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The Theatre of Romulus Linney, 1967-1995: Holy Ghosts and Hidden Histories

by

James Seymour

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1997

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 9, 1997
Date

Harry G. Carlson
Chair of Examining Committee

April 14, 1997
Date

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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In loving memory of Susan Kingsley Hurt and Bruce Peyton, whose passion for living and for the truth nourished me in this writing. My deepest thanks, also, to Romulus Linney for his trust and generous support. And to my wife, Lara, of whose patience I stand in awe.

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The divine has been ruined by God. That is to say, by man, who in permitting himself to be separated from Life by God, in permitting himself to be usurped from his own birth, became man by polluting the divinity of the divine.

Writing and Difference by
Jacques Derrida

Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
The tree of knowledge is not that of life.

I have one resource
Still in my science--I can call the dead,
And ask them what it is we we dread to be.

Manfred by Lord Byron

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Preface

Theatre scholars Don B. Wilmeth and Philip Kolin have both bemoaned the absence of any critical analysis of Romulus Linney's prolific career. Not only is he considered by Martin Gottfried "one of the best kept secrets of the American theatre,"[1] but Richard Schickel has hailed him "one of the American theatre's most mysteriously buried treasures."[2]

The following study is an attempt to fill this vacuum by exploring the author's more than thirty plays, their relation to the the life of the American regional theatre movement, and his debt to the European and American roots from which his deeply felt, idiosyncratic, and classically inspired plays are derived.

My personal and professional relationship with the subject, as a student in his playwriting class and actor in his first production at the Signature Theatre, has afforded me a unique perspective to his artistic process. A portrait emerges of an uncompromising, often poetic, and perennially productive philosopher, teacher, director and consummate writer for the stage.

In describing his play Dynamo, Eugene O'Neill makes a vow to

> dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel it -- the death of an old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life ...

That instinct, propeling society to search for that which may "comfort its fears of death," finds expression in the works of O'Neill and Romulus Linney. "It seems to me," O'Neill

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continues, "that anyone trying to do good work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays," or face having "no more real status than a parlor entertainer."[3] These sentiments could well characterize the spirit by which Linney approaches his craft, aligning himself with, not only O'Neill, but also Büchner, Chekhov, Ibsen, and Strindberg, all of whom were dedicated to tackling "this big subject."

Romulus Linney's career has remained, like the many personal histories he has brought to the stage, largely unknown to the majority of American readers or theatre-goers. One explanation for this may be that his vast body of plays express a desire to confront a culture less and less interested in or influenced by philosophy and history. Combining wry humor with intense examinations of the individual under moral and social stress, his work seeks to help us evaluate contemporary anxieties by experiencing the spiritual and ethical dilemmas of past times. Though he never flinches from showing us the darker side of his characters, they are endowed with intensely humanistic overtones. This thesis attempts to synthesize the various ideas expressed in his work, in an effort to make its worth more generally known.

In a letter to Linney from the author of Byron: A Portrait, Leslie A. Marchand reminds the playwright that the poet admitted to Lady Blessington that "I am such a strange melange of good and evil, that it would be difficult to describe me."[4] Byron's self-appraisal might have as easily fit into the mouths of Frederick the Great, Oscar Wilde, or Ahkmatova and provides an entrance

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into the ambiguous world of this endlessly fascinating playwright.

Romulus Linney was born September 21, 1930, in Philadelphia, raised in the South, and now lives in New York City. In addition to over twenty full-length plays and numerous one-acts, he is the author of three novels: Heathen Valley (1962), Slowly, By Thy Hand Unfurled (1965), and Jesus Tales (1981).

His first play, The Sorrows of Frederick (1966) deals with the complex relationship between Frederick the Great and his difficult father, a theme he returns to in a recent play, Shotgun, which premiered at the 1994 Humana New Play Festival at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville. The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks (1972), called by the Village Voice "the best play ever written about the Vietnam War, bar none," concerns the social and political issues of that time. Holy Ghosts (1974) explores the magnatism of religious faith, while Childe Byron (1977) centers around the figure of the English poet Lord Byron, conjured from from the dead by his daughter Ada to illuminate their conflicted relationship. Heathen Valley (1988), adapted from his 1962 novel, winner of the National Critics Award and, perhaps, his most compelling work, chronicles the tragic journey of a reconstructed criminal whose attempts to redeem both himself and a savage rural community are thwarted by an egocentric Protestant Bishop. His recent New York productions of Ambrosio (1992), A Woman Without A Name (1992), and Three Poets (1990), in addition to the mounting of 2 at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville in 1990

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and the Williamstown Theatre in 1992, confirm his stature as an important theatrical figure.

Mr. Linney's plays have been produced throughout the United States, as well as in Birmingham, London, and Vienna. His Laughing Stock was named by Time magazine "one of the ten best plays of 1984." Six of his one-act plays have appeared in Best Short Plays. He has received fellowships from the NEA, Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. He has been awarded two Obie Awards, including one for sustained artistic excellence, two Hollywood Drama-Logue Awards, the Mishima Prize for Fiction and the Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He has directed his plays for the Alley Theatre, the Milwaukee Repertory, the Whole Theatre, the Philadelphia Festival for New Plays, the San Francisco Bay Area Festival, the Theatre for The New City, the Signature Theatre, and the Actors Studio. A graduate of Oberlin College and the Yale School of Drama, he has taught fiction at the University of Pennsylvania and playwriting at Columbia University. He currently directs the playwriting program for the Actor's Studio at the New School.

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CHAPTER ONE

LESSONS OF TIME: HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

The first law of life: impressions received in childhood cannot be erased from the soul.

Frederick the Great, in
The Sorrows of Frederick[1]

It is immediately evident how monumentally important the historical imagination was to Büchner, Ibsen and Strindberg, not to mention Jean Anouilh, Paul Green, John Arden, Robert Bolt and Romulus Linney. Rather than to rely solely on the early impressions of their limited experiences as young writers, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Linney expropriated from their locales and nattional cultures stories and characters known to a wide audience, much as did writers for Greek and Renaissance theatres. They began their careers exploring historical material that reflected their personal identification with a vivid environment.

What distinguishes Ibsen, Strindberg, and Linney from Anouih, Arden, Green, and Bolt is that they are more autobiographical. In his biography of Ibsen, Harold Clurman describes the Norwegian playwright's plays as "deeply autobiographical... dramatizations of his emotional, spiritual, social and intellectual life." Ibsen himself noted, "Everything that I have written is most intimately connected with what I have lived through, if not personally experienced." He goes on to say that "environment has great influence upon the forms in which the imagination creates."[2]

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It can be said that any playwright's work is personal and that their environment influences their creativity, but few have revealed their psychic obsessions as explicitly as Strindberg or their identification with a particular environment as unquestionably as Ibsen. Linney shares with both these historical dramatists many of the same tendencies.

Ibsen's environment included the sea and adjacent towering mountain tops and fjords of Scandinavia. Romulus Linney spent a major portion of his youth in Appalachia. During the depression he lived in Boone, North Carolina, and then Madison, Tennessee, where he remained until, at age thirteen, his father, a medical doctor, died of cancer. The impact of the Appalachian culture, expecially the distinct character of its people, along with the early death of his troubled father, are as boldly stamped on the plays of Linney as are the Nordic icons--trolls, lofty peaks, and shipwrecks--on those of Ibsen.

Just as one must defend August Strindberg, who is commonly faulted for his overly subjective character treatments, "comprehensible only as mirrors of a private fantasy world,"[3] one must not allow the facts of an artist's life to disproportionately temper the reception of the artist's work. This criticism of overly personalizing one's subject (somewhat valid, perhaps, in Strindberg and, to a lesser degree, Linney, especially in The Captivity of Pixie Shedman) "does not explain why the power of [the] work remains undiminished, attracting audiences today who know little, if anything, about the playwright or his life."[4]

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Asked about the issue of uncovering the personal identity of an author in his work, Linney states:

> We know who Shakespeare is just because when you watch a play of his, suddenly the sensibility shines through and you say, "Oh, that's Shakespeare." You know that there is some great, good-hearted, wise, all-knowing, marvelous person. On the other hand, you've got Henry Miller where everything is all about getting laid in Paris.[5]

Linney, a professor of playwriting at Columbia University and former teacher of fiction at The University of Pennsylvania, believes it is less possible for playwrights to be autobiographical because they can't address the reader directly as a novelist can and as a poet does all the time. With that in mind, "you begin to see ... somebody's obsession ... and most writers have very few things to say."[6]

Strindberg began his career as a writer of fiction, as did Pinter, who, born the same year as Linney, produced an early unpublished novel (The Dwarfs) and whose play No Man's Land Linney ranks among his favorites. Less temperate than the more conservative Ibsen, Strindberg embarked on a journey earnestly in tune with the movements of the left, especially the 1871 Paris Commune. Like Ibsen, he had a commitment to a revolution on both a secular and spiritual level. In his short stories and in the novel The Red Room, Strindberg is the youthful revolutionary; Ibsen, the political journalist on the brink of creating his titanic idealists in Brand, Peer Gynt and The Emperor and the Galilean. Both Scandinavian authors reflected the spiritual idealism of, among others, Søren Kierkegaard, and the fire of

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social reform championed by Georg Brandes. Their desire to examine complicated messianic figures, most conspicuously in Master Olof, Brand, and The Emperor and the Galilean, is understandable coming from authors who, like Linney, are always exploring contradictions. A shared identification with their homelands helps explain Linney's choice to begin his writing by drawing first from the deep well of Appalachian folk myth.

Much as the friction between the Catholic church and concurrent reform movements was a constant concern in the post-Marxist world of the latter nineteenth century, it is this gap between a morally reinfused realist and an unbending idealist (the reformed criminal and the solipsistic Episcopal Bishop) that is addressed in Linney's first novel, Heathen Valley, later to become a play.

During Linney's first year in New York, having graduated from Yale School of Drama's directing program, he became frustrated by his inability to find acting work and began writing a Greek historical drama. In his early attempts, Linney considered himself a writer of logorrhea--uninhibited prose--having drawn his inspiration from Faulkner and O'Neill. It was then he came under the influence of Par Lagerkvist, "a writer who uses extremely simple and spare means, as, of course, Faulkner does not. Somehow mixing Lagerkvist and Faulkner together I learned to write novels."[7] It was in this period that he began a novel workshop with Hiram Hayden, the distinguished editor who had discovered William Styron and Reynolds Price. Linney soon wanted to be rid of the theatre, with its accompanying disappointments: to

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escape the failed auditions and personal doubts. As fortune would have it, in 1956 his grandmother left him a small 160 acre farm in Oklahoma and in 1958, with expenses of about forty dollars a week, he was able to seriously devote his time to the task of writing fiction. But the harder he worked the more terrible he felt his writing was becoming.

Soon thereafter, while in North Carolina, he was struck by another inspiration, one that had its roots in his boyhood. As an eager young listener of mountain tales, he had heard family members gossip about "something weird" that had happened seven miles outside the town of Boone, North Carolina in the 1840s. He recalls driving to a little parish in Valley Crucis, all that was left of a nineteenth century mission, where the preacher gave him a book titled Missionary Life in Valle Crucis by Susan Fenimore Cooper, the novelist's daughter. He began to have a very different feeling about this book than he did about the Greek myths that Lagerkvist cared so much about. He had rediscovered the land where his father's family had thrived for generations; where his great-great-grandfather, Romulus Zachariah Linney, once served as a three-term congressman, and where he had grown up as a child.

Ibsen never quite found his calling until he began mining the wealth of mythology and legend of his mountainous home. Master Olof was the first major expression of Strindberg's lifelong interest in Swedish history, to which he would return so often late in his career. Similarly, Linney did not feel he was

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a writer until he turned to his natural habitat and began work on the novel that was to become, perhaps, his most perfectly formed and representative creation for the stage: Heathen Valley.

All three authors were searching for ways to express a belief, not unlike that of Hegel's, that if a spiritual revolution was not possible, surely there was a way to find "the idea of spirit" in a secular form. Their early writings, especially, reflect these kinds of investigations.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the root meaning of the word "history" in Greek was "investigation" or "inquiry" and "the earliest Greek history writing was characterized by the spirit of empirical investigation."[8] The Romans adapted this sense of "history as inquiry" to a meaning more akin to the "account" or "tale," but the quality of "finding out" has never been lost, especially as it is conceived by Ibsen, Strindberg and Linney in their historical and biographical works that explore an individual's search for the ethical self.

Hayden White defines historical work as the attempt to mediate what he calls "the historical field, the unprocessed historical record, other historical accounts, and an audience."[9] In this respect Romulus Linney is as much a historian as he is a playwright. His work has regularly required lengthy and concentrated research, especially for The Sorrows of Frederick, Childe Byron, Three Poets, Ambrosio, and 2. Though the focus in these plays is unquestionably on the individual, the personality of the particular era is indelibly stamped on each. In order to

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comprehend Linney's point of view regarding the individual's response to its era, it is helpful to consider the paradigms advanced under the tenets expressed in the criticism of Northrop Frye and Hayden White.

Frye's discourse presupposes a symbolic system by which the four basic genres (White's modes of emplotment), Comedy, Romance, Tragedy, and Satire, represent literary equivalents to the seasons of the year. Linney's stories subtly express all the seasons of Frye's calendar, mixing tragicomedies with satirical romances, always defying easy categorization. Frye's system, rooted in ritual, the foundation of mimetic performance, illustrates the natural laws of the historical process. A careful examintion of these genres reveals that, in White's words,

> Comedy and Tragedy take conflict seriously, even if the former eventuates in a vision of the ultimate reconciliation of opposed forces and the latter in a revelation of the nature of the forces opposing man on the other.[10]

Linney's stories offer neither the comfort of reconciliation nor the pure revelation of the tragic form. Their emplotments suggest the Satirical Romance, that which is "intended to expose, from an ironic standpoint, the fatuity of a Romantic conception of the world." In reference to Satire, White believed that

> It views the hopes, possibilities, and truths ironically, in the atmosphere generated by the apprehension of the ultimate inadequacy of consciousness to live in the world happily or to comprehend it fully. Satire presupposes the ultimate inadequacy of the visions of the world dramatically represented in the genres of Romance, Comedy, and Tragedy alike.[11]

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According to White, satire is the fictional counterpoint to historical irony and "is intrinsically antagonistic to the archetypes of Romance, Comedy, and Tragedy as modes of representing the forms of significant human development."[12] Linney shares with Chekhov, whose short story "In The Ravine" he adapts in Unchanging Love, the desire to cultivate characters whose idiosyncrasies contradict these archetypes. Romance is fleeting, Comedy turns dark, and Tragedy seems impossible in a world so morally and ethically askew. Questions, such as Linney addresses, regarding the moral decay of religiosity, the individuation of human responsibility, and aesthetic freedom can only be expressed within the ironic mode. White states,

> [As] the basis of a world view, Irony tends to dissolve all belief in the possibility of positive political actions. In its apprehension of the essential folly or absurdity of the human condition, it tends to engender the belief in the 'madness' of civilization itself and to inspire a Mandarin-like disdain for those seeking to grasp the nature of social reality in either science or art.[13]

Linney's ironic historical perspective is undoubtedly the product of a sensibility influenced by the twentieth century's wars, reflecting a psychologically-scarred cynicism, a potent disdain for authority, and an appreciation for the sublimely absurd found in Pinter and Albee, two of his favorite peers. His initial impulses, however, are driven by the desire to explore dimensions of the soul that were more prominently on display before the apocalyptic events of this century. The myths of the earlier centuries also allowed the playwright to attain what he considered to be that "certain distance from subjects," that he

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prefers.[14] It is this distance that enables Linney to explore so personally those characters and conflicts that preoccupied first, the nineteenth century Romantics, and later, the young Ibsen and Strindberg.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century authors had various opinions concerning the relationship between drama and history. Diderot, prior to any concern with Romanticism, "regarded history as an avenue of entrance into real human existence in time and social relationships: history embraced the present moment, its limits and possibilities."[15] Dumas père's statement in 1831 that "life is not interesting, but history is," would seem to affirm Diderot's belief that "history is the basis of dramatic art." Tom F. Driver takes a more modernist view, suggesting a friction between drama and history, though his definition of "historical thinking" remains a question of debate.

> [i]n the modern theatre, history has appeared as an alluring subject whenever Romanticism has been a strong force, in spite of the fact that Romanticism in the long run tends to destroy historical thinking.[16]

The early historical works of Ibsen and Strindberg were holdovers from the Romantic era. Their natural inclinations towards the analysis of individual will as it is confronted by ethical dilemmas, reminiscent of the Romantic poets, are similar to those tendencies in Linney's histories Heathen Valley, The Sorrows of Frederick, The Death of King Philip, Childe Byron, The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks, Ambrosio, and 2. All of these plays also owe a debt to the understanding of individuation: the equivocation of seemingly antithetical forces that

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occurs during the formation of character. These forces, and the wider philosophical questions they engender, are central to the themes of Büchner, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Linney, especially as they are demonstrated in Søren Kierkegaard's essay "Equilibrium Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Development of Personality."

The histories of these authors have all reflected, in their singular biographical approach, an intense focus on the individual's struggle to reconcile his or her aesthetic and ethical sides, or, as Kierkegaard phrased it, the "either/or." His emphasis is on the choice.

> I simply want to bring you to the point where that choice truly acquires a meaning for you ... My either/or does not denote in the first instance the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil or excludes them.[17]

Ibsen's Peer, Strindberg's Olof, Büchner's Danton, and Linney's Frederick are each confronted with a choice between living in the immediate world or striving towards an identity, constantly becoming, that defines itself in ethical, and thereby contemplative, terms. The plays' structures imply that the characters are always in the process of becoming.

> The aesthetic factor in a person is that by which he is immediately what he is; the ethical factor is that by which he becomes what he becomes.[18]

Strindberg, perhaps the most subjective of all three writers, claims to have been influenced by Kierkegaard, whose writings he encountered while at the University of Uppsala. Most biographers agree that Kiergegaard was also a favorite of Ibsen's

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and a strong influence on Brand, a play whose resonances are strikingly evident in Linney's Heathen Valley. The process of individuation so fully examined by Kierkegaard also helps in the interpretation of the personal journeys of the character of Starns in this play, as well as Lord Byron and the unnamed journal-keeper in A Woman Without A Name.

While Brand refuses to capitulate to any human weakness in his striving for the "all or nothing," and Strindberg's Olof, more political than philosophical, cannot sacrifice his ideals to the tyranny of the Catholic Church, Starns resists surrendering his homegrown ideals to the egotistical theology of the Bishop. The Sorrows of Frederick provides a nearly clinical portrait of the eccentric Prussian prince as his artistic and intellectual affinities are subjugated by militarism and the tyrannical hand of his father-king. The General's suicide in The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks only becomes explicable once the unusual visionary's life, conflicted by the doctrines of East and West, is laid out in full detail by those whose lives he changed. Like his nineteenth century predecessors, Linney chooses to focus singularly on the individual soul in conflict with a hostile power, but, unlike the megalomaniacal tyrants of Marlowe's Tamburlaine or Shakespeare's Richard III, these figures, with the possible exception of Brand, seem to be in conflict with themselves as much as with fate or history. Ibsen's Peer and Strindberg's Julie, like many of Linney's antiheroes, especially

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Frederick, are at the mercy of their genetic heritage, striving to overcome powerful predestinations.

"The conflict of opposites generates power, as fire and water create the power of steam," wrote Strindberg.[19] Such an alchemic formula could as easily refer to the uncompromising internal conflicts found in the works of all three playwrights. Each portrays burning ideals whose realizations are thwarted by opposing social and personal forces. The nearly protohuman, firebranding, Schillerian archetypes found in Brand, Master Olof, Heathen Valley and Büchner's Danton's Death, are next of kin to the tragic heroes found in so many Shakespearean and eighteenth century German historical dramas, but these particularly modern revolutionaries contradict the Greeks' tragic formula by emphasizing the ironic rather than the cathartic. The character's collapse has less to do with any tragic flaw than it does with the nearly insurmountable odds with which the spirit is faced. So overbearing are these forces that, according to Austin Pendleton, who has played Frederick on three occasions, they are one reason Linney has had problems as a dramatist. Speaking of his characters, the actor believes

> [t]here's a cold wind that blows through them. It's very difficult to find a dramatic structure around a character that is that profoundly lonely, because there's never any real possibility of anything else. There's no possibility that can then be destroyed or fulfilled.[20]

Each historical investigation, be it into Frederick or Danton, was the product of a young playwright's passion to exercise a great idealism that included the desire to alter the forms

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of theatre that playwright saw as opulent, restrictive, and false. Ibsen, Strindberg, and Linney can all be considered naturalists who toyed with historical forms early in their careers, embraced naturalism more fully, and then strived to go beyond naturalism to establish their own forms. Their early years find them all unshackled and anxious to make their mark.

With The Emperor and the Galilean Ibsen sired an aesthetic dialectic comparable to Tony Kushner's Angels In America in its brave disregard for structural rules. Strindberg's Master Olof, like Linney's Heathen Valley and The Sorrows of Frederick, addressed, in Harry Carlson's words:

> the interaction between man, the psychological animal, and man, the political animal: man with responsibilities to himself and his individual destiny and man with responsibilities to his fellow men and to the renewal of the cultural tradition that is his legacy.[21]

Büchner, whose career elapsed nearly unnoticed, wrote almost in defiance of form, creating completely unique plays that are eerily modern. Likewise, Linney, sharing Strindberg's belief that form relies on the subject, has, especially in his history and Appalachian plays, always stretched the narrative structure by letting his characters dictate that form. And the form, so beautifully conceived in Heathen Valley, is that of storytelling --a rich tradition more oral than it is literary, with a debt to rural culture and common life. Many of his Appalachian tales, in addition to Jesus Tales and certain of his historical plays, have been products of his passionate love of folk ballads.

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At age twenty-two in Boone, North Carolina, he attended classes in "Old English and Scottish Popular Ballads," as taught by the laconic Professor Cratus Williams, a local authority on traditional ballads going back to the eighteenth century.

> I felt connected to these ancient stories through Cratus Williams and through this town where I had lived in my childhood summers. They have been my guide ever since. They underlie all that I write, even when at times I have been quite unconscious of it ... For instance, Frederick the Great of Prussia and Lord Byron. Not exactly folklore figures, one would say. However, I saw very clearly how my entrances into the lives of those two men in those two historical works were still guided basically by a sense of folklore.[22]

James F. Schlatter observes that "Linney scavenges through the darker reaches of history in search of his "heroes of the damned ... psychologically disordered and morally questionable 'heroes'."[23] The first of these in Linney's canon is Frederick the Great of Prussia.

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CHAPTER TWO

KINGS AND WOULD-BE KINGS

It never stops
life never
stops playing with us.

King Philip in
The Death of King Philip[1]

The Sorrows of Frederick

While discussing this play completed in 1965 and published a year later, Linney recalls his intense empathy with this mad, sexually ambivalent world conqueror. Having discovered a history of Frederick the Great by Frederic Shoberl, with an introduction by the eighteenth century poet Thomas Campbell, in a bookstore in Matteo, North Carolina, and encouraged by novelist Mary Durant to "follow his bliss," he began exploring the character's fantastic behavior, and consequently, found his own story in Frederick's.

> This is the man who created Prussian Germany, so he was supposed to be one of the toughest nuts who ever lived, right? He'd be screaming about his dogs! I was reading it in a restaurant and I started crying. I was terribly moved by it because my father loved bird dogs. I was a little jealous of them, to tell the truth.[2]

Linney had found his entry into history via the subject's undying love of dogs. The memories of his father's love for dogs gave him the hook he needed to see Frederick through a singularly personal lens.

Most of the work on the play was done while Linney was in residence at Yaddo, a writers' retreat similar to the MacDowell Colony, where he has also gone on several occasions. Optioned by

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Robert Whitehead and Albert Marre, it was successfully produced in 1967 at the Mark Taper Forum, but a subsequent move was contingent on the playwright giving up significant control of his play. Wary of the producers' desire to make changes and in the true spirit of Strindberg, whom he later incorporated into his adaptation of Miss Julie as a symbol of resistance to the kind of censorship promulgated by Senator Helms and the Religious Right, Linney told the producers he didn't care about the play's coming to New York. He contented himself with the knowledge that The Sorrows of Frederick would be published that fall by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. The play soon had numerous productions in Germany, Vienna and Great Britain. Irving Wardle described John Wood's performance at The Birmingham Repertory in March of 1970 as "heroic acting of a kind that asserts the inviolable mystery of the individual in the very act of stripping him naked."[3]

Perhaps the play's finest realization came with Austin Pendleton's striking portrayal in the St. Clement's production of 1976. Alan Rich noted that "Linney is obviously an important new writer" and found it "an enormous play in several respects."

> It deals with Frederick not as a figure in your basic historical pageant, but as a brilliant, haunting study of a tortured person who is both master and slave of his own intellect. He is trapped by the conflict between his flights of fancy and his pragmatic court, by his homosexuality against the need of public image-making, and--most of all--by his need to win respect from his idolized Voltaire ... Linney has accomplished the considerable feat of dealing with majesty and frailty in a manner that neither glorifies nor condescends.[4]

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Following the progression of a neurotic, aesthetically inclined child transformed into a willful military strategist, The Sorrows of Frederick embraces many of the same mythopoeic and philosophic motifs one finds in The Emperor and the Galilean, Master Olof, and, especially, Danton's Death.

These four theatrical histories share enormous landscapes: early Christianity, Protestant Reformation in Sweden, France's Reign of Terror and Prussia's Seven Years War. Their focus is, however, deceptive, as they can more accurately be interpreted as the personal journeys of creative, and ultimately destructive, figures whose mythos are more internal than extensive. Mel Gussow of the New York Times observes that, "The Sorrows of Frederick is not primarily an epic about wars and power plays, but an interior psychodrama about what goes on in the crumbling mind of a philosopher-king."[5] These early works of Ibsen and Strindberg, as well as Büchner's masterpiece, are similar to Linney's histories in that they are best studied as psychodramas whose dialectics establish each writer's motifs, though the themes are increasingly disguised by the naturalistic plot structures of their middle plays. All share sympathetic character exposition, an unrelenting spotlight on the individual, a manifest distrust of religious orthodoxy, and, whether consciously or not, a fascination with the Nietzschean clash between the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

The plays' mythic heroes, each intent on challenging either the paternal hand of Christian power or the systematic autocracy

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of Machiavellian resolve--Church and State--are the creations of romantics pursuing highly personal ethical investigations critical to the understanding of all epochs. This accounts for their continued popularity where other theatrical histories seem imprisoned in their own age. The search for a moral compass found in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard helps to clarify the authors' shared intellectual thrusts.

Alastair Hannay, in his introduction to Kierkegaard's Either/Or, writes:

> The ethical life involves rejecting any idea of oneself as just a passive accumulator, or in the case of the mature aesthete also imaginative manipulator, of life's contingent blessings; it requires acceptance of the quite different idea that one is a responsible agent.[6]

Be they monstrous and self-possessed or righteous and resigned to death, Ibsen's Julian and Brand, Strindberg's Olof, Büchner's Danton, and Linney's Frederick and Byron are active players, true and fictional giants of their respective historical milieus. The backdrops provided by the cataclysmic events that shaped their lives are secondary, however, to the essentially existential questions pondered by these men as they struggle to integrate their spiritual and physical worlds.

Julian, in a burst of characteristic doubt, asks Basil, "Don't you have that horrible feeling of nausea you get on a ship becalmed, tossing backwards and forwards between life, scripture, pagan wisdom and beauty?" He wonders "whether truth is the enemy of beauty."[7]

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In his quest to comprehend his own beheading, Danton asks if "we children [are] roasted in the glowing Moloch arms of this world and tickled with rays of light so that the Gods may enjoy their laugh?" He considers that "the world is chaos. The Nothing is its too fertile Deity."[8]

Frederick, in the Act Three condemnation of Voltaire, his former mentor and literary model, discards the noble intentions of his youth and early reign to embrace both Julian and Danton's world-sick cynicism.

> Men eat flesh. I didn't sign that into law. It's the way things are. So we eat flesh. But sip brotherly love, as some poets pretend we should, and help! Nausea soon follows.[9]

The fact that Frederick, like Danton, embodies an excruciatingly existential despair became apparent to Pendleton each time he acted the role.

> Frederick is, without exception, the loneliest character I've ever played. To live inside that role feels virtually like physical pain. There's no relief from it, ever, except those few ecstatic moments with that young man, who is then murdered before one's eyes as a direct result of that love. I think that's the thing I've felt in all of Romulus' plays. I felt that the loneliness of these people is so piercing that it's almost unbearable.[10]

Julian, Brand, Danton and Frederick, giant figures transformed from earnest, though often wanton, humanists to defeated men as flawed as they are famous, are portrayed with a sympathy only possible in characters who are aware of their own failings and are capable of expressing their personal doubts in a passionate and ultimately redemptive manner. It is this tension between their expression of ethical desires and the inability to act in

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accordance with those desires that forms the core of the theatrical discourse. Our fascination with this brand of existential history is also due to the authors' understanding that, in Kierkegaard's words,

> This is the main defect with everything human, that it is only through opposition that the object of desire is possessed. I shan't speak of the various syndromes that can keep the psychologist busy (the melancholic has the best-developed sense of humor, the most extravagant person is often the one most prone to the picturesque, the dissolute so often the most moral, the doubter often the most religious), but simply recall that it is through sin that one first catches sight of salvation.[11]

Like Strindberg, who reveled in and sought mystical answers to life's struggles, Linney, "a kind of Emersonian mystic, who embraces life's awesome mystery with sublime fatalism,"[12] creates characters who express these paradoxes, but, unlike Strindberg's, they do so with an ironic wit.

The melancholic and humiliated Frederick, upon learning that a private in his army has been condemned to death for having sexual relations with his horse, pardons the soldier with a recommendation that he be transferred to the infantry. Then, with the sardonicism that always seems to underline his often inscrutable declarations, he tells his private, "I am only sorry you must lose your horse."[13]

Frederick's ultimate problem with Voltaire, the father-figure for whom he yearned, is that he cannot accept the Frenchman's "true brotherhood," the kind of noble words that the young Frederick had aspired to.

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Dismissing the church with one phrase, Voltaire eloquently ponders the hollowness of power: "I have never understood why monarchs become so infuriated with brotherly hatred, and so bored by brotherly love."

"The body is honest, if the mind is not. It vomits!" retorts Frederick. "I am always amazed by men who have the bad taste to speak for God," exclaims Voltaire. "I will desert the Enlightened, and join the Bishop," Frederick replies.[14]

The opposites explored in Frederick are also clarified when compared to those forces at work in Buchner's Danton's Death. Büchner is able to establish the same dialectic, wherein Danton's ideas are given a vivid corporeal reality. Like Frederick, his phrases frequently take the forms of anatomical metaphors: "Sweet grave, your lips are funeral bells, your voice my death knell, your breast the mound above me, and your heart my coffin." Characters are unceasingly fascinated by body parts, flesh, and bones. "We must bury the great corpse decently, like priests, not murderers," demands Saint-Just. "It mustn't be torn to pieces, all the limbs must be there."[15]

These allusions to the disemboweled in both works serve to highlight Frederick and Danton's perpetual desire to reconcile their own earthly desires with their spiritual quest to understand and execute justice and goodwill. These same battles are fought by Ibsen's Julian and Strindberg's Olof. The characters, in their devotion to human enlightenment, give us a very

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different portrait of religiosity than the popular ones of their day. Their religion is forever linked to the everyman, while the Priests, Saviors and Bishops come to embody the corrupt establishments.

Linney's dissolute antiheroes, Frederick, Byron, Starns and Oscar Wilde, reveal a humanism absent in his religious figures. These apostates, like their doubting predecessors Gert, Danton, Peer and Julian, share an ideal that transcends orthodoxy in its quest for earthly salvation: the unquenchable desire to be redeemed. A personal journey in the literary tradition of Büchner, Ibsen, Strinderg, and in this century, Linney, can be translated as the need to understand, especially oneself, and to be understood. Its venue is often the world of dreams and spirits, alive and dead. This spiritual journey is the key not only to many of Linney's historical figures, but also to his contemporary characters.

The outdoor dramas of Paul Green had a tremendous effect on Linney. While performing in the chorus of The Confederacy at Virginia Beach in 1959 (in the role of General Lee's chaplain) he gained a great respect for the playwright, who had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1927. Green was "in many ways way out ahead of a lot of other people," says Linney. "And Abraham's Bosom was not the sort of play that was being written."[16]

Two years later, while teaching in the drama department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Linney and Green's paths crossed once again. His first novel half finished,

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Linney was asked by novelist John Ehle to show his writing to Green, a generous author and social activist who was forever encouraging other playwrights to cultivate what had come to be known as "symphonic outdoor drama." After reading his work to Green, who encouraged him to continue Heathen Valley, he spent that summer attending performances of The Lost Colony, while finishing the novel at Manteo. Awed by the play's symphonic form and site-specific immediacy, Linney

> marveled at its originality, strength, beauty and richness of texture ... blending drama, music, dance and pageantry into a sweeping, deeply moving story of the first American settlers ... The play had, and still has, a great power, merging captivating large-scale theatre with a sobering view of American history.[17]

Even more significant than the historical models Green provided Linney was the shape of these outdoor dramas. Similar to the cinematic scene structures of the fourteenth and fifteenth century mystery cycles, Childe Byron and The Sorrows of Frederick share with Green's natural epics the semblance of a form that began under the skies, amidst the cool sea breezes of The Waterside Theatre on Roanoke Island, North Carolina.

> If you look at historical drama you will see that you have this scene, then you have that scene. They get a little klunky and Paul has solved that by having had to --by having one big stage at center and those two side stages. When I look at Frederick I see a lot of the dramaturgy of Paul Green's The Lost Colony.[18]

Another influence to whom Linney gives credit is Eugene O'Neill, no stranger to the uses of history for dramatic form. Interestingly, it was not so much the master's adaptations of the Atreus myth that caught his attention, but the epic Marco

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Millions that became a primer. His final directing project at Yale, the play prompted Linney to investigate O'Neill's notebooks, where he encountered voluminous notes and scenarios with no dialogue.

> It was a great education, because while I was ostensibly doing it to learn how to direct this play, I was in fact learning how to write a play. I said to myself what I think many directors should admit, which was that it wasn't enough just to direct this play, I wanted to make this play look like I wrote it.[19]

Prior to the success of Frederick and with his first published novel Heathen Valley under his belt, Linney occupied himself with his writing and teaching. It was then, recently divorced from his first wife and separated from their three year-old daughter, that he turned to Yaddo, where he began life-long relationships with, among others, Virgil Thompson and Philip Roth.

> I really started to figure out who I was and what I wanted to do. This was the way I wanted to live and these are the people I like. And I really get along with these people in a way I never quite got along with people in the theatre.[20]

This period is also notable because it instilled in the playwright an indelible familiarity with the literary world, an association which few playwrights bred in the theatre can claim. Linney graduated from Oberlin College in 1953 with a background in the humanities, and in 1954 was drafted into the army while in his first year at Yale, but henceforth he was predominantly shaped by the demands and sacrifices associated with a career in the theatre. "I was not a natural writer," the playwright said in

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1981, "and had not really thought of myself as a literary person."[21] Ironically, it was not until he had written two well received novels, Heathen Valley and Slowly, By They Hand Unfurled, that he found his true vocation as a writer for the stage. A devotion to the literary model has, however, remained constant.

Democracy

Linney's hunger to examine literary figures, while nowhere more apparent than in his second major historical biography, Childe Byron, written nearly ten years later, is also evident in his shorter plays written soon after The Sorrows of Frederick: Democracy and The Death of King Philip. Both are loosely adapted from novels and diaries, sources already recognized in literary circles as important historical documents. Here was material previously unexplored by the theatre, but well-known to the world of books.

The two short novels by Henry Adams, Democracy and Esther, that are merged in Linney's final dramatic adaptation, Democracy and Esther, were early works completed shortly before the suicide of Adams' wife in 1885. The heroines, Madeleine Lee and Esther Dudley, represent emerging Neo-Romantic archetypes of modern women who share many of the same qualities as the conflicted male antiheroes of the Ibsen, Strindberg and Linney plays previously discussed. Their fates, like Frederick's and Aida's (in Childe Byron), are determined by their fathers' wills. They are

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products, even, of their genetic makeup. These extraordinarily iconoclastic and disillusioned women exhibit the same skepticism that fuels Frederick and Danton, but their strength and fortitude are even more unusual, considering their status in the staunchly patriarchal world of Washington politics seventy years after the formation of the Union.

In Esther's case, especially, the archetype goes so far as to embody a sensuality and rationalism often associated with the male heroes of the age, yet she never loses her feminine identity. As Lydia discerns in the beginning of Act Two: "Esther is a Dudley. She wants to believe what her man preaches is the truth. Evidently, she's having a little trouble."[22] And Esther herself seldom fails to mince words in her estimation of the preacher.

> I hate your church. I don 't simply dislike it, I despise it. When you preach I expect you to pull out a goat, or a ram, slice open its throat at the altar, and throw its blood on me. And your congregation. To sit in that herd of self-pitying, self-righteous American hypocrites revolts me to the bottom of my soul.[23]

Like Zenobia in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance, these women are attracted to art, troubled by coercion, and prey to the destructive powers of the male. Adams' spiritual Darwinism and Jeffersonian liberalism fit comfortably into Linney's world, wherein, like Nancy in Holy Ghosts, the female of the species emerges the stronger, the more mature and, in Esther's and Madeleine's cases, the more ethical.

Linney must naturally sacrifice some of the complexity and subtlety of the characters in the original novels. Madeleine's

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sister Sybil Lee and Esther's loyal friend Catherine, perfect foils to her egotistical suitors, are discarded, and the identity of President Grant, concealed in Adams' story, is evident in Linney's. Also lost is a view of the fragile and complicated state of Madeleine's mind when, in the original, she refuses Carington's marriage proposal. "Every nerve in her body tingled with fear," writes Adams, "when she thought what a miserable fraud she was; what a mass of pretensions unfounded, of deceit ingrained."[24] These are insights more precisely explored in the novel form. Understanding the constraints of combining these two stories, while providing more than one dimensional characters, Linney set out to compare the protagonists' mutual journeys towards a more confident womanhood. The reverberations of these nineteenth century individualists are also evident in his twentieth century women from Woman Without a Name and Akhmatova.

Linney, while eliminating several of Adams' other male characters, gives added importance to Baron Jacobi, who not only provides the narration, but also comes to represent the European counterpart to American Puritanism and hypocrisy. His little deception, whereby he acquires the necessary information to destroy Senator Raitcliffe's chances of marriage to Madeleine, is juxtaposed with the larger frauds committed by American politicians. Are we asked to forgive one and denounce the other? Neither Linney or Adams allows us to come to such facile conclusions. Both make it pointedly clear that Madeleine and her sister will give up the New World to return to the assurances of

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European tradition and cultural superiority. Jacobi, having proven to himself and to Madeleine the inferiority of American civilization, also makes a comfortable exit, forever the detached moralist who proves that hypocrisy is a universal condition. Here again, the character's contradictions evoke a world picture far more gray than black and white.

Mel Gussow makes the observation that the first of Adams' short novels "was published anonymously, the second under a pseudonym ... [T]he author was worried about repercussions."[25] Adams knew that he was taking on sacred cows, addressing serious reservations about church and state. Linney, in following Adams' lead, was simply finding a new arena for many of the same questions he had already addressed in The Sorrows of Frederick and Heathen Valley: how do people respond, when faced with an ethical impasse, to the greater problems of justice and faith? Esther's story focuses mainly on religion, while Madeleine's dilemma centers on the responsibilities of the state. The common denominator is the remarkable independence and spirit of these two strong women.

Linney knows that our interest is going to center on their love lives. By spotlighting two relationships on the verge of either marriage or self-destruction, he commands our attention. Esther is unable to escape her father's secular humanism and Madeleine cannot abide the compromises made by the eager and comfortably corrupt Senator Raitcliffe. In the guise of a

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romance, the playwright asks us to consider some of the fundamental flaws in the operation of our young democracy.

The play was written, says Linney, because "I thought it very pertinent to what was happening in the '60s."[26] Interestingly, the play assumes an even sharper ironic resonance if one considers the American landscape ten years after it was written. Baron Jacobi's 1875 pronouncement in Act One, Scene Three (one hundred years before Ford pardoned Nixon) predicts that

> [i]n one hundred years, the United States of America will be more corrupt than France under the Regent, than the Church under Leo the Tenth, than Rome under Caligula![27]

"Adams was sort of our first Voltaire,"[28] states Linney, and like Frederick's mentor, the playwright tries to make sense of virtue.

> Everybody knows what's morally right and wrong according to a strict code of morality. But is that what the country wants? This is what you have to balance back and forth. It seemed to me that Henry Adams understood this extremely well at a time when our form of government, which has grown so complicated now, was still relatively simple. I suppose this play is about the childhood of democracy: it's about youth; it looks at what was wrong with democracy when it was young.[29]

Eric Zencey, in his historical novel Panama, based on Henry Adams' search for meaning in the dark period after his wife's death, describes a desire in the nineteenth century author to explore a more innocent period when it was easier for individuals to discern ethical choices, such as those confronting Esther and Madeleine. There is little doubt that it was these same concerns that motivated Linney to transfer the work to the stage. Zencey goes on to say that

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> [w]hat [Adams] wanted was to find that point, somewhere in the 12th century, when life had been most whole; when church and culture had been one, when there hadn't been a cacophony of voices and visions in the world, when it had been possible to pursue both an individual moral life and the life of the community without feeling skewered by paradox. If he could find such a point, back seven centuries, he would have a base from which to measure change, the broad curving arc of time down to the present.[29]

Linney is also attracted, as he was in Frederick, to the idea that art, as a preoccupation, livelihood, or obsession of men can be as damaging to women as the zealous ambition of a Senator Raitcliffe. Here is a theme to which Linney returns again and again as his colorful madmen (Byron, Wilde, Goering, FM's Buford Bullough, and Strindberg himself, in his adaptation of Miss Julie) leave a path of personal destruction in their wake. These characterizations are conceived so vividly and with such purpose, however, that one cannot help but admire the single-minded honesty of their self-appraisals, as illustrated by Baron Jacobi's speech to The Daughters of American Progress.

> Beware the arts of men! We will put you in our visions, where you must live, with our mistakes! I love women. I wish you well. That is Art.[30]

The Death of King Philip

Linney's next project, like Holy Ghosts from 1976, shares with Democracy "matters rooted deep in the American psyche."[31] His first published one-act, discounting an early work, Don't Worry About Me, produced by East Carolina University in 1965, it is also the first play that begins to reflect his attempt to create a distinctly spare piece of "chamber theatre," a form to

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which he would return in both his historical and contemporary plays.

The Death of King Philip was written while Frederick was likely still very much on Linney's mind, a short time after the triumphs and disappointments associated with his Los Angeles production and subsequent publishing. It is also probable that memories of Paul Green were still fresh in his mind. The lives of indigenous people, while forever a concern in his Appalachian plays, are nowhere more apparent than in this meditation on manhood and spiritual retribution that is clearly indebted to Green's tale of the first colony in North Carolina. The inherent and resigned nobility of the Native American characters in The Lost Colony, especially in the Scene Four pantomime of the murder of old King Wingina, undoubtedly informed Linney's minimalist portrait of the fallen Poccaset Indian King Philip.

Adapted from The Narrative of Mary Rowlandson and the New England histories of King Philip's War by Captain Benjamin Church and others, The Death of King Philip is a mere twenty-eight pages in length, but leaves a profound impact seldom encountered in long-winded theatrical histories. Mel Gussow found it a "mordant and poetic tale about an Indian chief forced into acts of savagery."[32] Reflecting the same appreciation of an actor-driven mise en scène, found also in Heathen Valley and Childe Byron, King Philip is performed with little action. Its vivid narrative, however, captures Mary Rowlandson's intense transformation from a naive and bereft prisoner to a woman of sixty unable to bury her

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past. What she attests to in hindsight reflects the serious doubts of a good woman who cannot reconcile her culture's platitudes with the hard truths she has experienced. The savage and inhuman consequences of the actions of men like her Puritan husband, the Reverend Joseph Rowlandson, and Captain Benjamin Church, the commander of the Colonies' forces, are starkly recited by four actors, with the role of Mary at age thirty and sixty played by two actresses. The effect of such a division clearly puts the focus on Mary and the psychological turmoil that haunts her sleepless nights as she ponders the hideous plight of this Indian and his people. According to William Mootz in the Louisville Courier Journal, using "this narrative framework to meditate on historic ironies," Linney's Mary and the Indian chieftain "are both victims of destinies over which they have scant control" and the playwright "brings them ever closer to a confrontation with their dark and despairing fate."[33]

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CHAPTER THREE

DEATH WISHES

And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life,
I look upon the peopled desert past,
As on a place of agony and strife,
Where for some sin I was cast
To act and suffer, but remount at last
With a fresh 'pinion -

Byron in Childe Byron[1]

The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks

Any review of Linney's voluminous output confirms that nearly all of his plays reveal a historical consciousness, if not always strictly historical settings or factual reenactments. Many, especially those more closely associated with folktale and myth, are less dependent on historical or biographical events than they are on historical metaphor.

One such play, the first two-act version of which was begun in 1969 and completed in 1971, is The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks, a work that feels like a historical event, but that can be more accurately described as a burst of theatrical and historical imagination. It invents an entirely original approach to the courtroom drama of its day (Mutiny On The Bounty and Judgment At Nuremberg) by incorporating the shinju of Japanese Noh Theatre to illustrate the suicidal pact of a disenchanted father distraught over the death of his son in Vietnam. Imaginary events are too closely identified with this defining moment in American history to be omitted from any study of his historical drama.

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The play's evolution from a full two-act with fifteen characters and assorted voices and dancers to a tightly knit one-act praised by Michael Feingold as "the best play ever written about the Vietnam war"[2] is a textbook illustration of the playwright's craft. The fact that a Broadway production in February of 1972 did not elicit either an audience or serious praise failed to deter the author from reworking and ultimately reviving it in 1991 for the inaugural season of the acclaimed Signature Theatre, where it received mostly strong reviews. The process whereby Linney selectively eliminated all but the essential conflicts and images shows not only a devotion to clarity and spareness of character and milieu, but also a strong belief in himself. Most writers would have swallowed the disappointment and let it be forgotten, but Linney knew that this story needed to be told.

While critical notices for both the Broadway and the revived production found fault with the structure of Love Suicide, most seemed to misinterpret the author's intended critique of the soul of a nation at war as much with itself as with a foreign enemy. For the most part, they also failed to address the larger issue, one which, fortunately, didn't escape Martin Gottfried, who described the play's theme as "the difference between Eastern mysticism and Western rationalism." Finding blame in John Berry's 1972 production, not in the play, he writes:

> What Mr. Linney did was to look at the lives of his two dead heroes as if they were flowers, drawing one petal aside at a time to reveal an air of sincere, troubled, thinking, confused, pretentious, idealistic and silly

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> people who tried in their conventional ways to find a little beauty in life and honesty with themselves. In the process Mr. Linney pitched everyday life against mythological grandeur, common sense against fabulous notions.[3]

The play is more concerned with the world in which the deceased couple lived than the couple themselves. Those that found the work lacking a clear portrait of the central character seemed annoyed by the general's Godot-like presence and control over the proceedings. They blame his idiosyncrasies, especially the bizarre plot to embarrass the President, for preventing our sympathy and even our understanding of his motivations. The general's faults, however, are further evidence that Linney refuses to glamorize or canonize his characters by distinguishing them as noble or in any way sanctified by their self-sacrifice. In doing so their actions are more clearly an example of what the Louisville Times' Dudley Saunders called "an army which seemed to be falling apart psychologically. Discipline and tradition were crumbling."[4] Linney defends his own choices:

> [T]he play was criticized because some people wanted a vehement attack on the army. Instead I gave them a psychological exploration of people in the army. I don't write anti-war propaganda. At the heart of this play is the idea that citizens must take responsibility for the moral and political actions of their country, or at least decide where they stand on them.[5]

And in defense of a structure that some found lacking in surprise, Michael Feingold responded:

> The moral question of the war and what any one American could have done about it is burned through the center of the play's reflective structure, turning the overlapping testimonies into pieces of a puzzle that will never fit perfectly together.[6]

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When Lucy Lake, the iron willed poet whom the General and his wife befriend, is asked why the General believed he had murdered his son, her response goes to the central issue surrounding both our country's questioning its involvement in Southeast Asia and its growing military might, especially during the Cold War.

> LUCY: He believed he had done his duty. He believed his duty led to the useless death of his son. He questioned his duty. He decided he had become a moral lunatic.
> C.O.: A what?
> LUCY: Mo-ral lun-a-tic.
> C.O.: This is ridiculous. What did doing his duty have to do with the death of his son?
> LUCY: It was the murder weapon. The instrument of homicide.
> C.O.: You don't make sense.
> LUCY: Call it poison. He had poisoned his son. That help?[7]

It is this portrait of "moral lunacy" that seems to have remained with Linney following his tour of duty at Schofield Barracks during the Korean War. If one were searching for a clue to the source of this spiritual sickness that pervaded the General's world prior to his suicide, one would need go no further than Richard Rhodes' 1995 essay in the New Yorker concerning General Curtis LeMay. LeMay's report of the Tokyo firebombing on March 10, 1945 is a clear indication of military responsibility gone awry.

> The mission succeeded; the United States Strategic Bombing Survey estimated that "probably more persons lost their lives by fire at Tokyo in a 6-hour period than at any time in the history of man." LeMay's subsequent mission report emphasized that the object of

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the attack "was not to bomb indiscriminately civilian populations."[8]

Rhodes' account of LeMay in 1954 suggests that if he could not tempt our new adversaries into war, "he might be able to push the Soviets to sufficiently high levels of alert to justify launching a full preemptive attack."[9] Here is an example of a loose cannon at the highest level of power. Such a condition also existed while LeMay was overseeing the Strategic Air Command's part in Kennedy's Cuban Missile Crisis and later during the Vietnam War's middle years, as the American people were beginning to discern the morally corrupt black hole that existed there.

LeMay emerges as the same kind of military leader who continually lied to Americans about troop losses and military realities in Vietnam. His statements at the 1987 Hawks' Cay Conference, recalling his assurances to President Kennedy that there would be no reaction from the Soviets should the President decide to order an immediate air strike against Cuban targets, reaffirm the difference between the work of madmen and common human decency.

It is this plea for humanity that propels the engine of Linney's play, but he refuses to dilute the General's portrait. Here is a man so intent on making his private statement that the life of an orphan boy becomes expendable. The character's humanity is compromised, making the play's puzzle that much more difficult to assemble.

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Neither was Linney interested in conforming to the prevalent sentiment among progressives in 1972 that our country was the sole villain in the conflict. The circumstances that allowed the judicial inquiry to take place could only have existed under a system that practiced civil democracy. The playwright, while providing a rational and seemingly unbiased report, does, however, find guilt at the very heart of the military establishment, whose views on world domination and homosexuality naturally color our perceptions of the commission's findings. Though the political conclusions are, for the most part, discernible, the answers to the spiritual questions remain as enigmatic as the tenuous ties between East and West.

In this play, as in The Sorrows of Frederick and The Death of King Philip, the events of history and the exigencies of institutions propel the individual into a fit of existential despair. The tragic content of his major characters is mediated, however, by the flaws and inadequacies these characters possess.

Childe Byron

Nowhere, with the possible exception of 2, are a character's imperfections more apparent than in Childe Byron, published in 1977. First produced that year by the Virginia Museum Theatre, and later given widely acclaimed productions at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville and the Circle Repertory Company, it represents one of the author's most personal testimonies, a very

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private excursion that clearly establishes him as a Neo-Romantic in the Ironic Mode.

Two events in Linney's life motivated the writing of this, his seventh play. While in the seventh grade at a one room schoolhouse in Madison, Tennessee, the playwright was forced to read aloud Lord Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon" as punishment for a small misdeed. He was immediately smitten. Described by Linney as the "story of the yearning of the human spirit, a brilliant, romantic rhapsody on what it means to be free,"[10] the poem and "Childe Harold," the fictional account of Byron's youthful tour of the Mediterranean, spoke very personally to the older Linney, a distraught father who faced the uncertain future of a life without his daughter. Recently separated from his first wife, Linney empathized deeply with the Byron of 1816, whose daughter Ada, just a year old, had been put into the exclusive care of her mother. Denied his daughter's love, Byron fled to Venice. It was there he began composing Canto III of his "Childe Harold."

> My daughter! with thy name this song begun
> My daughter! with thy name thus much shall
> end
> I see thee not, - I hear thee not, - but none
> Can be so wrapt in thee; thou art the friend
> To whom the shadows of far years extend:
> Albeit my brow thou never should'st behold,
> My voice shall with thy future visions blend,
> And reach into thy heart, - when mine is
> cold,
> A token and a tone, even from thy father's
> mould.[11]

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As in The Sorrows of Frederick we are invited to follow a journey through the private and public life of a character whose mythos is as renowned for its depravity as it is for its place in the canon of historical icons. We are spirited from up close views of the plump and rather nasty child poet, who seems destined to repeat the sins of his father, to the embittered and sickly celebrity, the "fat, philosophical, faithful, retired, rich, and suicidal"[12] poet who discovers his fitting end playing Greek revolutionary. The remarkable quality of both these plays is that they do not avoid providing a broad, historical perspective to excruciatingly introspective confessionals.

Neither Frederick nor Byron's story would hold the stage if they did not flirt with tragedy as an ironic and modern form on the one hand, and on the other, treat time as a fluid void capable of showing us history from both a subjective and objective viewpoint. This ability to incorporate the broad strokes of history into what is fundamentally familial discourse represents a unique addition to the historical theatre, one that demands ensemble acting at its finest and an audience willing to transcend their usual expectations regarding character and time. It is this required theatrical leap of faith and the sometimes ethereal quality of the actor's transformations, also prominent in Three Poets, that make productions of these plays simultaneously resemble both chamber and epic theatre. It is as if the author had found a way to produce Hamlet with eight actors, Linney's standard cast size, while incorporating the living images of Hamlet's

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youth, his mother's frigidity in marriage, and his father's kingdom before the murder. One is immediately made aware of the psychological brutality and its consequences to each protagonist. This freedom of form, whereby characters' thoughts seem to materialize from thin air, a conceit with origins in Medieval allegory, provides a fresh perspective to the presentation of biographical tragicomedy. There is also the constant reminder, this being biography, that the characters' ephemeral lives, as our own, are clearly framed by a distinct beginning and end. Mortality, for Linney, is a frequent theme.

Charged by his ubiquitous skepticism regarding Judeo-Christian institutions, and his dabbling with Eastern and Greek thought in Childe Byron, Love Suicide and Komachi, he seems to be celebrating something closer to the Greco-Oriental conception of time, not the Judeo-Christian linear view wherein "the past is the point of departure into a future always open."[13] Essayist Mercea Eliade identifies the Greco-Oriental model in which "everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future."[14] In other words, the Eastern aesthetic suggests that all time is connected, if not concurrent; past and future are the same.

Paradoxically, Linney's stories are almost always showing men and women in the process of reliving their past while trying to understand its repercussions in the present. He rarely eschews, however, at least in some form, a linear, more evolutionary conception of time. Ernest Ferlita writes that the Greek

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tradition is mainly cyclical, yet there is a pull forward at the same time. The best example of this phenomenon can be found in Aeschylus' Oresteia, in which the action culminates in the decrees of a court of justice, signifying a completion such as one finds at the gates of Saint Peter. There is retribution, but there is also forgiveness, be it of God, gods or spirits of the underworld.

The notion that there is some salvation in one's own destiny, that in the cosmos somewhere there is all knowing intelligence, informs both Aeschylus' and Linney's plays. As ironically dark as Linney's plays sometimes become, one cannot help but be touched by a similar intelligence that shows a godlike mercy, rooted in the past and informing the present.

Sophocles' Oedipus Rex is another classic example of a play that develops such a tension between two forces of time, creating a dialectic that has been cloned by countless playwrights since. Ferlita shows that:

> Where the prevailing view of time is linear, the pull toward cyclic time comes in the form of temptation. Where the prevailing view of time is cyclic, the pull toward linear time comes in the form of aspiration.[15]

Such a premise could be the formula for understanding Linney's use of time. His quality of time suspension, so often associated with magic realism, is derived from this strain that exists between temptation and aspiration, as well as past and present. His biographical figures are tempestuous storms of discontent fueled by their own genius in conflict with their human appetites. They are dreamers with leaden wings, torn between

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aspiration and desire. In so many of his works, including Childe Byron, Love Suicide, and Ambrosio, linear time is in a race with its cyclical counterpart. Childe Byron uses an investigation of the decades preceding Byron's death in 1824 as a counterpoint to the years before Ada's death in 1852. It is a confrontation of generations, as is the conflict between Frederick and his father-king. With a nod to the Oedipal pattern, as the past reveals itself, the future gets clearer and more dangerous. The craving to understand suggests a cyclic wave, while hope reminds us that the hero has not given up, even as the events of the past seem to suggest predestined calamity.

The General's play, a traditional tale of suicide, or shinju, from Love Suicide, signifies his desire to redeem his son's death in Vietnam by the taking of his own life. Ada's conjuring of her father's spirit shows her wish to come to terms with her life as it is reflected in that of the famous poet's. She wants to sort out his myth from his reality and thereby understand her own destiny.

While both these plays possess tragic dimensions not unlike those found in ancient texts, they are best understood as examples of modern tragedy, a form explored by Kierkegaard in his essay "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection In The Modern." Written in an era in which Byron's aesthetic was still very much an influence on literary minds, Kierkegaard's thesis explores the differences between ancient and modern tragedy.

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He defines his age [1813-1855] as one where the tendency is towards comedy, while writing that "human existence is considerably undermined by doubt on the part of its subjects and isolation is consistently gaining the upper hand."[16] He finds the power of religion weakened, if not destroyed. "Our age certainly has one peculiarity to a greater degree than Greece, namely that it is more melancholy and hence deeper in despair."[17] This despair is, however, more akin to pain than it is to the sorrow found in ancient tragedy. Tragic sorrow, distinguished by the quality of leniency that gives it continuity, is found wanting in our less innocent age. Kierkegaard believed that the ancient form of tragedy enabled the individual to become happy. Such happiness is more elusive in a modern age where divine mercy has been displaced by individual responsibility.

So many of Linney's characters seem to have lost their identification with their families or communities and have found themselves in a world devoid of compassion, one in which is embodied the authentic expression of the tragic. Their guilt also signifies a certain debt to ancient tragedy in its tendency to be inherited.

There are numerous elements of both ancient and modern tragedy in Linney's historical plays, but the one constant by which Kierkegaard defines the modern is nearly always conspicuous: anxiety.

> [A]nxiety is a reflection, and in this it differs essentially from sorrow. Anxiety is the organ through which the subject appropriates sorrow and assimilates it. Anxiety is the energy of the movement by which

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> sorrow bores its way into the heart. But the movement is not swift like the arrow's, it is gradual. It is not once and for all, but in constant becoming. As a passionate, erotic glance desires its object, anxiety looks at sorrow in order to desire it.[18]

Anxiety also suggests a reflection upon time, as one tends to be more anxious about the past or the future than the present. Whereas ancient Greek sorrow is always expressed in the present tense, Linney is interested in expressing the tension that is created by a reflection of the past upon the present. This generational anxiety is illustrated in Sophocles' Antigone, as well as in Childe Byron.

Just as Antigone is experiencing the "re-echoing" of Oedipus' fate, Ada is under the influence of her father's tragic fate. Contrary to the outward expression of Antigone's ancient sorrow, Ada's anxiety turns inward. Resembling Kierkegaard's vision of a tragic heroine in the modern mold, Ada's secret sorrow is her eternal treasure. "Her real life is clandestine. She, too, though living, has in another sense departed."[19] Ada is, as is Antigone, "the bride of sorrow. She consecrates her life to sorrow over her father's destiny, over her own."[20] In order for the tragedy to be truly profound, the "colliding forces must be homogeneous ... the real collision is between her love for her father and her love for herself."[21]

Exhibiting the same belief in the potency of hereditary factors that he explored in Democracy, Linney demonstrates that the personalities of Ada and Lord Byron were not diametrically opposed. As a patron to Thomas Babbage, Ada displayed in her

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treatise on the inventor of the "analytical engine" what Linney found to be a brilliant prose style. He notes that

> She had her daddy's feeling for language and his penetrating intelligence ... Ada is most extraordinary for having broken the Freudian knot. Her mother had programmed her severely to hate her father and feel abandoned by him. She was taught that he was a monster. For her to turn around, as she did, and find her way back to her father after his death was nothing short of amazing.[22]

Hearing Linney describe the triangular relations between Ada, Byron and Ada's mother, Annabella Milbanke, it is possible to see the similarities to Miss Julie, in which another mother's teachings poison the father-daughter bond.

Harold Hobson, having found that "Mr. Linney tells an involved story in an extremely complicated way," is similarly taken by the shared qualities of daughter and father:

> Nothing calls for a charitable judgment upon him. Justice is not outraged by his having been expelled from society, but Linney suggests that Ada was expelled too. She ruined her inheritance, despite her great mathematical ability. She programmed the first-ever computer but was an unsuccessful gambler. She and her father were reckless fellow-beings.[23]

It is Ada and Byron's conflicting characteristics, however, that draw us into the play. Their final reunion represents the culmination of a process of individuation found also in Woman Without A Name, The Death of King Philip, Democracy and The Captivity of Pixie Shedman. In a memo to the Circle Repertory Company following a performance of Childe Byron, Harvey S. Karten noticed that

> Byron is disgusted by his daughter's worship of mathematics and computers which she considers the source of truth, just as he is appalled by Keats' writing to

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> Greek vases instead of to people. Ada is prepared to compromise her philosophy, telling her father that her book on math and his tomes of poetry can be reconciled.[24]

This observation helps to clarify the playwright's fascination with the Nietzschean divide separating the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as well as his joy in dissecting and then reconfiguring individual personality. His debt is clearly as much to Freud as it is to the golden age of Romanticism.

Linney's canvases are broad and his ambitions sometimes larger than the limitations he sets himself in his minimalist theatre, but to yearn for what isn't there is to ignore the greater rewards. In her radio review of the 1981 production of Childe Byron at the Circle Repertory, Vera Jiji writes,

> [T]o say that the play did not explain Byron's Don Juanism, that it did not do justice to the complexity of his character, [are] complaints [that] seem to me to be misplaced. The true subject of the play is the aspiration for love, not in its erotic so much as its paternal sense.[25]

Neither is this Byron the standard portrait adopted over the ages. Dan Sullivan, writing in the Los Angles Times that "we find [Byron] less guilty than the shallow society that condemns him," seems content to report that "it's charming to see a play that presents its hero as rather better than his reputation."[26]

In a fitting personal note to both the evolution and theme of this play, as well as to Linney's somewhat concealed career, the playwright's daughter Laura, a highly successful actress with a major career, counts Childe Byron a favorite of her father's plays. She is obviously proud to have served as inspiration for

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such a beautiful work. "Hopefully," she writes, "I will be able to embody what he writes so that I can communicate it. Somehow."[27] Like Ada's desire to be buried beside her exiled father, this filial devotion, and the personal redemption it implies for both fictional and non-fictional father and daughter, represents a gesture of love and forgiveness that is exactly the point and purpose of Linney's play.

Linney was disappointed with the final results of the 1981 Circle Repertory production of Childe Byron, especially the casting of Lindsay Crouse, having seen it more successfully produced at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville in 1979 with Susan Kingsley in the role of Ada. There was also some frustration with William Hurt's New York rendition of Byron. Richard Marshall's comments in The Westsider clarify why it is dangerous in Linney's plays to concentrate too heavily on the idiosyncraacies of character at the expense of the play's organic whole. Noting that the playwright wished to arouse ambivalent feelings toward the great poet--at once a genius and monster--Marshall believed that Hurt's ambiguous acting missed the mark:

> Hurt's Byron bristled competently with sarcasm, ironic defense and anger. But, when it came to expressing how he loved--truly loved--the farm boy whose life Byron saved, he was unfocused ... Hurt's deepest and saddest moments appear neither sincere nor sincerely deluded ... Scratch the surface and you'll find the phenomenon shallow, the man a flake. But this does not appear to be the position of the play ... The character is capable of something other than self-absorption. Byron is something more than Hurt makes of him.[28]

It is possible these disappointments, fueled by a flawed production at a theatre known for its exemplary handling of new

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works, prompted Linney to move in a different direction. While the play was, paradoxically, a critical success, Linney did not return to historical biography for almost another ten years, preferring to once again explore his Appalachian roots with both triumphant and sometimes discouraging results. This extremely productive period following the completion of Tennessee prompted the writing of Sand Mountain, Woman Without A Name, and Heathen Valley, three of his most original and characteristic plays; but The Captivity of Pixie Shedman, also from this period, proved that when he lost that precious distance from his subjects, the results were less satisfying.

2

Those plays in which the emotional connections to the historical lessons were more subliminal seem to have had more success. "Playwrights interested in putting historical figures on the stage," states Linney in 1990, "should write about people whose lives closely intersect events in their own."[29] This "connecting link" is not always apparent to the author and often remains undiscovered until well after the fact, but its recognition does provide a key to understanding the work.

What could possibly be the similarity in Linney's life to the Nuremberg trial of 1945 in which a terrifyingly seductive Hermann Goering defends his role in the Nazis' attempt to destroy a civilization? Linney has always been fascinated by the morally corrupt or confused, but here we meet the morally ambiguous, in

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the sense that his morality is indeterminate. With the possible exception of the infanticidal Leena in Unchanging Love, few characters achieve a state of moral bankruptcy comparable to Goering's.

One fact that may help explain the author's fascination with this aberration of a human being is the character's manifest resistance to making excuses for his actions or abandoning his devotion to the Third Reich. Linney explains that

> [t]he picture many of us have of Goering as a fat, pudgy, addlepated gangster is wrong. His testimony was cogent, authoritative and straightforward. He stood up for Germany with dignity. There was no excusing himself, as with Albert Speer and some of the other war criminals. He had taken an oath to support Hitler to his death, and he took pride in living up to it. It was very strong testimony.[30]

Having begun the character search (his customary entry into a play) while overseeing his 1988 production of Heathen Valley at the San Diego Repertory, the major work on 2 was conducted while Linney was in residence at the MacDowell Colony during the winter of 1989. This research, based primarily on the more than twenty volumes of records of the Nuremberg trials located at Columbia University's library, also relied on popular nonfiction works such as those I observed on his work table during my visit to his studio at MacDowell: William L. Shirer's The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich and Albert Speer's Inside The Third Reich, among others. While the writing of his plays and novel inspired by Gnosticism, as well as his plays The Sorrows of Frederick and Ambrosio, required lengthy historical investigation, this work represents his most extensive use of historical documentation.

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Other sources allowed him to digress more freely from historical fact, but for the writing of 2 Linney was provided with a full trial transcript by which to mirror an actual incident, rather than aggregate historical events. It is a testament to Linney's skill as a dramatist, however, that he avoids, for all but three scenes, setting the story in a courtroom, and he never resists the urge to embellish fact with fancy. The more revealing moments occur out of the main spotlight.

Though its premise may resemble that of his previous trial play, Love Suicide, where the audience must also bear final witness to a general's performance, 2 is significantly dissimilar. Its leading character, unlike the solipsistic general, is securely situated in the pantheon of devil's disciples who have scarred the landscape of recent world history. The play is more directly aimed and, by sheer bravado and reasonable argument, manages to put this man on trial in such a way that we, as a unified body of spectators, reluctantly become, if not sympathetic, uncomfortably compelled by a point of view we have all individually accepted as inhumanly degenerate. Clifford Ridley in the Philadelphia Inquirer noted that

> [i]ts court is the collective mind of the audience, and its concern is not with guilt versus innocence, but with the slippery turns of intellect by which human behavior is conceived, perpetrated and rationalized.[31]

Linney is unquestionably attracted to the intellect and creative spirit of this World War I flying ace and aspiring actor who possesses qualities that even the "good" German counsel respects. In the counsel's first statement to the man who has lost

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seventy-one pounds and kicked a twenty-two-year-old morphine habit since he last saw him, one can decipher Linney's near admiration for someone who refuses to defer the blame for a love of life and country that he won't accept as misplaced. The Counsel adds,

> When you stood up--in those childish uniforms, with all those gleaming medals, dancing over a belly getting bigger and bigger every day--you made no bones about any of it. We were dazzled by Hitler, but we loved you. You were human, sometimes harsh but good at heart. A mirror for Germans.[32]

This inclination to "make no bones about any of it" is arguably the "emotional link" that captivated Linney's curiosity and propelled him to commit to such a difficult, if not repelling, leading character. The prisoner's sly deceptions and linguistic foreplay are splendidly executed in this Act One exchange between him and the counsel. It is also an example of Goering's unnerving ability to retain control:

> GOERING: Can I call witnesses?
> COUNCEL: Yes.
> GOERING: Shift responsibility down to subordinates?
> COUNCEL: Yes.
> GOERING: And up to the top?
> COUNCEL: We can shift a great deal of the blame.
> GOERING: We shift nothing! Not a word against Hitler.
> COUNCEL: What? But we must!
> GOERING: Not one word!
> COUNCEL: The other prisoners will do exactly that!
> GOERING: No, they won't. I won't let them.[33]

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When asked to define the "Leader Principle" that prevailed under Hitler's rule, Goering's answer dazzles us not only with its skillful diversions, but also its hint of truth:

> Authority moving from above downward, while responsibility moves from below upwards. It was the only choice for us. As it still is, I might add, for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Empire of China, the Roman Catholic Church and the nations of Islam. Western Democracy is not for everyone. I do not think it ever will be.[34]

Goering's rationalization to the African-American sergeant of his country's newly found racial outlook, as infantile as it is fascist, bears the same semblance of truth that anyone with military experience will attest is not easily acknowledged:

> In the first war, officers looked down on enlisted men. We broke up that caste system and made everyone equal as a man. I told my fliers this. "You are young and you will pay for it. Go have your fun. I want you to. But when you get into that plane, you will be honorable, decent comrades, each respecting the next, so that in battle you will be warriors, destroying all resistance, and if it must be, dying for each other." No man in my command called another man "boy."[35]

His final incantation, made in the aftermath of his triumphant suicide by potassium cyanide, goes directly to the audience. Neither apologetic nor plaintive, its reverberations serve as an apocalyptic reminder, similar to that of Voltaire's to Frederick, that before we leave this blood-thirsty century behind us, we had best put our own house in order:

> I know you all very well. You always liked me. You will find other Hitlers, and other ways to go to war. When you do, he will need me, and call me back. I will bind myself to him again, laughing like a man, a good number two. (GOERING'S smile vanishes. He stares out coldly.) After all, what do you think men are?[36]

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Hopes were high in the spring of 1990 that after the Actor's Theatre of Louisville production the play would soon come to Broadway. Veteran producer Roger Stevens had signed on and New York Times critic Mel Gussow, a perennial enthusiast of Linney's work, declared, "there is every likelihood that the play will finally bring Mr. Linney the major success he so clearly deserves."[37] Not only was the play hailed as the find of that year's Humana Festival, as previously had been two other "southern" writers' plays (Beth Henley's Crimes Of The Heart and Marsha Norman's Getting Out), but all notices praised the work of actor William Duff-Griffin, whose performance as Goering would surely transfer with the production. Audiences were stunned, as they had been by Austin Pendleton's portrayal of Frederick, by the sheer bravado of the performer's commitment to a historical figure. As played by Duff-Griffin, Gussow found

> [t]he character is smirking, sarcastic, sybaritic, highly intelligent, perceptive, childish, gross, capricious, with a hard core of something underneath heroically admirable and utterly vile, charming and loathsome--all at once--a man you could die for and a man you want to kill.[38]

The author's emotional link to the play is clearly his ongoing fascination with contradiction and his respect for Goering's aversion to hypocrisy. It leads to a fearless need to explore the conviction that every human being is a composite of terrifying forces, able to destroy as quickly as they are to endow with power.

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2 is also an example of some of Linney's dramaturgical shortcomings. Some find fault in his inability to focus compellingly on a personality without spilling over into other dialectical worlds. Tom Dulack's Incommunicado, completed several years before 2, is situated just a short distance south of Nuremberg, at a trial on a hill above Pisa, Italy, in the very same spring of 1945. Hermann Goering in this case is Ezra Pound, astoundingly played by Tom Aldredge in the 1995 Maxemmus Theatre production. Pound is as complicated and as intellectually seductive, at least, as the Reich Marshall and family man. 2 sometimes becomes repetitive, especially in the scenes involving the Commandant and the Counsel, and the use of recorded voices alienates rather than mediates our relationship to the production. Incommunicado deepens its subject by giving us a relentless first person account of Pound's humiliation by imprisonment and his psychic fortitude fueled by logic, intellect, and a witty aestheticism. Ultimately, Ezra Pound is easier to sympathize with than Goering, and Dulack's use of theatrical devices to demonstrate Pounds' sense-deprivation, in combination with the effective monologue form that he develops, makes his play the more arresting.

Vincent Canby, in his 1995 review of 2 at Primary Stages, had quite different problems with the play, finding that it "ultimately seems small and teasing, like a trailer for work still to be written."[39] He believes "there's little in Mr. Linney's portrait of Goering that will surprise or shock,"

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faulting the character for being "vulnerable only when faced with the evidence of mass extermination, which he claims he knew nothing about ... too neat and tidy for its big, disorderly subject."[40] In support of this position, an audience member at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville responded in an audience survey with, "I wish I knew what idea in the play should shock me. I imagine that this play is supposed to be an ink blot."[41]

Economic realities have thwarted any Broadway production of this brilliant, though difficult, play, but it has been successfully staged at various theatres since the Louisville production. In addition to appearing in the Williamstown Theatre Festival's production in August, 1992, Duff-Griffin again played Goering with continued gusto at The Philadelphia Theatre Company in January of 1994. In a tragic note to the continued interest in this play and production, William Duff-Griffin, who had amazed audiences with his delicious portrait of defiant depravity, passed away at the age of fifty-four later that year, making that Goering reincarnation his last.

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CHAPTER FOUR

GODS HELP US ALL

Origins are mysterious and sad.

The Gentleman in Oscar Over Here[1]

Three Poets

Komachi, the first of a trio of short plays compiled in Three Poets, is a very different historical investigation in both form and content than the weightier biographical plays, but their shared philosophical points of view assist one's understanding of Linney's debt to world culture and myth. Its roots in Japanese Noh Theatre, this 1990 work is not so far removed as one might think from the ideas that nurtured Frederick, Childe Byron, and 2. The inherent contradictions of the European figures explored in these plays can also be detected in the Buddhism of the ninth-century poetess Komachi, on whose poems Komache and the Gravestone is based. This play, whose authors, Kwanami Kiyotsugu (1334-1384) and his son, Zeami, are responsible for more than 50% of extant Noh plays, provides the inspiration for Linney's work. In addition to the influence of the Noh form on a structure that resembles a composite of the original asura and "madwoman" or "female-wig" Noh plays, Linney became spellbound by a Noh mask he acquired in the Japanese city of Nara during his war years before graduating from Yale. A subsequent reading of Kamachi's love poems convinced him that the identity of the captivating mask was the same as the poet's.

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A description of one type of Noh play affords a reasonable summation of Linney's plot and suggests a state of mind with which to approach all three plays, in which the spirits of the omniscient dead quietly weave their stories:

> [T]he important and more ceremonious plays are in two parts; in Part I the leading character, or "shite," appears in a humble, human disguise; in Part II, as the god or hero whom he really is, though if a hero, almost without exception as his ghost. God or hero, he appears in the second part as a supernatural being. As ghost he endures his penance for a violent action performed in mortal life.[2]

The borrowed Noh structure, Linney's use of traditional masks and costumes, as well as the characters' tendency to complete each other's dialogue, as is the case in Noh, is especially relevant if you consider that, as a classicist influenced by the tragedies of antiquity, Linney is in pursuit of the same stated goals as Noh: to achieve yugen, defined by Columbia University professor Henry W. Wells as

> a mood of spiritual gravity and serenity, the very opposite of the violent emotions to which its scenes allude ... leading to a resolution of emotion and entrance into a state at once blessed with pleasure and with peace.[3]

Though theorists may disagree as to the compatibility of Eastern yugen and Western catharsis, can the Noh's blessed state of peace and pleasure wrought by violent means be far in meaning from the desired perceptions of a morally inspired fear and pity in Aristotle's Poetics? James F. Schlatter confirms this association when he notes:

> [t]he theatre event, like the shinju and the revival meeting, can serve as a rite of communal witness, an expiation for one's otherwise unbearable burden of sin.

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> Linney places great faith in the power of theatre to restore both himself and his audience, his national community, to a state of grace.[4]

Three Poets is a rare example of an American writer's attempt to find a core meaning to the emotions of all cultures, inclusive of both European and Eastern traditions.

Alluding to the fact that he finds women don't get credit for doing surprising things, as he demonstrates in his earlier Woman Without A Name, the playwright states, "I like contradictions in people anyway, and I love the contradictions in women."[5] His identification with these stories can also be attributed to a deeply felt presumption that a writer's individuation has much to do with the way his work progresses, suggesting it can become richer as he better understands his own life.

> The choices I make with my writing have a lot to do with myself as an unfolding personality. So that in the end your writing is really your destiny. It's a question of finding that central thing that's yours to say and yours alone.[6]

It is this strong unity of purpose that allows Linney to bind the three plays thematically, a device rarely rendered successfully in Western theatre, but entirely characteristic of the Asian tradition. Where his other collection of one-acts, Laughing Stock, Sand Mountain, Spain, and Pops, are not altogether separate entities randomly grouped, none take the shape of an organic whole quite so effortlessly as does this play.

The dominant cohesive factor in these works is the sureness with which he distinguishes the three vital and creative women artists and their misfortunes at the hands of ninth, tenth, and

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twentieth-century male authoritarians. Each play's impact reverberates off the other, collectively producing a Noh-like yugen in which flesh and blood symbols--archetypes of the life-force required to be heard in a hostile world--are embodied in three poets. Archetypes, writes Carl Jung, "act as transformers, their function being to convert libido from a 'lower' into a 'higher' form." As powerful inner stimulators, "they correspond to the concept of the 'pattern of behavior' in biology ... numinous, structural elements of the psyche [which] possess a certain autonomy and specific energy."[7]

What each of these women possesses is the will to teach the world how to love. Komachi continually rejects Shosho, the young prince whose "military" passion, "rising face on fire a heart charred wood turning black," she finds ridiculous and exhausting.[8] As the traditional shite--the masked principal actor--she boldly instructs him:

You want something you can't have.
and it burns
You call it fire, but I think
it has more to do with impatience
than with passion.[9]

Her prison is the life long knowledge of her deed, but she is redeemed by her reunion with the prince at death and the knowledge that her poems will endure, reminding others that "only the poet who writes about love when young can write about life when old."[10]

Another variation on the imprisoned imagination is explored in the second play, Hrosvitha, inspired by the tenth century

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German nun, Hrosvitha of Gandersheim, considered the first female playwright in the Western canon. While the worth of this writer's dramaturgy in her play Abraham cannot be as profoundly appreciated as Komachi's haunting verses, her determination to follow a singular path, despite the derisive dismissals of a Catholic monk, is no less impressive. Having been humiliated, Hrosvitha grows with experience and, in a humorous twist that allows the poet to address the characters in her play directly (in much the same way that Byron speaks to his younger self) she reinvents the action. From the highly metaphorical and clerical rendition of the wayward virgin's tale, she imagines a lustful act of incest that delivers both her players back into the hands of the church. In what may be the first recorded feminist alliance between an abbess and a intellectually and sexually stimulated nun, Hrosvitha, aided by the character she creates in her play, is transformed into an artist.

HROSVITHA:	(Thinking it out) I don't know. I tried to write about love.
MARY:	How love brings us to God!
HROSVITHA:	What did you say?
ABRAHAM and MARY:	How love brings us to God.
HROSVITHA:	Maybe that's what's wrong. God is not always so simple, and love is not always so -- beautiful.[11]

Hrosvitha of Gandersheim never deserted her convent, nor is it believed that any of her plays admonishing the selfishness of the flesh were ever produced during her lifetime, but the poet's

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spirit, personified by her wish to depict life as she truly saw it, is unforgettable.

No less memorable are the more political labors of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, whose physical and spiritual endurance is the subject of the final play, Akhmatova, a revision of Linney's unpublished 1984 one act The Soul of a Tree.

Only days after the death of Stalin in 1953, a close friend of the poet's is interrogated by a large, impervious bureaucrat intending to find evidence that Akhmatova's writings are the work of a subversive and traitorous counterrevolutionary. The closer truth is that she has been "a poet instead of a mother," though lately it is her son for whom she is devoting all her energies as an artist. Having eluded the authorities and completing her 1938 poem "Requiem" by verbally sharing a single word with each of her comrades, including those encountered while standing before the prison gates, Akhmatova only appears for the last third of the play. The preceding scenes, set in the same room in which Turgenev had been interrogated years before, illustrate the short-sighted thuggery of small minds in high places. The Minister of Culture's one attribute may be his blunt assessment of the state's intentions.

"We don't want to change a word of what you have written," he intones to the terrified Marya, "we just want to break its spirit."[12] He rants about "[a]ll this bunk steaming in the rotten fumes of sick Christian mysticism and the stink of Great Art,"[13] dismissing her as one whose only cause is her ego.

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Rudinsky disdains her for sacrificing her son when all that is required is her disclosure of the meaning of the poem's ending.

After explaining that her metaphor of "the grave where we buried the Sun" doesn't allude to the statue of a tzar, but to a statue of herself, she is declared "a crazy old woman," not a dangerous revolutionary. The irony attached to the Minister's misunderstanding the artist's missionary zeal, not to mention her subtle literary talents, crystallizes our appreciation for the women throughout these plays. One is awed by their devoted natures, their numinous, unwavering certainty that things of beauty and truth, such as poems and plays, can affect the world in which we live by touching us each deeply--one at a time, if necessary.

Ambrosio

Hrosvitha provides the perfect postscript to Three Poets when she states in her writings that, "It is as wrong to deny a divine gift as it is to claim falsely that one has received it."[14] These words not only give us a clearer understanding of the plays' through-lines, they furnish an entry into his next work, freely adapted from Matthew G. Lewis' 1797 novel, The Monk, in which the pillars of evil are no less motivated by political power or a lacking in human decency. Divine gifts are also the subject of Spain, but Ambrosio is aimed more directly at the seat of power. In a 1992 letter to John Dillon, Artistic Director of the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, which jointly produced the

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premiere at the Signature Theatre of New York, the author explains his own attempts to shape the drama:

> Ambrosio is about the way in which wholesale violence is engendered: through obviously righteous condemnation, in this case the condemnation of a man thought to be a heretic monk. He is in fact a vain and licentious man with a few more redeeming qualities than in the novel (though there are some there, too), but only a tool in the hands of larger destructive forces--presented here by a devil [Don Pedro] who gains his objective--Inquisitorial civil war--and asks us if he exists ... I am fumbling for the sexual component of political violence and how it is used by the self-destructive part of mankind.[15]

The symbol of the serpent, long associated with evil in Biblical texts, has numerous other connotations to other cultures. Its meanings descend from the Mesopotamians and then the Greeks, whose caduceus (a wand entwined by snakes) first signified the gods' power to cure illness. Romans saw their caduceus as a sign of equilibrium and good conduct, while esoteric Buddhism believed it symbolized the axis of the world, and the snakes: the power of pure energy, or kundalini.

Having familiarized himself with the Gnostic texts for his play Old Man Joseph And His Family, Linney was aware of the myriad associations attached to the serpent. For the purposes of understanding Ambrosio, it is especially useful to consider theosophist H. P. Blavatsky's explanation that snakes

> are connected with the 'temptations' facing those who have overcome the limitations of matter and have entered into the realm of the 'dryness' of the spirit ... the seduction of strength by matter (as Jason by Medea, Hercules by Omphale, Adam by Eve).[16]

Ambrosio is clearly one who has intended to leave the world of matter behind for that of the secluded convent and his

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destruction is the play's centerpiece, but it is ultimately the secondary character, Don Pedro, who not only prevails, but captures our imagination. Northrop Frye reminds us that the accuser is the primary role of Satan in the Bible and that Byron was accurate when he referred to man's history, as "the devil's scripture." The charisma of Ambrosio's accuser illustrates, once more, Linney's assertion that evil is as disturbingly familiar as it is alluring.

Nearly every interpretation of the serpent symbol also carries secondary essences having to do with duality: the sense of "opposing forces balancing one another in such a way as to create a higher, static form."[17] This attention to the duality of interior forces reminds one of Linney's debt to the early works of Ibsen and Strindberg: worlds in which a Peer is suspended between ego and responsibility or an Olof between his political and domestic aspirations. There is also a suggestion of the Jungian notion, also designated by the snake, that it is our repressions, not our excesses, that are to be the most feared.

Though it plays a relatively small role in the drama, the snake appears in the most tautly theatrical scene of the play, in which Ambrosio, a sexually and spiritually conflicted monk, saves the life of his enamored Rosario by sucking the snake's venom from his body. This moment, in which Lucifer, or Don Pedro, expropriates the soul of the divided monk, demonstrates the

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author's fascination with dualism and all its political, social, theological, and personal ramifications.

The roots of Christian dualism can be traced to the emergence of Neo-Manichaeism in the ninth century, which was in turn inspired by Zoroastrianism, perhaps the world's oldest revealed religion. Zoroaster (Nietzsche's Zarathustra) kindled a message that in various forms found its way into all the established religions of our day and was, according to Yuri Stoyanov in The Hidden Tradition in Europe, "underpinned by the new morality and dualist vision of the universal struggle between good and evil that confronted man with the opposing ways of Truth and Untruth."[18] Its basic tenet holds that man is faced with a persistent battle in which Satan, the firstborn son of the Almighty, personified by matter, must be purged by the spirit. Such beliefs stood in direct contrast to the Catholic's creed of absolute good and evil that instigated the anti-heretical campaigns of the Holy Inquisition.

Don Pedro, a distinguished Spanish gentleman who offers to Antonia, a young girl captivated by the monk, a new world in which she is free to explore knowledge and carnality, is another in a long line of Linney's libertarians. Today he would seem nearly exemplary in a world that has abandoned the innocence of the church in exchange for worldly knowledge, independence, and self-gratification. "No one should suffer from poverty of experience," he tells the infatuated virgin on the eve of her contract with the devil, "not even my wife."[19]

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In a provocative inquiry into the existence of sin, Don Pedro matches intellects with the intriguing young mistress, and in so doing shows the author's fascination with the central question of evil, one that seems as impossible to answer today as it was for the followers of the "hidden tradition" of Christian dualism.

ANTONIA:	God is evil?
DON PEDRO:	Or God and the Devil were the same thing once and may be again.
ANTONIA:	In which case:
DON PEDRO:	Good will be Evil and Evil will be Good all at once, as once perhaps it was.
ANTONIA:	And the Devil, ravaging the world, will be passionately certain he is doing good!
DON PEDRO:	Yes!
ANTONIA:	Oh, that's impossible!
DON PEDRO:	I love the impossible.[20]

Here the character could be speaking for the author. The playwright, too, loves the impossible, showing, once again, as he did in Childe Byron, Frederick, and 2, that the seemingly undisputed qualities of evil are as difficult to identify as they are to assign to others.

Linney relishes, as he does in Heathen Valley, Holy Ghosts, and 2, the implacability of established moral constructs. If it isn't the church, it is Stalinism, the smug self-righteousness of a post-war tribunal, or the deadening provinciality of small-town America. Ambrosio goes straight to the nucleus of organized religion: the Vatican. Consider Francesco Guicciardini's

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description of Pope Alexander VI, the Spanish Rodrigo Borgia, reigning Holy Father at the time in which the action is set: 1500.

> [T]hese virtues were bound up with far greater faults. His manner of living was dissolute. He knew neither shame nor sincerity, neither faith nor religion. Moreover, he was possessed by an insatiable greed, an overwhelming ambition and a burning passion for the advancement of his many children who, in order to carry out his iniquitous decrees, did not scruple to employ the most heinous means.[21]

Interestingly, considering Linney's fixation on the purging of creativity in Three Poets, Miss Julie and FM, it was Alexander, in his Index, who launched the first censorship of printed books into the world, a proclamation that lasted for over four hundred years. In Ambrosio's world, though, as in any melodrama, there are life and death consequences. Ambrosio illustrates, once again, how evil does not always preside where we expect it. Mel Gussow points out that

> The Inquisitor turns out to be a surprisingly judicious man, insisting on differentiating among sins, declaring that certain acts demonstrate "vanity, lunacy and lust, but not heresy."[22]

Once the engine of bureaucratic tyranny is in full force, however, events cannot be reversed. Due to the machinations of Don Pedro, who is able to manipulate church policy, the Inquisition condemns not only the wayward monk, but the Inquisitor himself. He escapes death only moments before succumbing to flames by denouncing Satan. This act of cowardice has the residual effect of elevating Ambrosio's fate, as we recognize the force of truth that will not allow him to capitulate.

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Such weighty topics might very well prove burdensome and pretentious in the hands of a lesser craftsman, but Linney's economy, in Gussow's words, makes this work "the antithesis of self-important epics that subordinate meaning to panoply and melodrama,"[23] forcing us, according to Alisa Solomon, to "confront theological questions that embarrass us with their refusal to be explained away."[24]

Based not only on The Monk, but also on histories of the Spanish Inquisition by Juan Antonia Llorente, Henry Charles Lea, and others, Linney's thirteenth full length play is the first of several Gothic inquiries inspired by that era, one that seems to have provided him the perfect canvas on which to paint his disturbing portraits of sundered spirits.

Spain

No less harrowing, though less intense, than the preceding play, Spain's three one acts raise similar questions and examine corresponding contradictions brought to light by illuminating the Spanish Inquisition.

First produced in 1993 at Theatre for the New City in New York and directed by the author, it was then only a compilation of two plays, Torquemada and Anna Rey. The third play, Escobado De La Aixa, completed that summer, was added as a third part to the 1994 published version, as yet unproduced.

Gussow found the initial staging "a sketch for a production," one that "conjures a mood of reflexive dread, of people

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compelled to make decisions that crucially affect the lives of others as well as themselves."[25] Linney's structure, not unlike that of his Three Poets, wherein themes are meant to coalesce, takes a cue from Tom Stoppard. Characters referred to in the first two plays materialize in the third and time travel encourages correlation of ideas. It links the central character, Escobado de la Aixa, both culturally and spiritually, to the twentieth-century Anna Rey, the suicidal psychiatrist of Spanish descent in the second play that bears her name. Events that occur in the fifteenth century remain an inspiration to a woman who fears her ancestral susceptibility to schizophrenia, and her inability to cure it in others, renders her impotent in all ways of life. It is only her urge to save the sick--the one quality so conspicuously absent in the earlier age when the mentally unbalanced met the same fate as murderers and witches--that ultimately redeems her. Linney has once again derived a story that illuminates the archetypal forces of a persecuted antihero.

Torquemada is neither a play about the infamous Grand Inquisitor who bears that name, nor is it about his three hapless victims unable to convince the tyrant they are not "devils laughing in his face." In fact, the first play, wherein Puyal, a portly friar, is revealed to be the seducer of a woman who is now on trial as a heretic, mainly serves to introduce us to a character ten years deceased. Escobedo de la Aixa, whose significance only becomes known to us once we have moved on to the contempor-

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ary story told in Anna Rey, doesn't appear as a character until the third play bearing his name.

The author instructs us that each play may be produced individually, but it is doubtful that interest in Torquemada alone would constitute more than a passing curiosity for a predictable, though humorous, ancient tale. The spark that ignites the play as a whole is our desire to comprehend Escobeda, a most unusual monk who condones Puyal's sexual escapades and believes his true role as a missionary is in the hospitals confessing lunatics.

Anna Rey is a dark, moody sketch of a demoralized, divorced, and lonely psychotherapist who has inadvertently lured an adolescent--a schizophrenic, not unlike herself, perhaps--into her cell-like office. Bradley's cry for help reinvigorates Anna's passion for living. It is an act of love not unlike that of Escobeda de la Aixa, described here in a lauding speech by Puyal in the first play:

> There were so many things he let us do. The rule was obeyed. Discipline, yes, but--we were so happy there, with each other. There was laughter as well as prayer, drinking, and some carnal attachments, which he did not discourage. [Escobeda] didn't think they mattered.[26]

Escobeda's character in the final play recalls the portrayal of Jesus in Jesus Tales. The play's archetypal content is similar to that of Ambrosio, Komachi, and Akhmatova. Its focus, as in the two selections from Three Poets, remains an omniscient offstage presence. The scenes invoke numinous spirits such as we find in Love Suicide and The Captivity of Pixie Shedman. In Spain the author paints the picture of a Christ-like figure whom

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he accentuates by saving his appearance for the end. As in Old Man Joseph And His Family, the holy man is flawed, but he has not abandoned the common man. The powers of love triumph, even in death, over institutional inhumanity. The tension, however, as in other of his plays, is never fully released and the dark questions raised early in the drama are mostly left unanswered, lingering as an aftertaste.

Oscar Over Here

James F. Schlatter describes Linney as thrice cursed: an intellectual who authors "hillbilly" plays and histories, all of which puts him safely out of the mainstream. He also attributes the writer's obscurity to his bold attempt to "traverse[] remote wilds of the imagination left largely unexplored by most other American playwrights."[27] This next and last, to date, of the biographies is arguably the best example of the artist's determination to amalgamate intellectual history and drama, while simultaneously offering a comprehensive portrait of a larger than life figure in his time.

Believing, as did Oscar Wilde, that art, by its nature, gives voice to the dissident, Linney shows us an Oscar whose maligned and proud nature, exiled as it is, perseveres, in spite of the dark forces and murky intentions of the Lord Chamberlain, the Marquess of Queensberry, and Alfred Douglas. Wilde is also at the mercy of his own personal demons. The poet's soul takes on such a paramount importance that the playwright, allowing the

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characters to shape the form, portrays Wilde, near death, in commiseration with Christ, reminding us that we are still in Linney's spiritual and redemptive realm. The play constitutes, as do many of his previous works, a meditation in which a complicated, divided character explains himself--to himself. The frequent forays, in this case, into the personal literary universe of Oscar Wilde, give the play its confessional quality, also apparent in Childe Byron, Frederick, and Woman Without A Name, but missing in 2.

As a latter work in Linney's canon, Oscar Over Here is a more sophisticated example of the structure employed in Frederick, Childe Byron, and Three Poets: another actor-driven construct that allows for frequent flights of both intellectual and theatrical inventiveness, such as those found in the intimate conversations between Wilde and his plays' characters (or dreams). This heightening of the mimetic level, displayed previously in Byron and Hrosvitha, allows for a finely tuned irony that further illuminates both Wilde's and Linney's aesthetic outlook. Some of these shared sensibilities are directly attributable to their parallel opinions of what constitutes good reading. They help demonstrate how effortlessly Wilde inhabits Linney's literary mode.

In his essay "The Decay of Lying," Wilde seems to explain both his own and Linney's preference for historical subjects. "The ancient historians," he writes, "gave us delightful fiction in the form of fact; the modern novelist presents us with dull

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facts under the guise of fiction."[28] Linney's ethos also recalls Wilde's interest in what Kierkegaard refers to as the "aesthetic man," who, contrary to the reflective "ethical man," is too preoccupied with living from sensation to sensation to question either his social standing or artistic "integrity." Wilde, more than any other literary artist of his generation, has come to represent the defense of artistic freedom, a theme whose variations appear regularly in Linney's work. Oscar Over Here takes Wilde's premise that art must go beyond good and evil and, with Wilde's life as a model, enlarges our view of that which is beautiful, delightfully witty, and patently human.

The two playwrights, wildly divergent in style and content, share the same conviction that "[t]he delight in debate is greater than the desire for conviction" and it can be said of Linney, as Richard Ellmann says of Wilde, that his "infusion of irony into aesthetics was adroit: he found a way of saying that art should please and instruct without making it obsequious or didactic."[29]

Unproduced as of 1995, except as a reading, and unpublished, Oscar Over Here contains facts about Wilde that one tends to overlook when only his very public image is considered. In his youth he longed for children, hoping one day to write stories and legends for them. He is revealed, especially in the early scenes set in Colorado during his American tour, as an incurable romantic, almost naive, and benevolently curious. His sensitivity to the misfortunes of others, even as he is nurturing a persona most

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comfortable at the center of attention, provides a counterpoint to the later portrait of a philandering aesthete who abandons his family for the sake of artistic and personal fulfillment. By focusing on the character during both his early and late years, Linney elicits the sense of time passing. As with Frederick, one detects in maturity, not just the dissolution of hope, but the destruction of a spirit that shone like a beacon in a characteristically unenlightened age. All that Wilde represents contradicts and undermines the shallowness of the conventional Victorian mind.

The play is also an exploration of how fictional characters reflect their earthly counterparts. As we are led effortlessly forward by the ensemble's hearsay narration, which seems perfectly appropriate in a world that never tired of gossiping about Wilde, we encounter Lady Wilde. Paradoxically, it is her sense of justice that persuades Oscar to file his slander suit against Queensberry, an action that results in his imprisonment and eventual exile. The relationship with his mother, in addition to those with Alfred Douglas and, the one who lived "the bravest life," Jesus Christ, are equally revealing of the ways in which Wilde transformed his rage into beauty. In reference to the writing of The Importance of Being Earnest, Oscar explains not only how life should imitate art, but how art should reconstruct life:

> It's Bosie, and me, the best of us, in this dreadful situation, but all translated into sunlight, butterflies, and food. Delicious young ladies and delicious

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> young men. An old dowager named for a train station, who looks like my mother and talks like England. I have transformed this squalid moral warfare into a comedy.[30]

Wilde wrote, as did Byron, Hrosvitha, and FM's Buford Bullough, to make himself feel better. Oscar believes

> It solves the problem, as Art always can ... [I]t redeems everything. Like those wonderful Greek vases with lusty orange men painted upon them, with lovely erections. Or Sophocles ending his tragedies not with hymns but sex farces; his audience sent home laughing about sex and embracing life, instead of condemning one and cursing the other"[31]

In addition, Wilde's continued defense of Earnest as his "good side" speaks volumes, not only about Wilde's literary output, but also about Linney's impetus for transferring Wilde to the stage.

Linney's freedom of form, fully developed after years of application in workshops and numerous regional productions, allows Wilde's own characters to interact with their creator. Oscar confesses to Lady Bracknell that she is the opposite of everything he believes and that "art does not exist without opposites."[32] When she berates him for being "an infantile perversion, in a sexual panic, corrupting everyone who listens to [him]," he replies that she really hates him "[b]ecause I make human beings laugh, and weep, with the truth."[33]

Algernon accuses Wilde of treating him like "a half-penny whore" and Oscar equivocates by insisting that Algy/Bosie used his virtue to destroy him, only to be rewarded by a charming version of himself in his play. "You feed on self-righteous denunciation," claims Oscar. "It is your religion ... as it is England's."[34]

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It is Oscar's encounter with Salome's Herodias and Herod, as well as Bosie, in the guise of the executioner, that portends the concluding epiphanic death in the cafe that follows. Linney's account of Wilde's association with John the Baptist is clear, as a light isolates Oscar's head and he proclaims the prophet's words:

> There will be a time when lilies will grow in the desert. The blind will see, the deaf will hear. The newborn child will lie in the dragon's lap. Boys will lead lions by their hair.[35]

Wilde's genius, and the greatness of others like Byron, Hrosvitha, Escobedo de la Aixa, Frederick the Great, King Philip, Akhmatova, even Strindberg (in Linney's adaptation of Miss Julie), can only be fully appreciated by subsequent generations. Their deaths, therefore, can be considered transitional and, in Schopenhauer's sense, resignations that evolve into human affirmations. They remind us, as the philosopher believed, that "[t]he end of drama in general is to show us in an example what is the nature and existence of man."[36]

These dramas of man's demise possess a sacrificial quality found in classical tragedy that "shows submission to inevitable fate and the inflexible will of the gods, but no surrender of the will to live itself."[37] While few of Linney's plays could accurately be termed tragedies, there are subversive reflections of the tragic mode in nearly all his historical characters. The work of these artists serves as a confession to their tragic side, often in paradoxical ways, and becomes their legacy, insuring literary immortality.

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Wilde's death in 1900, in a Paris cafe, the sounds of children singing in the background, reaffirms his loving spirit as a father and a friend. The figure of the Gentleman, who shares supernatural qualities with characters from Pixie Shedman, Childe Byron, and Three Poets, seems to be part Savior and part Oscar's alter ego. In his identity lies the mystery of life, or, more accurately, the mystery of Christ. The Gentleman is Linney's personification of forgiveness and unconditional love, a figure of Oscar's, Linney's, and our collective unconscious. The scene in which a drunken Oscar is defiled by two old "friends" represents an acceptance of himself and an end to his exile.

GENTLEMAN:	You will die in a fifth rate hotel, like this cafe. That's where you are now. Only a few friends are with you, but they are doing their best. The owner of the poor hotel holds you in his arms.
OSCAR:	Why does he care? Why do you?
GENTLEMAN:	Wouldn't it be boring if I came for the righteous?
OSCAR:	Very tedious.
GENTLEMAN:	Excessively loving, excessively forgiven?
OSCAR:	Perfectly charming.[38]

"Why are you here," Oscar asks again. "As the Artist sees heaven, you see me," replies Christ. "But when will I die?" "When you stop dreaming," says the Savior.

> Linney has said on many occasions that he is profoundly uninterested in religion itself or philosophy--but that people under the stress of religion are brought to a pitch of human passion and emotion and fire and fury and all those great theatre things rather more quickly.[39]

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While it is generally his Appalachian dramas that one associates with religious subjects, it is evident that spiritual upheaval and dualism are equally significant to the understanding of the playwright's profound contribution to historical theatre and aesthetic philosophy.

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CHAPTER FIVE

NOVEL APPROACHES: MOUNTAIN MYTH AND ARCHETYPAL FOLKTALE

The babies come, the babies go,
that's all of God I had to know.

Juba in Heathen Valley[1]

Heathen Valley

It is of express interest to note that Linney not only found his novelist's voice in Heathen Valley's richly textured story of a man's search for redemption in Valle Crucis, but this same folk-tale inspired what I and others feel is his most perfect play.

Heathen Valley is a testament to theatre at its most primal and celebratory level. The characters's fates, interwoven by a story made compelling by raw compassion and desperate cravings--both spiritual and physical--unfold in a world made real by the simplest means. A rough wooden platform and "a single wooden crate, built to be very sturdy,"[2] serve to transport the audience into a dark, yet richly human dreamscape, wherein we are captivated by a boy's desire to have a home. It is derivative of the child's folktales (heard in Boone during the late thirties) and is deepened by its exploration of mythic paradigms, including those found in Biblical folklore.

The novel and play are inspired by Susan Fenimore Cooper's 1889 account of missionary life in Valle Crucis, North Carolina, but the inspiration came sometime after discovering that book.

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> About 1960 I went to the 70th St. Library in New York and I came across a book about the Appalachian mountains, in which was mentioned a scientist named Asa Grey, the author of Grey's Botany, who went to North Carolina on a trip classifying flora and fauna and who came back and told the Second Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina--this was in 1840--about a valley he called "A Valley That Forgot God." ... I immediately got a hold of Susan Fenimore Cooper's book again.[3]

With inspiration from Marshall Haywood's The Bishops of North Carolina, as well, the novel and stage renditions of the fictional missionary William Starns show a man who shares the journey of the primitive community in a more personally meaningful way than does William Skiles, on whom the character is based. Skiles was reported to be a more steadfast, pious man, whose only moment of indignation seems to have been when his cat was tortured and killed by hunters. Starns is initially restless and has "kilt a man." He is bothered by "hurtful dreams and such"--a lost soul in search of a simple mission. This archetypal, nearly Christ-like figure, is very true to the picture of the man in Cooper's "sensitive document of the sacrifices offered for the spiritual and moral welfare of [her] community and diocese,"[4] but he is given greater moral and dramatic dimensions by Linney's elevation of the quest of the fictional Starns.

Here is a man driven to redeem his life, who suffers, as Christ suffered, for the "sins" of his community, and dies in the arms by which he "got born." The community itself takes on mythic significance, since its fight for survival can be seen as the archetypal evolution from "chaos to order," a journey that, in this case, leads back to chaos. The mythos is archaic in

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content, evoking ancient questions about the virtues of less structured, pagan societies, as opposed to the more ordered universe of the western model. Mircea Eliade describes these archaic myths as expressing "a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things."[5] Valle Crucis is a community whose laws are prehistoric, their "culture" derived from instincts untouched by the markings of refinement. Linney finds power in Eliade's "journey motif," which documents the tension that arises when a "civilized" culture, dependant on recorded history, comes into conflict with the collective world of primitive man. In this respect, the play displays a point of view that is skeptical of historicism, one that mines deeper territory, and is enriched by ancient myth and oral history.

How can the "terror of history" be told, asks Eliade, from the viewpoint of historicism, which is antithetical to archaic man, who derives his strength from rituals and their repetition?

> [T]he archaic world knows nothing of "profane" activities: every act which has a definite meaning--hunting, fishing, agriculture, games, conflicts, sexuality--in some way participates in the sacred ... every responsible activity in pursuit of a definite end is, for the archaic world, a ritual.[6]

Starns' instinctive understanding of the rituals that bind Harlan, Cora, and Juba to each other and to their "original ontology" allow him to be a mediator between two forces: the recollection of historical events and myth, which "employs categories instead of events, archetypes instead of historical personages."[7]

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By 1847 the work at the Valle Crucis mission had become strictly religious; the store had been closed and goods were being given to the needy. There were three services in the Chapel every day. Cooper describes the community at this juncture:

> Little bands of men and women, after leaving the schoolhouse or cabin where a Sunday service had been held, would often go on their way through the forest paths chanting the Benedictite--a holy song of praise never before heard in those ancient forests. And these were people who could not read. It seemed as if the Church was about to be cordially received into the hearts of the simple backwoodsmen.[8]

This was not to be, however. The bishop's ultimate allegiance was to the cerebral God that beckoned him to Rome, not to the needy souls living in a natural world untainted by the strict hand of piety. The journey from "chaos to cosmos," via the Judeo-Christian archetypes by which Western history is consistently fashioned, never occurs. The "idea" of God, just as it does in Ibsen's Brand, takes precedence over the "flesh and blood" of God; the Dionysian is reduced to a demi-urge. Linney's ethos, like Nietzsche's, "is based on his conception of a grand conflict between instinct and consciousness, feeling and rationality, art and systems of morality."[9]

Eliade writes that "the memory of the collectivity is anhistorical."[10] He gives significance to the process by which myth is born by comparing the tragic death of a young man on the eve of his marriage to that of a simple death by accident. The occult meaning only becomes evident once its identification with the realm of myth is apparent. Linney's enhancing of the near

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myth in Cooper's account evokes a richer and deeper meaning in the novel and play, revealing a tragic destiny missing from the memoir of William West Skiles.

While the New York Times Sunday Book Review found that in the novel "the Bishop's tragedy seems overly catastrophic" and "the nymphomania of a villainous clergyman's wife is implausible (despite the precipitating bacchanal)," it concludes that Mr. Linney "has composed it with power and skill."[11] Neither of these blemishes occurs in the stage version. In fact, Mel Gussow noticed that "no sentimentality is allowed to intrude ... not for a second does [the valley] resemble a magic kingdom ... the author makes an art of understatement [and] speaks to us with a primal eloquence."[12] Gussow also writes that by condensing the sprawling novel, in order to create an immediate connection with his audience (as did his boyhood tales),

> Linney captures the mysteries of a tight rural world without romanticizing it ... [h]is chaste, engaging style is built on a controlled, naively poetic language that creates setting and tone; his themes emerge quietly out of a deceptively simple narrative structure.[13]

Nancy Churnin in the Los Angeles Times compared Starns to "the tragic just man of mystical Jewish literature whose light is unknown even to himself, [who] crumbles slowly from the inside."[14] Noting that "[Linney] is one of the rare modern playwrights to take Christianity seriously as a subject for drama," Jonathan Saville of the San Diego Reader perceptively suggests that

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> [t]hese plays of Romulus Linney neither confirm nor deny Christianity's central iterant faith. But man's brokenness is never in doubt, and neither is the healing, numbing, fulfilling power of faith, whether the object of that faith be truth or illusion (or a mysterious fusion of the two).[15]

The play contains some of the most beautiful poetry that Linney has ever produced. It relies on the colloquial--the quality that makes A Woman Without A Name so distinctive--though here it is embellished with rich imagery, musicality, and earnest emotion, conveying a world that, like Arcadia, elicits universal longings. More often than not it is from the orphan, Billy, whose narration reveals the haunted landscape, that we come to know the hymn-like meaning of home:

> We looked out at the mountain night, over the graves and the Missionhouse Valley. Faint were the fiddles, hardly heard the dancing feet, because the night wind blew loud and cold down the great steeps and ridges, but we heard them, and we knew the Missionhouse was live, like a heart in a strong body.[16]

Heathen Valley is also one of his most produced and generally acclaimed works. It seems to have struck a chord wherever it was performed, be it in Philadelphia, where it received its 1987 premiere at the Philadelphia Festival Theatre for New Plays, at the San Diego Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, in Los Angeles at Theatre 40 and at the Gem Theatre, at Washington's Round House Theatre, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, or in New York at The Theatre for the New City and the Signature Theatre Company. From the East to West Coast its simplicity and universal collective wisdom have garnered contemplative praise and admiration. This unqualified popularity

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throughout the regional theatre circuit verifies the author's relevance to audiences less influenced by the dictates of the New York Times or other major media. The playwright has stated that the ability to "create[] an immediate relationship with the audience is unique to the theatre."[17] Forsaking the intimate for the grand, so much theatre recently presented on the New York stage has abandoned such intimacy and with it the actor-audience bond that lies at the heart of theatrical experience.

Alone in his reluctance to commend this play, though he does respect Linney as "one of the few playwrights who are not afraid of being unclassifiable," John Simon found the novel "harder to convert to drama than those cussed, ornery mountain people to Episcopalian orthodoxy." Out of touch with the emotions the play so eloquently celebrates, Simon goes on to say that "we get something between a church pageant and story theatre, and only intermittently a play."[18] Sadly, such a myopic view is characteristic of the often shallow observations of the mainstream press that has relegated Linney to the position Richard Schickel in Time magazine calls "one of the American theatre's most mysteriously buried treasures."[19]

A Woman Without A Name

The period following the publication of the novel, Heathen Valley, several years before his first theatrical success with Frederick, was a difficult one for the playwright. Still believing his future would be in the writing of novels, and recovering

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from a divorce from his first wife, he spent his first summer at Yaddo:

> I felt wonderfully at home. I was able to talk to [Philip Roth and Virgil Thompson]. I felt marvelous, but Yaddo taught me how to respect what I was doing, no matter what happened to it. It taught me how to get up in the morning and go to work hard for awhile and then forget all about it and go do something else--go swimming, go be miserable, go drink, whatever ... [20]

At Yaddo he immediately began work on a novel about his grandmother that he had been "over-conceiving" in his head. He wrote about one hundred and fifty pages, parts of which later became The Captivity of Pixie Shedman and FM, but the book "just fell apart." Towards the middle of that summer of 1964, discouraged, but clearly invigorated, the playwright spent an evening with his old college classmate, actor Richard Kiley, and his wife. Referring to his aborted novel, he mentioned that he thought there was a diary in it. Mrs. Kiley immediately brought to his attention a used ledger she had bought for twenty-five cents. She thought the woman's manuscript, the front of which had been ripped out, was marvelous and suggested he read it. Over the remaining twenty-five days of his stay at Yaddo, Linney remarked, "two-thirds of a novel came ripping out of me."[21]

Twenty-five years later, sitting by a fire in a cabin at Peterborough, New Hampshire's MacDowell Colony, Linney's other home away from home, the playwright told me "Slowly, By Thy Hand Unfurled, is maybe, I think, the best writing I'll ever do."[22]

Jon Jory, whose commitment to Linney nurtured many of his early works, believes

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> there's always a strong sense of loss underlying a lot of what Romulus writes and I think there's something touching about that because there's so much life force...[23]

His second novel is a manifestation of the durability of an immense life force confronted by overpowering familial loss. It is also an example of, in Stanley Kauffmann's words,

> Sex-as-dynamics ... a tradition of rural dissection (usually New England) that first shows the tree-lined streets with the white picket fences and the neat houses and churches, then strips the skins off the inhabitants to reveal the moral cesspools under the (usually) Congregational hides. It is a tradition that runs from Hawthorne through Eugene O'Neill to Grace Metalious.[24]

The novel's stage equivalent, A Woman Without A Name, is very much like a Strindbergian chamber play whose general theme, according to Maurice Valency, is

> the contrast, tragic and comic, between the decent appearance which people normally present to the world and the sordid reality which this appearance conceals.[25]

Strindberg's The Pelican tells a comparable story in which a mother is reproached by her vindictive children, a sterile daughter and a drunken son. Both plays are intense portraits of the poisonous consequences of familial guilt.

Linney is careful to locate the world of Woman in an uncharacteristically generic region of this country, neither North nor South, in "a small American town," from March of 1900 through May of 1901. It is not as good an example of his uses of folk myth as Heathen Valley or Old Man Joseph and might better be discussed as an illustration of his characters' search for faith, to be addressed in Chapter Seven. Nevertheless, its association with a

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factual personal account of a spiritual quest, not unlike those of Susan Fenimore Cooper or the anonymous authors of the New Testament Apocrypha, merits its discussion here.

The novel's diary form, embracing a semi-literate, yet finely honed, vernacular, enables Linney to seduce one into the intensely private world of a middle-aged mother whose grip on her family is as firm as the devotion with which she attends the duties of a vengeful God. The woman's journal reveals a character intent on righting the wrongs for which she feels she has long been afflicted and an iron will that does not recognize either her culpability or her lack of mercy. Is she in any way responsible for the death of three of her children or is her struggle only a step to eternal deliverance? Can we be expected to find sympathy for a callous woman whom Millicent Bell describes as

> no other than our terrible American Mom--lovingly destructive, who "kills" (though not literally) her children lest they leave her, and maims the sex in her men, who is herself an engine of perverted sexual energy venting itself in household cleanliness and temperance zeal[?][26]

The answer lies in the hearts of those who witness her story. Kauffmann believes, even though "this account of a woman whose various cruelties never breach the citadel of her own moated consciousness"[27] is a depiction of diabolical forces, Linney's portrait is ultimately reaffirming. Repelled, as we may be, by many of Linney's natural-born sinners, Bell recognizes there is "a passage from pride to redemption and humility [that] does, in a rough way, give the novel a certain outline."[28]

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The novel's release was roundly applauded. Mary Walfoort in the Milwaukee Journal found it "a story as powerful as any this reviewer can recall. It is a masterwork, faultless in conception and virtually perfect in execution."[29] In the Chicago Daily News Van Allen Bradley called it "surely one of this year's genuine triumphs of fiction writing."[30] In fact, it is arguably the one of Linney's three stories found in a novel that is ultimately best served by that form. The Nation's Thomas Disch writes that in the novel,

> keeping a diary leads the heroine to a degree of self-knowledge that allows her to transcend her stultifying circumstances; the diary becomes a part of the drama it relates. In Linney's stage adaptation, the diary format offers no such dividends and constantly intrudes on the action.[31]

It is also the first attempt by the playwright to adopt a woman's voice, which, in turn, raises questions about his views regarding the complex, adversarial relationship between the sexes that precipitates the spiraling collapse into a dysfunctional family.

Jory believes that Linney writes women from a male point of view, that "even their function as survivors seems to me to have a fairly male-based structure behind them."[32] He doesn't suppose that women would find them particularly complex from a female point of view and illustrates by asking why the role of the Woman in A Woman Without A Name couldn't have been a man. His point is well taken, though it obscures the larger impression that the demonic forces and serious doubts confronting human actions are as compelling in women as they are in men.

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Agreeing that Linney is truthful in his ability to identify with parts of his feminine side, Kathleen Chalfant, who originated the Woman's role at the Denver Center Theatre in October of 1985, observes that such an ability cannot be equated with feminism.

"The reviews were complicated," Chalfant remembers, "because there were people who just loved it, but the main reviewer didn't get it because it was very cold, as the Woman was, cold and detached."[33] Echoing some of the problems that some women might have with any feminist critique of FM, in which the whore/madonna archetype rears its ugly head, she believes that "it's been interesting to see Romulus fight this battle and come to terms with his relationships with women." Referring, again, to FM, Chalfant continues:

> As feminist consciousness got more and more currency in the literature, it became more and more difficult to do the play. There were things you just couldn't say. There's an evolution in my own sense of being a woman. All the women of my generation learned male literature and I don't know that men reading Jane Austin identified with the protagonists in Jane Austin. So, finding our way to aesthetic feminism has been a matter of some difficulty. In that sense [Linney] is becoming current in American society in the way that cultural currents happen, not as a political issue, but just the way you see things.[34]

The actress clarifies by adding that Linney's view of women can also be attributed to the fact that "he's been a part of the cultural change in women," coming of age concurrent with the women's movement itself.

Finally, the question must address the unalterable truth that he has created, in the unnamed Woman, Childe Byron's Ada,

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Democracy's Esther and Madeleine, Pixie Shedman's Pixie, and Holy Ghosts' Nancy, not to mention all the women from Three Poets, numerous dynamic, resourceful, and uniquely strong female characters. If the author's entry into these complicated lives is driven by his identification with their hunger to survive, such a perspective can only further our understanding of the human--not just the masculine or feminine--experience.

Old Man Joseph And His Family

The following two full-length plays are distinctive because the relationships to their associated novels, which rely on many of the same sources, are different from those of the preceding plays. Old Man Joseph was written in 1976, in an unpublished dramatic form, four years prior to Jesus Tales, and Sand Mountain was written and first produced in 1984. The inspirations for each, however, reflect the same fascination with the New Testament Apocrypha, the tales of which must have seemed perfectly familiar to one so enamored to Celtic ballads. Old Man Joseph's scenes, in a nod to Brechtian distance, are woven together by the singing of a medieval folk song, "The Cherry Tree Carol," recalling how traditional Appalachian music is integral to Unchanging Love. It is also easy to detect Linney's debt to Paul Green (i.e., Johnny Johnson). Nor can it be overlooked that these plays are also very personal explorations of issues having to do with the death of a parent.

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This period in the mid-seventies appears to have been a more secure one for the playwright. Now remarried, his relationship to Laura more stable, and raising a newborn daughter, Susan, the playwright's work reflects a lightness and playful sense of humor less evident in his earlier plays. A close reading, however, reveals what is surely a deep-seated wound, inflicted on Linney as a thirteen-year-old when his father died of throat cancer on December 13, 1943. It is no coincidence that the portrait of a feisty, yet loving, thirteen-year-old Jesus confronted by the death of his estranged father, Joseph, bears such a striking resemblance to the author himself, seeking a resolution to troubled emotions regarding his own father.

The untidy devotion to, and, sometimes, enmity for, the father figure, who loves in circuitous ways, is a perpetual theme of Linney's. Its reverberations can be felt in Frederick, Love Suicide, Shotgun, and, more directly, in The Captivity of Pixie Shedman. There is also a definite correlation between his choice to cover this period in Jesus' life and his belief that the vast majority of the personality is formed by the age of twelve and can be devastated by a traumatic loss at such a crucial point during individuation. These were important years to Linney, just as they must have been to Jesus. The realm of early self-definition is always at the heart of Linney's creativity.

The myth of Jesus' early years, which recalls the very human Jesus in whom people during the earlier centuries A.D. wanted to believe, would not exist today were it not for the Apocrypha, or

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"hidden," texts, sometimes known as "The Bible of the Folk." These episodes and some of their derivatives collected in Italo Calvino's Italian Folktales chronicle Jesus' birth and boyhood. They proliferated, according to Reynolds Price, "basically, perhaps, in compensation for the grave deficiencies as biography of the canonical gospels."[35]

The dialectic inherent to the conflicting interpretations of the life of Jesus are also of interest to Northrop Frye in his criticism, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature. His theories of typology, specifically as they relate to the roots of the Apocrypha, shed light on Linney's delightful treatment of Christ's infancy and pre-adolescence.

At a certain juncture in time following the death of Christ, the mythology associated with the life of Christ became divided into that which is considered literary, if not sanctified, and that which has come to be known as Biblical folklore. So too, over time, has the simplified myth become secondary to the historical "truth," an unfortunate process, according to Frye, who uses slavery as an example of history's inability to make the past meaningful.

> The point is that when any group of people feels as strongly about anything as slaves feel about slavery, history as such is dust and ashes: only myth, with its suggestion of an action that can contain the destinies of those who are contemplating it, can provide any hope or support at all.[36]

There is also a point where "imaginative" mythos (from oral traditions) becomes estranged from what Frye defines as "metonymic argument," that which is later identified with allegory and

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Platonic myth. Linney's inspiration is derived from imaginative myth, which derives its power from wisdom, rather than knowledge.

> Wisdom, as noted, is not knowledge: knowledge is of the particulars and actual, and wisdom is rather a sense of the potential, of the way to deal with the kind of thing that may happen.[37]

Appropriately, Linney discovers his source in that period of Jesus' life that remains a mystery, even to the liturgical texts. His point of entry is Jesus' relationship to Joseph, who, according to the Apocrypha, was an ancient widower when he reluctantly adopted the willful fourteen-year-old Mary. It is the first scenes that depict their meeting, the subsequent virginal birth, and the early mischievous miracles of the Baby Jesus where Linney provides the greatest comic pleasures--a rendition that in rhythm and flavor could arguably be described as "Borscht Belt Bible." Finally, however, it is the tempestuous bond between the elderly, cantankerous woodcarver and his precocious, trickster son, that forms the center of the play's discourse.

Apart from this first theme, which concludes that all knowledge is personal knowledge, Linney is also interested in exploring, as does Buddhist thought, the dangers associated with vanity. Frye further adds to our understanding of the play, an example of what he would call "wisdom literature" (the fourth phase in Revelation, following creation, revolution, and law, but prior to prophesy, gospel, and apocalypse) by citing the popular Assyrian tale of Ahikar.

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This myth, which influenced the Apocrypha, Greek literature (Aesop), and the Koran, enacts the revenge of an elderly counselor to the king of Nineveh on his scheming nephew. Its ingredients illustrate the "superior wisdom and virtue of seniors." The Biblical counterpart to Ahikar is Koheleth, the chief editor of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Frye describes this teacher or preacher as "not a weary pessimist tired of life; he is a vigorous realist determined to smash his way through every locked door of repression in his mind."[38] Such a portrait could as easily refer to Linney, who clearly identifies with the verism embraced by Joseph.

Like Koheleth, in his aged wisdom, Joseph has transcended his own lifetime and seeks to inform Jesus that for all his gifts, he must never forget, referring to Mary, that:

> You think the rest of the world cares about you like she does. That's all wrong. It makes you care about yourself more than you should ... When a man loves his son, he tells him the truth ... You got to straighten out. You ain't the sun and the moon. You can't expect other children to treat you like your Mamma does ... We're dust, Jesus. You, me, your mother, your friends, all the world. Don't stir it up.[39]

Joseph's dying counsel to his beloved son embraces Koheleth's central paradox that "all things are full of emptiness" and takes it to a new level of comprehension. Frye's translation of Koheleth's essential message clarifies Jesus' debt to Joseph, and sounds remarkably like a Zen Master's.

> As soon as we renounce the expectation of reward, in however refined a guise, for virtue or wisdom, we relax and our real energies begin to flow into the soul. Even the great elegy at the end over the failing bodily powers of old age ceases to become "pessimistic" when

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> we see it as part of the detachment with which the wise man sees his life in the context of vanity.[40]

It is apparent that a comprehension of parental wisdom was important to Linney, regardless of how close or far he came to acquiring it from his father. Its expression has a historical context, in that it represents a tradition with its roots in Buddhism, early European Christian folklore, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and Italian Popular Tales. The breadth of sources is another example of the author's ties to classical literature, a rare phenomenon when one considers the source material of most contemporary American playwrights.

"Only when we realize that nothing is new," Frye paraphrases Koheleth, "can we live with an intensity in which everything becomes new."[41] This basic tenet, at the heart of all religious philosophy, but so often lost in a morass of religious doctrine, finds a medium in this simple tale of lost childhood and the will of the father. "The paradox of creation," writes Joseph Campbell,

> the coming of the forms of time out of eternity, is the germinal secret of the father ... The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being ... He beholds the face of the father, understands--and the two are atoned.[42]

Public reaction to Jesus Tales, Old Man Joseph, and, specifically, Sand Mountain, can be seen as almost a thermometer measuring the religious temperature of the time. Hailing the novel as an "interpretation [that] rings true for our time in the same

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way that Bunyan's rather different Pilgrim's Progress did for its," the Nation's Frank MacShane credits Linney's success to his "dramatic sense and his ear."

> He uses a spare, sharp dialogue that owes a good deal to modern Jewish humor. His characters speak in the sardonic, wistful and resigned manner often found in the work of such writers as Malamud and Singer.[43]

Peter S. Prescott in Newsweek, noting that the play's spirit and content are reminiscent of the time of the Wakefield mystery plays, forewarns that "[t]he solemn-minded (and atheists, who are always the first to be offended by Christian levity) may find these stories sacrilegious."[44] The nearly unanimous consensus among literary critics was, in fact, with the exception of Radix magazine's Jack Buckley, who found "a serious lapse in creating Jesus in our own image,"[45] that the novel was good, clean fun. Interestingly, both the New York and regional theatre communities, for quite different reasons, were not always so magnanimous in their response.

With reservations similar to those that often greet the New York opening of a Linney play, Michael Feingold vehemently attacked Old Man Joseph as "Gospel tales reduced to TV sitcom level for easy consumption." One can truly appreciate the contrary aesthetic sensibilities of the New York and regional media, if they consider Feingold's dismissal of those who write in a "folk tradition."

> The concept of "the folk" as a giant, faceless collective of writers and musicians busily churning out works of art is pretty well exploded. Nobody denies that there were artists, or at least potential artists, among the Early Christian proletariat, but the folk

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> tradition is now largely seen as a corrupting and distorting force, where it used to be looked on as a saving grace. The phrase "lowest common denominator" applies.[46]

Showing the same shortsightedness that John Simon exhibited in his review of Heathen Valley, Feingold's claim that with Just Folks (produced at the Theatre for the New City during the same January, 1978 that the Chelsea Theatre Center presented Old Man Joseph) "an artist of genuine intelligence has abased himself to write in this plastic-cornpone way [though] Linney at least feels guilty about what he's doing," flies in the face of historical perspective.[47] Granted, the playwright chose never to publish this particularly slight piece, but the notice ignores Linney's penchant for tapping a rich legacy. Feingold's seeming dismissal of the vernacular tradition of Lope de Vega, Synge, O'Neill, Lorca, Richard Wright, Paul Green, and Howard Richardson sells Linney short. Perhaps, it is a consequence of Linney's earnest, emotionally charged simplicity, a mode of structure and dialect frequently found in the work of the aforementioned authors, that remains more easily accepted by the denizens of rural communities in this country. Surely this helps to account for the playwright's frequent regional theatre successes, while his oeuvre remains largely unproduced at many of our cities' larger institutions.

The next play provides a further example of his interest in the folk idiom, as well as an instance when a very different kind of response to his work was kindled.

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Sand Mountain

Though Sand Mountain is one of several collections of one-acts, better analyzed, perhaps, in that context, it is inexorably linked to Jesus Tales and the other plays inspired by European folklore and the Apocrypha. Sand Mountain's plays, Sand Mountain Matchmaking and Why The Lord Come to Sand Mountain, have frequently been paired with other of Linney's works, including Soul Of A Tree and Just Folks, which attempts to explore some of the same sexual taboos so humorously debunked in Sand Mountain Matchmaking. While Just Folks was not well-received in its 1978 production, the folk plays have generally elicited throngs of appreciative audiences and critics, especially when they've been produced in the heartland.

"There's more going on in [Sand Mountain], spoken and unspoken," writes Dan Sullivan in the Los Angeles Times, "than has been seen in a month of 'important' drama in some of our larger theatres."[48] Productions in St. Louis, Detroit, and Salt Lake City were uniformly praised for their handling of religiously delicate material, but at The Whole Theatre Company in Montclair, New Jersey, the explicit content of the sexual dynamics and the innovative approach to familiar myth seems to have alienated some of the suburban subscribers. While critics found the plays "simply wonderful" and "charming," the theatre's assistant director of marketing and press relations, Bonnie J. Kramen, suggested that

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> Jesus may seem too normal and simple for some tastes ... some audience members reportedly have found them not so disarming as threatening, and more sacrilegious than satirical."[49]

Attendance proved to be limited and even some of the twenty-five-member board of directors expressed their dissatisfaction. Some bad feelings lingered for a time following the production, but Linney returned the following October to direct his collection of one-acts entitled Pops. It seems curious, if not ironic, that such a sophisticated community would misconstrue Sand Mountain as blasphemous myth-making, when even Utah, known for its fundamentalism, identified with its spiritual core.

What qualities does Why The Lord Come to Sand Mountain exhibit that it could have threatened such a seemingly intelligent and enlightened audience? While a minority of the subscribers likely found the content truly upsetting, there was obviously some reluctance to embrace such a flawed portrait of the Lord. Contrary to Sand Mountain Matchmaking, the companion piece that celebrates a woman's resolve in a man's world, much as does A Woman Without A Name, Why The Lord Come To Sand Mountain captures the private journey of a often reticent and unpredictable Lord Jesus, set sometime and somewhere in the mountainous region of our imaginations. It is a sphere, like that of Valley Crucis, in which the accepted laws of faith are not codified--where men and women seek more natural explanations to the mysteries of life. The spiritual signs these characters look for are embodied not so much in the gospel, but in the flight of the crow and the potency of ginseng. The telling of their Bible Tales expresses more

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about their belief in the natural cycle of things than it does any canonical theology. Sang Picker, the charmingly demonic storyteller, creates a palpable air of hardened truth-telling.

> Every soul on Sand Mountain knows yore raven will jest downright dispute with ye. We are like that too, hereabouts. Can't read no Bible, but love to dispute the thang anyhow ... Roots of life. Yes, sir. Chew Gen Sang, ponder Bible Tales. Keep your body alive in spite of debts, doctors and even husbands ... we fancy'em all mixed up tegether, something a body ain't heared four hundred times, something a body kin dispute.[50]

Like Billy in Heathen Valley, the narrator casts a spell in which we are invited to journey forward. Her character gives us a focal point by which to view a new sort of Jesus, more god than God, whose quest to unlock the secret of his father's love allows us to appreciate the sacred figure as one who must surely live among us--a living god whose heart is more loving than vengeful and more spirited than cruel.

A view of humanity so closely linked to the rural terrain of Linney's southern childhood illuminates a passion for people whose heart and soul remain with him, but whose frailties he is often unable to accept. Explaining that he loves the South physically and is disturbed by stereotypes of southerners, Linney also expresses, through his understanding of Molière's The Misanthrope, his reservations about living in the South.

> A way of interpreting Alceste is that he doesn't hate people. He loves them too much, and he's continually disappointed by them. Maybe no place can live up to my childhood memories.[51]

These memories must surely have instigated the kind of spiritual questions he found answered in the Apocrypha. True to the

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character of a reluctant believer, his vision of a flawed Jesus reveals a vanity only the Greeks felt comfortable with in describing their supernatural mentors. Here is a figure even Saint Peter is never able to completely comprehend, so it is entirely appropriate, and surely the playwright's intention, that we, too, should feel we're in unfamiliar territory.

Borrowing from an episode out of Jesus Tales and culminating in the same father-son confrontation found in Old Man Joseph, the short play captures a spontaneous Jesus, unafraid of mingling with the spiritually desolate or, even, sharing their brandy. He recognizes that in order to gain their trust and, thereby, understand his origins, he cannot offer sermons. To excavate their shared truths he must bear witness to their shared ancestral consciousness.

During the long night the drunken threesome: Jack, Jean, and the Lord, exchange their tales of "The Moon Frog, The Child Who Could Not Shudder, The Sheriff Unexpected and The Bony Bandit, Flowering Cholera, Phantom Funerals, and Sleeping Kings." Saint Peter counters by trying to "fight fire with fire, and give'em something strong, human, and down to earth sensible. With a meaning to it!"[52] He is left aghast, however, by their laughter, not at his allegorical tales, but at their own stories in which, for example, Stamper Baines cuts off the head of Sally Newell, whose "baby's got as many daddys as a pickle's got warts." Peter wonders, as does the audience, to what end the Lord intends to take this stormy evening. The purpose, we

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discover, in Jack and Jean's final reenactment of "Old Man Joseph," is to reaffirm Jesus' love for his father, that same moment of childhood reconciliation explored in the play of that name.

"What's the use of a story about things that never happenned?" inquires a quizzical Saint Peter. Fantasy or fairy tale, Jean appreciates its meaning to her supernatural guest. "Hit ain't the ending whut's important," she explains, "[h]its the beginning."[53]

Such beginnings, absent in the collective unconscious of many conventional churchgoers, illustrate Linney's search for an understanding of the common man's thirst for faith as he or she is confronted by the stifling mindset of orthodoxy. It is conceivable that such a non-devotional representation of Christ would alienate even the more liberal believer, but Linney's point is not theological. His modus vivendi is to select that which is accepted and to turn it around, eclipsing the standard version so that it challenges and, often, disturbs. The point, of course, is also to entertain, but without deadening the core of that which is human and longing for a primal connection to others.

William B. Collins finds the play takes the audience "into realms of the imagination where the theatre hardly dares venture anymore."[54] While it defies logical analysis, the play's appeal to numerous smaller theatre companies affirms not only the playwright's worth as a rural storyteller, but also his importance to the relatively youthful history of the regional theatre movement.

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CHAPTER SIX

HELL IN OTHER WORDS: ADAPTING ARCHETYPES

> *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away from the truth, and be turned into fables.*
>
> The Bible (Second Timothy, Chapter Four) in Divine Comedy South[1]

Emanuel Swedenborg, whom Franklin S. Klaf refers to as Strindberg's "redeemer," suffered schizophrenic episodes, the telling of which provided the playwright not only an escape from his own hell, but also renewed energy to turn his own nightmares into creations for the stage. Strindberg is, perhaps, the "father" of the notion that there exists a supervening therapeutic value to creativity, as it relates to dramatic literature. So, too, has he always stood for complete artistic freedom. Both these concerns can be detected in Linney's work. These plays also reveal how Linney shared Strindberg's interest in Nietzsche and Dante, suggesting that he has suffered many of the same inner turmoils that the previous authors were able to transcend, producing great art.

Linney's fascination, like that of Chekhov's for small-town deceit in "In The Ravine" and Tolstoy's for lustful betrayal in The Power of Darkness, is with his characters' descent into a distinctly human hell. Dante's Inferno, which provides a thematic model for Divine Comedy South, seems to be of mutual concern to Chekhov, Strindberg, and Linney. It is, therefore,

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appropriate that an analysis of Linney's work that is derived from the stories of other playwrights or poets should begin with that of his nineteen century mentor, August Strindberg.

The historical archetype--like Byron, Frederick, and Oscar--becomes a living and breathing corporal reality in Linney's contemporary adaptation of Miss Julie. As a preface to his faithful, yet distinctively Linneyesque reworking of the seminal play, we are confronted by the living spirit of this defiant and sardonic Swedish master and truth-teller. The theatrical leap required to accept his presence, another sign of Linney's desire for theatrical distance, owes a debt to Brecht and his early teaching plays: a central problem of the play is explained by a mediating party. In this case, the mediator is the original author of the work, who, as will become apparent in what many at the time found to be a "viciously pornographic" play, is interested in "the three primal hungers of mankind: food, sex, and rewriting somebody else's play."[2] His primary purpose is not to apprise us of the many sexual or social meanings of his play, but to remind us that art must always confront those evils that people are afraid to see reflected in themselves.

The succeeding three plays are taken from the shorter works of Strindberg, Chekhov, and Tolstoy, and the last, more freely adapted Divine Comedy South, from Dante. All are disturbing portraits of lies, deceit, and passion gone awry. With these wrenching tales of patricide, infanticide, and suicide, there is no escaping either hell or purgatory, territory as familiar to

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contemporary society as it was to the readers of the aforementioned masters. Linney, especially in Miss Julie, insists that the audience--that necessary dimension to the theatre "event" he always keeps in mind--sees itself in these portraits. Certainly it is his intent to exploit Strindberg's situation, Chekhov's archetypes, and Dante's themes for their current relevancy, especially as they illustrate art's ability--and responsibility--to affront its audience.

Miss Julie

Each of these works is as uncompromising as the next, but only Miss Julie adds to the mixture so much acidic wit, contemporary social commentary, and sexual tension. The portrayal of class warfare, the consequences of nature's cycles, and the defiance of sexual custom are qualities borrowed from the original, but the grotesque humor, especially in the "ballet" section usually devoted solely to festive folk singing, is uniquely Linney's.

He sets this classically inspired, sexual face-off, familiar to any drama student with experience in a scene class, in what amounts to the perfect counterpart to the estate of the original count. John and Christine are designated as either Black, Asian, Hispanic, or White servants relegated to the opulent kitchen of a stately townhouse in Atlanta, Georgia, replete with hot tub and nearby wine cellar. While the author doesn't insist the casting be race-conscious, the reality of Southern class structure,

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combined with the combustive energy inherent to the American interracial romance, justifies including the social commentary.

The play's attack on the fin de siècle neurosis of the bourgeois is just as sharp and timely as the original's. Linney carefully replicates the same level of astonishment by allowing present standards of censorship concerning nudity, simulated sexual intercourse, and four-letter words apply to Strindberg's archetypal confrontation of man and woman.

The unpublished version was first performed at the Denver Center Theatre, after being commissioned by them in 1989. However, Linney was interested in doing more than just adding to a long list of existing translations. Its writing was undertaken just as the Reagan Era's cultural skirmishes were heating up. Public figures such as Senator Jesse Helms, Education Secretary William Bennett, and Reverend Pat Robertson were intending to destroy the core and fiber of artistic expression, freedoms of which were very much on Strindberg's mind when Miss Julie was created. The inclusion of Strindberg's opening monologue in Linney's version, wherein we are told that "the furious men and women of [his] time were upset by Shakespeare's mirror held up to nature,"[3] was paramount to his decision to adapt the work.

Apparently an actor to play Strindberg was hired and rehearsed, but by the time director Donovan Marley had opened the production, the decision had been made, unbeknownst to the playwright, to cut Strindberg's character. Apparently management was afraid of confronting their subscribers with Stringberg's

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uncomfortable truths. Linney was vehemently disturbed by this act of artistic sabotage, one of several instances that seems to have solidified his resistance to outside control of his work. This event and several subsequent artistic differences have hardened his resolve to direct his own works whenever possible, an understandable consideration from one trained as a director prior to a writing career. Perhaps his greatest fear regarding the fate of his plays after they have been premiered is that succeeding productions, so often found in lesser known theatres with limited access to acting and directing talent, will compromise the plays' original intent. These apprehensions are endemic to the late twentieth century playwright, but the irony associated with the omission in Denver of Strindberg's introduction dramatically reinforces the necessity of artistic freedom, especially at the regional playhouses, where these rights appear to be doubly at risk.

Audiences in Denver, oblivious to any artistic disagreements, were not disappointed, despite the compromise. Adapted from a literal translation by David Reed, the play transposes Julie's wanton dancing with her guests to include the raiding of her father's whiskey cabinet and the "sniffing of lines with hundred dollar bills." John and Christine's speech perfectly suits their southern backgrounds, without being obvious or cliched, and their relationship possesses a steamy intimacy not found in the original work. As Linney notes in his manuscript,

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"the casting alone should make the social comment, without revising Strindberg to fit ethnic conditions in America."[4]

Julie's character, so much a product of her mother's abandonment and gender-based revenge in Strindberg, is here more accurately explained in terms of the social and racial barriers that predominate. Her haughtiness and willful abandon are heightened by the sharper, more precise dialogue. Whereas Strindberg's Julie was allowed to play with sexual directness, the more sophisticated and candidly confrontational world of America in the nineteen-nineties lends the proceedings an aura of sado-masochistic yearning not fully explored in its prototype.

> JOHN: Poor Yvette!
> JULIE: What did you say?
> JOHN: Poor Yvette!
> (JULIE slaps JOHN in the face.)
> JULIE: Wise ass.
> JOHN: Thank you.
> JULIE: For what?
> JOHN: For slapping me in the face, and leaving the smell of your perfume in my nose.
> JULIE: You are a little boy <u>and</u> a wise ass. What do you know about French perfume?[5]

This sexual dueling is also made more vivid by giving the characters' increased license to use their bodies as engines of desire, malice, and self-hatred. Julie's newly discovered freedom to disrobe, empowering her to turn John's will to her own advantage, and her demands that John oblige her physical whims, add a dimension of arousal to the seduction and ensuing suicide. By making a hot tub the focal point of the action, Linney is able to better realize the play's deadly carnal overtones. Julie's death

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by knife, while immersed in a red sea of steaming water, is a tour de force of theatrical audacity that Strindberg, were he able, would certainly commend.

Aspects of the original are lost in translation, especially the substitution of New Years Eve for Midsummer's Eve. There are qualities to Atlanta's smoldering summer heat that would have increased the sense of inevitability that so concerned Strindberg, here diminished by the winter setting. It can also be argued that because the eighteen-eighties was a more sexually repressed period, the carnal energy of the original loses something when so much is seen and outwardly expressed. This paradox, however, curiously adds interest to the whole comparison of our world to that of Strindberg's; the explicitly sexual games have a different power all their own.

The contemporary treatment also takes a very different approach to the play's "interval," that period during the mid-play fornication in the cellar or bedroom, at which time Strindberg's or "chorus of country folk" descend on the playing area. Linney enhances the scenic transformation--Strinderg's snicker at an audience's demand for an intermission--by giving each of the chorus members distinct and broad personalities. The "ballet" now includes a Gross Old Woman, Disgusting Old Man, Hateful Sexy Man, Mean Voluptuous Woman, Beautiful Young Girl, and a Pretty Boy: southern archetypes singing "Roll me over, lay me down, and do it again." Another example of Linney's quest for theatrical distance, such moments encourage the director to exploit the use

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of masks and choreographed staging one might find in Noh Theatre or puppetry. The effect is to accentuate the recklessness of the sexual act and the random hatefulness that is often manifested when "society" drinks together. The interlude provides a sharp contrast to the simmering quality of the early scenes and prepares the audience for the more brutal sexplay and final sacrificial death in the hot tub.

As cruel and fateful as the actions are, especially in Linney's more expressionistic treatment, any production begs for broad strokes aimed at fulfilling the steely demands of the original, while simultaneously framing it, via Strindberg's personage, as a mythic statement with truths as vital today as in the past.

Julie's dilemma illustrates a private hell prompted by fears of poverty and abandonment, sexual longing, and submission of gender, all issues Linney is devoted to throughout his career, but never so profoundly as in his treatments of Strindberg, Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Dante.

Unchanging Love

It is certain that something about the character and environment of Chekhov's remote village of Ukleevo reminded Linney of the misty foothills of southern Appalachia. Maynard, North Carolina was populated in 1921 by the descendants of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant mountain folk, of whom many were emigrant German and English convicts who preferred the secluded valley

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life to the larger villages that often held them in contempt. To Linney, these ancestors seemed the perfect counterpart to the inhabitants of Chekhov's desolate factory landscape of late nineteenth century Russia. Chekhov's characterization of the family's unscrupulous business practices is so vividly described in this passage that it captures in a few words the breadth and meaning of this deeply human saga that portends a sure progression to purgatory.

> When at Carnival or at the church festival, which lasted for three days, they sold the peasants tainted salt meat, smelling so strong it was hard to stand near the tub of it, and took scythes, caps, and their wives' kerchiefs in pledge from the drunken men; when the factory hands stupefied with bad vodka lay rolling in the mud, and sin seemed to hover thick like a fog in the air, then it was a relief to think that up there in the house there was a gentle, neatly dressed woman who had nothing to do with salt meat or vodka; her charity had in those burdensome, murky days the effect of a safety valve in a machine.[6]

Both Chekhov's and Linney's portrait of these struggling, single-minded men and women illustrate a shared affection for self-sufficient, family-dominated pursuits, while also expressing a disillusionment with petty hatreds, common greed, and self-aggrandizement. Both writers are bemoaning the shortsighted and, too often, small-minded qualities of the people they love.

More than any of his other plays, Unchanging Love benefits from its dependence on, and marriage with, music. The Musgrove Family Singers and their periodic renditions of traditional ballads represent the heart of the play, providing the kind of frame so common in Linney's theatre. This musical frame reflects the

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progression of grief as darkness descends upon the innocent--and not so innocent. Jan Stuart writes in New York Newsday that

> Over the course of Romulus Linney's intensely moral drama, the sadness grows and grows, engulfing the characters and the audience till all traces of hope have been snuffed from the music ... It reminds us, as if we need to be, of the pyramidal tendency of evil to regenerate itself with increasing dividends and damage.[7]

His defense of musical forms is demonstrated by the problems he encountered with early drafts of this play. Originally conceived as Precious Memories, it was first produced at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre in October of 1988 and later as part of the "Works In Progress" Series at the Circle Repertory Company. The title is derived from the traditional hymn-like folk song "Precious Memories," which becomes the harrowing central theme of Judy Musgrove, the young girl whose personal sacrifice, and that of her infant son's, to the gods of greed, constitutes the play's central event.

It became known to me, as a student of Mr. Linney's during this period, that following a reading of the play I attended at the Circle Repertory, artistic administrators there suggested that the musical portions of the evening were interfering with the story line and stipulated that any further production would require they be deleted. Linney insisted that the music was necessary to the organic whole and withdrew his play. His passionate refusal to compromise, so apparent when he related the matter to me, further enhanced my respect for an artist who understood what was fundamental to his theatrical vision. "Linney uses folk music," notes Harry Weber in the Riverfront Times of

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St. Louis, "like Chekhov used gossip and detail: to cozen the reader or audience into sticking with him through the pity and fear of his narrative."[8]

Interestingly, he was soon to find that publication rights to "Precious Memories" were not available, thus necessitating his use of "Unchanging Love," by then in public domain. Both variations give equal weight to the musical interludes, balancing the impending blanket of evil that overwhelms all the inhabitants of the valley.

Next to Miss Julie, Unchanging Love is Linney's closest adaptation of another writer's work. He believes his play hasn't disturbed the spine of Chekhov's story, but there are differences that Weber felt worth mentioning.

> Linney's play is more concentrated; simpler, with fewer characters and little of the gossipy humor that makes Chekhov's terrifying story bearable. The principal difference between the story and the play, however, is attitude. Linney seems to view his people more as equals than does Chekhov, who portrays the characters of his story as disgusting, wretched creatures who more or less deserve the awful things that happen to them.[9]

Mel Gussow adds that "there is a dramatizing of what is only hinted at in Chekhov."[10] Two of the leading characters, Barbara Pitman, the patriarch's good wife, and Shelby Pitman, the prodigal son imprisoned for his inherited graft, are strengthened, to the degree that they represent diametrically opposite views of the future, dialectics that were also of concern to Chekhov.

> In the original story, the storekeeper's wife was quietly dutiful; one trusted in her decency. Mr. Linney has given her a more active role, and she speaks some of the sentiments reserved in the short story for

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> passing travelers who represent the spirit of Mother Russia.[11]

Gussow suggests that in Linney's more thorough characterization, "the wife becomes the voice of Mother Appalachia, pleading for humanity and horrified by the realization that in her town 'everybody cheats on everybody else.'"[12] That impression is deepened by the bond that exists between Barbara and Judy, whose musical expressions of all that is gracious about the people reinforce any hope that some goodness might prevail.

Similarly, Shelby, who remains an inarticulate cipher in the short story, embodies a strength of will and a self-delusional hubris less well defined by Chekhov.

> People think I'm just good looking and stupid, but I ain't. In the ancient world, Julius Caesar had to cross the Rub-i-con. That was a river. He looked hard and clear, seen his chance and had the gumption to take it, and he crossed that river, and won--well--some country or other. Point is, he done it! He made is move!! I can too.[13]

Linney, like Chekhov, is skewering the doggedness of the merchant class, disturbingly characteristic of both post-Feudal Russia and late twentieth century America, but his chief indictment is reserved for Leena Pitman: Chekhov's Aksinya. Unflinchingly the opportunist, she is, perhaps, the purest, most potent expression of banal wickedness to emerge from either of these two writers.

Chekhov is known to have used "In The Ravine" as a sketchbook for his portrait of Natasha in The Three Sisters. Leena in Unchanging Love embodies the same energy we find in Andrei Prozorov's wife, so devoted to extinguishing every ray of light

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that appears in a darkening home. This archetype of the singularly determined, sometimes predatory, female can be likened to Julie's mother in Miss Julie, Laura in The Father, and Mrs. X in The Stronger. Neither is this character alone in Linney's canon, as he seems to have followed Chekhov by enlarging upon this archetype to create similar creatures in True Crimes.

In both this and Unchanging Love, not to mention Heathen Valley, the most heinous, nearly unstageable, acts imaginable are boldly reenacted, providing each of these works a clear visual symbol for the evil that has seeps into these families. Their archetypal entrance into the barren, purgatorial abyss that Chekhov and Linney so often associate with the family, achieves a mythical--and familiar--reality. The mythopoeic structure of the journey into darkness represents an attempt to shape contemporary drama by classically conceived means, enhanced by a transcultural change of locale. That same method is apparent in Linney's borrowing of Leo Tolstoy's The Power of Darkness.

True Crimes

If purgatory can best be illustrated by the actions of men and women caught in a web of their own deceits, then Unchanging Love and True Crimes are variations on the same theme. In each case, innocence is snuffed out by forces one usually associates with virtue, if not the life force itself. Family and religious solidarity, cornerstones of harmony and human productivity, are rendered in terms that can only be described as mortally and

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morally poisonous. If the first work, inspired by Chekhov, offers a glimmer of hope for human decency in the characters of Barbara and Judy, then True Crimes would seem to shut the door to any light in a world devoid of either spirituality or mutual respect.

Consider, once again, Linney's sources and their origins in myth. Tolstoy based his 1886 "peasant tragedy" on an infanticidal event in Tula, an ancient Russian town of ill repute, augmenting the moral critique of post-feudal nihilism begun in his first play, The Contaminated Family. Had Linney simply copied the story borrowed by Tolstoy, whom Vincent Canby notes, "preached his own very special kind of pacifist Christianity [and] made associations between poverty and depravity,"[14] he would not have conceived such an uncompromising indictment of American values that so bluntly approximates an Appalachian purgatory.

Whereas Tolstoy allows Nikita, the lustful son whose sins are compounded by the avarice of both his mistress and mother, a concluding confession, no such redemption is awarded Logan Lovel, his American counterpart. Defined by Canby as "pre-moral, an empty vessel," Logan is, to Ab, his "fundamentalist" father, "a tree that might bear fruit." However, Logan, in collusion with both Ab and Vangey, his scheming mother, is soon a vessel more full than empty. Lust begets brutality, until he is finally coerced into seeing the devil in himself. His final transcendance of these accumulated sins and acceptance of his evil stands in direct contradiction to the last moments in The Power of

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Darkness, wherein Nikita bears witness to his crimes, as the Constable officially brings an end to the wedding ceremony.

> Papa forgive me. Forgive me. I am a poor sinner. You warned me. You used to say, "If a claw is caught, the bird is lost." But I didn't listen to you. Everything you said has come true. Forgive me in the name of Christ[15]

In contrast, Logan joins his forsaken family by assimilating its greed, deceit, and sexual appetite. The spiritual decay is conveniently swept under the floorboards, along with the remains of a newborn daughter.

Linney's refusal to give his story Tolstoy's morally reaffirming conclusion is another example of his ironic treatment of the tragic form. This irony is also apparent in his choice to borrow from another mythos, that of the Penny Dreadfuls, the "true crime" pamphlets that so splendidly reflected America's love of violence, especially when it was motivated by sex and greed. These graphic tales give Linney his customary theatrical frame, as Logan's imagination, fed by explicit images of hangings and dismemberment, is confronted by the ultimate atrocity.

In Linney's universe, the atrocity finally has the effect of seeming mundane, simply reflecting a way in which this family conducts itself. It is a world-view that holds out little hope for restitution, compassion, or justice.

As a mirror to Tolstoy's impression of nineteenth century Russia, it provides pungent commentary on many of the same social institutions: family, marriage, and the church. Nikita and Logan, however, find very different ways of coming to the truth

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about themselves. When Logan's option--to cover up his crime--seems more familiar to society than Nikita's, who begs forgiveness, questions regarding contemporary morality automatically arise. Canby found that

> True Crimes leaves you with a sense of dread and foreboding about America. Is this all there is? Possibly, Mr. Linney seems to be saying, unless you do something about it.[16]

Canby also observes that Linney "has the cool, compassionate, unsentimental eye that was evident in Depression-era photographs of the great Walker Evans."[17] A defining quality of Linney's adaptation is that the emotionally effusive Russian peasants, personified by Nikita's God-fearing father Akim and Mitrich, sensitive companion to the younger Anyutka, are absent. The members of this extended family display a spare directness characteristic of the Appalachian men and women Evans caught on film.

Consider Mary's resolve, emerging, as it does, after her timid contribution to the murder of her sick husband. Its coldbloodedness is conveyed in the clipped rhythms of necessity, in stark contrast to Tolstoy's verbosity.

> Mary: Do it, Logan.
> Logan: Not me!
> Mary: It's your baby!
> Logan: Did you kill Soony?
> Mary: Nobody killed nobody.
> Logan: Tell me the truth.
> Mary: If anybody did, your mother did.
> Logan: Oh, Jesus.
> Mary: She give the powders to me. I give them to him. He put them in his own whiskey. What difference does that make now? You married me,

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didn't you? What does that make you look like?

Logan: I'll not have it, woman!

Mary: Then what will you have, you stupid son of a bitch?[18]

The verisimilitude of these characters is a consequence of the accuracy of the rhythms and authenticity of the sounds: the semiotic content of the dialect.

Linney's style is just as relentlessly authentic when it comes to the simulation of infanticide, a theatrical conceit the playwright also employs in Unchanging Love and Heathen Valley. This horrific stage act troubled Tolstoy, raising questions regarding the effectiveness of onstage violence. Is there tension lost when such a violent act as the murder of a newborn is visually represented or is the Greek's custom of "telling more than showing more effective in capturing the spirit of the act? Tolstoy's alternate versions of his Act Four, Scene Two, one of which shows us the murder, while the other distances it, add to our understanding of this mimetic dilemma.

Tolstoy's first scenario involves the attempts by Matryona, the mother whose steadfastness is most responsible for the killing, to calm Anisya and to force Nikita to finish burying the small body. Frustrated by her son's hysteria, she grabs the human bundle and flings it down the cellar stairs, a stunning stage action for its time. Tolstoy, while wishing to be faithful to his realistic intentions, worried about the reception to such a brutal act and felt compelled to give any producer of the play the option of another point of view to the violence. In doing

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so, he significantly enriched the play by providing a counterpoint: the innocence of a young girl (Anyutka) sharing her fears with an old soldier (Mitrich). This scene alters our perspective and reminds us of the lasting effects such violence engenders.

The first account of the events in The Power of Darkness is concerned only with the tension of the plot and the already established characters of the two female partners in crime. There is little information provided and the scene leads to several violent physical outbursts. His alternate scene is quiet, as Anyuka confides to the old man her nightmares, confessing her knowledge and fear of the abundance of evil that has occurred in their house that evening. While she knows about the death of the baby, she wants only to hear a fantasy of Mitrich's war experiences in which a child is saved from death and given a home. The abominable act is deepened by its being in the background, more sinister as subtext. Anyuka wonders if the baby would have survived if her grandmother hadn't been there and declares that "[i]f it'd live, I'd take real good care of it." The poignancy of her hopefulness, followed by the old man's tirade about the uselessness of women, gives this altered scene a resonance that is missing from the more graphic display of savagery in both Tolstoy's original version and in True Crimes.

This is not to suggest that Linney had the same options as Tolstoy. Nancy Sparks, the young mother who chooses to bury any memory of her childbirth, is much more a victim than the younger Anyutka and succumbs to the prevailing acceptance of evil. No

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Tolstoyian moral center exists in Linney's play. His hired man, Sawdust, contrary to the complacent Mitrich, betrays his Christian facade by cheating his way to freedom. Consequently, such extended tenderness as we encounter between Anyutka and her "grandfather" would be entirely uncharacteristic. Yet one cannot help but yearn for some relief in True Crimes, the kind of a breather so often provided by music in Unchanging Love and spectacle in Miss Julie. There is a bleakness in the vision, nearly unmatched in other of Linney's works, contrary to the quantity of mercy displayed in his nod to Dante's Divine Comedy.

Divine Comedy South

There seems to be an attempt in much of Linney's later work to transfer his literary conceit of hell on earth to more contemporary surroundings. Intimations of it can be felt in three of his shorter works: Anna Rey, April Snow, and Shotgun, but the best example of this sub-genre, inspirations for which can be found in several of Strindberg's chamber plays and in Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, exists in the three scenes of Divine Comedy South: "Hell," "Purgatory," and "Heaven."

The play no longer exists in the form considered here and the author is presently revising it under the title Up. Unpublished and produced only in part as a workshop at the Ensemble Studio Theatre, its disparate sections, like those of Three Poets and Spain, are united not so much by theme as by an unspoken compassion for humanity itself. Though its reincarnation will

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surely differ significantly, the work-in-progress illuminates the writer's many varied modes. Mel Gussow, in his introduction to Linney's Seventeen Short Plays, remarks that Linney is a playwright with many voices, all of them linked by his humanitarian regard for individualism by his instinct for humor as an essence of character."[19]

Apart from several of his comic one-acts, Divine Comedy South is as good an example as one can find of his unique ability to find humor in the quiet desperation of human longing and desire. He exhibits a Chekhovian predisposition to render his characters in forgiving terms. Should our curiosity turn too quickly to a revulsion for these floundering characters with inclinations towards adultery, murder, and drunkenness, we might fail to recognize that these frailties are very much our own responses to uncertainty in a seemingly deteriorating secular age.

Written so near, as the play was, to those with historical southern milieus, Unchanging Love and True Crimes, it also represents a return to the more personal territory explored in Pixie Shedman, FM, Yancy, and Juliet. Their source--Linney's imagination--seems to be fed more by incidents in his own life than by literary prototypes or historical documentation. In each case, his characters, having made choices that run counter to the social mainstream, confront traditional notions of sin, as they reach for personal fulfillment on their own terms. Such an undivided allegiance to the inner voice, one that eschews social acceptance or approval, is characteristic of a playwright who has

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never written to please a particular audience or to gain wider notoriety. These characters embody Linney's deep conviction that one's worth will only emerge after careful listening to one's self.

The paradox, however, as unmistakable in Linney's "Hell" as in Dante's Inferno, is that we are in territory, be it contemporary or medieval, more akin to the "City of Man" than to St. Augustine's imagined "City of God." John Freccero, in his foreword to Robert Pinsky's The Inferno of Dante, captures an essence of both Dante's and Linney's world view.

> Because of the contrast between the perspective of the pilgrim, who looks forward to his salvation, and the perspective of the damned, who have no future, conversation in Hell is charged with irony. Much of what the sinners have to say about their lives or their actions is undermined by their guilt or self-delusion. Their testimony is self-serving, as one would expect of any prisoner's account of his or her conviction, except that here, as we learn from the inscription on the gates, all have received the same sentence, with no hope of appeal, and none has been framed.[20]

If these characters have been rashly judged by a world hell-bent on administering justice and retribution, no such moral benchmark is attainable in Linney's temporal treatment of the hereafter.

> Few of Dante's readers have derived much satisfaction from the triumph of this somewhat anonymous justice. Like Dante's protagonist, we find ourselves moved by the souls in Hell despite the moral system that condemns them so pitilessly ... In the either/or of the afterlife, distinctions are obliterated and the soul's place in Hell is determined dispassionately, by the flick of a monster's tale.[21]

The tenor of Divine Comedy South is best represented in Dante's own words, from "Canto IV" of The Inferno: "We are lost, afflicted only this one way: That having no hope, we live in longing."[22]

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Linney's southern pilgrims, in their journeys to the outer limits of public and private dignity, are haunted by bestial, sometimes monstrous, images that recall Dante's three-headed Cerberus. In "Hell," as Horace and Muriel, kindred spirits in adultery, share their respective adventures in love--mutual confessions to their lusts and lethal indiscretions--Muriel cites Turkish farmers who achieve orgasms while decapitating chickens. Horace recounts his sexual encounters with a male German dachshund, whose sense of betrayal inspires him to investigate the core of moral decency.

> Horace: Brian, the dog, possessed a moral sense. We didn't.
> Muriel: What?
> Horace: Fido? Fidelity? His disloyalty, mine, hers? It was in his eyes. Animal shame, and animal dignity.
> Muriel: You felt yourself sexually reproached by a moral dachshund?
> Horace: That's right.
> Muriel: You're a lunatic. Polar bears and dogs?
> Horace: Fish and chickens and dresser drawers?
> Muriel: Nuns and woodants![23]

Muriel later admits that during a frivolous sexual encounter at a country club she humiliates a "silly and snappy" bachelor, literally, to death. Revelations like this of their cryptic erotic appetites betray a fear of moral retribution, the sort that is expressed in the final playing of "Rock of Ages." Despite the hymn's plea for redemption:

> LET THE WATER AND THE BLOOD
> FROM THY RIVEN SIDE WHICH FLOWED
> BE OF SIN THE DOUBLE CURE
> CLEANSE ME FROM ITS GUILT AND POWER[24]

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they both assert that they want to be there doing what they're doing. Are their actions an affirmation of life or a snubbing of the acceptance of an almighty arbitrator? Are they both? Any answer would have to be paradoxical.

"Purgatory" exposes a moral dilemma no less treacherous. John is a seemingly reasonable husband facing the desertion of his wife, who has fallen in love with her closest female friend, and the decision by his long-divorced parents to remarry, thereby negating certain assumptions on which he has based his life. Betrayed by all in whom he has invested trust and left with no secure ground on which to stand, John finds himself suspended somewhere between self-definition and violent requital. If purgatory can be best described as such a state of arrest--neither hell nor heaven--Linney has captured this moment with a clarity that is especially disturbing in the extended treatment that became the full-length play, Shotgun.

Produced to a decidedly mixed, if not negative, response at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville 1994 Humana Festival, Shotgun illustrates once more the playwright's uncompromising desire to illuminate the roots of the human proclivity for violence. It can also be cited, along with True Crimes, as another example of how a violent act may dissipate tension, at least in part, where such tension would carry more weight if sustained. The actions taken in Shotgun, wherein John's final solution is to murder his copulating parents, are withheld in "Purgatory," allowing John to organize his emotions. This climactic scene in Divine Comedy

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South curbs the savagery that so dominates Shotgun, giving the abbreviated text more power and subtlety, in much the same way his one-act, Love Suicide, surpasses the original. The transcendance of the darker self in this shorter version showcases some of Linney's most expressive and lucid writing, as evidenced in this monologue by John.

> But we will go different places. You have done things I will not do. I think they are wrong, and you are wrong in doing them. I am so angry and so hurt I do want to kill you. But the stars on the lake are beautiful. Perfect instrument in my hands, a death-dealing doubled barreled shotgun. What agony. But the stars are moving over the body of the lake. They are passing over each of you, lying underwater as if drowned by what you have done to yourselves and what I would do to punish you. There, all mangled from my fury, I see you come to life again, your wounds in my vision healed, rising up smiling at me from the starstruck lake. You fly away from me, slowly, beautifully, up through the stars into the sky. And I am alone, the gun in my hand, unfired, letting you go, at peace.[25]

"Heaven" is the third of the snapshots of life among the "sinners" of the American South and is the longest and most sublime of the scenes. The less-than-healthy Dudley has abandoned Paul, his messianic father, for the comfort of the home of Paul's sister, his Aunt Jean. Jean provides the dose of unconditional love he has so far been denied. Her honesty and frankness liberate Dudley from his fears, allowing him to forge a different life for himself. Dudley's actions represent a just rebuttal to the patriarch: the Oedipal urge to kill, or, at least, escape the father. In fact, all three parts of Divine Comedy South constitute varying portraits of American fathers--their faults and their executions.

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Contrary to the first two scenes, there is a warmth to "Heaven" that is reminiscent of other of his short plays: Songs of Love, Can Can, Goodbye, Howard, and Tennessee, to be discussed in Chapter Eight. The scene illustrates with what ease Linney creates psychologically complex characters, divulging rich backgrounds, in a very limited time period. The craft of the playwright becomes apparent if you consider the depth to which the stories go in providing vivid journeys for all five of the characters. Over the course of a few short days each goes through profound changes. The play's Chekhovian affection for character over plot renders fully-realized human beings, counter to so many one-acts that provide merely caricature or parody.

The scene's humor, especially in Aunt Jean's generous acceptance and the playfulness of four people in bed together, punctuate the two preceding darker scenes, affirming a certain hope that there is life out there if you reach out for it. Dudley's needs become lifesavers to both Jean and Angelina, who adopt him for their own. For the first time in the evening we sense the presence of a real family.

The pursuit of familial connections is a frequent theme of Linney's, but it is the central focus of the next plays to be considered, wherein faith comes to mean finding others to believe in besides oneself. The Captivity of Pixie Shedman and Holy Ghosts may seem worlds apart, but they both reiterate the author's perennial interest in the quest for faith.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

RITUAL SELF-RENEWAL: THE QUEST FOR FAITH

> *Well, what is real religion? One thing I know, it don't have no beginning, and it don't have no end. It is happening all the time, and tonight I hope it will happen to us.*
>
> Reverend Buckhorn in Holy Ghosts[1]

Holy Ghosts and The Captivity of Pixie Shedman are two of the best examples of Linney's belief that human will is capable of transforming doubt and despair; that our strength is derived from an acceptance of human frailties--those of ourselves, our descendants, and our spouses--and an embracing of one's power to love.

They are ghostly odes to the religion of survival. In one we encounter the introspective deconstruction of character whereby Linney, like Strindberg in A Dream Play, is seeking to define his essential self. The other offers us the fervent spiritual zeal of Euripides' The Bacchae. They are, perhaps, the oddest of Linney's creations, challenging, as do Euripides and Strindberg, our notion of what is possible on a stage.

The spiritual passion ignited by the break-up of a marriage in Holy Ghosts (juxtaposed as it is with the desperation of lost souls hoping to verify God with the touch of a snake) allows Nancy, the protagonist, to recognize her own strength and her husband, Coleman, to find his initiative to love. The ceremonial climax, in which all seek to challenge the natural order of the

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universe, represents a new kind of stage experience, one which clarifies the theatre's debt to ritual, especially that of renewal. Witnessing actors handle the invisible snakes en-encourages the sense that one is experiencing religious ritual, rather than theatrics, and the result, like that of Ancient Greek theatre, is cathartic.

The theatrical conceits of The Captivity of Pixie Shedman are similar, as they also demand an audience's acceptance of something beyond naturalism: a world in which four generations of a family partake in a private therapy session with the intention of giving the surviving son (Linney) a better understanding of his past and the courage to move beyond it. As in Childe Byron, ghosts clutter the stage, reflecting the disordered mind of a drunken, dispirited, and angry writer convinced that his grandmother has poisoned the lives of all the men in her life, thereby tainting his own relationships. However, as Nancy in Holy Ghosts is able to walk away from the church, and Coleman can embrace Cancer Man, Bertram, Linney's alter-ego in Pixie Shedman, finds a way to empathize with his grandmother and to reconcile with his young daughter. The rituals of renewal in both plays culminate in reassuring affirmations of love, though the preceding personal journeys--and the rituals themselves--are peculiar, unique, and complicated.

In his respectful, but decidedly negative, review of Pixie Shedman, Clive Barnes writes that

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> Romulus Linney is certainly not an untalented playwright, but is certainly a strange one. From what I know of him, he writes with a kind of undirected zest. He shoots plays off into the horizon.[2]

While it can be said that this biographical play, with a form that is never able to capture its content, does not succeed the way Holy Ghosts does, the detractors found many of the problems in the Phoenix Theatre production. Others found the author's concept labored, though fascinating. "When one is in the business of actually commissioning plays," adds Barnes, referring to the theatre's soliciting of Pixie Shedman,

> you actually need to be in the failure business. You take desperate risks, and most often they will desperately fail. Yet the risks, if calculated, are worth taking.[3]

Linney's body of work proves he is continually taking risks, always daring his audience to venture into new dimensions of the imagination. It is inevitable that one construct will be more accessible than another. One reason, perhaps, Holy Ghosts was so enthusiastically embraced and Pixie Shedman dismissed, is that Nancy and Coleman's conflict possesses a universal quality (a celebration of community), whereas Bertram's self-analysis might strike some as slightly solipsistic, revealing an internal schism that keeps us at arm's length.

If, however, we approach each piece as differing expressions of the power of ritual and, comparably, the power of art as a kind of ritual, we can better discern the playwright's essential point of departure. Nancy's participation in the Pentecostal Amalgamation Church is an attempt to fill her emptiness and vent

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her frustration, just as Bertram's rewriting of his grandmother's fanciful autobiography is his way of unburdening his disdain and self-pity. Pixie Shedman is a celebration of the ritual of re-creating oneself--of redefinition--through a living journal. The search for redemption for the characters in Holy Ghosts is an articulation of a similar craving to be made anew. Nancy emerges ready to make a life of her own and one assumes from the emotional closing scene that Bertram, sharing with his daughter the sounds of "reconciliation and victory" in Puccini's Turandot, will survive his current crisis to create his own histories.

Holy Ghosts

"There are, very rarely, moments in the theater," writes Gerald Weales in Georgia Review, "in which something electric happens, when the audience becomes so clearly one with the production that a joyful community is created."[4] Such moments distinguish this work as a high point in the playwright's career.

The need to be a part of community and, conversely, to defy community, are issues that some mistake as Linney's fixation with religion. More accurately, he is a writer, having denied any prescribed faith or religious commitments, whose ideas are most often informed by a devotion to the spiritual health of the common good. This kind of respect for human dignity, as one finds in Tolstoy, Steinbeck, and Paul Green, is especially evident in Holy Ghosts.

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The tension that exists between the individual and community, apparent also in Woman Without A Name, Heathen Valley, and Unchanging Love, is explored here on many levels, including a mimetic one. The experience of attending a performance of Holy Ghosts reminds one that the primal roots of performance are in religious ritual. Many who have attended this play, myself included, recall encountering a splendid deliverance, wherein the snake ritual becomes something in which you're participating, almost without knowledge--not just as a spectator, but as an active witness. Parallels can be made to the use of the audience in 2, where one innocently assumes the position of both judge and jury. Despite being intellectually stimulated and entertained, all present wish to believe the man is a monster. The passions of Hermann Goering and those of the snake-handling congregation are similarly captivating and difficult to dismiss. More significantly, the core of their beings is fundamentally theatrical.

Linney remembers the evangelists that would come through his home of Madison, Tennessee, and his natural attraction to their music and highly emotional services. He stipulates that "the play is funny, but it's not satire."

> It takes these rural people very seriously. It deals with people who, I think, are very desperate. Their religion is not a small thing to them, their humanity is not a small thing to them. The two things are very much mixed together ... it's a matter of trying to understand very deep feelings of people who are themselves at the bottom of American life.[5]

Those assembled by the Reverend Buckhorn, whose evangelical deceptions are nearly forgivable in light of their healing

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properties, are in search of something to fill the void left in the absence of either brotherly or passionate love. They find it in the strength derived from overcoming fear, affirming their worth, and, consequently, confirming their connection to the Holy Spirit. They find grace.

> These people believe that the power of the universe, the actual Holy Ghost, suddenly recognizes them when they take up a snake, or drink some poison. If you have the power, you won't get bit; if you don't, then maybe you will. It's a primitive ritual, sure, but it also must be an overwhelming religious experience. Even if you're losing everything else, to win that one must be extraordinary.[6]

This play confronts religious belief more directly than many of his others, though nearly all his works are concerned with people "in the grip of religion" or with the belief in self as an emerging spiritual form. While the play adopts an ironic point of view towards the ritual itself, it is not in any way judgmental.

"[T]he strength of the piece," writes Weales, "lies in the fact that Linney is not interested in the easy psychology of religion as escape, but in the replenishing reality of the community they have."[7] Its ultimate conclusions, if they exist, are as paradoxical and perplexing as those in Love Suicide, Ambrosio, Spain, and 2. As T. H. McCulloh illustrates, it is the intention of the author to provide both a theatrical and a philosophical enigma.

> What is faith and what is its measure? is the question he asks. The yardstick is in the hand of the believer, and the markings span the comfort of the soul. That Nancy has become an entity and can walk away is one measure; that Coleman must seek the same reality is

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> another ... Linney's interests are deeper than organized religion; they flirt with the inner longings of humanity for shelter and security.[8]

Written in 1971 and produced the same year at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., it was published by Harcourt Brace Javanovich in 1977 in a collection of two plays (with The Sorrows of Frederick). Over the next fifteen years it saw as many as one hundred productions throughout the country: at Actor's Theatre of Louisville, Ford's Theatre, San Diego Repertory Theatre, The Alley Theatre in Houston, and Off-Broadway at the Cubiculo Theatre. Its most heralded performance was as part of the 1987 American Theatre Exchange series produced by the Joyce Theatre Foundation.

This progression of productions allowed the play to be honed, as it assimilated changes from earlier mountings. In his Philadelphia Inquirer review of the People's Light and Theater Company's 1980 production, William B. Collins warned that, with the novelty in their use of live snakes,

> You still wouldn't want one to land in your lap when the flinging reaches an ecstatic peak. The production's beautifully cohesive ensemble effect breaks up. Reality slithers in, destroying illusion.[9]

Pictures included in the 1977 edition of Holy Ghosts show a woman's face framed by an actual snake, but in the subsequent Alley Theatre production of 1983, directed by the author, he realized the power lay in the actor's expression of the terrifying moment, not in the reality of a living reptile. Linney explains:

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> When you have real snakes brought on the stage at the end of the play, it just blows the play to pieces ... What happens [in his production] is that you see right through the hands of the people handling them, you see what's on the actors' faces, because they're staring at something that if it were real would be within an inch of their faces.[10]

He goes on to say that the experience of encountering these serpents is not about overcoming Satan.

> [I]t's not so much the power of dominating the snake. It has nothing to do with symbolism. The snake is not evil. They feel that they have been recognized and given a power. Water will go downhill, the sun comes up in the morning, if you hold a snake it'll bite you - but it won't.[11]

The event is further heightened by the rhythms of the language, both of the Pentecostal ceremony and the dialects, reflecting the author's indigenous understanding of its musical value. Linney notes that southerners

> love to talk in cadences, and most of those cadences are mixtures not only of their accent but of the King James Bible ... somehow the Bible sounds great with a southern accent.[12]

At the heart of Linney's concern about productions for which he has no control is, again, his fear that the comic elements, so abundant in Holy Ghosts, will be misconstrued as satire. A devotee of this form, especially that which emerged in the sixties, he adamantly asserts that this is not what he writes. His characters, from the much-married preacher to the openly homosexual bikers, are heartfelt renditions of individuals bent on affirming their own identities in an inhospitable world. Parody or generalization are never part of the mix. "The humor," he says,

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"comes from people getting themselves into binds that they can't get out of."[13]

Another reminder of the playwright's empathy for this despairing, soul-searching, and distinctly southern mélange is the use of his family name, which shows up again in Pixie Shedman. Linney, whose Welsh name is derived from the word for "lean-shed," a structure used to dry hay, found a way to incorporate himself into his own mythos. In fact, the act of translating the name Shedman from his own seems to have liberated him. In 1980 he commented that "I don't have as much trouble with autobiography now as before."[14]

Personal exploration was surely on his mind during this period. His next venture, produced at the beginning of the following year at the Phoenix Theatre of New York, proved to be his most personal and unruly work to date.

The Captivity of Pixie Shedman

Linney's more experimental plays, so often misunderstood by the mainstream press, sometimes inspire in other critics an admiration absent from their considerations of his more naturalistic or conventional plays. Confounded by the merciless pounding of the New York press that shortened the play's run at the Phoenix Theatre in 1981, Peter Wynne in the Record of New Jersey found the "peculiar" play "a kind of fantasy one encounters in serious drama, but rarely these days."[15] Citing that all the men are named Bertram, Wynne illuminates the author's attempt, as in

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Childe Byron and Democracy, to explore several generations' influence on the present and the repercussions of genetic hand-me-downs, from drunkenness to the creativive impulse. Bertram is a writer unable to find his voice--or his personal confidence--who sets out to understand the ways his ancestral fathers have biased his relations with wife and daughter.

> I think it is safe to presume that Linney is saying that all the men are different aspects of the same man and that this is a way of exploring some of the archetypal ways that a man and woman can relate to each other.[16]

The dynamics of the male/female encounter, first glimpsed in Frederick's tenuous meeting between the king and his queen, followed by the many examples of missed connections in Democracy, Holy Ghosts, Heathen Valley, and, of course, Miss Julie, are here compounded by one man's distress at not being able to coexist with the women in his life. These are issues at the center of Linney's inner landscape. In all these plays, but especially in Pixie Shedman, the author is scrutinizing the immutable and subterranean archetypal longing that informs all relations between the sexes.

William B. Collins, an ardent defender of Linney's work, found the play "the most troublesome of them all, doubtless because it is so troubled."[17] Conversely, Michael Feingold, contradicting his often negative impressions of Linney, found Pixie Shedman to be

> twice as exciting to me as any piece of easy conventionality would be. Here the density comes from two images which, taken together, actually make up a

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> philosophical vision of human life (and I can't remember the last play I saw that had one).[18]

He admired it for many of the same reasons others had problems finding their way into the play.

> [H]is best plays, the ones on which he brings his intellect to bear most steadily, are the most complex: They tend to have actions within actions, entangled subplots, impacted structures that come from the cross-breeding of two metaphors and their density seems to make directors lose heart.[19]

Frustrated by the inadequacies in John Pasquin's production that "boils it down to a few dry crumbs of stilted rhetoric," Feingold writes that these metaphors help explain an artist haunted by his forebears and "the image of male-female relations as a perpetual war of Indians and settlers," recalling the ethos of <u>King Philip</u>. This "perpetual war" is

> embodied in a manuscript left the boy by his grandmother, who sees herself as the scalped, raped heroine of a Wild West tale, and her lover, husband, and son as the attacking Comanches. The two are linked by the grandson's failure to, as it were, be a good Indian: he has let his estranged wife take over the little daughter without a custody battle.[20]

Comparing Bertram's obsessed stream of consciousness to Henry James' Owen Wingrave, Feingold's observations of Linney's probing the closets of his family's past illustrate how clearly the playwright uses his personal journey to create richly enigmatic stories for the stage.

In <u>Pixie Shedman</u> he creates another indomitable female life-force whose ability to translate rage into poetic form, as in <u>Ahkmatova</u> and <u>Woman Without A Name</u>, provides a counterpoint to her difficult, not always admirable, nature. Pixie is a

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formidable combatant in all domestic skirmishes, refusing to sacrifice either her child or her version of the Shedmans' selfish brutality. Translated into Gothic prose, her discontent, recriminations, and triumphant will are as cleverly poisonous as they are imaginatively drawn.

> At first we made a brave show of our independence. My savage husband was virile, I was young, and so it seemed awhile that my body was wiser than my mind. But time is implacable, horrors of the spirit are hidden, multitudinous and emergent, and the savage beast can only dream of escape from bloody antecedents. Mandates of fate and iron prevail, and I must watch the son to his father's will submit.[21]

Emboldened by her declaration that the son may belong to either father or grandfather, she wields the upper hand,

> For the scythe of time swings both ways. Captives become wives, and wives become mothers. The lines of battle shift into bone and blood and their ancient weapons into the hands of women fall.[22]

She embodies the zeal of a pioneer woman, whose use of _verbiage picaresque_ recalls one of _Frederick_'s corporal metaphors. She possesses a hunger to do battle with all that threatens and is determined to provoke a listless Bertram into action. Upon the son's failed attempt to come to an agreement with his divorcing wife, Pixie praises him for standing fast. "Congratulations," she says, "You handled that just right. Now do your war dance."[23]

Pixie clearly represents to Linney a strength of character not found in his father, Doc Shedman, Jr., who, like Frederick, never found fulfillment in his bequeathed profession. Resolved that he was "born for the army," he died at forty-one, to join

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his forefathers in their graves, gazing finally on the face of Pixie.

Linney's personal historiography is the manifestation of a continued effort to define the strongest qualities of both men and women as they come into conflict with one another: to reconcile the anima and animus. Once again he is submitting his intense identification with the masculine character of his bloodline to repeated female scrutiny, so as to determine which powers are destructive and which are creative. Consequently, while they would not have expected the playwright to take sides in this battle of the sexes, most critics felt cheated by his lack of a coherent point of view. Are we to side with Pixie, who has heroically survived the cruel men in her life (and translated that experience into myth) or do we conclude that she has blithely destroyed consecutive generations of Linney's family? This ambiguity, at the heart of so many of his protagonists and story lines, is characteristic of his world view, but discomforting in this instance, perhaps, because we sense the intensely personal associations.

The play's final moments, in which father and daughter are reconciled, make clear the indelible influence of Pixie on the welfare of her grandson and are a testament to the spiritual strength Linney (Bertram) derives from the legacy of this potent matriarch. It becomes clear that her fortitude is that which the playwright wishes to capture, so that he may better understand his own psychological and creative heritage.

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Drawing from the sense of inadequacy he experienced during an early period when he hadn't yet proven to himself his writing abilities, Linney shows how he was able to chart a future for himself. His grandmother--essence of the fierceness of archetypal mother--bestows on him, not only the courage to write in earnest, but also the capacity to spiritually evolve. Like Joseph to the rebellious Jesus, she passes on her wisdom to the succeeding generation.

> You are damn near finished, sonny, because you just can't bear it, what people do. You think I didn't care, when they said goodbye to me? I bore that, as I bore everything else they did to me, and they everything I did to them. And we've left it for you, in that damn book. So you'd learn something! From captivity![24]

Like every artist, Linney surely has felt himself a prisoner to the legacy of familial forces, captive to the demons, real or imagined, that force the creative personality to either succumb or bear fruit. He turns to this woman and her prescriptions are clear. She encourages him to embrace life for all its pain and sorrow and do it with a fierceness that reminds all, including himself, that he's alive.

> You dance, with them. You have to! You take your prisoners. Tie their hands. Slit their bellies, light your torch, nail their guts to a tree, and chase them around it until they pull out their own stomachs! Life! Beautiful life! And you live it![25]

Clearly the playwright's separation from his daughter Laura, along with the ensuing guilt and longing, shaped this drama as clearly as that same relationship influenced Childe Byron. The premise in that play, however, is enlarged by its more universal

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concerns with artistic form and the pronounced search for order in a treacherous universe. While Pixie Shedman addresses some of these same issues, there is no historical distance, allowing Linney is to disguise himself under the cloak of George Byron.

It cannot be ignored that Holy Ghosts and Pixie Shedman, more directly than in other of his works that take direct aim at the destructive aspects of male dominance, highlight a perseverance that is explicitly female in character--a sensibility which the author both admires and, perhaps, subconsciously, fears. Consequently, the lasting impression is that these are predatory, yet life-affirming, qualities of which he stands in awe.

Whatever lessons Linney learned from Pixie Shedman, his only profoundly personal play, he does not subsequently return to such obviously private material. Tennessee, Sand Mountain, A Woman Without A Name, and Heathen Valley, created over the eight years following Pixie Shedman, all feature a knowledge and deep abiding appreciation for his Appalachian roots, celebrating strength of character and the love of land one can call his or her own. The playwright, though he is mining much of his past in these plays, is less visible and his characters are more a re-reflection of his creative imagination.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

LINGUISTIC DELIGHTS: CHARACTER, SIMPLICITY AND THE COMPATIBILITY OF ONE-ACTS

> *You look like me, son, and I was beautiful, son, beautiful as the day we share in this place of flowers, with our bond singing in our blood. No one, no one can alter that, for you look just like me, child, and I was beautiful, child, here, wear this as I did to get you, so you will always always love me, and the two of us shall be forever one. Let me see, in your face, the bride I was, let me kiss myself upon your lips, angels the two us, on earth, in gardens of delight.*
>
> Buford in FM[1]

The defining quality of Linney's oeuvre is the power of its language, its ability to be at once lyrically embellished and simply colloquial. According to director John Dillon, "the key is in Linney's ability to hone in on the lyrical quality to be found in the working language of ordinary people." In addition to revealing the dignity and humor of his characters, says Dillon, he "creates a poetic style deceptive in its simplicity ... never a man to waste time."[2] Mel Gussow agrees that, "seemingly casual conversation can be dense with portent and imagery."[3] Nowhere is this concise, yet humbly adorned, style used to better advantage than in his one-act plays.

Had Romulus Linney never completed a full-length play, he would still be known as one of the few superior craftsman of the short play. "There is no living playwright," writes Thomas M. Disch in the Daily News, "who writes better one-acts.[4]

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The attraction to such a model is not surprising if one considers two of his favored models: Strindberg and Pinter, both of whom brought distinction to the form. Also apparent is his debt to both the literary and theatrical prototypes of Eastern drama, many of which, in length, resemble western one-acts. He favors the Asian practice of condensing a story--minimilizing its scope--so that the image of the event (ie., ritual suicide, living poem, or confessional novel) burns an indelible mark in the fabric of the theatrical illusion.

In his famous memorandum to the new Intimate Theatre in 1907, Strindberg challenged other authors to "resist the shackles of set forms" and to recognize that "the theme determines the form."[5] As a teacher of playwriting and fiction for nearly thirty years, Linney has offered similar advice. In his playwriting course at Hunter College I heard him recommend that you should always seek the "flesh and bones" of a character. Ask yourself if what you're offering is information or human life. He advised the creation of characters who speak in present tense, since an audience demands immediate action. Begin the play at the last possible moment so the audience will not get ahead of the author, as they frequently do. Acknowledging that he favors long seduction scenes, Linney further recommends ripe situations with plenty at stake, so that the audience will watch the play the way they watch real life, figuring things out for themselves without having to be told. The playwright believes the content of the characters should ultimately determine the overlying

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structure or form, that the thread of the story will properly unwind so long as the characters are true to themselves.

In their short forms as part of an evening of one-acts, these stories need not share locale, period, or even mood, as there is usually a stronger bond holding them together. The predominant concern of both these collective blocks of plays is love. The accumulative appeal of the diverse pieces is in their ability to so concisely define love's qualities that the effects of its absence are devastating.

The settings of the following nine plays that comprise Pops and Laughing Stock range from a 10th century Saxon convent (Ave Maria) to a dreary contemporary classroom in a small southern college in Alabama (FM). Among them are numerous sketchbook portraits of distinctly southern eccentrics, especially his women in Goodbye, Howard, Songs of Love, and FM. Yet their aggregate force is derived from the plays' unmistakable ability to address love in all its complexity, in language at once symphonic, yet elegiac.

Alvin Klein noted in the New York Times that

> [i]f love and music are Mr. Linney's concerns, then words, he proves, are their equivalent. In theatre, where the purity of language is at a premium, Pops is a restorative. In it-all of it-the words dance and sing and play and delight.[6]

Time magazine's Richard Schickel is no less impressed by

> Linney's singular talent for stating wild ideas with high, simplifying intelligence, and for drawing deft portraits of the half mad in which not a line is misplaced or wasted.[7]

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These short works also reveal his continued reliance on early acquired emotional attachments exhibited in so many of his full-lengths. Goodbye, Howard recounts the impressions of a teenaged Charles confronted by the busy-body relatives of a dying man not unlike Linney's politically prominent great-great-grandfather. Can Can is undoubtedly drawn from the author's experiences overseas during the Korean War. Tennessee, heralded by Time as one of the best plays of 1984, evokes his childhood in rural Tennessee and North Carolina. And FM is indisputably, at least in part, a product of Linney's frustrations and rewards associated with academia. In praising his emotional bonding with the text, Jon Jory believes that

> one of the reasons for Romulus' success is that he's good at that. He insists on drawing blood, which is crucial to the work of most writers, certainly those who are not satirists. Satirists are basically involved in drawing other people's blood and the rest of us draw our own.[8]

Jory, confirming Linney's opinion of himself as something other than a satirist, is also able to clarify the playwright's distinct tendency to remain elliptical, so much so that

> [he doesn't] always know that you can really examine his attitudes in the play, because he's so busy paying off the characters and giving you a wonderfully theatrical evening. You're so satisfied that in a sense there's something very cleverly hidden about Romulus and his own attitudes ... they get hidden under the craft ... his technique is to give you the tip of the iceberg. You know something big is moving under the surface, but he doesn't insist on describing it to you.[9]

In addition to being excellent examples of his affinity for mining historical myth, both European and Appalachian, the plays

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illustrate how much can be evoked by sharing only the most essential moments of dramatic action. Pops and Laughing Stock, both written in the eighties, also represent his most accomplished explorations of the human response to love--an attempt to find a universal language of love with a perspective that spans epochs.

Pops

Pops, more, perhaps, than the majority of his other plays, insists on giving you theatricality before continuity, breadth rather than focus. Gussow described it as "an evening of curtain raisers ... like a buffet of tempting appetizers."[10] It might better be described as the literary equivalent of a popular music concert, its various parts bearing the names of familiar melodies: Can Can, Claire De Lune, Ave Maria, Gold And Silver Waltz, Yankee Doodle, and Tonight We Love. The last piece, retitled Songs of Love in the published edition, was later added to the other five pieces, all previously written over a period of five years. The alternate title would seem to exemplify the ethos of the entire evening. The effect of Pops, as opposed to Laughing Stock, which reveals glimpses of larger stories that suggest full-lengths, is that of a medley of impressions, diverse parts that, once combined, communicate a larger meaning.

Like Ibsen and Strindberg, both of whom also found their early inspirations in local histories, Linney, in recalling his influences, always returns to the formative years. His father, having been forced to relocate to Madison, Tennessee in 1933,

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after discovering a fellow doctor, with whom he was to go into practice, was an abortionist, proved to be a major influence. The patriarch's love of the physical life--the outdoors and its associated sports--was to leave a fixed imprint on the only child. Similarly, the playwright never fails to portray, not even in his biographies of historical figures, the effects of life on undistinguished individuals. Since he often spent summers with his grandparents in Boone, which was distinctly rural then, Linney's childhood was significantly shaped by the American small-town and its inhabitants. "I went to a small high school and grade school," he remembers, "and the church. Those were the two social organizations of the southern town."[11]

When asked about the influence of the two Scandinavian dramatists, he recalls having more often seen Ibsen performed, though the productions were frequently melodramatic and heavy-handed. He admires Strindberg's ability to write in "feverish riffs" and revealingly associates his reading of Master Olof with the death of his father. A child's production of Peer Gynt at Catholic University also seems to have made an impression on him, leaving one to conclude that these two plays, both concerned with a child's guilt over the death of a parent, had a strong impact on his subsequent themes.

As for borrowing from specific individuals from his past, he cites only one instance, from Gold and Silver Waltz, a small work he has sometimes performed himself and whose only character is named Romulus Linney. Probably the most intensely contained of

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all his monologues, it, too, is related to the period around his father's death. Its immediacy is almost Beckettian in structure, blatantly cerebral in its condensed recollection of a feverish phone conversation with an old acquaintance from Madison, Tennessee. As with Beckett and Pinter, his written pauses, shown in the example below, are crucial to the rhythm of the text, as well as to the expression of the power of remembrance.

Upon discovering that Martha Miller, a seventh grade sweetheart who offered him solace during the period of bereavement for his father, has died at age forty, Linney seems better able to sustain himself through a serious illness. His words to the long-departed young girl are splendid examples of the playwright's ability to blend precise exposition with controlled sentiment. It shows the writer at his most vulnerable and captures a moment of pure, unadulterated love.

> I am so sorry you're dead!   And I can't   send you my books   ask you to plays in New York   buy you a drink give you back   something for your childhood gifts of consolation   and courage   So   I will just get well, as you would   want me   to   And I will mow the lawn And I won't   let the weeds   grow wild.[12]

This is Linney speaking from his inner core. The play's spirit, like a dream or hallucination, is his closest approximation of a minimalist memory play, yet it is unlike anything of either Miller or Williams. His stylistically brazen choice to destroy the barrier between imagination and recorded experience by introducing his own character is typical of an author who is always challenging the perspectives of his audience. It is also an example of one who often seems frustrated by the stage's

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inhospitality to interior monologue, whose voice can't help but sometimes be lured by the freedom of the novel form, from which he has long disassociated himself.

As with Spain, the fibers holding the separate parts of Pops together are not always immediately apparent. Its structure is unusual and comprehending a central idea requires reflection. Several critics noticed the author's decision to juxtapose young love, so full of yearning and untouched by experience, in Can Can, with the concluding Songs of Love, a near-farcical comedy of manners dealing with the loss of dignity and the vigor of octogenarian affection. This particular frame is another instance of Linney's identification with motifs that Northrop Frye shows signify the natural cycle of existence--from birth to death. Pops illustrates what Frye calls "pictorial structure." It indicates a move away from realism into a more archetypal approach to drama.

> "Realism" connotes an emphasis on what the picture represents; stylization, whether primitive or sophisticated, connotes an emphasis on pictorial structure.[13]

In addition to suggesting a gallery of snapshots, it also anticipates subsequent works produced in the late eighties and early nineties, including his collections, Three Poets and Spain, as well as the fully contemporary Juliet, Yancey, and April Snow. With Pops, especially, a central ethos unites the diverse narratives. Beyond the various plots and characters there is a larger focus in mind. The effect, like that of the Noh play, is to force the audience to address design before content, myth before

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naturalism. While the individual pieces are naturalistically expressed, their spirit is romantic and the collective design of the whole denotes, in Frye's words, "the presence of a mythical structure."

> Myth, then, is one extreme of literary design; naturalism is the other, and in between lies the whole area of romance, using that term to mean, not the historical mode .... but the tendency .... to displace myth in a human direction and yet, in contrast to "realism," to conventionalize content in an idealized direction.[14]

Pops also contains his first treatment of Hrosvitha of Gandersheim, later altered for Three Poets. Ave Maria represents another perfect example of a playwright's ongoing desire to bring to the stage some of the more obscure literary, political, and cultural icons of European history. One is immediately reminded of Akhmatova, Komachi, Torquemada, and Escobedo de la Aixa.

As for the canoness of the Imperial Abbey of Gandersheim in tenth century Saxony, Linney's versions provide a lesson in adaptation. The character, intent, focus, and structure of Hrosvitha's original The Fall and Repentance of Mary (Abraham) is reconstructed by her twentieth century counterpart, creating two treatments: Ave Maria and Hrosvitha, each of which is distinct, yet clearly derivative of the other. The process of that transformation and his preoccupation with this seminal authoress is worth revisiting.

With the intention of counteracting "the noxious effects of Terence's comedies by attempting to gain both intellectual and emotional assent to the monastic ideal,"[15] Hrosvitha, like Terence, wrote six plays. Author of legends, plays, and epics in

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which the "temporary delusion of the characters is a physical reflection of their spiritual blindness,"[16] a phrase that could be describing Linney's approach to character, she exhibits a style and craft that is unmistakably precocious. Though essentially Augustinian in her world view, her obsession with contrary portraits of erotic and spiritual love--visiting suitors disguised as serpents or monsters and virginal heroines sacrificed to evil forces--makes her play the ideal source for Linney's own brand of revisionism. Similar themes and motifs can be found in The Sorrows of Frederick, Childe Byron, FM, Can Can, Heathen Valley, Unchanging Love, and Ambrosio.

Linney's real attraction is, however, not so much to the religious myth Hrosvitha employs as it is to the myth of the playwright herself. He is ultimately concerned with the free expression of human desires as a celebration of free will over subservience to dogma and patriarchy. Though Hrosvitha never abandoned the strict confines of religious subject matter, he senses in the nun a kindred spirit with whom he can glorify love's necessity, thereby redefining that which is profane or unnatural. This becomes evident upon examination of the changes made to Ave Maria as it was transformed into Hrosvitha.

Both plays begin with Hrosvitha's attempt to explain to the religious hierarchy her rendition of the spiritual fall of Mary: the demise of the virgin in a brothel and the subsequent rescue by her uncle Abraham, a monk whose love for his niece precipitates their decision to separately sequester themselves in

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monastic exile for the remainder of their lives. Hrosvitha's insistence on having Abraham impersonate one of Mary's lovers illustrates, at the least, a latent erotic impulse in the troubled monk. Just as in other of her plays and legends (Calimachus and Pelagius) that delve into homoeroticism and necrophilia to depict her "exaltation of the virtue of steadfast and pure virginity,"[17] she is careful not to stray too far from the fold. Linney, however, senses her longing to capture the world more truthfully, which means moving away from church orthodoxy. What becomes clear is her contention that a seduction by Christ can be considered comparable to a seduction by man. Such a concept was heretical to the church powers.

Gerberga, the Abbess of Gandershiem, promising that the Sister's play will never be performed, naturally objects to the clearly carnal nature of the plot and defends the play only after selfishly realizing she will benefit by preserving it. Her response to the verisimilitude of the writer's vision constitutes the central theme of Ave Maria. In the words of the Abbess,

> This little play, if examined closely, might really imply that women, holy ones anyway, are seduced into their sanctity, and their convents, by men. It is only a small step further to suggest that we are all seduced, and not just by hermits, either, but by God, the greatest of Fathers. By Jesus, our bridegroom, to whom we think we give our lives. Yes, I can see why the Bishop would be upset.[18]

Just as in Holy Ghosts, Oscar Over Here, Sand Mountain, and Three Poets, Linney is exploring the thin line between sexual and

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spiritual love, the human dimensions of spiritual discovery. Devotion to supernatural powers is often aligned with, if not superseded by, erotic idolization.

A full realization of the play's potent sexual possibilities, merely suggested in Ave Maria, is vividly played out in Hrosvitha. Having wisely chosen to transplant the play to the second position in Three Poets, Linney presupposes an "illicit" love between Mary and Abraham. In their final confrontation, as written by Linney, after Gerberga's demand that "Abraham can't say out loud that he wants a women," the characters (and their creator) quench their fleshly desires. The incestuous lovers, a heap on the floor, recall the "huge sleeping animal" of Abraham's dream. Once the sexual act is completed, however, there seems little to keep them together. An ironic denouement follows, in which the two lovers, according to the rules of tenth century decorum, pledge their love by agreeing to spend their remaining days isolated from each other and all of the opposite sex. Linney, tongue securely in cheek, is depicting Hrosvitha as a devoted Christian, who shows a growing commitment in her art to imitating the natural world, an ethos already explored in FM, Oscar Over Here, and Akhmatova. This expression of a deeply felt, uncompromising need to examine the sacredness of both good and "evil"--the accepted and unaccepted in all its forms--is another defining quality of Linney's work.

Conceived as movements in a concerto, via Offenbach, Strauss, and Tschaikowsky, among others, Pops uses the spirit of

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each musical piece to ease our way into emotions that in other plays would require lengthy exposition and characterization. Each short play adopts a distinctly musical form of its own, imposing on the total dramatic structure a semblance of six unified tonal movements.

Can Can, in its comparison of two pointedly dissimilar encounters with love, contains dialogue that flows as if it were an exercise in counterpoint. Its content, which pays homage to both the transient and, often, socially treacherous features of love, suggests a dancing foursome. It offers, along with sections of Love Suicide and Sand Mountain Matchmaking, Linney's richest portraits of romantic love, countering effervescence with passionately devoted affection. As in Claire De Lune and Gold and Silver Waltz, it shows the courage required in leaving that which one adores, demonstrating how our lives are filled with countless little births and deaths, losses that define our existence. Seldom in the theatre have there been such transcendent moments so poignant in characters for whom we have very little invested, showing the power derived from the archetypal content of the material. The brevity of time spent with these characters is also a consequence of the playwright's desire, as he notes here, to reach a contemporary audience.

> Playwrights don't have time for exposition anymore. Years ago, a whole first act could be exposition, but things don't work that way nowadays because of quick cutting in film, because of TV, because of the accelerated pace of life. Today, you have to start with a subject that can be quickly grasped.[19]

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In this selection from Can Can's abbreviated glimpse of two women's forbidden desires, Linney demonstrates once again his reliance on images of the church and the songs he first heard within its walls.

> Housewife: Then on a Sunday, when I stood up to sing my solo, "Only A Rose Will Do," I saw somebody come in at the back of the church and oh God! There she was, in that congregation, like some old black sheep with her broken teeth, watching me.
>
> Country Woman: In that spotless place, with the roses and the lilies smelling so sweet and all that perfume and fur pieces, well, I paid it no mind. You commenced to sing, and you were my flower then, my rose, my own.[20]

Yankee Doodle's characters fit right into Linney's gallery of historical misfits, depicting two of Queen Victoria's servants and their iron devotion to authority. Their comical abduction of Ulysses S. Grant's nineteen-year-old son reveals a love that has obviously been tested on many occasions, giving it a worthiness and validity that is immediately apparent. Yet the play's strong actions materialize abruptly; theatricality takes precedence over the development of ideas, thereby sacrificing the humanity of both the seducer and the seduced. More than any of the other pieces it appears to be a fragment of a larger untold story.

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Also less effective in serving the whole, Claire De Lune, which evokes the autumnal quality of an adagio or sonata, never reaches the emotional depths of the other plays. In this instance, too, the absence of any knowledge of the characters hinders its effectiveness, though Alvin Klein, referring to this play and to Tonight We Love at the Whole Theatre Company, was most impressed by "Mr. Linney's love for how elderly people love."[21]

The best example of the playwright's sensitivity to the elderly--the aging passions of a forgotten class, so often ridiculed in the boulevard theatres--is in the renamed Songs of Love. Seldom has the coarseness of the southern bourgeoisie been so adeptly captured or so humorously dwarfed by such a simple reverence for mutual need and understanding.

Always careful to remain faithful to his overlying musical metaphor, he sets the tone for the final piece by introducing a pop version of Tschaikowsky's "First Piano Concerto," thereby creating a world in which artifice and false emotion, as in the music, are shown to be enemies of the life force. The ensuing indictment of two families' shallow disregard for the welfare of their once-loved parents provides a balance to the unbridled fervor of the first play. The strength of the older lovers' resolve, their determination to disregard their children's wishes by insisting they remain independent, substantiates the playwright's unwavering faith in the power of love to transcend greed, small minded selfishness -- even time itself.

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Laughing Stock

Few playwrights, even those who, like Linney, owe their careers to the provincial, yet, often, more adventurous American regional theatres, have devoted so much energy to one-act plays. Even fewer have found so many ways, as he has, to make them accessible both to acting companies and to audiences. Having been an actor himself for nearly ten years in the fifties, as well as a Yale trained director, he is, in the truest manner of speaking, "an actor's playwright." Nearly all of his plays are dedicated to friends or colleagues in the theatre, many of them actors. Smith and Crouse recognized the plays' rich potential as a source for actors by publishing Linney's Twenty Plays For Actors. More importantly, he always seems to have in mind the performer's natural affinity for transformation. He loves to treat his actors to a fine meal, a potpourri of roles by which they can exploit their diversity. This concern for the universality of characters shows an awareness of both Eastern and Western acting traditions, a reverence for Moliere, as well as Zeami.

Linney's reference to Pops is also relevant to Laughing Stock.

> Things must vary a bit, no matter what kind of play you're writing. You want to use the actors in different combinations and to give every actor a turn, which I've done. Six actors make up the basic theatrical family: the ingenue and the juvenile male, the leading man and leading lady, and the character man and woman.... My goodness, the old Greek playwright Menander figured it all out [circa 300 B.C.], when you come down to it.[22]

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Among the many devotees of Romulus Linney's work, none would dispute his preeminence as a craftsman for the stage. It is this passion and respect for the playwright's process, for the sheer artistry of writing truthful characters for actors who instinctively understand authentic behavior, that sets him apart from his peers. Actor's Theater of Louisville artistic director Jon Jory, recalling his own direction of the premiere of Childe Byron, explains that such professionalism is rare in the theatre, commending Linney's generous demeanor as both playwright and friend, while applauding his innately theatrical instincts.

> Sometimes you go into a play and you think, oh, basically I'm here to serve the writing, but I don't get to have much fun. Romulus always gives you a little fun, too. He empowers you visually, which is just another good aspect of his theatrical sense.[23]

As one who is no stranger to the new play, Jory recognizes that such attention to artfulness deserves to be recognized.

> Romulus really does have craft. He has craft, in the sense that say, in Japan, they would honor with a national honor, like they would honor a great potter; they would honor Romulus for his craft, because he has craft that transcends craft by its very expertness ... when the play really arrives ... you can produce it. Well, there aren't more, probably, than a dozen people in America like that. The fact is that Romulus is very much like a decathlon.[24]

No play so perfectly illustrates this craft or better captures Linney's sensibilities than does Laughing Stock. As my own introduction to his theatrical world, it remains among my most admired and loved works for the stage.

While love and the consequences of its absence are recurring concerns in each of the collection's full-bodied scenes, Linney

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is here utilizing a broader canvas than in Pops. Though the three plays are uncharacteristically linked by their southern locales, the subjects addressed have a wider philosophical appeal. FM and Tennessee, as different as one could imagine, are equally thought-provoking. Their simplicity and, according to Michael Feingold, "basically barbaric sources,"[25] belie an intense scrutiny of the forces that produce art, as well as the courage required when one is confronted with a lie they have spent a lifetime believing. As in so many of his plays, the characters' ultimate redemption lies in their ability to either transcend or disclose a lie, to themselves or to others, thereby celebrating the act of seeing life for what it really is. It is more than likely that Linney is indebted to Ibsen's obsession with the lie and its revelatory consequences.

The evening's first course, Goodbye, Howard, in flavor so close to Songs of Love, is by far the frothiest of the three servings. In both works we are confronted by the crass self-interest of well connected, highly neurotic, families in crisis. Our points of view are divided between the naively young (Finley and Charles) and the infuriatingly inflexible elders (Ellis, Cora, Edna, Sarah, and Alice). Their comic force is derived from the tension created when scrupulous, yet sympathetically foolish, people seem unable to conceal their own rapacious desires. The plays' characters come closer than any of Linney's to being satiric figures, but the playwright's compassion is always there

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to remind us that where there is hilarity, there is always pain underneath.

The behavior of Goodbye Howard's three aging sisters, Edna, Sarah, and Alice, as each challenges the other for control of the telephone, frequently recalls either the Marx Brothers or Abby and Martha from Arsenic and Old Lace. Simultaneously, they are fully fleshed individuals whose appraisals of each other reveal complex emotions and relationships. Their repartee, built upon a solid foundation of life long frustrations, illustrates, not only a Chekhovian empathy, but a comparable ability to allow characters to walk the tightrope between joviality and despair.

> Alice: Tired, I tell you. Worn out.
> Sarah: I'm just going to say it. It's just your rude, crude attitude, Edna. It is simply excruciating at a time like this, and it is boring as well! That's what I said. Boring.
> Alice: On the floor. I could just lie right down on the floor.
> Edna: I heard you. And I can't bore you any more than you bore me, baby sister, and have every last year of our blessed lives!
> Sarah: Well, I know that.
> Alice: And die. And just simply die.[26]

As effective as this piece is as an entertainment, in comparison to its companion plays, FM and Tennessee, it can best be regarded as a curtain raiser. Few one-acts of any twentieth century playwright can compare in their ability to relate in so concise a form such powerfully large stories. The volcanic emotions revealed in each uncover essential truths of the human character: that life's lessons and their accompanying pain of

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discovery must be confronted, so that the cognizance of that pain can take one to a new level of understanding.

In Buford Bullough's case, confrontation allows him to appease the monsters that ravage his soul and, in so doing, alleviate his pain by putting it on paper. The necessity expressed in his passion for creativity recalls the fervor shown by Akhmatova as she manipulates her artistic vision. Is this a process necessary for the creation of genius, or is Buford, as in the eyes of the proper May and the avenging Suzanne, a crude and reckless aberration? As Kathleen Chalfant noted to me following her performance as Suzanne Lachette in the Long Wharf Theatre's 1987 production of FM, it is difficult to think of another play that so successfully attempts to explain the process of art. In addition, like his prologue in Miss Julie, it is a hard hitting response to the assorted philistines calling for the institutional sanitation of artistic expression.

Described by Richard Schickel as a "masterly miniature,"[27] it relates the uncommon discovery by a writing teacher of a bold new writer in the Faulknerian mold, one whose blunt and dissipated lifestyle offends his fellow students, "a drippily sweet middle-aged housewife [and] a dogma-spouting young feminist."[28] In the course of one writing class, Constance, the novelist-turned-professor, comes face-to-face with the genuine article: a writer able to express in vivid language his achingly painful inner life. It is also the rare example from the playwright's canon of two isolated characters finding, rather than forfeiting,

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common ground, contradicting the previously discussed tendency of the writer to give us only missed connections between men and women.

It becomes obvious to Constance, arguably a stand-in for Linney during his early, leaner years, that the two female students share none of the talents or sensitivities of the eloquent drunken farmer. Their inability to comprehend Buford's passion, and the audacity of their selfrighteous critiques, move the teacher and her male student towards a sympathetic understanding of each other: an epiphany that promises a salvation of sorts, for all willing to chance the journey to self-discovery. Schickel believes it is this bridge between two like-minded souls that distinguishes the work.

> It is hard to say whether the other students ... are more appalled by the erotic spew of language in Buford's work or by the way their teacher reaches across the barriers of age, sex and class to acknowledge the right of great gifts to wrap themselves in socially unappetizing forms. What one can say is that her act of commitment to another committed writer turns rich comic turmoil into touching drama.[29]

Two particular achievements of this comically dark masterpiece are worth considering. The first is that most similar attempts to illustrate on stage the greatness of a work of art are usually trivialized in the presentation. Buford's output, however, is mesmerizing, demonstrating the author's admitted proclivity for richly textured southern loquaciousness, and supporting Dan Sullivan's claim that

> Linney has brought off a very difficult trick here. Almost every play about an artist founders when it comes time to exhibit his art. Either we don't get to

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> see it or we don't see what's so great about it. But the novel-within-the-play really does sound like the goods.[30]

Secondly, while some feminist camps, according to Kathleen Chalfant, found his portrayals of the two female students to be sexist in origin, limiting their qualities to either precious superiority or predatory disdain, FM is another clear example of Linney's preoccupation with the Strindbergian clash of sexual wills. As usual, though, Linney's territory is multi-dimensional, giving neither the feminine nor masculine view exclusive legitimacy. As noted by Michael Feingold, commenting here on both FM and Tennessee, he is a writer sincerely attempting to illuminate difficult issues relating to gender and subservience.

> American folklore, of course, is rife with taming-of-a-shrew myths in which an obstinate woman gets her comeuppance from some man. Linney takes this motif as a given, but to his credit he adds enough shadings, and gives his women characters enough strength, to show you that he feels guilty about it; he's a halfhearted sexist at worst.[31]

Feingold's impressions, valid as they may be in appraising Linney's ability to write about women, display a prejudice that, at least in part, helps explain the reluctance of a sophisticated New York audience to accept his work. His conclusion that the plays' "folksy" milieus somehow negate the power of the characters and their message reveals an urban provinciality, if not superiority, that prevents full appreciation of the play's value.

> As so often with American folksiness, the comedy contains a worrisome anti-intellectual component: the final implication is that only people who swill bourbon and cuss like troopers can really be creative.[32]

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By reducing the play to a study of rural eccentricity, the critic has helped to obscure what is essentially a rare testament to human courage, independence, and love.

A note about the casting of Buford's role: it has been played in numerous productions by two actors long associated with the work of Linney, both of whom come closer than other actors to the playwright's image of himself in his own work.

Leon Russom had an early association with Linney, having assumed roles in various definitive productions, including that of The Lord in Why The Lord Came to Sand Mountain, Dr. Bertram Shedman, Jr. (Linney's father) in Pixie Shedman, and Starns in Heathen Valley. This particular personality triptych, more than any other compilation of character types, would seem to capture the essence of the Linney ethos: the good man beset by ghosts of past transgressions who is able to find some sort of vindication in his attempt to right certain wrongs.

No young actor could have been more fortunate than Scott Sowers when he first auditioned for the playwright/director's 1987 production of Heathen Valley at Theatre for the New City and subsequently went on to play a myriad of roles during Linney's very active period in the late eighties and early nineties. Recently graduated, then, from the North Carolina School of the Arts and blessed with the natural rhythms of the American South, in addition to a rare acting talent, he has left his mark on several important characters with whom Linney can be closely associated.

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Sowers' roles have ranged from Starns in Heathen Valley, Buford in FM, Sam Beam in Sand Mountain Matchmaking, and Shosho in Komachi to Shelby Pittman in Unchanging Love and the Ex-G.I. in Can Can. The actor's understanding of Linney's precise talents help to explain the kind of theatre he creates, as well as the kind of artist attracted to working with him.

> Even though the characters in Heathen Valley are poor and uneducated and live hard lives, they still have a great deal of integrity and dignity... stereotyping a character comes as much from the actor as it comes from the writer. There's so much left to the interpretation and the performance. The thing about Romulus and his writing ... the first booby trap that people hit is they don't find the humor. And then, because the story will tell itself, it's your job as the storyteller to get out of the way.[33]

Both Russell and Sowers radiate a certain masculine stability, undermined by a sense of insecurity--even doubt. They are soft spoken, yet solid, possessing qualities associated with theatrical icons such as Spencer Tracy or Gregory Peck, who were often cast as flawed, yet good, men who refused to be compromised. It is an archetype we often expect to be confronted by devastating events such as a death or loss, for whom we can only hope the best, because he or she embodies the will in us all to prevail. Sowers found this dimension prevalent in all the roles he undertook.

> The underlying theme in a lot of Romulus' plays is letting go and saying goodbye. You find that recurring often and that's an obstacle that confronts just about any character in any of his plays ... from the GI in Can Can to Shosho in Komache. His muse has always been those obstacles that he's found in his life.[34]

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The last of the three plays, Tennessee, is an ode to letting go and bidding farewell. It is an adult fairytale, conjuring the dead husband of a woman on her final journey to self-revelation, having discovered she is the sole stranger to herself.

Often overlooked in reviews, when compared to the preceding, uproariously pungent, FM, it is, none the less, unique and often moving in its evocation of an enchanted forest that beholds truths many of us must sooner or later encounter. An old woman, recently widowed, journeys to her homeland, which she believes is many miles away, but is actually, and paradoxically, in her own backyard. Brutally humiliated by the realization that her "Tennessee" is no more than a distant and illusory state of mind, she is able to summon her strength, her innate knowledge that all of life is a mirage, and assimilate this brutal confrontation with the past.

Perhaps the best example of his use of magic realism, he lends the characters, as he does in Sand Mountain, Heathen Valley, and Unchanging Love, a distinct vernacular that is expressive of a world very much its own. His style, according to Jonathan Saville of the San Diego Reader, brings the language to center stage by "reintroducing extravagant, expressive, poetic speech into the modern prose theatre." In this way Saville distinguishes Linney's style from the more traditionally naturalistic fare of most of his contemporaries.

> No one, of course, really talks the way Linney's characters do, any more than the Aran islanders were all consummate oral poets. It is the playwright who has created this language--on the basis of something

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> actually to be heard in North Carolina or Tennessee, yes, but projected back into a more or less fantasized nineteenth century past, and going far beyond any natural speech to an elaborately crafted theatrical medium. Linney's language is just wonderful to listen to: funny, uninhibited, wildly imaginative, dense, delectable, glowingly beautiful.[35]

Terry Curtis Fox found the telling of his story "extraordinary," summing up, as well as anyone, a central question he often addresses: is there value to be found in the moral code of a simpler people more in touch with their origins, as well as their more humble struggles?

> Each bit of narration is textured with rich detail so that an entire world emerges, in which land is important not only as property but a ground for sustenance, independence, and family continuity. That the husband can sustain this deception sums up the isolation of preautomotive rural life, just as the woman's refusal to go back on her ill considered word, indicates the importance of an absolute moral code in such harsh surroundings.[36]

Laughing Stock, an oddly affecting compilation of farce, poetic drama, and surreal fantasy, was most successful in its productions at the Manhattan Punchline Theatre and the Long Wharf Theatre. On many occasions both FM and Tennessee have been separately mounted alongside other plays by Linney or with the work of others. Most often Linney's one-acts have been produced at the Ensemble Studio Theatre, always as a part of their marathons. On one occasion, at the Alliance Theatre in Burbank, California, FM was imaginatively paired with Richard Greenberg's The Author's Voice. On another, at the Philadelphia Festival Theatre for New Plays, which also offered the premieres of Heathen Valley and Sand Mountain, it was performed alongside plays by John Bishop,

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Willie Reale, and Martin Halpern. For the Bowery Theatre in San Diego in 1988, the director chose to capitalize on the similar milieus of Sand Mountain Matchmaking and Tennessee, matching the two plays in a program he also called Laughing Stock. The diversity of the playwright's one-act yield offers many opportunities for directors to pick and choose as they may, confident that they will always come up with provocative couplings.

Saville, in his cogent appraisal of Linney's contributions to lyric theatre, substantiates the claim that modernism has had a deadening effect on culture. He clarifies a dilemma faced by any serious American playwright who fears that contemporary values have obscured--even poisoned--the theatre's debt to its greater traditions.

> The problems are the dullness of common American speech, corrupted by the educational system and the mass media, and the secularism of American values, according to which the only reality is social and material. Flat language and narrow materialism dictate a specific theatrical mode: realism, the dominant type of theater for the last hundred years. But in all its other periods and traditions, the theatre has thrived on eloquence, rhetoric, poetry, gods, witches, oracles, and ghosts. What is a playwright to do who feels that realism has diminished the theater's range, but who at the same wants to depict the world in a manner accessible to contemporary, realistically oriented audiences?[37]

Linney's unique and prolific contribution to dramatic literature can be best appreciated if one considers his devotion to answering this particular question.

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CHAPTER NINE

SINGLES, SONGS, AND LESSONS OF PRODUCTION

My childhood? Millions can't buy it back, even if we dream of nothing else.

Philip in Juliet[1]

One thing has become increasingly clear since the burgeoning of the regional theatre movement in this country. Many contemporary playwrights with an eye towards historical storytelling, whose more adventurous works would have otherwise withered on the vine, have found places there for nurturing. Many plays, either too bizarre, folk-based, or esoteric to be marketed on the commercial stage, have been realized, thanks to these institutions. Were it not for these not-for-profit venues, historical plays by such fine writers as Timberlake Wertenbaker, John Guare, William Gibson, and Horton Foote would never have found productions.

A look at several of Linney's less well-known works and their mountings confirms that a serious theatre artist needs a place to exercise his or her imagination, in spite of the fact that historical subjects often alienate audiences bred on popular culture. One is also reminded of the author's difficulty when he decides to abandon the historical milieu for contemporary landscapes.

It is also impossible to fully understand Linney's theatre without also considering the importance of music to nearly every play he's written, be it historical, contemporary, comedic or

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serious. His poetic and rhythmically dazzling prose are obviously the consequence of an abiding love of music, nurtured early in his life, and an instinctual sense of how language can sing without appearing to be artifice. Not only has he gained inspiration for dramatic pieces from specific songs, he is also sometimes able to find in music the perfect metaphor for his actions.

Like Foote, Guare, and Gibson, Linney is most interested in exploring character. The plots of FM, Tennessee, Three Poets, Spain, Ambrosio, and Oscar Over Here, especially, are subordinate to the power of the central character's personality. In the following three shorter, unpublished pieces one becomes further aware of his nearly clinical attention, in the best Chekhovian sense, to the demons that accompany desperate souls caught at the height of their discontent.

Savanarola and *Punk*

As blueprints--exploratory sketches--for larger ideas, Savanarola and Punk clarify some of the origins of both Ambrosio and Spain, showing glimpses of the latter works' more mature handling of the paradoxes of faith, insanity, and evil. Who could be a better a companion to the two persecuted monks of these plays than Faustus of Marlowe, Goethe, and Moliere?

Few theatres would have had the vision or confidence to compile in one evening seven leading playwright's various representations of Faustus' seven deadly sins. This adventurous concept only became a reality thanks to the efforts of one of the

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country's leading regional theatres, the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, N.J., and director Nagle Jackson. Such an idea would seem to suit Linney more than it would the other participants. His short plays have been characteristically presented in alliance with others, while his co-writers are more often committed to longer works only.

Along with Edward Albee (Envy), Christopher Durgang (Sloth), Jean-Claude van Itallie (Pride), John Guare (Gluttony), Joyce Carol Oates (Lechery), and Amlin Gray (Greed), Linney was asked to limit his scene to five minutes and three characters. Always one to appreciate fate, he found it perfectly fitting that in the summer of 1984, just as he was reading about the pious Savanarola, the "harsh ugly friar," he should be asked by Jackson to devote a play to wrath. "I like to believe," he said, "that there is some sort of order and purpose in chance situations."[2]

Where others utilized at least two or three actors, the minimilist at heart chose a monologue. His Savanarola, captured in one tirade of wrathful self-righteousness, illustrates the author's unique ability to express in concise, Gothic imagery the tenor of an era. This historical figure, also the subject of Maurice Valency's play of the same name, is a descendant of Ibsen's Brand. He berates mankind for its repulsive, pathetic, and pagan vanity, especially its art that reflects a passion more consumed by the delights of the earth than of the spirit--a Jesus more man than Son of God.

> Is the woman beautiful, her breast naked, pawed by a child and called Mary? You paint the mother of God in

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> a whore's body with a whore's tits and you paint Jesus Christ playing with them! Look, I told you! That is not the body of a man painted for the glory of God! That is the body of a fool, painted for the pleasure of a sodomite! Look, I told you! Look at yourselves![3]

Reflecting themes first explored in Frederick, Holy Ghosts, and Sand Mountain, then afterwards in Heathen Valley, Hrosvitha, Oscar Over Here, and Spain, the monologue broadens our understanding of Linney's fascination with the chasm that exists between the Apollonian notion of the perfect idea (God) and creative man's tendency to portray salvation in human terms.

If Jackson's Faustus In Hell, as Mel Gussow noted, "stops far short of the promised mark,"[4] the decision to take such a richly diverse approach to theatrical production suggests there is still a yearning in the American theatre for the kind of derivative historicism that Linney consistently produces. Even when the topic is not specifically "historic," as in Punk, a short monologue, the effect is to capture a character who represents his own time.

Punk is even more directly linked to a subsequent work. In it a belligerent, near-violent youth, the early personification of Bradley Smith in Spain, spews forth his contempt for a Spanish psychoanalyst devoted to healing, who offers him a cure for his enmity. Confident that he has sexually satisfied the older woman as no one else could, his bravado reveals a disturbed child, as unable to accept her love as he is incapable of showing compassion for one so consumed by the physical and mental illness of others. He suffers a blindness to her life force. The emotional

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wounds are characteristic of those to whom the doctor is drawn and his sudden rage at her suggestion that he really wants "everything hated suddenly loved," illuminates a devastating malady of the soul.

"This old bag," he chortles. "You know what she told me then? That loving her would give me back what life has taken away from me!" In his determination to dismiss her, convinced, as she is, that Don Quixote was the "the first real crazy man anybody ever understood," he bares the essence of his wrath.

> She said, what I wanted was, everything mean suddenly kind. Everything hated suddenly loved. Everything rotten suddenly healthy. Everything dead suddenly living. Everything UGLY suddenly BEAUTIFUL! EVERYTHING BAD SUDDENLY GOOD! EVERYTHING WRONG SUDDENLY RIGHT!
>
> (Pause. A sudden rage.)
>
> NO! NO! NO! NO! YOU OLD BITCH! I WANT IT JUST THE OTHER WAY AROUND! EVERYTHING KIND SUDDENLY MEAN! HEALTHY, ROTTEN! LIVING, DEAD! BEAUTIFUL, UGLY! GOOD, BAD AND RIGHT, WRONG! WHY ELSE DO YOU THINK I'M A GOD DAMNED PUNK?[5]

Revelations, such as those of Anna Rey, the silent analyst referred to here and the subject of the second play in Spain, afford a singular view of madness as a heightened state wherein paradox prevails, where the mad denounce memory and hope, remaining absorbed in the present. "For the mad," she tells him, "there is no such thing as trivia. Everything is crucial."[6]

It is this kind of opportunity for a moral tension between opposites that has always seduced Linney into the realm of spiritual or religious expression. He is reaching for the essential explanation of evil, so often associated with that which we fear. Madness or invention is more often feared than embraced. Linney,

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by invoking this fear of, and fascination for, the irrational, wants to make evil better known to us. And like Strindberg before him, he recognizes that the line between madness and enlightenment can be precariously thin.

For no other reason than to find a way to consider what I find to be his lesser works, though no less idiosyncratic or interesting, the following plays are all similarly located in contemporary times, from the beginnings of the Cold War to the present. Historical perspective is sacrificed, the playwright having found inspiration in the workings of a world much closer to his own. That they may not always satisfy in ways his other plays do neither obscures nor diminishes the fact that his themes and dramatic intentions remain solidly intact.

El Hermano and *Ezra*

Just as it is clear that the strongest of Linney's female characters are driven by the need to shatter the rigid confines of a man's world, so it is that many of his men appear to be blinded by an allegiance to sexual dominance and military glory. Frederick is relentless in exploring this theme. In Schofield Barracks such a credo seems to define the entire mind-set that prevailed in 1970, at the crest of America's arrogant pinnacle of power. El Hermano, set twenty years before, during the waning years of the Korean War, takes a more micro approach to the fissure that exists between Western might and indigenous tradition. Like David Henry Hwang's M.Butterfly, it equates personal

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insecurities with the kind of machismo behind America's colonial disregard for the perceived weakness of foreign cultures.

The care with which Linney handles some very difficult cultural realities in this play, and his refusal to provide us with facts regarding el hermano's identity, make it puzzling in ways that enhance its theatricality. When two American soldiers, an unrestrained bully (Buddy) and his reluctant sidekick, set out to bed two young Nicaraguan girls in a San Francisco bar, what ensues is a cultural collision of two sexually charged egos. The girl's "brother" (Esteban) refuses to allow his role as "unfortunate head" of his family to be compromised, insisting that he oversee his sister's affairs. Is he upholding his family's pride with apparent best intentions or is he pimping? While the question is never definitively answered, Esteban's resolve, in the face of the girls' refusal to go with him, is disturbing both because of, and in spite of, our reluctance to accept everything he says.

> When I sent for my sister, I of course insist that she come too, and send passage for both. I have hope that she would find a new life here, as I have, but as yet, no, she will not forget her man. We are stubborn people, even in gracious America.[7]

Esteban is determined that he will again head his family, once well-to-do landowners, and that "he must take care for her, because she understands this no more than [Buddy]."[8] He only loses the duel because Buddy carries the larger knife. When the testosterone-fueled soldier dismisses the brother's concerns,

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insisting he'll "play the game" his way, the outburst reveals disturbing questions about our culture's lack of social or familial responsibility. Who would want Buddy for a brother? What does it mean to be a brother?

> Well, listen, Mr. Hermano. Who permits this and doesn't permit that, with his beat-up whore hanging around his shoulders, and who's a whole lot younger than he makes out, with his big Spanish dance. Eighteen, maybe? Seventeen? In gracious America, it just don't work, this Big Brother routine. I mean, we just don't feature it here no more.[9]

Linney also impresses with his deft handling of the bar's atmosphere, aided by the addition of two minor characters, drunken strangers on the make, who hover over the proceedings as constant reminders of the kind of world in which the immigrants have found themselves. Even though Michael Feingold writes that the sexual pairing "isn't particularly new," he observes that "both sides ... come out with some surprising revelations, and some sharp things have been said about notions of pride and manliness North and South." Commending the playwright's natural ability to get to the bottom of his subject, Feingold adds,

> Linney's a skilled and intelligent writer, who knows how to build his action, pace his surprises, take the curse off his schema with touches of characterization, so that despite its one-dimensional moral, the play carries both credibility and emotional weight.[10]

What Feingold calls a "one-dimensional" moral is a simplification of Linney's raison d'être; for others, myself included, he has formulated a complex dilemma. William Raidy more accurately illustrates the play's ability to confound when he writes,

> Linney cleverly never tips his hand in El Hermano, but instead keeps the situation on edge. Is the boy just a

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> protective brother, or is he a young hustler learning his trade? The enigma of the situation makes the "game" and the play fascinating.[11]

Originally conceived in 1968 under the title The Broofer, but not produced until 1981, El Hermano explores territory also explored in a small unpublished piece entitled Ezra. Here we are introduced to a character who could easily be Buddy, twenty-five years later. Armed with the same hubristic bravado, Ezra recounts his varied sexual and military conquests while two fellow hobos feverishly attempt to start a fire in an oil drum. Slight by any standard compared to nearly all his other monologues or one-acts, it contradicts his self-imposed rule: to always endow a play with a central event. Never the less, Ezra's blood-thirsty ravings are reinforced by two bold, theatrical counterpoints. As a metaphor for the character's desire to recreate an orgasmic moment of victory over the German Army, the slowly expanding fire is a clever dramatic device. The concluding verses of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" also evoke apocalyptic images, though one is uncharacteristically left feeling somewhat manipulated by a dramaturgical exercise that fails to achieve the promise of its grand ideas. Its brazen, yet compact, austerity, though, provides a paradigm of the sort of deliberate theatricality for which the author is consistently reaching.

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Yancy and Juliet

Two later short plays, Yancy and Juliet, are noteworthy as much for their failings as they are for showing us the playwright's ongoing preference for paradoxical revelations. In both cases what begin as humorous incidents, borrowed from his experiences in the backstage world of summer stock and Off-Broadway, take unexpected turns. The results are seldom as gratifying as when he employs similar twists of fate in Holy Ghosts, FM, and Sand Mountain. We are either unable to invest as much in their characters or less impressed by their sense of truth. Whereas Linney uses comic flourishes to create the snake handlers, Buford's writing class, and Jesus' late night rap session, both Yancy and Juliet also feature amusing characters, but their purposes sometimes appear to be to serve an idea rather than the truth of the characters. Their "flesh and bones," a primary concern of Linney's, as both teacher and playwright, are not fully revealed, ultimately diminishing their effectiveness, if not their knowing humor.

Yancy's rewards, however, are many, though its brevity may contribute to a frustration with the play's fleeting approach to character. Not that any of them appear false; they are immediately compelling and identifiable, leaving one regretting that the incident, real or imagined, didn't inspire a more complete scenario. Their veracity, however, is compromised by the facileness with which their core beings are summarily related.

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Based on his own playing of the role of General Lee's chaplain in The Confederacy at Paul Green's Waterside Theatre in Roanoke, it suggests the playwright, questioning, perhaps, his own lifestyle at the time, may have felt entirely inadequate to portray such a religious man. Whether Linney actually encountered the real-life Yancy, he was undoubtedly impressed by the passionate and indelibly authentic purity of the southern character.

Yancy, a wonderfully blunt young apprentice, finds new confidence when he meets an actor who, unable to conceal his West Virginian roots, sounds like, but cannot, according to Yancy, act the preacher in their play. He is distraught by the idea that the goodness of the character should be conveyed by a man whose own nature so contradicts the preacher's. Yancy is convinced the actor's histrionic talents are misdirected. As in other of Linney's texts, it is the disconnect between the idea and the reality--the Apollonian and the Dionysian--that informs or propels the action.

> Hit's the powerful waste that hurts. You are going to stand up in front of all them people coming to see a play, and in you they will see all good things. A man honest and straight and tall and kindly faced and strong and loving the Word of God. They will worship with you, praying when you move to kneel, and singing when you turn yore face to heaven. But you are only an actor.[12]

In his condemnation of the perceived hollowness and insincerity of the New Yorker's life, seeped, as it is, in "the miseries of a plank-plain life," Yancy finds his preacher's voice, having discovered he has something to preach about. This

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encounter between two distinct world views, that of the rural Christian southerner and the big-city bohemian, confirms Linney's affinity for culture clashes, adding to our understanding of his love of a region from which he has chosen exile.

Though neither of these short works is in any way comparable to classical tragedy, the question of inevitability can also be addressed when considering Linney's attention to verisimilitude. Is such a model in any way pertinent to the truthfulness of his characters and their actions or do such expectations hinder our appreciation of his plays' heightened realities?

Aristotle was the first to analyze "reversal of situation." He determined that for a complex action,

> change is accompanied by ... reversal [and] should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action.[13]

With an understanding that Aristotle's concern for probability is not necessarily applicable to Linney's intentions as a playwright, the question arises as to the importance of believability. Is it necessary that a surprising turn of events have a certain inevitability or can peripeteia in the post-modern age be just as effective without plausibility?

In the playwright's one-act Juliet, published in 1989 as the first companion piece to Yancy and April Snow, a successful, though troubled, young director (Philip French) is hired by the middle-aged producer (Willy) of a vanity production of Ibsen's Ghosts. Willy's girlfriend, whose playing of Mrs. Alving is a prerequisite to his getting the job, insists that only a revised

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ending to the play, in which the mother offers to the dying son her naked breasts, can express a modern equivalent to the character's need to save her child. Philip regards her suggestion as "dumb," reminding her that "Oswald has syphilis, not rickets."[14]

With an odd set of individuals, beset by even more curious circumstances, Linney has created a slyly humorous, yet truthfully rendered, predicament that ingeniously reflects Ibsen's sorrowful nineteenth century denouement.

In what is yet another derivative treatment of a European master's exploration of the pervasively lethal influence of family, the director's mother is hastily introduced late in the drama, as a sort of incestuous deus-ex-machina. Her claim, like that of the reconstructed Mrs. Alving, that she is what the suicidal director desires, both contradicts Philip's artistic assumptions and clarifies his lingering depression over a life that has a remarkable likeness to that of Ibsen's Oswald. In an ending that recalls the irony of Coleman's conversion in Holy Ghosts, Philip confronts his youthful longing for a mother's love, reassuring her that she will "live within [him], as Mrs. Alving, as Lady Macbeth, and as Juliet."[15] Having faced the metaphorical equivalent to his mother's breasts, the director also appears ready to consider his actress's bold new theatrical concept.

Is there a point at which the verisimilitude of Linney's story is sacrificed so that Ibsen's larger themes can be

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addressed? And, if so, does it matter? Suggesting that such a line has been crossed, Mel Gussow writes that the play has a

> knowing theatricality ... [b]ut, with the sudden appearance of the director's mother, Juliet takes a predictable though unpersuasive turn, as life imitates would-be art.[16]

Characterizing what is a familiar theme in Linney's fictional universe, the New Yorker's Mimi Kramer found the "play is about the necessity of shaking off the ghosts of one's living parents." Unlike Gussow, though, she seemed less bothered by the sudden addition of Mrs. Alving's alter-ego.

> The joke, of course, is that no grown man's mother would behave as Mrs. French does--not literally. But Linney has a gift for dramatizing the potential metaphorical content of a ludicrous character, premise, or situation. He also has an instinct for finding just the right image--one sufficiently far out to be comic but expressive of a truth sufficiently universal to make us want to accept it. This is a difficult thing to do.[17]

Consequently, while some may bristle at the playwright's license, others will accept such improbabilities, confident that these mimetic leaps have the potential not only to mystify, but entertain and enlighten, as well.

April Snow

For one so identified with characters whose vividness is conveyed with a rural poeticism, April Snow would appear to be an anomaly. Set in 1982 Soho among the literati, it is a lighthearted, yet probing portrait of aging artists anxious to recapture a spark of the lifeblood their youthful lovers both covet and dangle before them.

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I refer again to Kierkegaard's Either/Or, in which it is held that "the real meaning of life, after all, is sorrow, and being the unhappiest is the happiest thing of all."[18] Comfortable as he is with contradiction, Linney's play personifies this paradox, to the extent that its characters' emotional scars make possible their shared affinity. Few writers possess his ability to illuminate sadness with such wit or sardonic wisdom.

Concluding that sorrow "lies at the dangerous transition between the aesthetic and ethical," Kierkegaard observes that "[a]t a certain age, there is no more dangerous poison to a young girl than sadness ... "[19] April Snow,

> a bittersweet comedy about a May-October romance (she's 20, he's 61) in which sweet triumphs over bitter without any damage to the character's emotional truth,[20]

considers this reality, while simultaneously suggesting that as life's hungers subside, a greater wisdom is attainable. It marks a return to themes explored in Old Man Joseph and recalls his fondness for Ibsenian truth-telling.

The world-weariness of Gordon, a much married screenwriter accustomed to solitude, juxtaposed as it is with his lover Milly's sometimes unbalanced, yet keenly intelligent, enthusiasm for life, captures the tension that exists between experience and the longing for experience. So, too, does the dignity with which Grady, Gordon's former wife and confidant, learns to cherish her precarious lesbian alliance. Their shared anxiety celebrates those moments in later life when one is more able to set aside selfish desires and, forgiving oneself and others, reap the

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rewards of a love that is presupposed by freedom. Whether it be Gordon's decision to discourage Milly from becoming the "Virgin" to his "Leper" or Grady's acceptance of her lover's inconstancy, we are confronted by highly sensitive and uncompromisingly candid individuals for whom there can only be, despite their frequent indiscretions, an abundance of empathy. The regenerative power of Linney's evoking snowfall in April yields a metaphor for the world, like that of "Paradise," in which healing exists only after the acceptance of each other's faults and the frailty of one's human family.

Familiar icons reappear in this play, as they do in Spain, Savonarola, and Juliet. Gordon, Grady, and Milly are equally as interested in using the past, and its intellectual history, to explain the present. Reminding one of Philip's suicidal journey from Choate, Harvard, Austin Riggs, and Yale Drama School in Juliet, Milly recalls how comforted she was by the plays of Strindberg while recuperating in a mental hospital. A centerpiece to Gordon's living room is a statue of Don Quixote (found also in Anna Rey), which inspires Milly's courage to confront her inability to connect with those outside the world she has created with her older teacher, lover, and friend. Neither is Faust forgotten; his lust for Gretchen prompts Milly's queries to Gordon.

> Milly: Know what Faust did when he first made his pact with the Devil?
> Gordon: He corrupted an innocent child.
> Milly: That came later. Anyway, she wasn't a child. She was a buxom lass who went to bed with a good looking man. It usually happens without supernatural assistance.

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> No, in the old German books, the first thing Faustus did was to go to a tavern and order a big dinner. Then, when it came, because the place was so crowded, people jammed in back to back, eating shoulder to shoulder, - well, by God, Faustus for the first time invoked the powers of hell. He waved his arms and every single person in that whole nasty medieval diner turned to stone. And he ate his supper in peace. Would you do that?

Gordon: Of course.[21]

Milly's appraisal of herself as "a grubby little intellectual moth, climbing up out of old books," precludes her looking forward to a time in which her "little bag of hopes will stand empty."[22] Conversely, in searching for his true self, Gordon cherishes his past, "a Knoxville paperboy, wanting to be a writer."[23] As we have seen on other occasions, especially in Childe Byron, the clash of two generations (the younger looking forward, the older looking back) maintains a richly reflective dramatic tension.

Kierkegaard might conclude that Milly's anxiety, "as a passionate erotic glance desires its object,"[24] reflects her inability to possess Gordon's more seasoned sorrow. The play's poignancy is also the consequence of the characters' willingness to shed illusions, allowing them to fool neither themselves, nor the objects of their infatuation.

Mimi Kramer found it, in its concern with the moral condition of its characters, "probably the best play I've seen in New York all year,"[25] citing the "exquisite" performances of Lois

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Smith, Harris Yulin, and Sarah Jessica Parker at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in 1987. Radically altered after its premiere at the South Coast Repertory four years earlier, it is an example of the heights Linney's plays can reach when performed by recognized, charismatic performers. Sadly, it also engenders a regret that more of them have not found their way into the hands of the great actors of our age.

As a boy with a little radio, Linney recalls listening to the Longines Symphonette, his "introduction to higher culture, you might say."[26] Music remains an enduring influence on the playwright, though he states,

> I don't consciously use a musical structure when I write ... but a lot of my pieces for the stage are episodic, with elements of different lengths, so matters of rhythm and structure do come into play. When I find a subject for the theater, I always find myself asking what music will go with it.[27]

A review of certain productions will testify to Linney's reliance on music in its many forms: from opera, European classical, Asian, and pop to hymns, marches, and Celtic ballads. Each musical statement is carefully considered and, as an essential ingredient, integrated into the theatrical whole.

To enhance the flavor of eighteenth century court life in The Sorrows of Frederick, he recommends using Frederick's own flute sonatas and concerti, the Hohenfriedburg Victory March, Anton Webern's transcription of Bach's Musical Offering, or the works of Graun, Quantz, and Emmanuel Bach. The play's density, as it traverses decades of Frederick's life, owes much to the temper of the musical compositions. They insure that any

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production will naturally reflect its qualities as both chamber theatre and historical pageant, Shakespearean in form.

Irving Wardle, who called the play, "certainly the most substantial contribution to romantic drama since Osborne's A Patriot For Me,"[28] noted Frederick's manifesto that no one will listen to his flute until they first hear his cannons. In order to define Frederick's aesthetic longings, Linney is careful to leave the audience with a distinct impression of Frederick's musical soul.

As one might expect in a story centered on the ceremonies of a religious cult, Holy Ghosts makes ample use of Christian hymns, including "Amazing Grace," "Fairest Lord Jesus," "Softly And Tenderly Jesus Is Calling," "I Love To Tell The Story," "Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus," and "In The Garden." In fact, the integrity of the characters, so crucial to Linney's insistence that they not be performed as caricatures, depends on the actor's sincere commitment to the music's emotion. In addition, Coleman's climactic conversion would be impossible were it not for the rhythms and wailing of the Pentecostal's musical traditions.

Linney's production notes nearly always stress the necessity for simplicity in any use of musical accompaniment. This would apply whether the music calls for a medieval folk song, as is the case for the Singers who introduce each scene with "The Cherry Tree Carol" in Old Man Joseph And His Family (also suggested for use in Sand Mountain) or the compositions of Berlioz for Childe

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Byron: Harold in Italy (viola), Overture to Rob Roy, The Childhood of Christ (harp and flute), Sanctus (from Requim), Les Francs-Juges Overture, Ball Waltz (from Symphonie Fantastique), and the second lyrical theme from the Roman Carnival Overture. In all instances, he stipulates that "[p]assages where Berlioz scores his orchestra very heavily should be always avoided."[29]

The melodies woven throughout Unchanging Love distinguish this as the work in which music is most integral. Their sorrowful narratives, sung mostly a cappella by the choral cemterpiece, the Musgrave Family Singers, accentuate the grim tale of heartless ambition, giving it added emotional power. In addition to the traditional "Unchanging Love," the folk hymns and ballads include "Shady Grove," "Springfield Mountain," "Turtle Dove," and the exquisite "A Baby Is The End of Time." Of these, Linney, who plays the guitar, contributes the music to the traditional lyrics of "Loathly Worm." Its haunting sea imagery, familial dread, and cryptic sense fit his milieu perfectly, as if he had also composed the words.

I WAS BUT SEVEN YEAR OLD
MY MAMMA SHE DID DEE,
MY DADDY MARRIED THE WORST WOMAN
THIS WORLD DID EVER SEE

SHE'S MADE ME THE LOATHLY WORM
THAT SITS AT THE FOOT OF THE TREE,
AND OF MY SISTER MARILEE
THE MACKEREL OF THE SEA.

AND EVERY SATURDAY AT NOON,
THE MACKEREL COMES TO ME,
SHE TAKES MY LOATHLY HEAD,
AND LAYS IT ON HER KNEE,
AND COMBS IT WITH A SILVER COMB,
AND WASHES IT IN THE SEA.[30]

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The song offers a stark vision of the woman under whose spell Judy will soon find herself. Its singer provides a moral center for whom we can all lend our empathy.

Music being the most direct link to pure feeling, Linney has always been open to its influence. His Childe Byron was very much a by-product of his having seen Virgil Thompson's opera, a celebration of the poet in an era mostly concerned with his public improprieties.

Operatic motifs are also useful to his defining various climactic scenes, including the moment in Pixie Shedman, in which Bertram savors with his daughter the aria in Puccini's Nessun Dorma from Turandot, when "the Prince says his mystery is his own, no one else can find it, but he will say his name on her lips, in the morning."[31] Stage directions indicate that "[t]he tenor sings about names said on other people's mouths, about silences broken." [32] Here the intent is to universalize the very personal triumph of the playwright's breaking the long silence between him and his estranged daughter.

When, in Juliet, the actress Jane wishes to demonstrate her dramatic new ending to Ghosts, like Buford, she uses the aid of a recording, in this case My Heart At Thy Sweet Voice from Saint-Saens' opera Sampson and Delilah. The effect here, though, is as comical as it is designed to heighten the emotional impact.

If FM is, at least in part, a reflection of the torturous process by which a writer like Linney exorcises personal demons, then one must believe that he constantly searches for the musical

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equivalent to his characters' feelings. Prior to Buford's reading of his manuscript, the manic writer plugs in his phonograph and, upon reaching the crowning moment he shares with the ghost of his naked mother, begins the second movement of Elgar's Piano Quintet in A Minor. The music's tempo slows his speech, allowing us not only to see her through his eyes, but to hear his heartache, as well.

The musical touches are not always as broad or essential to the whole as they are in the preceding plays. Often their placement is discreet, adding detail to the play's larger canvas. In Democracy, heard greeting General Grant on his silver anniversary, two children dressed as a miniature wedding cake bride and groom sing their respects to the president:

> I LOVE YOU AS ONCE WHEN THE SUNLIGHT
> WAS FRESH AS THE DEW ON THE ROSE
> LITTLE BRIDE
> WHEN SUMMER WAS GREEN IN OUR CHILDHOOD
> ERE OUR LIFE DREW ON TO ITS CLOSE[33]

This "absurd and touching" moment is precisely rendered, prompting Grant to comment that "I don't have much of an ear for music. I know two tunes. One of them is "Yankee Doodle" and the other isn't.[34] The ease with which, often comic, peculiarities of character become apparent help give this, and other plays, their multi-layered texture.

As opposed to the deliberate use of singers and the conscious addition of musical aids, subconscious musical and sound effects are also common. To introduce the bar setting and to later isolate the one moment in El Hermano where sincere human

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contact appears possible, Linney indicates "Love Is A Many Splendored Thing" should be played, utilizing a pop tune alive with associations regarding the clash of opposing societies.

In Songs of Love, the use of a commercialized pop version of Tschaikowksy's First Piano Concerto, previously mentioned in Chapter Eight, exactly establishes the atmosphere of a sterile nursing home, in addition to providing a proper segue from the previous scene.

To establish Anna's dream-like dialogue with her former lovers and husbands, and to sooth the sleeping Bradley, Anna Rey calls for Chopin's First Nocturne in C Minor, Opus 48. What follows is another example of the playwright's occasional dependence on the voice-over, used with mixed results in 2. In this instance, because the intent is to summon voices in the mind, the device is more effective.

Sounds of the Japanese flute in Komache and the Benedictine chant, Ave Maria Stella, in Hrosvitha contribute to the contemplative ambience of Three Poets, the rare American theatre piece that more closely resembles a meditation than a conventional play. It is a stellar example of the playwright's unfailing desire to transcend naturalism, thereby creating, as does music, an experience definable only in emotional terms.

Responding to Philip C. Kolin's questions regarding his theatrical impulses, Linney refers to an early military leave when he visited Ryoarji, the stone garden in Kyoto. "What I try to do is be Japanese about it," he says, "[t]o take the simple

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aspects and work them over and over."[35] Such an approach might also describe how many modern composers, similarly aware of the Asian influence, see their work: more reduction than embellishment.

Forever aware of the unique qualities of the theatre, compared to the less reflexive nature of film, Linney concludes that

> [t]heatre is like chess and movies are like checkers ... movies to me are dreams; you change from one scene to another scene the way you do in dreams; you can just cut the machine off. You can't do that in the theatre. You have to get to the bottom of a scene before you can go to the next scene, and that scene has to be finished, and it has to point to the next scene before you can go on.[36]

While having contributed on several occasions to television, most notably with The 34th Star, a 1974 historical treatment of a Kansas family at the time of that state's joining the Union, and Appalachian Sounding, an ETV Network production in 1978, he has avoided most opportunities to adapt his talents to the screen. One exception to this rule is his screen adaptation of Holy Ghosts. Encouraged by reviews of the stage version at the Joyce Theatre in 1987 to exploit the play's naturally cinematic qualities, it remains to this date woefully unproduced.

The devices and theatrical surprises that distinguish the stage as intrinsically dissimilar to the screen are those by which Linney has crafted his generous body of stage plays. Contrary to so many talented playwrights of this century, his devotion is to the theatre only. His unique vision for the theatre has also impelled him, especially through the eighties and early nineties, to direct as many of his own works as he

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could make time for. A look at various stagings of Linney's plays, especially those occasions when he chose to be director, reveals several insights.

The author's own production of a rewritten Frederick at the Signature Theatre in 1991, though it garnered nearly unanimous praise for its spareness and emotional clarity, caused Mel Gussow to question his use of a final tableau (Hitler's marching armies on a television monitor), meant to compare Frederick's age to our own. This action, Gussow suggests, could be an example of a director not trusting himself, the playwright.

> In this revised version of the text, a brief epilogue wrenches the play forward into the 20th century, offering a glimpse of the rise of Nazism and the suggestion that it was an outgrowth of Frederick's reign. This observation might have been better left to the audience's imagination.[37]

Herbert Berghof's 1971 production of The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks under the auspices of HB Playwrights' Foundation, restaged less successfully on Broadway the next year, featured numerous characters and scenes eliminated twenty years later in the Signature Theatre production under the author's direction. Critics seemed to agree that the more meandering Act Two "failed to make his clearly heartfelt views as impressive and persuasive as they should have been."[38] Linney's condensed version, transferred to the more appropriately intimate chamber theatre at the Kampo Cultural Center, elicited praise from Michael Feingold.

> To find an event of such originality, with so many complex resonances, at the center of an American play is startling enough; nearly as remarkable is the way in

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> which Linney tells it ... [his] careful, low-key prose blaze like poetry in the spectator's mind.[39]

Acknowledging that novelists usually have great difficulty constructing equally effective stories for the stage, he cites as examples John Updike (Buchanan Dying), Saul Bellow (The Last Analysis), and his good friend, the poet Carolyn Kizer, whose "language was marvelous, and you were interested for about ten minutes."[40] Just as adamant about the playwright's role as a director, he notes his dependence on his considerable experience as an actor to inform his directorial decisions. He finds that,

> What a playwright will do if he directs his own play is to get results too quickly. You have to know the actor's processes, and you have to be able to leave something alone and let it grow rather than force it.[41]

The playwright's excursions into directing, though he has lately determined to commit almost exclusively to writing (and, of course, teaching), have provided him richly satisfying respites from the solitary duties of a wordsmith. He has called his year at the Signature Theatre, overseeing and directing productions, three of which he directed, "the single most satisfying experience I have had in the theatre."[42]

Born in Philadelphia, Linney has found that city especially hospitable to both his plays and his directing. Holy Ghosts and Love Suicide both found successful productions at People's Light and Theatre Company, as did Childe Byron at The Wilma Theatre. More significantly, four of his world premieres have been at the Philadelphia Festival for New Plays, including FM, Soul of a

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Tree, and Why The Lord Came to Sand Mountain, all of which he directed.

Heathen Valley, premiered there in 1987, stands out as the best example of a play he has been particularly careful to develop under his own tutelage. This production, transferred later to the Theatre for The New City and the Signature Theatre, could be a prototype for the sort of spare mise en scene he prefers. He manages, writes Nels Nelson, by "keeping the concept simple in the presence of form and managing rock-solid dignity in the shoals of folk fantasy."[43] Where designs for other productions, such as the "mossy, rocky sod" from the San Diego Repertory production, have attempted a more naturalistic representation, the results have run counter to the author's vision. In subsequent mountings he has always insisted on the unadorned, planked platform that evokes, not only the doomed mission, but also the mind of the narrator. Such an approach hinges on the abilities of a lighting concept that will allow subtle transformation, while not contradicting the theatrical distance he plainly desires. Of the Theatre for the New City's production, Alisa Solomon found,

> Linney stages the shift between telling and showing with a fluidity that matches his writing [creating] not so much an easy complaint against church hierarchy, but an elegy for a social goodness lost to this world.[44]

For one whose sources are so often melodramatic, Linney's greatest challenges are those having to do with countering our expectations of conventional evil by adding layer upon layer of doubt as to the origins of that evil. What appears at first in

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his dramas to be well defined barriers between good and evil evolve into complex ontological messages meant to question our underpinnings of belief. As an example of his pervasive inclination to view history and myth with a distinctly skeptical eye, Ambrosio stands out as nearly an archetype.

The play's 1992 premiere at the Signature Theatre, one of his more recent directorial assignments and the rare instance in which a collaboration (with co-director Jim Houghton) proved fruitful, elicited from Alisa Solomon a string of questions, all pertinent to a host of Linney's plays.

> Can evil be eradicated through evil means? ... And what if the evil you're trying to eradicate isn't really evil at all? ... Is there a malignant force driving our lives? ... And how can we come to understand it, to describe it, without oversimplifying?[45]

Though she felt the "earnest and crisp" production didn't "hit the pitch of intensity the play demands," she goes on to praise the Signature Theatre that "has, like a beneficent force, laid a series of engaging intellectual traps for its audience, celebrating the depth and delicacy of one of our most underappreciated playwrights."[46]

As are so many of Linney's works, this play is based on a story centuries old, though its handling of delicate social issues (unorthodox sexuality, freedom of thought, and political corruption), also examined in Frederick, Democracy, Childe Byron, Heathen Valley, and Oscar Over Here, are as pertinent today as they ever were. The journey of this tormented monk, the latest in a long line of antiheroes whose spiritual quests reflect a

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universal anxiety about the individual's place in an unforgiving universe, characteristically denies any acceptance of moral absolutes. In this sense, Linney's plays represent a uniquely modern contribution to progressive intellectual history.

If history teaches us anything, according to his interpretation, it is to challenge history: to question its moral certainty--or authority. Linney subscribes to that which Mitchell Stephens, while describing the principles of the playwright's contemporary, Jacques Derrida, calls,

> guard[ing] against the belief--a belief that has led to much violence--that the world is simple and can be known with certainty. It confronts us with the limits of what it is possible for human thought to accomplish.[47]

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Conclusion

I cannot read Romulus Linney's plays without being reminded of Maurice Valency's remarks concerning Strindberg: that "no writer makes so much the impression of belonging to the human race." Where there are glimpses of sentimentality, even, at times, self-pity, in the portraits of both authors, "we are aware even more vividly of the idealist and the poet, his misfortune, his pain, and, most poignantly, of his profound humanity."[1]

With Ibsen, Linney shares the intractable view that love is the one element of permanence in the world, though their characters may seldom realize it. Equally persuasive are the playwrights' convictions that the need for love and for self-fulfillment are rarely compatible. Few of Linney's contemporaries can make comparable claims to these potent philosophical legacies. Fewer, even, come close to be being identified with the richly mythopoeic dispositions of the Scandinavian masters.

So, too, is the debt to Chekhov impossible to ignore; not only for the Russian's hugely sympathetic treatment of character, but also for his recognition of what Hugh Dickinson calls "the unexpected paradox: [wherein] the subconscious becomes the mother of demons, the dead become the pursuing Furies and man goes inward to a hell of his own doing."[2]

The death of Linney's father when the playwright was just twelve years old has played a major role in his development. Similarly, deconstructionist, Jacques Derrida, born the same year

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as Linney, lost a sickly younger brother at age ten. He attributes to this experience a "precocious awareness of mortality," admitting that an obsession with death follows him to this day.

> Psychoanalysis has taught that the dead--a dead parent, for example--can be more alive for us, more powerful, more scary, than the living. It is the question of ghosts.[3]

This familiarity with loss seems to have fed his writing in very much the same way it has the playwright's.

Linney's work defines a man, like Derrida, very much in touch with his inner doubts as to what is knowable--a respectful allegiance to the notion of the "impossible," which, in Linney's universe, suggests acknowledgment of a spiritual realm inaccessible to the doctrinaire. Derrida believes, as does Linney, that no political or ethical decision is either straightforward or uncontradictory; he praises these contradictions, what he calls "tangles ... the health of politics--and the health of art, too ..."[4] In much the same way that Pinter defies rationality or that Derrida celebrates "the unknowable," Linney illustrates the difficulty in either clearly identifying goodness or condemning evil.

While some may regard Linney as a minor, though intriguing, member of the American playwriting community of late twentieth century America, others will be enriched by taking notice. Fortunately, there is every likelihood that his work will be more fully understood and appreciated by future generations seeking superior vehicles for actors interested in exploring a rich

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contribution to American folklore, magic realism, and historical biography.

With plans to leave his full-time directorship of the playwrights' program at Columbia University, so as to devote more time to writing and to leading the new writers' unit at the Actor's Studio at the New School, there is also every reason to believe that some of his best work has yet to be written. Always more comfortable as one outside the mainstream, be it academia or the marketplace of the commercial playwright, he may now be in the position to cultivate ideas that have previously been eclipsed by responsibilities to teaching, family, and career.

There is little doubt that his legacy will serve as a strong reminder to serious dramatists of the future that a career free of a dependency on either the New York commercial stage or the Hollywood studio is not only possible, but valued by the theatre community-at-large, which is hungry for the kind of intelligence, imagination, and dedication to craft that Linney has always demonstrated in his plays.

It is also difficult to foresee a time when individuals will not be searching, as was Henry Adams, for a time when "life had been most whole." The attachment each one of us has for our childhood may explain much of the power of Linney's mythos. By drawing upon a universal longing to be complete, as well as the fear of losing faith, he imagines worlds "when it had been possible to pursue both an individual moral life and the life of the community without feeling skewered by paradox."[5]

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Appendix

A LIST OF MAJOR PRODUCTIONS OF THE PLAYS OF ROMULUS LINNEY

1967-1995

The Sorrows of Frederick

Mark Taper Forum, Los Angles, in association with Robert Whitehead: June 1967 (premiere)
Director: Albert Marre
Actors: Fritz Weaver, Albert Dekker, Nancy Marchand
Set Designer: Ralph Alswang

Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, England: March 1970
Director: Peter Dews
Actors: John Wood, Peter Jobin, Hugh Sullivan, Jane Freeman
Set Designer: Finlay James

Vienna Burgtheater, Vienna, Austria: March 1970
Director: Leopold Lindtberg
Actors: Heinz Heincke, Gunther Haenel

St. Clement's Church (and Next Stage), New York City: February 1976 (New York premiere)
Director: Elinor Renfield
Actors: Austin Pendleton, Joseph Warren, George Morfogen, Katina Cummings, P. L. Carling, Ron Johnston
Set Designer: Peter Harvey

Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas: October 1984
Director: Pat Brown
Actors: Robert Cornthwaite, Bruce Norris, Todd Duffey, Timothy Arrington, Paul C. Thomas, Cynthia Lammel
Set Designer: Michael Holt

Signature Theatre Company, New York City: October 1991
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Austin Pendleton, Garrison Phillips, Fred Burrell, Katina Cummings
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

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Democracy

Virginia Museum Repertory Theatre, Richmond, Virginia: February 1974 (premiere)
Director: Keith Fowler
Actors: Laurinda Barrett, Lynda Myles, Brooks Rogers, Mel Cobb
Set Designer: de Teel Patterson

Milwaukee Repertory Theatre: October 1975
Director: John Olon-Scrymgeour
Actors: Penelope Reed, Peggy Cowles, Daniel Mooney, Robert Lanchester, Josephine Nichols
Set Designer: R.H. Graham

Democracy and Esther (revised)

Triangle Theatre Co., New York City: October 1992 (New York premiere)
Director: Elisabeth Lewis Corley
Actors: Maureen Silliman, Kathleen Dennehy, John Woodson, Paul Urcioli
Set Designer: Bob Phillips

The Death of King Philip (opera)

New England Chamber Opera Group, All Saints Church, Brookline, Mass: April 1976 (text from Linney's play)
Composer: Paul Earls
Director: Rafael de Acha
Actor/Singers: Beverly Morgan, Kim Scown, Thomas Olsen, Jerrold Pope

The Death of King Philip (one-act)

Actors Theatre of Louisville: November 1983
Director: Ray Fry
Actors: Ann Shropshire, Deborah Hedwall, Federic Major, Michael Kevin
Set Designer: Paul Owen

The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks

HB Playwrights' Foundation, New York City: April 1971 (premiere)
Director: Herbert Berghof
Actors: William Prince, Wesley Addy, Baxter Harris

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American National Theatre and Academy, ANTA Theatre, New York City: February 1972
Director: John Berry
Actors: Robert Burr, Alan Mixon, Mercedes McCambridge, William Redfield, Jerome Dempsey
Set Designer: Douglas W. Schmidt

The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks (one-act)

Actors Theatre of Louisville: November 1984
Director: Frazier W. Marsh
Actors: Dorothy Holland, Lanny Flaherty, Sylvia Short, Dana Mills, Vaughn McBride
Set Designer: Paul Owen

Signature Theatre Company, New York City: May 1991
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Fred Burrell, Gordon G. Jones, Mary Jane Wells, Garrison Phillips, John Woodson, James Seymour
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

Old Man Joseph And His Family

Chelsea Theatre Center and the Colonnades Theatre Lab, New York City: January 1978 (premiere)
Director: Robert Kalfin
Actors: Lou Gilbert, Jacqueline Cassel, Peter Scolari, Louis Giambalvo
Set Designer: Carrie F. Robbins

City Players of St. Louis: June 1993
Director: Jeffrey Dent
Actors: Ralph Murphy, Elizabeth R. Brown, John Hatfield

Childe Byron

Virginia Museum Theatre, March 1977 (premiere)
Director: Keith Fowler
Actors: Jeremiah Sullivan, Marjorie Lerstrom
Set Designer: Sandro La Feria

Actors Theatre of Louisville: November 1979
Director: Jon Jory
Actors: Ken Jenkins, Susan Kingsley, Ann Pitoniak, Cynthia Judge
Set Designers: Kurt Wilhelm, Paul Owen

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Circle Repertory Company: February 1981 (premiere)
Director: Marshall W. Mason
Actors: William Hurt, Lindsay Crouse, Timothy Shelton
Set Designer: David Potts

South Coast Repertory Theatre, Costa Mesa, California: April 1981
Director: Martin Benson
Actors: John de Lancie, Megan Cole
Set Designer: Susan Tuohy

Young Vic, London: July 1981
Director: Frank Dunlop
Actors: David Essex, Sara Kestelman
Set Designer: Wanda Seets

Holy Ghosts

People's Light and Theatre Co., Philadelphia (transferred to **Ford's Theatre**, Washington, D.C: October/July 1980.
Director: John Loven
Actors: Michael McKee, Catherine MacNeal, Andy Backer, Murphy Guyer
Set Designer: James F. Pyne, Jr.

Alley Theatre, Houston: April 1983
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Cynthia Lemmel, Brandon Smith, Timothy Arrington, Blue Deckert, Bob Burrus, John Woodson
Set Designer: Keith Hein

Actors Theatre of Louisville: November 1983
Director: Patrick Tovatt
Actors: Katherine Borowitz, Dana Mills, Bob Burrus, Andy Backer
Set Designer: Paul Owen

San Diego Repertory Theatre (transferred to **Joyce Theatre (Theatre 890)**, New York City: June 1986/August 1987
Director: Douglas Jacobs
Actors: Diana Castle, Chiron Alston, W. Dennis Hunt, Ollie Nash, Priscilla Allen
Set Designer: D. Martyn Bookwalter

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Tennessee (one-act)

Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: November 1979.
Director: Anthony McKay
Actors: Melodie Somers, Stephen Hamilton, Lois Smith, Matthew Cowles
Set Designer: Brian Martin

The Captivity of Pixie Shedman

Phoenix Theatre of New York: January 1981 (premiere)
Director: John Pasquin
Actors: William Carden, Penelope Allen, Ron Randell, Jon DeVries, Leon Russom
Set Designer: Robert Blackman

Detroit Repertory Theatre: January 1982
Director: Barbara Busby
Actors: James Budd, Ruth Palmer, Robert Rucker, William Boswell, Willie Hodge
Set Designer: Bruce E. Millan

El Hermano (one-act)

Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: February 1981
Director: Pirie Mcdonald
Actors: Frank Girardau, Curtis Armstrong, Lisa Leguillou, Christina Sanjuan, Esai Morales
Set Designer: Brian Martin

F.M. (one-act)

Philadelpia Festival for New Plays: May 1982 (premiere)
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Nancy Franklin, Pamela Kneller, Christine Jenson, Leon Russom
Set Designer: Daniel P. Boylen

Signature Theatre Company, New York City: May, 1991
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Elizabeth Lewis Corley, Ann Sheehy, Scott Sowers, Adrienne Thompson
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

April Snow

South Coast Repertory, Costa Mesa, California: May 1983 (premiere)
Director: David Emmes
Actors: Scott Hylands, Jordan Charney, K Callan, Rhonda Aldrich, Brad Cowgill
Director: Dwight Richard Odle

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Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: May 1987
Director: David Marguiles
Actors: Harris Yulin, Lois Smith, Sarah Jessica Parker, Thomas Gibsn, Sam Schact, Joe Ponazecki
Set Designer: Lewis Folden

Two Legends (Soul Of A Tree and Why The Lord Come to Sand Mountain)

Philadelphia Festival Theater for New Plays: June 1984
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Sloane Shelton, Pirie McDonald, Leon Russom, Kari Jenson, Walter Rhodes
Set Designer: Phil Graneto

Laughing Stock (Goodbye, Howard, F.M., and Tennessee

Manhattan Punch Line Theatre, New York City: April 1984 (premiere)
Director: Ed Howard
Actors: Frances Sternhagen, Timothy Wilson, Jane Connell, Peggity Price, Helen Narrelson, Harold Guskin
Set Designer: Paul Bryan Eads

Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut: November 1987
Director: David Esbjornson
Actors: Frances Sternhagen, Sloane Shelton, Kathleen Chalfant, Thomas Copache, Richard Topol, Don Patrick Brady
Set Designer: Hugh Landwehr

A Woman Without A Name

Denver Center Theatre: October 1985 (premiere)
Director: Donovan Marley
Actors: Kathleen Chalfant, William Hardy, John Hutton, Dougald Park
Set Designer: Robert Blackman

The Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain, London: April 1987
Director: Michael Shipley
Actors: Carol Berlyne

Signature Theatre Company, New York City: February 1992
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Barbara Andres, Fred Burrell, Bernie McInerney, Peter G. Morse, Mark Niebuhr
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

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Sand Mountain (Sand Mountain Matchmaking and Why The Lord Come To Sand Mountain)

Whole Theatre Company, Montclair, New Jersey: February 1986
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: William Hardy, Kathleen Chalfant, Radley Nollins, Lee Savin
Set Designer:

City Players of St. Louis: July 1990
Director: Charlotte Voges
Actors: Gary Cunard, Ted Gregory, Jeffrey Dent, Shirley Waide, Bruce Collins
Set Designer: Theodore Roy

Pops (Can Can, Claire De Lune, Ave Maria, Gold And Silver Waltz, Yankee Doodle, and Songs of Love)

Whole Theatre Company, Montclair, New Jersey: October 1986 (premiere)
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Adrienne Thompson, Peter Toran, Robin Moseley, Sam Tsousouvas, Jane Cronin, William Hardy
Set Designer: Michael Miller

Heathen Valley

Philadelpia Festival for New Plays: May 1987 (premiere)
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: John David Cullum, James Maxwell, Thomas Kopache, Dan Patrick Brady, Kate Levy, Kathleen Chalfant
Set Designer: Eric Schaeffer

Milwaukee Repertory Theatre: February 1988
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Norman Moses, David Hurst, Albert Farrar, Steven J. Gefroh, Gabriella Farrar, Marie Mathay
Set Designer: Pat Doty

San Diego Repertory Theatre: September 1988
Director: Doug Jacobs
Actors: Tom Stephenson, Tavis Ross, Bill Dunnam, Bruce McKenzie, Daria Cash, Priscilla Allen
Set Designer: D. Martyn Bookwalter

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Theatre For The New City, New York City: December 1988
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Jim Ligon, Scott Sowers, Robert Hock, James Houghton, Julie Pollansbee, Ann Sheehy
Set Designer: Mark Marcante

Signature Theatre Company, New York City: December 1991
Directors: Romulus Linney and James Houghton
Actors: Jim Ligon, Scott Sowers, Ann Sheehy, Peter G. Morse
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

Juliet (one-act)

Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: July 1988
Director: Peter Maloney
Actors: Thomas Gibson, Sam Schacht, Robin Mosely, Lois Smith
Set Designer: Ann Sheffield

Yancy (one-act)

Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: March 1988
Director: David Shookhoff
Actors: Victor Slezak, Don Patrick Brady, Lisa Maurer
Set Designer: Ann Sheffield

Three Poets (Komache, Hrosvitha, and Akhmatova)

Theater for the New City, New York City: November 1989 (premiere)
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Kathleen Chalfant, Adrienne Thompson, Scott Sowers, Mary Fosket, John MacKay
Set Designer: Anne C. Patterson

Wilma Theater, Philadelphia: May 1991
Director: Blanka Zizka
Actors: Derek Meader, Penelope Milford, Bonnie Burgess, Kenny Gold
Set Designer: Anne C. Patterson

Unchanging Love

Milwaukee Repertory Theater: October 1988 (premiere, under the title Precious Memories)
Director: John Dillon
Actors: Tom McDermott, Marie Mathay, Catherine Lynn Davis, Norman Moses, James Pickering, Amy Malloy
Set Designer: Roy Arcenas

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Repertory Theatre of St. Louis: January 1990
Director: John Dillon
Actors: Tom McDermott, Catherine Lynn Davis, David Warshofsky, Gordon C. Jones, Jan Leslie Harding, Jacqueline Knapp
Set Designer: Carolyn L. Ross

Studio Theatre, Washington D.C.: January 1991
Director: Edward Morgan
Actors: Bill Grimmette, Janey Richards, Carla Hargrove, Carter Jahncke, Constance Fowlkes, Peter McKenzie
Set Designer: James Kronzer

Triangle Theatre Company, New York City: February 1991
Director: John Dillon
Actors: Tom McDermott, T. Cat Ford, Gordon C. Jones, Fred Burrell, Jacqueline Knapp, Scott Sowers, Jennifer Parsons, Elizabeth Lewis Corley
Set Designer: Steven Perry

2

Actors Theatre of Louisville: March 1990 (premiere)
Director: Thomas Bullard
Actors: William Duff-Griffin, Ray Fry, Bob Burrus, David Kimball, Scott Sowers
Set Designer: Paul Owen

Williamstown Theatre Festival, Williamstown, Massachusetts: August 1992
Director: Thomas Bullard
Actors: William Duff-Griffin, Bernie Mcinerney, David Chandler, John Woodson, Scott Sowers, Laurie Kennedy

Primary Stages, New York City: May 1995
Director: Thomas Bullard
Actors: Clarence Felder, Matthew Lewis, Peter Ashton Wise, Laurie Kennedy
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

Tonight We Love (one-act, also titled Songs of Love)

Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: May 1990
Director: John Stix
Actors: Adrienne Thompson, Phyllis Somerville, Stephen Hamilton, Baxter Harris, Hope Cameron, Emmett O'Sullivan-Moore
Set Designer: Linda Giering Balmuth

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Can Can (one-act)

Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: May 1991
Director: David Shookhoff
Actors: Hope Davis, T. Cat Ford, Cass Morgan, Scott Sowers
Set Designer: David K. Gallo

Ambrosio

Signature Theatre Company, New York City: April 1992 (premiere)
Directors: Romulus Linney and James Houghton
Actors: Peter Ashton Wise, Marin Hinkle, T. Ryder Smith, Jacquelin Bertrand, Mark Alan Gordon, Craig Duncan, Garrison Phillips
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

Milwaukee Repertory Theatre: January 1993
Director: John Dillon
Actors: Daniel Mooney, James De Vita, Catherine Lynn Davis, Tom Blair, Rose Pickering, Richard Halverson
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

Spain (Torquemada and Anna Rey)

Theater for the New City, New York City: April 1993
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: Frank Anderson, Peter Ashton Wise, Fred Burrell, T. Cat Ford, Mary Beth Peil, Michael Burrell, Russel Lunday
Set Designer: Mark Marcante

Shotgun

Actors Theatre of Louisville: February 1994
Director: Thomas Bullard
Actors: Tom Stechschulte, Michael Kevin, Jeanne Paulsen, Bob Burrus, Gloria Cromwell
Set Designer: Paul Owen

Paradise (one-act, as part of Up)

Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York City: May 1994
Director: Christopher A. Smith
Actors: Lois Smith, David Eisenberg, Sheri Matteo, Gretchen Walther
Set Designer: Michael Allen

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True Crimes

Theatre for the New City, New York City: December 1995
Director: Romulus Linney
Actors: David Johnson, Heather Melton, Cheryl Haas, Christine Parks, Daniel Martin, Fred Burrell, Rebecca Harris, Mark Alan Gordon
Set Designer: E. David Cosier

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