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Chaos To Clarity: The Technique Used In Performing The Role of George In Whitney Buss' The Dark End of Day

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Chaos To Clarity:
The Technique Used
In Performing The Role of George
In Whitney Buss' *The Dark End of Day*

A Thesis

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

Master of Fine Arts
in
Acting

By

James Yeargain

B.F.A., New York University, 2001

May 2009

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Introduction

I auditioned for the University of New Orleans' production of Whitney Buss's original One Act, *The Dark End Of Day*. This was unlike U.N.O.'s typical thesis show because I was not pre-cast, and was directed by guest director, Rodney Hudson. I was cast as George.

I planned to make my thesis role extremely well organized, as a testament to my acting career as of date. What I ended up with was an enormous task, where everything I thought I knew was brought into question.

To receive my Master of Fine Arts in Acting I must complete this written thesis. I will use an interview with the writer Whitney Buss, my rehearsal and performance journal, an interview with the director Rodney Hudson, a scored script, and the student responses from Acting II: Intermediate Level class at U.N.O.

I was aiming to create an original character based on all of my training. The Atlantic School of Acting's training is my foundation for script analysis. I use Chuck Jones' and Kristen Linklater's teaching on voice for the actor. The physical training I have comes from Anne Bogart's Viewpoints, Tadashi Suzuki's method, and Stephen Wangh's teachings based on his experiences with Jerzy Grotowski.

My experiences were not all positive; in fact, they were quite dark at times. The real task for me was to work through this chaos, and find a repeatable technique on which to base my future work. I needed to find a method that would enable me to translate any director's vocabulary into my own personal, flexible technique. I will go through a brief examination of how script analysis, voice freedom, and gesture discovery failed and succeeded. Most importantly, I will discuss the adjustments I made to these processes to not only improve my

complete technique, but also to keep me away from the darkness... if I ever have to face another experience like *The Dark End of Day*.

Chapter 1

Interview with the Playwright

Whitney Buss

James Yeargain: How are you Whitney?

Whitney Buss: Good.

James: So tell me where were you born?

Whitney: Yankton, SD.

James: What was your childhood like?

Whitney: Adventurous.

James: Who were your parents?

Whitney: Patti Imig and Nigel Buss.

James: What was high school like for you?

Whitney: Exciting at first then over it.

James: Do you remember your first theatrical experience?

Whitney: 4th grade, I stood in the hall and “got into character” to play “Mrs. Brown” for some version of a “Paddington Bear Adventure.” The next summer, I played a No-neck in “Cat”, at Lewis and Clark Playhouse. But having already been involved in chorus, church groups, and dance, there were experiences before those.

James: So how did you start writing?

Whitney: Grade school, creative writing assignments. Wrote my first play when I was twenty-three, then took a playwriting class at UNO.

James: How many plays have you written to date and what are your favorites?

Whitney: Not enough. Generally, I guess I like the one I'm currently working on, but there is a funny little 10-min. about a husband and wife folding a flag that hasn't really found a place in the world yet.

James: You and I have something in common. We both went to Atlantic Acting school in New York, New York. How did that inspire (or did it) your writing?

Whitney: I don't know.

James: What writers have inspired you? Why? What writers do you think you emulate?

Whitney: Williams, Beckett, Athol Fugard. Hemingway, Bukowski, Pablo Neruda.

James: Would you put your writing in a specific style?

Whitney: No, but there's not technology in any of my work, no computers or cell phones, so maybe it's a little dated.

James: How did you get to New Orleans?

Whitney: My mom moved here, I visited her from Pittsburg and didn't want to go back.

James: How did the idea of "The Dark End of Days" first come to you?

Whitney: Feeling/seeing the relationship between owner and pet, and the gut wrenching anxiety felt each time your pet doesn't come right away when you call.

James: Really? What about the theme of death or love? Were these themes inspired by the relationship of human and animal?

Whitney: Yes.

James: What did you first think when you found out your show was being produced?

Whitney: I thought it was too good to be true.

James: Were you ever worried?

Whitney: Of course.

James: In what way? What worried you most?

Whitney: Does my dialogue communicate? And not a lot happens in this story, I'm all right with that but would others be compelled?

James: What did you imagine the audience's reaction would be to the production?

Whitney: I didn't know.

James: Well, what about the ending? You are dealing with audiences expecting a certain ending, like a love affair with George and Luca. You very specifically don't give it to them. What did you think their reaction would be?

Whitney: The play ends in a way that, in my perspective, is true to life: anti-climactic, but with change and new beginnings.

James: Did you think your play was going to be easy or difficult to produce?

Whitney: Not hard to produce, single location, small cast, but maybe difficult to conceive.

James: Who did you envision the character to look like? What famous or well known actors do you think would most resemble what you had in mind?

Whitney: I pictured George kind of tall and robust, in his early sixties, with an even skin tone and dark hair. Frank Langella maybe? In my mind, his size contrasts his emotional vulnerability.

James: Did you envision any problems with the cast or the director staying close to what you had envisioned?

Whitney: Yes, but I had created these characters and worked with them for a year.

James: How did the first rehearsal you went to go?

Whitney: Good, not bad. I started attending a few weeks in.

James: How did you decide to take out the references to George's age?

Whitney: Because you, the actor playing George, aren't in your early sixties. Some of the themes were altered with a younger George, but my interests were in a believable production.

James: The audience's pull towards George and Luca getting together was significantly changed. I believe that was entirely because of age. Is that the theme that was most changed?

Whitney: I disagree. The original age separation between the characters of George and Luca did not make for a mandatory disinterest. It's O.K. to me that curiosity be there, both on the part of the audience and the characters. The theme that was most changed is loss. Loss for an older man nearing his own end, and loss for a young man are different. Also, it implies that the nature of Lillian's death was tragic rather than something more natural.

James: In the final production they sprayed my hair gray. Did this help the age, or further confuse it?

Whitney: Age would have to have been invested from the character's origin: walk, tempo, etc. That choice for me was cosmetic and insignificant.

James: How did you and Rodney Hudson work together?

Whitney: Great.

Chapter 2

Rehearsal and Performance Journal

Entry 1

After the first day of rehearsal, I believe I must purge a cancer growing in me that is getting in the way of my work as an actor. Our lives must be left at the door of the rehearsal, but this cancer stems from the audition.

For the first audition I had two “tried and true” monologues. Perhaps they have served their usefulness in the past and are worn out, but they are definitely dead to me now. I could not get traction in them. I mean, I could not focus on the task at hand- my objective, my action, my tools. Looking back at it I can see that I was trying to appease or please or elicit a positive review from a teacher who for the past two weeks had been telling me “you don’t know shit” and that I was not ready to compete with his students. Is this his fault? Not at all. I had forgotten the cardinal rule of my canon of work: Fuck the audience. This has served me very well in the past and will serve me well in the future. I have no control over whether an audience likes or dislikes me. I can only control my work, my preparation and my commitment. I did not remember this in the first audition; and I certainly did not utilize my cardinal rule this in the call back, and I have ended up not getting the role I wanted. I felt in my bones that I could do well with the role, but at the same time this was also a role I could fail miserably at attempting. The role had all the ingredients of fantastic theater. Well, that role ended up in the hands of someone else- someone who failed to appear at the call back because he thought the role (of George) he was to read for would be too taxing for his current state of mind. But I cannot focus on this. I am

ready to work on the part that I was given, the part that will actually be my thesis role- George, in *The Dark End of Day*.

The only thing I know right now is that the director loves his idea of *The Chairs* (the other one act in a double bill) and is being made to do *The Dark End of Day*. My first and foremost goal is to change this dynamic as quickly as possible.

The director wants George's only connection to the outside world to be through Molina, his dog. While the play is centered on loss, he wants only the audience to deal with sadness while I will mine other territory, such as:

Unmovable
Embitterment
Hatred
Rage
Pity for others
Empowered strength
Destructive
Creative- as in building a better machine of life

That's all for tonight.

Entry 2

I have a lot of work to do. The script is a nice pleasant read. There is a confident dramatic build and a conclusion that will leave the audience either wanting more or happy it is finished. I don't know which one I would prefer right now. Nevertheless, this play is hard. While it might be easy to read, it is certainly not easy to act. Often in my training, I was told that my action changes with new information from a fellow actor's lines or from some outside source like a bear coming on stage. There is a challenging mix of where the characters actually connect and where the characters actually refuse to connect from self-defensive reasoning. The first monologue is difficult.

Entry 3

We are going towards a theater of stillness. While I love specific blocking that I have a hand in creating, this is more about finding moments for physicality in very tight containers. My first explosion is riddled with my unspecific gestures or, more appropriately, twitches. I need to put the physicality in my mouth, which is a great image for me since Rodney continually tells us to “articu-fucking-late”. Still, the idea that *The Dark End of Day* should be minimalist in movement because *The Chairs* is going to be exaggerated in movement doesn’t seem to serve the play. Either the play should be allowed to progress naturally or the actors in the play should be allowed to let the play do what it does to the physicality of the actors naturally.

Entry 4

The scheduling of rehearsal seems to be confusing. While I am very specific when I complete my conflict sheet at the beginning of each audition, it helps if the powers-that-be actually read the sheet. So now I am given the unforgettable life lesson that an actor needs to schedule, at the very least, the same amount of alone time as the rehearsal or be prepared to burn out.

Entry 5

I am becoming very frustrated with myself. The director is way too ahead of me. It seems like every time I make a choice it is somehow wrong or does not fit in the show the way he has envisioned. I need a day off to catch up. I feel like I look like an idiot who is not prepared. I do not like constantly playing catch up.

Entry 6

This opening monologue is beating me up. I have two people to connect with, and I can barely focus. Georgette, who is playing Molina, is there at times but the monologue is focused on my dead wife. Actually, that's not true, the monologue is focused on bread, Molina, my wife, God, the sky, and George's inability to make it through a day without falling apart. The problem is I am trying to keep the monologue fast for the audience's sake. I am trying to keep it volatile for the writer's sake. I am trying to keep it funny and exciting for George's character arc sake, and I am trying to keep the very specific blocking for the director's sake. I am in my head. I am not reacting. I am not acting.

Entry 7

I am evidently doing two different things with my body and voice. I am attacking with my voice while retreating with my body. I start interrogating Luca when I don't get the answers I want; and when she unknowingly triggers George's sadness, it is expressed through my rage. I attack. While I do this action ("smacking a bitch into reality"), I physically retreat from Chrissy (Luca). Her size and angelic innocence always give me a "Stop that. This is a girl," moment. I cannot tell whether this is a George moment or if this is a James Yeargain moment.

Entry 8

Working with Ben is nice. He is in the same boat as I am. We both do not know what is going on. Yet through his experience at the hands of Rodney I can see more clearly how Rodney is working. He talks at the table reading about what the characters are doing psychologically. He then works the scene in this way for a little while; and when he puts it on its feet in his blocking he masks intention with public persona. Often times this seems conflicting, like he wants us to do two certain things at the same time. What he is doing in my opinion is making sure we have conflict within ourselves as well as with each other.

Entry 9

The blocking is not sticking with me. The specific playing areas are so specific that there is a fine line to keep the illusion in performance. One step too far over the invisible line Chrissy has developed previously with her blocking destroys the theatrical convention. I need to take my time to convey to the audience the distance between the two houses. In simple terms, I need to be extremely specific.

Entry 10

I am pushing my voice. I let the idea of emotion enter into my head, or more importantly my throat. When left alone with the opening monologue, I begin using clear actions and tools but by the end I am forcing emotion. I am straying away from “begging”, “threatening”, and “pleading”, which are committable actions to “I am so sad”, “feel sorry for me”, and “hear my pain,” which are selfish actions. This makes me tense, up and I feel as if I am forcing emotions versus letting them come naturally. I also fear I am not hitting the right note in my monologue. This fear makes me no longer able to focus and speak the truth of the moment. Without the truth and focus I am a fraud.

Entry 11

We are finally running the show, which is starting to take a load off of my mind. Physically, I am retaining the movement of the show. While I say that the things I don't understand are also apparent to me, I need to figure out how to be more specific in my looking for Molina through the audience. However, I think this needs the audience in the seats before I can truly navigate the task of searching to make sure I am not looking anyone directly in the eyes.

Entry 12

O.K., so after all this time trying not to move and to be very still at the director's request, he suddenly wants me to explode my arms way out at the first confrontation with Luca. What?! Now movement in the piece seems to be forced throughout the play rather than organically found. This is not the director's fault. But if I had known we were working like this to the end, I should have been allowed to experiment and to try different things, to let my body go. I could have allowed many choices to appear physically and then he and I could have decided on the right ones. Once again I am left confused and frustrated, and at odds with my director instead of with him.

Entry 13

Tech is clearing up a lot of confusion. I am becoming aware of how a fantastic lighting designer can do wonders for actors. She has turned the final scenes, the pictures of the play, into absolute brilliance. This is the first time in my life I have been able to see the picture like the audience sees it and then walk in to place. Thanks to my previous experience with Anne Bogart's Viewpoint training, I feel up to and excited about the challenge. I feel like I know how to slow down and pace myself so I can enter the picture at the appropriate spot with the appropriate timing and pacing. Simply put "James, don't mess up what the director, fellow actors, set designer and lighting designer have given you."

Entry 14

Opening night went well, but I still feel constrained. I cannot stop thinking of messing up my moments. I have very specific turns action-wise but if the moments aren't created by me, then I miss a step- which I hope the audience does not know.

A very close person to me was visibly shocked that this was my thesis. I assume that I was not as powerful as I would hope, but at the same time it released me from thinking that I just didn't understand something about the purpose of a thesis. I have to make sure that I don't let it eat away at me. I am very happy with the entire cast. I understand that we all must make sacrifices and would be willing to do it all over again if given the opportunity. That is theater. You have to take a hit every once in a while. What saddens me is that I let all of this throw me. An actor can please no one if he is trying to please everyone because that leads him straight into his head. An actor cannot work from his head.

Entry 15

I didn't plan to write journal entries after the show closed, but I thought I might as well put this one paper. Throughout the entire run I was given notes before the show about the previous show. Is this normal? Why has no one ever done this to me before? The notes were constantly that I did not earn my builds, over and over, to the point that one night while I was listening to my fellow actors waiting for my entrance it was the only thing I could hear. *"You didn't earn your builds. You have never earned your builds. You are worthless. You cannot do any thing right. You cannot even pay attention to your fellow actors."*

If I had to summarize my experience with this show, I would say I was trapped in my head at every turn, unable to get out. The fun was removed from the acting process and it was like walking through a land mine, praying not to misstep. Consequently, I was then continually stepping on land mines along the way. At a certain point, the actor needs to be "let go" so that he can deal with his own insecurities, so that he can get out of his head to have a truly connected and present performance. But I was never afforded this opportunity.

Chapter 3

Interview with the Director

Rodney Hudson

James Yeargain: How did you first find out you were directing *The Dark End of Day*?

Rodney Hudson: Earlier this summer.

James: What was your initial response?

Rodney: I did not think it was a finished play, only a dramatic good exercise.

James: Did you know it was my thesis?

Rodney: NO.

James: From the very first audition you asked me to change in the monologue, and it threw me.

Were you unsure about working with me?

Rodney: Yes.

James: How did you decide that I would play George?

Rodney: I did not have much choice with the few audition choices I had. I felt that with your experience that I would have liked you better with the other male lead in *Dark End*.

James: What were my biggest challenges to play the character?

Rodney: Maturity and flexibility.

James: Did I meet any of them?

Rodney: Few choices were made. I felt that there was a lot of resistance to directorial input.

James: You and Whitney Buss took out all the references to George's age. Why did you want to grey George in the end?

Rodney: You have such a youthful look. And I did not want to infer a romantic liaison with the

other female lead.

James: We had a fun ride of stripping me of unnecessary movement. Then you wanted me to add movement back. Did this ever come to fruition?

Rodney: No, because you were so blocked physically.

James: I fell apart in my voice, especially shouting for Molina. How destructive was this to my performance?

Rodney: Your character rose to the emotional heights that he should have because of your lack of vocal technique.

James: Did I accomplish what you wanted in performance?

Rodney: No. I do not understand your resistance to learn something new. Grad students should also work outside of their comfort zone.

James: What did I fail at?

Rodney: Consider the above answers.

James: Any successes?

Rodney: I think that being in the show should have awakened you to the fact that your learning process never really ends.

James: Honestly, would you ever want to work with me again?

Rodney: Not really, unless the casting was very specific.

James: I am graduating, but I feel as if I will never stop training. My first priority is to take some improv workshops. After working with me would you recommend other things to do?

Rodney: Improv would be great along with a lot of voice and movement. FIND YOUR PROCESS.

Chapter 4

Script Analysis

My creation of the character George was a massive process, filled with many ups and downs. When I first read the script I had a hard time understanding how I could possibly play the role of George because the role was considerably older than any I imagined I could play. Rodney Hudson and Whitney Buss assisted me in this, by taking away any reference to George's age.

For me to really delve into the script, I turned to *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. I always use *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* to analyze a script. I spent two years at the Atlantic Theater Company Acting School, so it is ingrained as my first step. This is very important because I can take on the initial gigantic task of portraying a character on stage by systematically finding beats within the script and analyzing them. "A beat change occurs when a new piece of information is introduced or an event takes place over which the character has no control and which by its very nature must change what he is doing." (Bruder 23) I find what the character is literally doing first, and then follow it by what the character wants in the beat. Then I find the best action to get that 'want' while labeling tools to support my action. Lastly, but most importantly, I find an 'as if' to connect the analysis to my life experience. An 'as if' is when I take the action and find a real, or at least possible, scenario that I would use the action in. This allows me to fine tune my action in a beat, as well as make sure that I am not stuck in line readings.

There are actually four steps to my analysis work, not three, like in the book. This is because by the time I got to Atlantic Acting School they had divided the second step of their

analysis “What is the essential action of what the character is doing in this scene?” (Bruder 19) into two steps: what does the character want, and what is the best action to get that ‘want’. The first task I attempted to tackle in *The Dark End of Day* was to put some actions into George’s hands. I only work in want, action, and tools at the beginning of a play to portray character. This process takes emotion out of the equation. The process forces the actor to have a strong skeleton for the performance, and a strong focus on their scene partners.

For me, as the actor, before these ideas got out of control, I had to create an understandable, fun platform on which to work. First, what does George want? Does he want his dead wife back? Yes. Does he want to not feel the pain? Yes. Does he want to mourn her properly? Yes. For some reason I decided that this to me felt like he wanted to just make it through a day. Then, he wouldn’t feel crippled about his loss. He wouldn’t think about his wife, or he would somehow come to terms with her death. With a clear ‘want’ for the entire play I could begin to find actions to get me that ‘want’.

Actions are very specifically defined in the *Practical Handbook*:

An action must: 1. Be physically capable of being done. 2. Be fun to do. 3. Be specific. 4. Have its test in the other person. 5. Not be an errand. 6. Not presuppose any physical or emotional state. 7. Not be manipulative. 8. Have a cap. 9. Be in line with the intentions of the playwright. (Bruder 13)

Once I have found an action, which is not an easy task, I know the scene much better. I also must remain open to the fact that I will very likely throw this action out during rehearsal due to more understanding of the play or input from the director.

Since the director, Rodney Hudson, talked with me about the sadness associated with this play, we chose to never show his sadness. Since that action was removed from the start, I hoped that it would allow the audience to hang their own sadness on George. I chose, with the help of Rodney, “to beg” and “to plead”. We also used anger as a tool to get to George’s inner emotions.

We thought that these were closest to what the audience would expect to see in a play about death, lost loved ones, broken relationships, and knowing what you want but not being able to realize it.

Now that I knew what the big choices for the play were, and what the audience would already bring to the performance, I made sure to not use these in my analysis. Instead, I found other ways, other actions to use to get my due, i.e. to slap a bitch off the cross, to get him to crown me etc. While these were not what any one else would choose, these were my choices, which would make the character my own.

The first scene of the play is George looking for his dog Molina, finding her, and then discovering the vision of his wife. The scene has all the trappings of melodrama, but I did not want to go there. Instead, I allowed George to reveal himself as a hero just trying to make it through a day. At this point, the audience does not yet know how complicated getting through a day will be for George. The playwright, Whitney Buss, takes extremely good care of these difficult emotions in her writing.

I found ways of expressing these emotions through different actions. Some examples of actions I used were: “To embrace freedom”, “To call to”, “To hold air still”, “To excite”, “To seek satisfaction”. None of the actions I used were “To mourn”, or “To be sad”, or “To carry the weight of the untimely passing away of a loved one”. I hoped that this would allow the audience inside the piece, without giving away too much information. After all, the only thing they have seen is a man in the midst of grieving, talking, and searching for his dog. The audience has not yet seen him interact with another human character.

I believe a play simply does not exist if the characters do not want something. ‘Want’ can be a very instinctual and analytical process all rolled into one. Sometimes it is easy to

discover a ‘want’; i.e. he wants to have sex with the girl, or he wants to kill the villain.

Sometimes a ‘want’ can be quite tricky to figure out. In the opening scene of *The Dark End of Day*, at the end of George’s monologue when he is calling for Molina, the text only talks about Molina finding her way home. If an actor would play the scene that way it would not be that important. If the actor finds a stronger ‘want’, then the scene comes alive. That’s why I chose for Molina to be alive as my ‘want’. It makes the stakes or importance of this scene much higher. The next step was to find a suitable action for this ‘want’. In the same beat where George wants Molina to be alive, I thought it would be fun to beg for forgiveness. Begging for forgiveness is an action that further propels the stakes of the scene while leading to very specific tactics or, in *Practical Handbook*’s words, ‘tools’.

While the action spans the entire beat, I can incorporate tools within the beat to assist my action. For ‘to beg for forgiveness’, the tools can be to plead, to apologize, to bargain, to threaten, just to name a few of the limitless possibilities. Tools are ways to go about getting your action. In *The Dark End of Day* I had to very specifically lay out and map my use of tools for Rodney’s vision of specific builds. Builds were his way of saying that I needed to hit marks he had laid out in order to keep the integrity of the show intact. I would rather hold on to a list of variable tools (i.e. to lure, to interrogate, to jar) to use based off of my scene partner. Doing it this way keeps me connected to my scene partner while also allowing me to use my action to get what I want in the beat. When this is allowed, it also keeps the actors listening to one another because there is no telling what your scene partner will throw back at you. Tools, used in this fashion, are the last element of improvisation in an extremely fine tuned, rehearsed performance. This is not to say that the actors can do whatever they want, or select any tool they can think of,

because they are working a specific action to get a very specific ‘want’. The action must match the ‘want’. This type of work was not encouraged in the production of *The Dark End of Day*.

The Dark End of Day was a great experiment on how an actor works with a director. He and I were heading for the same goal, but to him I simply worked the process backwards. Or perhaps I did not work fast enough for him. Either way, his constant repeating of the critique “you did not earn your builds” made me very goal-oriented, and thus sent me into my head during performance. Instead of having fun, and letting go, I couldn’t even focus on my scene partner. All I would think was, “I’m letting the cast down. I’m not earning my builds, this show sucks, and I am the reason.” It is important to note, that I allowed this to happen. I should have taken his notes and worked them into my analysis so that I could take ownership of my technique, rather than throw it all away because one director says I have no technique. The role of George, coupled with my anxiety, caused me to become obsessed with the emotion of the character, rather than the clear “want” and “action” of the character development.

Another part of the process in which the director and I differed was in terms of beats. As I previously stated, beats are defined as such: “A beat change occurs when a new piece of information is introduced or an event takes place over which the character has no control and which by its very nature must change what he is doing.” (Bruder 23) This is a rule that I thought I knew until talking with Rodney made me question my understanding. He thought a beat change happened after my line and on my line. I had always looked for beats to change outside of my character. The rule of thumb I used was that outside forces change a character’s beat, not the character themselves or the actor. I thought that an actor changing his own beat was a shortcut that leads actors to be in their head and away from their scene partner. Yet when your character explodes violently at another character, is this not something he has no control over?

We decided that it was. When George explodes at Luca with, “a man can’t lose his dog,” he must stop, regain himself and start apologizing. It can be argued that this is simply a tool change within a larger beat. I struggled with this, but in the end allowing the beat change smoothes the transition between “completely vomiting volume” to “caressing a kitten to sleep.” This is a lot of weight that the audience should be able to comprehend. If it was just a tool change I might have missed an opportunity for the audience to truly see the gears turning between George and Luca.

In Appendix A I have included my scored script. I have numbered blocking in sequential order restarting with each new beat change. At the top of the beat I have an L, W, and an A meaning respectively literal, want, and action. On the margin I have listed some possible tool changes that I think accomplished what Rodney wanted. I say ‘possible’ because all can change based on my scene partner. Tools have got to be based on my scene partner or the audience will find the work on stage false. I also have omitted my ‘*as if*’s’ from the script because they were constantly changing. The ‘as if’ I used at the beginning of the rehearsal, may not be the one I used in the end of the rehearsal. They are the sounding fork I use to know whether an action is heading in the right direction, and are by no means permanent.

Chapter 5

Voice Technique

“The only way to develop your vocal instrument is to practice. Discipline is thus absolutely necessary for results. You don’t have to practice endlessly but you do have to do it regularly and consistently.” (Jones 88)

First, let me acknowledge that voice technique was my weakest link in performing *The Dark End of Day*. I have been lacking the discipline to maintain a warmed up, responsive voice. The volume I produce at the beginning of a rehearsal period is, at times, dangerously low. This is because in the beginning I am getting to know my fellow actor. I am very curious to see what they are giving me, and what tools they are using. The actor has to do this work, or how else is the scene going to develop? The problem with this approach is that I start cutting off everything except my scene partner- even the director, who will eventually be replaced by the audience. I certainly need to make sure that I can be heard when the audience arrives, but on the other hand, if there is no connection between me and my scene partners, all the audience will be able to hear is nonsense. If an actor starts the first rehearsal with the objective to be heard in the back row, and there aren’t even people in the back row, what is their attention on: himself, or the scene partner, or an empty chair? I believe that these actors are unconsciously disconnecting their voice from their emotional life and their scene partners. The voice on stage should not sound different from the voice in everyday life. If I am connected in a scene during that dreaded, first off-book rehearsal, often times the stage manager cannot tell that I am calling for a line because I do not see why I should stop what I am doing with my scene partner. I am using my real voice,

not an idea of what my voice should sound like on stage, or what my voice should sound like for the character. I am the character, this is my voice, and so the job is complete.

I was none of these things. I was tense because I was making sure the audience believed me. That is not an action. That is Chaos on stage in the form of James Yeargain. I never prepared for the scene, I never marked where I would breathe, and I never mapped out tools to use to get what I wanted. I thought the scene was self-explanatory; therefore I fell in to the emotional trap. I was trying to show panic, hurt, and desperation, but instead I showed only chaos. What I wanted to do was to give George a deep protective voice when dealing with others, and a free, full range voice when dealing with Molina. I wanted to do this technical thing to help tell the story of George. The audience would respond to the different qualities of George's voice seeing the high registers in association with Molina, as the time with his wife. The good times he no longer experiences. In taking that quality away at the times when he is dealing with other people he would then sound like loss. The loss of a loved one is a loss that changes a person forever. This was all well and good, but I failed, I got caught up in pushing my voice, which is a sign of falseness. I wouldn't take time to breathe to ground myself. That only made things worse.

Looking back, it is so obvious that I needed to breath into my diaphragm, and take my time to get a full breath. Without this, I could never do anything with my voice that wasn't connected or honest until I took a breath, a real full, relaxing, aware breath. My weakest moments were when I was shouting for Molina. I am screaming for something I cannot see, and my throat would tighten. I put a block of a tightened throat in between the sound coming out of my body, and between me getting another breath. I think this also has to do with me being stuck in my head. It is important for me to remember the grounding breath. Other important breaths,

are the “time consuming breath”, the “breathing my scene partner in breath”, and the “preparing for the next moment which I have no idea what that might be” breath. Every breath must come from the core. This should be the corner stone of my acting. The moment I run out of breath while saying a line, I should simply stop, and take another breath because I am on a one-way trip to getting stuck in my head. I cannot act from there, I can only judge my own work, and I am the most critical judge of my own work.

A technique I use when my voice needs to be heard is to first adjust my intention with the fellow actor so that my voice then responds to what I am trying to accomplish. I do not just automatically make a direct adjustment to my voice volume. For example, the tender love scene when your scene partner is finally six inches from your face and about ready to kiss you, your voice will naturally respond by becoming more intimate, softer, and welcoming. This is natural and great but if the audience can’t hear you all your work will be lost. The first thing to do is to adjust your intention. If you don’t do this, and instead try to put your attention on the audience or on your voice, you will end up thinking of everything besides your scene partner, and then be ineffective in the scene. If you adjust your intention to allow yourself to be filled with joy that you might get kissed or encouragement for your scene partner to go ahead and kiss you, you have thereby also changed your voice. I love to attempt to shock or startle my scene partner into a kiss. All of these options change the voice naturally without specifically concerning me with my voice. They all make my voice rounder and fuller, and thus volume is achieved.

With regard to articulation, I do prep work with the text every night before a performance. I read my lines out loud while over-emphasizing the constants. That is the only time I do this kind of work because while in performance I have no time or focus left for worrying if I am articulating. During performance, the focus is, and should be, on my scene

partner. If this step is not sufficient to gain clear articulation, I then engage my tools. Once again, I adjust my tools to be more precise for my scene partner. I can slow down to get my message across, or I can speak as if talking to a child, or I can find the syllables and make sure my scene partner comprehends each one. This exercise or technique accomplishes more attention on my scene partner, as well as more articulation and volume because my voice is not being told what to do. My voice is instead expressing my action to my scene partner.

In *The Dark End of Day*, silences were actually another opportunity to have the characters' voices heard. Whitney Buss wrote in these silences. This was her greatest accomplishment. Often times her characters are not saying anything and that is what explains who they are. George never explains what exactly happened to his wife, and that is very important. He says when she died, but Luca is not paying attention at the time. In fact, Luca learns more about George while he is not talking to her at all. She overhears his heartache, and when she is near, she is propelled by frustration of George not letting her in. The silences between George and Luca, or James and George, are always where they learn the most about one another. They give themselves time to take the other person in, and start trying to understand each other. This is very important in George and James' scene together. George reveals a truth to James, as well as himself. In the silence between the two, the audience sees James' distraction. They see the missed opportunity between the two men.

With this all said, in voice work terms my warm up is still not complete. Instead of only doing voice warm ups only before performances, why do I not do them every morning? I do not have the discipline to do a voice warm up everyday. Fear is the culprit. I am afraid to look foolish or to let other people see my struggles during a warm up. I am afraid I will wake my

wife or annoy the neighbors. My voice is connected with vulnerability. This is precisely why it so important to my acting.

When training an actor's voice, it is important for teachers not to condemn a voice or the actor because it only creates stress on the voice. This was my experience with Rodney Hudson. If the actor is told he does not know how to breathe, breathing suddenly becomes forced or over emphasized or mechanical. None of which are free or relaxed. The voice needs to be free and the only way to accomplish that freedom is through relaxation. An actor steps onto the boards with a great amount of stress and anxiety. When the voice warm up is done daily, it is what allows them to take in a confident breath of preparedness and release the tension of their anxiety. This theory of mine is destroyed if an actor is being taught a voice warm up while being ridiculed or criticized negatively. There is a large difference between telling someone that they aren't aligned and that is a serious problem that they should have mysteriously solved before they entered the rehearsal, and telling them that for some reason their head seems low and we would like to see their eyes more or take a stronger stance with your scene partner. The latter of this example frees the alignment to be more connected with outside impulses or your scene partner. It also alleviates physical or psychological stress from the actor. Our director seemed to accidentally drive actors into becoming overly focused on their bodies, so that instead of focusing on their scene partners the actors were focused on themselves.

I was one of these actors. Because of my lack of discipline to do a daily voice warm up I allowed myself to be vulnerable to a director. If I had been doing a voice warm up as explained in Chuck Jones' *Make Your Voice Heard* I would have been prepared for his onslaught of negativity. In fact, I might not have been criticized at all because I would not have had the problems that I exhibited.

When I was told that I had problems breathing I panicked. I gave up. I surrendered, waiting to be told what to do next. If I had the confidence in my voice from doing a daily warm up, I would have known to spend more time in certain parts of the warm up to achieve the director's notes. Or I could have dismissed him completely. Instead I gave up, and threw away five years of experience waiting for answers. When I finally went back to the Jones warm up I was surprised at how much my body and voice reconnected with the warm up because I had muscle memory of the exercises. My answer was always in front of me. I should have simply started doing a daily voice warm up that I knew. The one you know is always better than nothing at all.

A voice can never be fully trained. Voice training is a continuous exploration for freedom when on stage that must be done off of the stage. If an actor is working on their voice during performance they are not in the moment of the scene. They are in their heads focused on breathing. While freeing the voice in the 15 minute daily warm up the actor is actually building confidence in their instrument. The warm up allows them to let go and trust their voice, which in turn assists them in achieving their objectives in the play.

I have described my voice warm up to simply show in writing my method based on Chuck Jones' ideas. My method is not for everybody. I believe each actor has to develop their own warm up based on what frees them the most. Kristen Linklater summarizes what I strive for so well that I will let her words speak for Chuck and myself:

The objective is a voice in direct contact with the emotional impulse, shaped by the intellect but not inhibited by it. Such a voice is a built-in attribute of the body with an innate potential for a wide pitch range, intricate harmonics and kaleidoscopic textural qualities, which can be articulated into clear speech in response to clear thinking and the desire to communicate. The natural voice is transparent: revealing, not describing, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. The person is heard, not the person's voice. (Linklater 1)

Chapter 6

Gesture Discovery

“If the body is fully engaged, adding restrictions, even extremely precise ones, will tend to expand your imagination, not close it down.” (Wangh 232)

“In Composition work, we practice creating. We keep in shape our ability to be bold, articulate, playful and expressive.” (Bogart 175)

Do these statements contradict each other? I hope so. On the one hand Stephen Wangh is telling the actor that restriction can be a freeing experience. On the other, Anne Bogart is telling the actor to practice being open. While these ideas might seem to contradict I think they are working hand and hand in a very important direction: forward. Anne Bogart is talking about freeing your body to discover movement or gestures that come from your impulses. Movement and gestures are tricky to separate. I would like to argue that all movement is a gesture. If an actor walks across stage to another actor, this is a gesture, for it has a beginning, middle and an end. The stillness before the cross is also movement. If an actor thinks their stillness is as important as movement, would this not change their stillness? It would bring more energy to the stillness. By letting stillness breathe, the actor receives ownership of it, as opposed to stopping or letting their energy dissipate.

A typical example of a gesture is the psychological gesture of covering our eyes with our hands, fingers pointed upward. A gesture has a beginning, middle and an end. You can do it slow or fast or neutral. You can do it forcibly or with air-like fluidity. It seems to me that an actor should take every piece of movement he is blocked to do by his director as a gesture. I also have faith that during a rehearsal the actor, being human, is already unknowingly prescribing the

specifics of a gesture to his movement. For example, when that actor walks across stage, does he walk fast or slow? How heavy or light are his steps? This precision is what Anne Bogart is seeking to free in the actor. It is what leads to boldness, articulateness, playfulness and expressiveness.

It is at this point in the acting process that Stephen Wangh's restriction is most useful. His version of restriction is a form of editing and empowering an actor's gesture choices. We as actors cannot simply do anything we want to on stage because the play will then resemble chaos or babble to the audience. Our gesture work is what tells the story. It expresses the characters struggles and triumphs. It allows the audience to see truth in the story. There also has to be some editing and/or removing of gestures that are unnecessary for the story to be communicated clearly. To edit these gestures, actors can act themselves if they can boil the beat down to one gesture. Or does one gesture contain the action of the beat?

We must consider that gestures are tools. If the actor intentionally refines his gestures, it will allow his imagination to fill the gesture with life. He will be able to safely contain a rage for himself and his scene partner. If an actor swings his fist through the air, it releases the tension that the scene has created, therefore allowing something new to enter. The actor can only feel safe to commit to the swing if there is nothing in the way of his fist- he should not be in danger of breaking his hand or hurting his partner. It is this type of precision in a gesture that frees the actor to connect to his scene partner and imagination, therefore creating a truly alive performance.

Working with Rodney has given me the need to solidify a gesture technique. I very specifically only use the word 'gesture' even though it is typically thought of as something in addition to movement. I believe that when words fail, there is a body to convey the message. In

silence on stage the audience connects with the actor's body. In fact, today with the importance of visual influence on the audience, the body must be the most dynamic thing on stage.

With that being said, the actor's body is also the vehicle that gets the character through the performance. The body contains the action an actor has created to get their objective. Why else would the word action be used? The actor's body has complete and direct influence on the voice. Why else would the vocal warm-up be about finding and releasing tension? The body is the entire performance. Even the most novice of audience members can immediately identify stiffness in an actor. It is the thing that they see first, so why would we not have a technique to free our body?

Directors immediately start blocking a show out of necessity, as they have very little time to get the show up. This is typically a stifling experience for the actor and teaches the actor that they do not own their body. If they owned their body wouldn't the director let the actors work and find their own blocking? Isn't that why they were cast? This is not the case because directors block immediately for very specific visual reasons. This is where Rodney and I came head to head. Though our ideas were in two different forms we ultimately wanted the same thing. The scene in which George asks Luca how she knows Molina's name can be very dangerous and should be very dangerous. George is attacking and Luca is defending. When the director told me to get directly in Luca's face, it immediately limited my movements. I also had an impulse to back away from her. This was to give the person I was attacking space. It would also have been enough room to move my arms whether in a thrusting, beating or slashing response to my scene partner. The director wanted me in her face, so I taught my body to stay planted in front of her to demonstrate that I was not retreating. As a result, my hands started twitching at the finger tips, then forming fists, and I began grasping or thrusting downwards

because there was an impulse to move or strike or pound. I was told at this time that I had no control of my body and I had not yet learned to match my body with my voice and action.

Rodney then started blocking the scene using the film blocking idea that every gesture should be small and contained. He wanted the scene's blocking to resemble specifically an Ingmar Bergman movie with stilted and rigid movements. I learned from him that I should stand my ground in Chrissy's face and use stillness, and let the words and my voice do all the work for me. A week before we opened Rodney asked me why I wouldn't let go and move my arms in an explosive gesture over my head in the exact same moment that he had described as 'filmic'. He told me that this was not film this was theater. I completely lost faith in my director at this time from the contradictory messages I was being given. I had been losing it slowly for a very long time, but this was one of the last straws.

Rodney was working in a releasing direction to the same goal that I was trying to achieve with my refining direction: connected movement. Movement found in a releasing direction gives the actor a limited, neutral body that is grounded in stillness. From this stillness, the actor then can start discovering what his bodies impulses are telling him to do within the action. This direction can be difficult for me because I might find the stillness and never let go of it in performance, or I will start to shut down impulses that encourage me to move. I typically find gesture in a refining direction. I listen and try everything- even the things that might not serve my character. I do this so that I have a plethora of choices, or tools. I then refine my movement to only the gestures that are important for my scene partner. It is in this last stage that I can find the stillness and economic use of gesture. The director and I were working in two different directions toward the same goal, but because of this major break in communication between us I can now work in a releasing direction or a refining direction.

If I had been allowed to work with my refining direction I would have tried a lot of different gestures in rehearsals, the test being in my scene partner and my action. My reverse backward step from Chrissy was not only meant to keep her from running off, but more importantly to give me space to be able to use my arms in a free gesture that would also keep me connected with her. With space between us I could have discovered how to contain within a repeatable gesture my action and tools. I could have brought up both of my fists in front of my chest in a defensive manner, and then thrown them down in disgust or in attack and let my physical gesture fuel my voice, which it does automatically.

Within the immediate restrictions I was given I started working with imagery to help understand my blocking. I envisioned becoming a brick wall, stationary and buried deep within the earth, surrounding Chrissy at every turn with unshakable stillness. I envisioned my voice covering her in steel chains. I also saw my eyes piercing her brain looking for the answer I wanted. I was also very excited to use the Suzuki Method in the portrayal of George. I kept all of my body tight like a spring, always ready to burst immediately. The best example of this is when George sits on a bench with Molina at the end of the play. I never fully sat on the bench. I never allowed my full weight to just relax on the bench. This, I believe, keeps the actors body immensely observable. If I am doing it right, the audience will never notice that I am not relaxed on the seat, but they will see a very active, ready, listening body. While I use a lot of movement theory in my character building, if the movement is noticeable to the audience I have failed my character. Movement should always make sense to the audience. They should be able to recognize a truth to it. Does the movement support your action? Yes- George does not completely sit because he is seeing everything for the first time. He is waking Molina up to the greatness of life. I thought I was achieving the goal the director wanted. I was making the choice

that I believed to be correct and defending it to myself. That is how an actor works with a director-he takes their ideas and makes them possible and believable by finding truth in them.

When told that I was unwilling to use my arms in an upward explosive gesture a week before the show opened I was thrown off not only because I felt that I was now being told something different but also because I had now created muscle memory of how to affect Chrissy in the moment. I was then attempting to put a gesture on top of the gesture I was already working to achieve. This is simple to do, but since I had spent three-fourths of the rehearsal process committing to the absolute stillness that the director wanted, I was incapable of reconciling the contradiction in gesture.

The only thing I was left with was a sense of failure from the director's constant assertions that I didn't know my own body and that I was blocked physically. The director blocked me in the scene so specifically and sold me on the importance of the movement that I came to believe that it was the only choice I had to tell the story. I, in turn, became physically blocked. My feelings of frustration, anger, and betrayal were now not focused on Chrissy but on the director, which sent me to my head and not into the scene or to the imagery within the scene. Because of my judgmental mind, which is the harshest critic I know of, my exploration was stilted.

The next time I work with a director that questions my beginning approach to discovery of gesture, I will adjust my process. I will allow the blocking of the scenes to ground me, giving me the strength to find stillness and let the words be heard. Once this step is complete and I am off book, I will then discover what my body is telling me to do. Is my foot bouncing because my knee is trying to move me forward? Is my hand twitching because I need to let energy out of my

arms with a swing or do I need to increase the stakes of my action? Do I need to motivate my voice with a gesture?

This approach will hopefully give the director some ability to trust me, because Rodney never did. That must be the actor's fault. If one was to watch chaos come out of an actor within the first couple of rehearsals would one not be scared or concerned that this indeed is what this actor is going to bring to the ensemble? If actors work in a releasing direction this chaos will be quieted. Actors will learn how to free their impulses toward gestures and also to find the loudest ones. In this example with Rodney, I do not believe he was trying to silence my impulses but rather to get me to listen to the loudest impulses before committing to them. Before I worked with him, I was trying to give all of my impulses toward gestures equal voice and then discovering whether they worked or not with regards to my scene partners, and my action or tool. Now, thankfully, I can work in a releasing or refining direction in regards to discovering gesture and giving it constrictive freedom.

Conclusion

While I was trying to remain upbeat about the entire process of *The Dark End of Day*, I have to admit that this was the worst acting experience of my life thus far. For a few heartbeats, I questioned whether I would ever act again. Yet I had to consider, how did I make it this far? There must be something in me that continues to get cast. I originally didn't completely understand the play. I thought the language was too abstract to be portrayed naturally. It was not an option to dwell on these negatives, however, because I was cast as George. I decided to take on my role, as a lawyer would defend his client. I would defend the playwright, the play and the character of George. I defended the director. Whatever choices I made, however, were at every turn rejected by my director. He kept telling me I had no technique (which I do), but what I do not have is *his* technique. My biggest failure was to allow him to take away my technique without a viable substitute. I have a strong urge to make everyone happy, but there are some people you can never make happy and my director was one of them. An actor must stand on his own two feet and have confidence in himself to allow his technique to thrive. I will never allow a director to strip me of my technique because it is mine, and mine alone. No actor can thrive if he is continually told he doesn't know anything. I cannot forget or forgive that every performance was started by the director telling the assistant director to give us notes on the previous nights performance, an hour before the show started. There has to be a period of time for actors to process the director's notes. Graduate school is a time for an actor to learn a technique over a two to three year period, not to be told that he doesn't know what he is doing in his final year. As Oida said, "In Japan there is a saying that it is better to spend three years looking for a good teacher than to occupy the same period of time doing exercises with someone inferior." (Oida

112) We as actors have to stay a step ahead of our directors in terms of technique. Even if we never work with that director again, we can at least be proud of our own work.

While I stand here thinking I have found a new path, through the forest of education and technique, to become a better theatre artist, I have stumbled upon a tree carved by Constantin Stanislavski:

When these physical actions have been clearly defined, all that remains for the actor to do is to execute them. (Note that I say execute physical actions, not feel them, because if they are properly carried out the feelings will be generated spontaneously. If you work the other way around and begin by thinking of your feelings and trying to squeeze them out of yourself the result will be distortion and force.) (Stanislavski 201)

All artists travel through the forest perhaps only to poke their heads out now and then to perform. We never really leave the forest because that is where all of our inspiration, education and experience take root. It is easy to understand how actors and directors sometimes miss each other because they are simply at different points within this forest. Thankfully, in the real world, these directors and artists don't often work together because they are not forced to, as Rodney and I were in *The Dark End of Day*.

The role of George will ultimately not be my last performance, but I look forward to applying all that I have learned, from both the failures and the successes, to my next role.

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Appendix A

Scored Script

1

1

THE DARK END OF DAY
"A One-Act Play."
by
Whitney Lee Buss

CAST OF CHARACTERS

George, ~~a man in his sixties~~

Molina, George's dog

Luca, a woman in her thirties

James, a man in his thirties

TIME

Present, the fall.

PLACE

Not specified.

Playwright's Intent: Molina is played by a woman. As spoken in the script she is dignified, loved, intelligent, wise, and relied upon. Molina is also referred to as being very old, that's not to say the actress playing Molina is old. In my first conception she was dressed in all black like a mime, but with further thought that choice seemed limiting. There is something magical about role in the play, and she can be recreated. However, it's imperative the previous list of character qualities are always present.

SCENE ONE

(GEORGE'S home: A redwood porch upstage left. Across the front of the porch are three long wide steps. On the upstage side of the porch is a handrail and a long bench ending at a screen door, the screen door represents his house. There are potted flowering plants (pinks, purples, oranges) on the floor of the porch, on the edges of some of the steps, and planted ivies hang along the handrail.

JAMES' and LUCA'S home: A suggestive living area downstage right. Furthest stage right is an expensive looking, though weathered, brown stuffed armchair and matching ottoman. An end table and lamp sit next to it. The room ends at a free hanging window frame slightly more onstage. The window frame hangs facing stage left at a subtle angle upstage. Outside the window is a garden indicated by an outdoor cement decorative bench. It's late afternoon in October, not long before dusk, and vibrant classical music plays from inside GEORGE'S home. GEORGE enters the stage through the screen door. He is robust and moves lightly. He wears carpenter pants with suspenders, a flannel shirt,

- ① enter
- ② crank vitrola
- ③ check bread
- ④ Molina Neutral
- ⑤ Molina Left
- ⑥ Molina Right
- ⑦ grab dog food

and boots. GEORGE has dark hair and is in his early sixties. MOLINA is asleep on the porch steps. GEORGE holds a drink and a watering can. He waters the plants then looks at MOLINA lying on the steps. He puts down the drink and watering can and picks up a silver bowl from the ground. The bowl is filled with dry dog food. GEORGE shakes the bowl, creating a sort of maraca sound. MOLINA lifts her head. GEORGE continues using the bowl and the food in the same rhythm.)

⑧ Shake dog food

To search	GEORGE Molina. X 4 / (He shakes the bowl.)
To flirt	I see you. / (He shakes the bowl.)
To meet	What's that now? (He shakes the bowl. He waits.)
To censure	Not yet, not hungry? / At your old age it's important that you eat. Don't say I didn't try, it's my job, my girl, to keep you nourished. / We'll put this over here, maybe later my love. / I'll forgive you
To encourage	(GEORGE picks up the watering can, the drink, then starts to water the plants)

Peek a boo

L George is finishing his day
W Molina to Return home
A der got my child to leave the store

Doctor

⑨ put food down
by stairs

To enquire

To command

To compliment

To assure

To urge

To challenge

To propose

To stay

To stay

again.)

What a smell, what a smell.

~~(Now referring to the drink.)~~

What a smell / Drink thirsty devils, drink!

~~(Watering one of the plants and taking a drink himself.)~~

Ah Molina / a day it is. Fall fills the air, and summer's fragrance blooms / What's that my poor dear old friend?

~~(He kneels beside her.)~~

The music's too loud for you? / Here Molina, how about a drink?

~~(He offers her the watering can and after no response he offers her the drink.)~~

No? No water for my flower. This? / I know my Molina, she likes her water stiff /

~~(Setting down the watering can, he strokes her face.)~~

Dear girl, the music is too loud for you, a pain on those poor old ears. Why we can barely talk. You lie here Molina, I'll fix it.

~~(GEORGE exits through the screen door. At the sound of it closing MOLINA takes a long stretch and gazes toward the door. She continues looking at the door until the music is gone then she closes her eyes and goes back to sleep as if having seen GEORGE through the screen door making his return.)~~

Jealousy

your thirsty

⑩ Notice plants
⑪ Go in house for water bucket

⑫ Go get Gin

L Talking to my dog
W Molina to know every thing fine
A to get her to embrace He
truth

⑬ Turn off music

I'll pull the splinter out
your foot

Who needs music when I can serenade you.

(GEORGE ~~sits on the porch steps next~~

~~to MOLINA. He kisses her face then~~
sings to the tune of "Maria" from "West
Side Story.")

"Molina,
I've just kissed a girl named Molina,
and suddenly I've found
how wonderful a sound can be-"

(He stops. Pause. Staring out.)

Her eyes. I can't remember. / See wife
(He drinks.)

That's right we were three, but three minus one equals two, and that's you, and that's me. / I'm sorry it's fun time
(He deals an imaginary deck of cards.)

Pick a card young lady, any card. / What? Not young? That means nothing to
me. / Why here, let's see, I'll bet you grabbed a queen. A queen for a queen. /
And what's next? My, my, my, a ten for a ten. / Two good in a row, now try again
for three, let's see... / a nine. / A nine is fine. A nine times seven, dog years, puts
you at the ripe young age of sixty three. /
(He strokes her.)

If only that were the truth. / Look here old girl, can you see me? Tell me
something Molina. No one lives as long as you and doesn't know more than the
rest of us. And no stock answers. /

Oh I know
you hate this (14) Bolony #

you love this (15) sit w Molina

come on play (16) 2 steps away

~~(Leaning in he listens to her.)~~

"Blindness has its benefits; you don't have to see the truth."
~~(He listens to her again. Pause. He~~
~~needs. He drinks. The orange and pink~~
~~colors of evening start to light the~~
~~porch.)~~

You are the best ⑦ to audience

Is seeing believing? She was right there in front of me
~~(He drinks.)~~

Her face was so beautiful, (until she would deform it with confusion) I liked to call
her Apricot. Even the seed in the center of the fruit seemed comparable. A
peach colored beauty with a brain hard and full of crevices.
~~(He drinks.)~~

⑩ Returns Molina

you remember

I can't remember the perfect color of her.

~~(GEORGE stands and finishes the drink.~~
~~He exits into the house and slams the~~
~~screen door behind him.)~~

Fucking dusk,
~~(MOLINA, at the sound of the screen~~
~~door slamming, wakes up lazily. She~~
~~stretches then gets on all fours and~~
~~walks slowly offstage right. The lights~~
~~continue changing into twilight.~~
~~GEORGE returns with a full drink.)~~

Don't Ruin our parade

to simplify
to read
to demand

Settling now, it comes to this: the absence of light. You're not scared of night
George, nothing's different in the dark than in the day.
(GEORGE takes a drink then throws the
drink in the direction of the screen door.)

① Rise to Sky

Dear God, what color were her eyes? (A thousand pictures and not one of them
show the exact). Days, I've gone through nights without you, there is joy, there
is no joy. The music will play, it plays but Christ, God, why her? Where are your
eyes? I've seen nothing without your eyes, I've seen nothing but your eyes
why?

(Standing at the edge of the porch, ~~he~~
~~attacks the changing light.~~)

L Talking to God about my wife

W God to answer me

A to settle a score

① Press wife

② Return to porch

③ defeated sit

To realize
to focus
to punch
to push
to pull
to push
to pull

At this desperate hour every day, I lose you again. I watch the day die, I watched
your life leave your eyes, and it is so black. You gone is evil inside grief, where
is my wife! Where is my wife! Not this, I wanted to, I wanted to go, I should have
gone, Molina. Molina?

(GEORGE goes to the edge of the
porch and stops.)

Molina, Dear God, my dog. Oh God.
(Pause.)

No not that

① Rise

② x to bench

③ Return home

L Calling for my dog

W Molina to be alive

A to beg for forgiveness

To search
to speak
to threaten
to realize

Molina! Molina! Molina it's dark, where have you gone? Molina you're old,
you're deaf my girl come back, the night's no place Molina! Hear me with those
ears. Molina! Molina, find your way back, you don't need your eyes in the black,
pick a trail, the way you left my girl.

(GEORGE collapses in tears on the
porch steps.)

(Bring her home. Not my... and, not my... Molina! Molina.

I'll get you

(Moments pass and the lights change to night. MOLINA, unnoticed by GEORGE, slowly enters from stage right. She strokes GEORGE with her cheek then finds a place on the steps beside him and stretches, falling asleep. GEORGE sighs, he takes her in his arms. Moments pass. LUCA cautiously enters from stage right. LUCA is thirty three years old. She's dressed practically for the cool fall night wearing nice jeans, stylish walking boots, a tailored trench coat to mid-thigh and a scarf. Silently she watches GEORGE and MOLINA lying together on the porch then quietly she exits stage right. Lights fade.)

SCENE TWO

(Later that evening at JAMES' and LUCA'S house. The lights come up on JAMES, a man in his late thirties. He looks clean and casual wearing khaki pants, an oxford shirt with a pull over sweater vest and brown leather shoes.

JAMES is standing at the window staring out, he checks his watch. He looks offstage right as if having heard something. He goes to the armchair and sits. He picks up the newspaper and starts to read. LUCA enters from stage right humming the same classical music heard in scene one. Her entrance into the room goes unnoticed by JAMES. She exits, still humming, then returns a few moments later no longer wearing her coat and holding a small glass of port wine. She walks to the window and looks out.)

LUCA

I've been humming, haven't you noticed?

JAMES

I wouldn't have noticed a drum right now.

LUCA

Did you get any work done? I left today-

JAMES

All day.

LUCA

I walked, to give you room.

JAMES

Is that why you walked?

(Pause.)

LUCA

Tomorrow could be better, should be, might be.

JAMES

Haven't a chance for a thought of that today.

LUCA

Haven't a chance at remembering either.

JAMES

Forgetting is hot liquid substance on a hot liquid day, natural easy evaporation.

LUCA

Two things I'm tired of, having to remember and life without music.

JAMES

No one forces you to remember.

(Pause.)

Why say there is no music, when moments ago you were humming.

LUCA

No one noticed my hum.

JAMES

As it just now was mentioned, you stop to say that no one noticed your hum?

LUCA

In the past.

JAMES
Recent enough.

LUCA
You can't live in the past

JAMES
Only moments ago does not-

LUCA
The past. Make an observation of now.
(Pause.)

JAMES
Your beautiful.

LUCA
As I'm aging.
(JAMES leaves the newspaper and

goes to LUCA.)

JAMES
You're not humming.

LUCA
But thinking of a tune.

JAMES

Music. The interlude comes in the distance, unrecognizable but a drum, a drum in there is included, it sounds out, pulls recognition, gives definition. Oh, the impact of a drum.

LUCA

Passion from a reasonable man.

JAMES

The strings play too, but not so distinguished, it's the drum completes the choir. Thunder. An entrance. Now I hear your hum. Now I hear it.

LUCA

The drum grows faint and is leaving.

JAMES

The drum stays on.

LUCA

The drum grows faint and is leaving. That wasn't my hum.

JAMES

That was my hum.

LUCA

No longer it's over.

JAMES

No longer it never began.
(Pause.)

LUCA

Never began! Never began? If this never began, then where does it find itself now? Somewhere near the end.

JAMES

Somewhere at the beginning.

LUCA

You can't begin again when something has already started.

JAMES

You can't end it either.

LUCA

You can change the tune.

JAMES

What if you like the old one?

LUCA

What if the old one was never there.

JAMES

Maybe it played in the back.

LUCA

The quiet interlude does not sustain.

JAMES

Luca, after the interlude there is commotion, there are wars, but then a serenade.
The drum always returns.

LUCA
Only to slow down the process.
*(JAMES returns to the armchair and
newspaper. He reads. GEORGE
opens the screen door, whistles, waits,
then closes the screen door.)*

JAMES
Did you say something?
(She does not respond.)

They're looking forward to a vast migration. More butterflies this year than ever
before.

LUCA
Ever before?

JAMES
An expression. It's a delicate process-

LUCA
Expressions.

JAMES
Interruptions from wind and rain. Fragile things. And no other option. Stay here,

freeze?

LUCA

We will. Making it through the winter, a dreadful winter on the way.

JAMES

We'll manage. A butterfly breeze, that would be something. Give them all an even float, fly their slight little wings south before winter. Winter, I don't mind it much. The nature of things, exchanging warm blooded, warm weathered passion for cool reason. The time of year to settle with a book, retrospection, red sauce.

(Pause, he laughs.)

Oh, and rest! Those long, dark nights. I sleep like a rock in the winter.

LUCA

Your book, newspaper. Red sauce.

(Pause.)

I would say a short prayer for each butterfly, but I'm afraid there would be no time to talk. As a girl they'd arrive where I lived shortly after the rainy season, late fall, after leaving here they'd arrive. Standing outside, I'd name each one of them as fast as they flew by, always starting somewhere, a word would fall out: Jennifer, John, Jake, Jessica, Julian, Joseph, Julie, Juliet-

JAMES

You can't live in the past.

LUCA

At this point it's history.

JAMES

Funny, I don't seem to remember the laws of functional biology including name tags for butterflies.

LUCA

They'd fly by in the rainy season, drops the size of apricots-

JAMES

Apricots?

LUCA

Small, South American, imported apricots. Dropping from the sky mid morning, mid afternoon in sunshine, then sometimes all evening long.

JAMES

The butterflies liked it there?

LUCA

Only to continue on. Not to where they came from, but to someplace they've never been.

JAMES

With light. The migration navigates their journey with light.
(*LUCA stands at the window.*)

LUCA

It's getting dark.
(*Pause.*)

JAMES

Luca, I'll let you go.

LUCA

And listen to the drum at a distance?

JAMES

Too close can be too loud. Too close can sometimes strain.

(Pause.)

LUCA

I looked at the moon, and thought I saw the reflection of a snake in the grass, then I looked into the garden, and it was there.

JAMES

A certain degree of uncertainty is given, no guarantees. Add the complexities of any human. We sit and discuss butterflies, not even touching on metamorphosis, because already instincts involved in migration alone are overwhelming. That's the discussion of butterflies!

(Pause.)

What compels us I don't know. I am clear, go, don't go.

LUCA

They'll never make it in the rain. And the wind, destruction.

(She crosses to him.)

Touch my hair. I've been taking in rain water from the garden for a rinse.

There's a snake there now, or I'd get more.

(He caresses her hair for a short time

then stops.)

Why did you stop?

JAMES

I can't remember.

(Referring to the newspaper.)

There's nothing new.

LUCA

We did care once. Soon we'll both begin to forget, and then what?

JAMES

It doesn't continue like that. There are instincts involved. Things that don't leave. Sounds, noises you continue to hear. Why is there question? I can rest knowing that.

LUCA

What was-

JAMES

Not so different than now. Not the same.

LUCA

There is lightening in the rain James.

JAMES

And thunder, and waves, and wind, and sometimes the sun will shine through, sometimes it will not, and then it is just dark, that is all. It is not over, it is not ending, it is just dark.

LUCA

Like now.

(Pause.)

JAMES

Goodnight.

(LUCA'S at the window, he kisses her hair. GEORGE opens the screen door, picks up the bowl of dog food and shakes it in rhythm. JAMES exits stage right. LUCA sees MOLINA through the window. She smiles then turns to where JAMES was standing. Lights fade.)

① step out house
look for molina
② Return

SCENE THREE

(Late Saturday afternoon, the next day. JAMES sits in the armchair reading a newspaper. LUCA is heard offstage right talking to MOLINA and laughing.)

LUCA

What, what's so funny? Come on girl. No, no, no, this way. Look there, you can see. Aren't you pretty. Slow. Pretty and slow. This way Molina. Can I call you that?

~~(They enter stage right, LUCA walking backward towards GEORGE'S porch and MOLINA slowly following.)~~

That's a girl. What a girl. /

~~(LUCA'S leg bumps the bottom porch-step startling her. She looks towards GEORGE'S house then watches~~

① enter

L Getting Rid of Luca
W Luca to play by the Rules
A to teach a simple lesson

105324

To interrogate
~~MOLINA find her resting spot on the
 perch step. GEORGE enters from the
 house. He's holding a glass mixing
 bowl, the bowl has a wooden spoon in it
 and looks as though it's been used for
 baking. Over his shoulder is a dish
 towel and in his back pocket is a racing
 form.)~~

GEORGE

Are you lost my girl?

(MOLINA looks up at GEORGE then
 rests her head.)

I said are you lost?

LUCA

I found her near the... I was walking and saw her in the-

GEORGE

Not my dog, you. Are you lost?

you bitch

LUCA

No.

GEORGE

Do you live nearby?

LUCA

Yes.

GEORGE
Between here and the town?

LUCA
Yes.

GEORGE
The house up the road?

LUCA
Yes. /

GEORGE
Good, you'll find your way back. / Done
(He starts to exit.)

② Return home
③ Get Molina

LUCA
I thought she was lost.
(He stops.)

GEORGE
Not her, doesn't happen. Sharp as a whip, lived here all her life.

you have min. ④ sit on steps

LUCA
She's lovely. I haven't-
(LUCA makes a gesture to pet her then stops.)

May I?

GEORGE
She could kill.
(LUCA kneels next to MOLINA and pets her. GEORGE watches then turns and walks away.)

LUCA
We had one.
(He clears his throat.)

GEORGE
Our last chance at humanity.

LUCA
/Molina, such a pretty name, how did you?

GEORGE
Excuse me.
(He quickly goes inside the house and returns without the bowl and towel.)

How did you know her name? I never mentioned it. Who are you?

LUCA
I live down the-

GEORGE
You've said as much. /How do you know my dog's name?
(Pause.)

It's over

⑤ Rise

⑥ Push her to Bench

How do you know my dog's name!
(LUCA does not answer.)

I don't know what you've got going on here but quickly, right now, tell me, how in the hell do you know my dog's name? /

Jump from pistol

LUCA

I was near here last night, early last night, dusk, there was music. She must have been lost, I heard you call.

(Pause. GEORGE crosses to MOLINA and kneels to pet her.)

GEORGE

A man can't lose his dog. / Quick as she is I still worry, the night you know. I'm George. /

(Offering his hand to LUCA.)

① semicircle please forgive me to Molina

LUCA

Luca.

(Pause.)

Were you baking?

GEORGE

Zucchini bread. / The end of the summer squash. My garden out back. I read today it's the time to plant garlic, but I've no need. No more tilling the soil. Zucchini, one of the last words in the dictionary. Do you garden? /

thank you thank you so much

*L Getting to know h
W Luca to know my gr
A to crown her king*

⑧ to porch

LUCA
Some, well, house plants. /

GEORGE
A census is taken here every ten years, population not changing with exception to death, or birth. What moves you here? *that's OK well move on*

LUCA
Inspiration. /

GEORGE
Certainly these woods you'll find it. / Mindful of dark, inspiration may become imagination, a dreadful and often uncontrollable thing. *see you not bad (9) come down steps*

LUCA
Not my own inspiration. /

GEORGE
Why not?

LUCA
I've spoken to so few until today, until I met Molina. /

GEORGE
She'll start a conversation for you. My lovely beloved. Often can't tell if it's her talking and me listening, or reverse. Not so much matter who speaks and who listens, we've said as much, and most likely at the point of repeating. / Most likely at the point of, most likely at the point of repeating- *(MOLINA lifts her head. He speaks to her, touching her face and head.)* *she looks like my wife*

(10) sit on bench

God help us. / My beautiful girl, did you find yourself a friend? Young women sometimes like to run together. Young women at times do run together, in the mind that is, and the trick of their names: Lara, Laura, Linda, Leigh, but then of course there's Lillian, the always beautiful and forever more my Lillian. Have you heard of a word like Lillian? It is a garden and a water source in one. Names do hold rainbows. Not George, the ever practical, a man of the soil George, but Lillian... /

(He looks at the setting sun.)

The loss of daylight, is there anything more painful? /
(Pulling out the race form from his back pocket.)

agree yes or no

But today, God lives in mysterious ways. Today, I have a race. Five twenty, a bet on number three across the board, and number four horse to win, takes me out of the oncoming dark, into my home, for the last of summer's squash, and undoubtedly a beautiful glass of gin. And, there is a chance then Molina, though small, at the end of it all, I just might sleep.

(He touches MOLINA.)

You, my dear, slip into slumber without any help, only the quiet comfort of knowing. / Good night Luca, you'll find your way home.

(GEORGE starts to go back inside.)

LUCA

The Breeders' Cup? /

I forgive you
shes great

⑪ go to Molina

⑫ Find wife Sh

⑬ play in circle
w/ Molina
+ ticket

I'm great
to Molina

⑭ exit

(He stops.)

GEORGE

Do you know a thing or two?

LUCA

Just noticed the headlines...

(JAMES stands and walks to the window.)

GEORGE

I see.

LUCA

It is the time of year for garlic, at least where I'm from. Quite a ways south from here. Though the climate is different there, much more humid. It may affect the soil, keeping it moist. I've heard of, not done it, people do plant garlic now, this time in the fall. /

GEORGE

I've said as much, no use for it.

LUCA

It's great in... Winter can be a wonderful time for red sauce, zucchini a substitute for more common, less interesting things like ground beef. /

GEORGE

Why take away meat and leave me only a vegetable.

(LUCA laughs. JAMES exits stage right.)

You are my superior

(15) stay on porch

you really want to spar

The zucchini has all been baked.

LUCA

This time of year the days grow so short. /

GEORGE

They do.

LUCA

Something fantastic happening with the sunset though. I find a break in the trees, the horizon, and colors get magnificent. Where I'm from, the sky at this hour, fills pink, purples, magenta. Here it seems orange, yellow, red. And why would I say, I sometimes see green? /

GEORGE

I have seen green. We both have seen green. You moved here not long ago?

LUCA

At the end of summer.

GEORGE

Summer's end. Last winter was cold. So cold. I lost...

LUCA

Winter. I moved here from a place more tropical. /

(GEORGE and LUCA stand looking at the sunset.)

GEORGE

your magical
 16 Return to Luca
 down steps

To educate

Transition. A liminal moment. Threshold. The time between two absolutes.
Sunset, not day not night. Not here, and not gone.
(Pause.)

It's awful. Molina.
(He turns from LUCA and crosses to the
screen door holding it open while
MOLINA exits into the house.)

There are still hints of light, you'll find your way home.
(As GEORGE exits through the screen
door he speaks to MOLINA.)

It's time, it's time, remember my dear, you have a date with a horse.
(Lights fade to black.)

for the record
your honor

①7 Final exit
walk + talk

SCENE FOUR

(Later that night. Classical music plays softly from GEORGE'S house. MOLINA sleeps in her spot on the stairs lit by porch light and moonlight. LUCA enters the living room from stage right. Her jacket is off and she carries a glass of port wine. JAMES sits outside the window on the bench in the garden and, with the help of the living room light shining through the window, reads a book. LUCA watches him. She drinks. She hums the same song playing.)

LUCA

A pitch that would crack this window.
(She drinks.)

Not my window, where else would life wash by. Thru the pages? On the page,
 turning thru today's, yesterday's, news.
(She drinks.)

Tomorrow could be better, should be, might be.
(LUCA turns away from the window.
MOLINA enters downstage left. JAMES
looks up from his book. Both he and

MOLINA seem slightly startled. JAMES inquisitively reaches out his hand. GEORGE opens the screen door and whistles. MOLINA exits.)

Not all of what we had is lost.
(She drinks.)

Still fall. Where's the dry brittle winter, when you're ready for something to break.
(JAMES turns a page. LUCA finishes the wine then sets the glass on the end table.)

Last night, in a dream, everything was very green, real green, like where I'm from, the kind of green you can't find here. I looked around, and I felt hope. I dreamt last night, and I felt fine. The colors were tropical, they said something. They spoke of a richness that I left behind, to dry up in this-
(JAMES, reading, laughs then turns the page. Pause.)

An exchange with a stranger has more emotion. You sit there with the page, day after day, turning, turning into what? A sacrifice James. Did you hear I used that word? My life is draining outside this little town. This place, this place I had hoped to call a home has done nothing but distance me from everything I understood, everything consistent. And I've been in love with you, but it's brought me what? Blank stares. Maybe I've been wrong, focusing on you, what you will find. Why are you so far away? Why don't you touch me in the night? Did I leave what I knew, to walk with a man who doesn't hear me? There was strength in that small city that housed me, corners, direction, not here, everything's undefined! And it was green, and the butterflies came through... You talk to me about reading, you talk about red sauce, you say everything,

except what I need to hear. And I'm stumbling. My hands are stretched in the night, I'm searching for a wall, structure, something to lean on, something to guide me. I would have never done this, I would have never come to this place by myself. You steered my course. It wasn't these woods, it wasn't wanderlust that made me leave where I was, it was love. But then, to find a man calling for his wife in the night? Us, in relationship to them? I'm embarrassed to think we had more.

(MOLINA enters upstage right.

GEORGE opens the screen door and she goes inside. The living room light and porch light turn off. Moonlight and music fade.)

SCENE FIVE

(Late Sunday morning, the following day. LUCA sits in the armchair. She looks disheveled wearing casual house clothes. She is drinking coffee out of a large ceramic mug. JAMES enters the room abruptly. He's wearing a light winter jacket and rubbing his hands together to warm them.)

JAMES

What a morning, what a morning! Luca, you have no idea.
(He kisses her on the head. The kiss goes unnoticed by LUCA. JAMES starts enthusiastically pacing the room.)

Oh, it's right there in my hand, this struggle, I understand it now. Like a bullet! A drum, clear as a bell. Here we are, here, all the way out here, searching for what? And you, I drug you from your city, your life, asking you to participate in this silly quest. Moving to this place, this stopping post, these woods. And you agreed, so kind, out of love, you agreed, and to what? You agreed to these last two months of living with a mad, angry man. Isolated, thinking only of himself, his overwhelming reality. Believing that moving far, far away from distraction, I would somehow find an incarnation, a beautiful idea. I believed that Luca, that is what I believed. Leave commotion, recover, search, find. And what happened? Stuck. Stuck, like iron wheels in mud. Motionless, nothing turned. So what I said? What. You are here, you are stuck here. Read through this. Read. Sit patiently and read through this lack of inspiration. And I did Luca, I did. Well you've seen, you've complained, I've ignored you, you've been wonderful, you've

been nothing but that. And I'm almost sorry, except it worked. Coming here, and waiting through these last eight weeks, it's, at last, landed on my lap. There is nothing new Luca, not in my field, not now, or maybe just not from me. But that isn't the point. That does not stop me from becoming who I will become. The inspiration is not out there.

(Referring to the window.)

Well, not for the case in point. These woods, this simplicity has taught me something about myself, I like it here. I like it here. Can you see, can't you, the foundation of things? I'm not talking the earth's core, we don't need to go that deep. I'm talking about life on top of itself, the layers of it. We, all of us, are not machines, organisms regenerate, reproduce, and there's the opportunity. And that is where it's endless. Every fact I want to find, need to know, falls out of itself. And the rules don't change!

(He laughs.)

They may, but don't. The laws of natural origin are just that, they're laws. Laws. Oh, the relief of structure, with evolution at a snail's pace. And interdependence. Luca, the way that life needs life. The way we rely, feed on each other. And responsiveness! Organisms sensing environmental change and adapting. And heredity, and reproduction! And me! Searching for a great big point of completion to send me on my way. I used reason and found it! And it's nothing new, it's not about a new idea. It's about having something you believe in, or want to believe in, and researching facts, theorists, who think and want that same truth, and have spent their time, lives trying to prove it.

(Letting out a deep sigh.)

The work went Luca, my work, what I do, was gone. It became ambiguous, no longer concrete, and I've been inconsolable, frustrated. But today, in a breeze,

like a light in the night, bam! I saw it, and it wasn't new, but it was not without passion. And it's only a matter of gathering data, thinking critically, and being able to communicate myself. Kiss me.

(He goes to LUCA.)

Kiss me.

(She lets him kiss her. He touches her hair.)

I want to marry you.

(She lets him kiss her again. He brushes her hair from her face.)

Luca, will you let me?

(Pause. She leaves the chair.)

LUCA

James?

JAMES

Yes.

LUCA

Do you know how to bake?

JAMES

No.

LUCA

Do you believe in God?

JAMES

Luca, I'm a scientist.

(Pause.)

LUCA

I used to have trouble sleeping. It seemed like there was always something on my mind. I wouldn't know if I dreamt or not, the rest was so wakeful. But lately... Last night, I stood alone, in a warm and sunny field. It wasn't like here, it was a prairie, a pasture maybe, with small and sort of rolling hills. You could identify where it began, and where it ended. I looked around, and was surrounded by flowers, yellow, with, what seemed like, small buttons sewn in their centers. Alone, I felt the breeze and the sun. I did not want to wake up... There's a story about a little girl who lived on an island. Her parents were in a ship wreck, her father died; her mother, then pregnant, found her way to an island. She had the little girl and raised her, and all the while told her long, never ending stories about the love she had for her husband, the little girl's father. The mother died and girl lived on. But she was never lonely, because through the stories, she'd learned about love.

JAMES

You're not doing this Luca. You are not defining our reality with a stupid dream and a fairy tale! You act like these affairs come at no cost! Two people just find each other and then what? The little girl's father probably died at twenty- five. My life expectancy is almost four times that. And guess what, we are in the middle of the woods, there are no islands here. Be reasonable.

LUCA

No. No. No! Your reason has no place in my world. I feel your heart, it's faithless.

(LUCA exits stage right.)

JAMES

Believing in God is not a prerequisite to being a good husband! Do I bake.

(JAMES kicks the arm chair then sits on it. Moments pass. GEORGE enters through the screen door and holds it open while MOLINA enters onto the porch. He is reading the Bible aloud and makes his way across the porch to sit on a step. MOLINA does the same, stopping at different flower pots and stretching.)

GEORGE

"The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of His hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the end of the world."

~~(MOLINA walks down the porch steps heading offstage right. GEORGE touches her head without looking up from the Bible. MOLINA has stopped in her path, she stares offstage. LUCA enters from stage right wearing the~~

- ① enter w/ bible
- ② sit on rocker

L Reading from the B
W God to give me peace
A to search for an answer

~~same house clothes but now with her coat and boots. She's having trouble catching her breath, she seems confused.)~~

LUCA

There was something I wanted to ask you. I can't remember. Were you praying? I was walking this way toward... I wondered if you prayed. We've lived here these weeks, it's been... I'm too old to make such poor choices. James, I know now, he won't... That night, I heard you call out, your wife, the things you said, she must have meant so much. /
(She starts to cry.)

I've never been certain, it's not my nature. But this, this one thing must be real: time has its limit, and you can't waste yourself on someone who doesn't reach you.

~~(LUCA drops and sits on the porch steps. GEORGE stands.)~~

GEORGE

Lost people often find uncompassionate ears. You walk over here half dazed, and disrupt my Sunday morning? You eavesdrop on my sorrow, and vomit a sentimental version of my marriage! Do you understand what that word means? I can tell you what it implies, what it implies is something sacred. Don't mention my wife! You can't comprehend what she means to me. You are a stranger, you trespass on my home! Time does have its limit, that fact is what I breathe. Could you see through flesh, inside my head, it's all dark. It is absolutely black. /
(He starts to leave.)

I live in the middle of nowhere for a very specific reason, your small pilgrimages from up the road have done nothing but disrupt that. /

L Confiding in L
When he never
back
A to spare a bab

② take a hit
stomach

③ Rise

④ steps

⑤ turn

⑥ call for Molina
on steps

⑦ execute back
to stove

⑧ collapse

(GEORGE exits into the house. JAMES exits stage right. LUCA sits with her face in her hands. MOLINA, having watched everything from where she stopped center stage, crosses to LUCA and gently touches LUCA'S head with her face. Lights fade.)

SCENE SIX

(Late afternoon the same day. JAMES sits on the cement bench in the garden reading the newspaper. GEORGE enters from stage left carrying a small brown lunch bag. He speaks right as he

To strengthen

enters the stage.)

GEORGE
Newspapers, sense makers, sense extinguishers. What news?

JAMES
Meteor shower tonight, our area, assuming you live nearby. I'm James.
(JAMES stands and shakes his hand.)

GEORGE
George. Today's date is...

JAMES
The first.

GEORGE
I've wondered.

JAMES
These woods will be fantastic, no streetlight, the weather should hold.

GEORGE
An anniversary of mine, the day I got my dog, the first

JAMES
Pack animals, how's the joke? Why is dog man's best friend? Because he has no choice. Biology.
(JAMES laughs.)

You leave a dog home alone, and he cries. Genetically not solitary animals. /

① Long pattern
to James house
② in doorway
L George is meeting G
W James to take care of
A to coach a young lad

What we
you made of
③ look for Moline

GEORGE

Not her, not today anyway, haven't seen her since this morning. Maybe I'm the pack animal, so desperate for company, crying at her absence. The only house down the road is mine should you happen to- /
(He takes a deep breath.)

you have to be careful

⑤ lend back my house

Not the reason I've come here though. I was under the impression a woman lived in this house, moved here not long ago?

Come on be a man

③ Give bread

JAMES

That's Luca my... Do you have some sort of business with her?

GEORGE

I do.

JAMES

Maybe I can help you, we, the two of us, live here together. /
(GEORGE rubs his forehead seeming to collect his thought.)

that's better

GEORGE

Do you understand the significance of bread?

JAMES

Bread?

(JAMES laughs.)

A necessity in most cultures. Made with flour, water, sometimes a rising agent. Bread, a synonym for money.

you're a loser

GEORGE

What I mean is, I owe her an apology. Please extend that from me, and offer her this.

(Handing him the small brown bag.)

Baked yesterday.

JAMES

You've spoken to her?

GEORGE

I have.

JAMES

When?

GEORGE

This morning, she interrupted a sort of, though that wasn't the first time that we... It seems she's awfully bored, seeking me out. Not the best of company. Afraid I was rude. Not sure exactly what she was looking for... Women, I have a terrible tendency to dismiss them. One particular woman sort of rose through the heavy dust that is my mind. She's no longer, and I can't seem to remember the exact, her eyes, a color, they were, have you seen-

(He yells, startling JAMES.)

Damn it where is my dog!

JAMES

Your dog, I've been sitting here for most of the day and haven't, what does she

⑦ walk down st

Do you understand

No Not now
not in front of him

⑧ town
home

Change subject

⑨ lunge
to be

to acknowledge

to divert

look like?

GEORGE

She is old, frail limbs, she must have plenty of water.

JAMES

Maybe you should sit.

(GEORGE walks to the bench
and sits.)

GEORGE

Molina, she is black with golden eyes, her ears lie down the sides of her face.
You cannot hear her coming, she does not make a sound.

JAMES

Listen, there's no cars on the road here. Dogs are very, very resourceful
animals. There's still light left in the day / Maybe try and remain calm. There's a
very good chance she can find her way.

GEORGE

It will be dark, and when that happens, she can't find her way. It is one thing with
us, and one thing with them. Molina, as bright as they come and still is... As real
as they are, as human, my dear girl is not burdened with the responsibility of free
will, and not fate either, that is her honesty, and that is what makes her my
queen. We stand, stumble for direction, and they quietly, knowing naturally, what
is right, and what is not right.

JAMES

Would you like some water? /

To plead

How can I
coach you

(10) search

GEORGE

To clear my soul? It is that obvious. Water won't remove these marks. I made a choice once...
(He smiles.)

Encouraged by the voice of a woman, and we married. Fate had to have been what removed her, because there was no choice there. Her death, I did not make that choice.

JAMES

Death? Well that's a biological function.

~~(GEORGE does not respond. JAMES~~

~~touches GEORGE'S shoulder and~~

~~speaking quietly.)~~

Life continues. There is no beginning, there is no end, imagine a continuum where-

GEORGE

That means nothing to a man lying awake in the dark.
(Pause. He mumbled.)

Dear God, Your words alone...

(He takes a breath and stands.)

I've given you the bread.

(GEORGE starts to exit then stops.)

Simple routine suits me best. I've apologized for my abruptness. Perhaps it's best that I get no visitors.

ARE you Ready ① Lunge &
② ease of

③ slow to
to see

You are
not Ready

④ exit

good luck

(He exits offstage left.)

JAMES

Bread and an apology. But I have no idea where she is.

(JAMES stares offstage in the direction of GEORGE then sits on the bench.

MOLINA enters upstage right moving slowly to her spot on the porch. LUCA, looking exhausted, follows behind her humming the tune to "Maria". MOLINA settles on the porch, LUCA kneels beside her and strokes her face.

MOLINA stretches and closes her eyes, LUCA lies on the porch steps next to MOLINA and puts her arm around her. They fall asleep. Lights fade.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Later that night. JAMES is sitting on the bench and periodically looks up at the sky. MOLINA and LUCA are asleep on the porch steps. GEORGE quietly moves about the porch pruning the plants. Classical music plays softly from inside the house. MOLINA stretches disrupting LUCA who then stretches and lies on her back staring up at the sky. GEORGE stands over them.)

GEORGE
Awake now ladies?
(LUCA, looking startled and
disorientated, sits up. MOLINA watches
LUCA.)

LUCA
She was lost George, I think, or did I dream. /

GEORGE
Not lost, not my Molina.

LUCA
She was. I'd wandered off, after this morning, after leaving here, far, far down
the road. I heard a stream, left the road, walked through a sort of a ditch, a
trench, I reached the stream, and she was there.

GEORGE
A little stopping spot of hers I'm sure.

LUCA
Maybe but... She was very, very happy to see me, and stayed right behind me all
the way back, until there.
(Pointing offstage right.)

She recognized where she was there, sped up. and led me. /
(He touches MOLINA'S face.)

GEORGE
Quite a girl this one, leading the lost.

Beautiful
① long pattern
observing
ladies by
Rail

L George is enjoying
the night with Luca
+ Molina
W The ladies to find pea
A To let someone else
drive

② move to Molina

OK I'll drop it

LUCA

It's late. We slept. I dreamt...

(She smiles then stops.)

I'm sorry for what I heard. /

(She stands and faces GEORGE.)

I'm sorry I thought we could share. You live alone, away, not interested, I understand, my problems are... I thought I found compassion in, heard... At a lost time your voice hit me. I'm sorry that's all. And I don't mean to say, but it's too much to stay in the past.

GEORGE

You can't live there, and you can't forget it either, that is what my faith and I grapple with. Hard pressed in those dark hours to believe that heaven does wait, but the choice otherwise? /

(Pause.)

I stood with a Bible, and screamed like you were a stray. / You had disrupted my refuge, my necessary refuge, what seems to almost determine whether or not I make it through the day. Showing up in the midst of an unsatisfactory, a lovers' quarrel-

LUCA

Don't trivialize, I - /

GEORGE

I'm not here to understand! My wife is dead. This is not decision making time, this is not poor choices. Everything I had has been taken. Please don't come

here acting the end of the world, behaving like your breath is your last, when it's not.

~~(MOLINA lifts her head, pause, he touches her face.)~~

Did you really find her?

LUCA

I did.

GEORGE

You must not get lost again my lovely. I am a young man growing old, and would leave fast without you.

(LUCA sits on the other side of MOLINA. Classical music plays and the sky lights up, the meteor shower.

JAMES, looking up to the sky, stands.

LUCA, looking up to the sky, stands.

GEORGE sits with MOLINA, touching her face.)

LUCA

The lights in the sky are falling. /

(JAMES looks down from the stars, gazes offstage left then walks in that direction. LUCA looks down from the stars and gazes offstage right then walks in that direction. GEORGE stands and walks to the screen door.)

GEORGE

Oh, my Molina, come with me now. The moon will rise again tomorrow.

I'm not chasing you any more

③ X to Bench

LUCA

Tomorrow, could be better, should be... might be. /

GEORGE

The moon, the moon and his effect on women. /

(MOLINA doesn't move. GEORGE picks up the bowl of food and shakes it in rhythm. MOLINA'S head lifts instantly. GEORGE smiles. MOLINA stretches and walks toward the door, GEORGE speaks.)

One day, is that too clichéd for you my girl? My girl with the wandering feet, but never a wandering heart. All alone in the woods lived a lost little dog, until one day, one day she was found by my wife...

(MOLINA walks slowly through the screen door. GEORGE looks at the sky.)

Her eyes... I can't remember. I can't forget
(Music and lights fade.)

Appendix B

Voice Warm-up

Body Alignment

drop down

centering

connect with breath

Connecting Voice with Breath

huh huh

The Vocal Passageway

ha hum

humming series

tongue stretch

soft palate stretch (big yawn)

keh

ngah ngah

flay la la

jaw

The Resonating Chambers

chest

hard palate

teeth

blending and freeing

facial isolations

vacuums

sinuses

me me me me

undulations

key

Liberating the Voice

range

Vita

James Wadsworth Yeargain received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in May 2001 from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. He continued his education through various programs and coaches while working as an actor in New York until 2006. During that time he also started teaching his own intensive workshops in smaller rural towns because he wished the same type of training he received in New York was more accessible to people like him. He was raised in Ponchatoula, Louisiana.

James was accepted into the University of New Orleans Master of Fine Arts program as an actor in 2006. He continued teaching public speaking as well as acting classes during his Masters program. While he was acting for the University of New Orleans he received an Irene Ryan Acting Nomination three years in a row. He also became a company member of the NOLA Project, a New Orleans-based theatre company founded in 2005.

James hopes to continue teaching artists to fully realize their potential, as well as to continue to work as an actor in film and theatre. He will never stop training in acting because it is a constantly evolving art.