Visiting Griffin at the Confluence of Playwriting, Ethics and Spirit:
Towards Poet(h)ic Inquiry in Research-based Theatre

by

Heather Anne Duff

B.A., York University, 1979
M.Div., McMaster University, 1983
M.F.A., The University of British Columbia, 1986

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Language and Literacy Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

September, 2016

© Heather Anne Duff, 2016
Abstract

Poet(h)ic inquiry is a pedagogical space of inquiry at the confluence of playwriting, ethics and spirit, in the context of research-based theatre. It is an inquiry about presences and absences: the *yu-mu* (Aoki, 2000) within ethico-spiritual dilemmas, with respect to (1) an ethic of meaning, (2) individual and social justice, (3) aesthetic values, (4) an ethic of respect (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005) regarding authorship, and (5) integrated ethical relationality in contexts of teaching-learning-creativity-playwriting-knowing. Within arts-based research, there are notable ethical gaps (Boydell et al., 2012; Gallagher, 2007b; White & Belliveau, 2010) related to a quest for ethicality (Denzin, 2006; Norris, 2009), meaning (Frankl, 1946/2004), and hope-based, emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 2006) within located social justice. Research-based theatre (Belliveau, 2015; Goldstein, 2012; Lea & Belliveau, 2015; Lea et al., 2011; Norris 2009; Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013; Saldaña, 2005, 2011), which aims to balance aesthetics with instrumental purposes (Jackson, 2005), is well positioned for ethics-situated inquiry, within a plethora of psycho-spiritual, socio-political, and geo-historical contexts.

My dissertation play, *Visiting Griffin*, expresses the interplay between memory and present time. While visiting an absent student actor in a hospital wing, Blythe, a director/drama teacher, inquires poet(h)ically on a thread of memories through the lens of playwriting –incorporating various art forms, genres, literacies and modalities (Siegel, 2006). Scenes depict a paradox of presence-absences: *yu-mu* (Aoki & Jacknicke, 2000, p. 3), within particular ethical dilemmas across time and place, towards a (possibly redemptive) visit to Griffin, who is both character and metaphor in connection with the notion of self-other: *hito*
(Aoki, 1995, p. 6). Chorus-like, supporting characters, Henriette and Mabel, offer a bilingual presence-absence in counterpoint to Dancer, who embodies a literacy of silence. Themes emerge from Visiting Griffin such as exile and return, expatriation and repatriation, and the cost of social justice. I explore my ethics criteria in dynamic poet(h)ic relationality from various perspectives. Aesthetics in poet(h)ic inquiry is linked to sub-textuality, how theme and meaning are reflected within multi-modalities, and what constitutes aesthetic knowing. Beyond Visiting Griffin, ‘redemptivity’ may be realized as a point of departure, through integrated poet(h)ical relationality on the stage of life.
My research design is informed by conventions of playwriting, research-based theatre, arts-based research and other aspects of scholarship. Research Ethics Review was not required for this thesis.

Act Four incorporates journal entries from my journal written at L’Abbaye Cistercienne, Oka, Quebec, June, 1977, based on a verbatim dialogue between Père Benedict Vanier (1925-2014) and myself.

In Act Six of Visiting Griffin, the poem “Christmas 1982” is based on the poem:


Appendix A – Jan Swaren (1983). Communion With Whom? (Lithograph 2/8) is used with permission of the artist.

Appendix B – Jan Swaren (1983). Mary Magdalene (Oil on canvas) is used with permission of the artist.

Appendix B, continued – Jan Swaren in McMaster University Art studio, 1983, with Mary Magdalene painting on the wall. This photo is used with permission of the artist.

Figure 1 – Self/other equation is my own design.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. ii

Preface ............................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................... v

List of Figures .................................................................................................................... viii

Invocation ........................................................................................................................... ix

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................. x

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... xii

Part I – Approaching the Visit (Prologue) ........................................................................... 1

“Perhaps it is the Task” (found poem) .............................................................................. 1

Towards Poet(h)ic Inquiry ................................................................................................. 2

A Memoir: (Ghost)-Playwriting and Paradigm Wars ......................................................... 5

Dramatization of Research ............................................................................................... 10

Playwriting as Research and Data .................................................................................. 19

After Reading Aoki .......................................................................................................... 22

Yu-mu as Paradox of Ethical Dilemma ............................................................................ 23

Complementary Theoretical Viewpoints ......................................................................... 27

Interspace and Poet(h)ic inquiry ..................................................................................... 29

Poetics, Ethics, Poet(h)ics ............................................................................................... 33

Inside Visiting Griffin ......................................................................................................... 36

Multiple Genres, Literacies and Modalities .................................................................... 37
“Dramatis Personae” (a poem) .................................................. 42

PART II – The Visit (Visiting Griffin, a stage play) .................................................. 43
Characters ............................................................................. 43
Act One ................................................................................... 45
Act Two ................................................................................... 64
Act Three ................................................................................. 77
Act Four ................................................................................... 88
Act Five ................................................................................... 100
Act Six ..................................................................................... 113
Act Seven ................................................................................. 159
Act Eight – Postscript ............................................................. 176

PART III – After the Visit (Epilogue) ...................................................... 178
The End ..................................................................................... 178
Poet(h)ic Moments ................................................................. 179
Exile and Expatriation ............................................................. 182
The Griffin Question ............................................................... 189
Criteria Towards Poet(h)ic Inquiry ........................................... 194
Authorship and Sacred Literary Memory ................................. 199
Subtext and Authorship ........................................................... 201
Production Notes ................................................................. 203
Director’s Vision ................................................................. 206
Genres, Literacies and Modalities .......................................... 207
Role of Dancer in Visiting Griffin .................................................................................. 213
Super-Objective and the Future ...................................................................................... 214
A Response to Visiting Griffin ......................................................................................... 218
“Here I stand” (poem) ..................................................................................................... 220

End Notes (Part I, II, III) ............................................................................................... 221

References ......................................................................................................................... 228

Appendices ......................................................................................................................... 246
Appendix A .......................................................................................................................... 246
Appendix B .......................................................................................................................... 247
List of Figures

Figure 1. Self-other equation. Design by Heather Duff.................................................................201
Invocation:

I wade where three rivers intersect

They say it takes a community to raise one child
to raise a whole human being,
may take a whole world, and tumult.

This re-raising, effervescent;
deep torrents, caught at that confluence.
I wade where three rivers intersect, a sacred place.

The third river may be unseen;
one may long to dwell in absence,
to flow in a safe, cool place, un-ravished.

In this metaphor of three rivers,
which one is the river of no sight:
playwriting, ethics or spirit?

At different times and places,
each element in tenacity,
may take its turn to be the unseen.

Unseen river is the strongest one,
river that flows far beneath the ground,
or in silence and memory; it is the un-flow

dry riverbed, or trace of a riverbed,
that lingers: the holy, that flows through
soul-self, in presence-absence.

My soul-felt thanks to those who have emerged,
at times from sacred invisibility,
to uplift this journey: from past, future

Here, there, this life and beyond death,
the eternal inner flow of memory,
muse-like, Aokian yu-mu – presence-absence.

Heather Duff
Acknowledgments

First, I express heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. George Belliveau, whose outstanding leadership, talent, and courage as an arts-based researcher inspires many. Dr. Belliveau’s outstanding belief in me through the apparently insurmountable, has taught me about the expansiveness, justice, and joy of research-based theatre. Also, I thank my rigorous and loyal committee members, who are also extraordinary artists: Dr. Carl Leggo and Dr. Rita Irwin.

Special thanks to Dr. Anthony Paré, Head of UBC’s Department of Language and Literacy Education, and for the generous financial support of the LLED Department towards my research over the past few years. In appreciation also to the kind donor of the Cody Fund Award. In appreciation also to Margaret McKeon for her assistance, to LLED Graduate Programs Assistant Chris Fernandez, to Doctoral Exams Assistant, Janet Lam, to Head Librarian of UBC’s Education Library, Chris Ball, and to Faye Chisholm, Coordinator of Library Public Services at Vancouver School of Theology (VST). Many thanks to Kelli Kiyomi Kadokawa from GPS at UBC, and to Jennifer Hogg for assistance with formatting. Thank you to Botao Wu, for his consultation about Chinese language and culture, and to Yayoi Hirano, for her consultation about Japanese language and culture. Thank you also to Dr. Patsy Duff (UBC), Dr. Bonnie Norton (UBC), and Dr. Monica Prendergast (UVIC), for their support and inspiration.

I also thank past supervisors – Dr. Patrick Gray (McMaster University), Rev. John O’Connor, (MUMC), George McWhirter (UBC Creative Writing), Clarke Blaise (York University Creative Writing), Carole Tarlington (founder of Vancouver Youth Theatre), Tim Porteous, Dr. Ken Reeder, & Ingrid Kastens (Past Chairs of Vancouver Youth Theatre), Dr. Gustave Weltsek, (Past Board Director), Jan Robinson (Chair), Wendy Peaker (bookkeeper), and VYT’s Board Directors. Thank you to artists- mentors Marilyn Aikman (Alexander Technique), Katherine Ricketts (dance training), and Richard Howes (theatre mentor). Thank you to Dr. Kasia Heiglemann, Chrystal Malapas, Shauna Mullinix, Kathy Eugster, Mary Craig, Gregg Taylor, Rt. Rev. Gary Paterson, Curt Allison, Jen Cunnings, and Rev. Beth Hayward, for their healing practices; to Dr. Roger Forsman (family friend) and Rev. John Duff (cousin), for humour and wisdom, and to Swami ji and Devi (meditation practices).

In Loving Memory: Dr. Ted Aoki (1919-2012), Fr. Tom McKillop (1928-2012) and Père Benedict Vanier (1925-2014), for their contributions to my understanding of the links between silence, contemplation and justice. Also, W.O. Mitchell (1914-1998), Canadian icon/ author, whose notion of “freefall writing” and his York University writing tutorial started my writing in earnest. I remember the inspired Susan Jean McKay (1952-2011),
whose healing essence haunts me in a good way. I am grateful to my inspirational young friend, Masashi Shintani (1991-2016), emerging leader at Nikkei Museum and Cultural Centre, friend and mentor for many Japanese home stay students.

Thank you to friends and colleagues: Daphne Jarvis, my dearest childhood friend, who keeps me true to myself. Thank you to other supportive friends some of whom are listed here: Lia Marie Talia (courage-bearer), Anar Rajabali (light-bearer), Ahava Shira (love-bearer), Tanisha Beattie (hope-bearer), and many friends along the way, such as Bev Sauvé, Eileen Barrett, Jenn Hogg, Sue Belliveau, Jan Swaren, Linda Watson, Heather Watson-Burgess, Jude Walker, Alison McLean, Angela Brown, Melissa May Bellingham, Phil Makow, Autumn and Luke Johnson; my writer’s group: Ellen Schwartz, Lori Thicke, Chris Petty, Bob Strandquist, Morna McLeod, Graham Bibby; as well as artists, Donnard MacKenzie, Niki, Saige & Tiernan, for their encouragement. Thank you to inspirational family and friends of Masashi Shintani – his mother, Miyuki Shintani, his father, Minamur Chowdhury, and dear friend, Shoko Kitada.

Thank you to storyteller, adventurer, and father of my son, Norman Angell. Thanks to my dear son, Angus Angell, who is very much his own person; he believes in the future, in me, in himself, in the unfolding of dark into light.

Thank you to special family members: Doreen Raymer, my aunt, for her inspiration, creativity, and generous spirit, as author of books on Duffs and Duncans, and for helping me see my own “journey paved with miracles”. For my brother Bruce Duff, & sister-in law, Lisa, who carry torches of wisdom, humour and gladness for many families. Heartfelt appreciation to my dear sister, Holly Duff, whose artistry, fierce loyalty, and life journey in joyous parallel, never lets me be less than who I am. Thanks to important grown up children with whom to share in celebration: Rosemary Crane, Ian Crane, Danny Duff and Patrick Duff, Tori Chatten, Cassie Chatten, Bryan Chatten, Melissa Bowlby, Rachel Strandquist, Celeste Makow, my godson Jonathan Cox, and brothers, Dylan and Aidan Cox.

For Glenn Chatten, my “spiritual friend and colleague,” music-man, tireless soul mate and partner, without whom all this would not be possible, for his belief in me and constant press towards the mark. I thank the Great Spirit, to whom we owe commitment to self-neighbour and to this fragile Earth.
to my mother who taught me to read

Elva Addie Hawley Duff, b. 1935

and my father who asked to listen

C. Gordon Duff, 1928-1993
Part I – Approaching the Visit (Prologue)

Perhaps it is the Task

Perhaps it is the task
of philosophy
  to only offer
    means
by which questions can arise,
  issues such as
ethics, existence, and responsibility.

Why is there theatre,
rather than nothing?

– a question
which philosophy also asks of itself;
    a question unanswered
in myriad forms on the stage,
  if we give it a theatre
    to think the thought
that is most proper to it,
    and to put that thought
    into play.1

Well how the hell are we ever going to climb Mt Everest if we don’t take a risk? It’s uncomfortable, and difficult and sometimes totally terrifying to be at the cutting edge, but that is not only what good art has always done…, it’s what good research has too. And it’s terrifying, and sometimes dangerous, yes it is. (Harris & Sinclair, 2014, p. 161)
Towards Poet(h)ic Inquiry

Poet(h)ic inquiry\(^2\) is a pedagogical space of inquiry at the confluence of playwriting, ethics and spirit, in the context of research-based theatre. In essence, poet(h)ic inquiry is a springboard to inquiry about light and shadows, and the presences and absences: the \textit{yu-mu} (Aoki & Jacknicke, 2000) within ethical and spiritual dilemmas. Poet(h)ic inquiry is an approach expressing inquiry into the unique, particular and fundamental values, and the presence-absences within various ethico-spiritual paradoxes emerging from arts-based inquiries, and within moral theoretical underpinnings such as meta-ethicality. Poet(h)ic inquiry explores strands of ethics with respect to specific questions regarding (1) an ethic of meaning, (2) individual and social justice, (3) aesthetic values, (4) an ethic of authorship, and (4) integrated ethical relationality in contexts of teaching-learning-creativity-playwriting-knowing, including life-long learning. At the confluence of playwriting, ethics and spirit, poet(h)ic inquiry offers ethical reflection incorporating poetic-aesthetic values in arts-based research through playwriting in research-based theatre, which encompasses a plethora of collaborative art forms, genres, literacies and multi-modalities. In poet(h)ic inquiry, the (h) in parenthesis represents the symbolic (character) role of spirit (symbolized in the non-verbal character ‘Dancer’ in \textit{Visiting Griffin}): as in Aoki’s notion of presence-absence \textit{yu-mu} (Japanese), which is akin to what is ‘unseen’; as in the embodied notion of spirit as breath, with its multi-linguistic parallels such as \textit{prana} (Sanskrit), \textit{ruah} (Hebrew), and \textit{pneuma} (Greek).

The heart of my dissertation is the exploration of poet(h)ic inquiry at the confluence of playwriting, ethics and spirit, adopting the lens of research-based theatre within a non-
fixed site of teaching-learning-creativity-playwriting-knowing. I examine this question in relation to the subtly different, yet critical and/or often neglected, aspects or strands of ethics that arise within these sites of creativity using an arts-based research approach. Movement towards the approach of poet(h)ic inquiry is a journey forward towards a non-fixed, sacred place where ethics and spirit and playwriting (as research) meet at the confluence. My playwriting site is the script and process of writing the play *Visiting Griffin*, which includes heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981) layers and contextualization within writers’ collectives, as well as embodied interdisciplinary arts utilizing multiple genres, literacies, and modalities. The sense of the sacred is represented by *yu-mu* and an ethic or notion of ‘spirit’ or ‘God’ or ‘God becoming’ or ‘self’ or ‘self becoming’ or ‘spirit,’ related to presence-absence (*yu-mu*) and ‘self-other’ (*hito*).

The paradox of *yu-mu* is echoed in the multiple truths, tangential sites and hybrid in-between spaces in non-fixed sites of spirit within creativity, teaching and learning. Non-fixed sites of spirit are informed by *a/r/tographic* inquiry (Irwin, 2003; Irwin, 2008; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin et al, 2006), a methodology that explores the interplay of artist, researcher and teacher identities, including ‘rhizomatic relationality,’ creating “interconnected networks with multiple entry points” and a sense of “always becoming” (Irwin et al, 2006, p. 4). *A/r/tography* is complementary to narrative inquiry (Leggo, 2004a, 2008a, 2008b), and poetic inquiry (Gaylie, 2008; Kelly & Leggo, 2008; Leggo, 2006; Luce-Kapler, 2003; Prendergast, 2007, 2008), whereby researchers pursue poetic ways of knowing (Leggo, 2004b, 2006) within teaching-learning contexts to envision “poetry as embodiment of meaning” (Luce-Kapler, 2003, p. 84). Another parallel inquiry is *theopoetics*, based on Wilder’s *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (1976). Since Wilder, there
has been a continuum of echoes regarding theological issues from the standpoint of the poetic, including an embodied learning perspective and resonances with ‘process theology.’ Theopoetics suggests that we “re-imagine God” (Caputo & Keller, 2007), disrupt certainties of traditional theology, and that we see “God, as poet of the world” (Hulbert & Slettom, 2006, p. 1), where “the actuality of God is a multiplicity of processes of becoming” (p. 1).

One can then re-imagine self/other, or ‘I-Thou’ (Buber, 1958), and notions of ‘God’ (or what we deem as universal truth, ultimate meaning, or transcendent process) or ‘God as poet/poet-creator.’ Within Aoki’s world, a notion of God may essentially be a notion of the self/Self. In educational philosophy and curriculum, Aoki’s area of specialty, themes of currere dovetail with spirituality; perhaps, then, we are witnessing a hybrid spirituality that births eclecticism in-between languages, world faith traditions, and multiculturalism. Here or there we may in fact be ‘the created’ – embodied mystics, walking poems in our humanity – evolving, incarnating, becoming. Thus, I/you am/are both self and other, and as Aoki suggests, disclosing “life as lived in and through language, disclosing in some way what it means to be human” (Aoki, 1991a/2005, p. 181). As in life, perhaps also, we are all both poets and poems, playwrights and plays, in a courageous linguistic of spirit, even when no spirit is felt; we are playwright/play, even in the invisible, non-fixity of site, in presence-absence.

In the intentional silence
and often
in the language
of an inner or inaudible voice,
presence and absence coalesce
or are metonyms for each other

in an uncanny

interconnected dance

A Memoir: (Ghost)-Playwriting and Paradigm Wars

My own professional journey as a director, playwright, and as director at Vancouver Youth Theatre (with its dual professional expectation regarding both directing and playwriting) has offered various turning points in ethical reflection on nuanced aspects of meaning and justice, authorship and anonymity. My first experience as a playwright was as an undergraduate college-aged cast member in Summer Company, sponsored by a federal grant. I was commissioned to write the musical play *The Almanac* (Duff, 1978), comprised of humorous vignettes depicting historical events, movies, fads, and music from the first and second wars. We toured that original play to nursing homes and seniors centres in the Mississauga-Toronto area. The following summer, when I found a higher paying job as a Drama Camp instructor, I was invited to return to watch the performance of Summer Company, 1979. It was disturbing to discover that the new troupe had re-mounted *The Almanac*, without consultation or permission, based on a tattered script they had found on the floor behind the curtain from the previous summer. I realized then about the importance of knowledge about authorship and copyright.

My history regarding working with diverse ensembles continued in the early eighties. I was a young woman seminary student with an interest in the meaning of ‘meaning’
informed by logotherapy (Frankl, 1946/2004), called to contemplation, social justice, and arts-based theological inquiry at McMaster University in Ontario, in a denomination (Baptist) that struggled to find its place between conservative and liberal paradigms. At that time there were only five women ordained in Canada. I arrived with playwriting experience from undergraduate creative writing courses and the summer touring studio theatre company.

At seminary, I was invited to join an experimental, theologically-based theatre group called the Divinity College Players that included seminary students, professors and other students on campus under the direction of playwright-director, Linda Watson. Watson’s work was informed by religious drama, chancel drama, and liturgical drama, genres with roots in medieval theatre, embracing the particularities, structure, and techniques of the Mystery Play, the Miracle Play, the Passion Play and the Morality Play (Cuddon, 1999/1977; Paul, 2009). Moreover, Paul (2009) suggests that “all drama is religious” due to the communal belief bonding actor and audience, and the fact that “shared effort among actors and audience to make the invisible visible is critical to all plays” (p. 2). In the early 1980’s, I resonated with the idea that dramatic embodiment could itself be considered sacred. I was subsequently commissioned to write a play that would involve an ensemble in collaboration with a musical choral group. In hindsight, the large scale touring production, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers* (Duff, 1980) was akin to a medieval morality play or even to contemporary didactic theatre, including an element of spectacle (Cuddon, 1999/1977) in the utopian spirit of Bertolt Brecht, where “theatre itself” creates “a new kind of society” (Jameson, 2000/1998, p. 11). *Blessed* featured choral speeches, narration, drama, mime, dance, music, choir repertoire, spectacle, and the polarized forces of evil and good. The adversaries of peace (World Players) donned grey prison-like garb, while the forces of peace (Peacemakers)
wore colourful ‘Godspell-esque’ costumes. The pinnacle of the play was a tableaux of a female peacemaker/dancer, arms outstretched, perched on the tallest actor’s shoulders: symbol of crucified woman.

When Linda graduated, I became the director, and as there were limited contemporary scripts available, I began writing more new scripts. In retrospect, these plays inspired, challenged and disrupted mainstream theological training. Although I was interested in dramatic moral inquiry, my ethical stance as a playwright-director reflected the tenor of the times. My plays arose initially from interest in the peace movement framed by the notion of “non-violent resistance” (Hardiman, 2013), associated with the humanitarian notion of universal justice (Kohlberg & Power, 1981), transcending existential despair, suggesting the integration of “principles of human justice with a perspective on life’s ultimate meaning” (p. 233). Social justice praxis was explored through various dilemmatic scenarios portrayed in all of my plays written in the Divinity College Players era of the early 1980’s, which was my playwright’s ground work towards poet(h)ic exploration in my dissertation play, Visiting Griffin.

In addition, my plays written in the early 1980’s reflected many heated debates of that era such as discourses about the feminine face of the divine (Trible, 1978). Although there were no women faculty members to offer voices of guidance, some of us also read theologians like Mary Daly (1973, 1978) who advocated for a radical feminist meta-ethics beyond “phallocentric ethics” (1978, p. 14), and Rosemary Radford Ruether (2012), a feminist theologian with a post-colonial lens. Another challenge to the mainstream church (which I read years later) is Mary Jo Leddy’s critique of the Catholic Church’s broad confessional regarding some connection to the World War II Nazi movement entitled Say to
the Darkness I Beg to Differ (1990). In seminary, we also studied the Latin American martyrs informed by liberation theologies, such as Gutiérrez (1998), that I now know ran parallel to Freire’s educational pedagogies from Brazil, tackling themes of liberation. In addition, there were reverberations more broadly of the paradigm wars of the eighties, influenced by critical pedagogy and affected by “struggles for power and cultural capital for the poor, non-whites, women, and gays” (Denzin, 2008, p. 317).

With respect to content, plays that I wrote and presented at this time (Duff & Chatten, 1982) included an alternate Genesis story where both God and Adam (Adamah) were female characters with taped music from Woodstock folksinger Melanie Safka, called Daughter of God. In People, Guinea Pigs and Daisies, the Holy Spirit was a jester-dancer in purple satin pants; in another play, The Gardener portrayed an ex-con in blue denim overalls, leaning on a rake in a garden as a Christ metaphor. I cast a theology professor as the ex-con man/antihero/Christ figure, as I wanted my actors in the troupe to play characters they ‘needed’ to play. This sometimes meant playing opposites from who they were in real life, or characters on a life journey similar to their own. For that reason, as an emergent playwright, I created characters intuitively for the particular actors I had in mind. This process of playwriting for a specific ensemble, and my subsequent ‘emancipatory’ goal with respect to playwriting, casting, and directing, was influenced by psychodrama (related to improvisational drama), which was utilized by my supervisor, Chaplain John A. O’Connor, throughout my basic unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). CPE was a program of basic pastoral counseling training where we worked as student chaplains alongside nurses, doctors, social workers and other clinical team members at MUMC (McMaster University Medical Centre). In this context, psychodrama was used within a group of six interdenominational
students as an innovative method of processing verbatims (written remembered dialogues between various combinations of patient-chaplain-family member-clinical team members), as well as for debriefing in the aftermath of interactions among chaplains and staff, and patients and their families in acute care, palliative care, and ICU. A simple example of the use of psychodrama as a method for processing pastoral visits would be guided closure in the form of a (student) chaplain talking to an empty chair representing her/his patient who had unexpectedly died.

Consequently, I was fascinated by the potential of drama as a means of healing. As a playwright, I created characters resembling particular members of the college drama community, characters whose development paralleled journeys of their own lives. There was an informal unwritten ethic or process of verbal consent to this process. I told the actors that I wrote these parts specifically for them, and these character parts were then accepted or not by the actors. In workshop, actors would often discuss the script and change a line if they had a better one in mind. Although no formalized ethical reflection occurred, I was aware of the issues of ownership, and argue that there was an emotional-spiritual connection actors had to their characters. It was as if they wrote their parts, as if I was their ghost-writer. In addition, original folk music by Glenn Chatten brought light to the play themes, insight, and cohesion to the community. In essence, there was a sense of co-creativity, group inquiry, and collaborative ownership, even though on paper, I was deemed the playwright. A collection of these scripts is located in the Canadian Baptist Archives at McMaster University (Duff & Chatten, 1982). My (ghost)playwriting process and direction of these plays was a forerunner of what I now know as playbuilding – concurring with the experience of playbuilding directors such as Norris (2009); in playbuilding, with guidance and through storytelling,
brainstorming improvisation and other strategies, actors actually help to create/write/act their own character parts.

When I came to the University of British Columbia (UBC), I took a graduate course in playwriting (towards my MFA) where I wrote several one-act plays, one of which I directed and produced at the 1986 Fringe Festival. This play, called *Mansion Over the Hilltop*, included music and was about family members grappling with individual and collective identity in Southern Ontario in the 1940’s and 1950’s. My lighting design for *Mansion Over the Hilltop* was a stage illuminated as in an old photograph. My original song, “Mellow Spirit” (Duff, 1986), was arranged and played live at the Western Front on a grand piano by theatrical pianist Sergei Ryga, whose musical contribution built on his father’s work in Canadian theatre. (Playwright George Ryga’s play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* “emphasized the sense of disenfranchisement of those living on the Canadian social and political margins” [Talia, 2008, p. 12].) The process of writing *Visiting Griffin* has been a delight as it hearkens back to an era when, for the sake of maintaining my identity as a writer, I practically lived on inner symbolic resources (Bourdieu, 1991; Norton, 2001), which are particularly significant for people in peripheral or marginalized positions (Zittoun, 2006).

**Dramatization of Research**

That the ‘truth at-all-cost’ protagonist (Blythe) of my dissertation play *Visiting Griffin* is a director-educator-writer-actor on a journey of self that stretches beyond the self to the Aokian *hito* (self-other), across a life long ethical quest for individual/social justice, is
both fictional and deeply connected to my own poet(h)ically layered journey. Meyer (2008) contends that, “self/other as a theme has a reflexive edge since we’re at once both self and other” (p. 1). Although I position myself as sole playwright in the sphere of this dissertation play (Part II), I have been director /educator at Vancouver Youth Theatre (as well as in other contexts), co-creating original issue-based plays with youth through playbuilding (Norris, 2009; Tarlington, 1996; Tarlington & Michaels, 1995; Vancouver Youth Theatre, 1983-2015). Collaborative playbuilding with youth is an inspirited, mysterious, esoteric, intellectual, surprising, open-minded and open-ended, flexible, unabashedly creative, reflexive, positional, communing, multi-layered, polyphonic, heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981), and at times terrifyingly honest process – heralding both tears and laughter. Each new collaborative play is a journey that privileges movement over stasis. Voices and spirits of actor-author-researchers travel in immediacy and spontaneity, both through the process of playbuilding and in the dissemination of the performed ensemble-centred play.

*Visiting Griffin* is situated among various strands of collective playmaking approaches related to playbuilding, theatre, theatricality, and meta-theatricality. Ultimately, the script of *Visiting Griffin* is positioned in the category of playwriting within an emergent, vital and potentially (richly) ethical area of research-based theatre, which encompasses various art forms, genres, literacies and modalities. Research-based theatre refers to the multiple ways of integrating theatre throughout the research process in order to enhance understanding of lived experience in different groups and communities (Belliveau & Lea, 2011, 2016; Mitchell, Jonas-Simpson & Ivonoffski, 2006). This understanding of research-based theatre does not restrict the approach of creating theatre from disseminated research or from data involving an ethnographic approach (Belliveau & Lea, 2011). Related
methodologies in this field share much in common, yet each is distinctive as I discuss in
detail below.

Playbuilding and drama-based methods are informed by scholarly perspectives within
qualitative research that strive for a balance between intent that is both aesthetic and
instrumental (Jackson, 2005, 2007). Bulchotz (1999) writes about the ethical-political aspects
of the transcription process in academia and in other legal contexts, and admits that linguists
may be reminded to prioritize “aesthetics and accessibility” (p. 1454). Prendergast and
Belliveau (2013) state that reviewers of poetic and performance-based qualitative research
need to “attend to both scholarly and aesthetic aspects” (p. 197), while Lea and Belliveau
(2015) contend that, “performance-based research can be seen as a doubled enterprise; the
researcher is not only charged with creating something worthy of peer-reviewed publication,
but it is also responsible for creating work that is aesthetically rich and rewarding” (p. 1).
Elements of research-based theatre strands related to the collaborative process of
playbuilding are various.

Arts-based qualitative research includes ethnodrama and ethnotheatre (Belliveau,
Johnny Saldaña (2005) defines ethnotheatre, as that which “employs the traditional craft and
artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of
research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of data” (p. 1).
Saldaña contends that the goal is “to investigate a particular facet of the human condition for
the purposes of adapting those observations and insights into a performance medium” (p. 1).
Other drama-based approaches that are also used as research methodologies include
research-informed theatre (Goldstein, 2001; 2012; Kaufman, 2001), applied theatre
(Prendergast & Saxton, 2009), playwriting/fiction-as-research (Belliveau, 2015; Harris & Sinclair, 2014), and performative inquiry (Fels, 1999; 2010), in addition to specific methods such as role drama and process drama (Fels & Belliveau, 2008; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Heathcote, Johnson & O’Neill 1984/1991; O’Neill, 1995; Tarlington & Verriour, 1991).

Research-informed theatre includes the skilful use of interviews in the process of data generation as in the example of Tara Goldstein’s *Hong Kong, Canada* project (2001) wherein the craft of playwriting is applied to ethnographic processes, with skills that include aesthetic choices in order to portray transcriptions of interviews. Goldstein (2012) further explicates the roots of the term ‘ethnodrama’ within research-informed theatre, and refers to Denzin’s notion of performance ethnography “as sociology-based research findings that are scripted, read and/or performed” (Goldstein, 2012, p. 2). Goldstein contends that Saldaña’s ‘ethnodrama’ encapsulates a concept that includes a broader perspective reaching beyond sociology to multidisciplinarity, and suggests that health researcher/playwrights like Mienczakowski (1997) and Teresa Moore (Mienczakowski & Moore, 2008) can be considered ethnodramatists.

Ethnodrama emphasizes the process and the accuracy of new research understandings in a completed script format. Ethnotheatre also refers to the process of incorporating research data (e.g., interviews) into a completed written script (as does ethnodrama). However, ethnotheatre takes that script beyond the page to a staged piece that privileges theatricality and an aesthetic of theatrical convention(s) in a potentially polished final product(ion). Belliveau and White (2010) assert that, “Ethnotheatre enables us to actively engage, and perhaps even ‘discover’ new research findings on a personal and embodied level” (p. 26). In essence, then, both ethnodrama and ethnotheatre involve artistic expression and drama-
informed protocol. Ethnotheatre, however, may allow for a more expansive research-based theatre aesthetic, featuring directors, actors, stage managers, publicists, audiences, critics, and/or arts-based researchers gathered at a conference – in sum, a wider community of theatre participants.

Gallagher (2007b) argues that using theatre as a potent metaphor in critical ethnographic research brings research stories and identities into an explicit framework and “keeps alive the immediacy of the discourse” (p. 106). Performance ethnography, and in particular, performance auto-ethnography, related to autobiography, is methodologically related to “researcher-voiced” poetic inquiry (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013). Denzin (2003) maintains that, “performance auto-ethnography now becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project” which is “centred on an ongoing moral dialogue involving the shared ownership of the performance project itself” (p. 17). Other performance ethnographers such as Kaufman (2001) – in connection with Members of the Tectonic Theater Project – exemplify a socio-political moral consciousness such as within the provocative research-informed play, *The Laramie Project*; this play is fuelled by Kaufman’s question: “Is theatre a medium that can contribute to the national dialogue on current events?” (p. 12).

Denzin builds on theorists such as Conquergood (1985), who notes that performances are “deeply enmeshed in moral matters” (p. 2), by arguing “performers critically bring the spaces, meanings, ambiguities, and contradictions of late-capitalist culture alive. The performed text operates in the liminal spaces of culture” (Denzin, 2003, p. 37). In these spaces, Denzin explores “the moral, the political, and the ethical, toward the literary and the aesthetic; and toward trauma and the politics of experience” (p. 111). He proposes “a dialogic epistemology and aesthetic” (p. 113), high standards such that “committed scholars
implement these understandings in their performances” (p. 115). Denzin refers to both Ellis’ (2000) criteria of ‘literary value’ as it complements the five criteria for arts-based research developed by Richardson (2000): 1) ‘substantive contribution,’ 2) ‘aesthetic merit,’ 3) ‘reflexivity,’ 4) ‘impact,’ and 5) ‘expresses a reality.’ These criteria are also referenced in assessment-centred literature (Lea & Belliveau, 2015; Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013).

As proposed by Denzin (2003), there are two groups who use dramatic performance as research: researchers within health sciences, social sciences and the humanities who are using creative means to explore data, and secondly, a smaller group who use (auto)ethnography and (auto)biography in playwriting, who are often not conscious that they might be categorized as those who are engaging in qualitative research projects. Applied theatre is related to this latter group in the sense that participants may share in the development of creative theatre projects that unknowingly explore the fruits of their unconscious ‘research’ on social issues. Applied theatre embraces popular theatre, peoples theatre, grassroots theatre, social theatre, prison theatre, political theatre, radical theatre, and other theatrical forms (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009) such as interventionist theatre (Balfour & Somers, 2006), resonating with epic theatre developed in the 1920’s (Cuddon, 1999/1977), which not only provides social critique but “in Brecht’s case, potential revolutionary action” (Prendergast & Saxon, 2009, p. 7). In all these forms of Applied Theatre, those who may not always have formal theatre training have an opportunity for aesthetic self expression in a context where performers can safely challenge the power differentials of society.

A number of contemporary theatre companies engage in research-based scripted material work with most elements described in the above methodologies. Selected playbuilt
issue-based teen productions from Vancouver Youth Theatre (VYT) such as *Will the Real Canadian?* (Tarlington, 1989) *Canadian Stories* (Tarlington, 1990) *Teen Parents* (Hogan, 1999), and *Harmony* (Brownsey, 2000), with *Harmony: A Teacher’s Guide* (Duff, 2000a), are plays incorporating intensive data-generative processes involving multiple interviewees. Interviews with new Canadian students and young parents included research ethics protocol such as consent forms. Interview data was then workshopped in rehearsals, along with actors’ ideas, with the intent of generating new playbuilt scripts under the direction of professional director-playwrights in collaborative partnership with youth. As director (and coordinating playwright) of seven VYT teen one-act play productions: *Say Peace* (Duff, 2007), *Say Peace 2* (2008), *Echo Freedom* (2009), *Why Justice?* (2011), *Identity* (2013), *Identity II* (2014) and *Doors of Choice* (2015), my choice was to simplify the generation of data by eliminating (non-VYT) research participant interviews. Thus, I have streamlined the playbuilding process by featuring exclusively the ideas, research, and direct experiences of teen ensemble members, who, in turn, embody their own self-generated characters and scenes.

Joe Norris (2009), artistic director of Mirror Theatre, maintains that playbuilding contains some similarities to ethnodrama. In both methodologies data is 1) *generated* (in playbuilding by director(s)/ensemble, and in ethnodrama through participant interviews), 2) *analysed* (in playbuilding by director(s)/ensemble, and in ethnodrama by researchers), and finally, 3) *disseminated* in a dramatic performance (in playbuilding by director(s)/ensemble who have generated and analysed data, and in ethnodrama by a director and separate group of actor participants). The differences between the two methodologies are significant, however, mainly because in ethnodrama the three phases are distinct. In playbuilding, “data
is generated and interpreted in a different manner, and at times these three phases are simultaneous” (Norris, 2009, p. 22), which is an “organic approach to data generation” (p. 24). Thus, ethnodrama employs a sequential process, whereas playbuilding is essentially an integrative process. Norris (2009) also concludes that the participatory generation of data/stories as well as its vignette structure makes playbuilding unique.

[W]e are all in a state of “becoming” (de Chardin, 1969), and we, as pilgrims, have gathered to tell our stories (Kopp, 1972) not only to advance our current positions but also to change them, when personally deemed appropriate, as we listen to the stories of others. As dialogic researchers we must question everything, even our current positions. (p. 23)

Norris’ work resonates with my own playbuilding experience as young Vancouver Youth Theatre actors share stories that extend to dramatization beyond the circle. VYT actors re-tell their stories in various performance modes such as through vignette, dialogue, monologue, and within the evolution of each character played by a participant who is co-author and co-actor. In essence, playbuilding is an inquiry, both self inquiry and collective inquiry: interconnected and interactional.

With reference to the qualitative research focus on truth and validity as criteria (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007), playbuilding celebrates diverse opinions and a multiplicity of truths, representing various identities of participants woven together in consensus and polyvocality, explored through spontaneous expression, such as in dramatic improvisation. Norris (2009) discusses the “translation of stories into dramatic form,” and states that in this respect, “improvisation can be a powerful form of inquiry” (p. 31). Improvisation, then, is a unique exploratory component of the playbuilding process,
which also differentiates playbuilding from ethnodrama and other research-informed theatre methodologies. Seham’s history of improv (2001) acknowledges the influences of improv pioneer Viola Spolin (1963) who wrote about the value of spontaneity and shared her “notion of the exploration of the unknown” (p. 9) with the Second City improv company during its formative years. Seham’s (2001) feminist perspective also rallies the generative power of improvisation with respect to original material, especially for “women and marginalized people whose lives and histories are underrepresented in mainstream performance” (p. xxiii). She also writes that, “improv comedy must be based on the humour of emerging truths – incongruities, character, and situation – rather than jokes” (p. xxiii).

If storytelling is a critical component in generating data for Vancouver Youth Theatre’s playbuilding process, then ‘improv energy’ is pivotal in the embodied re-telling of stories, as a vehicle for uncovering fresh stories, or as what Seham calls “the humour of emerging truths” in youth culture. Improv is critical to my vision of playbuilding, and as such, I concur with a flexible script-writing process, wherein although plays are often scripted, improvised portions may unfold in the spontaneous blaze of performance. In my work, these improvisations serve to edit the show and are accepted and integrated by the ensemble to become the revised play. Improv is, then, the ‘gold’ of playbuilding, as well as within the unfolding originality of the performed play. Improvisation is also foundational at the grassroots of theatre and drama/theatre education (Lazarus, 2004; Moreno, 1947/2010; Seham, 2001; Spolin, 1963, 1986; Way, 1998).

My own playwriting strategies reflect my experience as a playwright, drama teacher-director, and playbuilding facilitator-director. The protagonist of Visiting Griffin, Blythe, is a director on a quest to find a young actress (Griffin), who has been mysteriously absent from
rehearsals. As playwright-researcher, I tap into improvisational techniques related to psychodrama (Moreno, 1947/2010), a tool for psycho-spiritual integration also based on theatrical improvisation. Throughout my playwriting process, spontaneous monologues and dialogues are adopted as exploratory methods regarding characterization, before transcribing them into character voices in script form. Speeches are also read aloud in order to listen to how they sound. My improvisation-centred playwriting method is akin to playbuilding among voices, energies and aspects within the psyche of the self.

**Playwriting as Research and Data**

To situate ‘playwriting’ and ‘playwriting as research’ in the panoply of research-based theatre methods is to discover its unique rock-hold at the confluence of rivers. MacKenzie and Belliveau (2011) argue that historically, playwriting is inherently research-based, in that “the playwright as researcher is not new, as playwrights have been researching and reflecting on the human story for thousands of years, “making the invisible visible” (p. 3). Prendergast and Belliveau (2013) suggest that playwriting and playbuilding “are forms of qualitative analysis [that] have been theorized, offering academics ways as to how theatre can be used critically during the analysis phase” (p. 201). Lea (2013) differentiates between three approaches of playwriting within research-based theatre: 1) the “collective approach” (akin to playbuilding and related to devised theatre); 2) the “playwright-centred approach;” and 3) the “composite approach” which is a combination of playwright-centred and collective approaches (p. 43). Lea’s own scripted dissertation play *Homa Bay Memories*
(Lea, 2013), is a playwright-centred memoir of Lea’s experiences of teaching in Kenya interwoven with the past echoes of his mother’s literary voice as a young teacher through her letters from Kenya to Canada. Another playwright-centred memoir within the scope of research-based theatre methodology is revealed by Belliveau’s “reflexive drama-based process” (2015, p. 5), in exploration of his family, cultural and artistic identities. Belliveau generates and analyzes data, writes a script, rehearses collaboratively, critically reflects, and ultimately, “as an actor and academic” (p. 12), moves beyond written script to perform his poignant monologue, Brothers, for an audience at University of Melbourne’s Open Stage.

With respect to authorship, playwriting is similar to playbuilding and to composite approaches in that both require that a chief playwright have skills in collating dramatic segments and/or data (non-dramatic recorded or written material including material from brainstorming, scene-building and improvisation, monologue-writing, and other forms of collective playmaking) into the structure of scenes, monologues, stage directions, and segues – that is, into play format. Research-based theatre directors often wear the hat of the ‘playwright’ while they sculpt or shape the final draft script. In playbuilding, such as within the work I do with youth, an ensemble gathers to co-create an original play from raw materials of shared stories, tales, lists, pictures, media clips, thematic (structured and unstructured) improvisations. Playbuilding is centred/situated on the floor, with actors – an organic and dynamic collective process – whereas the dynamism of playwriting (and sole authorship) is its reconnaissance of multiple voices within the psyche of the playwright. In a playwright’s world, an ethic of individuated voice and authorship is more structured than in the multi-contextual inquiry regarding shared authorship and collectivity within playbuilding and other collective drama-based methods. In the context of playwriting, and subsequently
within playwriting in research-based theatre, sole authorship may be indisputable, including the possible implementation of individual copyright.

Visiting Griffin and the process of writing this play is an unequivocally playwright-centred process. It is worth noting Marlene Schiwy’s reply to an assumption of narcissism underlying critiques that through journal-writing she is being self-centred: “Where else is there for you, or me, or anyone else to be centred but in ourselves?” (Schiwy, 1996, p. 96). Schiwy highlights the importance of reflexivity in journal writing, and here I extend this necessary centring on the self to playwriting, positioned within qualitative research and across research-based theatre.

In addition to external historical data, research data for Visiting Griffin includes memories, personal remembrance, memoires, diaries, journals, artefacts, letters, published poetry and fiction, produced plays, verbatim pastoral counselling assignments from seminary called “verbatimsm”10, and conversations with my mother and other family members, in addition to book-length family histories researched and written by my aunt (Raymer, 2000, 2012, 2015), which help to inform parts of the dissertation play. Hence “the role of the researcher in inter-subjective relation to the topic under investigation” (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013, p. 203), is crucial with respect to Richardson’s (2000) inquiry regarding her criterion of reflexivity: “How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Are there ethical issues? How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?” (p. 937). Essentially, the method of playwriting as research requires an inherent commitment to soul-searching within inner life research.

The research-based play Visiting Griffin tackles a diversity of sites, scenes, and locations (both non-fixed and fixed), socio-political-historical time frames, and in-depth
situated and developed characterizations, hovering in the ambivalent presence-absences of justice/injustice; consequently, my intent is to raise a number of ethical issues. It is hoped that *Visiting Griffin* builds on Denzin’s (2003) notion of “an ethical self-consciousness that is critical and reflexive [that] gives people a language and a set of pedagogical practices that turn oppression into freedom” (p. 229). The approach of poet(h)ic inquiry being developed in this study is birthed from the felt need for greater ethical reflection, reflexivity, and (potential) ‘redemptivity’ across qualitative research and arts-based research, and in particular, within research-based theatre – in pedagogical and community expression through the Arts, and across humanity for whom aesthetic value and artistic expression is essential to ethico-spiritual becoming, which arguably, is key to becoming human.

**After Reading Aoki**

Many seasons ago, after reading Aoki, I went for a stretch where a window overlooked a slender garden wedged between two jutting wings of UBC’s Education library. In a rain swept gust from the merciless tail end of winter, bamboo trees rose; tallest branches of elliptical leaves tapped as morse code, obscure messages of World War II against the window, encoded by wind. Here I sensed Aoki’s notion of bridge or space between East and West, where “earth, sky, mortals and divine, in their longing to be together, belong together” (Aoki 1996a, p. 4), between dichotomies of wartime Japanese-Canadian evacuations and peace time Canadian multicultural identity, between suffering caught in history and the oblique suffering of the present moment, between theoria on paper and praxis in located
specificity, between two rain-drenched walls of the Education building representing theoretical polarities too numerous to count, and my own lost, meaningful tales.

my birth mother, father, with uncanny clarity, apparent

in a space of forgiveness amid those rain-wind-tossed bamboos

reluctant pedagogues in an unseen institute my mother his widow:

parents held as fronds in paradox of presence (in absentia)

and I left on this earth to continue their rare, bold, unfathomed journey.

**Yu-mu as Paradox of Ethical Dilemma**

*Our presence, and our absence, matter.* (Fels, 2010, p. 4)

Aoki’s notion of *yu-mu* (presence-absence) expresses a theoretical-pedagogical-philosophical-spiritual dimension:

*Yu-mu* as both ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ marks the space of ambivalence in the midst of which humans dwell. As such, *yu-mu* is non-essentialist, denying the privileging of either ‘presence’ or ‘absence,’ so deeply inscribed in the binarism of Western epistemology. As the groundless ground in traditions of wisdom, the ambiguity textured in *yu-mu* is understood as a site pregnant with possibilities. (Aoki & Jacknicke, 2000, p. 3)
Aoki’s work is illustrated with his own rich autobiography, grounded in teaching/learning in the poignant context of Japanese Canadian history, with thematic echoes of light and shadow, revelation and concealment, living and dying, presence and absence. In the Japanese language, yu (presence) and mu (absence), are essential components of the same word expressing an inherent dichotomy of seeming opposites. Among its multiple meanings, within Aoki’s curriculum scholarship, yu-mu refers to grief – ‘absence’ – and the absence indicated by “pedagogical withdrawal” (Aoki, 1991b/2005, p. 394), as well as to the sense of a listening teacher ‘presence’ inextricably linked to absence, suffering and silence in connection to ultimate meaning.

For Aoki, the sakura and rose from Nitobe gardens reflect the “dialectic between life and death” (Aoki, 1979/2005, p. 346), whereby each brings meaning to the other. Rose/sakura metaphors echo Aoki’s notion of presence/absence; Aoki suggests “that sakura and rose need to emerge into a single being – a hybrid” (p. 347). In connection with the loss of his daughter, Aoki refers to a tale from Ch’an Buddhism: Kisagotami’s Story about the bereaved mother who loses her mind, but at the Buddha’s direction, she travels far and wide to find a household that had not been touched by death. When she discovers that every home has been touched by death, she is comforted by a community of mourning. Aoki reflects on Kisagotami’s discovery of her own story as both personal and shared:

> Although my suffering is always uniquely embedded in a story in which I am the seeming narrator, it is never mine alone but always ours. The locus of suffering is not the objective so-called ‘natural’ world of individual people and things, but rather the fathomless intimacy of narration. (Aoki, 1996b, p. 8)
At a conference in Hiroshima, Aoki summarizes another presentation by Smith (1994) about facing pedagogy in the nuclear shadow: “In it he [David Smith] dwelt on a metonymic theme insisting that in the presence is absence, questioning the modernist imagery that by privileging presence, erased absence by placing it in the shadow” (Aoki & Jacknicke, 2000, p. 3). Here, images of ‘shadow’ and ‘absence’ refer to the reality of atrocities and genocidal acts, in parallel to the veiled nature of some philosophical concepts. Aoki and Smith contend that nuclear shadow as metaphor for ‘absence’ is so quintessentially linked with ‘presence’ that ‘presence’ is in fact a metonym of ‘absence’; furthermore, pedagogy ought to validate both aspects of reality and human history. Education valuing an equal integration of light and shadow may involve awareness of the shadows of societal injustices, as well as consciousness with respect to the suffering of children and their families both in and beyond traditional learning contexts.

The aspect of Aoki’s notion of absence – ‘withdrawal’ – may in fact be actualized in the paradoxical absence/presence of solitude, where learners have the opportunity to reflect on, to integrate, and to synthesize concepts, experiences and relationships. Aoki suggests, “a truly educated person speaks and acts from a deep sense of humility, conscious of the limits set by human finitude and mortality” (Aoki, 1990, p. 42). Monk-mystic Henri Nouwen writes: “we know each other in our absences,” a contemplative’s rumination on the importance of both presence and absence in pastoral “creative withdrawal” (Nouwen, 1989, p. 77). Here are cross-disciplinary reflections between a Western theological education lens and Aoki’s multicultural notion of ‘pedagogical withdrawal’ in curriculum theory. With respect to Korean Anjin’s story of leave taking, Aoki writes:
For Mookwol, our esteemed teacher, it is not for him to be concerned about sharing power; rather, it is for him to know, as a sage knows, that as a pedagogue, at times, he must take leave, that he must withdraw, such that in the very event of withdrawal, there may inhere a pedagogic creativity, a coming into being of a clearing that is vibrant with pedagogical possibilities. Hence, pedagogic withdrawal may, within a seeming negating of self, confer in the silence of the pedagogue’s absence an opening wherein the student can truly learn what it is to stand, what it is to be in one’s becoming. (1991b/2005/, p. 394)

The paradox of yu-mu, related to Aoki’s notion of hito (self-other), boldly disrupts Western spiritual philosophies and is echoed in the multiple truths, tangential sites and hybrid in-between spaces of learning, offering Eastern philosophical theoretical underpinnings that celebrate ambivalence, possibility, poetry, and a Third Space (Bhaba, 2007/1994, pp. 53-56) between East and West, between Japanese culture/language and English culture/language, offering a currere for a spirituality of ethics-related inquiry.

Yu-mu is, then, a practical lens through which to view life’s ambiguity, with a universal scope (inter-cultural, inter-linguistic, and inter-faith) to ground the exploration of light and shadow characteristic of the ethical dilemma or ‘ethico-spiritual paradox.’ Defined, this would be a psycho-socio-political-spiritual dilemma that may present itself in life and/or in a designated dramatic space, possibly on stage, ‘dilemma’ being a non-fixed place or quandary where there is no apparent clear choice, where there are ongoing ethical questions about ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’ Aoki’s notion of yu-mu echoes the ethico-spiritual quandary in its examination of the dialectic between life and death, presence and absence, open and hidden spaces, light and shadow. Moreover, there may be a certain tranquility in commitment to the
struggle, in the pedagogical-spiritual space of yu-mu. Poet(h)ic inquiry emerges from this pedagogical-spiritual space and positions that struggle in the aesthetic spaces of presence-absence at the confluence of rivers: playwriting, ethics and spirit.

**Complementary Theoretical Viewpoints**

This theoretical frame of yu-mu characterizes ethical quandary as a space with which poet(h)ic inquiry grapples; yu-mu is complemented by critical and emancipatory pedagogies of Freire (1997, 2006) and Giroux (1997) regarding ethical struggles pointing towards hope, politics and freedom. These scholars write in parallel to other Latin American scholars whose work resonates with emancipatory pedagogies and theologies such as those of Boal (1979) in his vision of theatre of the oppressed, and Guttiérrez (1998), father of a ground-breaking theology of liberation. Brecht’s political theatre from Europe also parallels the intent of these proponents of emancipatory pedagogies; Prendergast and Saxon (2009) suggest that Brecht and Boal are similar “in offering performers and spectators a language that can lead to transformation” (p. 52). Denzin (2006), whose commitment is to hope in performance pedagogy, builds upon Freire’s theory in his “ethical self consciousness” with “a set of pedagogical practices that turn oppression into freedom, despair into hope, hatred into love, doubt into trust” (p. 332).

relationship” (Norris, 2009, p. 36), and the “moral integrity of the researcher” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2007, p. 268) – each maintain a distinctive but similar perception of ethics as an integrated qualitative research value. A discussion on ethics and spirit in poet(h)ic inquiry is positioned within the frame of emancipatory pedagogy, because the quest for ethicality in relationships is quintessentially linked to hope and emancipation.

Emancipatory pedagogies link to positioning within frames of indigenous methodologies, thus embracing ancient wisdoms. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) writes about ethical inquiries within indigenous epistemologies, decolonization, as well as alternate ways of knowing and envisioning that link to inquiry about other marginalized communities (such as women and youth). Tuhiwai Smith (2005) indicates that there are “two paradigms of ethics, the one we know as principalist and a potentially new one in process that is about relationships” (p. 100), and she advocates for an “ethics of respect” reflective of indigenous ways of knowing (p. 99). Tuhiwai Smith’s work resonates with indigenous scholar Ermine’s (2007) notion of “the ethical space of engagement [at the] fragile intersection of indigenous law and Canadian legal systems” and the conceptual development of the “ethical space – a theoretical space between cultures and world views” (p. 193), a space where we look critically at “difference and diversity” (p. 194).11 Many of these theoretical viewpoints emerge from community histories of marginalization and absence; thus, these theories echo the inspirational presence of hope and justice. The approach of poet(h)ic inquiry embraces the yu-mu inherent within theories of emancipation, social justice and hope, along with envisioning an ethic of respect resonant with indigenous methods of ethical reflection.
Interspace and Poet(h)ic inquiry

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in critical thinking regarding an interspace and sense of absence across ethical inquiries within arts-based research. The approach of poet(h)ic inquiry (through the lens of *yu-mu*) offers creative exploration within the challenge of an ethical chasm identified across arts-based research. Gallagher (2007b) identifies gaps in the arts-based research ethical arena:

[T]o find an ethical standard for theatre and research, however, is to risk effacing the important specificity of each individual research/artistic process. Are signposts for ethical behaviour (on the stage or in the field) the best we can hope for? There are, to be sure, significant ethical protocols in place in the cognate disciplines, but there appears to be a lack of ethical standards that specifically relate to performed research. In addition, what is recognized as ‘ethical’ is a highly subjective and political concept. (p. 108)

Gallagher’s notion of hope in ethical ‘signposts’ may be key as arts-based research continues to grapple with ethics. Belliveau and White (2010) echo this call for awareness regarding researchers’ engagement in the theatricalisation of data with respect to a broader ethical responsibility towards participants, to their cultures and social systems. This relates to notions of ‘microethics’ – pertaining to the particular research context (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2007) and ‘macroethics’ – pertaining to “what happens when the methodologies and knowledge produced circulate in the wider culture and affects humans and society” (p. 274).
Within the larger body of arts-based research – with links to not only educational arts-based research, but to arts-based research within health sciences and other psycho-socio-politico disciplines – Boydell et al., (2012) identify ethical questions and areas needing more attention such as issues of ‘authorship’ and ‘anonymity,’ which are relevant in performance-based projects. The Boydell et al. paper is a springboard reference for important studies such as Akesson et al.’s (2014) ethical inquiry about the likelihood of true informed consent in the context of arts-based research among “children affected by global adversity, including children affected by war” (p. 75), not only those in conflict zones, but also refugee children who may be present in our school systems. On a global scale, Odysseos (2002) discusses the dichotomy of ethical theorizing whereby the ‘other-as-enemy’ political realism stance “is largely accountable for sustaining the separateness of ethics and International Relations” (p. 404). Odysseos suggests that the ‘ethos of survival’ puts ethics itself into the role of ‘enemy.’ Arguably, ethical gaps in research extend to every discipline, initiating damage, perhaps, to our capacity to keep peace with our neighbour in a world of fracture and disparity. This sense of fracture between self/other is an interstice for the approach of poet(h)ic inquiry towards awareness of the need for self/other integration towards ethicality within the aesthetic structure of playwriting, at the crossroads of ethics and spirit.

In my capacities as director/head playwright in a playbuilding context I am aware of the essential importance of addressing ‘authorship dilemmas.’ Norris (2009) indicates that the very complexity of playbuilding in the context of traditional qualitative research with its defined roles of participant/observer requires “a different set of ethical considerations” (p. 35). He maintains that “since cast members are considered co-researchers and co-authors, no formal ethics review has been needed” (p. 35). In fact, Norris stands for this perspective, as
he lists his co-author/actors as legitimate authors in formal citations. From a slightly different perspective, Vancouver Youth Theatre founder Carole Tarlington’s (1996) keynote address in Tasmania addresses the authorship issue:

Then there is the question of ownership – a major challenge. Who owns youth theatre scripts? If the playbuilding process is successful, the cast takes ownership of the play in a very special way. It becomes emotionally theirs, even though you as writer/director have taken the major responsibility for its creation. (pp. 10-11)

As a playwright, I explore poet(h)ically various ethical quandaries about authorship. In Visiting Griffin, the protagonist, Blythe, is director of a playbuilding ensemble in present time. That Griffin, a valued cast member, is absent from rehearsals with no story of explanation, instantly evokes a tangible dilemma regarding the inclusion or exclusion of co-authors, both present and absent, within their playbuilding process. Ironically, Griffin’s true whereabouts is a nameless place: “This building is House of the Wordless. It is unpoetic and grey and cruel” (Act three). How then can she be named? Other related dilemmas relate to the legitimacy of authors such as those inhabiting the unnamed silences where “bursting words have been deemed linguistically illegitimate” (Act three), or in the wordless ‘voice’ of Dancer, who speaks in symbol and multidisciplinarity.

In research-based theatre, questions of authorship are linked to questions about anonymity (Boydell et al., 2012; Gallagher, 2007a; White & Belliveau, 2010). Ethical dilemmas arise regarding public identification and exposure which may compromise the dignity and privacy of participants. Most research ethics review boards require an elaborate protocol of consent regarding human subjects in qualitative research; there is the “principle of ‘beneficence,’ which means that the risk of harm to a participant should be the least
possible” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2007, p. 267). Arguably, ‘anonymity’ may present a peculiar moral paradox as it both safeguards participants and denies them true voice. Brinkmann & Kvale (2007) suggest: “interviewees, who have spent their time and provided valuable information to the researcher, might wish, as in a journalistic interview, to be credited with their full name” (p. 267). Belliveau and White (2010) discuss ethics in an ethnodramatic dialogue that explores the ethical dilemmas in performed research regarding the key question of ‘whose story is it anyway?’ They also explore the complexities regarding making choices as to whether to integrate multiple participant voices into one character, as well as issues and choices regarding the dramatization of universal stories in performed research. Their conclusions ask arts-based researchers to adopt a critical reflexivity (White & Belliveau, 2010). Seham (2001) parallels this ethical inquiry with her book title Whose Improv is it Anyway? with respect to the ownership of stories, power differentials, as well as character/actor and gender identities within the emergent improv community.

I argue that the notion of “ethics of respect” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 100) is instrumental in envisioning a poeth(ch)ics of research-based theatre that honours the voices and authorships, both for individual playwrights and collectives. This relates to the context of research ethics in creative practice, where traditional approaches are being replaced by “new hybrid ethical practices emerging out of each new project” (SSHWC: PRE, 2008). Hybridity within ethical inquiry may include cross-cultural mentorship regarding indigenous values of respect, as well as sensitivity to the ethical questions unique to each creative project.

Thus, underlying ethico-spiritual paradoxes within playwriting and playbuilding are evident within various textual frames and creative drama projects. Ethical inquiry may be less visible in non-drama-based genres of creative writing and within interdisciplinary works
using the genre-languages of dance, theatre, and music; moreover, the integration of ethical awareness may be more successful as it is interwoven within interdisciplinary projects. The approach of poet(h)ic inquiry may recognize the validity of the paradoxical yu-mu of ethical dilemmas, in collaboration with a multidisciplinary artistic lens that best incorporates these presence-absences.

Poetics, Ethics, Poet(h)ics

In the beginning the theatre was the dithyramic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast. (Boal, 1979, p. 119)

Boal’s (1979) ‘poetics of the oppressed’ proposes a revision of Aristotle that focuses on theatrical action whereby the spectator can assist in changing the dramatic action. Even in contexts of co-creativity not associated with a theatre of the oppressed, there are implications for a ‘pedagogy of the spectator’ (Prendergast, 2009), a theory with six key characteristics: aesthetic, improvisatory, performative, critical, political and social. During the process of writing Visiting Griffin, a reading with graduate students and professors from the Department of Language and Literacy, University of British Columbia (March, 2015) was held, and scenes from the play were also ‘workshopped’ in a Writer’s Group comprised of Creative Writing MFA (UBC) Alumni (Winter, 2015). Responses varied (with some informal adherence to Prendergast’s criteria regarding spectatorship), as colleagues read character parts, listened, and discussed various scenes. Readers could then participate in both critical and aesthetic aspects of the research as they alternated between roles of spectator and player; thus, the process of playwriting for research-based theatre may encompass collaborative
alternatives. Playwrights often workshop their plays through multiple drafts in theatre-based workshops, in the presence of actors, directors, and other playwrights. The process of poetry writing and playwriting are similar, as both require a certain writer’s sensibility and usually, solitude. Plays, however, involve myriad relationships between creative team members beyond the relationship of a poet to a poem. In co-constructing plays, playwrights, directors, players, and spectators, all develop an awareness of their critical and interwoven relationality to one another.

Thus, a poet(h)ics of relationship is at the crux of playmaking. In envisioning a poet(h)ics of the playwriting process, I see playwright, director and actors working in mutual empowerment, collaboration, and embodiment. Springgay (2008) reflects: “Being with constitutes the fabric of everyday life and the ethical encounter. Through bodied encounters body/subjects create lived experiences together and nurture one another’s ethical relationality” (p. 157). Poet(h)ic inquiry encircles a relationship ethic at the mysterious confluence of playwriting, ethics and spirit. Here, a poet(h)ics of relationality is informed by the textured yu-mu (presence-absence) of ethical quandary; one needs to commit to hito (self-other), not only within the actor-spectator link during performance, but throughout the playwriting process. In sum, a theatrical writing genre evokes a certain collaborative spirit. Certainly Boal’s vision of active spectators helping to shape the action of a play would be the theoretical extreme. Denzin (1997) suggests that we keep work open-ended, that “empowerment begins in that ethical moment when individuals are lead into the troubling spaces once occupied by others. In the moment of co-performing, lives are joined and the struggle (begins) anew” (p. 122). Arguably, through poet(h)ic inquiry, spectators are
participants in the creative team; if they are not part of the action in a literal sense, they may participate from non-fixed, intuitive, energetic, and spiritual perspectives.

In essence, gaps in discourse on ethics within arts-based research offer a poignant springboard for new questions, inquiries, complexities, tangential discourses and understandings arising from this inquiry. More research in the area of ethical reflection is needed. Prendergast & Saxon (2009) suggest, “ethical practice depends on ‘reflection’ as a key means of intra- and inter-personal discovery” (p. 194). Research-based theatre may, then, facilitate an open-ended, vibrant, aesthetically rich space, where gaps can be addressed. Moreover, in situating my thesis play within the research-based theatre field, I am also situating poet(h)ic inquiry within an array of qualitative research and arts-based research ethical inquiries. Brinkmann and Kvale (2007) argue that the researcher’s role is to go “beyond ethics as rule-following to raise some principal ethical issues” (p. 263). Perhaps this sense of ‘beyond’ is the poet(h)ical ‘holy grail’ quest for the arts-based researcher. The rationale for this dissertation play, Visiting Griffin, emerges from an observable yu-mu: shadow and absence (mirrored by the light and presence of possible future creative solutions) regarding a need for ethico-spiritual reflection, and response. In addition, the play provokes questions about a potential for integrated ethicality within arts-based research, and in particular, within playwriting processes in research-based theatre. This soul-wrenching field of ethics may bear the cross of upholding an aesthetic relational mirror to the broader ethico-spiritual, socio-political, local-global spheres, where we struggle valiantly with the morally dramatic paradoxes of our day.
Inside *Visiting Griffin*

*Visiting Griffin* explores poet(h)ically various locations and eras, categories that are political, social, psychological, spiritual, as well as the autobiographical, and characters fictional and historical, living and dead. Playwriting here is a non-fixed site where I build towards the spiritual unification of voices, identities, and memories, and integrate the presences and absences of self in relation to other, across teaching, learning, knowing, being, and becoming. I incorporate an open-ended perspective into my playwriting approach, in order to build a script towards an un-prescribed conclusion. With reference to Aoki’s notion of *yu-mu* or presence-absence, challenging ethical dilemmas may not evoke ‘right answers,’ but rather ethical questions may be best addressed in open-ended inquiry. I genuinely did not know how the play *Visiting Griffin* would end until I got there. This writing project has involved immense energy, tenacity, and a contemplative solitude, with an uncertain future. This uncertainty provides the perpetual ‘edge’ often required for a serious artist, and is probably a healthy positioning.

My dissertation play, *Visiting Griffin*, explores a plethora of situated ethical dilemmas within various developmental stages of a female character’s education and life journey at the crossroads of historical (from the early sixties to present day) and theoretical aspects: notions of *yu-mu* (presence-absence) (Aoki & Jacknicke, 2000), *hito* (self-other) (Aoki, 1995), emancipatory pedagogies (Freire, 1997, 2006), symbolic resources (Norton, 2001), multimodality (Siegal, 2006, Suhor, 1984), and transmediation (Hoyt, 1992; Semali & Fueyo, 2001; Short & Harste, 1996). In addition, the play engages with poet(h)ic inquiry, which is informed by arts-based methodologies, and in particular, by research-based theatre.
Through various modalities, voices, identities, and memories, my work explores philosophical ethical inquiry, and epistemological questions about knowing, where aesthetic knowing is intrinsic to theatrical conventions (e.g., characterization, acting, and directing); potentially, the play is a journey towards redemptive hope. Transformation is never guaranteed amid the presences, absences and ambiguities of a character’s (or for that matter, a play reader’s or spectator’s) journey, but it is always the hoped for, the always possible. The journey of the play, then, is an opportunity to explore poet(h)ic inquiry through the development of character(s) across multiple layers of structure, story, text and subtext, character and voice, theme and ethos, or, within the approach of poet(h)ic inquiry, an opportunity to uncover a poet(h)os of the world of the play.

Multiple Genres, Literacies and Modalities

My original intent as a playwright was to explore ‘playbuilding as metaphor’ (due to the multi-faceted quality of drama); this has been re-positioned to ‘playwriting in research-based theatre, which encompasses the aesthetics of multiple genres, literacies and modalities.’ If metaphors function in the play, they are rather, 1) ‘Griffin’ as metaphor and 2) ‘visit’ as metaphor. These metaphors unfold throughout the journey of the play; many Griffins inspire visits and consequently, there are many varieties of visits. This dissertation represents an integration process over a number of decades of scholarly-creative, professional-personal work, as well as synthesis of interdisciplinary and transformative genre explorations. My life work is an exemplar of how research expresses Aoki’s yu-mu (presence-absence), in complex simplicity, in the sacred ordinary.
Over my life time, I have evolved into a multi-genre writer (poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, drama), which is reflected in *Visiting Griffin*, as some scenes contain a multidisciplinary approach within the primarily dramatic play structure, including poetic, narrative and fictive elements, informed by a history of writing poetry and short fiction, with natural connections to interdisciplinary produced work in theatre, music and dance. Thus, my playwright-centred lens both incorporates and celebrates various art forms, genres, literacies and multi-modalities (including dance, music, improv, poetry and story). Hence, embodiment through, drama, dance and music is key to my vision and identity as a playwright. Informed by all of these methodologies, poet(h)ic inquiry is an approach wherein ethics, spirit, playwriting (and/or other art forms and modalities) meet at the confluence to inquire about epistemologies and meaning amid the *yu-mu* of life, in the heart of ethico-spiritual paradox.

In the context of playwriting in research-based theatre, my research question and strands of ethical query may be adopted as evaluative criteria regarding poet(h)ic inquiry within an arts-based project: questions about a poet(h)ics of (1) meaning, (2) justice, (3) aesthetic value, (4) respect regarding authorship, and (5) integrated relationality regarding ensembles, troupes, and casts, as well as among multiple genres, art forms and multi-modalities. The notion of spirit may unify all of these strands of query: a spiritual dimension of meaning that informs justice, an aesthetic and aesthetic value that is spiritual in nature, an ethic of respect motivated by one’s spirit, and a sense of the relational that may include grace, forgiveness, sacrifice, transcendence, ultimate meaning, and other values of spirit that dare to grapple with ambivalence, liminality, memory and loss, in connection to *yu-mu* (presence-absence). The confluence of playwriting, ethics and spirit is a meeting place where the approach of poet(h)ic inquiry emerges, for these evaluative questions encompass (i) the
cognitive: ethics as philosophy, (ii) the spiritual: ethics as spiritual, transcendent value and as value system, and (iii) the intuitive: ethics as truth and aesthetics.

Visiting Griffin contains poetic structural elements such as line breaks, metaphor and imagery, logistically relevant in a play about poet(h)ics situated in the meta-theatrical world (theatre about theatre) of Visiting Griffin. Some whole poems are included in the form of monologues, and some monologues are poetic in nature. Some of my monologues are in fact stories told in a narrative voice where there are poetic elements, including whole poems cited by characters such as the poem “The Unbinding”, intended to be spoken or chanted chorally or collaboratively, with potential for linked choreography by the Young Women within Visiting Griffin. Prendergast and Belliveau (2013) indicate that, “we turn to poetry because it allows us to express something that feels inexpressible in prose” (p. 202). In the poet(h)os of Visiting Griffin, I advocate for the right to turn to the genre that seems to best express the moment. Particularly relevant to Visiting Griffin is an article about identity within the embodied role of ‘actress’ in Performing (Our) Selves: The Role of the Actress in Theatre-History Plays by Women (Farfan & Ferris, 2013). Many plays feature ‘women actresses’ as female characters and women playwrights have also incorporated actress characters in their meta-theatrical approach. Ultimately, Ferris and Lee (2013) posit “the real and symbolic power of the actress as a site for struggle, change and future possibility” (p. 217), concluding with reference to the scholarly trend towards “performing (our)selves,” with the conclusion that, “placing the actress-self onstage suggests a new meta-theatrical strategy, a modernist moment that stages a neglected subjectivity and envisions the actress as knowingly and perpetually self-reflexive” (p. 227). This sense of self-reflexivity, authorship and the embodied self on stage resonates with scholarly-performative work in dance within arts-
based research and interdisciplinary community arts practices (Brown, 2008; Fels, 1999; Ricketts, 2007, 2011; Snowber, 2002, 2014), foretelling Bickel’s notions of ‘ethical sanctuary’ and ‘restorative learning’ (2010), where not only women’s arts, but ritual (Bickel, 2006, 2008; Bickel & Jordan, 2009) and ethical women’s spirituality can be honoured:

It [ritual] offers the learner an opportunity to recover and reinstate displaced ethical values and practices in their life. Restorative learning requires the creation of an ‘ethical sanctuary’ or sacred space for the learning to be engaged, and a return to a whole experience of the radical relatedness of all aspects of life. (Bickel, 2010, p. 17)

In fact, a poet(h)ics (of art and life) that embraces meaning, justice, aesthetic value, and respect within the interplay of self/other may serve to honour Bickel’s notion of ‘ethical sanctuary.’ Citron (1993) advocates for “the construction of a female aesthetic: women composers creating their own definition of self” (p. 75). Schiwy (1996) argues that in the ironic nurturing of self, we can perhaps “see our interactions with others as symphonies of shared understanding rather than as solo performances competing for centre stage” (pp. 96-97). Conquergood (1985) upholds:

Dialogic performance is a way of finding the ‘moral centre’ as much as it is an indicator that one is ethically grounded. One does not have to delay entering the conversation until self and other have become old friends. Indeed, as the metaphor makes clear, one cannot build a friendship without beginning a conversation. (p. 10)

Herein the self-other dichotomy is addressed in an ethicality that may emerge from the transformative power of ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’ across the poignant presence-absences within both aesthetic and human experience. Building on this notion of sanctuary among voices in collectivity, Cutler, Monk and Shira’s (2014) commitment to writing practices in
circles with women initiates practices that offer a naturally interwoven ethicality: “Being part of a circle transforms our sense of isolation and separateness into a grounded awareness of our interconnectedness and universal consciousness…as women we need ways of coming together to collaborate, heal, and evolve” (pp. 4-5).

Poet(h)ic inquiry is, then, an approach that strives for meeting at the confluence of playwriting, ethics, and spirit, a striving for creative, transformative justice in the valiant struggle for authorship of ethically integrated theatre. Poet(h)ic inquiry may help shape perspectives for facing the yu-mu of life paradoxes within birthing, dying, being, becoming, and the evolution of symbolic values within an inspirited humanity. Poet(h)ic inquiry is about the efficacy and intrinsic value of research-based theatre towards a compassionate ethicality on stage and in life. The poet(h)os of the play, Visiting Griffin, may be an indwelling of ethicality in relationship both in spite of and amid presence-absences, across storied-poet(h)ic moments, scenes, acts, voices, identities, and memories of a colourful, eclectic…
Dramatis Personae:

selves, others
characters
voices, spirits, ghosts
dancers, mimes, clowns

chorus

actors, directors
teachers, readers, students, spectators
theorists, scholars, philosophers

families, friends,
enemies, oppressors

girls, women
boys, men
other genders...
folks.
PART II – The Visit

Visiting Griffin (The Play)

CHARACTERS:

BLYTHE, in her 50’s, theatre director for youth, also plays FROSINE in excerpt from The Miser, and other characters as needed, such as ROSE-MARIE from Paris.

GRIFFIN, 18 year old young female actor in BLYTHE’s Company, also plays: Young BLYTHE in flashbacks, MARIANE in excerpt from The Miser, ELIZABETH PROCTOR in excerpt from The Crucible, and other characters as needed.

DANCER, follows the journey of an apple.

MABEL, English-Irish Canadian descent, working class background, Toronto.

HENRIETTE, French Canadian low income background, from Eastern Townships & Montreal. MABEL & HENRIETTE, in their 60’s, drink tea a table down stage left. They share stories throughout the play, about BLYTHE and about themselves.

From theatre community, Toronto and area:

YOUNG WOMEN, 4 young adult female actors in BLYTHE’s Company, can play other characters as needed such as ELISE from The Miser, USHERS, POLICEMAN 1, POLICEMAN 2 at Tarragon Theatre, CHEEVER & PARRIS from excerpt from The Crucible.

AGENT, Actor playing MASTER JACQUES from The Miser plays AGENT from Yonge Street, Toronto, also plays: TEACHER, well-meaning History Teacher from BLYTHE’s high school, & PROCTOR from The Crucible.

FINNBAR, young drug dealer from BLYTHE’S past high school, also plays: CLEANTE in excerpts from The Miser, & JUDGE DANFORTH in excerpt from The Crucible.

From Greenwich Village, New York & Norwalk, CT:

ADELE, BLYTHE’s mother.

HADAR, cop’s wife/audience member at children’s theatre in Greenwich Village.

WITCH, from Snow White in children’s theatre.

SNOW WHITE, from Snow White.

JANNIE, BLYTHE’s foster sister from Harlem.

SUNBATHERS on segregated beach (played by Y. WOMEN).

BECKY, BLYTHE’s little sister.
OLD WOMAN FROM HARLEM APARTMENT (voice on telephone)
SECRETARY, BLYTHE’s kindergarten school secretary in the USA.
JFK, John F. Kennedy’s ghost (can be played by AGENT).

From the Present:
NEIGHBOUR to hospital building.
PROFESSOR KELLY, PROFESSOR SAM, PROFESSOR HARVEY, professors
from Science Fiction Institution of Learning.

From Paris, France:
U. STUDENT, from University of Sorbonne.
ROSE-MARIE, beggar at St. Germain-Des-Prés.
USHER, in charge of cathedral security.
TRACE, Blythe’s father’s ghost.

From Trappist monastery, Oka, Quebec:
FRÈRE DEGARÉ, physically fit monk and Auschwitz survivor.
L’ARCHE BOY, disabled teen from L’Arche community.
PÈRE BENEDICT, BLYTHE’s spiritual director & brother of Jean Vanier.
JÉSUITE 1 & JÉSUITE 2, Jesuit novices on a retreat.
SUBTITLE 1 & SUBTITLE 2, personified subtitles: JÉSUITE 1 & JÉSUITE 2.
SUBTITLE B, personified subtitle for BLYTHE.

From The Present, Ward Two East:
Y. WOMEN play women on ward.
ADMIN, medical staff person at front desk.
NURSE, burned out psychiatric nurse.
TOM GIRL, RASTA GUY & JESUS GUY, patients on passes.

From Late Imperial China:
EMpress Dowager CIXI, last Empress Dowager of China.
COURTIERS to CIXI
ADVISOR 1, ADVISOR 2, court advisors to the EMPRESS.
JESSIE DUNCAN, BLYTHE’s missionary great grandmother.
Y. WOMEN play girls at Chinese girls’ school.
MISSIONARY, from another mission and has his own agenda.
YOUNG MALE STUDENT, from another missionary school.
YOUNG CHINESE GIRL, at school for girls
HAO SHEN, Buddhist monk from Temple at Gold Mountain, Shanxi Province.
MOIR DUNCAN, husband of Jessie, missionary great grandfather of BLYTHE.

From Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario:
(DR.) PRATT, conservative theologian-professor.
ALVIN, seminary student, studious.
VELMA, client of inner city mission.
VOICES (of clergy, church officials).
GENE, seminary student & guitar player.
SECURITY GUARD, campus security guard.
GHOST, BLYTHE’s grandfather.
NEWSCASTER, Voice Over from TV.
(REV.) SMITH, Credentials Committee Chair.
(REV.) JOSH, hospital chaplain and BLYTHE’s CPE supervisor.
BELLE, Art student.

From Walk of Reconciliation, Vancouver:
BERNICE, Dr. Bernice King, daughter of Martin Luther King, Jr.
LARA, disabled walker.

From ADELE’s Memories:
TRACE, BLYTHE’s father, a memory.
SOLDIER, American soldier stationed in Seoul, Korea.

ACT ONE

(MABEL (English-Irish Canadian) and HENRIETTE (French Canadian) are drinking tea from antique cups, saucers, and a teapot at a small round table Down Stage Right. Their table stays set throughout the whole play and is strewn with old newspaper clippings. In the semi-darkness, BLYTHE walks, stops at a street corner where the hospital is supposed to be. She doesn’t see anything except an old stone doctor’s residence, a heritage building, lit only at the front entrance as in a museum of a ghost town. The address on the tiny scanned bit of paper is barely visible on the screen of her phone.)

BLYTHE
I met Griffin when she auditioned for the teen play I directed last winter. Griffin is brilliant, a valued member of the ensemble. Since the summer, she has been AWOL. In playbuilding there are no understudies, no prima donnas. If you are lost from the process, like a co-playwright who abdicated, it’s glaring, the absence, and the story itself, altered. I have been worried sick. And now she is ill? Her text says she is in the hospital. Griffin reminds me of me when I was that young – feisty, and dead honest. In those days you weren’t supposed to be honest…. Especially if you were a girl.

(YOUNG WOMEN are a ghostly circle upstage, and GRIFFIN is among them. BLYTHE steps into this playbuilding rehearsal.)

YW 1
There are lies you are supposed to commit to.
YW 2
Fears...lies.

YW 3
Fears...truth.

YW 4
Lies line the soles of your new silver patent leather shoes.

YW 1
After a while you don’t know what end is up.

BLYTHE
Griffin, can you lead a theatre game?

GRIFFIN
“Truth and Lie.” You know, everyone in the circle has a turn to tell one truth and one lie. And the rest of the group has to decide which statement is the truth and which statement is the lie. For example: I am a boxer. I am a librarian.

YW 2
Which is the truth?

YW 3
I am a student. I am a fugitive.

YW 4
I am a passport photo. I am a selfie.

YW 1
Come on, try it, everyone.

GRIFFIN
For some of you it will be harder to say a truth. For others, it will be harder to say a lie…. Listen!

BLYTHE
*(stepping into the middle of the circle)* Younger women these days seem to be so much wiser than I ever was….Who was I at Griffin’s age?

Y. WOMEN & GRIFFIN
*(chorally)* We remember who you were. Don’t you?

BLYTHE
I was in a play I couldn’t get out of. It was 1979. Molière’s *The Miser*. I was Mariane.

(Musical transition. DANCER walks across the stage, searching for an apple tree. The Past. This is a glimpse into BLYTHE’s youth. In exile from home, school and self, BLYTHE experiences absence and loss of identity. The actor who plays GRIFFIN can also play the young BLYTHE. It is 1979. GRIFFIN, 18, plays the young BLYTHE playing MARIANE in Molière’s *The Miser* in a summer theatre at a college, a part of the University of Toronto. She steps into the play. FROSINE parallels the Nurse from *Romeo and Juliet*, who helps MARIANE to face dreaded nuptials to the old man, HARPAGON.)

**ACT III, Scene vii**

FROSINE
Oh yes! All those dandies are very pleasant, and can talk agreeably enough, but most of them are as poor as church mice; and it is much better for you to marry an old husband, who gives you plenty of money. I fully acknowledge that the senses somewhat clash with the end I propose, and that there are certain little inconveniences to be endured with such a husband; but all that won't last; and his death, believe me, will soon put you in a position to take a more pleasant husband, who will make amends for all.

MARIANE
Oh, Frosine! What a strange state of things that, in order to be happy, we must look forward to the death of another. Yet death will not fall in with all the projects we make.

(MARIANE played by the younger BLYTHE goes offstage into the wings. There is a man in the wings in period costume, who plays MASTER JACQUES, the cook and coachman to HARPAGON. However, he has nothing much to do back stage. He is also an AGENT. BLYTHE is in two plays, the play on stage and the play in the wings, the public play and the private play.)

AGENT
I’m offering you a job in downtown Toronto.

BLYTHE
Yeah?

AGENT
I’m a scout.
BLYTHE
I’m already in a play right now. I’m on again in five minutes.

AGENT
This is a much better job. You would be marvellous. What a beautiful actress you are!

BLYTHE
I don’t want a new job.

AGENT
It’s on Yonge Street.

BLYTHE
Sam the Record Man?

AGENT
*GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!*

BLYTHE
*(mutters to self)* What’s the uniform?

AGENT
One grand every single week.

BLYTHE
One thousand per week?

AGENT
Only one week’s work pays for university tuition.

BLYTHE
I work all summer just for tuition.

AGENT
Two weeks is five months rent.

BLYTHE
I don’t know, I…

AGENT
Three weeks pays for rent for the rest of the year…

BLYTHE
I can’t imagine making that much money.
AGENT
Four weeks is Christmas shopping plus a ski trip.

BLYTHE
No, I couldn’t really make money like that for wearing…

AGENT
Five weeks is a trip to see your grandmother…

BLYTHE
I want independence.

AGENT
Six weeks is a trip to Disneyland…

BLYTHE
(aside) But what if I see people there I know? A former teacher? The minister? I would die from embarrassment and so would they. I would know everything, all the things people want to hide. I would be like Christy, from The Diviners. Like tea leaves, he read the town’s garbage.

AGENT
Seven weeks is moving away, forever…don’t you want to leave home?

BLYTHE
I can’t leave. I’m already in a show.

AGENT
You’ve got better shows ahead, a better life.

BLYTHE
You mean better pay or a better show?

AGENT
What do they pay you here?

BLYTHE
Nothing. They pay me “a Big Fat Zero,” as Germaine would say, in Les Belles Soeurs. But I’m doing this play because I love Theatre.

AGENT
Nobody loves Theatre that much.

BLYTHE
So what are you doing back stage anyway? I’m going to tell the Director.

AGENT
Go ahead. I know the Director. I was invited to play Master Jacques.

BLYTHE
I’m on again in sixty seconds. Go to hell.

AGENT
Been there. Got the T-shirt. I own the company.

BLYTHE
I said I’m on now. Go to hell!

AGENT
(grabs her arm as she is heading on stage) Hey, there’s always Zanzibar!

BLYTHE
Get the f*%# out of my play!

(The young BLYTHE goes back on stage as MARIANE, visibly shaking. The same actor who plays FINNBAR later, plays CLEANTE. MARIANE’S partner in The Miser. ELISE is the sister of CLEANTE. Both CLEANTE and ELISE are children of HARPAGON.)

ACT IV, Scene i 14

CLEANTE
What could I do? It is my evil destiny which has willed it so. But you, fair Mariane, what have you resolved to do? What resolution have you taken?

MARIANE
Alas! Is it in my power to take any resolution? And, dependent as I am, can I do anything else except form wishes?

CLEANTE
No other support for me in your heart? Nothing but mere wishes? No pitying energy? No kindly relief? No active affection?

MARIANE
What am I to say to you? Put yourself in my place, and judge what I can possibly do. Advise me, dispose of me, I trust myself entirely to you, for I am sure that you will never ask of
me anything but what is modest and seemly.

(MABEL and HENRIETTE continue to sip tea from vintage floral china tea cups at a small round table Down Right. They stand with their tea cups and sit again around the table, changing places & chairs frequently. Thus far, they have been drinking tea in silence, and now they speak.)

MABEL
This really happened to Blythe. He was back there in the dark wings, waiting. In the 70’s, Yonge Street was a madhouse. Strip clubs. Massage parlours. Neo-signs. Sooo many girls in scanty clothing. Drugs, everywhere. They started to crack down, and shut down a lot of clubs after 1977 when a 12 year old “Shoeshine boy” called…

MABEL & HENRIETTE
Emanuel Jaques.

MABEL
…was murdered above a club.

(They leaf through old newspaper clippings on the table, and hold one up.)

HENRIETTE
Emanuel Jaques. In the holy name of Jesus Mary Joseph and all the saints, even my grand-grand mère, Manon, who died in childbirth seven times over, and in the holy name of…

(HENRIETTE stands loyally, with her hand on her heart to sing Frère Jacques and MABEL stands also to try her best to join in.)

Frère Jaques, Frère Jaques,
Dormez vous, dormez vous…
Sonnez les matines, Sonnez les matines
Ding, Daing, Dong… Ding, Daing, Dong

HENRIETTE
Emanuel Jaques was innocent, I tell you.

MABEL
I still can’t believe it. I read the newspaper and I had to vomit I tell you also. It makes me sick to know what they did to a Portuguese boy.

HENRIETTE
It was a tragedy. It takes the murder of a young boy before anyone starts to care about…
MABEL
Girls?

HENRIETTE
Les jeunes filles, magnifique et inquiétant.

(YOUNG WOMEN whispering, shouting, chanting, calling loudly, overlapping each other, circling around the tea table, echoes of “Les Jeunes Filles…Les Jeunes Filles…Les Jeunes Filles…Girls! Girls! Girls!”)

Y. WOMEN
Girls! Girls! Girls!

(Music/dance transition. DANCER continues to look for the apple tree, moving the opposite way through the chorus of Y. WOMEN; she dodges their bodies and voices hurling “Girls! Girls! Girls!” Lights up on MABEL and HENRIETTE at tea table. DANCER and Y. WOMEN vanish.)

MABEL
(picks up old newspaper clippings from the table and is half-reading )
So it all started when Blythe went on her first date at the Tarragon Theatre. September, 1974 – the Toronto première of Hosanna. I wasn’t allowed to go to that show because Ma was a cleaner in the latrines, and after a long bleak day in the bowels of the TTC, she says to me, “Are you daft? No daughter of mine is going to a vaudeville act about faggots!” That was a whole five years before Blythe played Mariane in The Miser.

HENRIETTE
Wild times, the seventies. I made my confession about three miscarriages before I could drive a car.

MABEL
She had no idea, really…. She was so young. She was 15.

(1974. Lights on BLYTHE at 15, on her first date. It is Hosanna at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. She squirms uncomfortably in her seat beside FINNNBAR. At intermission, they step out of their seats and go to stand in the lobby drinking water. POLICEMAN 1 and POLICEMAN 2 come in and buy hot chocolates from the Theatre concession stand, glance around, then walk out. FINNBAR looks nervous.)

BLYTHE
This is, like, my first real date.

FINNBAR
Cuirette, do you want a cigarette?

BLYTHE
I don’t smoke.

FINNBAR
I’ll step outside.

BLYTHE
I don’t drink.

FINNBAR
I want a cigarette, Cuirette.

BLYTHE
I don’t smoke…anything.

FINNBAR
My mother teaches Sunday School.

BLYTHE
Are you trying to impress me?

FINNBAR
It’s true. She’s a Sunday School teacher.

BLYTHE
So what happened to you?!

FINNBAR
(laughing) I’m a walking joke.

BLYTHE
I’ve never had coffee.

FINNBAR
Not one sip?

BLYTHE
Nor tea.

FINNBAR
Water is free. Have you had water?

BLYTHE
Yes, water. I’ve had water.

FINNBAR
What else haven’t you done?

BLYTHE
I’ve never actually met anybody gay.

FINNBAR
They won’t come out to the lobby.

(BLYTHE holds a small fake fur purse, white with brown spots on it, and handles.)

FINNBAR
Here I’ll hold your purse while you go to the Ladies.

BLYTHE
I don’t need you to hold my purse.

FINNBAR
If I have it, you won’t have to worry about losing it. Right?

BLYTHE
I wouldn’t lose my own purse.

FINNBAR
There’s nowhere in there to put it while you wash your hands. It’s crowded.

BLYTHE
I’m sure I know how to hang on to my own purse.

FINNBAR
It’s downtown Toronto.

BLYTHE
I’ve never been downtown at night.

FINNBAR
You never know what will happen.

BLYTHE
Like what? What could happen?

FINNBAR
I go everywhere at night. It’s not such a big deal.
BLYTHE
I can’t believe my parents let me go downtown on transit, I mean, with you.

FINNBAR
What do you mean “with me”?

BLYTHE
You have long hair. You smoke.

FINNBAR
Your parents are in a middle class fog. I could get away with (laughs) anything…

BLYTHE
My mother votes liberal, my father, conservative. They cancel out each other’s ballot.

FINNBAR
And they would never notice.

BLYTHE
Excuse me?

(FINNBAR goes to the snack bar for a coke for himself and he doesn’t ask BLYTHE if she wants anything. BLYTHE takes a small journal from her purse and scribbles.)

They see only themselves in their own gilded suburban mirror, with the mortgage paid. I am lost in a Fun House mirror, somewhere in the corner of a back shed among rat droppings. Cinderella. I see myself, in some distorted too fat too thin too short too tall version of myself, and I don’t know what is true reflection.

FINNBAR
(walks over to her and points to her handbag.) Your purse?

BLYTHE
Won’t everyone think you are gay?

FINNBAR
The last one to care is Tremblay!

BLYTHE
My grandmother made this purse.

FINNBAR
It looks like a dead rabbit.
BLYTHE
Possibly.

FINNBAR
Rabbits are good luck.

BLYTHE
You need it. Luck, that is. You’re failing just about every subject.

FINNBAR
Grade 11 sucks.

BLYTHE
You need to work harder.

FINNBAR
I can always join the Navy.

BLYTHE
You’d have to be able to read and understand the ship’s manual.

FINNBAR
I’d need an angel.

BLYTHE
Yeah?

FINNBAR
I’ll start getting A’s if I hang out with you, right?

BLYTHE
If you suddenly got A’s, everyone would suspect cheating. Better to start with C’s and work up gradually to A’s.

FINNBAR
A “C” would be cool.

BLYTHE
Well, how about C plus for your critique of Hosanna.

FINNBAR
You gonna write it for me?

BLYTHE
No.
FINNBAR
What should I say?

BLYTHE
Hosanna is trying to find himself. Say you, too, are trying to find yourself and you empathize with the character, Hosanna, because he (?) is struggling with the same issues. They’ll love it.

FINNBAR
I feel empathy for your rabbit.

BLYTHE
I want to give you luck, not my rabbit.

FINNBAR
Of course, I’ll give it back.

BLYTHE
It’s only fake rabbit fur.

FINNBAR
I’m just going to hang on to it for you.

BLYTHE
I’m dead against fashions with animal fur.

FINNBAR
Hurry up, Lass.

(BLYTHE sighs, reluctantly gives her purse to FINNBAR, and goes to the Ladies Room. POLICEMAN 1 and POLICEMAN 2 come in again and buy giant cookies. Nervous, FINNBAR slips outside to the darkened street to light his cigarette. He reaches into his pocket, looks around to make sure no one is looking, then slips a wrapped piece of foil into BLYTHE’s purse. BLYTHE comes out of the Ladies Washroom and stands alone in the lobby. FINNBAR joins her.)

BLYTHE
I don’t know why I gave it to you.

USHER
Please take your seats. Hosanna is about to begin again.

(FINNBAR hands BLYTHE her purse. BLYTHE takes it back, slowly, like betrayal. They go in to the darkened Theatre and watch the rest of the play.)
HOSANNA
Look Raymond, I’m a man…. I’m a man,
Raymond…. I’m a man. I’m a man…. I’m a man….

(Reverberations of the last line. Lights come up. FINNBAR escorts BLYTHE on the subway and transit and all the way home to her door in the suburbs Y. WOMEN play various city dwellers and transit characters. BLYTHE clutches on to her purse.)

BLYTHE
So, in the end Hosanna is his true self.

FINNBAR
Bloody naïve.

BLYTHE
My eyes were half closed.

FINNBAR
The stage was half dark.

BLYTHE
The first man I’ve seen with no clothes on is an actor, Richard Monette.

FINNBAR
Too bad. I thought I would be your first naked man. See you at school.

(FINNBAR leans forward as if to kiss her, then stops himself, and waves instead.)

BLYTHE
Yeah, goodnight.

(FINNBAR leaves. BLYTHE takes her purse inside. That night, she sits at her mirror, takes her hair out of its pony tail, then finds a tissue inside her purse. She begins wiping off her make up, like Hosanna did at the end of the play. She looks in her purse for a second tissue and pulls out the foil wrapped package. She opens it up and finds it is a large piece of hashish. She quickly re-wraps it and hides it in a drawer in her dresser.)

BLYTHE
(to her own purse in the mirror) Look Rabbit, I’m a woman…

MABEL
(from the tea table) It’s a shame Blythe had school the next day.
HENRIETTE
I would have skipped every class and stayed in bed.

(BLYTHE is in the school locker area. Y. WOMEN pass by in hall on their way to class.)

Y. WOMEN
(Their voices overlapping as they pass by hurrying to class) Hey, how was last night? How was Hosanna?

BLYTHE
(without looking up, yanks open her locker door). Fine. (The girls pass by and FINNBAR is beside her suddenly.)

FINNBAR
Where is it?

BLYTHE
(BLYTHE jumps, skittish) Where is what?

FINNBAR
You know.

BLYTHE
No, I don’t know. Did you get your review of Hosanna done?

FINNBAR
Homework is the opiate of the masses.

BLYTHE
Mine is done.

FINNBAR
I’ll copy yours.

BLYTHE
No way.

FINNBAR
You can give it back now.

BLYTHE
Give back?
My foil.

BLYTHE
I don’t know what you’re talking about.

FINNBAR
Where’s your rabbit.

(BLYTHE clutches her purse tightly.)

FINNBAR
Let me see that. (He grabs her purse and rifles through it.) It’s not in here. (FINNBAR holds her purse up high and then drops it on top of the pile of textbooks she is carrying.)

BLYTHE
I don’t know what you are talking about.

FINNBAR
(he grabs her arm. BLYTHE tries to pull away from him.) Don’t play dumb, you bitch. (The History TEACHER walks by. FINNBAR drops her arm and turns quickly towards his locker.)

TEACHER
Is everything OK here?

BLYTHE
Yes, fine. I have to get to my English class. I’m fine.

TEACHER
Go on then, Blythe.

(BLYTHE, shaken, takes her books, closes her locker, rushes to class.)

TEACHER
And Finnbar, where are you supposed to be?

FINNBAR
I have a spare in Hades.

TEACHER
I presume you mean the library.

FINNBAR
Gonna visit the three-headed Hound of Hell.
TEACHER
Still recovering from last week?

FINNBAR
How do you know –?

TEACHER
The Staff Room has large ears. I was in the hall when you blacked out
last week. Flashbacks are to be expected. Why don’t you take a break at the nurse’s
office.

FINNBAR
I’d rather stand.

TEACHER
(quotes Buffy Ste. Marie’s song) The “Universal Soldier”? (pause) We were afraid
we’d lose you. You were rushed to ER white as a sheet. So far this year, at this school,
we’ve lost three students. All overdoses. We were afraid you’d be number four.

FINNBAR
Four strikes and…

TEACHER
What were you on anyway? LSD?

FINNBAR
Angel dust.

TEACHER
Manufactured PCP?

(FINNBAR is silent.)

TEACHER
Stupid thing to do, right?

(TEACHER talks to self: stream of consciousness. FINNBAR sings a John Lennon
song simultaneously on the other side of the stage.)

Angel…dust…angels in the dust, soldiers in World War I, II, Korea, Naam, the
Gulf, street fighters, memorials and angels of polished granite…but hey, what do I
know about adolescent psychology? I’m just a History Teacher.

(FINNBAR sings John Lennon’s song angrily, but not loudly, overlaps with
TEACHER’s monologue.)

As soon as you’re born they make you feel small
by giving you no time instead of it all
Till the pain is so big you feel nothing at all
Working Class Hero is something to be
Working Class Hero is something to be\textsuperscript{16}.

FINNBAR
Gotta split.

(FINNBAR leaves the locker area with no books, pulls his cigarette package
half out of a shirt pocket. TEACHER stands there, silent, looking straight
ahead. Lights up on MABEL who pours herself and HENRIETTE another cup
of tea at the round table. They walk around with their cups of tea.)

MABEL
I heard that Blythe couldn’t get away from Finnbar. He stalked her for years. Like a very
bad version of *Grease*. He was so tough. She was so good. But it was no musical.

HENRIETTE
Finnbar hated to dance.

MABEL
He was too “high” to dance.

HENRIETTE
He would stand at the edge of the stage and watch the band like it was
the Transubstantiation.

MABEL
He auditioned for all the plays she was in. In *The Crucible*, Finnbar got the
part of Judge Danforth.

(Freeze. Tableaux of this court scene from *The Crucible*. FINNBAR plays
DANFORTH. GRIFFIN playing the Young BLYTHE plays ELIZABETH. The other
male actor who plays AGENT/TEACHER/JFK plays PROCTOR. CHEEVER and
PARRIS are played by other Y. WOMEN. Unfreeze.)

\textbf{ACT II, Scene ii}\textsuperscript{17}

DANFORTH
(There is a knock at door. He calls off.) Hold! (To Abigail.) Turn your back.
Turn your back. (She does. To Proctor.) You do likewise. (Proctor turns
away.) Now let neither of you turn to face Goody Proctor. No one in this room is to speak one word, or raise a gesture ay or nay. (He turns toward door and calls.) Enter! (Elizabeth enters U.R., followed by Parris. She stands alone, her eyes looking for Proctor.) Mr. Cheever, report this testimony in all exactness. Are you ready?

CHEEVER
Ready, sir.

DANFORTH
Come here, woman. (Elizabeth crosses to Danforth, looking toward Proctor.) Look at me only, not at your husband. In my eyes only. (She looks at him.)

ELIZABETH: Good, sir.

(Freeze. Tableaux of this court scene from The Crucible. Lights on MABEL and HENRIETTE, who continue their story.)

MABEL
(sarcastic) “Good, sir!!”

HENRIETTE
And no invite to the high school prom. The other boys were too scared of Finnbar to invite her, so she missed her own prom, eh. I missed mine too but that was because of my miscarriage. I wore a gold satin housecoat and I looked out the window at all my friends who spent their last dime to dress like peacocks.

MABEL
Blythe wore jeans and a ripped T-shirt on the night of her prom and watched the Carol Burnett Show. Her mother and father didn’t even know it was prom night.

HENRIETTE
She lost herself, I tell you. You can lose a baby and a boyfriend and a mother and a father and the best apartment you ever had, but do not lose yourself!

MABEL
She was a missionary of the “Protestant Work Ethic.” If she only taught him to read, he would start wearing pinstripe suits, carry a leather brief case and give her perfect white Protestant babies.

HENRIETTE
Finnbar was a bad trip.

MABEL
It was time to read from her heart.
HENRIETTE
It’s all talk.

MABEL
But who am I to say?

(Musical transition. DANCER dances to fragment of taped song. Seventies music, such as “Lover’s Cross” sung by Melanie Safka.)

ACT TWO

(The Present. At the street lamp at the corner near the hospital.)

BLYTHE
Lots of discretion here…Griffin won’t reveal what is wrong, or why she is in hospital, only the number of her room. It is a mystery door I have been invited to walk through. Like “The Lady or the Tiger.” Remember that short story from high school? She could be in ICU, or Emerg, or Acute Care, or she could be the new Hospital Cafeteria Lady…. It’s the not knowing where or why that kills me – I am talking to myself. It’s the getting there to a place I don’t know that kills me, the anticipation and absence, the unknown…stark, off white….Visiting. Griffin.

(Meditative music. The Past. Projected slide of apple tree. DANCER picks a real apple from the tree in the projected slide and then stands down stage with the apple in her arm and her arm outstretched. DANCER alone, with an apple that has leaves still on it, freshly picked.)

MABEL
Her heart began to read when she was three years old. It was her first stage play. Greenwich Village.

HENRIETTE
Any clown with a wig thinks she can be the actress in New York.

MABEL
1962.

(DANCER still holds the apple. Silence. Sixties music. BLYTHE is very young member of a Canadian family of “expatriates” situated in the US in the early sixties amid issues of civil rights and segregation, women’s rights, and global concerns such as the Cold War. Greenwich Village, New York. 1962. Inside a Children’s Theatre at a production of Snow White. Sounds of children’s voices,
laughter. Two moms, ADELE (Blythe’s mom) and HADAR (another mom from New York she has just met) whisper in the audience. On the stage, WITCH is disguised as an old woman in a ragged shawl. She snatches the apple from DANCER’s outstretched hand. DANCER, afraid, runs away and sits curled up with her head in her hands in the corner of the stage.)

ADELE
So we came here because of my husband’s job. We live in Connecticut.

HADAR
My husband’s a cop. We live here in New York.

ADELE
I couldn’t do that. I would worry too much.

(WITCH offers the apple to SNOW WHITE. BLYTHE is mesmerized.)

WITCH
(on stage) How would you like a lovely, tasty red apple?

HADAR
You get used to it. I used to stand at the window of our apartment and look out at the millions of car lights racing to the finish line, and I’d wonder if he’d come home. Each night, I’d stand there, not knowing if I was really a widow but just didn’t know it yet…

AUDIENCE
(VOICES of Y. WOMEN play voices of AUDIENCE.) Don’t eat that apple! It’s poison! She’s in a disguise. It’s a poison apple!

BLYTHE
(age three) Snow White! Don’t eat that apple!

ADELE
(whispers to Blythe) It’s only a play, dear. It’s not real.

HADAR
To her it is real…

ADELE
(to BLYTHE) The story will end happily. I promise. (to HADAR)...I used to be a teacher in Quebec and then Ontario. I can’t teach here. I hear about those apartment rooftop schools in Harlem? I wish I could teach way up there. Eleanor Roosevelt says black folks should be in college. (pause)...My husband, he’s in research, by the way.
HADAR
What kind of research?

ADELE
Nuclear.

HADAR
(whispers) Social…family…atomic?

ADELE
Both.

HADAR
Scary.

ADELE
He insists on peace time work.

HADAR
Huhh…. Here in this country?

ADELE
Yes, here.

HADAR
(sarcastic) Good luck! God bless America…

BLYTHE
(calls out!) I told you not to eat the apple!

HADAR
And then after a while I got used to it, my husband being in the streets…. Out of the blue, like, I stopped worrying. I figured if he’s going to die as a cop tonight in New York, he’s going to die tonight. There’s nothing I can do but wait. I watch Johnny Carson in black and white and grey on the TV, with my Chardonnay (she mimes holding up a wine glass), and I eat those slice gum drops dusted with sugar that look like lemons, limes, oranges, and those blood red oranges.

BLYTHE
Snow White!

ADELE
My husband is away a lot at conferences. Don’t tell anyone I said all this.

HADAR
There’s no one to tell.

**ADELE**
I drown my sorrows in social causes.

**HADAR**
I eat whole boxes of candy. I drink a lot of wine.

**ADELE & HADAR**
I get so lonely, I could die.

**ADELE**
Here in America, I swear the nights are darker.

**ADELE & HADAR**
There are dark days also.

*(BLYTHE in the present, by the streetlamp, watches her memory of the past.)*

**BLYTHE:**
*Snow White* reminds me of Jannie…

*(Flashback within a flashback. BLYTHE points towards Y. WOMEN walk in wearing sunhats and sunglasses. There is a “White Side” and a “Black Side” Some sit on towels on the white side and others on the black side, making a tableaux of sunbathers.)*

**ADELE**
Summer of ’62. We took a little six year old black girl from the slums in Harlem. It was a church-sponsored social program. Through this friend at church who heard Martin Luther King Jr. speak at the March on Washington. Jannie’s mother was a single mother raising four kids on her own. We took Jannie to the beach. Norwalk, Newport, Bridgeport. Mystic Seaport. It was the height of segregation. You should have seen the faces on the white side of the beach, which is where we put down our towels, of course. We sat there all five of us, me, my husband, my two daughters, Blythe and Becky, and Jannie, our black girl. And we didn’t apologize to anyone. We built sandcastles with Jannie. The sand on the white side was clean, brown, sleek and soft. And on the other side of the fence, the black side - stones and sticks and not much sand. That’s where the black families were sitting on their towels. And they stared at us too. Everyone, everyone on that beach for miles around, it seemed, was staring at us. Jannie became part of our family. I felt like I was finally doing something I really believed in. All those years of sitting on a hard pew in a country church singing hymns to a wheezy old organ amounted to nothing compared to that moment sitting with my self respect. On a towel, with Jannie and all of us, on the “white” side of the Atlantic Ocean.
(BLYTHE in the present at the streetlamp. Two Y. WOMEN mime the mirror game as if in a bathtub while the adult BLYTHE reminisces.)

BLYTHE
I remember my bath with Jannie. It was like that mirror game in Theatre Arts class, where you face your partner and they mirror everything you do with your hands and feet. Jannie was trying to scrub herself raw. I said, “Why are you scrubbing so hard? I don’t even use soap. I just soak myself. I’m lazy compared to you.” And Jannie said:

JANNIE
(scrubs herself with soap) I’m scrubbin’ all the black off.

BLYTHE
We drove her home to Harlem after she stayed with us in Norwalk. She lived in a tenement with four apartment buildings facing each other. Fire escapes, rusty ladders and stairways everywhere. She gave me a tour as we stood beside the car, while her mother dressed in a hot pink cotton suit that was prettier than anything my mother ever wore, and a necklace of pearls that seemed real enough, and she kept talking to my mother and father. My little sister Becky was asleep in the back seat of the car.

JANNIE
See that fire escape up that building? Way up high there? Do you see it?

BLYTHE
“Yes,” I said. “I see it.”

JANNIE
That’s where my girlfriend Madison fell off couple of weeks ago. She fell all the way down and died on that slab of concrete there below.

BLYTHE
I looked way up at the fire escape and down at the concrete. I imagined her friend falling, slowly, like a chocolate rag doll, falling down on to the hot asphalt. “Oh well…that’s too bad.” That’s all I said to Jannie and hugged her goodbye, hard, like she was my long lost sister. Then her mother thanked us once more, and she held Jannie’s hand and walked back through the courtyard. I wished I could do something…but I never saw Jannie again.

(In the present, ADELE stands parallel to her adult daughter BLYTHE. Both face the audience. Their stories are parallel, but noticeably different.)

ADELE
I had to take Jannie back in the train to meet her mother at the South Norwalk Metro – North Station. Near Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd…. The agency wouldn’t let us take her all the way back home to her door. My husband was away on business. He was away so much. So I went alone.

BLYTHE
I remember with photographic clarity that my father drove us in the family car, which was a turquoise 1955 Plymouth, all the way back to Harlem. It was hot as Hades that day. You could see the steam pouring out of the radiator from under the hood. I tried to show off my tan in my yellow paisley sundress. All the black neighbour kids gathered around as we stepped out of the car, parachuting off metal dumpsters with their pieces of cardboard and cheering. Truth is, that summer Jannie was the star of her neighbourhood.

ADELE
I secretly kept in touch with Jannie. I never told my own daughters that one day, two years later, I called the apartment building and someone told me.

OLD WOMAN FROM HARLEM APARTMENT
(Voice over as if from a telephone). You won’t be hearing from Jannie no more. She’s gone.

ADELE
(secretly, almost a whisper) “Gone” meant “died.” Something happened to Jannie. I don’t know what exactly, but something happened.

BLYTHE
I’ve always planned to go back to New York and find Jannie. This summer, my mother, who is eighty, confessed that Jannie most likely died in Harlem before she was eight years old, which would have been about 1964. Maybe Jannie fell off the fire escape like her friend Madison did. I wept when I heard this because it was like I’d lost a sister. Not lost, really, as some kind of holy literary memory has kept Jannie alive. Sometimes, you remember things, the way they ought to be.

(Children’s Theatre in Greenwich Village, 1962. Children’s voices echo and overlap.)

HADAR
(to ADELE) It’s crazy how the kids in the audience yell out.

AUDIENCE
(overlapping children’s voices) Don’t eat that apple!

(Surreal fog Down Left of stage where Snow White is playing. JFK’s spirit appears and seems to be calling out to BLYTHE’s mother in the audience.)

JFK
Your husband is a brilliant man.

ADELE
I know.

JFK
His brains are of great value.

ADELE
I miss Canada.

JFK
Ask what you can do for your country!

ADELE
I’m asking, I’m asking.

JFK
We want him to design for us.

ADELE
He never will. We live here and work here but we are really Canadians.

JFK
Peace is critical, of course. But your husband’s brains are such an asset.

ADELE
I’ll tell you what. You can have his brains and I’ll have the rest of him…

JFK
We need him.

ADELE
What for? Is this some kind of kidnapping?

JFK
Weapons research.

ADELE
To make nuclear bombs?!

JFK
Not the bomb itself exactly.

ADELE
Well I know my husband and he will never do that…

JFK
Never make a bomb?

ADELE
Yes, that’s what I said.

JFK
Come on, every boy dreams of making a bomb someday. Didn’t you see them all in the streets, the boys of America, covered in dust.

HADAR
Now I see you now, too, JFK. I know what is going on.

JFK
I face a dilemma. Build up nuclear arms, or do nothing and appear defenceless before Cuba, USSR, the world.

HADAR
But this is a Children’s Theatre. I don’t get it.

ADELE
So then, what is peace(ful) research? That’s what he came here to do, why he said we were in America.

JFK
(speaks slowly)… Glory, glory, Hallelujah. *(Sounds of “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” children’s laughter and other voices singing.)*

Glory, glory, Hallelujah (3X)
His Truth is marching on

ADELE
Look around. Children everywhere. The children of America, all here in the audience.

JFK
I see them. Their eyes haunt me, so bright, like a thousand fireflies over my yacht. At night, I watch them light up the harbour.

ADELE
My daughter’s first stage play.

JFK
I am a Father.
ADELE
Whose father?

JFK
I am.

ADELE
You are not my daughter’s father.

JFK
I am Father of America.

HADAR
She thinks the play is real.

ADELE
Everything is real to her.

JFK
I am a family man, a good Catholic.

ADELE
Just don’t…

JFK
And I am here to…

ADELE
…shatter…

JFK
…to protect all the children of the nation

ADELE
…her innocence.

HADAR
What’s the matter?

ADELE
Handkerchiefs everywhere…

HADAR
Here’s a clean tissue.
ADELE
The dwarves are weeping. They feel there’s been a death -

JFK
In the White House…

HADAR
Snow White lies sleeping like death.

JFK
I dream about my family, my beautiful wife, my children, lost out in the yacht at night and I just can’t reach them, no matter what, and so all I can do is wait on the dock in the fog and watch the fireflies. You see they naturally gravitate to all the masts on the boats. It’s a place to alight. You see those sailboats? The masts are crucifixes, and the harbour is like a grand cathedral that kneels in mourning, lit by just so many fireflies.

ADELE
Don’t you dare take my husband away.

JFK
Have you ever had a near-death experience, where you can almost see a white light, shimmering ahead?

ADELE
Take your fireflies, your white lights, just don’t take him. He’s all I’ve got.

JFK
It’s an ethical paradox, you know, the Cold war. You can’t leave me to face that alone.

ADELE
Without my husband, I’d be nothing.

JFK
He’s safe in America. Everything is top secret.

ADELE
I despise secrets.

JFK
No one will know what your husband is doing.

ADELE
I said leave him alone.
JFK
You can do this one thing for your country.

ADELE
This is not my country!

JFK
It is now.

ADELE
It’s not home. I want to go home to Canada!

JFK
Look, your daughter knows the Pledge of Allegiance…. There she is in kindergarten, saying it with all the rest of the kids!

(The very young BLYTHE’s voice, sounding very patriotic, over classroom sounds of American children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.)

BLYTHE
I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

ADELE
I won’t let you take my family! This is a nightmare! Like he’s being drafted!

JFK
He won’t be stationed in Cuba.

ADELE
I’m going back to Canada. I’m taking the girls back to Canada, taking my daughters back home.

JFK
Your eldest daughter believes she’s an American.

ADELE
You’re wrong. You’re absolutely wrong!

JFK
She’s an American, now.

ADELE
So you’d take her too, then? Is that it?
JFK
I offer opportunities for all, civil rights, and…

ADELE
I won’t let you have my family! Damn you, I am the mother!

JFK
Am I handsome?

ADELE
You can’t have us!

(Sounds of “Star-Bangled Banner” sung by children’s voices.)

Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight,
O’er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

(JFK’s spirit slowly steps backward, fading into blackness as Snow White is about to end.)

HADAR
Look, Snow White is being kissed by the Prince.

BLYTHE
She woke up!

HADAR
Yes, dear, she woke up.

BLYTHE
It’s a happy ending!

ADELE
See, dear. That’s what I told you. There would be a happy ending. Plays have happy endings.

(Sound of a gun shot. Slow motion of kids in theatre. AUDIENCE moving in slow motion as if lost in space. “Star Spangled Banner” playing in slow motion softly in the
background. Voice Over of SECRETARY as if over a school PA system.)

SECRETARY
November 22, 1963. Attention Principal, Vice Principal, teachers, and students. This is an announcement. We will have a special closure of school for the rest of the day. Will all students please pack your personal belongings and walk directly home. Our president, our beloved president, John F. Kennedy has been shot. In a moving open car in Dallas, Texas. The First Lady, Jackie, his devoted, beautiful wife, was there in the car with him. (she sniffs.) Parents will want all their children safe at home today. God Bless America!

(The surreal JFK sequence is over. ADELE and BLYTHE and HADAR and her child and all the others gather their coats and things from their seats in the Theatre, all smiling after Snow White, as if JFK’s spirit hadn’t been there at all, and as if they haven’t heard this foreshadow of the future. Lights on tea table where MABEL and HENRIETTE are drinking tea. The young BLYTHE and Y. WOMEN (as Canadian Kindergarten kids) mime the story told in another part of the stage.)

MABEL
Blythe went home and on TV, JFK was shot over and over, so she hid behind the TV, curled up in the dusty plugs with the family cat. In the spring after the assassination, her family moved back to Canada, but Blythe didn’t know she was really a Canadian. On the first day of a new Kindergarten in the spring of 1964, she didn’t know the song. During “Oh Canada”… (Sounds of young children singing “Oh Canada”) a circle of warm pee grew and grew around her cotton plaid dress, and she couldn’t stop it from flowing outwards like Hudson Bay. All the Canadian kids moved farther and farther away.

HENRIETTE
Mais non. That circle of piss was her island, I tell you. She was a Séparatiste.

MABEL
An immigrant.

HENRIETTE
Mais non!

MABEL
She didn’t know where the washrooms were.

HENRIETTE
Maybe she was queer and didn’t know which washroom to use.

MABEL
She returned to a new country.
HENRIETTE
When I left Granby and moved to Magog and then Montreal, I felt like that, except there was a new stepfather every move. One thing I’ve learned in life, if you want to get rid of a man, just piss in the bed.

MABEL
Blythe used to go to a family cottage on Lake Simcoe and she slept in the attic with knotholes in the wood. She and her sister, Becky, would play “Guess the shape.” Right above the big double bed, on the sloping ceiling, there was JFK. Unmistakable, with the cowlick in his hair and everything. And there was a dark hole in one of his eyes. Blythe would tell her wide-eyed sister: “That’s where the bullet shot JFK’s eye right out of the socket.”

HENRIETTE
There’s another good way to get rid of a man but I have enough confessions to make in this life already.

MABEL
It gave them all comfort to know that JFK was watching over them in the night.

(Meditative music. DANCER with apple comes on again and dances. She throws the apple to the Y. WOMEN who play catch with the apple, and then when the music stops, one of them (GRiffin ?) places the apple on the tea table near MABEL and HENRIETTE.)

ACT THREE

(The present by the streetlamp. NEIGHBOUR wearing a head bandana and fuzzy slippers, slips out into the darkness from her apartment lobby.)

NEIGHBOUR
Are you lost?

BLYTHE
I have an address.

(BLYTHE holds up her phone screen. NEIGHBOUR is a self-appointed gatekeeper. She points to an archaic structure across the street, walks with BLYTHE to the corner.)

NEIGHBOUR
Well, you see that building? You see those bars on that window. It’s a double or triple glazed smoked glass window, part of the reno. It’s an old building, you know. The
city tried to make it look less like a prison so the neighbours wouldn’t complain. That’s the (loud whisper) “psychiatric unit.” Is that what you are looking for?

BLYTHE
Guess so.

NEIGHBOUR
That’s where you’re going?!

BLYTHE
To visit my student.

NEIGHBOUR
And you are a teacher?

BLYTHE
Yeah.

NEIGHBOUR
What do you teach?

BLYTHE
(fumbles with her phone and purse, wanting to be discreet) I – I don’t know.

(Musical transition. Surreal. Fog-like. DANCER carries the apple into PROF. KELLY’s office and places the apple in her hand as if giving an apple to a teacher. Three professors stand as if in a hologram, like Sci-Fi commissioners assigning an intergalactic mission. PROF. KELLY, at the apex of a triangle, holds the apple. PROF. HARVEY, with a long ponytail, wears sunglasses. PROF. SAM eats trail mix from a bag tucked inside his upturned bike helmet. BLYTHE in baggy T-shirt with dishevelled hair reveals an empty sheet of paper from a backpack. She stands separate from the three.)

PROF. KELLY
You’ve been telling me everything you know already. What is it you don’t know?

BLYTHE
I – don’t know…

ALL THREE
(chorally, repeating) Finding or not finding, what you don’t know yet.

(BLYTHE shrugs, not knowing what to say. Pause.)

PROF. KELLY
Look, Blythe, FYI, everyone goes through this.

BLYTHE
Everyone on Planet Earth?

(PROF. KELLY nods thank you but gives the apple back to DANCER, who hides it up her sleeve. THREE PROFESSORS slowly move to a place upstage, where they stand in a line with their backs to the audience. Musical Transition. The Present. BLYTHE watches NEIGHBOUR’s eyebrows raised in semi-darkness near the street lamp. A rare car passes, hint of rurality.)

NEIGHBOUR
Are you really a teacher?

BLYTHE
Extra-curricular. No mat leaves.

NEIGHBOUR
(shrugs) I don’t get it.

(BLYTHE walks under the streetlamp, deep in thought. NEIGHBOUR picks up litter on the sidewalk.)

BLYTHE
The streetlamp looks white on top, like snow.

(BLYTHE draws a horizontal line in the air as if to divide the stage in half.)

BLYTHE
What about a play that divides the stage into “outside” and “inside”?

(BLYTHE’s monologue follows. She holds on to her journal, and it is as if by her thoughts, she is writing in it. BLYTHE steps back and forth over her imaginary line to portray stage areas of “inside” and “outside.” Y. WOMEN create dramatic tableaux within the monologue on two sides of stage. NEIGHBOUR continues to pick up litter.)

No snow, but it reminds me of the snow-laden lamp post at the entrance to Narnia. I wonder about so-called “normal” and so-called “abnormal.” If you say the “streetlamp looks like the snow laden-lamp post at the entrance to Narnia,” it is a simile. If you say the “lamp post on the corner of Aster and 14th Streets is the lamp post at the entrance to Narnia,” it could be metaphor. If the lamp post itself needs no further explanation but indeed represents Narnia quite literally, it is metonym. If you are deemed mentally ill by “the powers that be,” you are probably speaking in metaphor and metonym continuously. If you say “The White Witch is over there waiting to turn us all into stone” and you are mounting The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe, you are a “dramatist.”
If you say these things in another context, like a sidewalk, you are “psychotic”? Why are we “outside” and they are “inside”?

(A sudden coastal gust almost blows away NEIGHBOUR’s bandana; she grabs it and stops picking up litter and ends up closer to BLYTHE.)

NEIGHBOUR
So what exactly do you teach? Chemistry? Physics?

(Three Professors behind her upstage, play like heard inner voices. They are invisible to NEIGHBOUR. The three PROFESSORS start a discussion with BLYTHE, and she is having two conversations at once.)

PROF. SAM
Wasn’t your father a nuclear physicist?

BLYTHE
(Pause, to NEIGHBOUR) Drama-Theatre Education.

PROF. HARVEY
(to PROF. SAM) Darth Vader revealed his true identity.

PROF. SAM
(to PROF. HARVEY) Why a mask?

(BLYTHE writes a poem in her head, or in the air.)

I need to say the “Education” part, slowy…
My voice, some

NEIGHBOUR
(points to psychiatric unit). Lots of “drama” in that building.

BLYTHE
…filmy
transparent
cloth.

NEIGHBOUR
“Drama.” You know, acting out.

BLYTHE
It’s like they’re all in masks.

NEIGHBOUR
Medical masks? No – surgery in that place.

PROF. SAM
Activists would have called you names.

PROF. HARVEY
(points at her) Like, “Hey, there’s the nuke’s daughter!”

BLYTHE
Let’s talk about this conversation.

NEIGHBOUR
It’s our…

BLYTHE
(to the voices upstage, puts her finger to her lips, and also to NEIGHBOUR) …secret?!

NEIGHBOUR
I mean, don’t tell them I said anything.

BLYTHE
The authorities?

PROF. SAM
You are the author.

BLYTHE
(to everyone) It is – was – peace time research!

NEIGHBOUR
They don’t understand criticism.

PROF. KELLY
How is “peace”?

NEIGHBOUR
They don’t understand sarcasm. It’s a threat to them.

PROF KELLY
How is “peace” (pause) secret?

PROF. HARVEY
Good question, Professor Kelly.

PROF SAM
Meta-textual.

*(NEIGHBOUR flashes BLYTHE a peace sign with her fingers, then leaves.*
*PROFESSORS mime conferring with each other as they slowly vanish, like fading holograms. BLYTHE nods, crosses the road at the light. Somehow, in the early autumn evening, this corner seems darker than the rest of the city. Most streetlamps aren’t working. Maybe this is intentional. She sees the large square window with smoked glass and cleverly disguised bars that look like a window of high-end décor, the ultimate “smoke and mirrors.”*)

**Y. WOMEN** *(following BLYTHE)* Hey, time to play “Truth or Lie”? So who is going to go first? *(Voices continue, then slowly fade away…)* Truth!…Lie!…Truth!…Lie!…Truth!…Lie!

**(BLYTHE walks past the mental health clientele on passes, standing in ambiguous lounge wear on the steps of the 1950’s building reminiscent of a Victorian asylum. There is a bearded man, JESUS GUY, who may be the “second coming” incognito, RASTA GUY, with dreadlocks, and TOM GIRL, a young woman wearing denim overalls who fidgets with her pack of menthol cigarettes.)*

**BLYTHE** *(to TOM GIRL)* Do they still sell those menthol cigarettes? I smoked once, for one month straight. In the early eighties.

**(Y. WOMEN create mime of BLYTHE in the past under a streetlamp. One becomes BLYTHE, trying to light a menthol cigarette. The others create a streetlamp with their bodies. BLYTHE observes her past self.*)

**BLYTHE**
I remember I tried to smoke with finesse despite the fact that I didn’t know how to inhale; the menthol disguised the nicotine. I wanted to French inhale, so I would look like Betty Rizzo from *Grease*, but never quite got the knack of it. Here we are with those who have no light. Matches are forbidden. *(BLYTHE walks up the steps where the three patients sit, holding unlit cigarettes.)*

**TOM GIRL**
Do you have a light?

**RASTA GUY**
Do you have a light?

**JESUS GUY**
Do you have a light?
BLYTHE
Do I look like a smoker?! No, sorry, I didn’t mean that.

JESUS GUY
Are you one of us?

BLYTHE
No. Yes, of course. I mean we are all humans, looking for a light. *(BLYTHE steps aside, clings to her journal, as if writing in it.)* I think in gilded calligraphy subtext. I do have a light. Many fire lights, tea lights floating moonward on lily pads on the surface of a lake, tiny lights that will never go out, and if they do, I will re-kindle them with clashing rocks and defiant sparks, or with my gnarled bare hands. I will slip in unobtrusively and then slip out again, like an exquisite, slippery fish, careening through the seaweed of the system, and no one will know who I was or why I was here.

*(Meditative Music. The Past. March 1976. Grade 13 field trip to Paris. BLYTHE has free time away from her school group. Amid the aesthetics of Paris, BLYTHE finds respite from FINNBAR, from her roles in Ontario. DANCER tosses the apple in the air and passes it to University student (U. STUDENT) on a bicycle. BLYTHE strolls on the Left Bank in the Latin Quarter past the Sorbonne. Y. WOMEN become people on the street, students, intellectuals. BLYTHE refers to her tourist book, looks up.)*

BLYTHE
*(to herself)* Sorbonne University?

U. STUDENT
*(eating apple while riding slowly beside her on a bike).* Mais oui.

BLYTHE
Mon père. *(gives up & switches to carefully pronounced English)* Before Christmas, my father was here in Paris. He presented a paper on anti-seismic design for nuclear power plants. *(Blythe looks at tourist booklet.)* I guess I missed it.

U. STUDENT
*(understands)* Vraiment? Ça, c’est “cool”!

BLYTHE
*(she refers to her tourist book)* Où est L’Église Saint-Germain-des-Prés?

U. STUDENT
*(stops riding to give directions, points to map in BLYTHE’s tourist book.)* Cette église est très ancienne…. Prenez la rue devant et puis, prenez l’autres rue et puis, prenez cette rue là…. *(The U. STUDENT waves goodbye, and rushes on her bicycle to class.)* Bonne chance!
BLYTHE
OK. Merci!

(U. STUDENT passes a new apple to DANCER, from her/his pocket. BLYTHE walks down the streets until she gets to L’Église St.Germain-Des-Prêts. DANCER places the new apple in a basket held by a beggar woman named ROSE-MARIE dressed in a grey coat, ear muffs, and forest green wool leggings, in the archway of L’Église St. Germain-Des-Prêts. ROSE-MARIE tries to sell the apple to BLYTHE.)

ROSE-MARIE
(holds out the apple) Voici une pomme savoureuse.

BLYTHE
(covers her own mouth). Je n’ai pas faim.

(BLYTHE enters the archway of the old cathedral. A sign inside says: “Concert de L’Orgue à L’Église St. Germain-Des-Prêts, par donation.” BLYTHE sits down in a pew near the back and listens to the finale of the Organ Concert. The audience is sparse. BLYTHE writes in her journal.)

BLYTHE
(writing) Hardly anyone here. My father would really like this concert. I catch a glimpse of him, in absentia, or perhaps, more present in foreign places, where his career is. He leaves a trace, ephemeral.

(TRACE is the surreal image of her father in a corner of the cathedral, delivering a paper at the conference in Paris a few months earlier, in December, 1975. He points to a slide on an overhead projector. Sound of the organ concert overlaps with this. As the concert is slowly ending, along with the fading sounds of TRACE’s lecture, ROSE-MARIE, the apple-seller, slips into the cathedral, sits in a pew at the back to warm herself. BLYTHE walks over to sit with her.)

TRACE
“Smooth ground-response and floor-response spectra provide a convenient means for determining the resultant motion of nuclear power – plant structures, and light equipment mounted thereon, when subject to a seismic disturbance. The graphical methods described herein are simple and convenient to use. They give results which are consistent with those produced by modal analysis techniques involving earthquake time-histories which are closely matched to the chosen ground-response spectrum.”

BLYTHE
Tu t’appelles comment?

ROSE-MARIE
Rose-Marie.
BLYTHE
Tu habites près d’ici?

ROSE-MARIE
Oui, j’ai toujours vécu près de Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Quand j’étais très jeune, je suis devenu une religieuse bénédictine. Puis, je suis devenu inquiet, et je ne pouvais pas être chaste. Je suis donc devenu une actrice à la Comédie Française et j’ai joué Mariane dans Tartuffe et dans L’Avare.21

BLYTHE
Par Molière ?

ROSE-MARIE
Alors, je ai dû quitter ma vie à la Comédie Française.

BLYTHE
Pourquoi ?!!

ROSE-MARIE
Je suis devenue mère, sans mari.

(ROSE-MARIE’s flashback to Mariane in L’Avare. Y. WOMEN and others mime the parts to portray ROSE-MARIE’s story.) Un homme m’a offert un emploi comme une dame de la nuit qui a payé beaucoup plus que joué Molière. J’ai fait semblant que ce était juste un autre jeu de la comédie. Les hommes sont venus et sont partis comme des moustiques vertigineuses. Et puis, j’ai perdu mon fils…. Et maintenant je suis trop vieille pour la vie nocturne à Paris, alors je suis devenu une mendiante. J’ai été tout ce qu’une femme peut l’être.

BLYTHE
Ta vie est intéressante, mais triste.

(Holding her journal, BLYTHE tells the story in English about ROSE-MARIE while the offering plate is passed around. USHER is careful not to pass it to ROSE-MARIE. BLYTHE nods ‘No’ to the USHER and slips her donation secretly to ROSE-MARIE.)

She was a great actress at the Comédie… and what was she doing here? Rose-Marie was Lady of the night emeritus, and she had also been a mother and a nun. Her story is either fiction or truth, gospel truth, or another kind of truth. So when they passed the pewter, red velvet-lined offering plate, instead of putting it in (pauses to change her mind), I slipped my 25 francs into her nicotine-laced fingers as into brown lace gloves, which felt both warm and cold at once. (holding on to ROSE-MARIE’s hand) Rose-Marie’s hands were the direct line to heaven. She was an actress playing all the stages of a woman’s life.
ROSE-MARIE
(bows to BLYTHE, teary) Merci!

(ROSE-MARIE walks back to the archway of the cathedral, and stands there like an icon. BLYTHE wanders around the sanctuary at St. Germain-Des-Prés, lighting candles. MABEL & HENRIETTE observe the tableaux with their tea cups.)

HENRIETTE
Blythe saw the nun within the whore.

MABEL
You’re daft, Henriette.

HENRIETTE
In Quebec it is a shame to be a whore. And no shame at all. Both.

MABEL
Not so loud. They will kick us out.

HENRIETTE
OK. (pause) Elle a vu la lumière à l’ombre.

MABEL
I think Blythe was ashamed to be a Protestant.

HENRIETTE
She loved those candles you can light to pray for the dead. She liked to put her vingt-cinq franc coin in the slot and hear it clink way down into the fires of hell.

MABEL
I think she borrowed the Catholic Church.

HENRIETTE
Mais non, they borrowed her. She was good promotion.

(Music transition: “Tous Ce Que” recorded song by Glenn Chatten. The Present.
BLYTHE looks around to see if anyone out in the city sees her turning brass door knobs of the windowed doors of this asylum. No one is around except the patients. They accept her without question as one of them because, well, visitors are rare here. There is only endless, hollow silence that smells like a mausoleum, no bells, no buzzers, just a heavy sedated silence absorbed into gray walls. Sparse signage: Y. WOMEN make a formation of signs and their voices are the signs, speaking.)

YW 1
(Beside the antiquated elevator inside a room, "ADMIN sits behind a long desk. She won’t look up at BLYTHE, seeing her perhaps as a patient on a pass wandering BLYTHE clears her throat, but there is no response.)

BLYTHE
Excuse me.

(There is still no response.)

BLYTHE
(louder) Excuse me.

(Silence.)

BLYTHE
Excuse me I am looking for Two East.

ADMIN
Upstairs. Can’t you read the signs? "ADMIN points to the elevator out the door in the hall. Beside the elevator is a door to the stairs. BLYTHE goes back out into the hall and finds the door to the stairs.)

YW 1
(as sign) Stairs Closed.

YW 2
(as sign) Outpatient Clinic Downstairs.

YW 3
(as sign) Stairs Closed.

YW 4
(as sign) Outpatient Clinic Downstairs.
BLYTHE
So how do you go up or down the freaking stairs if the stairs are closed? (BLYTHE sits on a vinyl bench in the hall under a hand sanitizer and writes in her journal.) On the sign, there are doodled eyes and mouths of faces with curlicue hairs sprung from the vowels such as “o” and “a.” My heart leaps at this small indication of something that faintly resembles art. I have seen the main hospital with its art through the walls of many wards. The main front lobby is like a gallery, complete with bells, beepers, and bustle of importance. But here, in the loony bin, no one is in a rush to save any lives. What are the underlying values here, where human beings are kept perpetually over-medicated, losing their very selves? This place should not be too pretty even by institutional standards, but must continue to maintain the cruel calm of sedation, where prison bars rise above each one in calculated invisibility, and there is only a quiet, disciplinary ambience. In fact, here, this is the very successful discipline of silence. People are shut in covert sterility between walls whose bursting words have been deemed linguistically illegitimate. This place is mislabelled: hospital. This building is House of the Wordless. It is un-poetic and grey and cruel.

ACT FOUR

(The Past. Oka, east of Montreal. 1979. L’Abbaye Cistercienne. BLYTHE is on a silent individual retreat for a week, a self-designated exile. She is the only young woman here, and the only non-Catholic. BLYTHE is outside the Abbey watching a monk, FRÈRE DEGARÉ, in work clothes suspended from the cross from a rope at the top of the steeple. He is re-painting the bells with silver paint. He stops to talk with BLYTHE.)

BLYTHE
(calling) Are you OK up there?

DEGARÉ
C’est n’est-pas possible de tomber! Je dois avoir la foi dans la croix!(laughing & pointing to the cross from which he is suspended)

BLYTHE
How did you become a monk?

DEGARÉ
(calling down) I will tell you when I get down from the roof. It is a long story.

(BLYTHE waits for Frère DEGARÉ to climb back down a ladder with the help of another monk. He comes down and out to the grass, and speaks to BLYTHE, still carrying his silver-coated paintbrush. His work clothes are covered with silver paint.)
We don’t usually talk to guests here. When I was in Auschwitz, I was so thin I could see my own bones through my own skin. And I could see everyone else’s bones. I listened to my rancid breath and I heard myself thinking through my own bone marrow. There was a stream of words and finally, no words. The silence was deep and cavernous. I didn’t know if maybe I had already died and this was hell. And then there were voices, suffering eyes talking, some strange interior language, like praying, that emerged through my quiet terror every minute and hour and day and night. I promised God if I survived hell… (I swore this before the heaven I didn’t believe in anymore.) Tu comprends? I swore my survival would be traded for a promise to become a Trappist monk.

BLYTHE
They put Catholics in Auschwitz?

DEGARÉ
Anyone not Nazi. Mostly Jews but others also.

BLYTHE
You kept your side of the bargain.

DEGARÉ
Mais oui. (pause)

BLYTHE
You didn’t want a wife and family?

DEGARÉ
I lost my wife in the war. You don’t need two families in one lifetime. It’s not bad, being a monk. Work pray sleep pray eat pray. Die pray. And then, we are buried in the back there – “avec tous les frères morts.” (He points to the cemetery behind the chapel and crosses himself.) It is simple, this place. I’m on “maintenance” because I am in the best shape. The brothers, they make the cheese. Many have heart conditions, and they are aging. They can’t do the heavy work.

BLYTHE
And silence?

DEGARÉ
That’s where I first knew the interior life because there was nowhere else to go. Those camps…

BLYTHE:
Is this a different silence, here at the Abbey?

DEGARÉ
(laughing) Mais oui, petite soeur. Un silence différent.

(A group from a nearby L’Arche community home is visiting. BLYTHE sees their van outside the chapel with the L’Arche logo on it. Sound of “Salve Regina” chant from the chapel. BLYTHE sings along and walks into the chapel.)

Salve Regina⁲³, mater misericordiae:
Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus, exsules, filii Hevae.
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia ergo, Advocata nostra,
illos tuos misericordes oculos
ad nos converte.
Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis, post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens: O pia: O dulcis
Virgo Maria.

(Monks lead chants from inside front pews in the chancel. L’Arche boys played by Y. WOMEN are sitting in a group in a pew adjacent to BLYTHE. There is absolute silence for prayer. You can only hear the occasional cough of a monk. One of the L’Arche boys starts to giggle. The leaders don’t stop him. The monastery is inclusive of these boys with disabilities. BLYTHE makes eye contact with the L’ARCHE BOY and starts to stifle giggles also, and can’t help herself. Then BLYTHE starts to cry. The L’ARCHE BOY runs across the silent aisle impulsively and sits beside BLYTHE.)

L’ARCHE BOY
(putting his arm around BLYTHE, speaks loudly). It’s alright. I am sad too.

(BLYTHE starts giggling again. None of this apparently disturbs the silence. Tableaux of BLYTHE and L’ARCHE BOY. MABEL and HENRIETTE observe the tableaux from their tea table.

MABEL
By sophomore year at university, Blythe had finally broken up with Finnbar.

HENRIETTE
(crosses self) Merci à la Vierge, la Mère de Dieu.

MABEL
Another Great War was over!

(Sound of Taps with a trumpet in the distance. Both women stand at attention as if it was the end of a Great War.)
MABEL
The Abbey was a safe refuge.

HENRIETTE
She didn’t want to ever go back to…

MABEL & HENRIETTE
The real world….

HENRIETTE
…seemed to be far away.

MABEL
… was a place to run from. They were good to her, those monks.

HENRIETTE
Les moines rient et les moines font…

MABEL
… delicious Oka cheese…

HENRIETTE
Ils font ce fameux fromage.

MABEL
What is the real world anyway? My family: Protestant Work Ethic and television.

HENRIETTE
Les moines ont une attitude unique au sujet de travail.

MABEL
Ma and Pa punched a time clock instead of each other.

HENRIETTE
For me, growing up Catholique was avoir de la misère. You could say it was a gong show. I won’t tell you about those sisters of lack of mercy…. (laughs, pause). I made a vow I would sacrifice my virginity as soon as I knew how to read the contraception instruction booklet, with real colour cartoons.
MABEL
For some reason, Blythe liked hangin’ out with the R.C.’s.

HENRIETTE
C’était étrange, n’est-ce pas? Mais pour Blythe, l’Église Catholique était un exil plus heureux.

MABEL
T’was happy exile….

(After Matins, BLYTHE goes for her one to one session with PÈRE BENEDICT, in a bare office with a tall, well-lit bay window. She sits up holding her knees in the window seat.)

BENEDICT
You spoke with Frère Degaré.

BLYTHE
He told me how he became a monk. Unbelievable. Intellectuals were a threat?

BENEDICT
Many of us became monks after the war, eh. I came to the order in 1948, and was fully instated as a Trappist by 1952. It was a horror what happened in Europe. It seemed that God Himself was lost. I have been influenced by the Belgian philosopher, Adolphe Gesché. He has written about emptiness and absence, and hope.

BLYTHE
I am also looking for hope.

BENEDICT
Tom said you should take a week here.

BLYTHE:
Frère Tom has worked with Viktor Frankl, who is an Auschwitz survivor like Frère Degaré. Big Tom is my friend. He said I should take a week of silence. Here I am.

BENEDICT
How did you meet Tom?

BLYTHE
Jean Vanier gave a talk in 1978 at Massey Hall. Afterwards you could sign up for a prison volunteer group. Big Tom was at the front with a clipboard.

BENEDICT
Tom is a dear friend.
BLYTHE
You and Jean Vanier are brothers? You look alike.

BENEDICT
Yes, except my nose wasn’t hit by a football.

BLYTHE
What was it like growing up?

BENEDICT
Jean and I had pillow fights and we played football.

BLYTHE
You are close to Jean?

BENEDICT
Jean and I complete each other. He in Service and I in Silence.

BLYTHE
The L’Arche group came here today, and one boy comforted me.

BENEDICT
They come here a lot, those boys. They see the truth of people even if they are not ready for it.

BLYTHE
What is it like being a monk?

BENEDICT
Simple. We don’t need TV. I work in the garden and see messages. In the city, people see price tags on the cabbages. Here we see messages.

BLYTHE
(sighs) I don’t know how to be silent.

BENEDICT
You need a rest. Just “be” for a couple of days and then you can send out small shoots, tendrils. You can be like a Buddhist, and do nothing, just stand there.

BLYTHE
There is no work here for me?

BENEDICT
You can wash your own plate after meals. What kind of work do you do in
Ontario?

BLYTHE
I teach Drama.

BENEDICT
Wonderful! Listen…and teach the children to listen.

BLYTHE
Right…

BENEDICT
Drama is good. It is a calling. It’s all Drama here. Each day, we put on our cloaks. We pray and work and listen.

BLYTHE
What about (pause) relationship?

BENEDICT
Someone worries you?

BLYTHE
(choking on her words). A boy from high school.

BENEDICT
You don’t peel the leaves off a cabbage.

BLYTHE
Oh?

BENEDICT
When I go to weed the vine, I listen. If I am gardening, do I pull the leaves off a cabbage to make it grow? It’s the same with an orchid, eh? A cabbage is just a humble orchid.

BLYTHE
Ok. I understand. I am a cabbage.

BENEDICT
There are two dining rooms. One is for conversation and one is for total silence. It’s up to you.

(BLYTHE leaves BENEDICT’s office and walks to the dining room. She selects the one where conversation is allowed. There are others there on individual retreats and
guests and such. BLYTHE walks in and sits down alone. Two novices are eating and chatting. They come over.)

JÉSUITE 1
Que faites-vous ici?

BLYTHE
Je suis ici pour la même raison que toi.

JÉSUITE 1
Pour combien de temps?

BLYTHE
Pour une semaine. Pour le silence.

JÉSUITE 1
Mais, tu es une femme.

BLYTHE
Il y a d’autres femmes ici.

JÉSUITE 1
Mais ce sont des femmes âgées – comme nos mères and nos grand-mères et nos grand, grand-mères…

JÉSUITE 2
Quel âges as-tu?

BLYTHE
J’ai vingt (20) ans.

JÉSUITE 1
Es-tu catholique?

BLYTHE
Non, je ne suis pas catholique.

JÉSUITE 1
Alors, pourquoi es-tu à l’Abbaye?

BLYTHE
J’ai été élevé Baptiste, mais ils ne pratiquent pas le silence.

Y. WOMEN
(whispering) Where are the subtitles when we need them?
(Y. WOMEN play SUBTITLES, who stand adjacent to their designated characters. Their lines are spoken aloud repeating the meaning of the French in English. The tension builds with all three characters and their corresponding subtitles. SUBTITLE 1 is JÉSUITE 1’s translator. SUBTITLE 2 is JÉSUITE 2’s translator. SUBTITLE B is BLYTHE’s translator.)

JÉSUITE 2
Je suis venu ici pour échapper aux pressions du monde et de trouver la paix.

SUBTITLE 2
I came here to get away from the pressures of the world and to find peace.

BLYTHE
Içi, c'est un microcosme du monde.

SUBTITLE B
Here, this is a microcosm of the world.

JÉSUITE 1
Tu n’est-ce pas censé d’être ici.

SUBTITLE 1
You are not supposed to be here.

BLYTHE
Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas avec moi d'être ici?

SUBTITLE B
What’s wrong with me being here?

JÉSUITE 2
(expliquant) On nous a dit qu'il y aurait des moines ici et pas de femmes.

SUBTITLE 2
(explaining) We were told there would be monks here and no women.

BLYTHE
Je ne dors pas ici. Je passe la nuit sur une ferme voisine, pas loin. Hélène prend soin des femmes.

SUBTITLE B:
I am not sleeping here. I go at night up the road to a nearby farmhouse. Hélène takes care of the women.
JÉSUITE 1

( obtainir en colère ) Je ne te veux pas à mon monastère.

SUBTITLE 1

(getting angrier) I don’t want you at my monastery.

BLYTHE

Ton monastère? Je suis juste en train de manger mon petit souper. Est-ce que ça vous inquiète?

SUBTITLE B

Your monastery? I am just eating my humble supper. Does that offend you?

JÉSUITE 1

Si vous restez, Je dois partir.

SUBTITLE 1

If you stay I will have to go.

BLYTHE

Je crois que je vais laisser alors. Je vais aller à l'autre salle à manger, et manger avec les moines.

SUBTITLE B

I guess I will leave then. I will go to the other dining room, and eat with the monks.

JÉSUITE 1

Non, vous restez ici. Nous allons manger avec les moines.

SUBTITLE 1

No, you stay here. We will eat with the monks.

BLYTHE

Donc vous avez un problème avec les femmes?

SUBTITLE B

So you have a problem with women?

JÉSUITE 1

Bien sûr que non!!

SUBTITLE 1

Of course not!!

BLYTHE
Vous êtes tous les deux en études pour devenir prêtres?

SUBTITLE B
You are both studying to be priests?

JÉSUITE 2
Nous sommes novices Jésuites.

SUBTITLE 2
We are Jesuit novices.

JÉSUITE 1
Il s'agit d'un long voyage avant l'ordination.

SUBTITLE 1
It is a long journey before ordination.

BLYTHE
Comment allez-vous devenir prêtres si vous ne pouvez pas communiqué avec les femmes?

SUBTITLE B
How are you going to be priests if you can’t relate to women?

JÉSUITE 1
(en regardant par la fenêtre les routes de campagne) Tu voies ce chemin de terre là-bas? Maintenant, à cause de toi, j'ai besoin d'aller pour une longue, longue course, sur cette route demain. Des miles dans la poussière, jusqu’à ce que je suis prêt à vomir!

SUBTITLE 1: (looking out the window at the country roads) You see that dirt road out there? Now, because of you, I need to go for a long, long run up that road tomorrow. Miles and miles in the dust, until I am ready to vomit!

BLYTHE
Eh bien! Comme nous disons dans le théâtre, “casser une jambe!”

SUBTITLE B: As we say in the theatre, “Break a leg!”

JÉSUITE 2
Mais non. Nous disons “Merde!”

SUBTITLE 2
We say “Shit!”
JÉSUITE 2
Fermes ta bouche! Içi, c’est L’Abbaye”!

(JÉSUITE 2 gestures wildly for their Subtitles to disperse, as if there is an impasse in the translation. Both cross themselves. In frustration, JÉSUITE 1 and JÉSUITE 2 clear off their plates, and leave the dining room. BLYTHE looks out the window. Her SUBTITLE vanishes. BLYTHE runs into the meadows by the farmhouse (where she is staying) and sits there by a brook and writes in her journal.)

BLYTHE
I never ever want to leave here. I found wisdom in silence, or something like that, here at the Abbey. Je veux toujours avoir une vie intérieure…

(Voices of Y. WOMEN in choral echo, repeating the stanza below, and in some creative way they become a moving soundscape.)

We are the Yearning
That never ceases
When time and space
And voices
Do.

(HENRIETTE and MABEL put down their tea cups.)

HENRIETTE
And now, we can make silence for two minutes. It won’t hurt anyone.

MABEL
The silence is a place from a tire swing under the McIntosh apple tree in my grandmother Lisbeth’s backyard in Brighton, Ontario. I could sit in that swing for hours and I would hide treasures in that empty tire, only to find them later on, wet as drowned sailors. So I changed my hiding place to a dry spot in my grandmother’s attic. I’m not about to say where.

HENRIETTE
The silence can be a place from the childhood, or it could be another sacred place.

(Two minutes of Silence. Actors/characters on stage observe this also, including MABEL and HENRIETTE.)

INTERMISSION
ACT FIVE

(The Present. In the psychiatric hospital building. *BLYTHE* is going up the elevator to Two East, in order to visit Griffin. She arrives on the second floor and finds a patient lounge and sits on a vinyl couch and writes in her journal.)

*BLYTHE*
This is deemed recovery, the robotic stare. This place reeks of souls fearing they will never be free, even via the out-of-order staircase. How is thinking possible in a place so devoid of colour, sound, and taste? Although there may be many artists sandwiched between these walls. I wonder if this place may be the kindred spirit of prison camp, where those with imagination are the first wave of the unlucky to be admitted. The only decoration here is a collection of wall hand sanitizers. Tell me the meaning of these sanitizers we are instructed to use, all white, some with blue nozzles, many jammed from over-use, from people slamming into them, especially at the door where the smokers on passes go in and out. We furtively clean our hands with the iridescent foam as if somehow this will make everything alright. I want to race free across town through the darkness. Yet, I pause here in this hidden ward to visit an absent actor? I wind my hair into a ponytail bun (so I look like staff) and wonder if there are any tangible moral imperatives in any corner of this hell hole. Here, no spider dares weave a web.

(Y. WOMEN playing patients in slippers are in the Patient Lounge.)

*BLYTHE*  
*(calling out)* Excuse me, have you seen Griffin?

YW 1
Griffin?

YW 2
You heard her.

YW 3
I haven’t seen her today.

YW 4
She went for electroshock. She’s forgotten everything.

YW 1
Don’t freak the guest out. She’ll never come back.

YW 4
They tied her down and shocked her brains ‘till they squeezed out her ear drums,
like stale linguini.

(The Y. WOMEN are laughing pathetically, with little energy.)

YW 3
Watch it, we had pasta for lunch.

YW 2
Don’t listen to them. They’re full of shit.

YW 1
I think Griffin is doing well.

YW 2
Doing better than the rest of us.

YW 4
Yeah, last week Shyla over on Two West hung herself with her bed sheets. They found her with her pink teddy bear, stiff as a doll.

YW 1
(whispers) Don’t freak out our guest.

YW 1
Truth is we don’t see Griffin much.

YW 4
After treatment, she forgot her name.

BLYTHE
I don’t think anyone with a name like Griffin could forget it. She texted me. I am, sort of, her teacher.

YW 2
Yeah, it’s such a cool name. I wish I had a cool name like that. My name is Two East.

YW 1
Stupid. That’s the name of the ward. You aren’t the ward.

YW 3
What about Silver lost in the jar? I found that novel in a box of old stuff someone left behind. *The Bell Jar* under a dusty ole pile of Harlequins.

YW 1
They told us we could read the Harlequins but not to read *The Bell Jar*.

YW 4
So is Silver Plath patron saint of this dump?

YW 1
Sylvia. Not Silver.

YW 2
(*looks up to an imaginary balcony*) Wherefore art thou, Sylvia?

YW 4
Don’t listen to us. We’re crazy.

YW 3
(*in mock British accent*) Extinct species in a human zoo. Psycho-meds rule all, like kings and queens. Side effects are dukes and duchesses. My mouth tastes like chalk white bone dust in a nameless desert. There is an empty sign in that desert, with my no name brand on it. Can you read it for me? What does it say?

YW 1, 2, 3 & 4
(*chorally, slowly*) Blank, white, nothing….

(*Now, there is silence among them. Y. WOMEN move about the patient lounge in slow motion; they look into each other’s faces for answers.*)

YW 4
But who the hell? Who the hell cares about us?

YW 2
Why don’t you just shut up.

YW 3
Damn them. Damn the quacks. Damn you all. Griffin is one of us.

YW 1
One of us… Girls!

(*Y. WOMEN start chanting “Girls! Girls! Girls!” and then alternate lines of the poem, and sometimes they speak as a Chorus. DANCER leads them in choreography amid the words of the poem. BLYTHE and others can share lines on the right hand side of the poem.*)

**Girls!**

Girls among us as pine, balsam, fir
Girls on archaic foothills
Girls run global peace in dust over cenotaphs
Girls print foot circles in karmic soil
Girls beaten too hard, married too young
Girls skip on imploding asphalt in schoolyards
Girls stand to balance clay water pots they walk not to school anywhere down a bare path
Girls run in sandals through red-orange wildflowers: Devil’s Paintbrush
Girls in bare feet, green tea mud of rice paddies
Girls in slippers, institutions brush over disinfected linoleum
Girls in low and high heels click over marble courtyards
Girls in hiking boots, they claw the clay of earth
Girls in storms with gum boots, count fishing worms
Girls in work boots, broken barns, decay and straw
Girls across time/space across self/other across presence-absence
Girls we hear crackle of bone
listen to bound, broken feet
Girls through a door, ajar, shattered wood
from holy rood, past lives on cracked tile
whisper high, heart-sodden, a lowly shard of flame
it bends toward an unholy walk,
(At the end of the choreographed poem, Y. WOMEN have fallen down to the floor as if they have forgotten how to walk. BLYTHE sits quietly in the patient lounge and looks into the past.)

(The far Past. Shanxi Province, China. Turn of the Century. This is a flashback from BLYTHE’s Great Grandmother’s Era. JESSIE DUNCAN’S history and memory inhabits BLYTHE as she seeks to understand her own life. EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI28 sits on a throne in the Forbidden City, being fanned by servants played by Y. WOMEN.)

CIXI
Bring me the letter from the Anti-Footbinding Society29.

(The letter is brought by a COURTIER in a woven basket. She reads it to herself, then comments aloud to her Advisors.)

CIXI
Advisors, what do you make of this western talk?

ADVISOR 1
Your highness, although this Anti-Foot Binding Society is comprised of mostly foreign missionary wives, their viewpoint is not religious. They have some practical points. Chinese women cannot fulfil their moral duties as wives and mothers if they continue to walk in three-inch shoes. The unbinding of women’s feet would, then, in all decency, facilitate an increase in women’s mobility and productivity. You may want to think on this. In the name of progress, I propose that you consider making it illegal to bind the feet of girls.

CIXI
And what about all the small shoes of China made of threads from the finest silk worms? Are they not exquisite?

ADVISOR 1
Oh yes, your highness. Of course. Exquisite.

CIXI
Then why do you talk this drivel?

ADVISOR 1
Your highness, the foreigner wives plead not for your royal feet but for the feet of China.
No, it is for the children of China, and the boys. Their mothers will move freely, with healthy, strong feet.

ADVISOR 2
There is a Confucian saying: “The strength of a nation depends on the integrity of the home.”

ADVISOR 1
Your reverence, China now has railways, telegraph, and telephone because of your generous and progressive Imperial Reforms. We now have the Navy, the Press, a modern education system and more humane methods for the execution of prisoners.

ADVISOR 2
And I am grateful that I have not yet been given an imperial silk scarf.

EMRESS DOWAGER CIXI smiles and nods.

ADVISOR 1
Another Confucian saying: “Study the past if you would define the future.”

(EMRESS DOWAGER CIXI pulls off her shoes and displays her own normal-sized bare feet, discreetly from under her robe.)

CIXI
I am from the Manchu Dynasty, and we do not believe in foot-binding. I shudder on that cruel day for small girls when the dreaded Foot-Binder arrives on the doorstep, with a bag of stones to crush toes and break the arch of the girl’s foot, a smell to nauseate the household, the inevitable sickness and life long chronic pain. Because of the popularity of the abomination, I have kept my ordinary big feet hidden under my robe. Yes, it is timely for China to walk with unbound feet through the gilded archway of yet another imperial Reform.

ADVISOR 1
Your reverence…

CIXI
(sighing) Well then. Write this new law. I will sign it. The foreigners and their wives will be happy, no?

ADVISOR 2
Many foreigners are teaching our children.

CIXI
And what, pray tell, do they teach?
(Location: JESSIE DUNCAN’S School for Girls in Gospel Village, Shanxi Province. JESSIE looks out the window and she is writing in a journal.)

JESSIE
(writing and reading) I care for them as if they were my own daughters. I want literacy for these Chinese girls. Meanwhile, my own daughters are in boarding school back in Scotland where others care for them. I hear from them after the Empress of Japan is moored and letters are brought by mule. In my quiet moments, I observe keenly these ironies of the missionary life.

(Another British MISSIONARY arrives, with his protégé student. They get out of a small donkey cart and walk to the door of the School for Girls. JESSIE watches them from the window, then rushes down to the door to greet them.)

JESSIE
And what exactly are you doing here?

MISSIONARY
I am looking for a suitable young wife for my protégé.

JESSIE
Suitable?! We have no wives for sale here, only students here to learn.

MISSIONARY
The young students I bring will observe these young girls. They will choose wives.

JESSIE
I will not tolerate your cheap parade of voyeurs! This is a reputable School for Girls. My husband is away speaking with the government. I am also a university graduate, not merely a missionary’s wife. My own full salary is paid by the Baptist Missionary Society of Scotland.

MISSIONARY
With all due respect, Mrs. Duncan, these young women will require husbands. (The British MISSIONARY and his YOUNG MALE STUDENT brush past JESSIE into the school, scrutinizing the school girls, played by the Y. WOMEN). The school girls stand near the wall, embarrassed.)

JESSIE
(following them) Excuse me, sir! I forbid you “pluck” a girl from this educational institution like a peony in a public garden. These girls are very young. This is their school. They trust us. You think nothing of condemning them to a life of servitude, to care for aging and dictatorial in-laws. Is not this practise of taking child brides as barbaric a practice as is foot binding? Would you like your foot bound with rags? Could you walk?!!
(The YOUNG MALE STUDENT looks down at the feet of the girls to see if they have bound feet. The girls try to hide their feet. He sees one Girl he likes and points her out to the MISSIONARY, speaking in Mandarin.)

MISSIONARY
(to the young girl). Step forward, miss.

(THE YOUNG CHINESE GIRL selected, shyly steps forward. The MISSIONARY and the YOUNG MAN look her up and down.)

JESSIE
(to the MISSIONARY) I seem to recall that Jesus of Nazareth drove the moneychangers out of the Temple. And I will personally drive you out of this place!

MISSIONARY
My protégé desires to make her his wife.

JESSIE
(stands in front of the YOUNG CHINESE GIRL, protective) No. I am her teacher.

MISSIONARY
He offers security, and a future. I am sure you can’t offer that.

JESSIE
What I offer is education and her soul! Now, begone!

(JESSIE points her Chinese fan fiercely in their direction. The British MISSIONARY and the YOUNG MALE STUDENT back away and reluctantly leave the school without achieving their goal. The school girls huddle and watch all of this, loyal to their teacher.)

JESSIE
(calling after them) If I wasn’t a non-card playing Christian woman, I’d send you the Curse of Scotland! That you dare call yourself a missionary!

(JESSIE stands there watching them leave. All is quiet. Then a telegram is delivered by HAO SHEN, a Buddhist monk.)

JESSIE
(teary, reading a letter) Dr. Moir Duncan’s tuberculosis has taken hold. He has been transferred to a safe refuge in the Cave of a Buddhist Temple thirty miles away in the mountains near Taiyuan. Travel by mule back for three days to find him. Here is a map. Here at the Temple, he will restore his strength with discretion. The monks have shown compassion, though he is a Christian missionary. To them, everyone is
a Buddhist. I am assigning to you, Hao Shen, to guide your way.

HAO SHEN
I am your guide. I have provisions.

JESSIE
I am Moir’s wife. It is not prudent….

HAO SHEN
I am a celibate brother and my meditations, strong. I will make my face into an angry Buddha and scare off any wolves we meet along the way.

JESSIE
And you know exactly where my husband is?

HAO SHEN
Yes, hurry. In a delirium, he asks for you.

JESSIE
I will leave my oldest girl in charge of the school. They will study, pray and work.

HAO SHEN
(with a twinkle) Your girls resemble monks, Mrs. Duncan.

JESSIE
And young man, if you were a girl, you could learn much at my school.

(JESSIE explains her upcoming absence in Mandarin to the eldest student and gives her money in a small sack, then packs a hasty bag of clothes, and a container of rice, and water. Y. WOMEN AS SCHOOL GIRLS WALK A LITTLE WAY ALONG THE ROAD BESIDE JESSIE AND HAO SHEN TO WAVE GOODBYE. JESSIE AND HAO SHEN BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY, ON MULE BACK, ALONG A DUSTY ROAD.)

HAO SHEN
You still carry your Hymn Book, Mrs. Duncan? Why not pack it in your sack?

JESSIE
(laughing) Why, for choir practice, of course.

HAO SHEN
And who will sing in your choir along this dusty road? Magpies? Chinese pond herons? The Golden Pheasant?

JESSIE
Do your birds read music, Hao Shen?
HAO SHEN
Our chants are known by heart. Many monks do not read.

JESSIE
(while HAO SHEN stops to adjust his sandal). Hao Shen, as you said, we may be greeted by a wolf along the way. It’s a true story that, one night, I walked back alone from prayer meeting only to discover that a wolf was in my path, baring his teeth. I carried no weapon, of course, but a sudden thought was to thrust my wee Hymn Book into the wolf’s gaping mouth. Terrified, the wolf dropped the Hymn Book and ran off into the forest!

HAO SHEN
Mrs. Duncan, you have courage. Written words can indeed be powerful as weapons. And yet perhaps even more so, the silent language of morning dew, over wing of the ibis.

(Transitional Music. DANCER carries the apple across the stage again, places it on the altar of the Buddhist Temple, as an offering, and bows. DANCER hides behind the Temple. After their long journey, HAO SHEN guides JESSIE to the Cave of the Buddhist Temple, and she runs to the side of her husband, lying on raised bed in the Cave, where there are candles around him and Buddhist statues.)

JESSIE
I came to you as fast as I could.

MOIR
The monks have been good to me. From here I can hear their chanting.

JESSIE
I’ll sing Psalm 23, when I find my hymn book. It is in my sack somewhere.

MOIR
You didn’t lose it in the mouth of the Beast?

JESSIE
(laughs) I won’t leave you now.

MOIR
Why, dearie, because I am short of breath and surely dying?

JESSIE
You are living now.

MOIR
In God’s Breath.

JESSIE
(laughs) Hush, my husband, you talk like a Buddhist.

MOIR
It is easier to breathe here, the mountain air, fresh, and no soldiers.

JESSIE
You are safe here, thank the Lord. The monks protect you.

HAO SHEN
(brings water in a cup) Dr. Duncan, I bring a cup of water from the spring and No-Self.

MOIR
(lecturing) The cross of Christ, was his No-Self, the self-emptying.\(^{31}\)

HAO SHEN
(holds cup to MOIR’s lips) Yes, then your Christ was a true Buddhist monk.

MOIR
(short of breath, with tubercular coughing) The “peace that passeth all understanding” offers us some kind of collaborative spirit. My eternal gratitude to you, Hao Shen, for your kindness.

(HAO SHEN gives JESSIE the cup of water and leaves the bed. MOIR coughs and then becomes delirious, re-living his memories of China.)

MOIR
Opium or wheat?

JESSIE
In Gospel Village.\(^{32}\) The choice was a difficult one.

MOIR
So are we there now? I hear the scythe on the wheat.

JESSIE
We are in the Cave, Moir.

MOIR
No room for us in the Inn? (Sound of MOIR’s memory: screams, gunshots, massacre. MOIR holds his ears as if deafened) Lost heads under Boxer swords. (MOIR sings with wheezing breath. JESSIE joins in.)
Onward Christian Soldiers  
Marching as to War  
With the cross of Jesus  
Going on before

JESSIE
Don’t listen to the guns, my dear. Listen to the peaceful silence, here in the Cave.

MOIR
Dead missionaries in the streets. Did we make a mistake coming here? Are they not better off with Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism?

JESSIE
The will of God is oblique, at times.

MOIR
It is my calling, China.

JESSIE
In this life, we are all students.

MOIR
Rivers of blood from the Yan to the Ganges to the Jordan…

JESSIE
*(tries to cheer him up)* But there has been restitution. I will tell stories about the indemnity paid by the Empress Dowager for the loss of life, enough money to build the magnificent first university of western learning in Shanxi, in our beloved China! And you, Dr. Moir Duncan, first Principal. Remember, you taught History, Philosophy, Literature, Latin, the Classics, Languages.

MOIR
Our beloved China…

JESSIE
Yes, dearie.

MOIR
My love, you will speak about China and tell about us.

JESSIE
I will write a book³³ and speak to the whole of Scotland about your brave and brilliant soul! Tales of you will play on as bagpipes forever across the moor.
(“Amazing Grace” played on distant Bagpipes, as JESSIE lays her head on MOIR’s chest and falls asleep. When she awakens, she sees that he has stopped breathing. A sob catches in her throat. JESSIE looks up to see HAO SHEN standing in the doorway. He also sees that MOIR has died, so he bows respectfully towards JESSIE and turns around. He looks outside the cave through a window towards the mountains of Shanxi. A lone crested ibis flies through pine and cypress.)

HAO SHEN: (calling back) You see, Mrs. Duncan, through the cypress branches. The crested ibis!

(The Present. BLYTHE looks up towards the crested ibis as if it is her own memory. MABEL and HENRIETTE are drinking tea as they watch the whole story unfold. They look up as if to try to spot the ibis, and yet they speak as if seeing their foremothers in the sky.)

MABEL
Grandmothers and Great Grandmothers…

HENRIETTE
My grandmother Manon could have died seven times over but her babies were determined to “jeté passé en l’air” straight from purgatory. And Manon had twins so there were eight children, all added up, and only two died later on, not the twins though, one of scarlet fever, and the other died, too slow like “Jésus sur la croix” – from polio. Manon wanted to get her tubes tied with the baler twine from the barn, she said, although she was joking about the baler twine, but the Catholic doctor refuse. He refuse to take that operation and march with his stethoscope straight down into the fires of hell. Manon told him to go to hell, anyway. But as it turns out no contraception was necessary after that because her husband, my grandfather, Pierre, he was afraid of heart failure. So he pledged to “La petite Vierge” frozen to the window sill of the milk house, not to overtax himself under the flannel sheets. (HENRIETTE & MABEL laugh.)

MABEL
My grandmother Lisbeth was no missionary, but she lived a sober life in a small town in Ontario – Brighton – because her husband, my grandfather, Terence, was a drinker, and of course, they couldn’t afford to keep two drunks under one roof. Lisbeth didn’t drink a drop, not even tonic or cooking wine, and she made everything from scratch: bread, buns, pies, soups, stews, custard. She wanted to join the suffragettes but she had too much to do with so many greasy kids and a lousy lush of a husband, so she tied the suffragette sash right into her apron. It was sheer stubborn-ness on her part, and everyone who came to the kitchen door – neighbours, in-laws, peddlers – they all saw those words: “Votes for Women!” tied like a banner of truth and righteousness into her apron, dusted in flour and white, white as fresh powder snow.

HENRIETTE
Manon, she always loved Pierre.
MABEL
Well, Lisbeth was devoted to Terence. You make it work, you know, when you are a wife.

HENRIETTE & MABEL
My mother. My grandmother.

(The Present. In another part of the stage, BLYTHE is still in the patient lounge in Two East. She wraps her arms around herself, remembering. The conversations overlap, so that all three say the words “great grandmother” simultaneously.)

BLYTHE
Jessie was my great grandmother.

HENRIETTE & MABEL
I never met my great grandmother.

ACT SIX

(The Present. Hallway near Two East. Y. WOMEN playing patients in slippers have followed BLYTHE from the Patient Lounge.)

YW 1
So Two East is up that way.

YW 2
No, it’s not. It’s down that hall.

YW 4
All wards look the same, somewhere on the road to, in, or out of hell.

(“Home on the Range” is playing on a piano somewhere on the floor.)

YW 3
Griffin’s playing.

YW 4
One piano in one godforsaken hall.

YW 2
Needs tuning.
YW 3
Yeah, they don’t think we can perceive pitch.

YW 4
The real reason is the Piano Tuner is afraid when he opens up the piano, he’ll get a free shock treatment.

(YW 4 mimes opening a piano and being shocked. The women laugh, softly.)

YW 1
(whispers) ECT? It happened to Lila.

YW 3
Yeah, Lila was sent home last week. Happy as a clam. She’ll be back.

BLYTHE
Isn’t informed consent required? 34

(YW laugh, like it is the funniest joke they have ever heard.)

YW 1
Yeah right!

(Y. WOMEN mime acting out YW 2’s story following.)

YW 2
I was upset the other day. PMS. I guess someone overheard me crying at the front desk. Ten minutes later, five men surrounded my bed. They held me down and stuck this humongous needle in my hip. At that point they “informed” me:

ALL YW
“This sedative will relax you.”

YW 4
(getting angry in a sedated sort of way) Yeah, like the sound of one woman crying is some kind of goddam fucking threat, eh? Makes you wonder how they raise their own kids.

(BLYTHE starts to walk down the hall, slowly, but they follow her.)

YW 1
Don’t scare away Griffin’s only visitor!

YW 2
But Shock is barely legal.
YW 4
With or without anaesthetic?

YW 4
Oh, yeah. What about Russia? What about…Vancouver?

YW 2
Is that where we are?

YW 3
Don’t be stupid.

YW 1
Interrogation with light therapy?

YW 2
Watch your back.

YW 3
Watch your front.

YW 1
Watch your watch.

YW 4
*(hands cupped over her mouth to make a megaphone)*…for men in white.

BLYTHE
I’ll be aware.

*(Y. WOMEN dissipate, and YW 4 follows BLYTHE farther down the hall until they are alone. YW 4 looks around to make sure no one else is listening.)*

YW 4
Listen, last year, I was in Boundary Central Psych.. I was there for two months. They were “monitoring my meds”. I just wanted the hell out. It was prison. I told them they had to let me out because I was in college. I studied Philosophy and Psychology. For example: “If there is a God and God is omniscient and omnibenevolent, so like, *why* is there evil?” Truth is, I could hardly see the page of those text books, on account of the borderline overdose of meds they call “therapeutic.” And there was a new guy on the ward, a young guy, Bram. He was kind of different, maybe Trans? And then one day, I heard some voices and I stood at Bram’s door. Two big male nurses had him down on the floor over below the window. I could see his toy stuffed owl on the window sill. Bram had the bed farthest from the door. His roommate was out on a pass. They were pounding Bram on the floor beside his bed and
he couldn’t get up. No one saw me until one of the nurses suddenly looked over. He quickly pulled the white curtain across. So is this a bedpan change? I suppose they wanted to beat him up in privacy. I ran to the nurses’ station and told them what was happening. They raised their eyebrows. That’s all. Later that day they granted my discharge. To stop me from talking?! And what is my word worth anyway in this freaking… dystopia?

BLYTHE
Talking is good.

YW 4
If they question you, please, don’t mention my name.

BLYTHE
I won’t. I appreciate your help finding Two East.

(Y. WOMEN playing Patients slip away. BLYTHE walks down the hall towards the sound of the piano and the NURSE’s Station at Two East.)

(The Past. Hamilton, Fall, 1979. Protestant seminary. BLYTHE’s class at a seminary in Southern Ontario. She is the only woman in the class. DR. PRATT, with spectacles and a stork-like walk, finds BLYTHE challenging to his conservative paradigm, but tries his best to work with her.)

DR. PRATT
We are assigning practicums. Twenty hours a week plus your course work. I will pass around a list and you can sign your name up beside your first choice. All of these sites have applied for a student minister. The senior minister there will be your supervisor.

(The sign up sheet is passed around to everyone, and the male students sign up. BLYTHE gets the sheet last. She stares at it, then speaks to the class.)

BLYTHE
(mock Southern church lady voice) Well, what job’s left for me? Tea and coffee lady? Whoops! I forgot my floral apron! Well, good heavens, I’ve got my string of pearls on! That oughta get me closer to them pearly gates….

(Everyone laughs, and a few call out “Amen!” and “Amen, sistah!” DR. PRATT, who is clearly dumfounded.)

DR. PRATT
(clears his throat) There should be twelve work placements on the list.

BLYTHE
And thirteen students. I’m number thirteen.
DR. PRATT
Hmmm….Let me see that list.

(Students pass the paper back to DR. PRATT.)

DR. PRATT
My apologies. Wait, I have another sheet here with an extra placement. Here it is. “First Hope Place.”

BLYTHE
It’s not a church?

DR. PRATT
Not exactly. Would anyone here like to take the inner city mission? (Moment of Silence.) Anyone? No one?

BLYTHE
I’ll take First Hope Place. Obviously, no one else wants it.

DR. PRATT
It’s an old run down place.

BLYTHE
I know.

(DR. PRATT sighs, and hands BLYTHE the paper with the contact information on it.)

DR. PRATT
(to everyone) This is a reminder that the 2,000 word paper on Karl Barth is due next Wednesday.

(Icy Ontario Winter, 1980. BLYTHE, 21 years old, Hamilton’s North End, on the street with an address scribbled on a piece of paper. She walks towards a low-rise tenement, dirty, litter everywhere. She opens the front door and gasps. There is a smell unlike anything she has ever smelled before. She climbs rickety stairs to the second floor, hyper-vigilant, nervous. Holes are bashed into the walls and it is freezing cold in the building. VELMA’s apartment door (#5) is ajar. BLYTHE calls in to her.)

BLYTHE
Door number 5. Velma? Are you there?

VELMA
Yes, come in.

(BLYTHE pushes open the door. VELMA, of European descent, wears several layers of
dirty clothing and a scarf around her head, sits on her single bed watches a small black and white TV.

BLYTHE
I wanted to visit you as you are one of the very few women at First Hope Place. The men already seem to have their buddies. You always sit alone.

VELMA
Those bums from the street don’t like me.

BLYTHE
No women friends?

VELMA
I live alone.

BLYTHE
Yes, I see.

VELMA
I keep the TV on. For a voice.

BLYTHE
Oh, I see.

VELMA
Thank you for coming. Do you want something to eat? (VELMA opens a small refrigerator, and there is one chocolate cream donut in there on a dirty plate. She points to the donut.)

BLYTHE
No, thanks, Velma. It’s your donut.

VELMA
Got it from that other Mission, not yours. (smiling) They have better donuts.

BLYTHE
This your apartment?

VELMA
One room.

BLYTHE
Do you have a lock for your door?
VELMA
Broken.

BLYTHE
I see a hole under the doorknob, so… anyone can get in.

VELMA
I hope not.

BLYTHE
Holes in the walls. I can see pipes and not much insulation.

VELMA
Yes, rats live in the holes. I keep my food inside the fridge.

BLYTHE
How big are the rats?

VELMA
_gesturing_ This big!

BLYTHE
That must be hard, to live with rats.

VELMA
You get used to it.

BLYTHE
No one can get rid of them for you?

VELMA
No.

BLYTHE
Your bed?

_(BLYTHE points to a black and white striped mattress on a steel frame cot, with large holes in the mattress also. It looks like a bed from a run-down jail cell.)_

VELMA
Yes, I have two blankets.

BLYTHE
Torn.
VELMA  
I sleep in my coat.  

(BLYTHE looks to the window directly above VELMA’s bed, jammed open about six inches with old and dirty thick icicles. Icicles grow right down the walls of the room.)  

BLYTHE  
You can’t close your window?  

VELMA  
Too much ice.  

BLYTHE  
It’s 4 below zero Fahrenheit today! (BLYTHE tries to break the icicles in the jammed open window but they are too thick. She pushes manually, then tries to knock them through to the outside with a broken leg from a chair; however, the ice is immovable.)  

BLYTHE  
We need to get rid of that ice.  

VELMA  
It doesn’t matter.  

BLYTHE  
But it’s winter! You need heat in a Canadian winter. The wind and snow will come right through the open window.  

VELMA  
There’s no heat anyway.  

BLYTHE  
(BLYTHE stops trying to break the ice.) Rats. No heat. Holes in the walls, icicles built up over months, jamming your window. Who’s the landlord?  

VELMA  
Reggie come by once every two weeks.  

BLYTHE  
(looking around in case REGGIE is close by). Do you pay him rent?  

VELMA  
Reggie took my money but he says it’s not enough.  

BLYTHE  
Don’t you have a social worker?
VELMA
No worker.

BLYTHE
So Reggie lets you live here anyway?

VELMA
He makes me pay.

BLYTHE
Your Welfare cheque isn’t enough?

VELMA
He uses my body.

BLYTHE
What?!

VELMA
To help pay the rent.

BLYTHE
That’s horrible.

VELMA
Yes. He come by. He use me.

BLYTHE
It’s too cold here to “use”…anybody. I can’t believe this.

VELMA
Nice of you to come by.

BLYTHE
What can I do?

VELMA
Nothing.

BLYTHE
Don’t you have a family?

VELMA
My son, he’s 42, and he’s in Guelph Correctional.
BLYTHE
Can you visit him?

VELMA
Need money for the bus. The rest, they’re in Poland.

BLYTHE
Remember…hot soup at First Hope Place. Hot tea.

VELMA
Nobody visits me.

BLYTHE
Thank you for showing me where you live.

VELMA
I won’t forget you.

BLYTHE
I’ll never forget you Velma.

(BLYTHE holds her breath, hugs VELMA, who is large. BLYTHE turns to leave and walks slowly down the icy stairs and away from the apartment building. Lights on MABEL and HENRIETTE drinking tea at their table.)

HENRIETTE
Velma never came back to the Mission?

MABEL
Blythe heard from the “down and out” grapevine that Velma was picked up by the police one day in January when she was eating a jelly donut and she fell on the icy sidewalk and broke her ankle. Her face was dusted with icing sugar, but they thought it was snow. She was taken to Emerg. After they treated her ankle, they found her whole swollen body was ridden with some kind of obscure cancer I don’t know the name of. So they kept her there in St. Joe’s until she died. She had no family to speak of. They wouldn’t let her son out of Guelph Correctional to come to the funeral of his own mother, and I don’t know if there was one. They have a kind of funeral mass for the nameless street folk every once in a while and the non-denominational chaplains take turns saying a few words. Blythe never heard about all this until it was too late. She would have dropped in to St. Joe’s and brought some pink carnations and baby’s breath in a basket. It’s hard to get the timing right, you know. Living and dying don’t always fit into the calendar.

HENRIETTE
At least Velma had a warm bed to die in. My Aunt Bernelle in Magog, she died of frostbite when she slipped on the frozen imprint of a milk can. She broke her hip beside the barn door. The hired hand, André-Joseph, found her the next morning on his way to milk the cows.

(*HENRIETTE crosses herself, and MABEL tries to imitate her but she gets mixed up with right and left.*)

MABEL
I don’t know my right from my left. We Protestants don’t cross ourselves but I don’t know why not. It’s such a quick way to usher folks on.

(*Two weeks later, BLYTHE is back in her Ministry class where they are giving practice sermons. One of BLYTHE’s colleagues, ALVIN, with thick glasses and a suit jacket, is finishing up his sermon. He stutters a bit, but tries hard.*)

ALVIN
And thus when…Lazarus…was raised from the dead, we learn that Jesus of Nazareth, the healer, can raise even the dead from their tombs. Exegetically speaking, the story of Lazarus foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus found later in the Book of Mark, and subsequently, this reminds us of the new life that we have through…faith. (*ALVIN does a thumbs up and everyone laughs. Hearty applause from the class.*)

DR. PRATT
Thank you, Alvin. Lazarus is a difficult subject. Blythe. You’re next.

BLYTHE
OK. (*BLYTHE assembles her folders, papers, books, Bible, on the podium at the front of the classroom. BLYTHE speaks in a way that shows she is an experienced theatre person. This annoys DR. PRATT, although he tries to be polite.*)

BLYTHE
They say you should begin a sermon with a joke. I’m not sure how funny this is, however. (*clears her throat*) Knock, Knock.

STUDENT(S)
Who’s there?

BLYTHE
“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” (*Revised Standard Version, Matt 25: 35-36*)

I’ve worked at First Hope Place for the last four months. I made my first pastoral visit to
Velma. Her bed was framed with a canopy of icicles from a jammed open window. Rats, no heat, no friends, and a landlord who prostituted her to pay the rent. I walk the streets of Hamilton, and I find that the only folks who say hello to me are the bums from First Hope Place, who consider me to be their friends, while strangers pass by. Our cities are places of disparity and we are the elite. We parade our vows to the status quo. Mother Teresa’s “call within a call” lead her to love even the untouchables of Calcutta. But Calcutta is global. I found out that “the poorest of the poor” are close at hand. There is a Fourth World, even in the First World, and yet it remains invisible to most of us. Poverty – both outer and inner poverty – is everywhere. The God we thought existed to redeem us for living our whole lives of privilege may not be. The darkly comic popularity of Nietzsche’s phrase “God is dead” points to the undeniable fact that something is wrong with the picture. Tillich’s notion of the “God beyond the God of theism” looks beyond doubt. He writes: “The vitality that can stand the abyss of meaninglessness is aware of a hidden meaning within the destruction of meaning.”35 And so I ask why is God apparently absent in the icy slums of Hamilton? The Jesus of Matthew 25 is the Jesus who asks us to see him or her (like a living metaphor beyond our own despair), in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick and imprisoned, who could be from any walk of life, or any sidewalk. We need not look farther than our own hearts.

(There are stray claps from a few classmates.)

DR. PRATT
(nervously wipes his glasses, mutters under his breath) Self-righteous bitch.

(Dead silence. BLYTHE gathers up her papers and leaves the podium. She sits down at her place at the table, puts her head in her hands.) Lights on HENRIETTE and MABEL as they stand up with their teacups.

HENRIETTE
That one is an A-Hole.

MABEL
Blythe had a rough time at seminary.

HENRIETTE
You try to be yourself and look what happens. I’ve seen it before. I tried to be myself and what happened? I got knocked up. Easy as cake. I went with a lot of boys. Why? Because I was good at talking to boys, that’s why. Their bosses were “les riches bâtards Anglais.” One or two had an ex-wife who made them mad. They were all broke. I was their confessor! “Chalice de bitch!” I had miscarriages when I was young and we never even spoke that dirty word. (whispers) You could say “Tabernacle” before you could say “Abortion.” I never saw any pro-choicers in those days. I went to the church. I lit three candles, one for each soul that might have been born.

MABEL
They didn’t call it “harassment” in the early eighties. Nobody said “bulimia” until Princess Diana told the world.

HENRIETTE
Three candles for three souls to carry on my mischief, or the light in my eyes.

MABEL
If she questioned authority, she would have failed her courses.

*(Transitional Music. DANCER places the Apple on the floor Centre Stage. In this symbolic ritual, BLYTHE is in the middle of a circle beside the Apple, surrounded by vestment-clad figures. Each comment is like a stone hurled; figures can hurl mime “stones.” BLYTHE tries to defend herself, but there is no chance.)*

VOICE #1
You’ve got trust issues.

VOICE #2
Give me your hand.

VOICE #3
You need to be…

VOICE #4
Cooperative.

VOICE #5
Dependable.

VOICE #6
Feminine.

VOICE #7
Buy a yogurt machine.

VOICE #8
Take a yoga class.

VOICE #9
Skip the Hatha part.

VOICE #10
Take up gardening. Get earthy!

VOICE #11
You’ll never make it in this vocation.

VOICE #12
Become a teacher?!

VOICE #13
Marry a pastor.

VOICE #14
You’d make a great pastor’s wife.

VOICE #15
Bet you’re a tigress in the sack.

VOICE #16
Wild one!

VOICE #17
Just teach Sunday School!

VOICE #18
My supervisory role is to teach you about intimacy.

VOICE #19
Hug me longer.

VOICE #20
Damn you!

VOICE #21
Sexy!

VOICE #22
You’re better in the pulpit than I am.

VOICE #23
I could lose my job.

VOICE #24
What if you get yourself pregnant?

VOICE #25
You know what they say: “If you can’t do - teach!”

VOICE #26
I pinch your backside behind the pulpit and no one will believe it ever happened. *(He looks around to make sure no one is watching, then slowly moves forward and pinches her rear end.)* It’s your word against mine, honey.

VOICE #27  
Self righteous B$#&!

VOICE #28  
Arrogant B$#%!

VOICE #29  
Petulant B$#&%!

VOICE #30  
Your final course mark is written in ink on this one inch square piece of paper. *(he hands a tiny paper to her to her)* Fifty-five per cent!

VOICE #31  
Emasculating B$#%!

VOICE #32  
Pious B – See I didn’t even say the bad word, but you get the gist.

VOICE #33  
Sanctimonious ball-crusher!

VOICE #34  
Now that I’ve pinched you, we know you are alive!

VOICE #35  
Now read the scripture.

VOICE #36  
Tryin’ not to look at your boobs!

VOICE #37  
Hey Blythe. In the lunch room I overheard those guys visiting from Ontario Bible College. They said your “call” to the ministry was from Satan. So how does that make you feel?

VOICE #38  
How many scholarships did you win? Eight? And what good are they now?

VOICE #39  
*(like a game show host)* And the winner is…
VOICE #40
Holier-than-thou!

VOICE #41
Who do you think you are, the first female pope?

VOICE #42
Exodus 22:18. “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!” I suppose we could burn you at the stake, just for a party trick…

VOICE #43
Put your hands together for the winner of the most naive woman in seminary award.

VOICE #44
Guilty!

(VOICES start clapping, some confused)

VOICE #43
And the winner is…

ALL VOICES
(fans cheering) Guilty! Guilty! Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!

VOICE #46
(chants like a cantor) Let us give thanks to God that we are not like our pagan brethren.

ALL VOICES
(BLYTHE slowly sinks lower and lower towards the floor as VOICES become choir-like, as a Gregorian chant) Thanks be to God we don’t stone women, as our brethren (each throws a mime stone)...do.

VOICE #48
(chants) Let us give thanks and (throws a mime stone)...praise.

ALL VOICES
(chant) It is right and meet to do (throws a mime stone)...so.

ALL VOICES
(they sing and mime throwing stones at her) A-men!

(BLYTHE is now curled up on the floor. Transitional Music and VOICES disperse, in all directions. She is left alone in silence. BLYTHE slowly looks up to find she has survived the barrage, and that FINNBAR stands above her.)
BLYTHE
Finnbar! What are you –?

FINNBAR
You called me, right?

BLYTHE
Sort of. It was the wrong number.

FINNBAR
My number is always the right number. I told you I’d be back. You look good.

BLYTHE
No I don’t. I look like hell.

FINNBAR
I had a lot of cups of tea with your mother while we were broken up.

BLYTHE
I’m so bad at this. I think I’m too sarcastic.

FINNBAR
Your mother read Wordsworth, and the tea cups were really lovely, antique, with gold trim.

BLYTHE
(skeptical) Oh? That’s nice….

FINNBAR
I quit street drugs, tequila and beer. It’s true.

BLYTHE
You got your hair cut.

FINNBAR
No nicotine either.

BLYTHE
(sighs) I can’t be accepted as a minister.

FINNBAR
(laughs) You scare the hell out of them. (FINNBAR reaches his hand towards her to help her up. She takes his hand and lets him help her up. She is shaking and she collapses into his arms.)
FINNBAR
I’ll move in.

BLYTHE
Clergy don’t “shack up.”

FINNBAR
We’ll get married then.

BLYTHE
I don’t know.

FINNBAR
(as he is leaving the space and waving). Next spring!

(Fall, 1980. Student Lounge at the seminary. BLYTHE walks in with a stack of heavy books and drops them on a table (or desk). GENE on a vinyl couch, laughs and talks to other students. His closed guitar case is on the floor. She watches him for a bit and can’t keep her eyes off him. He looks up and their eyes meet. Their connection is sparked, mutual.)

BLYTHE
(making her way through the students over to him) Gene, right? You play guitar?

GENE
Yes!

BLYTHE
I’m Blythe and I’m in second year. Can you play guitar for this play I’m writing?

GENE
I’d love to.

BLYTHE
It’s about peace.

GENE
OK. (GENE opens his guitar case and starts playing and singing the Beatles, “Here Comes the Sun.”)

BLYTHE
Cool. (pause) Can you write something original?

GENE
Of course.

BLYTHE
We have a Drama group here. Grad students. Undergrads. A few professors. When I came to seminary I thought I’d have to sacrifice writing and acting. Not so.

GENE
When’s the rehearsal?

BLYTHE
Tuesday at 3 pm.

GENE
I’ll be there!

(University Chapel Service. GENE is playing guitar and singing. BLYTHE is walking around the chapel with a pen and clipboard. Music fades. Lights on MABEL and HENRIETTE drinking tea.)

HENRIETTE
So the darkness returns. Finnbar is back.

MABEL
I can’t believe it. Why?

HENRIETTE
Maudit Bloke! He got sick to death of his own bullshit.

MABEL
Blythe was like a dog at the animal shelter. She was ready to fall into anybody’s arms.

HENRIETTE
And Holy Mother of God, what’s with him having tea with Blythe’s mother? When I had three boyfriends in a row: un, deux, trois, like Trois Rivières, my Aunt Bernelle took a fancy to all of them. She would burst in the door when I was making out on the couch “avec la plateau d’argent ternis de cafè noir et des croissants rassis.”

MABEL
A tarnished silver tray. Black coffee and stale croissants!

HENRIETTE
Mais oui! Stale croissants that were two, three days old from the bakery downstairs. Her cleavage was hanging out all over and she would say: “It’s time to make confession!” She had no boundaries, my Aunt Bernelle. May she rest in peace.
MABEL
And was that bit with Finnbar supposed to be a marriage proposal? Pathetic! I’ve seen better proposals on *ER*, or *The Edge of Night*. I used to watch that show every afternoon.

HENRIETTE
Ostie! My boyfriend broke his teeth on those infernal croissants.

MABEL
And who’s that new guy, Gene?

HENRIETTE
What kind of a name is Gene?

MABEL
It’s spelled “Gene.” Not the name, “Jean.”

HENRIETTE
So, is this a “chick flick” or *Mon Oncle Antoine*?

MABEL
*Arsenic and Old Lace!*

HENRIETTE
I should have been an actress.

MABEL
I should have been a lot of things.

HENRIETTE
*(winds the tablecloth around her like a strapless gown.* Je suis Geneviève Bujold!

*(Uproarious laughter from MABEL and HENRIETTE over their cups of tea.)*

*(December 9, 1980. The seminary Reading Room. GENE runs into the Reading Room out of breath wearing a black arm band. GENE stands in the middle of the Reading Room surrounded by study carrels, tables, Bible commentaries, books, papers. BLYTHE looks up from her study carrel. GENE sits down on the edge of his seat in his carrel adjacent to BLYTHE’s, out of breath and panting.)*

GENE
*(trying to be quiet but clearly disturbed)* Last night! He was walking back from a show with Yoko Ono and some crazy *(whispers)* bastard took out a .38 calibre revolver and shot him five times in the back. I wore this black arm band and ran through three parking...
lots to get here. The Security Guard…

BLYTHE
What happened…?

(Flashback to campus parking lot. The SECURITY GUARD grabs GENE’s arm to stop him from running.)

GUARD
Wait a minute buddy! What do you think you are doing?

GENE
John Lennon’s been shot. He’s dead.

GUARD
Yeah? In New York. Not here, so slow down!

GENE
It’s tragic.

GUARD
What’s that armband doing on your arm?

GENE
“Imagine there’s no Heaven.”

GUARD
You look like a terrorist.

GENE
I’m a seminary student.

GUARD
Oh yeah? They let you wear stuff like that in seminary?

GENE
I’m not taking it off. I don’t care what they say.

GUARD:
Who?

GENE
The Fundies.

GUARD
What?

GENE
Fundamentalists.

GUARD
Slow down, stop running!

GENE
I’ve always been running. *(GENE slows down until the GUARD is out of view. Then he continues to run to the college and into the Reading Room. GENE and BLYTHE are intensely half whispering.)*

BLYTHE
I guess that security guard didn’t know how important John Lennon was. When JFK was shot, we got the rest of the day off kindergarten.

GENE
So let’s take the rest of the day off.

BLYTHE
You mean skip?

GENE
Why not? Dr. Pratt hates you. Nobody likes me.

BLYTHE
We can recite our Greek verbs in Coots Paradise.

GENE
τα πόδια στον παράδεισο.

BLYTHE
Aha! Good one! “Walk in paradise.”

*(BLYTHE and GENE grab their jackets on the back of their chairs and BLYTHE grabs her old “rabbit” purse. They half run out the doors to the outside, and then continue towards Coots Paradise, which is a woodsy trail on the edge of McMaster University campus. GENE holds on to his black arm band as if it was an injury. BLYTHE touches his black arm band.)*

BLYTHE
Ιήδούς εκλαψε.

GENE
“Jesus wept.”

(When they get to Coots Paradise, they run into the woods by the swamp and breathe easier. It is Tuesday, Dec. 9, 1980.)

GENE
I just had to get out of there.

BLYTHE
Stifling.

GENE
Couldn’t…

BLYTHE
Breathe.

BLYTHE
We don’t seem…

GENE
…to fit in.

BLYTHE
…to the church

GENE
…not really in …

BLYTHE
seminary.

GENE
We don’t belong in time.

BLYTHE
We’re out of time.

GENE
Out of real time.

BLYTHE
In real time, I’m supposed to be marrying Finnbar.

GENE
When?

BLYTHE
Next spring.

GENE
I’m engaged to Peggy. It’s to be a summer wedding.

BLYTHE
*(in the voice of a southern church lady)* Why, that sounds perfectly delightful!

GENE:
I’m just walking through my life like some automaton, but the true me isn’t really there.

BLYTHE
You’re just sensitive because of John Lennon.

GENE
Hamilton is New York City.

BLYTHE
Finnbar is quite a Beatles fan. He’ll be really upset.

*(GENE gives her a weird look at that comment, like maybe jealousy or disbelief or incredulity.)*

GENE
I can feel the bullet.

*(GENE lies on the ground as if avoiding gunfire. We hear a distant shot, like it is in GENE’s mind; then he looks up to see that the “shot” missed him.)*

GENE
*(sitting up)* If I am my true self I will be shot.

BLYTHE
You mean writing activist songs?

GENE
All I’ve ever wanted to do is play guitar.

BLYTHE
Then play guitar…
GENE
I’ve got to get out.

BLYTHE
Out of what?

GENE
Anything.

BLYTHE
If you don’t want to get married then break off your engagement.

GENE
I just can’t hurt Peggy. She’s quite shy.

BLYTHE
I don’t care if I hurt Finnbar.

GENE
Yes, you do. You don’t want to hurt anyone.

BLYTHE
That’s not true.

GENE
I don’t want to be an ordained minister if I have to give up music.

BLYTHE
Don’t give up your music. (They get to a pond and throw in stones.)

GENE
Keep singing, John. Peace! (GENE throws a stone, like a ritual. BLYTHE throws another peace stone in the same direction.)

BLYTHE
What do you want?

GENE
To be a songwriter.

BLYTHE
(picks a dried daisy, encrusted with snow in December, and traces his face with it, and he shivers.) You are a songwriter!

GENE
Right. I am.

**BLYTHE**
You are. You’re only 22. You can still do anything you want.

**GENE**
Identity.

**BLYTHE**
How much money do you have?

**GENE**
(*looks in wallet*) Fifty-six cents.

**BLYTHE**
(*looks in pocket*) I have thirteen cents.

**GENE**
Let’s run away. Start over.

**BLYTHE:**
Elope?

**GENE**
Sure. Let’s change the world.

**BLYTHE**
I need to know who I am first.

**GENE**
Who am I?

**BLYTHE**
Coots Paradise is ours.

**GENE**
Let’s stay here all day.

**GENE**
Alpha.

**BLYTHE**
Omega.
You’re a mystic.

BLYTHE
Between us we have sixty-nine cents.

(BLYTHE and GENE stand there by the tree looking at each other. To show the passage of time, there is a homestyle video or slides on a screen, or slide-like mime sequence of the following scenes. Music: “Tell Me Why,” written by Glenn Chatten.

- BLYTHE and GENE in rehearsals together for plays.
- GENE playing guitar, and BLYTHE laughing, with the Theatre troupe in the back of a van.
- BLYTHE and GENE in ripped jeans, smoking cigars in the seminary hallway outside DR. PRATT’s classroom. DR. PRATT smells smoke, comes out into the hall, but misses them, however, as they have already run out the door with their cigars. They run out the door and bump headlong into the same security GUARD as the one who stopped GENE when John Lennon was shot. They tip their cigars to him playfully, then run past him, leaving him perplexed and angry. Children’s musical, with the original song: “Tell Me Why” presented at Sick Children’s Hospital in Toronto. The song, which has been playing throughout the film clip ends as BLYTHE as Director, from the audience, smiles with her clipboard.

May, 1981. Coots Paradise. BLYTHE and GENE walk very slowly together, stalling for time.)

BLYTHE
My wedding is this weekend.

GENE
I won’t be there… I’ll always be there.

BLYTHE
I want to get out of it but I can’t.

GENE
Can’t I play guitar at your wedding?

BLYTHE
You can be the Best Man.

GENE
Yeah, right!

BLYTHE
I asked for folk music. My parents are paying so they hired the church organist.
(BLYTHE is teary). I despise my wedding dress.

GENE
Why not wear jeans?

BLYTHER
(taking both of his hands) I’m going to miss you.

(DANCER comes through the trees in Coots Paradise, and tries to stick the apple back into the tree. She finds a branch where the apple will balance. DANCER is a mythical character invisible to BLYTHE and GENE. They slowly let go of each other’s hands and reluctantly exit in opposite directions.)

(Lights on BLYTHE is in her bedroom on the night before her wedding to FINNBAR. The wedding dress is hung over the closet door, in transparent plastic wrap. She is at her window.)

BLYTHE
(writes in her journal) Wish someone would take me away. My monologue for The Miser audition – Juliet’s soliloquy – never had more relevance than this night before my wedding. Even if I was happy, which I’m not, I would still recite it, for posterity. My wedding is my death knell.

(BLYTHE puts her journal down, wraps a blanket around her as a shawl, and recites part of JULIET’S soliloquy, using her closed bottle of pink nail polish as a prop for the “vial.”)

…Alack, alack, is it not like that I,
So early waking, – what with loathsome smells,
And shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad; –
   O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
   Environed with all these hideous fears?
And madly play with my forefathers' joints?
And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
As with a club, dash out my desperate brains? –
   O, look! methinks I see my cousin's ghost
Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body
Upon a rapier's point: – stay, Tybalt, stay! –
   Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.36

(Like a satire on JULIET, BLYTHE mimes drinking the nail polish “vial.” She looks at herself in the mirror.) Drat! I’m still alive!
FINNBAR
What are you reading?

BLYTHE
Chekhov’s *The Seagull*.

FINNBAR
I’m sure that’s not required reading.

BLYTHE
It’s my own requirement.

FINNBAR
Do your actual homework, or you will flunk.

BLYTHE
I don’t know what my actual homework means anymore.

FINNBAR
There’s something wrong with your mind. I’ve always known that.

BLYTHE
*(clears her throat and reads aloud from The Seagull.)* “She loves the lake the way a seagull does.”

FINNBAR
Even in high school, I knew that. You got high marks, but why? It was a scam! And now it gratifies me to be a witness to you, finally, flunking.

BLYTHE
*(continues reading)* “…and she’s happy and free as a seagull. But a man happens to come by, sees her, and for want of anything better to do, he destroys her, just like this seagull here.”

FINNBAR
Aren’t you supposed to fly around now?

BLYTHE
(BLYTHE watches FINNBAR polish the sword. She walks closer to FINNBAR, and suddenly recognizes the sword.) May I ask where you got that?

FINNBAR
Your grandfather gave it to me.

BLYTHE
Why would he give it to you?

FINNBAR
He likes me. I let him win at Scrabble.

BLYTHE
I can’t believe this.

FINNBAR
Would I lie?

BLYTHE
If this is the truth, it was some kind of existential crisis.

FINNBAR
No, free will.

BLYTHE
That sword’s an artefact from the Boxer Rebellion! It belongs at the cottage above the back door, and the matching sword hangs above the front door. (BLYTHE looks up to see her Grandfather’s GHOST, who pulls up the sword from FINNBAR’s hands as if from a sheath. FINNBAR continues to polish an invisible sword and doesn’t notice the ghost. GHOST tells BLYTHE about the sword.)

GHOST
I put that pair of swords up over the doors after we returned from China. (He places the sword up on the wall.) Just in case the Boxers come back (he smiles)…. To them, we were “foreign devils” or “white devils.” My father-in-law and mother-in-law both teachers – narrowly escaped the Taiyuan massacre in July, 1900. Then, the next generation: I taught at Wesley College in Wuchang, (not too far from Kuling where my uncle ran a resort for the British). I taught Physics, Chemistry, English, and Gymnastics. The Chinese boys, my students, loved to hold those swords! They were given to me by my friend at the British consulate. September, 1926. School was just about to open again and there was a siege on Wuchang. We sought refuge in Hankow where your grandmother was teaching Household Sciences. I walked 150 scorching hot miles on foot from Hankow back to Wuchang only to discover that our home had been looted and burned. We had to leave China in 1927, with only a few precious mementos.
By the grace of God, we are still alive.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{(GHOST puts the sword back into FINNBAR’s hands reluctantly, and vanishes.)}

BLYTHE
My grandfather would \textbf{never} break up that pair of swords.

FINNBAR
Well he did.

BLYTHE
It was a mistake. We should give it back.

FINNBAR
I’m an antique collector.

BLYTHE
You don’t need more weapons.

FINNBAR
Couldn’t buy this at “Army Surplus.”

BLYTHE
I thought you were a war resister.

FINNBAR
I’m not American, so it doesn’t matter, does it? \textit{(FINNBAR turns on the TV.)}

BLYTHE
Is M.A.S.H on?! 

FINNBAR
\textit{(laughs) The Korean War is over. \textit{(FINNBAR puts on the News, on a small living room TV. BLYTHE cannot hear anything except the pounding of her own heart.)}}

NEWSCASTER
July 30, 1981. That’s all for now on the fairy tale wedding of the Prince and Princess of Wales. \textit{(pause).} One lone family of the endangered crested ibis, registered as extinct until now, was found in the mountains in Shanxi Province, China, in May, 1981. Naturalists have declared the area a sanctuary, with the hopes that the population of crested ibis can re-populate. The crested ibis is a symbolic bird in China and its reappearance may cause a wave of wildlife protection measures.

\textit{(While the news is on, FINNBAR picks up the Chinese sword and fences in the air, coming closer to BLYTHE, as she tries to dodge the sword. FINNBAR laughs. He chases her around the apartment. Finally he holds the sword against her throat, and she is}
caught against the frame of the bedroom door. Lights on HENRIETTE and MABEL. They almost drop their tea cups and run towards BLYTHE. There is a kind of “fourth wall” between past and present.)

HENRIETTE
(pounding the invisible wall with her fist.) Maudits Anglais! Maudits Anglais!

MABEL
Henriette, stop! There’s nothing you can do.

(BLYTHE is still pinned by FINNBAR at her throat by the antique Chinese sword.)

BLYTHE
G –

FINNBAR
…stands for?

BLYTHE
(pause, thinking) Gandhi?

FINNBAR
You married me.

BLYTHE
(pause again) Non-violent resistance. (Tableaux of BLYTHE pinned by FINNBAR using the sword.)

HENRIETTE
Holy Mother of God! Le Bâtard! I will kill him with my own hands! I will go to hell for it but eternity in hell is worth it!

MABEL
There’s nothing you can do.

HENRIETTE
Chalise de Tabernacle!

MABEL
Blythe is strong -

HENRIETTE
I will pull his stupide heart out!

MABEL
enough to survive.

HENRIETTE
He’s going to kill her.

MABEL
We always talk about other people -

HENRIETTE
I will kill him first. Avec plaisir.

MABEL
But we can’t help them.

HENRIETTE
How will he like it when this Quebecoise in the change of life puts that sword through his stupide A-hole brain to make shish kebob! When they take me to court I will say, “Oh, your Honour. Please forgive me. I swear on the Bible in any translation. It was the hot flash!”

(HENRIETTE and MABEL listen.)

FINNBAR
I said you married me, but you love Gene!

BLYTHE
‘Satyagraha.’

FINNBAR
(sarcastic) So you speak in “tongues” now? (FINNBAR pushes the blade closer to BLYTHE’s throat. She can scarcely breathe. Sound of BLYTHE’s rapid heartbeat and breathing.)

MABEL
You can’t get into the past.

HENRIETTE
Nom de Dieu. I can go anywhere I want.

MABEL
How so?

HENRIETTE
J’ai mon passeport pour l’enfer.
MABEL
Quoi?

HENRIETTE
My passport to hell is good to go.

(It appears that FINNBAR will slit her throat.)

BLYTHE
(trembling) I am not afraid.

(FINNBAR drops the sword, then holds BLYTHE by the shoulders and slams the back of her head into the wall.)

FINNBAR
(spits full in her face) Whore!

(Freeze on tableaux of FINNBAR and BLYTHE. HENRIETTE finds a “Door” in the wall between past and present and shows her passport to an imaginary customs officer, played by the DANCER, who gestures that HENRIETTE can pass through. HENRIETTE climbs into the past. MABEL keeps calling to her through the door into the past.)

MABEL
You can get as mad as a hatter, but you can’t change the past.

HENRIETTE
Don’t tell me what to do. (HENRIETTE walks towards the frozen tableaux of FINNBAR and BLYTHE. She picks up the fallen Chinese sword, and positions herself behind FINNBAR poised to run the sword through him from behind.)

MABEL
Let her decide.

HENRIETTE
Decide what?! How to perform Last Rites on herself?

(HENRIETTE pulls the sword away from FINNBAR angrily, and walks around to study the frozen tableaux.)

MABEL
It’s Blythe’s life.

HENRIETTE
It’s my life too! We are all connected in this lousy life! I had three miscarriages and
Holy Crucifix, I’m telling you this story. (HENRIETTE reaches out to touch BLYTHE, but it is like God and Adam on the Sixteen Chapel ceiling. Her fingers can only almost touch BLYTHE.) She’s like…my…daughter…(BLYTHE slides down the wall to the floor and it is unclear whether she is conscious or not. Crying, HENRIETTE slides down to the ground beside BLYTHE. Then MABEL slides through the door to the past and she tries to comfort HENRIETTE.)

MABEL
It’s OK, Henriette. It’s OK.

HENRIETTE
I refuse to let my daughter die again.

MABEL
It’s OK, pet…. It’s OK…. It’s OK.

(MABEL slowly leads HENRIETTE back through the door from past to present. MABEL and HENRIETTE watch as FINNBAR slowly steps backwards, realizing what he has done. He storms outside angrily with the sword and finds the apple in the tree. He pierces the apple with the sword and brings it back into the apartment again. He continues to polish the sword (apple still on the end of it) with the table napkin, as if nothing is amiss. FINNBAR ignores BLYTHE. BLYTHE slowly sits up against the wall shaking. She holds her head, and rocks herself.)

(The next day. Lights up on the Reading Room at the seminary. BLYTHE wears a soft scarf high around her neck and sunglasses. She runs over to GENE’s vacant study carrel. ALVIN, from BLYTHE’s Ministry class, sits on top of his study carrel eating a sandwich. His legs dangle down and he wears his glasses and is reading.)

BLYTHE
Hi Alvin. What kind of sandwich?

ALVIN
Baloney. You want half?

BLYTHE
I’m not hungry, just curious. (looks everywhere, puts her sunglasses up on her head)
Where’s Gene?

ALVIN
He’s gone.

BLYTHE
What do you mean he’s gone?!
ALVIN
He told me he quit seminary.

BLYTHE
What??!

ALVIN
Yesterday. He took all his books, everything. He said he just wanted to pursue his music.

BLYTHE
(searches in vain for a note on his desk). So why didn’t he tell me?

ALVIN
(eating, shrugs) I’m sorry, Blythe. I don’t know.

BLYTHE
Didn’t leave me a note? Not even a scrap of paper?

ALVIN
He was in quite a rush. His wife Peggy was waiting.

BLYTHE
He didn’t talk to me.

ALVIN
Are you still going to class?

BLYTHE
He didn’t say goodbye.

ALVIN
Umm…Maybe he’ll call you.

BLYTHE
(looking out the window) My life is a cosmic joke.

ALVIN
Are you OK, Blythe?

BLYTHE
I just left…my husband.

ALVIN
Oh well, I’m really sorry to hear that.
BLYTHE
(sighing) “Divorcée.” Add that to the strikes against me. (She points to the book he is reading) What’s that book?

ALVIN
(holds up his book cover) Gene left it behind. He said I could have it. The Courage to Be. Paul Tillich.

BLYTHE
Right. Yeah. (BLYTHE rushes out of the Reading Room, fighting tears. On her way she literally bumps into the Chair of the Credentials Committee, REV. SMITH, carrying a binder.)

BLYTHE
Oh! Pardon me, Rev. Smith.

SMITH
(all too obviously looking up and down her body.) Committee’s already heard the story.

BLYTHE
What do you mean?

SMITH
We all heard you were “Separated.”

BLYTHE
From whom?

SMITH
We have our sources.

BLYTHE
It was a matter of survival…

SMITH
Blythe, we have filed your resume in “The Bottom Drawer.”

BLYTHE
What’s “The Bottom Drawer?!”

SMITH
I can’t talk any further about this right now.
BLYTHE
I don’t understand this. I thought -

SMITH
I have to slip out. I have another meeting.

BLYTHE
I’m still an ordination candidate,

SMITH
Best of luck, Blythe.

BLYTHE
…aren’t I?

SMITH
Actually, I don’t know of a single church who would call you. Best of luck with your future endeavours. (REV. SMITH rushes off to his meeting.)

(BLYTHE stands there, shocked by this news. Then she runs out of the seminary, bumps into the Security GUARD again on her way over to the Hospital on Campus. Lights up on REV. JOSH’s Chaplain’s office. REV. JOSH was BLYTHE’s CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) Supervisor. BLYTHE, out of breath, rushes in.)

REV. JOSH
Glad to see you, Blythe. You still alive?

BLYTHE
(out of breath) Barely. Skipped my class. I think I just got black baled by the Credentials Committee.

REV. JOSH
 Barely is a good start.

BLYTHE
(in doorway, improv of a motivational speaker) Hello. I’m the new poster child for Kubler Ross’ “Stages of Grief.” I lost everything. So-called holy matrimony. My promising career as a liberation theologian. “God is on the side of the Oppressed,” But when? Seven years of university to become what? My parents will freak. I ache all over. I have a grand total of $54.63 in the bank, and no other training. I can’t even type well enough to be a secretary. Hmmm… what else? I lost my dearest friend. I’m having a “great” day!

REV. JOSH
Gene?
BLYTHE
(sarcastic) Took all his stuff from the Reading Room and drove away.

REV. JOSH
Come in and have a seat. (BLYTHE comes into the Chaplaincy office and sits down.)
Well I guess that poster is a propos: “If you love something set it free.”

BLYTHE
That’s no comfort.

REV. JOSH
What else is there but to let go?

BLYTHE
Guess you’re right, but how.

REV. JOSH
And a phone message for you. The patient with MS you visited two years ago in your Clinical Unit? Maria? She called to say thank you, and her marriage has been revived!

BLYTHE
Maria?! I told her to imagine her medical tubes were bangles made of pure gold. That was my Chaplaincy Improv.

REV. JOSH
(laughing) Fantasy, the healer.

BLYTHE
Not always.

REV. JOSH
Take care of yourself, my friend. Find out who you are outside of all relationships.

BLYTHE
I am losing who I thought I was.

REV. JOSH
Write a poem. Paint a picture.

BLYTHE
Or, like Virginia Woolf, I fill my pockets with stones and walk into Lake Ontario.

REV. JOSH
You won’t. Here’s my pager number. I’m in ICU a lot these days. (*He gives her a piece of paper*) If you decide to “off” yourself, page me first, ’cause I’m going to talk you out of it.

BLYTHE
Thanks, Rev. Josh.

REV. JOSH
*(draws a cartoon on the black board of himself standing at his office door with a sign on it: “Welcome to Hell.”)* As the gatekeeper to Hell, I’d like to suggest there’s a better life somewhere out there for you.

BLYTHE
Huh?

REV. JOSH
I won’t close in prayer because what you need is the self.

*(A few months later. December, 1982. BLYTHE is walking through Hamilton alone, with a folded newspaper portfolio and some water colour paintings sticking out of it. She smokes menthol cigarettes, with poor inhaling technique. She wanders through the city eating small apples from a bag. BLYTHE ends up at the hospital lobby, and she asks Reception to borrow the phone. She pulls out a small piece of paper with a pager number on it and dials her CPE supervisor, (Chaplain) REV. JOSH.)*

BLYTHE
Are you in your office? I’m at the hospital, in the lobby.

REV. JOSH
No. I’m at home. It’s my day off.

BLYTHE
What’s my name? I thought you’d know.

REV. JOSH
You don’t know your name?

BLYTHE
I lost my name.

REV. JOSH
You’re more vulnerable than I thought.

BLYTHE
Rev. Josh, right? I know your name.
REV. JOSH
You are Blythe.

BLYTHE
Who is she?

REV. JOSH
You!

BLYTHE
I really don’t know her. I’ve lost it all. I knew I should page you.

REV. JOSH
You did the right thing.

(December, 1982. BLYTHE has had a breakdown and she wakes up in the hospital. She is in the hall making Christmas ornaments out of plastic hospital jello containers, glitter and ribbon. A trolley is wheeled by. A woman strapped down to the trolley calls out in Portuguese to BLYTHE. Voice Over of BLYTHE’s voice speaking the words of the poem.)

Christmas Eve, 1982
Southern Ontario

Strapped to a trolley
with black leather and shiny buckles
nurses wheel her down the hall to Electroshock:
in Portuguese
her parched weeping

Eu quero ir para casa para O Natal!
(I want to go home for Christmas!)

Through a doorway where tinsel droops
from forest green plastic wreath
some tinsel drops over Angelina’s heart
falls, and rests there like tears
of the mother of God

Shivering in thin sweater over ward green
your tree ornaments
homemade from plastic jello containers
flutter to the waxy floor, and
you call out
For God’s sake, it’s Christmas Eve!

To prevent this singular activism from becoming mutiny
they give you a sedative
the ward, appropriately,
cold, as Siberia

(January, 1983. It is a quiet day in the loony bin.)

NURSE
(comes into BLYTHE’s room, picks up one of her books and looks at it like it is a foreign object, puts it down again.) It’s mid-January and what are you doing with these books?

BLYTHE
If I seem like I care, it’s probably the Stockholm Syndrome.

NURSE
(wincs at her comment) There’s a visitor for you at the front desk. Do you want a visitor?

BLYTHE
Male or female.

NURSE
Male, with guitar case.

BLYTHE
My God! Please, stall him! (BLYTHE quickly finds her hairbrush and tries to brush her hair, but it is full of tangles and she can’t get the brush through it. She tries to fix her pyjamas, but has run out of time. She vigorously rubs her cheeks for colour in lieu of make up. GENE opens the door and walks in, smiling, with his guitar case.)

BLYTHE
It’s you.

GENE
It’s you.

(They stare at each other, then hug nervously. BLYTHE sits on her bed and holds her pillow. GENE gets out his guitar and starts tuning it.)

BLYTHE
How did you know where I was?
GENE
Got your letter.

BLYTHE
I sent it a month ago.

GENE
How’s the Loony Bin?

BLYTHE
Well, my throat is parched dry. Head of Psychiatry told me I’m on the same dosage of largactil they give to the criminally insane in Penetang. What an insult. My handwriting is a mess. I can hardly see.

GENE
Seeing is overrated.

BLYTHE
Sing for me, then, and I will listen.

(GENE sings “Tell Me Why.” BLYTHE sits on the bed listening with her eyes closed holding a pillow. Then GENE stands and looks out the window at the parking lot below.)

GENE
I will always love you. (He gives her a furtive kiss on the head, and packs up his guitar.)

BLYTHE
Act crazy. I hope they book you in here so we can hang out.

GENE
If I stay much longer, I’m sure they will. (They both laugh nervously. GENE stands at the door with his guitar case.)

BLYTHE
Will I ever see you again?

GENE
Maybe in the old folks home.

BLYTHE
Yeah, that was an idea for a film we thought up, remember? Synopsis: “Gene and Blythe are separated for decades and then by chance, they meet again in a nursing home,
and resume their relationship as if no time has passed.”

GENE
*(laughs)* Sounds like a comedy.

BLYTHE
That’s a long time to wait.

GENE
I really have to get going. Good Bye.

BLYTHE
*(waves from her spot sitting up on the bed)* Thanks for stopping by. *After GENE leaves, she gets up and presses her face against the inside of the closed door. Lights on HENRIETTE and MABEL back drinking their tea.*

MABEL
Star-crossed!!

HENRIETTE
We can’t change the channel on Blythe. Look what’s she’s gone through.

MABEL
You’re right. She’s our girl.

HENRIETTE
I make my confession. I almost killed Finnbar with my bare fingers curled up with arthritis.

MABEL
I know you almost killed Finnbar. But I would visit you in jail.

HENRIETTE
You would?

MABEL
Of course. I would bring you Birds nest cookies with raspberry jam in the middle. And I’d bring you pure maple butter, in case you got homesick for Quebec.

HENRIETTE:
C’est bon! I need some toast for the maple butter.

MABEL
Mais oui, my friend, and I’d bring you a cup of tea.
HENRIETTE
Jasmine tea?

MABEL
Tea tastes like a muddy Lake Erie thunderstorm in a styrofoam cup.

HENRIETTE
You’re right. They won’t allow china cups and saucers. You could smuggle in a Coca Cola.

MABEL
They probably have a pop machine in prison.

HENRIETTE
I don’t think so.

(Lights on Art Studio. March, 1983. After getting out of hospital, BLYTHE (in recovery) gets a part time job for the University Art Department. She models on a small stage as VELMA in her hovel in Hamilton’s North End, sitting on a torn blanket, with a ragged shawl. The artist, BELLE, is a senior art student. She stands by an easel in painter’s coveralls.)

BELLE
Hold that for a moment.

BLYTHE
Can I breathe?

BELLE
Breathe, blink. This will eventually be part a series of silk screen prints.

BLYTHE
The real Velma couldn’t afford a bottle of wine. (BLYTHE looks down at the wine bottle, which is a prop in her hands.)

BELLE
Yes, but the bottle makes more sense for the portrait. Communion, except no one else is there.

BLYTHE
The ultimate loneliness.

BELLE
(looks at clock). OK, done for today. Let’s go for lunch. (BELLE cleans her
158

brushes. BLYTHE packs up her props. They walk in sunshine towards the university cafeteria.)

BLYTHE
So Gene left me three times: once as a colleague, once as a friend, and once as “What might have been.”

BELLE
“What might have been?”

BLYTHE
“…and what has been/ Point to one end which is always present.” T.S Eliot.41

BELLE
Hey, remember I’m not an English major!

BLYTHE
An artist would know why Gene left. (There is a moment of silence.)

BELLE
Ego, I guess…. His loss.

BLYTHE
I can’t accept it.

BELLE
They say time heals, and maybe it doesn’t, but it’s all we’ve got. Time, that is…. Next week, I want to do a portrait of you portraying another character. Life size. Oils. Who would you like to be?

BLYTHE
Mary Magdalene.

BELLE
Perfect!

BLYTHE
I was kidding….

BELLE
I’m not. Let’s do it.
ACT SEVEN

(Musical transition. The Present. DANCER discovers the sword pierced by the apple and leans it against the tree. When she sees BLYTHE, she hides behind the tree. The Present – BLYTHE locates the NURSE on the front desk at Two East.)

BLYTHE
Excuse me…

NURSE
(she answers her phone at the reception desk, then speaks to BLYTHE as if in two conversations at once.) No narcotics! Patients are medicated strictly under Doctor’s orders. (NURSE looks exasperated and puts her phone on hold.) Can you hold please?

BLYTHE
(takes out items from her purse) Do you want to see the inside of my purse? Comb. Eye liner, mascara. (pulls out bus pass) Loose change. Transit pass. That’s all.

NURSE
Who are you?

BLYTHE
A teacher.

NURSE
Whose?

BLYTHE
Griffin’s.

NURSE
She left high school a year ago.

BLYTHE
Graduated from high school. Not “left.”

NURSE
Who do you say you are?

BLYTHE
Theatre Director, then. Director-Teacher.

NURSE
How do you know she wants a visit?
BLYTHE
Griffin asked me.

NURSE
*getting up to go into the ward* I will go and see if she wants to see you today.

BLYTHE
She does, she texted me. See. *(BLYTHE shows the text message on her phone to the NURSE to prove her point. NURSE sighs and sits down again at her desk.)*

NURSE
Griffin must have been on a pass. A lot can change during a pass, you know.

BLYTHE
A text is more “in the moment,” don’t you think?

NURSE
You’ll have to leave your phone here.

BLYTHE
What if I need to call out?

NURSE
You’ll get your phone when you’re on a pass.

BLYTHE
Whoa! I’m only a visitor.

NURSE
Razor blades? You’ll have to leave your razor blades here also. Safety pins? Jack knives in your pocket? Scissors? Cash?

BLYTHE
I don’t shave my legs in winter. I’m like a European.

NURSE
So you’re not a Canadian citizen?

BLYTHE
Yes, of course, Canadian. I was kidding.

*(Musical transition. Surreal Fog-like. PROFESSORS appear as in a Sci-Fi film. PROF. KELLY is at the apex of a triangle. PROF.HARVEY wears sunglasses, with a long ponytail. PROF. SAM eats trail mix from a bag tucked inside his upturned bike*
helmet. BLYTHE in baggy T-shirt with dishevelled hair sees the apple impaled by
the sword leaning against the tree. She pulls the apple off the tip of the sword, wipes it on
her shirt, and puts it in her pocket. She carries the sword over and presents it to PROF.
KELLY.)

PROF. KELLY
So why, then, this? (PROF. KELLY, baffled, hands the sword to PROF. SAM.)

PROF. SAM
From our solar system?

BLYTHE
Yes, Earth.

(PROFESSORS confer quietly on the meaning of the sword, and they pass it to
PROF HARVEY, who examines it. They slowly move to sit on stage blocks stage left,
contemplating. Four Y. WOMEN from BLYTHE’s Theatre group step forward, one
at a time, opening an umbrella as it is each one’s turn to speak, in four locations on
stage.)

Y. WOMAN 1

Y. WOMAN 2
(opens an umbrella) Daughter of Martin Luther King Jr., on stage by the CBC
building.

Y. WOMAN 4
(opens an umbrella) Rev. Bernice King has the mic; she is determined, and there are
wet drums, traditional dress, everyone, many faces from all nations, streets, alleys.
We are Canadians, we think, with a borrowed American history.

BERNICE
(from podium) “I greet you with ‘Numayut.’ ‘We are all one’…as brothers and sisters
in the human race…”

Y. WOMAN 3
(opens an umbrella) Driving cold rain, half-drowned umbrellas in a river of colour.

(GENE opens BLYTHE’s pink umbrella over her, and they stand together at the curb
by the Vancouver Public library.)

BLYTHE
Gene showed up a few years ago while on a business trip. We thought we could just
continue on where we left off in the eighties, but it wasn’t that easy. I was still living frugally, like a student. Between us, there had been more than two decades of absence. It was quite an adjustment.

(BLYTHE steps out of umbrella tableaux into small flashback where GENE has a bulging briefcase, and a Starbuck’s cup, Blackberry glued to his ear and he wears (or carries) white golf shoes. BLYTHE points to his shoes, and laughs.)

GENE
(on his mobile phone.) Right! Golf with the President this afternoon…I’m on it!
(on the side, to BLYTHE) Hey, don’t worry, Blythe, I also have running shoes, somewhere.

BLYTHE
(looks at him quizzically) Okay?! (BLYTHE and GENE step back into tableaux of CBC building and umbrellas.) Now, a few years later, Gene is still here in Vancouver. It is the Walk of Truth and Reconciliation for residential school survivors and First Nations, for all of us. Clergy from every church and synagogue are here too, just like those old marches for civil rights I remember in the US.

BERNICE
(speaking into mic on CBC stage) “…I am here today because of the sacrifices of my parents, my mother and my father. I am a better person because of their sacrifices. America is a better place because of their sacrifices, and the world is a better place because of their sacrifices. But they are no longer with us. They set an example of how to bring about change and transformation without using physical weapons… My father taught us about non-violent social change.”

BLYTHE
(to GENE) My mother would love this. She fought segregation.

GENE
Are you warm enough? (He tries to give her his coat.)

BLYTHE
I’m fine.

BERNICE
“My father reminded us 45 years ago that the choice was not non-violence or violence, but non-violence or existence…”

(ADELE, BLYTHE’s mother, at 80 years old, steps forward with her walker. ADELE doesn’t seem to see or hear what is going on. She is in a different time and place.)

ADELE
I met a Filipino housekeeper in 1965, when we first came back to Canada, and she was being ex – Oh, what’s that word? Not ex-communicated…

(BLYTHE leaves GENE, the umbrellas and the Walk of Reconciliation, and she wanders over to MABEL and HENRIETTE who pour two new cups of tea. She keeps one cup and takes the other cup of tea over to her mother, ADELE, who is able to rest the tea on her walker.)

BLYTHE
Exploited?

ADELE
Yes, exploited by her sponsor.

BLYTHE
(head in her hands) I can’t even count the number of teachers and preachers in my family. I inherited some kind of “highly developed social conscience,” that tugs endlessly at my soul, whether I like it or not.

MABEL
(to HENRIETTE at tea table) I wonder, is that blessing or curse?

HENRIETTE
I was supposed to be the “priest” in my family, only I was a girl. They all knew I wasn’t going to make a good nun.

ADELE
All of the money that poor housekeeper made went straight to her sponsor. She had virtually nothing in her bank account.

BLYTHE
(sits down on a stage box) Sometimes, I don’t know who I am anymore.

MABEL
(comments on BLYTHE) Workin’ for justice can be exhausting, and you know, we can only do so much in one life time.

HENRIETTE
Je suis Québécoise. Don’t tell me about justice.

MABEL
Then all of a sudden one day, the grandfather clock stops chiming the hour, and the waves stop crashing against the seashore.

BLYTHE
Or maybe I know who I am, but I don’t like what I have to give away.

HENRIETTE
My grandmother Manon was the paradigm of sacrifice.

MABEL
And you look up to the sun, and see that you are not daft. As my grandmother Lisbeth would say, “It’s not the fairies who have stolen your life away, but Time steals itself.”

HENRIETTE
Manon died on the cross so many times there was no chance to get out her Easter bonnet. And my Aunt Bernelle (crosses herself) – may she rest in peace – all she wanted was l’amour. L’amour. She wanted a real man, not a statue made of white stone in the corner of the church. She wanted a man with a live heart, with real bones and a real bank account.

ADELE
Then I asked the housekeeper if she would mind if I went to her priest and she said that would be OK. So I brought her bank book to the priest. I spoke in my “teacher voice” and showed him with carefully written out equations that all the housekeeper’s earnings had been garnished by her sponsor, and I told him that it wasn’t right. The priest thanked me and he spoke to the woman’s sponsor, and they cleared it up, and the housekeeper got to keep her own earnings after that. She was so happy because she wanted to send some money back to her own poor mother in the Philippines! All that made me more aware of the plight of the Vietnamese Boat People, so by the late 70’s, we were ready.

HENRIETTE
(from tea table) Très bon. Confess the sins of the other guy. Why didn’t I think of that?!

MABEL
(find a newspaper article under the pile of articles on the table and begins reading.)
What about confessing from the Korea Herald, 2000: “The war left about 5 million people dead, wounded or missing, more than half of them civilians…more than 10 million people separated from their families, 300,000 war widows and 100,000 war orphans.”

ADELE
Your father, he liked to be in the thick of things. He used to chum up with the American soldiers when he was in Korea.

(TRACE, ghost of BLYTHE’s father, steps forward also. The Past. Coffee Shop, Seoul Korea, 1970.)

TRACE
Seoul, Korea. 1970. I ate breakfast with an American soldier when I was eating in that coffee shop for westerners. I liked Korean food, alright, but I still missed my eggs, bacon, toast and jam. (to the SOLDIER) How long have you been stationed here? (They sip their coffee.)

SOLDIER
‘bout two years.

TRACE
I’m an engineer.

SOLDIER
Me also.

TRACE
What do you do?

SOLDIER
Oh, fix a lot of broken old army vehicles mostly, and other equipment at the base. Design new equipment on a slow day. What about you?

TRACE
I’m here on business. We’re preparing for Wolsong-1 nuclear power plant. Anti-seismic specifications.

SOLDIER
Interesting. It may help the country get back on its feet.

TRACE
Wolsung-1 will generate employment, and power.

SOLDIER
(laughs) Poverty here is crazy-making. At night I close my eyes and see kids with malnutrition. Instead of sheep, I count war orphans. (They both laugh, darkly.)

TRACE
Is there an orphanage in Seoul?

SOLDIER
We visit one regularly on the edge of town. We go to see if there is anything we can do. They have medics, but they’re short on maintenance. Vehicles break down, and other technical problems.

TRACE
I’d like to see this orphanage.
SOLDIER
I can take you there.

TRACE
I’d love to go. How long will it take?

SOLDIER
We can be back later today.

TRACE
That’s good. I have a meeting at 2 pm.

(TRACE and SOLDIER finish up their cups of coffee and pay the half-American waitress. TRACE follows the American SOLDIER outside to his tank, where he helps TRACE to get into it. They ride to the orphanage, and talk as they roll into view of the orphanage. TRACE is thrilled to have this opportunity to ride in a tank.)

TRACE
How much fuel does she take?

SOLDIER
This is an old M41 Walker Bulldog, used at the end of the war here in 1953. Fuel-heavy, only .06 miles per gallon. We only use it within the city because it breaks down a lot.

TRACE
Seems to be running well this morning.

SOLDIER
Yep. It’s our lucky day.

(They stop the tank, get out. Sounds of children’s laughter. Everything is obviously in dire need of repair. The latrines are on the outside of the orphanage.)

TRACE
I can see the orphanage latrines have a bad drainage system. Don’t they have anyone who knows anything here?

SOLDIER
I told you there’s more need than knowledge and man power. We can’t keep up. It’s like the Korean War never ended. It’s the same battle, and it’s a different one also.

TRACE
I’ll tell you what they need to do. (TRACE draws on a piece of paper, and shows the SOLDIER.)
SOLDIER
Right. I see what you mean.

TRACE
*(he points)* They need to dig a deeper trench behind the latrines and let it flow down there.

SOLDIER
I can round up a work crew this afternoon.

*(TRACE and SOLDIER stand in a tableaux of drawing diagrams and pointing to the latrines. ADELE stares straight ahead leaning on her walker.)*

BLYTHE
*(steps forward, parallel to ADELE)* The last night before he left the house for palliative care, he refused the morphine patch.

ADELE
Your father had the back off the toilet one night at three am, just two weeks before he died.

BLYTHE
And he stayed up all that last night, hand writing a memo for his colleagues, so his “esoteric knowledge” wouldn’t leave this Earth when he did.

ADELE
Your father was always too Scotch to hire a plumber. *(BLYTHE and ADELE stand there as if at attention.)*

*(The three professors move down stage again and PROF. HARVEY examines the sword further. PROF. HARVEY passes the sword to PROF. KELLY, who looks at it also.)*

PROF. SAM
It is a weapon. I’ve seen others like it.

PROF. KELLY
Undoubtedly an artefact from the myriad wars of planet Earth.

*(PROF. HARVEY holds the sword and recites a poem, which builds in intensity as the Y. WOMEN with umbrellas, BERNICE King, DANCER & BLYTHE, GENE, ADELE, MABEL and HENRIETTE sing the traditional African American spiritual “Gonna Lay Down My Burdens,” starting very softly mid-way to overlap through the poem below, at “corn’ is for forgiveness.”)*
PROF. HARVEY
I suspect – *(then seems to compose poem on the spot)*

This, an ancient
symbol
of prodigal fathers; they
travel to curious places
grateful at last to share gnarled, broken cobs
with barn animals:

“corn” is for forgiveness

our children’s children
grandfathers
great grandfathers
grandmothers
great grandmothers

All of human history
*our burdens laid*
*down by the riverside*
and parables lost and found
in the oblique mist
of vast and furious
poetic
imagination

*(The Traditional African American spiritual is sung from the places where characters are already on stage:)*

I'm gonna lay down my burdens *down by the riverside*
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside
Oh I'm gonna lay down my burdens *down by the riverside*
Ain't gonna study war no more

I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield
*down by the riverside*
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield
*down by the riverside*

Ain't gonna study war no more
Well I ain't gonna study war...

*(The song turns into soft humming that overlaps with the following dialogue.)*
ALL THREE
A secret peace?

PROF. KELLY
Perhaps. I hear that to end Cold War, we need to disarm simultaneously.

ALL THREE
(counting together) One. Two. Three. (The professors lay the sword down together. The song fades out. The professors disappear. BLYTHE polishes the apple again on the bottom of her T-shirt, and passes it back and forth between her own hands. Then she throws the apple to DANCER, who catches it and guards it, curling up on the floor. BLYTHE puts down her cup of tea on the table, then walks back to GENE who still holds her umbrella at the Walk of Reconciliation.)

BLYTHE
Everything is in this moment – Gene’s return, Vancouver’s most vibrant umbrellas, and Bernice King, like fire to quell rain, half a century later. She is one of the “four little children” from *I Have a Dream*.

BERNICE
(near the end of her speech) …If Canada is to be the great nation it is called to be, people from all walks of life will have to suffer, if necessary, for what is right.

BLYTHE
All this makes me feel old, and very, very young.

ADELE
(still with her cup of tea at her walker) My house in Connecticut….Well there was an old stone wall around the property left from a pioneer farm and wild pink roses, climbing. A brook flowed through our property and under the road. Tall trees, majestic. White oak, Norway maple. On a windy day, so lovely.

BLYTHE
I was once a child in America.

ADELE
Eastern red cedar. Speckled alder…. Your father just couldn’t work in America after JFK’s assassination. That pioneer stone wall, low enough for you girls to climb on…. So, he marched right off to the Canadian Embassy!

BLYTHE
My favourite was a children’s TV show from New York. “The Story Lady” sat in a tall brown carved rocking chair on a rug by an old fashioned hearth.
ADELE
They helped him get a new job north of the border. Oh, and we had Buttonbush, Sweet fern by the brook.

BLYTHE
“The Story Lady” wore hats and shawls and glasses drawn from a basket beside her, and she acted as every character in the story.

ADELE
He left us in America to take that new job. I had to manage things for a while, alone. You were in kindergarten. It broke my heart to put my beautiful house on the market! I’d never done that before, sell anything, never mind a house.

BLYTHE
“Greensleeves” was the theme song of the Story Lady show, played on a harp. *(Fade in and out of “Greensleeves”).*

ADELE
The real estate agent said I must never sell my house to a black family, no matter how much money they offered! It would bring the “value” of that whole neighbourhood down, he said. Even a black family with a decent income couldn’t live in our neighbourhood. They had to drive through the slummy part of town where the poor blacks lived. On the other side of the slums, there was a nicer neighbourhood where the well-to-do blacks could live hidden away in bigger houses.

BLYTHE
When Jannie was with us, we would act out our own story by the stone bridge that was our stage over the brook.

ADELE
Trees, the colour of people: White pine, Pitch pine, Black spruce, Red spruce, Black birch, Grey birch, White ash, Black ash!

BLYTHE
The ducks were our audience and sometimes my little sister, Becky, watched too. We’d let her be in the play, if she behaved.

ADELE
Round-leafed hawthorne!

BLYTHE
One day Becky found a dead drowned rat on the bank and she carried it around in her floral cotton pinafore, and made its front paws play “patta cake.”

ADELE
Eastern cottonwood!

BLYTHE
My mother screamed bloody murder, and told Becky to drop that rat back over into the flowing water near the culvert so it would get swept down under the road to rat heaven.

ADELE
Choke cherry…I had to resist the temptation to fight this new form of segregation. I wanted to make a social statement about the true “value” of neighbourhoods based on poetry about trees. I never wrote that poem. Truth is, I had to focus on the job at hand – getting back up to Canada with two small children.

BERNICE
(The CBC building tableaux is still there, and B. King nears the end of her speech.) “All of God’s children are first class citizens….”

ADELE
I’m sure Eleanor Roosevelt had a nanny. I certainly didn’t.

BLYTHE
I imagine that there’s a happy ending to the story about Jannie, that she doesn’t get killed in that tenement in Harlem, and that she always remembers our storybook house in Connecticut. I imagine that one day she gets educated as a lawyer and goes back and buys our beautiful house by the brook with her own hard earned money. It’s what the truth ought to be.

(“Greensleeves” swells again in the background, and then it fades.)

ADELE
That’s when I had to stop working for social change. I sold our beautiful house to a Jewish businessman, and all the white neighbours approved the sale.

(Y. WOMEN with umbrellas huddle closer to listen to the tail end of Bernice King’s speech.)

BERNICE
(near end of her speech) And in the words of the song of my people: “Walk together children…. Don’t you get weary”…. Walk together brothers and sisters…. Don’t you get weary… Struggle together. Hold on to each other. Don’t you get weary…. And you will get weary, so keep on walking….

BLYTHE
I have another dream, too. Jannie, whose skin is black as midnight, and I, pale face with a blood-red heart, we’re skipping down the Ponasses Path, that winds everywhere in Norwaake through the woods. Jannie leads Becky and I down that trail where
Chief Ponus hunted. We visit Chief Ponus on top of the hill and he gives us fresh brook trout from the Norwalk River cooked over a fire, and Eastern screech owl feathers to wear in our hair, and he waves, and we run back laughing. We find that same brook that will someday have my house beside it, and we scoop water into our thirsty mouths. We run several miles to the end of Ponasses Path where there is a grassy field with golden partridges, and brown and white doves everywhere, and wild berry bushes. And we sit down beside an oak tree in that Promised Land, Jannie and I and Becky, and we wolf down blackberries, blueberries and strawberries until our tongues, teeth and lips are navy blue like June twilight fading into the starry forest. And we never leave that place. Becky and I never have to move back to Canada. Jannie never has to go back to Harlem. And we are forever soul sisters under the leadership of Chief Ponus, who won’t ever get assassinated. He’s Chief of a land without fear. As Jannie says:

JANNIE
We’re gonna live at the end of Ponasses Path, and we ain’t gonna be weary.

(The Traditional spiritual, “Walk Together Children” is sung by everyone as they begin the walk.)

Walk together children
Don’t you get weary
Walk together children
Don’t you get weary
Oh, talk together children
Don’t you get weary
There's a great camp meeting in the promised land

Sing together children
Don't you get weary
Sing together children
Don't you get weary
Oh, shout together children
Don't you get weary
There's a great camp meeting in the promised land

(BLYTHE and GENE whisper and point to one of the women on the Walk, played by one of the Y. WOMEN. LARA drops her umbrella and starts to collapse.)

BLYTHE
I tell GENE we have to keep on marching for something we believe in. As it turns out, we can’t go on the Walk of Reconciliation in Vancouver because an enthusiastic disabled woman we know – Lara – nearly collapses near us standing in the cold rain too long. We have to help get her through the crowds to a nearby Blenz coffee shop. I buy us all hot tea and scones.
(Everyone turns to stare as BLYTHE and GENE help LARA across the street to the coffee shop. LARA nods thank you so BLYTHE and GENE sit down with her.)

BLYTHE
The only seat available for Lara is at a small coffee table beside the former Premier of the Northwest Territories who is Inuit. It is all so exciting, it seems like we didn’t miss anything! Some walks of reconciliation are shorter than others.

(All umbrellas are pulled down to signal the end of the Walk of Reconciliation. The Present. Two East.)

BLYTHE
Can I please visit Griffin?

NURSE
What’s in your other shopping bag there?

BLYTHE
(opening her shopping bag, shows the NURSE.) You see, just an empty notebook, a sketch book, pens, magic markers, and two literary journals, small gifts for Griffin.

NURSE
Isn’t that a bit – ambitious? They’re all sedated, you know.

BLYTHE
Too sedated to write a few words?

NURSE
Our therapeutic program is based on creating a calm atmosphere.

BLYTHE
You mean a place where no one thinks?

NURSE
I’d rather say it’s a chance to be free of the burden of thinking.

BLYTHE
Griffin is a poet, you know, and an actor.

NURSE
Do you have any idea the weight of anxiety these poor folks carry without closely monitored drug therapy?

BLYTHE
Maybe Griffin can decide for herself if she could benefit from self expression.
NURSE
She expresses herself on our ward piano. Can’t you hear her? *(Someone is still playing the piano, slowly, with mistakes. NURSE puts her hand out condescendingly.)*

NURSE
Don’t stay long. Visitors tire the patients.

BLYTHE *(She sighs and places her phone in the NURSE’s outstretched hand.)* Then, can I have my phone back? *(NURSE glares in the silence. BLYTHE forces a beatific smile back at the NURSE. BLYTHE walks into the ward. The piano playing stops. GRIFFIN greets BLYTHE, in her housecoat and slippers, walking very slowly.)*

BLYTHE
Griffin! *(BLYTHE and GRIFFIN embrace.)*

GRIFFIN
You made it.

BLYTHE
Yes, I made it.

GRIFFIN
I knew you would show up.

BLYTHE
It was quite a long path to get here.

GRIFFIN
Yeah. For me, too.

BLYTHE
Are you OK?

GRIFFIN
Good today. This is a good day. Some days, not so good. I’m dying of boredom. I need something to do.

BLYTHE
I have something for you!

GRIFFIN
Oh, thanks. I’ll show you my room.
(GRIFFIN is a little shaky, so BLYTHE and GRIFFIN walk very slowly arm in arm down the hall. BLYTHE enters GRIFFIN’s room and there are two single beds, and one chair.)

BLYTHE
Here – a bag of stuff to do!(BLYTHE puts the shopping bag of notebooks, sketchbooks, pens, etc., on GRIFFIN’s bed.)

GRIFFIN
(looking inside bag) Wow, thanks!

BLYTHE
I know you write poetry as well as being a great actor.

GRIFFIN
Truth or Lie: 1) I left my poems tucked into a magazine on transit. Or 2) My ex-boyfriend stole my journals where all my poems are.

BLYTHE
I’m so sorry to hear that.

GRIFFIN
He’ll say he wrote them!

BLYTHE
Can’t we get your journals back?

GRIFFIN
(whispers) I can’t ever contact him.

BLYTHE
I see. Then I guess you’ll have to write something new.

GRIFFIN
I guess so.

BLYTHE
Keep in touch.

GRIFFIN
I’ll text you.

(BLYTHE hugs GRIFFIN goodbye and waves. BLYTHE walks back to the front desk. NURSE glares at BLYTHE and hands her the phone, then they share a forced smile goodbye. After visiting Griffin, BLYTHE goes outside the building past TOM GIRL,
RASTA GUY and JESUS GUY, still on their passes. TUNER brushes past them all in a hurry, and up the stairs towards the door. He carries an old-fashioned black medicine bag.)

JESUS GUY
(looks up at him, points to his black bag) Hey man, you the brain surgeon?

TUNER
(stops, turns and looks at them all) No. Sorry, I’m late. I’m the Piano Tuner.
(TUNER slips in through the door. TOM GIRL, RASTA GUY and JESUS GUY share a laugh and sit on the steps.)

ACT EIGHT – Postscript

(BLYTHE sits with her journal on the outside steps of the psychiatric unit. Y. WOMEN echo names on the list below, stepping forward. Each comes down the steps as if to leave the building. BLYTHE listens.)

YW 1
Rosemary Kennedy.

YW 2
Sylvia Plath.

YW 3
Ernest Hemingway.

YW 4
Robin Williams.

MABEL
(holds tea cup up in a toast) Virginia Woolf.

HENRIETTE
(holds tea cup up in a toast) Camille Claudel, the girlfriend of Auguste Rodin. Nothing wrong with her, except talent.

BLYTHE
In the 1920’s, my great, great aunt was committed to a Scottish asylum, and so, in family photographs, forever-absent. All these great lights might observe from their effervescent shadows, that nothing much has evolved in all these years except, perhaps, the hand sanitizers. In essence, all of us are “doing time”: patients, staff and all visitors, which is a small number and mostly for Griffin, who, as it turns out, is more popular
than most, and she maintains her Facebook account, faithfully. We “do time” as if time/space was something to be “done” in a vacuum of soul, in absence of healing, rather than time being a (fourth or fifth) dimension into which we embark. It is a perilous journey, the undoing.

(Transitional Music. MABEL and HENRIETTE continue to drink tea at their table. DANCER guards the apple, dancing in the spaces between words. BLYTHE’s voice speaks the words of poem. Other characters in the play add a vocal echo.)

As outstretched arms
long shadows
draw unholy, sacred portraits
through a valley –
 wry, silent
beneath sunlit rock

Echo, the unknowing

Ever-returning
from exile

Don’t ever, ever
let anyone
take self
and language of self
away

(DANCER plants the apple in a pot of earth, and then kneels down in front of BLYTHE. Everyone on stage look towards BLYTHE as if there is something she should be doing. ALL pause in the breath of the question. BLYTHE looks around the stage and re-discovers the artefact downstage: the sword from the Boxer Rebellion, where the three PROFESSORS have laid it down. She picks up the sword, brings it over to the kneeling DANCER and knights her with it.)

BLYTHE
By this sword, I dub thee.
PART III – After the Visit (Epilogue)

The End

Visiting Griffin evolved in a similar spirit to the collaborative playbuilding projects I have directed, as I did not know how it would end. Surrendered to improvisational dialogue, lively performative energy and spoken ritual, the characters moved forward, both on the page and read aloud, in a collective momentum towards an unknown, undetermined end. Aoki’s (1990) definition of “an educated person” as “a being-in-relation to others” who “hence is, at core, an ethical being,” integrates the ultimate life-long learner’s currere with a vision of multi-layered ethicality (p. 42). In this pedagogical space akin to that of the poet(h)ic journey, an aesthetic-ethic for the play’s direction and destination may be defined in terms of an endless point of departure. In poet(h)ic inquiry – emerging from the historical expression of ethics in the form of ‘moral codes’ towards a new expression of ethical relationship (Odysseos, 2002, p. 414) – ‘ending’ or the notion of ending may appear as a beginning, or a sense of becoming (Irwin, 2013). Self may appear as self in ethicality and in sacred relation with other, as in Aoki’s (1995) notion of hito: “For the Japanese, a person was a 人 (HITO), the graphic strokes signifying that it takes at least two to make a person – a person is a twofold of self and other (p. 6). This epilogue, then, continues the spirit of opening up to possibilities and questions, rather than seeking tight resolutions.

Conquergood (1985) writes:

The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists
conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and
text open and ongoing. (p. 9)

As in a jazz piece, I express improvisational segments of learning-teaching-
playwriting-creating-knowing, via intuition, leaving openings in that dialogic, for learning
moments along the poet(h)ic-aesthetic pathway. A series of poet(h)ic moments will be shared
as well as critical observations and ruminations emerging from the playwriting process of
Visiting Griffin, towards the non-fixed place of three rivers’ confluence: playwriting, ethics,
and spirit.

**Poet(h)ic Moments**

> How shall we receive you who stand before us in this moment?
> (Fels, 2010, p. 2)

At this confluence of playwriting, ethics, and spirit, there are fleeting, ineffable
instants of seeing, towards an approach of poet(h)ic inquiry. Moments echo in
pronouncement, “a lingering note, which hopefully, like the ring of a temple bell, echoes and
re-echoes as it fades into silence” (Aoki, 1991, p. 34). Henriette (Act four) of Visiting Griffin
states: “Mais oui. The silence can be a place from childhood. Or it could be another sacred
place.”

*We co-exist in a delicate affiliation, energetic, sometimes momentary, across*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>presence-absence</th>
<th>light-shadow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>self-other</td>
<td>character-stranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audible voice-subtext</td>
<td>stage-real life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tangible place/non-fixed site</td>
<td>drama-stillness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound-silence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poet(h)ic moments are related to Denzin’s “ethical moments” (1997) and Fels’ “space-moments” (2010) related to her building on Applebaum’s (1995) “stop”: “a moment that arrests our habits of engagement, a moment within which horizons shift, and we experience our situation anew” (Fels, 2010, p. 4). In Visiting Griffin, poet(h)ic moments can be ephemeral, or they can be glimpses of clarity, insight, or resolve amid an ethic of survival. Through poet(h)ic inquiry, these moments of insight occur in the poet(h)os of the play, in non-fixed sites of urgency, danger, or exile, where leadership is positioned on the edge of social justice related to the ‘redemptivity’ of restorative justice (Smith, 2003), painful birth and transformation. Beneath an ethic of social justice, however, is an ethic of individual survival: “The fear of death pulls the self together” (Odysseos, 2002, p. 409). Henriette’s narrative about Blythe in Act one exemplifies an ethic of individual (survival ethos) justice:

HENRIETTE
She lost herself, I tell you. You can lose a baby and a boyfriend and a mother and a father and the best apartment you ever had, but do not lose yourself!

Odysseos (2002) refers to “the antithesis of friend/enemy” (p. 411), and contends that “this ethos of survival does not only underline the relation to the other, but also posits the self as the subject and object of responsibility” (p. 417). Thus, in the international arena, an ethical paradox occurs whereby for the sake of self, fear usually precludes universal morality. This means that even in contexts where humanitarian ethics are valued, an individual survival ethic usually predominates. Consequently, only a notion of transcendent morality (Kohlberg & Power, 1981) can overcome fear of loss of self. British Medical Journal (2003), eulogizes rabbi-philosopher-medic, David Applebaum, regarding insight
with respect to his training of both Arab and Jewish emergency medics in Jerusalem, thus ensuring urgent care coverage for both religions across all holy days. This action exemplifies moral forethought, and a rare and fearless self-transcendent spirit.

Arguably, the quest to address life’s unanswerable queries is the reason why ethical theory may be necessary in the first place. Visiting Griffin explores moral dichotomies intrinsic to relationships within education, theatre, spirituality as well as in other contexts, and quintessentially, within the self. Theatre is a place where moral paradox can be explored on stage where an aesthetic-ethic of transcendence is not only possible, but can be a necessary component of making a play ‘work.’ I resonate with Ricketts’ (2011) question: “If I am a museum of my own lived experiences, what are my artefacts?” (p. 4). The dramatic use of the prop which is Blythe’s grandfather’s artefact: a treasured Boxer Rebellion sword – symbol of war, history and pedagogy – is, however, an unlikely metaphor for Blythe’s “narrative inheritance” (Goodall, 2005, pp. 492-513). The storied sword is subsequently re-fashioned into an object of terror by insidious ‘Holy Matrimony’ gone awry. Henriette’s poet(h)ic moment of anguish (Act six), as she steps through a doorway into the past, tests her capacity to protect Blythe:

(HENRIETTE walks towards the frozen tableaux of FINNBAR and BLYTHE. She picks up the fallen Chinese sword, and positions herself behind FINNBAR poised to run the sword through him from behind.)

MABEL
Let her decide.

HENRIETTE
Decide what?! How to perform Last Rites on herself ?! (HENRIETTE pulls the sword away from FINNBAR angrily, and walks around to study the frozen tableaux.)

MABEL
It’s Blythe’s life.

HENRIETTE
It’s my life too! We are all connected in this lousy life! I had three miscarriages and Holy Crucifix, I’m telling you this story. *(HENRIETTE reaches out to touch BLYTHE’s brow, but it is like God and Adam on The Sistine Chapel ceiling. She can only reach her fingers to almost touch BLYTHE.*) She’s like…my… daughter….

Fels (2010) questions the ethics of broken innocence: “Will we be willing to imagine new narratives,” and she continues, “or shall the old narratives, the ongoing narratives, and those narratives yet to be written – those that break our sons (and daughters) of their innocence – prevail?” (p. 2). Henriette’s willingness to transcend the fear of losing her life or future incarceration for the sake of Blythe, is a poet(h)ic stage moment; this moment portrays the *yu-mu* of paradoxical confrontation with respect to truth, reality, choice, history, paradigms of victimization – even of time itself.

**Exile and Expatriation**

*How shall we sing the Lord’s song/ in a foreign land?* (Ps. 137:4)

During the process of writing *Visiting Griffin*, themes of exile, return from exile, expatriation and repatriation seemed to unfold despite a prior focus on ethical inquiry. These sub-themes naturally emerge as the character Blythe reflects poet(h)ically through a thread of memories connecting past, present, space, language, discourse, and socio-political climate: towards both knowledge and the unknown, presence and absence, linked to the *yu-mu* of dilemma, meaning and suffering. The notion of the *suffering exile* conceptualized by Freire
(2006), also informs the unfolding Griffin journey, and, interlaced with flashbacks, this becomes an extended relational journey that proves to be pedagogical, pastoral (in a rebellious sort of way), and poet(h)ic.

*Suffering exile* is more than knowing the reality of it. It requires embracing it with all the pain this embrace represents; this is the only way the exiled can prepare for the return. *Suffering exile* is accepting the tragedy of rupture, which characterizes the experience of existing in a *borrowed context.* (Freire, 2006, p. 67)

This notion of *borrowed context* is exemplified in various parts of *Visiting Griffin* where Blythe adopts a stance somewhere on a fragile continuum between role of the exploited and a truly contemporary prophetic role. In the context of multi-faith prophetic canon, the ancient Hebrew prophet’s visionary position was often one of alienation and exile, and as von Rad (1968) suggests, “a vale of deep suffering and even abandonment by God” which became a “unique kind of witness-bearing” (p. 18), a life that “meant relinquishing normal social life” and security (p. 37). It is a paradox that the prophet’s call allows him/her to “enjoy an entirely new kind of freedom” (p. 56), including “daring” writing and “treatments of poetic forms” (p. 57). In prophetic literature, “visions” are usually described in “first person singular” form (p. 41), and can include “symbolic picture(s)” (p. 45), costing what we know as psychological health: “where the prophet saw visions, and saw himself addressed, he became in a strange way detached from himself” (p. 42). Prophetic presence is usually found in less-than-safe places, often amid political turmoil. Within *Visiting Griffin,* contexts of (pedagogical, socio-political, psycho-spiritual) liminality and systemic shadow include: youth school-based drug cultures in the 1970’s, theatre communities linked to real life street justice, and a seminary in the early 1980’s (promoting gender equity) that is, in
actuality, a “whited sepulcher” (Matt. 23:27) of hidden harassment linked to domestic violence. In addition, revelation appears beyond the deconstruction of the concept ‘loony bin’ whereby generations of human voices have been silenced. In Visiting Griffin, exile is more than just a place; it is also a place within, a place of (dissociative) exile from the self, which often occurs in youth. Borg (2015) argues that this youthful stage is necessary:

The birth of the separated self – what we call ‘the fall’ – it is something we go through early in our own lives. We have all experienced this. Moreover it cannot be avoided; it is utterly necessary…. We cannot develop into mature human beings without self-consciousness. And yet it is a ‘fall’ – into a world of self-consciousness and self-centeredness, estrangement and exile. (p. 114)

Bickel propels this idea further, contending that exile from one’s embodied self is a significant exile even from language. In her work in art and women’s spirituality, Bickel (2010) confesses that: “the premise of my art practice is that humans have evolved into a place of exile from our bodies and in that, exiled from a body-based language” (p. 11). Blythe’s inner echo embodied in the character, Dancer, appears like a human talisman in every act within Visiting Griffin. Dancer guards the parallel movement journey of an apple, originally a prop from the Greenwich Village children’s theatre – to its becoming an emblem of life, survival, innocence, and freedom. Dancer is a continual reminder of an unorthodox and curious beckoning to come home to the yu-mu of knowing/unknowing a language of the sacred self, in a literacy of embodied movement transcending stasis in all its forms: societal, conceptual, dramatic, visual-spatial, and psycho-spiritual.

Even homecoming is no guarantee of transformation; within the inner world of homecomers, there may be residues of marginalization and an exiled identity. Roniger’s (2015)
study on displacement reveals a necessary reflexivity as post-exiles build “collective memory” (p. 2). This sense of communal memory is perhaps revealed best by Doña-Reveco’s translation (2012) of an excerpt from Palma Mora’s epilogue: “Exile, once it begins, never ends. The returnee, even glad of return, continues living in two worlds” (p. 27). In his hope-based pedagogy, however, Freire expresses redemptive hope of return from a non-fixed site of exile – ‘return’ as dynamic space-place that incorporates both light and shadow, related to Aoki’s ambivalent non-fixed site of yu-mu (presence-absence):

   Exile is a space-time dimension that one has not chosen, and where one arrives marked by rage, fears, suffering, early longing, love, broken hope, and also by a certain shy hope, one that signals return. (Freire, 2006, p. 66)

Visiting Griffin became longer than originally envisioned. I realized that in returning from multiple exiles, the characters needed to travel ‘home’ again, to a ‘promised land’ of innocence, silence, hope, pure creativity, and poet(h)ic relationship, such as in the purely ecstatic memory of the pioneer stone bridge over the brook in Connecticut (Act seven), where Blythe, Jannie and Becky arch over class, social, and racial distinctions to improvise their original play for local ducks:

   BLYTHE
   When Jannie was with us, we would act out our own story by the stone bridge which was our stage over the brook. The ducks were our audience and sometimes my little sister Becky watched too. We’d let her be in the play, if she behaved.

   Expatriation differs from exile in that it implies free will on the part of a self-selected expatriate, whereas an exile is not usually exiled by choice. In Visiting Griffin, Blythe’s family is re-located from Ontario, Canada to Connecticut, USA, for the sake of her father’s job in nuclear research. For the young Blythe, however, there may be little emotional
difference between expatriation and exile. Doña-Reveco (2012) translates Ana Montenegro’s reflection that “the exile carries a dual baggage that is both emotional and political; it is a conversation with the exile’s ghosts” (p. 16). Similarly, Blythe adopts the American culture, to the extent that she believes she is an American, and subsequently, she finds migration back to the new strange land of Canada near the end of kindergarten to be trauma-laden, post-JFK’s assassination. Literary critic Papayanis (2005) is one of the rare scholars who utilizes the term ‘poet(h)ic’ in the context of literary criticism, as she explores the ethics of the aesthetic journey of expatriate novelists who “can take us to the edge of what we are and what we are not. The point of fissure is a matrix” (p. xiii). Later, she contends that: “the committed wanderer achieves a productive self-estrangement that clears the way for creativity” (p. 145). Blythe’s wandering young self roams amid the tumultuous socio-political wake of the American sixties – somewhere between the civil rights movement and the dawn of literacy, between expatriate loyalty to the American flag and the rite of a first theatre experience. Here Blythe discovers her own edge, the place where creativity dwells, a place of self, and the dawn of an ethic of respect for ‘other’:

**BLYTHE**

I remember my bath with Jannie. It was like that mirror game in Theatre Arts class, where you face your partner and they mirror everything you do with your hands and feet. Jannie was trying to scrub herself raw. I said, “Why are you scrubbing so hard? I don’t even use soap. I just soak myself. I’m lazy compared to you.” And Jannie said:

**JANNIE**

(*scrubs herself with soap*) I’m scrubbin’ all the black off. (Act two).

Blythe’s brief expatriation on a school field trip to Paris offers freedom from white middle class ethos and from the tyranny of Finnbar. The “productive self estrangement” of visiting foreign lands conceptualized by Papayanis (2005, p. 145), characterizes Blythe’s
meeting of Paris-born Rose-Marie. Another parallel is Blythe’s ancestral link to her great grandmother, Jessie, whose visit to foreign places is sponsored by the Baptist Missionary Society of Scotland. Jessie’s missive of literacy, courage and faith as the pioneer founder and teacher of the school for girls in China (a nation where girls were not educated) is a multi-generational flashback that inspires Blythe’s fiercely independent spirit as she visits an icicle-overtaken hovel – unfamiliar, strange, and frightening – in the North End of Hamilton.

Visiting Griffin is not only a visit to the authentic Griffin, but that visit is a metaphor for all pedagogical-pastoral visits to the ‘vulnerable.’ It may be easier and in some peculiar way more accessible, to visit the vulnerable ‘other’ than it may be to visit the self. Although mountainous journeys by foot and donkey were common in China, I adopt poetic license in my fictional character, Hao Shen, the Buddhist monk who escorts Jessie thirty miles away through the Shanxi mountains to join her husband, who sought relief from tuberculosis in the “rarified atmosphere of the mountains” (Raymer, 2015, p. 21) in the Cave of a Buddhist Temple at Wu Jin mountain (Gold mountain). This place also represents a peaceful refuge from missionary persecution in the heart of an Eastern spiritual path. There, Jessie meets her husband within the paradoxical yu-mu of life’s passing, overlaid with an image of presence in the crested ibis. Here Griffin may be the ‘stranger’ vis-à-vis: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt. 25: 35). Here ‘stranger’ is the ‘other’ culture; this is a reversal of the assumption about the culture requiring precision spiritual care. The Cave in the Buddhist Temple is a sacred ritual place offering, dignity, closure, inner peace, and redemption to Jessie’s presence at the apex of Moir’s final absence. This unique and historic visit is the meeting place of Christian and Buddhist traditions in deep mutual respect and communion.

Timothy Richard resigned as Chancellor in 1910, thus symbolically handing over to
the Chinese, the future of Shanxi University. Richard advocated for the study of world religions in various schools and colleges across Japan and China (Richard, 1916; Johnson & Hamrin, 2015), in order to reflect his growing awareness of the need for diplomacy and education regarding a diversity of faiths; he translated two major scriptures into English from the Mahayana School of Buddhism: *The Lotus Scripture* written by an Indian Buddhist living in the second century Alexandria, and *The Awakening of Faith*, along with thematic parallels to the Gospel of John (Richard, 1916, pp. 337-340). Thus, both Duncan (first Principal) and Richard (first Chancellor) began their missionary quests hoping for tangible results in the form of conversions; ultimately, their careers in education culminated in wider inter-cultural acceptance across governments and traditions, built on genuine mutual respect and interfaith dialogue. This kind of connection across faith and cultural traditions is transformational, especially since my great grandparents and their missionary colleagues experienced this first hand. This history enriched my playwriting research experience, informing the protagonist Blythe’s vision, tenacity and capacity for facing difficult circumstances.

This history resonates with Aoki’s pedagogical-spiritual, hybrid notion of dialogue “that may help us to open ourselves to the pretextual realm that welcomes the belonging together of the language of the East and the language of the West” (Aoki, 1991b/2005, p. 399). In essence, emerging from poet(h)ic inquiry may be a notion of the potential ‘prophetic’ role of playwright (in and/or out of exile), at the rocky confluence of three brave rivers – that non-fixed point where playwriting dovetails with ethics and the spirit. The ‘prophetic’ may be an evolutionary component of ethical reflection and poet(h)ic playwright identity. In balance with a prophetic edge is the revealing of a pedagogical-pastoral or nurturing, grounding element, resonating with Aoki’s multi-culturally integrative sense of
language with respect to a “pretextual realm” (p. 399), which he argues is linked to Heidegger’s “Being” (1971/2001). These notions echo Hegel’s metaphysics of “Being” (Hegel, 1952/1977).

This story of the Duncans and Richards in late Imperial China finding respite in a multi-faith sensibility, also resonates with Merton’s travel writings, poems and meditations with Buddhist monks, wherein he found transcendent and aesthetic commonality vis-à-vis his contemporarily poetic-prophetic margins:

Are monks and hippies and poets relevant? No, we are deliberately irrelevant. We live with an ingrained irrelevance which is proper to every human being. The marginal man accepts the irrelevance of the human condition, an irrelevance which is manifested above all by the fact of death. The marginal person, the monk, the displaced person, the prisoner, all these people live in the presence of death, which calls into question the meaning of life. He struggles with the fact of death in himself, trying to seek something deeper than death, and the office of the monk, or the marginal person, the meditative person, or the poet is to go beyond death even in this life, to go beyond the dichotomy of life and death and to be, therefore, a witness to life. (Merton & Hart, 1968/1975, p. 306)

The Griffin Question

Griffin is the young female actor-poet who is mysteriously absent from Blythe’s teen theatre troupe while they work collaboratively on a playbuilding project. Thus Griffin’s absence from rehearsals involves the accumulative, collective building of a play (within a
play); hence, cast members might, understandably, decide to un-write Griffin’s part from their script. In fact, in hindsight I wonder whether an added short scene might depict ethical discernment in the form of discussion towards inclusion:

**Extra scene with ensemble:**

*(Voices of YOUNG WOMEN in a lively discussion rise up, overlap, and finally die down into silence.)*

YW 1
Where is Griffin anyway?

YW 2
Griffin isn’t here anymore. She abandoned us.

YW 3
So maybe we should write her out of the script.

YW 2
Yeah, I’m not sure if she belongs in our play anymore.

YW 3
She doesn’t care.

YW 4
She probably got a job. Waitress. Retail. Waitress. Retail.

YW 1
Barista. *(mimes turning on whipped cream spout over a mug with splutter of sound.)*

YW 2
We’ll probably run into her somewhere.

YW 3
I bet she’ll be back when she realizes how insane real life is out there.

YW 2
We could write her out and then write her in again if she shows up.

YW 1
What if she shows up and she sees we have, like, written her “out” and then how will she feel then? I’ll tell you. Like a reject.

YW 4
We could still put her name in the credits.

YW 1
Yeah, to show her contribution to the play.

ALL
Do we know her last name?

(YW look at each other, shrugging blankly. YW 4 writes on a piece of paper, and then reads it aloud.)

YW 4
OK then. No last name known. Griffin Griffin. Co-playwright.

As a playwright exploring poet(h)ic meta-theatricality, I want to include Griffin in the wider scripted journey. Blythe searches everywhere for Griffin in real time and space as well as in psychic space. Griffin plays herself trapped in the soul-desecrating, outdated psychiatric wing of the hospital. Thus, even on the margins, Griffin is allowed to keep her unique presence-absence in the troupe. Here yu-mu is inherent in the ethical dilemma regarding how to be a true artist in absentia? An ethic of respect and authorship demands that, somehow, Griffin, not be excluded. Jardine, McCaffery and Gilham (2014) begin to explore “how a pedagogy that turns away from suffering suffers a great loss, and how a pedagogy that turns towards suffering can become a locale of great teaching and learning, great wisdom and grace” (p. 5). Thus, Griffin’s loss of self/identity can best be incorporated into an open-ended drama embracing poet(h)ic relationality. In the paradox of yu-mu, Griffin can be gently pulled back into her deserved place in the dramatis personae of a larger story. In Visiting Griffin, Talia’s (2008) notion of “madwoman in the theatre” is manifested, quite literally, in Blythe’s symbolic pastoral visit (years after her ostracism as a minister candidate) to her young actor-poet, Griffin, in a ‘progressive’ psychiatric ward that boasts of a real piano; this
triggers meta-dramatic memories of Blythe’s plays within plays, as well as memories of her own incarceration. Blythe explores her voice as intelligent ‘madwoman’ who refuses to be silenced even in the oppressive ‘loony bin’ of the early eighties. Ironically, Griffin, the absent actor, becomes the actor ‘most’ present; Blythe’s liminal societal positioning becomes the ‘most’ ethical positioning; an undermining template of injustice reveals a world in eclipse, a world upholding what is ‘most’ just.

Blythe’s journey to find Griffin is fraught with (often perilous) memories of other significant visits. As the role of educators in the spiritual nurturing of learners has undergone restructuring due to secularization, Visiting Griffin opens the door to a suggested notion: the pastoral visit in education. Arduini (2004) positions spirituality in pedagogy, indicating his concern that in teaching, the “lack of clear connection with a deeper meaning has created a void” (p. 9). He argues that “spirit is a border crosser, a transgressor of linguistic and cultural boundaries” (p. 16). Spirit is found in two aspects, as Arduini suggests (2004): 1) the individual spirit or self/true self/soul, described as “the voice that enters the classroom is the songbird of the self”; and 2) the spirit as the “transcendence of individual experience” or “the songbird of the world” (p. 12). In Griffin’s case, she is not only out of the classroom and linked to an extra-curricular youth theatre program, but she is absent even from that. Griffin is clearly outside of the pedagogical grid, immersed in a hostile world where ‘transcendence’ may be the only way through a psycho-social-ethical chasm.

Parallel to the teaching profession, ‘hospital chaplaincy’ has also undergone secularization (Lee, 2002), being asked to justify its existence in “an increasingly pluralistic and culturally diverse” society (Swift, 2014, p. xi), often to be replaced by nurses and social workers entrusted with ‘holistic’ and ‘multidisciplinary’ functions such as interfaith
spiritual care for patients and families, particularly within palliative care (Walter, 1997).

Nonetheless, Blythe is determined to find Griffin in concealment, in her hidden grey ward, literally and metaphorically:

   BLYTHE
   I will slip in unobtrusively and then slip out again, like an exquisite, slippery fish, careening through the seaweed of the system, and no one will know who I was or why I was here.” (Act three)

Blythe’s role as ambassador of a situated poet(h)ic (dramatic-poetic, aesthetic-ethic) is key to addressing ethical, spiritual, and educational gaps across the healing team.

Boydell and colleagues (2012) indicate that many young people fall into psychiatric systems and subsequent stigma, coincidentally echoing Griffin’s story and those of her ward mates, with parallels to the young Blythe. This statistic has resulted in Canadian Institute for Health Research’s support of Boydell’s incorporation of dance in her research with young patients to “balance the despair and anguish of psychosis” towards de-stigmatization (CIHR, 2016). Hodgins & Boydell (2014) address systemic gaps within youth health and education regarding ethics, spiritual and existential life: questions related to truth and meaning. “Authorship and anonymity” are key ethical questions in Boydell’s dance project with young people experiencing a first psychosis; many preferred to be identified as “artist” rather than “patient” or “research participant” (p. 7).

‘Truth’ in Visiting Griffin is linked to ethical reflection towards exploration of the approach of poet(h)ic inquiry, which may best be expressed by artist identities over scenarios where research participants may fade, as students, patients, and ordinary citizens often do, into obscurity. Hence for those already on societal margins, the uncertainties of an artist’s life seem preferable over stigma, objectification, and anonymity. De Beauvoir (1975/1993)
writes: “I tore myself from the safe comfort of certainties to live for truth – and truth rewarded me” (p. 16). For his part, Caputo (2013) envisions living itself as a theatrical art form, and the self as unknowing:

Truth to tell, we do not know who we are – and that ‘is’ who we are. That is the little kernel of wisdom, and the grain of truth, of faith in truth, I serve up as I seek to make a graceful exit from the stage. We are that non-knowing and my final thought, my plea, my prayer – I am always praying – is to let that non-knowing serve to temper all we know and to nourish a faith in the future. (p. 258)

The poet(h)os of Visiting Griffin can be characterized, then, by exploration towards synthesis of my life’s work through the broader goal of future professional and personal integration of these strands of ethics (criteria) in dynamic poet(h)ic relationality, from all sides of pivotal healing (and educational) relationships: Blythe/Griffin, health care professional/patient, teacher/student, and director/actor relationships, as well as within peer/peer relationships representing power-equity.

Criteria Towards Poet(h)ic Inquiry

In Visiting Griffin, my research question can be re-considered in multiple playing arenas regarding proposed evaluative criteria with respect to the ethical strands in poet(h)ic inquiry, including:

(1) an ethic of meaning

(2) an ethic of justice

(3) an ethic of aesthetics
The quest for *an ethic of meaning* (and its connection to truth) in *Visiting Griffin* is pivotal and continuously unfolds, as Blythe uncovers layered meanings on her pilgrimage of the mystery of her absent student/actor Griffin, who may represent many. Ethical dilemmas interlaced with meaning in contexts requiring individual or social justice are often unresolved, but are nonetheless revealed and confronted and by the characters in various ways. For example, Blythe appears to take on the notion of vowed celibacy in her encounter with Jesuit novices in rural Oka, Quebec: “Comment allez-vous devenir prêtres si vous ne pouvez pas communiqué avec les femmes?” Subtitle B translates: “How are you going to be priests if you can’t relate to women?” (Act four). Significance and connotation is sought here with respect to nuances of meaning in languages, cultures, genders, and multi-faith contexts, within formal and informal education. Threads of memory revealed in *Visiting Griffin* portray various urban contexts (Toronto, Greenwich Village/ New York, Paris, Hamilton, Vancouver), and cultural specificities within these, where Blythe uncovers meaning in places of the past and in implications for the present. Meaning is sought by the assortment of characters in situated places and in non-fixed places of *yu-mu*: self and no-self, freedom and subjugation, knowing and unknowing, amid the presence and absence of ultimate meaning.

(2) An *ethic of justice* (socio-politically-historically and personally) is associated with risk. In *Visiting Griffin*, the quest for peace and justice is a major theme but at what cost? Reflection on this cost is reminiscent of the colloquial expression: ‘the cost of doing business.’ An ethic of justice is possibly always costly, personally and publicly, individually and collectively. Multi-layered notions of justice are sought by Blythe and by other
characters such as Blythe’s old history teacher; her activist mom, Adele, in the wake of civil rights; in Act four, by the monks of L’ Abbaye Cistercienne who, through silence, speak out against war: “Tu comprends? I swore my survival would be traded for a promise to become a Trappist monk;” by Gene, the peace-driven folk singer-songwriter who flees seminary confines; by Rev. Josh, hospital chaplain who champions the marginalized; and by Blythe’s father who uses his engineering skills to aid post-war Korea. Finally, there is the appearance of Bernice King, surviving daughter of Martin Luther King, who visits an important socio-political ‘Griffin’ in the form of Vancouver’s Walk of Reconciliation. Bernice King offers inspiration about worthy sacrifices intrinsic to an inherited life commitment to social justice. Blythe’s sense of justice brings meaning to her own life, as she rights some observable wrongs through her speech, language, action, and aesthetic.

(3) An ethic of aesthetics is encapsulated by the young Blythe’s act of donation to Rose-Marie, who once played Mariane in L’Avare and Tartuffe; Rose-Marie is now a beggar woman in the doorway of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. The two women share an uncanny bond in having played a common Molière character in the theatre. Here an aesthetic of Paris blends with an ethic of justice; Blythe sees beauty in Rose-Marie’s bittersweet life story: “I slipped my 25 francs into her nicotine-laced fingers as into brown lace gloves, which felt both warm and cold at once” (Act three). Rose-Marie freely receives the donation, playing on a ‘stage’ vis-à-vis the stages of her own life. This is a highly symbolic gesture; Blythe is an unrepentant rebel (albeit post postmodern) prophet(ess) across mainstream churches, schools, post-secondary education, hospitals, and contexts of systemic injustice.

Aesthetics in Poet(h)ic inquiry is linked to particular artistic choices regarding how theme and meaning is reflected in language, structure, characterization, plot, climax and
denouement within the dramatic interplay of voices, within multi-modalities such as dance and music, as well as across the voices and responses of spectators and among collective attitudes about what constitutes aesthetic knowing. The poetic philosophy of Keats (Keats & Bush, 1959), “Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all/ Ye need to know on earth, and all ye need to know” (p. 208), echoes across history, literature, and culture. Within Visiting Griffin beauty and truth are connected in an ethic-aesthetic that is part poetry, part drama, part dance. The field of aesthetics is itself a branch of ethics; hence, for many scholars, beauty and morality are inextricably linked.

(4) The criterion of an ethic of respect is a nod to indigenous scholarship (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005), wherein there are connections to a respect for authorship, and in the case of Canadian and American history, perhaps, respect for the original First Nations peoples who authored this continent. Indigenous scholarship inherently points to a sense of what I might term as nouveau prophétique on the topic of respectful authorship. Reflection on respectful authorship brings the following research-based theatre projects to mind: Boydell’s dance projects with young artist-patients in the mental health system (Boydell et al., 2012; Hodgins & Boydell, 2014); Ricketts’ dance Lugs in vulnerable urban communities (Ricketts, 2011); Norris’ playbuilding with young adult co-authors of Mirror Theatre (Norris, 2009); Belliveau’s layered and embodied autobiographical monologue: Brothers (Belliveau, 2015); Belliveau, Lea, and Valdez’ collaboration with returned Canadian Veterans (Contact! Unload, 2015); Gallagher’s drama with at-risk youth (Gallagher, 2007a, 2007b, 2014); Wager’s critical multimodal literacy co-authored project with street youth, Surviving in the Cracks (Wager, 2014); Beare’s Compassion Project in secondary school drama (Beare, 2011); and Vancouver Youth Theatre’s history of collaborative social-justice-based
playbuilding projects. Projects such as these grapple with ethics and are uniquely prophetic by speaking truth, whether it is comfortable or not: voice(s) of the people.

(5) Lastly, the ethic of integrated poet(h)ic relationality is not only an inquiry about interpersonal relationships and the psycho-spiritual notion of Aokian hito (self-other). This ethic also relates to theoretical and methodological integration. For Jackson (2005, 2007), the ‘aesthetic’ and ‘instrumental’ balance is pivotal within arts-based research. In Visiting Griffin, theme and structure often coalesce, in order to bring forth an integration of artistic and theoretical purposes. In essence, the play is ‘theatre researching itself,’ with respect to the efficacy and intrinsic value of theatre for education about justice, meaning and compassion. Because theatre is a necessarily embodied art form, live shared readings of Visiting Griffin allow for an expansive inquiry of the aesthetic/instrumental balance, adding a third possible balancing element of ‘ethics.’ Prendergast and Belliveau (2013) suggest that: “ideas should merge with emotions, inviting the audience to think and feel, experiencing the research-based theatre on multiple levels. The artistic aspects generate more potential for a more layered understanding and experience of the research shared” (p. 204). A reading of the first two scenes of Visiting Griffin by graduate students and professors at the Department of Language and Literacy Education in March, 2015, was essentially an inquiry towards an experiential aesthetic-ethical-theoretical balance, whereby participants could become actors who subsequently played characters as well as being listening spectators, only to return afterwards to their original roles as collegial scholars in interactive dialogue and poet(h)ic relationality.
Authorship and Sacred Literary Memory

More questions open up about the authorship of fictional and creative non-fictional characters. Do the characters have autonomy and do they author themselves? The sense of autonomy relates to “emotional memory” (Stanislavsky, 1936), wherein an actor explores her/his character through an in-depth psychological understanding of that character’s emotions, memories and motivations. A well-drawn character usually resonates with aspects of oneself, such that an actor playing that character may identify. Ferris & Lee (2013) argue for reflexivity in performing the self, which is a kind of performance genre in authorship. Whether one is a playwright, actor, director or empathic spectator, the journey of self, memory, and identity is key. Certainly this journey of self is characteristic of the poet(h)os of Visiting Griffin, not only with respect to the ‘self’ of Blythe, but to her parallel or opposing characters, whose journeys may echo Blythe’s but are, in fact, quite unique.

Visiting Griffin is comprised of characters birthed anew amid the fictive leap from historical material and non-fiction, requiring a particular kind of reflexivity, echoing the sense of “blurring of lines between fiction and non-fiction” (Iftekharuddin, 2003, p. 23). Writers often “lie openly to tell the truth, so that their ethical posture as storytellers lies in their aesthetic authority” (Abildskov, 2003, p. 26). However, in Blythe’s case, the strong memory of Jannie’s trip back to Harlem clearly differs from her mother Adele’s memory. Thus, the best literary question Blythe can utter is essentially: what ought to be truth in an equitable world? Blythe’s “aesthetic authority” (p. 26), then, springs from a spiritual locus of creativity, hope, and innocence. Moreover, in the liminal, shadowed spaces, truth may exist somewhere on the continuum between presence and absence (between yu and mu), or where
reality is disputed. In Act two, Blythe portrays an ethic of meaning and justice with reference to her ‘foster-sister’:

**BLYTHE**
I’ve always planned to go back to New York and find Jannie. This summer, my mother, who is eighty, finally told me that Jannie most likely died in Harlem before she was eight years old, which would have been about 1964. Maybe Jannie fell off the fire escape like her friend did. I wept when I heard this because I felt like I’d lost a sister. No, not lost, really, as some kind of holy literary memory has kept Jannie alive. Sometimes, you remember things the way they ought to be.

Blythe’s ‘sacred literary memory’ encapsulated by the family Plymouth’s triumphant return with Jannie to her tenement courtyard is, then, both exploration of a transformed personal story, and vision of a new Harlem. Subsequently, my reframed sense of ‘sacred literary memory’ is informed by what W. O. Mitchell dubbed ‘Mitchell’s Mission Band at the typewriter’ in his Writer in Residency at York University (1977); this is an apt metaphor for a writer’s ‘sacred’ vocation, where authorship is inherent to a sense of ‘calling.’ This memory-anchored writing technique is what W.O. Mitchell’s son and literary critic, Ormond Mitchell refers to as ‘reminiscent style’ fiction writing (Mitchell, 1988).

Further to this notion of a ‘call’ to authorship, Leuchter (2011) refers to the “prophet’s call narrative” (p. 94), to “prophetic utterance” (p. 114) and to “prophetic personality, where this literary persona forms the authoritarian basis for norms of devotion above and beyond older standards and praxes” (p. 114). The ancient vocation of Hebrew prophets, although bound by their call, held a paradoxical “prophetic office in its unique freedom” (von Rad 1968, p. 57). Authorship, however, related to autonomy, is a kind of freedom. As a rare exception from the custom of scriptural anonymity, Hebrew prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and others were specifically named: “A remarkable facet of this attainment of personality by the prophets was that their messages were issued under their
own names,” and “in the case of the prophets a message was uniquely bound up with the name of a single person, and he alone could be regarded as responsible for it” (von Rad, 1968, p. 57). Arguably, by nature of its disruption of the status quo, a prophetic-style message in advocacy of justice may demand unambiguous authorship and hence, clearly named authors; this may indeed be an argument for respectful authorship.

Subtext and Authorship

BLYTHE
I think in gilded calligraphy subtext. I do have a light. (Act three)

The playwright’s mysterious identity is distinguishable yet complementary to designated roles of actor, director, dramaturge, stage manager and so on. In Visiting Griffin, the playwright’s interior voices dovetail with the play’s voices, visions, layers, text, and subtext (unspoken dialogue between the lines), as well as across interlaced memories of past-present-future. During the process of creating Visiting Griffin, as playwright, I am most accountable to the self and to interior dramatic voices, whereby even stage directions can be classified as another voice, or thread of discourse. Talia (2008) reflects on process for Canadian women playwrights regarding an “implicit self-reflexivity” found often in “an ironic subtext, introduced on the level of structure and/or characterization” (p. 42). Talia also points out how didascalia (stage directions) “highlight the playwright’s intentions in ways that allow a reader, if not an audience, to interpret the playwright’s underlying intentions” (p. 42). Baboulene (2010) conceptualizes subtext as a “knowledge gap” in relationships: between authors and characters, characters and other characters, parts of a script, between
readers and/or audiences. In essence, then, in an oblique way, whether seul(e) in a writer’s garret sojourn, or in a basement suite among collegial arachnids, the author is accountable to the captivating, magnetic ambiguity of an Aokian (hito) ‘self-other’ relationship of text to subtext. Ethical relationality through sub-textual poet(h)ic relationship in its many forms is explored in Visiting Griffin through collegiality, platonic friendship, romantic friendship, enmyship, systemic glory, ambiguity or oppression, mentorship, kinship, citizenship and patriotism, as well as through an ethical relationship to universal truth: being, becoming, interfaith notions of God, God defined as God becoming (theopoetics, process theology), and I-Thou. Ultimately, at the heart and soul of ethico-spiritual definition/re-definition, there is the critical, mutable, and passionate relationship to (hito) self-other (Aoki, 1995/2005).

\[
\frac{\text{self}}{\text{other}} = \frac{\text{self}}{x} = \frac{\text{Blythe Griffin}}{\text{visiting Griffin}} = \frac{\text{text}}{\text{subtext}}
\]

Figure 1 - Self/other equation

As in a mathematical equation where \( x \) is the variable, ‘other’ changes across diversity of context such that the ‘self’ needs to adapt, understand, tolerate, harmonize, and to seek equity and cohesion. Ideally, we may work together towards creating microcosms of justice towards global peace. Questions continue and in the continual asking, in the continual wrestling with ethical issues and a poet(h)ics of morality, and in the playing of various parts on stage or in life, we commit to seeking truth, justice, beauty, mutual respect and a poet(h)ic...
sensibility that leads the way through shadowed valleys of sub-textual confusion into integrated light.

Production Notes

Within the script of Visiting Griffin, I have included stage directions although I am aware that a Director’s interpretation of the script would be unique. In production terms, a theatre company would find the mounting of this long multi-act and multi-character play impractical, unless it is carefully adapted for a theatre company’s means and intentions, with six to eight actors playing multiple parts each. Harris and Sinclair’s Critical Plays (2014) presents a similar scenario as the authors inquire into research and pedagogical debates through “playwriting as method,” wherein “the notion of multiple truths and multiple perspectives was played out through the act of writing itself” (p. 3). Critical Plays parallels Visiting Griffin in that both can be read silently, publicly, or produced as live theatre, while also serving as a catalysts for discussion and reflection. Belliveau (2015) advocates for a fully embodied dissemination, contending that, “theatrically performing research is arguably what lies at the heart of research-based theatre” (p. 12).

The process of post-play reflection will extend beyond the parameters of the dissertation. Scenes and themes within the larger play may serve as catalysts for possible later writing projects. For example, the Jessie Duncan story, which is the grounding for an inter-generational narrative, informs the decision for Blythe to enter seminary amid the theo-politically tumultuous eighties. Ultimately, the whole Jessie Duncan story, which is based on letters, memoires, and other documents (Raymer, 2000, 2015), might best be explored in a
future play, screenplay, or poetic/poet(h)ic-narrative work. This larger story involves moving towards an exploratory understanding of the pedagogical, socio-political, historical, colonial, intercultural, and psycho-spiritual aspects of this family narrative.

*Visiting Griffin* explores meta-theatricality; plays are referenced within the play as well as scenes where Blythe as an actor plays characters in scenes that parallel scenes, stories and ethical dilemmas from her own life. These plays within plays explore the nature, meaning and efficacy of theatre itself, as well as inter-textuality, whereby Molière, Tremblay, Shakespeare, Miller, Chekhov, and other dramatists, offer grounding within the historiographical theatrical fabric. On a reflexive note, I find it interesting that meta-theatrical references in *Visiting Griffin* are exclusively linked to the works of male playwrights, who, through the voices of their female characters (albeit spoken with sensitivity, compassion, and authority), address societal gender inequities of their respective time periods; this expresses a kind of secondary authorship. This pattern reflects my early education between 1963 to the early 1980’s, when curricula did not include the study of female playwrights. Even characters depicting mentors of women in literature were often male. In the aside about her quandary regarding a job offer at a Yonge Street club, the young Blythe refers to the novelist Margaret Laurence (1974):

BLYTHE
(aside) But what if I see people there I know? A former teacher? The minister? I would die from embarrassment and so would they. I would know everything, all the things people want to hide…. I would be like Christy, from *The Diviners*. Like tea leaves, he read the town’s garbage.⁵⁰ (Act one).
Blythe’s rebellious, theatre-loving character is a product of this era. For Blythe, theatre is perhaps, transcendent, although the Agent’s presence reminds her of her alternatives: “Nobody loves Theatre that much” (Act one).

Nonetheless, Visiting Griffin can now be situated among the international canon of plays by female playwrights. In Contemporary Women Playwrights Into the Twenty-First century, editors Farfan and Ferris (2013), note a “chronic under-representation of female playwrights” (p. 4) in theatre history, and these authors posit the importance of “playwriting as a means of writing women into and re-imagining history” (p. 8). In a poet(h)ic sense, ethical queries within women’s artistic autonomy are also evident in the historiographical realm of women composers, who, for centuries, like playwrights, novelists, poets, and artists, have struggled for professional acceptance. Citron (1993) refers to the historical “threat of female creativity” in literature, art, and music (p. 71), and later states: “For women creators a potential means of expurgating the negative myths of women in works by men is the construction of a female aesthetic: women composers creating their own definition of self” (p. 75). Ferris and Lee (2013) argue that “the actress character has served as a touchstone for a variety of issues linked to gender disparity and aesthetic autonomy” (p. 216), including the historical assumption that the actresses were automatically “lascivious and immoral” (p. 219). These authors exemplify this through reference to Playhouse Creatures, “Gwyn’s declaration, “I’m an actress, not a tart” (p. 34), betrays an understanding that if a woman is to be taken seriously as an artist, the two identities must be treated as mutually exclusive” (p. 220). In Visiting Griffin, Blythe struggles with the ethics of being a true actress versus an exploited female club performer, thus revealing the duality and fragility of women’s bodies on stage. This dichotomy of the female theatre professional with
its risks of possible objectification, continues throughout Blythe’s varied career and life. Ferris & Lee’s (2013) work helps to ground the socio-economically marginalized, historic role of ‘actress’ among the various acting roles played by Blythe in Visiting Griffin: Mariane from Molière’s *The Miser* (1668/1953) and Elizabeth Proctor from Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953/1982), in addition to Blythe’s ‘Mariane’ counterpart from Paris (Rose-Marie), and various characters played in her seminary drama group. Blythe stands up, with theatrical finesse, in the role of a woman preacher for her seminary class presentation, as if cast in yet another play with hostile critics. Later, she poses in silence in her job as a university art department model in the character of Velma, representing Blythe’s first pastoral visit to Hamilton’s inner city. Blythe also poses as Mary Magdalene, a figure of biblical literature linked with bridal mysticism, incorporating many aspects of the divine feminine (Bourgeault, 2010); the Magdalene is associated with crucifixion and empty tomb narratives, hence being the subject of numerous paintings and sculptures across centuries of art (Lahr, 2006). In posing for these two paintings, Blythe speaks the silence of lost dreams. Lastly, through the theme of meta-theatricality prevalent throughout Visiting Griffin, Blythe’s professional role as teacher-director of a young collaborative playbuilding ensemble allows her to explore aesthetic-social justice praxis while making her pilgrimage to the place of obscurity where Griffin waits.

**Director’s Vision**

Essentially, a Director aims to integrate her/his artistic vision across several disciplines in order to direct a stage performance with connectivity to audiences (Prospects,
2015). This vision may echo the poet(h)ic theme of the play *Visiting Griffin* linked to philosophical choices, research intentions and questions. In essence, then, a director’s interpretive vision might involve awareness of an emancipatory intent including a poet(h)ics of respect for the self as director, respect for the essence of the characters, including their psychological impact on the actors playing them, and the potential impact on spectators, including ‘prophetic’-style confrontational material. A director may adopt an objective towards respectful mutuality, among members of a cast who would be selected to play the characters – across gender, culture, language, ability, and socio-economic backgrounds. In sum, one would hope for acquired respect for meanings created together as a diverse cast collective – similar to values shared by a playbuilding ensemble – within a context of embodied co-creativity.

**Genres, Literacies and Modalities**

The context for this study falls under the umbrella of research-based theatre (Belliveau & Lea, 2011, 2016; Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013), encompassing multiple genres, literacies and modalities. The multi-faceted aspect of genre (Frow, 2005) becomes another area of reflection. As I identify as a multi-genre writer, I realize that although I primarily engage in theatre (playwriting), there are elements of other genres within the context of *Visiting Griffin*, as some scenes exemplify a multidisciplinary approach within the primarily dramatic play structure, including poetic, narrative and fictive elements. In *Visiting Griffin*, there are poetic passages, as well as actual poems included within the script, which may be accompanied by poetic and/or music-inspired choreography, as well as songs sung
and musical transitions. The playwriting process also feels like writing a novel, as I include interior monologues and monologues depicting journal entries; the play overarches a whole lifetime, as well as several generations, time periods, and locations, including multiple voices and layers, as in the context of a novel.

As I explore poet(h)ic inquiry through this self-designed medium, I am reminded of the “author’s subjectivity” (Richardson 2000, p. 937), and Prendergast & Belliveau’s (2013) “inter-subjective relation to the topic” (p. 203). Committing to a writing practice through playwriting demands a continual reflexivity, whereby insights are gleaned through a natural dialectic that evolves across multiple genres, voices, and possibilities, often through the exploration of antithetical viewpoints of characters, situations, ethical dilemmas, and following through to creative synthesis.

For example, there is a tribute to visual arts in Visiting Griffin. Paintings depict Blythe as various liminal characters modeling for her artist friend, Belle, thus becoming part of a new genre. The sacredness of ‘becoming art’ is illustrated in Bickel’s (2010) arts-based research projects where:

- the individual women bridged the divide between the individual and the universal self. In becoming art, they became Divine. The role of women’s spiritual leadership and teaching in service of the decolonization of the Divine, was revealed in the sometimes unsettling intersections of the private and public spheres of women. (p. 19)

I argue that one can ‘become art’ in diverse ways and through myriad genres, literacies, and modalities. The act of modeling during her life transition, presents an “unsettling intersection” (Bickel, 2010, p. 19) for Blythe, who models for artist, Belle, in
silent receptivity. As such, Blythe undergoes a process of unknowing and un-writing the self, a contemplative self-absence, and a reflexivity of absence (muy). The attempt to convey this mystical-aesthetic process in written script format is a challenge; it may require the expertise of a director to bring text to playing space, and thus to re-create a ritual ambience, the ultimate creative synthesis within a genre that privileges the theatrical.

Nonetheless, Visiting Griffin reveals a sense of multi-genre interplay within the structure of a written stage play. My vision as a playwright is reminiscent of the multi-genre writer (poet, fiction-writer, playwright), James Reaney. Memorable are Reaney’s collage-montage-style plays such as Colours in the Dark (Reaney & Hay, 1969) and The Donnellys Trilogy – Sticks and Stones: The Donnellys, Part I (Reaney, 1975), The St. Nicholas Hotel, Wm. Donnelly, Prop: The Donnellys, Part II (1976), and Handcuffs: The Donnellys, Part III (1977). I was present at the premieres of the Trilogy at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto; I was influenced by the docudramatic vignette style of those Reaney plays which included tableaux, choral sections, songs, short poetic passages, one-line reflections, diary entries and dramatized newspaper clippings about the Donnelly family. Another memorable experience was seeing Toronto Workshop Production’s premiere run of Ten Lost Years about the Great Depression directed by George Luscombe (1974/1983), a docudrama that “juxtaposed storytelling, dialogue and music in a complex collage” (Filewood, 2007/2013, p. 1). Ten Lost Years was a collective creation whereby actors played multiple parts and used props in innovative ways. Luscombe (1974/1983), worked collectively whereas Reaney was a sole playwright, although both worked in an era of collage-like experimental theatre, whereby excellent theatre is generated on a modest budget with an ensemble, simple sets, costumes, and props. A vignette style with simple sets and costume pieces is also frequently used
within Vancouver Youth Theatre’s history of social issue-based original playbuilt plays. In retrospect, I see that my poet(h)ic inquiry includes aspects of collective creation, reminiscent of memorable Toronto plays of the 1970’s. During the process of writing Visiting Griffin, I found myself immersed in the re-reading of favourite plays, upon which I reflected critically, often with a sense of detachment; this helped me to better situate my own play in the history of drama.

The Tarragon Theatre is also where I attended premiere runs of Tremblay’s Hosanna (September, 1974) and Bonjour, Là, Bonjour (winter, 1975). Hosanna was my first play at an intimate Toronto theatre, the kind of studio space where one can literally sit forward over the edge of front row seats to feel the breath of actors across an invisible fourth wall. Tremblay’s ground breaking multi-layered gender identities portrayed in Hosanna featured Richard Monette (professional actor) who plays the character Michel Ouimet (man), who in turn aspires to play Hosanna (drag queen) who wants to be “the real Elizabeth Taylor [actress] not the papier mâché one” (Tremblay, 1974/1973, p. 81), as the ancient queen Cleopatra makes her entrance into Rome. Other plays by Tremblay such as En Pièces Détachées (1972), Les Belles Soeurs (1979/1968), Sainte-Carmen of the Main (1981/1976), Albertine, en cinq temps (1984), and Bonjour, Là, Bonjour (1988/1974), all feature important characters who are actresses, exotic performers, singers, barmaids, prostitutes and other indigent women or transgendered men, who, within fundamentalist paradigms, may be perceived to be of ‘questionable’ moral character. These themes link to literature reviews addressing scholarship with respect to third wave feminism and queer theory (Farfan & Ferris, 2013, p. 7), and to the story of Emanuel Jaques (Scaachi, 2013), the 12 year old Portuguese Canadian shoeshine boy who was murdered in a Club on Young Street in 1977. This heartbreaking
story informs Canada’s historical directional change towards social justice regarding the street objectification of women, girls, and vulnerable boys, including perhaps, the feminine side of men. Henriette and Mabel offer their tribute to Emanuel Jaques, the young immigrant boy who deserved a better Canada; Emanuel is a parallel to the young Blythe in his symbolic and sacrificial innocence.

The sense of aesthetic detachment from my play and its process, fosters analytical insights such as these, and a desire to contextualize my work in the larger tapestry of literary, dramatic and historical work. In my enjoyment of Tremblay plays, I resonated deeply with French Canadian (especially feminine) angst, which contributed in part, to the creation of Henriette, my fond tribute to Tremblay’s diverse female characters, often from lower or working class Montreal, whose darkly comic monologues offer timeless portrayals of poverty of spirit, injustice, truth, and courage. I also visited my grandmother frequently in Quebec as a child; thus, the bilingual ethos of Quebec is a natural part of my inquiry. I explore themes in a dramatic genre that I also explore in my short fiction anthology-in-progress, set in the Eastern Townships of Quebec (Duff, 1997, 2000b, 2000c, 2001).

In Visiting Griffin, Henriette’s unlikely best friend is an older woman about her age, Mabel, an Irish Canadian Protestant woman, in counterpoint to Henriette. Mabel, also from a working class background, was raised in an English-Irish family in Ontario. The two women embody the meeting place of their respective identities over antique teacups, hearkening back to MacLennan’s Two Solitudes (1945/2008):

Two old races and religions meet here and live their separate legends, side by side. If this sprawling half-continent has a heart, here it is. Its pulse throbs out along the
rivers and railroads; slow, reluctant and rarely simple, a double beat, a self-moving reciprocation. (p. 5)

At the very least, Henriette and Mabel offer hope of moving past the anti-English sentiments described in Roch Carrier’s *La Guerre Yes Sir!* (1968/1970). On one level, Mabel epitomizes the *Maudit Anglais* explained in Carrier’s translator’s note as “goddamn Englishmen” (Fischman, 1968/1970, p. 2), except that she may be redeemed in Henriette’s eyes by her non-pretentious working class background, and by their linked concern for the young Blythe.

The question remains: What about Blythe herself? Chorus-like supporting characters, Henriette and Mabel are much like eccentric fairy godmothers to Blythe, giving the play frame and context, as they watch over her miseries, triumphs, and narrow escapes over endless cups of tea sipped from old fashioned floral china cups and saucers. What does Blythe learn, or realize, then, under the guardianship of these two unlikely angels? Blythe may learn that she needs ‘other’ in order to face ‘self.’ As a playwright, I need the aesthetic ‘other,’ the voice(s) of imagination, in order to speak a meaningful truth. From the perspective of a (reflexive) literary critic, I adopt a posture of detachment from my own play and its process; this fosters analytical insights to match a key evaluative criterion in my research question towards poet(h)ic inquiry: the sense of integrated ethical relationality in moments of teaching-learning-creativity-playwriting-knowing.

With respect to Henriette and Mable: their conversational, sometimes bilingual presence-absence provides a metaphysical *yu-mu* characterizing Blythe’s poet(h)ic struggle, in counterpoint to Dancer, whose linguistic skills are limited to the symbolic and non-verbal. Here Blythe may learn the value of kinesthetic silence, the mysterious inner dance of the Aokian *hito*. After her immersion in Quebec French Catholic culture, Blythe reflects in both
languages: “I never ever want to leave here. There is wisdom within silence I found this week at the Abbey. Je veux toujours avoir une vie intérieure” (Act four). As a playwright, I observe my characters while learning about the interplay of these layers, languages and literacies, voices and silences. At the watery confluence of playwriting, ethics and spirit, a sense of poet(h)ic synthesis is not stasis, nor is it rigid nor simple, but rather, fluid, moving, and complex, like a river.

**Role of Dancer in Visiting Griffin**

*There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

(Eliot, 1944/1968, p. 15-16)

Dancer is knighted with the sword that had once been a weapon in China’s Boxer Rebellion, only to become an artefact in Canada, and then again, a weapon, and finally, an amulet of peace. I was uncertain how to bring completion to the Dancer’s journey, and thus, the ending surprised me. My unfolding inquiry as a playwright allowed a final image of Blythe’s ‘knighting the dancer’ to emerge, an image faithful, perhaps, to notions of multimodality and transmediation, and to embodied ways of teaching-learning-creativity-playwriting-knowing. In poet(h)ic inquiry, the non-speaking role of Dancer may represent the flowing river of an unseen spirit or *yu-mu* at the confluence of playwriting, ethics, and spirit. Dancer is a celebration of the embodied sense of self in *yu-mu* (presence-absence), the final scene being a tribute also to the poet(h)ic synthesis of interdisciplinarity. The pivotal character of Dancer, compatriot to Blythe, communicates a powerful literacy of silence via an apple - a symbol that traverses time and wilderness of soul amid the *yu-mu*, chaos and
howling winds of Blythe’s life – reminiscent of an ethic of meaning, justice and aesthetic in the paradoxical wisdom within the dynamic relationship of the Fool to King Lear.

**Super-Objective and the Future**

Blythe’s super-objective \(^5\) (Stanislavski, 1936) and perhaps the one she bestows upon her protégé, Griffin (or that Griffin inherits), is that of triumph of “self and the language of self” (Act eight). Most of the characters in Visiting Griffin also seek a ‘language of self’ as they gasp for air in the undercurrents of social injustice. High stakes in Visiting Griffin are the soul defying situations where ethics have been abandoned for the appearance of normalcy, quasi-legitimate cloaked power differentials and the (albeit cryptic) languages of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) that are linked to issues of prison justice (Foucault, 1975, 1982), in addition to truths about human rights atrocities emerging from anti-psychiatry \(^5\) (Szasz, 2011), and the psychiatric survivor liberation movement (Weitz, 2002, 2015). Bracken and Thomas (2010) argue for a critical psychiatry that values process, critique of the pharmaceutical industry, the development of medical discourse “sensitive to the issue of meaning” (p. 226), and the creation of “spaces in which excluded voices can be heard” (p. 227); this resonates with Boydell’s arts-based dance approach (Hodgins & Boydell, 2014). Burstow’s (2015) *Psychiatry and the Business of Madness: An Ethical and Epistemological Accounting* offers the notion of ‘mad literacy,’ which informs Blythe’s interpretation of the role of metaphor in diagnosis. Moreover, the sense of metaphor in madness resonates further with phenomena such as unexplained manifestations of illness, inner chaos and exile, dark nights of soul, near death experiences, cacophonies of sound and
light, and kundalini awakening, all characteristic of the mystic-contemplative’s journey (Greenwell, 1995; Roberts, 1993). In the cave of the Buddhist Temple (Act six), Blythe’s great grandfather experiences delirium and self-emptying, while paradoxically, he also appears to reach mystical communion with both humanity and the ground of Being (Aoki, 1991a/2005; Hegel, 1952/1977; Heidegger, 1971/2001). In essence, then, in the mysterious realm of ‘madness,’ there may be a natural intersection of ethics and spirit, in connection with the Aokian hito: self/other.

The importance of considering this critical link between ‘self’ in relation to ‘other,’ is evident, as Blythe and her various companions navigate through hidden oppression and ethical short-sightedness within social, educational, medical, and religious structures. In these non-fixed sites, self-other or hito (Aoki, 1995) and I-Thou (Buber, 1958) exist in absentia. It would appear that soul oblivion has taken over in situations heralding absence akin to the boundary-less waste land (Eliot, 1922/2001) among ‘hollow men’ (Eliot, 1961/1967), or its inter-textual poetic response whereby women’s “hollow bodies” (Duff, 2006) are “mangers for messianic hope/ among crucifixions scheduled for dawn” (p. 21). This parallels Blythe’s meta-dramatic world: “I was in a play I couldn’t get out of” (Act one), hearkening to the “dangerous emotional terrain” listed as a potential ethical hazard in some arts-based research projects (Boydell et al., 2012, p. 4). Then again, according to Ermine (2007), this hollow, wasteful place might point to hope in “the ethical space of engagement” (p. 194). For this indigenous scholar, this space is “initially conceptualized by the unwavering construction of difference and diversity between human communities,” where “two sets of intentions confront each other” (p. 194). With reference to Act eight, Blythe’s “self and language of self” offers a world where truth and beauty à la Keats and
Tagore is sought at any cost, even truth amid the mad, hollow, empty places, and the power imbalances and warring intentions of the societies in which Blythe seeks education and in which she will subsequently enrol in her own self-educated brand of justice and justice-seeking. Tagore’s (1915) rendering of ‘aesthetic consciousness’ depicts an Eastern philosophical-spiritual lens wherein

To restore harmony we create the discords which are a feature of all reactions. We already see in the present age the sign of this aesthetic reaction, which proves that man has at last come to know that it is only the narrowness of perception which sharply divides the field of his aesthetic consciousness into ugliness and beauty. When he has the power to see things detached from self-interest and from the insistent claims of the lust of the senses, then alone can he have the true vision of the beauty that is everywhere. Then only can he see what is unpleasant to us is not necessarily unbeautiful, but has its beauty in truth. (pp. 77-78)

What, then, are the future implications of an aesthetic of truth and the potential applications of poet(h)ic inquiry? At the tail end of my own research endeavour (or the beginning, as ends and beginnings coalesce), I recall Ermine (2007), who maintains that, “the sacred space of the ethical helps us balance these moral considerations as we discuss issues that are trans-cultural, or trans-boundary in nature” (p. 196). We are humbly beginning to listen and heed the wisdom and spiritual leadership of indigenous communities. That ‘sacred’ and ‘ethical’ reverberate together in the voices of scholarship may be a possible sign of a (post-secularization) re-spiritualization of ethics. In the field of educational research, this ethico-spiritual trend may move, slowly, as one moves slowly, towards more inclusive practices of universality embodied in intercultural/interfaith dialogue, and within a lifelong
learning curve regarding the meaning of respect for all species and lands. This may be the only way to move forward in this shared intercultural struggle for peace, hope and sustainability. ‘All the world’s a stage’ reverberates. Our very lives are meta-plays within larger plays, such as within the graphic international media dramas depicted daily in a dialogic of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the temporal ‘comfort’ of our own homes. Poet(h)ic inquiry regarding a Canada-US cross-border ethics in Visiting Griffin, with references to other nations, is indicative of the crux of the desperate need for sound future-oriented ethical inquiry in a world enslaved by a chronic global humanitarian-ecological crisis. Liberation from no-self, suffering, and divisive ideologies as in the Sanskrit term mukti\(^{53}\) (Chatterjea, 2003) – made substantial in ethical action – may be possible through poet(h)ic inquiry in a soul-mind-body integration. For Chatterjea (2003), mukti is also linked to knowledge. Here at the confluence of creativity (playwriting encompassing multiple genres), ethics and spirit, there may be a knowing of freedom through redemptive hope. Denzin’s (2003) imagistic statement alludes to the Pauline poetic pattern of I Corinthians 13:

> Hope is ethical. Hope is moral. Hope is peaceful and nonviolent. Hope seeks the truth of life’s sufferings. Hope gives meaning to the struggles to change the world. Hope is grounded in concrete performative practices, in struggles and interventions that espouse the sacred values of love, care, community, trust, and well-being. (Denzin, 2003, p. 229)

I Corinthians 13: 7 espouses a similar lyric: “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” As there is a risk of de-ethicizing universal notions of ‘love and ‘hope,’ I balance this imagery with T. S. Eliot’s stark metaphor encapsulating the Aokian yu-mu (presence-absence) within a poet-contemplative’s journey:
To arrive where you are, to get to where you are not,

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy. (Eliot, 1944/1968, p. 29)

**A Response to Visiting Griffin**

After completing the first draft of the play and the knighting of Dancer, I attended a writer’s workshop facilitated by Dr. Ahava Shira (2010) at the Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of British Columbia (June 12, 2015). This final reflection emerges from the context of that workshop, where first I wrote down my memory of the T.S. Eliot stanza:

> We shall not cease from exploration
>
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
>
> And know the place for the first time. (Eliot, 1944/1968, p. 59)

My story begins at the end, at the end of the ancient Ponasses Path, blazed by a First Nations chief, heralding the origins of North America. Blythe is a daughter of her time on multidisciplinary levels – theoretical, methodological, geographical, historical, socio-political, and psycho-spiritual. The stone bridge (stage) over that brook in Connecticut where three young girls (Blythe, Jannie, and Becky) enact a drama of *hito* within their bravery of imagination, is the antihero of stages. Nonetheless, Blythe is a cross-border daughter of the essential bridge (literal and literary, conceptual and pedagogical), that links two spot-lit
nations on the post-colonial world stage: the United States of America and Canada, with echoes of the old country (Scotland, Europe) and winds from the East (China, Asia). Aoki (1996a) continually reminds us of the importance of bridges: “East and West is rendered as a binary of two separate preexisting entities, which can be brought together to conjoin in and ‘and’” (p. 3). Aoki continues, “But on this bridge which we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact such bridges lure us to linger” (p. 3).

At this bridge between languages, cultures, faiths, and the nuances of hope, there is ultimately a bridged path beyond exile and expatriation, and a connection “costing not less than everything” (Eliot, 1944/1968, p. 59), that is an unwavering commitment to peace and with it, the necessary sacrifices of *hito*, and loyalty to psycho-social-spiritual justice. Bernice King’s historic speech at the *Walk of Reconciliation* in Vancouver featured in *Visiting Griffin* bridges US-Canada relations on the issue of equality. She speaks words of encouragement to First Nations, spiritual and social justice leaders as she recites the old spiritual: “Walk together, children. Don’t you get weary” (LTA Productions, Sept. 22, 2013). Daughter of Martin Luther King Jr., Bernice parallels Blythe’s ironic (if iconic) role as daughter of the nuclear age, and her equally prophetic role as daughter of peace.

A new poet(h)ic inquiry emerges from prior questions: ‘Self and other becoming’: where do we travel now as we begin at that non-fixed place of *yu-mu* in our final paradox, in the last scene of this journey?

In ethico-spiritual essence, birth and death co-exist on one stage.
Here I stand
the ever-beginning
eyes ancient, young, and dim from age
as mute director for the eyeless Gloucester
ask my servant to wipe up all bloodstains of inhumanity
vainly, with a small damp kerchief
while there is still time
before the next Act

I look out: the birth of life,
of language.
I see ‘more and less’ and ‘both and and.’
I look to silent corners, the place promised

our invisible third river
floods with unseen, untellable currents
drinkable water sources
springs, whitecaps,
all wine turned back into water
(because wine on time’s slate precipice is useless)

we share among all who still breathe:
mammal, tree, grain, bird, fish, human

*that milk of forgiveness*

it is not milk
it is water

*Griffin is, of course, the self*

not the christ nor the zen
nor jew nor muslim nor sikh
nor tillich’s god beyond the god of theism
nor the known nor the unknowing
nor refugee nor endangered species
nor parched desert nor floods and lands
nor lost rivers, invisible rivers and rivers yet to be
nor borders, border crossings, demi-crossings
nor borderless places of thirst and famine,
nor first peoples’ drums driving beats of truth in or out of dry grass
nor staged nor stageless
nor exploited nor free
nor rich nor poor
nor tree nor treeless
and Griffin is all those things
and more than all

Griffin is, of course, the other
Griffin is, of course, the self

Griffin –
she all of us.
End Notes (Parts I, II, III)

Prologue End Notes (Part I)

1 A ‘found poem’ inspired by Prendergast & Belliveau (2013, p. 197) and Watt & Meyer-Dinkgrafe (2007, p. 4).

2 Theorists at the intersection of poetics and ethics may frame their studies with respect to the approach of Poethic or Poet(h)ic Inquiry. Aristotle’s term: Poetics (Halliwell, 1987) is broadly referenced across multiple disciplines. The term Poetics, inspired by Jewish Law professor (Weisberg, 1992) regarding the intersection of legal ethics, literature and socio-political theory, is occasionally found within literary criticism as in a discussion on the English poet Swinburne, entitled Swinburne’s Poetics (Latham, 2009), and within feminist literary criticism (Lauterbach, 2005; Retallack, 2003). The term poet(h)ics, with the (h) in parentheses is more rare than poethics. Authors using ‘poet(h)ics’ do not reference each other; these include scholars in literary criticism (Papayanis, 2005) and philosophy (Thiele, 2006), in addition to Italian literary scholar (Pireddu, 2001) and Brazilian literary scholar (Avila, 2002). Due to the diverse, multidisciplinary, and geographical scope of the terms: poetics, poethics and poet(h)ics, there is an apparent niche with respect to a proposed re-contextualization regarding poet(h)ic inquiry in the context of arts-based educational research.

3 Theopoetics dovetails with Living Inquiry, which is a practice of inquiry into “being in the world” (Meyer, 2010, p. 86 ), and Loving Inquiry (Shira, 2010), which is a “transformative vision of loving relationship” (p. ii).

4 An ethic of meaning is offered in holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Dr. Viktor Frankl’s (1946/2004) “logotherapy,” which is the expression of research and therapeutic intervention based on meaning, particularly within non-fixed sites of suffering.

5 First published in 1947, The Theatre of Spontaneity (Moreno, 2010), outlines psychodrama as a therapeutic method related to theatrical improvisation that taps into multiple memories, voices, and identities within the self, as well as exploring healing in relationships with others (present or absent, living or dead) through drama. A participant works alone and other times in the context of a group, in order to create symbolic meanings through drama about the inner journey.

6 In the Japanese language, hito or self/other is one word (Aoki, 1995, p. 6), (as presence- absence is one word: yu-mu (Aoki & Jacknicke, 2000, p. 3); hito includes the ‘other’ ambivalently within the ‘self’ in contrast to Western, distant, often self-obsessed individualism. To ruminate on Aoki’s curriculum theory is to begin to view language differently, and perhaps to see the presence of self differently, as a presence that embraces both ‘absence’ and ‘other.’ The notion of self-other is reminiscent also of Martin Buber’s notion of I – Thou: “The primary word I-Thou establishes the world of relation” (Buber, 1958, p. 6), whereby “All real living is meeting” (p. 11).

7 Cuddon (1999/1977) clarifies that, “in Brecht’s words, the ‘essential point of epic theatre is that it appeals less to the spectator’s feelings than to his reason’. It denotes a form of narrative/chronicle play which is didactic, which is not restricted by the unity of time and which presents a series of episodes in a simple and direct way: a kind of linear narration (‘each scene for itself’)” (p. 274). Cuddon also suggests that epic or didactic theatre has “much in common with documentary theatre” (p. 274).

8 Carole Tarlington was the founder of Vancouver Youth Theatre in 1983 and its first Artistic Director.
Although styles of playbuilding vary among directors, Vancouver Youth Theatre maintains a commitment to its Mission Statement: “Vancouver Youth Theatre is a creative partnership between young actors and adult theatre professionals, working together to create original plays from young people’s ideas” (VYT, 1983).

The section of Visiting Griffin featuring the verbatim pastoral counselling session (visit to Velma) could be categorized as Verbatim Theatre in arts-based qualitative research (Prendergast and Belliveau, 2013).

Ermine’s (2007) socio-political-legal notion of “ethical space” is resonant with Denzin’s “ethical moment when individuals are lead into troubling spaces occupied by others” (Denzin, 2006, p. 331).

After a trans-disciplinary workshop held in Toronto in September, 2011 hosted by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, a paper was written called Ethical Challenges in Arts-Based Health Research. Here, twenty-two professionals, artists and academics identified critical gaps and priorities with respect to ethics in arts-based research. Boydell et al (2012) note that significant gaps in ethical questions have not been fully confronted. The authors contend that “Consequently methodological and theoretical frameworks for other researchers and artists interested in this breakthrough work are lacking” (p. 1), and they identify the need for increased awareness of “emergent ethical dilemmas.”

**Play End Notes (Part II)**

This excerpt is from Molière’s (1894/2015) The Miser/L’Avare (Act III, Scene viii). The 1894 translation by Charles Heron Wall was selected by the director of Blythe’s summer acting company, because that older translation was in the public domain, and thus, no fee was required. The language of this translation sounds a little like Shakespeare, which is why Blythe chose Juliet’s soliloquy as her audition piece for the part of Mariane, referred to in Act six.

This excerpt is from Molière’s (1894/2015) The Miser/L’Avare (Act IV, Scene i).

This excerpt is the last line of Hosanna, by Michel Tremblay (1973/1974, p. 102).

Lyrics are John Lennon’s song “Working Class Hero” (1970) which is on side one of the album, John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band.

This excerpt is from Act II, Scene 2, (p. 69-70), from Arthur Miller’s The Crucible (1982). The play was first produced in 1953, in New York.


Trace (Blythe’s father’s ghost) epitomizes the notion of ‘father absence’—through exile and return, absence and presence, nuclear shadow and its afterglow. Experimental lighting effects may be implemented here. (Ghost is also Trace’s father; thus, the play is host to ghosts begetting ghosts.) Social activist and priest, Fr. Tom McKillop (Baltutis, 2010), used to say at Youth Corps meetings I attended in the late 1970’s: “We live in a fatherless nation”. Blythe’s story may represent a whole generation of fathers who were absent: physically-geographically and/or emotionally-spiritually. Blythe’s quest (within a quest to find Griffin) for the notion of ‘father’ in various mentors and icons, may be symptomatic, then, of a generational trend. Trace, the character, is also a theoretical personification, reminiscent of Derrida’s metaphysics of “trace” (Derrida, 1973): “The trace is
not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself.” (p. 156). Derrida’s philosophy is complementary to Aokian yu-mu.

20 This monologue is cited from the Introduction in C.G. Duff’s (1976, p. 248) paper presented at the Specialist Meeting in Paris, 1-3 December, 1975. Papers presented at the conference were collated and archived in 1976.

21 The character Rose-Marie, is fictional. It is common for the same actress to play the same character in several productions at La Comedie Française in Paris, which has a rich tradition of producing Molière’s plays. Both L’Avare (1953), originally written/produced in 1668, and Tartuffe (1965), originally written/produced in 1669, feature Mariane. Although C. W. Wall’s translation (1894/2015) uses the spelling, Marianne, I have used the ‘Mariane’ spelling consistently throughout Visiting Griffin because it is the spelling used in La Comedie Française. In the case of Rose-Marie, Mariane became her specialty as an actress. Since Blythe had also played Mariane in an English translation, she felt an immediate kinship to Rose-Marie, who had once been an actress, and now lived as a beggar woman in the cathedral alcove.

22 Lyrics and music to “Tout ce que” are by Glenn Chatten, with chorus vocals by Heather Duff, from the CD: Chatten, G. (2015). Tout ce que. Glenn Chatten Live at the Genesis Theatre. Vancouver, BC: Soaring Eagle Music/SOCAN.

23 A Marian hymn of Catholicism (The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, 2013), “Salve Regina” is also the traditional chant of the Trappist monastic community. The English translation reveals that it is a prayer for advocacy while in exile:

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy,  
hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.  
To you we cry, the children of Eve;  
to you we send up our sighs,  
mourning and weeping in this land of exile.  
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,  
your eyes of mercy toward us;  
lead us home at last  
and show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus:  
O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.

24 Père Benedict, son of the late Governor General Georges Vanier (and brother to Jean Vanier founder of the L’Arche communities for the developmentally disabled), was instated as a Trappist monk in 1951. Other biographical details are from Benedict Vanier, 1925-2014 A Spiritual Life, by Hutsak (2014). The dialogue between Blythe and Benedict in this scene is based on a verbatim dialogue recorded in my journal.

25 Father Tom McKillop studied with Viktor Frankl, author of Man’s Search for Meaning (2004), which was originally published in 1946.

26 Jean Vanier was the speaker at one of the ‘Events’ at Massey Hall in Toronto coordinated by Youth Corps, which was the visionary social justice project of Father Tom McKillop, who had been a secondary school teacher before becoming a priest, “identifying a pedagogy of action, reflection and friendship” (Baltutis, 2010, p. 11). Looking back on their participation in Youth Corps, adults see McKillop’s vision as a kind of “Canadian liberation theology” (p. 25). Other speakers at Youth Corps Events were great lights on the global justice scene such Mother Teresa, Caesar Chavez, and Chief Dan George. Mother Teresa’s first speaking engagement in Canada was through Father Tom’s invited Event and invitation to speak at Massey Hall. Fr. Tom McKillop was awarded the Order of Canada on Nov. 18, 2005 for his work with Youth Corps. This page can be found at http://campus.udayton.edu.

27 This reference is to Sylvia Plath’s (1972) The Bell Jar, first published in 1963 under pseudonym Victoria Lucas.

29 The Anti-Footbinding Society (Whitfield, 2008) was an organization of foreigner and missionary wives, who wrote letters to the government with the goal of abolishing the practice of foot-binding in China.

30 This is based on the true story called *The Tale of a Wolf* (Raymer, 2000).

31 Philippians 2:5-11 outlines the notion of ‘self-emptying’ or kenosis.

32 Gospel Village was the village founded by my great grandparents, Moir and Jessie Duncan, where those choosing to live in that community needed to grow food crops such as wheat, instead of opium, which was more lucrative. The Gospel Village community survived political transitions in China and it still exists today (Raymer, 2015, p. 25-28).

33 After Moir’s death in 1906, Jessie did indeed write a booklet called *Moir Duncan, LL.D*, which depicted him on the cover as the first Principal of the Taiyuan University. This booklet was published by the Baptist Missionary Society of Scotland and Jessie continued to speak about their adventures in China, as promised, across the UK and in Canada.

34 Issues of patient consent continue to be an ethical gap particularly for vulnerable patients such as psychiatric ‘inmates’ and the elderly in care. (Brickell, T.A., Nicholls, T.L., Procyslyn, R.M., McLean, C., Dempster, R.J., Lavoie, J.A.A., Sahlstrom, K.J., Tomita, T.M., & Wang, E., 2009; Friday, S. 2005).


36 This excerpt from Juliet’s soliloquy is from *Romeo and Juliet*: Act IV, Scene iii, lines 45-58, by William Shakespeare (1597/1964).

37 This quotation is from Chekhov, A. & Hampton, C. (1896/2007). *The Seagull*. Act Two, p. 44.


42 Excerpts from B. King’s keynote address from LTA Productions. (Sept. 22, 2013). Dr. Bernice King speaking at the *Truth and Reconciliation Walk* – Part I & Part II. Vancouver, BC. Available on You Tube.

43 Historical notes regarding this monologue, such as the names: Norwaake, Chief Ponus and the Ponasses Path are from Edwin Hall’s (1847) *The Ancient Historical Records or Norwalk, Conn. with a Plan of the Ancient Settlement, & of the Town in 1847*. 
Epilogue End Notes (Part III)

44 The original text in Spanish by Palma Mora (2003:82) reveals that she is not actually the author of that citation; there may be a sense of shared authorship regarding some post-exile reflections.

45 Moir Duncan was conferred the degree of L.L.D. by the University of Glasgow in 1905. After Moir died in 1906, Richard (1916) suggests that he “was mourned by all who knew him, both foreign and Chinese. The Chinese government conferred post-humous honors” (p. 307), in the form of a scroll for his outstanding service in the educating of the Chinese people and the order of the button to Jessie, who was first Treasurer of Taiyuan University. These awards came from the last Emperor (the same Emperor who had ordered their death a decade earlier).

46 Talia (2008) discusses the notion of abjection whereby, “the characters in the plays are each “cast out/outcast” in some way, and each struggles to articulate their own legitimacy and intelligibility” (p. 37). She explains that the notion of abjection might also protect “the playwrights because it allows them to challenge dominant culture by presenting characters that are abject and therefore potentially dismissible as aberrant or ‘mad,’ even as they offer compelling protests of the conventions confining them” (p. 37). Visiting Griffin disrupts stereotypes of the historical ‘madness’ of women by offering characters in social contexts who portray the truth and reality behind notions of madness.

47 Nursing Education may now incorporate aesthetic and holistically spiritual perspectives, exemplified by Hurlock’s (2002) argument for “the generative kinship of nursing and poetry” (p. 2).

48 Cook (2011) indicates that women prophets/prophetesses in the Old Testament offer legitimacy to the wave of women’s spiritual leadership in Judeo-Christian traditions. I suggest that both within and beyond formal religious institutions, women are becoming socio-political, ethico-spiritual leaders in a values-based pluralistic society.

49 Memory research explores the Freudian concept of a remembered event regarding the addition of new perceptions and a “transformation of consciousness” (Consenstein, 2002, p. 13), and within literary writing, a transformation of “society’s conceptual (memory) of itself by opening wide the possibilities rooted in the past” (p. 183). My research with respect to how meanings surrounding past memories inform, affect, and transform the protagonist Blythe’s ethico-spiritual journey towards her visit to Griffin points the way towards possible changes in a broader societal conceptual memory.

50 Christy is the wise town garbage-collector (albeit Christ-figure) in Manawaka, the fictional small town in Manitoba from Margaret Laurence’s The Diviners (1974), known for his views as a small-town sage on knowing people by their garbage.

51 Stanislavski’s (1936) system of acting maintains that each character has an overall objective or wish for the whole play called a ‘super-objective.’ The super-objective provides a focus of direction for an actor’s choices and character objectives in each scene, always moving towards that ultimate goal.

52 Bracken & Thomas (2010) compare Szasz’s views on mental illness as a “moral issue” (p. 220), supporting Foucault’s notion of “social exclusion of the mad” (p. 226). For Foucault, “it is about challenging the legitimacy of any group that claims to speak with exclusive authority about the truth” (Bracken & Thomas 2010, p. 226). Szasz (2011) is rightly concerned, however, about psychiatry’s “medicalization of the soul and of personal suffering intrinsic to life” (p. 180).
53 In Tara Chatterjea’s *Knowledge and Freedom in Indian Philosophy* (2003), she clarifies that "In different philosophical systems moksa appears in different names, such as apavarga, nihsreyasa, nirvana, kaivalya, mukti, etc.” (p. 89)
References


Ricketts, K. A. (2007). *Listen carefully, the dance is whispering...articulating praxis identity and place through dance.* (Unpublished master’s thesis). University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.


Vancouver Youth Theatre. (1983-2013). Teacher’s guides, scripts and resources. Vancouver, BC.


Appendices

Appendix A


Used with permission of artist.
Appendix B


Jan Swaren in McMaster University Art studio, 1983. *Mary Magdalene* on wall behind. Photo used with permission of artist.