grips his hand, hard.)

COLEMAN. It's eating on you, ain't it? And then drugs? (Cancer Man nods.) I can tell. Hang on to me. (Cancer Man nods.) You ever fish? (Cancer Man nods again, surprised.) Want to again. With me? I know where to find them. (Cancer Man nods.) Then we'll go. Together. (Coleman stands. He, Nancy and Buckhorn look at each...
other.)
BUCKHORN. Well, young man?
COLEMAN. I want to join the church. Please take me. Don't send me away. (He sinks to his knees before Buckhorn.)
BUCKHORN. Well, little bride?
NANCY. I'm leaving, I don't want to be a child no more. And my babies will just have to wait awhile. (She kisses Buckhorn on the cheek.) I do thank you. (She looks at the congregation.) All of you. I'll come to church again, some day. (She looks at Coleman, on his knees. She touches him, gently.) Good luck, Coleman. (Exit Nancy. Buckhorn stares after her, then at Coleman. He shakes his head.)
BUCKHORN. She goes. You stay. (Sighs.) Blessed be the name of the Lord. (Coleman weeps quietly. All the people watch. Muriel, sitting with her baby, begins to sing, alone.)
MURIEL. (Singing.)
There is a wideness to God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea,
There is a strangeness to God's blessing,
Like the thrill of eternity.

Jesus defend us, O sweet mercy send us,
O angels attend us with unchanging love,
Jesus defend us and sweet mercy send us,
And angels attends us from heaven above.

CURTAIN
PROPERTY PLOT

Bible for Nancy
Pint bottle cheap whiskey for Canfield
Teacups, teapot, small kerosene stove
Wooden boxes, very sturdy
Guitar for Billy
Baby wrapped in blankets for Muriel
Bucket for collection plate
Metal pipe for Oby
Small wooden cross for altar
Mason jar of whitish liquid for altar
Faded newspaper clipping for Buckhorn Sr.
Rubber snakes
Hymnals, piano, fans, for the church
Various musical instruments for those who play them

COSTUMES

The plain clothes of Southern rural people.

MUSIC

The hymns used in the play may be found in any standard hymnal, with the exception of the last, which was put together by the playwright to end the play. It should be sung to the music for the Welsh hymn melody, Alleluia! Sing to Jesus.
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Please Note: Rehearsals are subject to change. Call Jenny if you have any questions about the schedule or your call time. We will do our best to respect your time so please arrive before your call so you are ready to work.
Holy Ghosts
by Romulus Linney
Directed by David W. Hoover

"...in forty-three years of Christian ministry, no human soul has ever been cast out of a church by me. Of course, there is a first time for everything."

Feb. 7-11, 7:30 PM
Feb. 12, 2:30 PM

Robert E. Nims Theatre
UNO Performing Arts Center
$12 General Admission
$8 Stu., Sr., UNO Fac./Staff

For tickets please call 280-SHOW(7469)

Warning: Contains adult themes and language.
THEATRE UNO
University of New Orleans
2011-2012 SEASON

IS HE DEAD? by Mark Twain, adapted by David Ives
SEPT. 9-18
Directed by Bess Broach
Robert E. Nims Theatre

This is a joint production with acclaimed theatre company The NOLA Project and is sure to tickle your funny bone. This lovely period play of a painter faking his own death and assuming the role of his sister will delight you and reaffirm why Mark Twain is an American treasure!

NEW PLAY CELEBRATION*
*May contain material some audiences find objectionable.
NOV. 3-13
Robert E. Nims Theatre & The Lab Theatre

Theatre UNO continues its commitment to original work with this series of plays ranging from 10 minute play readings to fully mounted full-length productions. These plays are written, performed and directed by current students as well as our award winning graduates.

HOLY GHOSTS by Romulus Linney
FEB. 7-12
Directed by David W. Hoover
Robert E. Nims Theatre

This story of a young abusive husband setting out to retrieve his wife from a religious sect he perceives as destructive is sure to enthrall you. Written by a playwright of superior intellect, this play has been called, "an American gem cut out of the spirit of mountain people—funny and deeply moving."

A MAN OF NO IMPORTANCE
APRIL 17-22
Music by Stephen Flaherty, Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, Book by Terrence McNally
Director: Jeff Thompson
Robert E. Nims Theatre

Theatre UNO returns to its long tradition of producing during musical theatre! A Man of No Importance tells the story of Alfie Byrne, a bus driver in 1964 Dublin, whose heart holds secrets he can’t share with anyone but his imagined confidante, Oscar Wilde. Winner of the 2003 Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical, A Man of No Importance is a tender and beautifully woven tale of love, friendship and coming to terms with who we are.

Theatre UNO proudly presents
Holy Ghosts
by
Romulus Linney
Directed by
David W. Hoover

Scenic Design: Kevin Griffith
Costume Design: Lindy Bruns
Lighting Design: Diane K. Baas
Stage Management: Jenny Billot

February 7th—12th, 2012
Robert E. Nims Theatre
UNO Performing Arts Center

THANK YOU FOR COMING & ENJOY THE SHOW!!
Holy Ghosts

Nancy Shedman .................................. Caleigh Keith
Coleman Shedman .................................. P. J. McKinnel
Rogers Canfield ................................. Peter Gabb
Obediah Buckhorn, Jr. ............................... James Vitale
Virgil Tides ........................................ Bill Mader
Olin Hart ........................................ Justin Bupp
Howard Rudd ................................. Robert Faeto
Lorena Costburg .................................. Sarah Chatelein
Mrs. Wall ....................................... Jan Schuler
Meriel Boggs ..................................... Kaylin Hepting
Billy Boggs ....................................... Zach Rogers
Obediah Buckhorn, Sr. ............... Paxton H. McCaghren *
Carl Specter ........................................ Matthew Rigdon
Bonnie Bridge .................................. Brittny Nicole Garleped
Cancer Man ....................................... Mason Joiner

There will be one Twelve Minute Intermission

Meet the Cast

Caleigh Keith (Nancy) is excited to be working on UNO’s stage again with such a fun cast and crew. Caleigh is a candidate for an MFA in Theatrical Performance and she misses her home in the mountains of Virginia. Caleigh’s recent credits include: Chaos in Rainbow at Riverview Repertory Theatre, Judith in Hay Fever at UNO, and Laura in The Glass Menagerie at Le Poit.

P. J. McKinnel (Coleman) is a third-year MFA acting candidate at UNO. Recent credits: About Time (Dr. B) at UNO, The Glass Menagerie (Jim) at Le Poit, Goodnight, Moon (Bunny) at JPSAS, An Experiment with an Air Pump (Farwick/Tom) at UNO; Romeo and Juliet are Dead (Romeo) at UNO, Nine Ladies (Billy) at Le Poit, The Muir Man (Tommy Uggins) at T zrobić Summer Lyric, Our Town (Stage Manager) at UNO, All or Nothing (Lyle) at Hamlin Civic, Southern Rep, and Le Poit, Footloose (Ron) at JPSAS; and The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (Leaf Coneybeare) at Le Poit. Look for P.J. next in Jonathan in Tick, Tick...BOOM! at Café Istanbul in March. Thank you to David for this wonderful opportunity, Jenny B, and to CME for being the best scene partner, ever.

* In partial fulfillment for an MFA in Theatre Performance

"Appreciation to Actors Equity Association University of New Orleans Administration

President ...................................................... Dr. Peter Fox
Provost ............................................................ Dr. Lou Paradise
Dean, College of Liberal Arts .............................. Dr. Susan Krantz
Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts .................. Dr. Kevin Graves

UNO DEPARTMENT OF FILM THEATRE
& COMMUNICATION ARTS

Chair .................................................... David W. Hoover
Associate Chair ........................................ Debra Daniel

Faculty

Diane Beas ................................................. Roger Beresnevich
Laslo Fulop .............................................. Kevin Graves
Kevin Griffith ............................................. Eric Hansen
John McGowan-Hartmann ................................ Laura Medina
Robert Racine ............................................. H. Hampton Overton

Staff

Sara Fanelli .............................................. Petri Bahnchen

Graduate Assistants

Catherine Aman ........................................... Virgile Beddock
Justin Bupp ............................................... Mignon Charvet
Gwendolyn Granger ...................................... Eric Grenlioni
David LeBlanc ........................................... Paxton McCaghren
Timothy O’Neal .......................................... John-Aiden Patton
Dawn Spatz .............................................. Janet Stanton

NAST
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE

The University of New Orleans Department of Film, Theatre & Communication Arts is proud to announce our re-accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST). UNO was first accredited by NAST in 2000. We continue to be the only NAST-accredited program in the New Orleans metropolitan area.

NAST, founded in 1965, is an organization of higher education institutions (colleges, universities and conservatories). There are approximately 190 accredited institutional members. It establishes national standards for undergraduate and graduate degrees and other credentials.
Holy Ghosts

Peter Gabb (Canfield) has been active in local theater as well as TV and film shot in this area for over forty years in such varied roles as Morrie in Tuesdays with Morrie, and Ironman in A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. He is currently featured on a website, www.theatre1540.com, as Kid Tough, a paunchy ex-boxer. Peter is a graduate of UNO.

James Vitale (Obiediah) is a senior, double majoring at UNO in Business Administration and Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts. James was last seen on the UNO stage as Oliver in About Time. He is thrilled to be back on stage with such a great cast. James wants to thank his family for all their support especially Shelby for all her love! This will be James’ last performance as a UNO student. “The past three years were terrific, and Always Dream Big!”

Bill Mader (Virgil) is thrilled to be appearing in his first show at UNO! He is a transfer student from Delgado Community College where he was recently seen as Melchoir in Spring Awakening, and the title roles in Bat Boy: The Musical and Candida.

Justin Bupp (Orin) is a second-year MFA student from York, PA. He most recently appeared in An Autobiography About My Brother and Outside Stuka at UNO, Feltastic: An Oral Discussion as part of the 2011 New Orleans Fringe Festival, What the Butler Saw at the Millbrook Playhouse in Mill Hall, PA, and The Curse of the Starving Class at Lock Haven University (PA).

Robert Facio (Howard) is a second-year MFA student. Recently he could be seen on stage in Alan in The Boys in the Band, in last year’s Tennessee Williams Festival one-act contest winner An Autobiography About My Brother as Brian, and in the upcoming Sundance Film Festival movie Passed Out. Robert would like to thank his family, friends, and Hiko for their love and support.

Sarah Chatelain (Lorena) is very excited to be on stage and acting for the first time. She has been assistant stage manager for UNO’s productions of Our Town and An Experiment With An Airpump. She has stage managed UNO’s productions of Outside Stuka and About Time. She is thrilled to be working with the cast and crew of Holy Ghosts and is looking forward to this new experience. She would like to thank her friends and family for support.

Jan Schutler (Mrs. Wall) is thrilled to be in Holy Ghosts, as it is her first non-musical play! She spent thirty years as a chorus girl at Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre, Rivertown Repertory Theatre, and with the Jefferson Performing Arts Society. Her favorite role of late was as Eileen Toffelmeier, the piano player in TSLT’s The Music Man, because she got to have David Hoover as a romantic interest and dance partner. Jan is the director of music at Methodist Church, and is also a Kindermaus Educator. She thanks her hubby Steve for being Mr. Mom so she can indulge her love of performing.
Holy Ghosts

Kyle Hopeing (Mark) is so excited to be in her first UNO play! She has been working behind the scenes for many years, working in almost every aspect of "technical" theater, but to actually be on stage against such a huge audience is quite a thrill. She also wants to work with such a talented set of individuals. Kyleh would like to give a big hug and thank you to the PTOA department, who has taken her in and treated her like family. She also thanks her family and friends for their endless love and support.

Zach Rogers (Billy) is an FTCA major in his final semester at UNO. He has enjoyed his journey, and now looks forward to what the future has in store. Previous credits: Our Town (Charles Webster) at UNO, Zombie Town (Darin Webber) at Le Chat Noir, The Four Curious by Doremus at La Chou Neer, An Experiment with an Air Pump (Shakespeare) at UNO, A Midsummer Night's Dream (Lysander) with the UNO Project, & He Dead? (Easter Alice) at UNO, Romeo and Juliet (Paris) with the NCLA Project.

Pastor H. McCaiguer (Obabie, Sr.) is an MFA student and is thrilled to be in his third UNO production this year and to be working with such a talented group of people. His professional credits include: Black to the Future: Mr. Frank in The Diary of Anne Frank, Tom in The Glass Menagerie, China in Little Shop of Horrors, Rocky in 42nd Street, Special, 1867 in Catch Me If You Can and others.

Matthew Ribeis (Carl) is a fourth-year Theatre student at UNO. His most recent performance was in the 80s in the Key of Transformers. The play was performed in a staged reading at the KDACT regional festival in Lake Charles, and for which he received an Irene Ryan nomination for acting. Some of his early UNO productions include Judson House: Our Town, The Night of the Iguana, & Mr. Dandy, and About Time. He would like to take this time to thank his family and friends for all their love and support.

Rochelle Nicole Gabe (Jennie) could not be more excited to be appearing on the University of New Orleans stage again. She was last seen as Rae in Adam Halse’s About Time. She has enjoyed working with such a wonderful cast, crew, and director. She would also like to thank her family for their love and support.

Mason Joub (Cancer Man) is a second-year film student at the University of New Orleans. This is his second production with Theatre UNO, following the 2011 Tennessee Williams Festival One Act Women, The Autobiography of My Brother. Many thanks to my family, friends, and the PTOA Department.
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Holy Ghosts

MEET THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Director .................................................. David W. Hoover
Stage Manager ........................................... Jennifer Billot
Scenic Design ............................................. Kevin Griffith
Lighting Design .......................................... Diane K. Baas
Assistant Stage Manager ................................. Kit Staabberger
Assistant Stage Manager ................................. Mark Griffin
Property Master .......................................... Anthonyka Ferdinand
Sound Design ............................................ Timothy O’Neal
Light Board Operator ................................. Asia Arthur
Sound Board Operator ................................. Rosa Yanceh
Run Crew ...................................................... Jeff McCormick
Poster Design ............................................ Mike Hurkins
Music Advisor ............................................. Jan Schluter
Sound Recording ......................................... Clayton Hunt

David W. Hoover (Director) David is the chair of the department of Film, Theater, and Communication Arts at the University of New Orleans. For the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival he has directed Alec Baldwin, Elizabeth Ashley, John Goodrich, Stephen Cambell, El Walker, and Anna Jaffe. In New Orleans he has acting/teaching work has been seen at La Fonda, Théâtre de l’Espace, Came, and the Summer Shakespeare Festival, Riverfront Rep, Le Chat Noir, Southern Rep, and Tulane Summer Lyric. He has worked at several other prestigious theatres that include The Guthrie, La Scala Theatre Center, American Northwest Theatre Company, Shakespeare Festival of Dallas, and The Lyrical. David is the recipient of the Big Easy, Marquis, Aubin, and Steele Scene Awards. Internationally he has been an adjudicator in London, Bologna at the Heineken de Fanzini en Paris and has taught extensively in Italy and Mexico. David received an Artist Fellowship award from the Louisiana Division of the Arts and is the recipient of UNO’s coveted Career Achievement Award for Excellence in Research presented by the Alumni Association. As an actor, he was last seen in Theatre 18 and IPAS’S acclaimed production of The Drowsy Chaperone.

Jennifer Billot (Stage Manager) Some of her credits include UNO’s On the Other Side, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, and Herdsmen are Dead. She is currently the resident Stage Manager at The Elm Theatre and has returned to UNO for her MFA. In 2003 she received a regional ACTF award for excellence in stage management. She thanks her amazing cast, crew, and David.
Holy Ghosts
PRODUCTION TEAM

Kevin Griffeth (Scenic Design) is an Associate Professor with UNO’s FTCA department. He has a BFA in Theatre with emphasis in Design from Arkansas State University and an MFA in Design and Theatre Technology from the University of Southern Mississippi. Kevin has designed professionally for regional theatre, dance, and opera. Recent design work includes scenery for The Glass Menagerie, Katrina’s Path, Metamorphoses, Verses from Jordan, Much Ado About Nothing, Woyzeck, and The Night of the Iguana.

Diane E. Baas (Lighting Design) is in her first year on the faculty at UNO as Technical Director and Lighting Designer. She holds a BFA in Lighting and Scene Design and a BA in Art History and Painting from Tulane University. In 2008, she received her MFA in Lighting Design from the University of Washington in Seattle. Some recent designs include The Drowsy Chaperone, Fettie Benno, The Sound of Music, and Opera in New Orleans and Emma, Ghost Writer, and The Clean House in her hometown of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.

Lindy Bruns (Costume Design) is a second year graduate student in the Costume Design program at UNO. Her recent costume design work at UNO includes About Time, Outside Sita, and Rosenkranz and Guildenstern are Dead. She would like to thank the cast and crew for making this show such an enjoyable experience. She would also like to thank her friends and family for all of their support.

Kit Stenheimer (Assistant Stage Manager) is in her second year as a theatre major. Recently she has stage managed Follatto: An Oral Discussion for New Orleans Fringe Festival, and An Autobiography About My Brother (initially at UNO’s New Play Festival), which, in the spring, will be her second time working at the Tennessee Williams’ New Orleans Literary Festival (he first having been last year’s The Glass Menagerie). She looks forward to stage managing A Man of No Importance next!

Mark Griffin (Assistant Stage Manager) is a sophomore FTCA student. He last worked as the assistant stage manager for An Autobiography About My Brother. He is incredibly excited for audience members to see all the hard work the cast and crew have been putting into Holy Ghosts. Mark would like to thank his fellow crew and cast members for creating an enjoyable work environment and his family and friends for believing in him.

Holy Ghosts
Production Team

Anthonyka Ferdinand (Properties Master) is a UNO student pursuing a degree in theatre design. Previously a student of Southeastern Louisiana, Anthonyka has found an interest in theatre design. She is currently working as a shop assistant in UNO’s scene shop. She hopes to gain insight into the different aspects of scene design by being a part of Holy Ghosts and looks forward to working with the cast and crew.

Timothy ONeal (Sound Design) is pleased to be working sound on his first production at UNO. His sound credits include Andrew Lipps’ The Wild Party at OnStage Atlanta and Schoolhouse Rock Live’ at Southern Arena Theatre. He most recently directed As You Like It for UNO’s New Play Festival and appeared on stage as Clara in Hay Fever last fall.

Special Thanks to
Liz Gore
Jared Gore
Mike Harkins
&
Munholland United Methodist Church
Holy Ghosts Student Critique Agreement

I [LaLa Hanson] do give P. J. McKinnie permission to use my written critique of the University of New Orleans' production of Holy Ghosts, in part or in full, for supplemental material in his thesis. I understand that I am in no way obligated to participate in any study or other activity regarding my work and give said permission only if my work is not doctored or changed in any way and only if my criticism and opinions are displayed with respect.

[Signature] March 31, 2012

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[Signature] 4/11/12
Thursday night at 7:30 pm I walked into a dim lit auditorium to watch the play *Holy Ghosts*. As I watched the production unfold, I was taken back by the tragicomedy genre of the play. The first half of performance I was laughing and captivated by the actor’s humor but after intermission the play had a tragic and twisted tone that I did not care for. The plot of the play was too complicated and unfocused, causing for a confusing ending. As the *Holy Ghosts* opened, a young lady named Nancy is ranting to her self about whether she should stay or go. She had just fled from her abusive husband Coleman and joined a group of Pentecostal Christians. There she had fallen in love with “Daddy” the church leader. Coleman comes to the church to recall his items that Nancy had taken and also to file for divorce. As the story goes on Coleman finds these people to be crazy, yet ends up joining the group while Nancy backs out and leaves.

A plot point that worked was when Coleman tells the audience about his father having cancer. I thought it was a changing point in the story because it gave the Coleman depth as a character. This part of the play evokes empathy for the individual, making him three-dimensional and showing the audience that he had painful experiences. When Coleman met the character suffering from cancer, he genuinely looked sad and sympathetic. These were redeeming qualities and created the impression that Coleman was more then just a wife beater.

A part in the play I was unsure about was Muriel Boogs and her baby. The baby was wrapped in a grey blanket and had no face. I know this is a low budget production,
but I couldn’t help but think that maybe the baby was actually dead. The members of the church were treating the baby like it was alive, just as they had done with Carl and his dead dog. In addition, this was unclear to me because they mentioned the nickname Wrinkle. I believe the father actually killed the baby and these people are just treating it likes its still alive as a coping mechanism. If this is not the case, one way to clear this up in the future is to put a doll inside the blanket to give him/ her life-like qualities.

Lastly, I hated the scene where Coleman hits his wife. I thought it was unrealistic. Even a “normal” wife beater would not hit his wife in front of everyone in a manner such as that. Coleman hadn’t been physically aggressive till this point and it was shocking. It seemed out of character and forced.

Although, I did not care for the script of this play, the actors did a great job. The main characters were Coleman, Nancy, and Obdediah Buckhorn Jr. These individuals were dynamic and embodied their characters accurately. They each found something unique about their character’s personality and were able to make their actions life like. However, some of the actors went in and out of accent and said stuttered one too many times. I thought there were a couple standouts in the play. Number one was of course, Coleman; he was funny, sincere, and versatile. He expressed every thought and emotion that Coleman was feeling with such passion and dedication. I especially enjoyed watching him go from being a character full of anger to someone who is so vulnerable.

The actor who I didn’t care for was Bonnie Bidge. First, her part in the play seemed superfluous. In addition, her acting was amateur and she had no charisma. Her appearance and lines didn’t feel credible so therefore her presence was distracting.
Obdediah Buckhorn Jr. was also a standout in the play. I thought he did a marvelous job representing a character that thrived on power but maintaining the front that he was an innocent and good man. The author did a brilliant job by letting Buckhorn be the last character that walked on stage. This made me feel anxious and fascinated to find out who “Daddy” was. Making people wait is power, so not only did this character have power throughout his church but also with his audience.

In class our instruction and students discussed the idea that the characters are actually dead. I disagree. I believe these characters were dead, not in the sense of being physically dead but more emotionally. Each of the characters had lost something significant in their lives. Such as Karl with his dog or Coleman losing his parents to cancer. Everyone in this Pentecostal religion is still holding on to what they have lost, their ghosts of the past. These individuals seem to feel they have no reason to live, except when the snakes don’t bite them then this justifies their existence. Nancy, I believe is the only character who prospers as a person in this journey. Through the exposition of the play, Nancy experiences abuse from not only Coleman but also Daddy. This relates to today’s society dramatically. Nancy is an example of a woman trying to escape the life of domestic violence. When she leaves the play at the end I think it’s her way of saying I don’t need a man in my life that will treat me in any harmful way. Another idea I got out of this play is how religion is the opiate of the masses, quote by Karl Marx. Meaning that this religion oppressed these people by having them clinging on to this crazy idea that only people who don’t get bit by snakes are faithful to God. There’s other ways to rejoice in God and to prove your faith.
The diction and language used in this production seemed overworked, especially the use of the derogatory words. The F word was exaggerated, making me feel uncomfortable and awkward, which might have been the author’s main intention. Although, the southern, plain, hillbilly diction added a positive effect to the play. It made me feel as if I were in the rural south. The voices of the actors were clearly heard, although at times, I felt they were more focused on being loud then having quality to their lines.

I enjoyed the simplicity of the play set up. It didn’t get in the way of the acting but instead complimented it. The limited props parallel the basic southern lifestyle. Every costume was in sync with the location of the play. One of my favorite parts of the play was the scene where all the lights went dim and a blue light shined through to the stage. Then everyone acted in slow motion. This was very powerful and creative.

The music in the beginning of the play set the mood for the entire production. The tunes made the atmosphere of the country living come alive. When Coleman sat on the box and the snakes hissed it was unexpected and added a nice touch to the production. The onstage fighting was quite impressive and felt genuine. When Coleman hit Nancy the crowd could clearly hear the slap or KNAP sound made. It took me by surprise and caused a startled reaction throughout the audience.

I did leave the Holy Ghosts production a bit gazed and confused. However, it did make me think and analyze points of the play. I would not recommend this play to others. The tragicomedy had too many mixed symbols and hidden meanings to really convey any sort of important lesson. The script of the play however did not take away from the actor’s capability of putting on an entertaining production.
Holy Ghost follows a young man named Coleman, who is currently going through a divorce. The play basically follows this man over a short period of time, when he finds out that his wife has fallen in love with the pastor of a local Pentecostal Snake Handling Church. During the course of the script, Coleman listens to several testimonials of people of this church which all somehow, in very discrete ways, connect to him and his current situation. Although he is a very selfish, hostile character through the majority of the play, at the end, there is a character change and he ends up joining the church, when his wife, in the end, decides to leave it. In order to properly interpret a play such as this, it requires very strong actor’s who can get across, not only the direct dialogue, but script between the lines, so to speak, as well.

If I could describe the plot in one word, it would have to be “unique.” I typically like plots that follow one character the entire time, and in that since I thought it was conveyed very well. The role of Coleman, played by P.J. Mckinnie, was played with very high energy and resulted in a very clear transition at the end. The plot in terms of what it did for the show however, I did not think it worked. I found it very hard to bring all of the characters back to Coleman and what was happening in his thought processes. I don’t believe that this is because the other actors did a bad job, necessarily, but I thought the text and the writing might have been so difficult to interpret that the other actors were probably not on the right level for such a challenge. Overall, I found the plot entertaining, but with no real cause. What was the moral, or
the underlined lesson the playwright was trying to get across. Some might debate that there might have not even been one. I think in this case, the writer overestimated his audience.

Characters were huge in this play, because in the way in which I interpreted it, each character represented a piece of Coleman. To get this message, I think the characters had to be played in a way that they were their own character, but in some sort of underlined actions, they all had to resemble Coleman in some way. In my opinion, for most of the actors, this was a failed attempt. I saw their own interpretation of the character, but in places that could have been taken seriously with roots back to Coleman thoughts; they were replaced with campy comedy that took away from the characters in a devastating fashion. For example, the man who played the preacher’s son, made horrible character choices that made it hard for me to even take him serious as a character. I thought that he, in a sense, belittled his character’s potential. I found that none of the other actors did this to this much of an extreme, but it seemed like a directing problem because it was common in most of the characters.

Each character had to portray a certain amount of thought as well. They had to take a thought process from their own stories and still somehow connect it to the though process of Coleman’s story. I felt that the only characters whose thought process was really sticking out was Coleman, his wife, and the preacher. Coleman’s thoughts transitioned from “I want a divorce” to “All of you have shown me that this is where I belong.” It was a very clear transition from thought to thought. The wife’s was almost the exact opposite. Her thoughts changed from “This church and these people are what will make me happy,” and transitioned to “This isn’t me at all.” This was also another clear transition which I had no problem with. The only complaint comes from the preacher whose thoughts I found rather confusing. The thoughts turn from, “This church is the answer and the solution to all of your problems,” but through the play would
transition to animosity and anger towards Coleman. I just thought it was conveyed wrong and to too many extremes.

The language was simply not there. This play took place in an old southern town in which there would have been accents. It was extremely unconvincing because several people would both attempt accents and not fully go through with them, or they simply would not have an accent at all. In my opinion, this is simply laziness of the part of the actors. With research and practice, there is no doubt in my mind that every actor in that show could have held a consistent southern accent. If they couldn’t do it, they had absolutely no right to be in the show of this caliber, because that is simply just basics. I also had trouble accepting some of the campy fashion that some of the lines were delivered for a cheap laugh. This took away from important aspects of character and plot development.

I think that one of the things that make this show so entertaining is that it is a spectacle. It is a bizarre situation that many people are unfamiliar about, and with a script like this, you have the opportunity to really make an audience member leave the show with some “wow” factor. To create this kind of spectacle though, it takes practice. The best example I can think of from the show is when the actors have to portray that they are handling snakes. Some did this very convincingly while other made a spectacle of themselves, and not in a good way. To in vision something as a poisonous snake in your arms takes lots of research because, needless to say, it is not something that many people have a personal experience with. If the actor’s did the research, it showed and the audience was right there with them, but for the ones that didn’t, it was not convincing at all, and in a way, was rude to the other actors who had to convince the audience that much more.
In conclusion, I found that this play was overall a good show, but it is the little things that separate a good show from a great show. All of the actors and a director should have a similar vision of the show and be on the same page, and I felt that for this show it wasn’t the case. I thought more effort should have been contributed on the part of the actors and I think the director should have been more involved and aware of the script. The message got across to me, but you have to ask. Did it get across to the other audience members?
UNO theatre’s latest production, Romulus Linney’s 1971 Holy Ghosts, is a sure way to leave audience members thinking on their way home. Directed by David Hooper, the play about an unsuitable couple and a church full of unordinary characters and their unorthodox religion is brought to the stage at UNO’s Robert E. Nimms Theatre. The play tells the story of an outraged husband; Coleman Shedman played my P.J Mckinnie, insisting on a divorce with his runaway and unsatisfied wife, Nancy Shedman played by Caleigh Keith. The setting of the play takes place in a rural Pentecostal meeting house where the couple starts off arguing for possessions and discusses with a lawyer on whether or not a divorce is necessary, although, one thinks it is more than the other. Coleman refuses to leave the meeting house without anything only to soon find out that a church gathering is soon to begin and a very unusual crowd is about to unravel to worship a snake-handling Pentecostal tradition. A tradition to them at least.

Throughout the play, each character tells a story of their past and how they converted to the church and its not so usual religion that supposedly saved them from a life of hardship. Although the stories of each character were somewhat interesting, I felt the stories of the minor characters such as Ms.Wall or Bonnie could have done without. They seem to run on and I wanted to just get to the point of what was the significance of these testimonies being told. I believe in the end though they all sum up together to prove a point.
A few things that left me confused were the title of the play itself and whether or not it applied to the actual characters. Were they indeed “Holy Ghosts”? Some audience members may have believed they were and others could have no idea that they were at all deceased due to no actual lines saying that they were all dead or even alive. I was a bit disappointed that no one really knew for sure if we were watching a room full of dead ghosts or not. One part I thought went across well is when Coleman meets “Cancer Man” and has a slight change of heart on the way he presents himself to him despite the rudeness he presented to everyone else. McKinnie showed this right on point with just simple body language and facial features that this one character triggered something in him and we soon come to find that his character Coleman dealt with an ill father who has passed away from cancer. Throughout the play, fellow church members try to win over Coleman with their stories in hopes that he converts and join them. Though only wanting to retrieve his possessions and maybe his wife Nancy, he definitely gains more than he bargains for and soon becomes part of the snake-handling religion. Nancy, however, who was loyal at first to the church, soon realizes how crazy the Pentecostal group is during a moment of praise to the venomous Diamond Head snakes. This part was done very well by the lighting designer and/or stage crew whom lowered the lighting and changed the color to a blue light almost creating the mood of insanity mixed with horror. Soon after, the play comes to end as Nancy decides to leave walking away from Coleman who is kneeling on the floor hugging the Reverend Obediah Buckhorn, looking out as if he’s seen a ghost. His parents maybe? No one knows for sure.

Most of the play focuses on Coleman Shedman who is played by P.J McKinnie. Coleman is a very angry person, hateful to those who aren’t believed to be “normal”, and isn’t quite the believer. Most of what he may have been feeling was shown off by his facial features or body language and McKinnie did amazingly at showing each emotion. He also brought most of
the comedy to the play as well which I enjoyed and I’m sure that the audience did also. Caleigh Keith also did a great job playing Nancy Shedman the unsatisfied wife. She did well in bringing out the innocence of the character even after she had left her husband for another man. I’m still left questioning, though, why her character found what seemed to be a feather in a bible at the beginning of the play. Both parts were played across well and not lacking any type of emotion or physical actions.

After watching the play, I tried to determine what the play meant or what the message that was trying to be delivered was. If I look at it from the point that the characters are not dead, I would say that this play could be looked at in two ways by the people in the audience. One side can begin to say that the whole church and their beliefs are completely out of line and are closer to being a cult than an actual religion. The other side can also say that they are happy that Coleman finally gave in and converted in the end and gave his life to the church. This all comes down to what is the norm to society these days and really, there will always be two sides to an issue and whether it is accepted by society or not. That is how life is and it would be a good theme of what the play’s message could maybe be.

The set stage was done well by the stage designers, although I thought they could have done a little more with it, specifically, maybe putting up a background instead of making the back of the stage visible. The lighting was set well and I was satisfied with the costumes that were chosen. They helped set the time the story takes place in and also emphasizes where the characters were from and their Southern accents that most of the characters had. The snake sounds that cued on before time was noticeable to most audience members but was played off amazingly by the actors onstage who refused to break character despite the technical difficulty. The only problem I found was the actual sound of the snakes that sounded a bit too on time for
me. I only wish it had sounded more natural and a tad bit closer to the stage where the snake boxes were and not as if the snakes were behind me. Besides that, most things were consistent and flowed well into each scene. The songs that were played were mediocre but did help to set the mellow or depressing mood of the moment. A little help from the sound department could have enhanced the music if they wanted to.

Holy Ghosts definitely left me with a lot of questions left unanswered and a message that I’m not even entirely certain was supposed to be delivered. This play does have sexual content and inappropriate language for children. I would not recommend this play to those who are sensitive about religion but if you don’t mind having a few laughs and a bunch of questions that will leave you unsatisfied, this play would definitely be good to catch if there is nothing else to do.
Vita

Patrick Joseph "P.J." McKinnie was born on December 3, 1978 in New Orleans, Louisiana. He received a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology from Louisiana State University in 2001 and has been an active member of the New Orleans' theatre community for the last eight years. He has performed for numerous companies in the New Orleans' area including: Southern Rep, Le Petit, Tulane Summer Lyric, Jefferson Performing Arts Society, Rivertown Repertory, Le Chat Noir, FourFront Theatre, Theatre 13, 2 Left Feet, and Theatre U.N.O. Patrick currently resides in Metairie, LA.