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Procedure to Exit an Enclosed Space: A Story in Six Parts

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Procedure to Exit an Enclosed Space: A Story in Six Parts

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Theater and Performance
of Bard College
by
Brigid Boll

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
I. EXPOSITION.....	2
Chapter 1	2
II. INCITING INCIDENT	4
Chapter 2	4
Chapter 3	8
III. RISING ACTION	9
Chapter 4	9
Chapter 5	11
IV. FALLING ACTION.....	12
Chapter 6	12
Chapter 7	14
V. RESOLUTION.....	15
Chapter 8	15
VI. DÉNOUEMENT	17
Chapter 9	17
Epilogue.....	18
 APPENDIX A: <i>Lethe</i>	 20
APPENDIX B: <i>CAT(S)</i>	29
APPENDIX C: Production Stills <i>Lethe</i>.....	37
APPENDIX D: Production Stills <i>CAT(S)</i>	38
 Bibliography	 39

Introduction

On the subject of combatting loneliness, I have always found theater to be this world's greatest remedy. For a few fleeting moments in the grand scheme of life we sit together, in the darkness, in the silence, and are faced with the prospect of what has been and what may be. Upon my discovery of the art of playwriting, I have found a medium through which I can share my loneliness, my fears, my desperations and separations with a collective of identities beyond the scope of my own mind.

The formation and creation of *Procedure to Exit an Enclosed Space*, with all its struggles and failures and successes, exemplify to me the mimetic nature of the community of the theater throughout the entirety of its creation and reception. Collaborative forms of invention such as the theatrical process prove to be one of the world's most difficult. The navigation required amongst various peoples and opinions give way to a form of creation that is inherently chaotic, and messy. However it is within these chaotic communications and collaborations that, as far as I have found, the most beautiful and transcendent work is created.

I make no claim to say that my view of the piece is the 'right' one. Three individuals collectively constructing a work of theater entails three distinct viewpoints and narratives. Within these pages I will be exploring my own experience of the process. My personal view of the piece's struggles and successes, faults and triumphs. Herein lies one story of the creation of a piece of theater entitled *Procedure to Exit and Enclosed Space: A Play in Two Parts*.

I. EXPOSITION: setting the scene. The writer introduces the characters and setting, providing description and background.¹

Chapter 1

In the spring of 2014, I sank down into one of the gray rolling chairs that lined the large wooden table and took out a pen and notebook. A girl sat next to me and took out a notebook as well. For the next two years I would sit in that same seat next to that same girl and we would take out our notebooks and write. Our medium of choice was the theatrical play; our subjects were varied but more often than not dealt with the reality of human existence. Becca Glasbrener has been many things to me over the past four years of Bard College, a neighbor, a support system, and an inspiration; for the purposes of this story, however, Becca will play the character of the Second Playwright or the Co-Creator.

Fast forward to the spring of 2016, Becca and I decided to collaborate on our senior project and do what we did best: write a play. Deeply inspired by one of our favorite plays, Carol Churchill's *Blue Heart*, we decided we would each write a 10 minute play so each of us could walk away with our own distinct scripts at the end of the project.² Writers block is not a term I particularly enjoy, but any other term wouldn't accurately describe the extent to which Becca and myself were unable to write a project we felt good about. We made our way through one or two ideas before we decided to look for a new source of inspiration. After a night of investigation, we happened upon a mathematical

¹ Ohio University, "Analyzing a Story's Plot: Freytag's Pyramid," <http://www.ohio.edu/>,

² Caryl Churchill, *Blue Heart* (New York, NY: Theater Communications Group, 1997).

proof in which Robert Aumann attempts to mathematically prove the inability of two humans to agree to disagree on something.³ We spent hours trying to uncover the proof's true meaning and found its themes of truth, duality, transformation, and time to be fascinating and inspiring. Leaving for summer, we felt we had a solid basis upon which to build a play.

Upon our return to Bard in the fall of 2016, Becca and I made no progress on our mathematically inspired scripts. I personally had completely given up on finding anything that excited me. I struggled with about four or five half-baked scripts before it was the end of September and I was faced with a deadline. Auditions were in two weeks and I still did not have any characters to show for it. What was worse: Becca had a script. A good script at that. It was a story of a cat and a human, one of whom was dying of cancer. Maybe both. They were trapped in an apartment, seeing as the human was agoraphobic. Becca's piece, while exciting, lead me into a spiral of self-doubt, wondering if I should give up writing entirely so that Becca could write a fuller piece and co-direct with Jaquan. I also considered giving up theater entirely, but of course I don't ever seem to have a say in that matter. Sure enough, late one night towards the end of September, I sat at a computer with a blank document and began to type.

³ Robert J. Aumann, "Agreeing to Disagree," *The Annals of Statistics* 4, no. 6 (November 1976):, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2958591>.

II. INCITING INCIDENT: something happens to begin the action. A single event usually signals the beginning of the main conflict. The inciting incident is sometimes called 'the complication'.⁴

Chapter 2:

It was probably 1 am when I finally started to type. I find that 1 am is my favorite time of night in the Hudson Valley because everything is just the right amount of quiet. I sat in a turquoise desk chair at an old wooden desk purchased at an antique store. Music played quietly through the small ear buds in my ears. My brain did that thing it likes to do when I start to write something good. It gets very quiet. The usual clutter of this and that and to-do's and to-don'ts shut down. I am left alone with the glare of a blank white page on a computer screen, and my fingers on the keyboard. That night I was only left alone with the blank page for a moment before letters and words and sentences began to burst out of me like a leak in a bucket that couldn't get plugged. The words and sentences and thoughts became, slowly but surely, a dialogue. Two distinct voices. I sat and I wrote until my eyes started to tear and I realized I had stumbled upon two fish. A boy and a girl divided by a pane of glass. They were curious, these two, and I didn't quite know how to define them.

I felt strongly that these two were separated from one another; trapped in permanently alienated communication. I recalled walking through aisles at the pet store, seeing the beta fish lined up next to one another in little plastic containers, never able to swim together because they may kill each other. These characters were born out of a similar quality of alienation; loneliness by default.

⁴ Ohio University, "Analyzing a Story's," <http://www.ohio.edu/>.

Their immobility and lack of control framed these two characters in a world that was, from its very creation in the back on my mind somewhere, working against them.

In searching for more answers as to how these two might exist, I began to research goldfish. In my exploring I found an interesting relationship between goldfish and memory, a theme I grapple with in much of my writing. I was particularly struck by the fact that goldfish lose their memory quite often, as it only lasts up to three months, despite almost 40-year life spans.⁵ I realized that these two characters I had created would eventually forget the conversation they were having on the page before me, and had most likely forgotten many conversations before this one. The cyclical nature of this forgetting functioned as a framework around which I continued to build this world and its characters. In imagining how this cycle of memory and forgetting would affect my characters, I developed each with opposing views on the subject.

The character of the Girl exhibited an innate quality of curiosity. This curiosity, I imagined, allowed her a small amount of access to this vast memory bank hidden deep in her subconscious. She had distant memories of memories, almost like remembering a dream but not knowing its specifics. I wrote this Girl as the character who understood the concept that she had lived a life she could not remember. Despite having forgotten the whole, this brief memory of a memory allowed her the understanding that she would soon forget again. This is, if she did not change something.

⁵ Wordpress, "10 Goldfish Facts: Our Top 10 Facts about Goldfish," <http://thegoldfishtank.com/>, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://thegoldfishtank.com/goldfish-facts/>.

The character of Frederick dealt with this memory in a more matter-of-fact way: denial. I did not imagine Frederick really understood the concepts his friend was trying to relay to him. Or, if he was familiar with them, he was trying very hard to forget. The apparent cluelessness of Frederick functioned as both a point of conflict for the two characters as well as a revelation of another facet of their relationship: the distinction of “boy” vs. “girl”.

A lot of this script was born, subconsciously, out of the experience of womanhood. Women spend their entire lives being looked at and picked apart based upon the ways that they look. In a society that promotes and validates the male gaze, women exist very often as things to be looked at. This societal contextualization leaves many women with dualistic ways of imagining their own existence. While one end resists the male gaze, the other accepts it as validation. The Girl deals with this same struggle through the metaphor of a fish, constantly being observed as simply a “beautiful thing”.

The final fact I stumbled upon in my research was that goldfish cannot close their eyes.⁶ In constructing a world for these two characters I had to consider the concept of constant light. Darkness was absolutely non-existent for them. This fact solidified, for me, the true lack of control and agency each of these characters had within this world. Neither had any authority over their environment: their tanks, their eyesight, their memories, or their separation. They appeared to me extremely limited, and inexorably trapped.

⁶ Wordpress, “10 Goldfish,” <http://thegoldfishtank.com/>.

This brief moment in time I had created on a blank page became *Lethe* by way of the dictionary. Often in searching for titles or inspiration I look to the definitions of words, mainly because I find the syntax of definition to be fascinating and mysterious. In looking for a definition to inspire this play, specifically in regards to a title, I stumbled across the word *Lethe* when researching language related to memory. Lethe was, “A river in Hades whose water when drunk made the souls of the dead forget their life on earth.”⁷ Upon reading this definition, I knew I had found a title. I could think of no better name for a play about two beings living in water where everything was somewhat muddled, memory included.

The playwright Paula Vogel, in speaking on the topic of writing, stated: “To me, the purpose and function of language in a play is to destroy the *cognitive* purpose of language with an *emotional* language...”⁸ She is referring here to the unconsciousness involved in writing a script, and explains that a writer’s subconscious world views and political situations come through in the writing of a piece whether the author intends it or not. I find in most of my writing, especially in *Lethe*, that stories and societal contextualization appear within the script without me being aware at the time. Through this strange process of shutting off the thinking mind, stories of real world struggles and personalities appear in the text.

⁷ Oxford University Press, "Lethe Definition," Oxford Dictionaries, accessed April 28, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/lethe>.

⁸ "Paula Vogel on Writing," video file, 3:41, YouTube, posted by ComparativeDramaConf, September 26, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=120&v=gYFtGX60doE.

In just under 3 hours, as I sat in the turquoise chair at the antique desk, the once- blank page was now covered in lines of black. Within those lines rested two fishbowls. In one lived a boy named Frederick. He was innocent and humble. He was in love. He did not understand the world surrounding him but he did not know what there was to understand. In the other was a girl. She was fierce and inquisitive, frightened by the prospect that there existed some other life she should be living. She was in love, too. These two fish in their separate bowls of water told a story of friendship, fear, and loss.

Chapter 3

Auditions were to be held in mid October, and despite having attended many an audition, I suddenly found myself on the other side of the table. I sat towards the back of Resnick studio beside Jaquan and Becca, and I remember feeling too small to fill up a space so big. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat as the first actors shuffled their way in. I did not have any specific qualifications in finding Frederick and the Girl. I only hoped that when the right people arrived we would know.

I remember Elise walking into the room quite fondly, audition side in hand. She began reading off of the page. I recognized the words she read as ones that had come out of my mind but suddenly no longer belonged to me. They were hers, in all her joy and child-like bliss. Elise embodied the character of the Girl in such a way that I don't quite know how to express, aside from stating that she simply *was*, without having to act much at all.

A similar experience happened with Leon's audition. His sweet, innocent, and slightly awkward way of embodiment allowed Frederick to exist as a

perfect companion for the Girl. As we deliberated over actors, both Becca and I felt very attached to Leon as being the right actor for each male-bodied role. In this decision my collaborators and I quickly made a discovery: perhaps Sol and Frederick were more similar than we had first imagined. Both were male characters with strong opinions and stubborn qualities, unable to exit this space they were trapped in mentally and physically. Upon this realization, we found no reason as to why he shouldn't be both Frederick and Sol and decided to double cast Leon.

III. RISING ACTION: the story builds and gets more exciting.⁹

Chapter 4

The night of November 9th, 2016, I was sitting on a chair made out of rough polyester fabric. It wasn't a particularly comfortable chair, but it did spin around some. It was a rather repellent color; a grayish purple people probably liked to wear in the 70's. I was sitting in this gray purple polyester chair and everything felt a whole lot like nothing. The stale remnants of my last sip of beer rested in the pallet of my mouth as it begged for hydration. Next came the smashing. Pumpkins, we still had pumpkins from Halloween. We ran out into the streets and smashed them as hard as we could. Their rotting orange corpses gave us a strange sort of comfort. On November 10th, 2016, I stood in the lobby of the Fisher Center watching a concession speech on an iPhone. I was crying. That afternoon I spoke with Becca. We asked ourselves if we should just scrap

⁹ Ohio University, "Analyzing a Story's," <http://www.ohio.edu/>.

the entire piece. The world was ending, were we expected to continue putting up a play about two sad fish and a dying cat? Jaquan told us that while we deliberated over a decision to change the scripts, he would go on rehearsing.

From then on, Becca and I stepped back. We stopped attending as many rehearsals. After months of endless writing and re-writing and meeting and rehearsing, I think we honestly needed a break. Jaquan, on the other hand, was finally excited to start working. And so he did. Both Becca and I attended a few separate rehearsals for our own pieces, finding the actors stumbling over lines they did not yet know and stories they did not yet fully comprehend to be frustrating and rather boring. Nearing mid December, right before our winter break, Jaquan invited Becca and I to a stumble through of the show so far. We watched a run of *Lethe*, which went quite well and made me very happy. The actor's work, while by no means complete, embodied the characters and the script as a whole.

When *CAT(S)* was up, I sat with Becca and watched what could be called a quite skewed version of the script she had written. Sol and Jo's relationship reflected a deep sexual tension not intended within the writing of the script. Becca was lost and confused about what had become of her play. Having written a play my freshman year which was changed somewhat entirely by the creative team, I understood the pain of having ones words misinterpreted. This particular rehearsal sparked an incontrovertible tension within the fabric of our creative team.

In retrospect, I am happy Jaquan continued directing after Becca's and my moment of confusion surrounding the message of our piece in regard to the

election. I don't think I know what we would have done other than having actors stand on stage screaming. Jaquan's choice to continue rehearsing the play was extremely intuitive and ultimately the right choice, even with the complications that arose from Becca and I not being in the room as the plays continued to develop.

Chapter 5

My involvement in Becca's piece prior to that evening was extremely minimal if not non-existent. In her struggle to relay the true vision of her piece I became a mediator; a translator of sorts. When we returned from winter break and rehearsals began again, suddenly I found myself in an odd space between co-director and playwright. I began attending *CAT(S)* rehearsals in order to help us find Jo's voice as a character, which had become increasingly sexual and somewhat muted compared to Sol. In creating moments such as the quasi-anatomy class, I attempted to help re-frame the piece, or at least get it as close to Becca's vision as we could.

In terms of my own piece, which had gone somewhat untouched, things also began to shift. After watching Leon and Elise throughout auditions, Jaquan and myself decided against telling them about their characters as fish, at least for the time being. Because of their natural affinity and embodiment of the spirit of the two characters we felt that telling them they were playing fish would take away from their focus upon these characters relationships. However, come early February it became clear that our actors were lost. They didn't know who these characters were or what world they existed in. After realizing this, Jaquan suggested I go ahead and speak with both Leon and Elise about who they were,

really, and how I had conceptualized their characters. After this conversation, my role in the creation of my *own* play became confusing. As rehearsal went forward, I started to suggest ideas more and more. The lines between “playwright” and “director” became blurred and I found myself struggling to find the places I should take over and hold back. Ultimately, my input in both pieces allowed me to find a director's voice that I had never really known existed. Without the collaborative struggle, I do not know that I ever would have found this voice, and am endlessly grateful for the conflict that gave way to its discovery.

IV. FALLING ACTION: events happen as a result of the climax and we know that the story will soon end.¹⁰

Chapter 6

In approaching the spaces within which these characters would exist, we first had to consider *CAT(S)* set requirements. We would have to build an apartment of sorts, and initially we were considering using newspaper. In some of the first iterations of the piece, Sol was a hoarder, meaning we were imagining a stage entirely covered in stacks of newspapers and trash. As the script developed and we realized that Sol's agoraphobia did not inherently require hoarding, we let go of the idea of having a prop-heavy set. Through meetings with the production crew, we minimized the set to what we thought would be a three-wall structure. Creating Sol's apartment out of chalk was

¹⁰ Ohio University, "Analyzing a Story's," <http://www.ohio.edu/>.

entirely generated with regards to Becca's moderation piece, where she utilized chalk to create the characters surroundings. After Helena suggested using a road box instead of creating a structure, we discovered a home for our piece.

The idea behind the set for *Lethe* was to have the reverse side of the three-part structure act as a sort of backdrop, much like the backdrop of a fish tank. Originally, we requested silver foil to be glued onto the back of the road box to give the piece an ethereal and dream-like feel. When we arrived back at Bard after winter break, we were met with a fully completed road box equipped with foil lining the outside and black chalkboard paint lining the inside. But it still didn't feel quite right—so Becca and I got to work.

We spent hours in the scene shop, spray gluing further foil patchwork and cutting out cardboard to add doors to what would become Sol's apartment appliances. After revisiting some visual imagery I was interested in for *Lethe*, we purchased blue cellophane and began the long and arduous process of pasting together a backdrop for our two fish. I have never thought myself a set designer, but in those long hours of work I found a strange comfort and confidence. That big silly roadbed somehow became a work of art, a home for our piece, and means of physical evidence that we were creating something bigger than ourselves.

The major connection between my play and Becca's really revealed itself to us in the creation of the set. In fussing around with extra cardboard, Becca suggested she create a fishbowl to go into Sol's apartment. In fact, she would make two. We didn't know until that moment that The Girl and Frederick had lived in Sol's apartment the entire time.

In terms of additional stage design, each piece experienced an interplay with the set. The confetti in *Lethe* was Jaquan's brilliant idea, who suggested that glittering confetti could play two roles: one a more literal image of fish food, and another more vague and dreamlike, especially for the Girl's monologues. What fell to the floor in the ethereal first act Becca slowly realized mimicked the cigarette ash falling from Sol's cigarettes. The set and visual design we created as a team worked to connect the scripts and further the creation of one fluid, unique piece. Without one the other could not function, and the two separate scripts slowly became one story.

Chapter 7

About two weeks before production, I sat in Resnick studio and watched as our actors performed the show all the way through. Something was wrong. My actors were not themselves, nor were they their characters. Frederick had become comic and outlandish; the Girl had become angry and dramatic. I was devastated. I did not know what had happened. I let it go. It was one bad rehearsal. Until the next one. And again, my actors were different, *substantially* different. For the next few rehearsals, the Girl and Frederick only came through in bits and pieces from my actors. Their spirit seemed incontrovertibly lost, and although I worked with Elise and Leon for the two weeks following, something was forever changed. It seemed Frederick and The Girl would never quite be found again.

The last time I really saw them was a week before our final performance. I sat down in the glass atrium of the Luma theater after lugging our huge road box through its doors. We had no other space to rehearse. We sat there, in the

atrium with windows acting as walls, and the sunlight hit the road box in a way that showed every color within the cellophane. Leon and Elise were worn down, exhausted from weeks of rehearsal, trying to navigate all of the collaborative voices in the room. With all of this they performed the show, and it was beautiful. I don't know if it was the way the sun was coming through the windows, or the muteness of their emotions, but everything came through. It was raw, emotional, and blunt. I was overjoyed to see that my dear Frederick and Girl were not lost, and that my writing, even just for that moment, was something to be proud of.

V. RESOLUTION: the character solves the main problem/conflict or someone solves it for him or her.¹¹

Chapter 8

There is a rare form of fear in allowing your work to be put up on stage. Prior to attending Bard College, I had never quite known what it meant to allow your art to happen while not having any say in the way it is interpreted. Having only ever been an actor I never understood the ripping open, the pure exposure involved in having your own work on a stage for a real live audience. I sat in the dark theater on opening night in terror. My palms were sweaty, my breath was short, and the chatter of people in the audience sounded like thunder in my ears. I was so afraid of what people might see, more so than that what people might

¹¹ Ohio University, "Analyzing a Story's," <http://www.ohio.edu/>.

think. What if my actors mess up? What if the lights do not queue? What if the audience laughs during the serious parts? *What if they don't understand me?*

This is the true fear of the playwright, isn't it? Not the fear that your play will be perceived negatively, but that you, yourself, will somehow change in the minds of others. No other role in the creative process, as far as I have experienced, allows for such ownership. And it is terrifying, to own something that has come out of you and put it out in the open without knowing how people will react. But as I grow more accustomed to sitting in the dark, surrounded by people watching the inner workings of my mind be put on stage, I am slowly discovering the art of letting go. Because I find more and more that this fear is rooted in things I cannot control; people's opinions I cannot change, acting choices I cannot challenge, things I cannot combat from my seat in the third row from the back, lost in the darkness of the theater.

At the end of the day, my collaborators and I made a play. A rather short play, but a play nonetheless. It's funny, looking back. I remember that moment after the election, when we were so scared of making a piece about anything that wasn't relevant to the political situation and our lives in relation to it and, in turn, who we are in the world. Paula Vogel says about her writing,

“Everyone is always saying...gosh you're always doing these things that are so political...I actually don't know it in the writing. ..I'll finish a draft and go *oh my god I'm gonna get killed* but I don't know that in the middle because I'm actually concentrating on driving lessons, and music of the 60's, and playboy magazines...”¹²

¹² "Paula Vogel," video file.

Looking back at the piece, it was all of those things we wanted to talk about. We wrote plays about people who were trapped. We wrote plays about alienation, loneliness, and the fear of existing. We created a piece of theater about two female characters who could not be understood no matter how loud they shouted. We wrote a play about death, about life, about all the in between. *Procedure to Exit an Enclosed Space* was, in many ways and without fully understanding at the time, a play about life in our political climate. We just didn't know in the middle, because we were concentrating on two sad fish, and a dying cat.

VI. DÉNOUEMENT: (*a French term, pronounced: day-noo-moh*) the ending. At this point, any remaining secrets, questions or mysteries which remain after the resolution are solved by the characters or explained by the author. Sometimes the author leaves us to think about the **THEME** or future possibilities for the characters.¹³

Chapter 9

- I realize that the lines between beta fish and goldfish are blurry and I don't really have much to say on the matter other than that's just the way it is.
- I don't know why they knew about eyelids, and darkness. I suppose I just assumed they could understand English.
- No, the Girl doesn't die at the end. In fact, I think she's very happy somewhere, maybe on an Aruban shoreline, or the canals of Venice. I think she has gone on to see a lot of beauty in the world.

¹³ Ohio University, "Analyzing a Story's," <http://www.ohio.edu/>.

- I don't know what happens to Frederick. I really hope he is happy.
- When Sol screams "fuck!" in *CAT(S)*, he's just realized that the Girl is dead in her tank. (or so he thinks)
- They wore overalls mostly because they are kids, also because they looked good.
- The Girl comes out wet at the end because the entire play we have been looking at them in the tank, but in this final scene she has escaped! No comment on the loss of the overalls other than the fact that, well, it looked good.
- I think Jo and the Girl are friends in the play, they find each other quite curious and exciting.
- Becca and I cut out a cellophane cat and pasted it somewhere on the *Lethe* side of the road box, so Jo would always be watching Frederick and the Girl.

Epilogue

The more I reflect upon our experience, the more I realize how instinctual its entire creation was. None of us, certainly not I, moved forward with a plan. Rather, we allowed the plays to speak for themselves, and allowed the rest to fall into place. I do not wish to assume that we left our audiences with anything other than some confusion or laughter. In fact, I don't know that I care. This specific piece of theater that was the senior project, in its own unique way, was just for us. And I'm grateful, really, to be able to create such work in an environment as supportive as Bard.

In my four years at Bard College, I have found that my greatest sanctuary has been the massive silver walls of the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts. It's halls and rooms have granted me the permission, the *privilege*, to make theater. And it is, isn't it? A privilege? Who are we, to write plays and choreograph dances? Who are we to perform and to create? All I

can offer in terms of an answer is that we artists are the people who allow others to experience experience. Within theater, everything is possible, and maybe that goes for life as well. So here we are. As with any good story, this one must invariably come to an end. But before we go, some future possibilities:

Jaquan Beachem leaves the theater to pursue a law degree. Upon his graduation from Yale law school he gets hired by a senator, and goes on to become an influential politician. Alternatively, he becomes a famous theater artist. Most of his work is commissioned across the world, but he definitely does a residency at Bard.

Rebecca Glasbrener leaves the theater to travel the world. She founds a non-profit organization centered upon helping girls in the developing world have access to arts programs. Alternatively, she becomes a playwright. She is most definitely invited back to speak at a Zocalo.

Brigid Boll leaves Bard College with a degree in Theater and Performance and Religious studies. She goes on to pursue a career as an anthropologist, writing multiple texts surrounding yoga's development in the West. Alternatively, she becomes a director. She only directs new playwrights, most of them women.

I cannot pretend to know anything the future may hold. What I do know, however, is that theater, particularly the theater of Bard College, has ensured a future for Becca, Jaquan, and myself, regardless of our paths in life. I am forever indebted to those who have allowed to me to make work at an institution such as this, and only hope that the work I have made has, in some way, reflected the gratitude and humble respect I have for this place called Bard College.

Appendix A: Final Scripts

Lethe

By Brigid Boll

Character List:

FREDERICK- A male; he wants to stay; an old friend

GIRL- A female; she wants to go; an old friend

Setting: A Windowsill

Lethe: (n.) a river in Hades whose water when drunk made the souls of the dead forget their life on earth.

Scene I

*(The stage is in black. A pool of light comes
down from above on GIRL.)*

GIRL

Sometimes I wish I could close my eyes, just for a moment. I would close them and save certain moments. To feel them instead of constantly watching. All I can do is watch. I just wish I could close my eyes. Someone once told me about darkness. They told me the light went out, and you could feel things you could never see. I wish I could be in darkness. I think I dream sometimes

about it. I dream I am not in this place. I don't remember the first time I saw it. I did not know what was happening. It was so- how had I not seen it? I did not know what to do. What are you supposed to feel when you discover your home is- *beat*. Incomprehensible, for me, truly, it was- *beat*. I can't talk about it right now, they are coming, see. They are coming to look at me. Because I am so beautiful, see. So beautiful. They look at me and they think "I need that" They come to me and they think I need that, that that is so beautiful. So Brilliant. So Beautiful I am to all of them.

(Blackout)

Scene II

(Two people stand across from each other in two pools of distinct light on opposite sides of the stage. there is an invisible wall between them, they wish they could touch, but they can't)

You look so beautiful today	FREDERICK
	GIRL
You do, too	
	FREDERICK
Have they come yet? To see you?	
	GIRL
Once, this morning.	
	FREDERICK
Did you hear them speak	
	GIRL
The normal gibberish	
	FREDERICK
I see	
	GIRL
You see	
	FREDERICK
Wonderful weather we are having, don't you think.	
	GIRL
So funny you don't feel.	
	FREDERICK
Do you think they do?	

GIRL

It does not matter. I think they will take me away.

FREDERICK

Why do you think that.

GIRL

I do not think, I know.

FREDERICK

You are so beautiful when you know.

GIRL

I'm sorry

FREDERICK

Silly, to be sorry

GIRL

You think?

FREDERICK

I know.

GIRL

Can I ask you something, Fredrick

FREDERICK

Of course you can

GIRL

Do you think we will ever be in the out

FREDERICK

Shhh you can't talk like that

GIRL

I am serious

FREDERICK

So am I, stop that talk

GIRL

What if we could be

FREDERICK

Insane

GIRL

What if it wasn't

FREDERICK

We cannot be in the out

GIRL

How do you know

FREDERICK

I've seen it, that's why. I've seen it. With my own two eyes. It is not beautiful, or glorious, or magical. It is death, don't you see that? It is going away.

GIRL

I cannot accept that.

FREDERICK

Do you have a death wish?

GIRL

Maybe *winks*

(Blackout.)

Scene III

(Lights up, they both stand in their respective places.)

GIRL

Do you remember the first time you forgot?

FREDERICK

Why do ask me these questions

GIRL

I wonder if you'll know

FREDERICK

Do you?

GIRL

I think I do

FREDERICK

That's impossible

GIRL

How do you think we know that we forget? Someone must have remembered, long ago, don't you see?

FREDERICK

When did you forget, the first time

GIRL

It's more of a feeling, see.

FREDERICK

No, I don't see, you're losing your mind

GIRL

I am not. I know what I know. I know we forget.

FREDERICK

Why do we forget, then, if you are so certain

GIRL

I think, that maybe-

FREDERICK

Maybe what?

GIRL

Maybe we forget because something terrible has happened

FREDERICK

What do you mean

GIRL

Maybe something awful happened that we need to forget

FREDERICK

Why would we need to forget it

GIRL

In order to keep living, see

FREDERICK

And when did this terrible thing take place

GIRL

Before we were here, long before

FREDERICK

How long ago

GIRL

Unimaginable, I assume

FREDERICK

So it is in our-

GIRL

DNA

FREDERICK

And you think-

GIRL

I think,

FREDERICK

You think we can

GIRL

I think we can remember, see

FREDERICK

I see you losing your mind

(she chuckles)

And if this terrible does exists, why would you want to remember?

GIRL

Because maybe I was something else, before

FREDERICK

Something

GIRL

Not beautiful

FREDERICK

I thought you loved being a Beautiful Thing.

GIRL

I do, I do, I do...

FREDERICK

But-

GIRL

But sometimes, I look at all these people staring at me with their big eyes and I think of how small I am, and how little I seem, and I think of how good it would feel to be big. How good it would feel to be in the out.

FREDERICK

Again with the out.

GIRL

Anything but this, anything but this.

FREDERICK

Why can't you just be happy

GIRL

Like the rest of us

FREDERICK

Like the rest of us, yes.

GIRL

I thought you liked that I was different.

FREDERICK

Being different does not mean wishing for-

GIRL

Death?

FREDERICK

You make me too angry, don't you see?

GIRL

I can't say that I do, Frederick.

FREDERICK

I love you, I love you

GIRL

Yes, that I do see

(Blackout)

Scene IV

(Lights up, GIRL in her pool of light.)

GIRL

I am thinking, and my thinking is going to get me into Trouble. Big. Big. Trouble. I am thinking of going. I am thinking of Taking the Leap. I have heard them say that before. The Leap of Faith. They have called it that, The feeders. I have heard it many times. But I need to, I need to, I need to, I must. The method: that's the hard point. The method, what I need. Wonder if he'll help me, or tell me I am crazed. Wonder if I'll ask, or if I'll just- (pause) I can feel it, starting to happen. Again. And no one believes me when I tell them it's- again. And again, and again. Do they think they are feeders, living some sort of life down here. So small, so meaningless. I am not like them, I know I am not. I do not know where I come from, I do not know where I'll go. I swear, I swear, I'm going upward. Going somewhere. New.

Scene V

*(The Two Friends and the pane of glass.
FREDERICK gets increasingly agitated and
upset throughout the scene.)*

GIRL

Frederick

FREDERICK

No

GIRL

What is it

FREDERICK

I will not hear it. I will not. I will *not*.

GIRL

You do not know what I will say.

FREDERICK

I do, and I can't hear the words-

GIRL

Frederick, my dearest friend, I've trained myself, see. I know the way out.

FREDERICK

How?

GIRL

Will you come with me, if I tell you the way

FREDERICK

No, you are crazed, you have lost your mind

GIRL

I can't live here, anymore

FREDERICK

Yes you can, you must, you have to- don't you see- *(Starting to visibly get quite upset)*

GIRL

It doesn't have to be this way

FREDERICK

How could you do this

GIRL

I should not have told you, I'm sorry

FREDERICK

No. You see nothing. *Imbecile*. Do you have *ANY* - any- I can't believe you. I cannot believe you will do this, you will die, you know that, don't you? Don't you know that you will die in the out? You were not meant to live in the out. You cannot breathe in the out. You cannot close your eyes. You cannot remember. You will die. You'll die. You will stop existing. You'll go away. You'll go away. Please don't go away.

(FREDERICK sinks to the floor, crying, she reaches out to comfort him, but cannot touch him.)

GIRL

I'm sorry, I'm sorry

(Blackout)

Scene VI

(The final monologue, she stands soaking wet in her pool of light.)

GIRL

There are things that no one tells you, when you are on the inside. No one tells you about air, or water. No one seems to know the difference. No one seems to understand the particles of dust you see, when the light comes through the window at dusk. No one seems to understand the Other Side. No one seems to recognize the why, the where, the how. I was lifeless, floating, imagining nothing. Lying in wait. Rescue just inches away. I was lifted, breathless. Gasping, I could not imagine what I had done. I saw Frederick below me, as my lungs began to give in, I looked at his panic as I tossed and turned and gasped again, shouting but not finding the air to get the words out "Frederick!" "Frederick" I shouted as I was lifted and lifted further and further away until suddenly I was in a hole, being dragged down, down, down, until I could not see anymore. And there was nothing, all around me. I felt my breath return to me, slowly. And I went for hours onward and found nothing and nothing and nothing again. There was nothing all around me so I smiled. And it all returned. The terrible thing. The thing at the beginning of everything. And I see it, now, I see it.

(Blackout. End of P)

Appendix B

CAT(S)

By Becca Glasbrener

JO: A sad cat.

SOL: A sad guy.

They're both dying.

Set: In a Brooklyn apartment.

SCENE 1

*SOL is on stage. In a black box, his apartment.
He draws his apartment around him. SOL is on the phone as he's creating.
The only furniture is a small sofa in the middle of the home, made of black blocks and chalk. On
her own block, JO is knitting.*

SOL

Hi, yeah, I'm Sol Procter. I just spoke to you, I was put on hold an- oh, it's. *Beat.* It's okay, yep.
Beat. No it's okay, just my newspaper hasn't been coming lately, and I was wondering if there
was maybe a problem with the account? *Beat.* About two weeks. Okay, yes I'll hold.

*SOL is put on hold. SOL is the type of guy who
paces whilst on the phone. The hold song is
"Eye of the Tiger, Instrumental". We probably
don't hear it.*

JO

Why is yarn so fucking expensive?

*SOL coughs. He's in pain.
JO looks at SOL for a long time.*

JO

I think I'm going to make myself some expensive ass socks. Not like, ass socks. Just socks.

*JO looks at SOL for a long time. SOL is fiddling
with the phone cord, back faced to the audience.*

JO

I'm feeling pretty sick. Remember, when I saw that mouse poking around? I bet that mouse is
sick and ate our food and pooped on our plates and now I'm sick.

SOL gets taken off hold.

JO

SOL?

SOL

Hi, no. No one else lives here. I guess that's possible. Is there any way you can leave a note to
the deliveryman to knock on my door when it arrives? Okay, that, that's understandable. No, I
don't want to- I don't think I'll be able to contac- Okay. That would be wonderful. *Beat.* That's a
great idea. Thanks so much, Erin, right? Yeah, *****thanks so much. Bye.

JO

*****Sol, I've been thinking a lot about our future.

SOL does not notice...

JO

I think that we might not have a very long one together... Future...

SOL is creating the room.

JO

Like, it's not that we're not good... We are good. I just think something isn't right.

Silence.

I've been thinking about leaving. I know that it's not going to happen if I have you here, so I'm thinking, let's just, pause... And take a day or two. Maybe a week apart. And I, dunno. I don't know. I have cancer.

SOL messes up his work. It is not clear whether his next line is pertaining to the work or to JO.

SOL

Fuck!

Silence. JO looks at SOL confused.

JO

Please, say something.

SOL

Hm. *Beat.* Are you hungry?

JO

Fuck. Sol. Really...

Silence.

JO

Maybe you're right. Maybe let's eat. Maybe we can talk about this later.

SOL

Me too. Let's eat.

SOL starts preparing JO's food. JO goes to her block. This next monologue is entirely addressed to the audience.

JO

Some exposition. Sol's... Um... Sol hasn't left this apartment in 7 years. So I think it scares him to realize that if he wants me to live, he'll have to take his cat to the fucking vet.

Oh, yeah. I'm a cat.

SOL comes to give JO some food. He pulls out a cat food bowl from a compartment which he's drawn.

SOL

Here ya go, Jo.

JO

Well, more specifically, I'm the personification of the cat in this play.

Do you think I'm a boy or girl or neither or both or someone else?

If you think I'm a girl, you're wrong. If you think I'm black. You're wrong. If you think I'm anything besides a kitty cat, you're wrong.

If you think a white 21 year old girl wrote a play about a black girl as a man's pet. You're wrong.

If you'd like, you can imagine a real cat, because that's what Sol sees. I know presentationally it is confusing. I guess we could have done a voiceover and had a real live cat on stage. You would have gotten it. But the predictability of a real live cat on stage isn't dependable.

Beat. I guess we could have gone a little overboard, *****and put me in a cat costume.

******Memory, from CATS the Musical, begins to play softly over the monologue. Light slowly dims on SOL.*

I just need to take a moment and clarify. I'm dying. Which is fine. But I'm trying to live. And Sol doesn't know. Or he just doesn't notice. I've faked my death, many times, but he just thinks I'm sleeping. Cats sleep a lot. I dunno.

But I'm here to provide some narrative. Because it seems that you understand me. *Beat.* Nod if you understand me. Shout FUCK ME MOTHER FUCKER if you understand me. Do something to show me your understanding.

I have cancer. Maybe literal, maybe figurative. I just know that I have cancer. Right here.

Which means that I'm in the process of dying.

We're all in the process of dying.

Just my process is quicker than yours.

Points to someone in the audience.

I hope.

SOL yawns in the background. Not noticeable.

Speaking to the same person.

I'm very tired. I think it's the cancer.

Obviously I'm not a doctor.

JO goes over to the house, opens a door, to reveal her pointer and lab coat. She begins to put on her labcoat.

But I did go on web MD, and type in the symptoms on the symptom checker, cough, body aches and weakness, etc... And the first option was the common cold, but who has the common cold for 4 months? Then there were some other things, like Anemia and Fibrosomething blah... Then there it was. Cancer.

So I did my research.

On the Wikipedia page, weakness is a symptom. The wikipedia page for "Cancer in Cats" I mean. Which exists. In fact, it's a bigger problem for cats than people may think.

JO, fully clad in her lab coat, and with pointer goes up to SOL. Light change to spotlight just on SOL and JO. SOL freezes in position. JO uses pointer to point out symptoms using SOL's froze body.

"Similarly to humans, cancer is the leading cause of death among *older cats*." I take offence to that by the way. "It is caused by uncontrolled cell growth, and affects a wide range of cell types and organs in the body. Feline cancer initially manifests as a lump or bump... Lump or bump on any parts of the body. It rapidly grows in the affected cell; attaches itself to the tissue under the skin in that area; and, depending on the tumour, it can spread to other parts of the body." But only if you're lucky. "Although cancer accounts for approximately 50% of feline deaths each year, it can be successfully treated if diagnosed early."

"While the causes of cancer in cats are unknown, feline leukemia virus is suspected to be a prime contributor. Other factors suspected to increase rates of feline cancer include toxins from the environment, second hand smoking, excessive grooming, or licking parts of the body that have been in contact with an environmental toxin." Well fuck.

JO reads the citation aloud.

"Cancer in Cats." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 13 Oct. 2016.

Lights change back to normal. SOL unfreezes.

So. There's the gist. I have cancer. Sol doesn't know. How could he? I'm a cat.

I mean, you're people. I think. And I'm communicating with you. I don't know. Maybe you're just better listeners. Maybe you should tell him what I told you. You know, about cats having cancer.

Blackout. Light from lamp remains.

SCENE 2

Lights up. Time has passed. SOL is unable to breathe. Pain, lots. Struggling to breathe, obviously. Agitated. Gasping for air. He'd

*feel better sitting up until he eventually loses
consciousness.*

JO

She has probably been doing this for a long time.

...I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have
cancer I have cancer I have cancer...

JO begins to yell.

I have cancer.

Cancer!

SOL

(To JO.) Shut up. Shut up!

*SOL turns on radio to overpower JO's meowing. End of the World by Skeeter Davis blares.
We can't hear this monologue.*

JO

Sol. SOL. You're dying!! YOU'RE DYING. It's not me dying. It's you. You're dying. You're
dying. You know it too. Maybe if you didn't smoke all those fucking cigarettes, maybe if you
left the apartment and got some fresh air once in awhile, maybe we wouldn't be in this fucking
predicament. Maybe you'd be alive. Maybe. You understand if you die, I might die too. How the
hell am I supposed to leave this apartment. Do I have to eat your remains to survive? Because I
would. I fucking would. In fact, I'd really fucking like that. So why don't you just fucking DIE
Sol?

JO screams.

SOL turns off the music.

SOL turns off the light. He goes to bed. Lights a cigarette.

SCENE 3

SOL is on the couch, face down.

JO is on the ground. She wakes up.

JO

Sol, wake up, I'm very hungry.

Nothing.

Sol, I have cancer and I'm very hungry.

Nothing. JO goes over to SOL and tries to wake him up.

Sol- wake up.

SOL doesn't move. He's dead.

Fuck you Sol. Wake up.

Wake up. Wake up! Sol. Wake up. Wake up. Wake up.

To the audience.

Would you wake him up?

Please, maybe he can't hear me. Please.

Sol wake up.

Sol.

Nothing. Silence. For a while.

JO

Fine.

JO turns on the stereo. Don't Hurt Yourself by Beyonce begins to play, loudly. JO erases all chalk. She destroys what's been made. She's not crying, because cats don't cry. Once she's finished, she looks at the audience. She's smoking.

JO

What? It's catnip.

Blackout.

APPENDIX C: Production Stills *Lethe*

APPENDIX D: Production Stills *CAT(S)*

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