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The Marriage between Fury and Fervor: An analysis of the performance FURY, as part of the Senior Project Theater Festival, Inferno

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THE MARRIAGE BETWEEN FURY AND FERVOR:

An analysis of the performance *FURY*, part of the Senior Project Theater Festival, *Inferno*

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of the Arts

of Bard College

by

Michael Anna Gray

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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The Proposal

We cannot understand freedom without the concept of restraint. In the spring of 2015, the senior theater class of 2016 was dealt unexpected cards that required us to collaborate in order to produce a performance set on the Luma stage in the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts and receive professional support from the entire Theater & Performance Department. *Inferno*, the senior theater project festival we conceptualized under those restrictions, including my collaborative senior project titled *FURY*, was an attempt at attaining a sense of deliverance under a new form of directive. It was an ambitious endeavor for us to place trust in each other, 20 seniors as a collective determined to produce *Inferno* as a large theater marathon. Even Dante Alighieri himself cautioned us with his most famous line from the entrance to hell his *Inferno*, “Abandon all hope, you who enter here.”¹ However deep this seeped into my peers’ veins and guided them through the entrance and down to the depths of hell, hope was my personal guiding force. I held onto hope as a force for bridging the gap between the ancient and the present, hope for a congruent collaborative company, to conquer fears, to climb towards heavenly pleasure in the hollows of hell, hope to represent a sliver of my fiery heart on stage.

To form a giant company of seniors in a Bachelor of Arts program at Bard was something no graduating theater majors had done in my time and at anytime to my knowledge. Thus, we shifted history slightly and created a giant festival informed and inspired by the source text *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri. Bard alums, professors, staff, and students often speak of a common language established by a shared experience at Bard. I voted yes for *Inferno* as our source text because it was one of my favorite required pieces of literature that was ingrained in all Bard

¹ Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Translated by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000. III, 9. 47.

students during First Year Seminar, the course encapsulating the genesis of the shared “Bard language.” It is a text ancient enough to unite an audience and studied enough in our time at Bard to elicit excitement and engagement with the material.

With a giant umbrella of seniors with whom we could huddle under through the storm ahead, the next step in the process was to divide into smaller subsections of co-collaborators for each given senior project. The method we used to determine which circle of hell we would undertake and who our collaborators would be was primarily based on which circle excited us most on an individual artistic level. In an important meeting on March 4, 2015, Aleah Black, Cullan Powers, and I discovered a shared passion in creating an aesthetic grounded in nature and physicality. Coming to this meeting after rereading Dante’s *Inferno*, Circle V (Anger) stood out to us all as the circle of hell with material that frightened yet excited us the most. Within the world of Circle V is a story of Dante and Virgil paddling a skiff over the raging River Styx, filled with the angry dead convulsing at the surface and sullenly sinking beneath.² The potent, toxic, instinctive, animalistic, emotional, physical, and suppressed layers of anger burst out from the page and needed breath to give it life on stage. Until grappling with my senior project theme, anger was an emotion that was almost foreign to me; I continuously distanced myself from angry people and diffused most anger in myself. However, I wanted a challenging senior project ever since entering this college and I realized that my fear of and ignorance with rage could ultimately help fuel the project. Aleah, Cullan, and I shared similar experiences with anger, never letting the emotion fully take hold of significant events in our lives. Our curiosity and eagerness to dissect such an extremely volatile yet consistent occurrence in human nature brought us together. I had only met Cullan that spring semester in 2015, after having studied abroad my junior fall

² Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Translated by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000. VII-VIII.

semester, and I had little experience working closely with Aleah, but both individuals had intrigued me as artists and people. Thus, we were all excited to paddle our skiff into uncharted territory together.

The first month of meetings with the three of us consisted mostly of sharing stories about our lives and our relation to anger, discussing in depth the questions we wanted to explore, and learning how to navigate a structurally sound system of collaboration. Our proposal to the Theater & Performance Department explained that we desired equal roles as co-creators but it was mostly a compilation of unanswered questions. We set out to explore questions that would grapple with a long and expansive history of anger. What makes people angry? When should anger be accepted? Is anger punishable? What kind of anger is boiling to the surface in the world currently? In what ways can we cope with anger in a world that can be quite wrathful? How is anger expressed by different species and in different environments? How do we ignite the audience or current society with genuine anger?

Questioning has been an active theme in my time at Bard. Since my first exposure to its intellectual and creative culture, I've been instructed and encouraged to question everyone and everything and I certainly exercise this style of learning with philosophy, literature, and in classroom discussions. Playwriting professor, Jorge Cortinas, sparked my artistic questioning in my freshman year Introduction to Playwriting course. He repeatedly pleaded us to write plays that would ask the unanswerable. Since that class, I have agreed that asking questions with ambiguous or impossible answers leads to projects with potency and power. The unknown and our proposed unanswerable questions steered our skiff onward. The question that continuously cycled through conversation and one that we organically attempted to answer was: does fury ever subside?

The Engagement

Upon approval of our collaborative proposal, Aleah Black, Cullan Powers, and I began to naturally give our individual strengths to the project to engage with each other and the material to achieve the most sustainable relationship. Although I enjoyed devising pieces prior to senior project, I was most accustomed to a traditional production style, beginning with a script. One principle that the three of us agreed upon early in the process was that we did not want to use Dante's text word for word but rather focus on creating a language loosely based on Circle V, primarily rooted in rage. By overcoming my discomfort without text to use on stage, I began my individual research by reading not only scripts but also almost anything written about anger. I read 50-year-old New York Times articles, online medical journals depicting prescribed stages of anger, part of a book I discovered in the library titled *Islam & The Divine Comedy* by Asin Palacois, etc. There is an inverse pattern that emerged from the order of acquiring influential research and the three acts in the structure of our final production, *FURY*. Through many late night discussions and meetings, we created a collective theory based on life and death in space/time and the ether, respectively. We were interested in exploring not just a hellscape but also a conceptual, heavenly space and the reality of life. Thus we divided our play into three significant sections, each distinct in quality and content:

1. Pre-Life // Location: Womb, Water, Heaven // Time: Fluid
2. Life // Location: Home (Kitchen, Playroom, Bathroom) // Time: Real
3. Post Life // Location: Hell // Time: Immortal, Cyclical, Unending

Research played a major role in each section. My first significant discovery in the researching process were the Furies, who ended up being our guiding force and thus, we placed

them primarily in the climax and last section of our play, in our Post Life hell. Next, John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* and the "Angry Young Men" movement in British drama influenced our middle section, Life set in domestic time and space. Finally, Christian art, specifically Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* and the Pietà came to us in our search for representation of the first act in *FURY*, our heavenly Pre-Life section.

Thus, I shall begin at the beginning of our research and at the end of the play. Over the summer of 2015, I read and reread Circle V of Dante's *Inferno*. Specific images like the oar slicing through the angry bodies in the River Styx or lines like, "The eternal fire that burns inside them here in the nether Hell makes them show red, as you can see," were so compelling to me.³ In addition to those images, there were three characters that really roped me in as a creator. In early September, I came to a meeting with Aleah and Cullan bursting with excitement over my research on the three Furies.

The Furies, or Erinyes as they are also known in ancient mythology, are introduced by Dante as one of the many obstacles that must be overcome in order to continue his journey into the depths of hell. They present the threat of calling upon Medusa to turn into stone anyone who looks at the Gordon, and they produce grave conflict in Circle V.⁴ Although their presence in *Inferno* is brief, their figures are shaped more sharply in other historical and dramatic texts. In Aeschylus's final part of *The Oresteia* trilogy, *The Eumenides*, the Furies torment the protagonist Orestes with their incessant rage and are depicted more clearly as three individual creatures: Megaera, Alecto, and Tisiphone.

³ Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Translated by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000. VIII, 73. 153.

⁴ Ibid.

Megaera, “child of night and evil missionary” is known as the Fury of jealous rage.⁵ Like an apparition in a child’s dream, she can shrink from a serpent to a small bird whose “fatal shrieking” shares the song of an evil omen.⁶ The themes of youth, instinctive song, and jealous rage greatly influenced the character that I played in our final performance, Megan in human form and Megaera as the collective devised creature. Next, Alecto, Fury of endless rage, “with her blue-gray hair, glides on between breasts and dress, breathes its viper breath into her frenzy.”⁷ The ceaselessness of Alecto’s poisonous rage inspired Cullan Power’s character, Alex, a troubled father in human flesh, and Alecto as the joint demon in *FURY*. Finally, Tisiphone, the Fury of righteousness, is depicted as such by Aeschylus:⁸

“The avenger, armed with whips;
She leaps upon the guilty, lashing them;
In her left hand she grips her gruesome vipers
And calls her savage company of sisters.”⁹

Tisiphone spearheads her two sisters with the type of rage that combats the guilty, immoral, and sinful. Aleah performed the character Tiffany, a righteous mother, and her collective ensemble of Tisiphone Fury bodies. Together Megaera, Alecto, and Tisiphone form a single fierce and furious force, the Erinyes. Thus these Furies became our triangular foundation upon which the performance of Circle V (Anger) was built.

The revelation that the Furies had to be the characters to ignite the flames of fury in our play lead us to the question how we would make these characters grand and powerful. Although

⁵ Aeschylus. *Aeschylus II. The Orestia. The Eumenides*. Edited by David Green. Translated by Richmond Lattimore. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2013. XII,1124.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. VII, 431.

⁸ Advameg, Inc. "Furies." *Myths Encyclopedia*. Last modified 2016. <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Fi-Go/Furies.html>.

⁹ Aeschylus. *Aeschylus II. The Orestia. The Eumenides*. Edited by David Green. Translated by Richmond Lattimore. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2013. VI, 755.

we were well aware it would present many challenges, Aleah, Cullan, and I wanted to have a large ensemble to produce a sense of monumental ferocity in the Fury characters. Throughout our exciting and extensive casting process, we were lucky enough to assemble an extraordinary ensemble of 15 Bard students. Although two of them had to drop out early in the process due to personal reasons, we were able to place our trust in 13 performers who filled in the gaps and generated a most passionate presence as the Furies for our final performances. Aleah, Cullan, and I began the rehearsal process in December 2015 by individually leading rehearsals with our smaller three Fury armies representing Megaera, Alecto, and Tisiphone, each consisting of four to five cast members.

My group consisted of the talented and good-natured Aniya Picou, Brigid Boll, Miles Messinger, and Sam Harmann who devised and collaborated under my guidance to create the character Megaera, the Fury of jealousy. This was my first experience as a director of a devised group, outside of a classroom setting. It was a challenge for me not only because I view myself primarily as a performer but also because I had to be both an outside eye and a body on stage. I lead my army into battle with methods I've learned by building community at Bard as a Peer Counselor and leader on campus. With compassion and care towards them as human beings before all else, I was able to build trust and honest communication within the group in a personal and professional manner. Inspired by the Queen, Jack Ferver, we would begin each rehearsal with a check-in by going around in a circle sharing something about how we were feeling physically and emotionally that minute, day, week, etc. It is a tactic that can elicit a simple summary or an honest spew of emotions shared within a group, fostering understanding and support throughout any given rehearsal. Together, we answered complex questions as a group, we wrote, we burned our deepest sins in a fire, we finger-painted, we danced, we sang, we

laughed, and cried. We had the pleasure to play and transform only because our early rehearsals were build upon our true selves. Without creating caricatures or stereotypes of ourselves, together we formed a verisimilitude creature based on archetypes and individuality.

Without an explicitly clear route for the Furies to follow until our script was finished about a month before the show, there was a lot of room for exploration and moments that were never used. However the material we decided to use was heavily based on the physicality, language, and desires that the group presented to me and with me in early rehearsals. My inspiration for Megaera specifically, came from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, "Scales new, budding out, black and gray, tongue began to split in two and speech did fail, snakish heads grew crests and were into very dragons turned."¹⁰ With jealous rage as our guiding light, we gravitated towards animalistic movement, like the snake depicted in Ovid's character, Megaera. One day off the cuff, Cullan introduced me to a video online called NOWHERE by Dimitris Papaioannou, a dance piece dedicated to the memory of Pina Bausch.¹¹ This bodily language involving snake-like arm and hand gestures greatly influenced the movement in Megaera's section of Hell. In contrast, I wanted the text to invoke the world of Dante in the most playful, childlike way. Therefore, the text for our section came from an exploration of modes of communication and levels of English comprehension in children. If you have never had the pleasure of asking a young child to share a joke, you should. It always results in the most hilarious, engaging, and nonsensical "jokes." Bad Kid Jokes is an online example of a compilation of jokes reflective of the ones I have witness with such joy. For example, one of Sam Harmann's lines was inspired by a Bad Kid Joke and devised with my group as a collective. In the performance of *FURY*, in a

¹⁰ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by Aurthur Golding. N.p.: Macmillan Company, 1567. 105

¹¹ Papaioannou, Dimitris. "NOWHERE." *Vimeo*. Last modified 2009. Accessed 2014. <https://vimeo.com/100021239>.

moment of playing a slightly skewed version of hide and seek, Sam tells his joke, “What is the biggest thing than god? One time I saw three dogs.”¹² Building text for the Megaera Fury was a collective process of breaking down conventional storytelling and structure while at the same time, using phrases and images marginally relevant to the Fury Megaera and Circle V of *Inferno* at large. Overall, my experience of bridging the gap between the ancient beings and contemporary cast members was challenging, fascinating, and rewarding. Like a psychology experiment, we discovered a great deal about human nature, evolution, and early developmental stages through simplistic prompts given by me as a directorial deviser and through my cast’s ever inspiring dedication and eagerness to generate material.

As I was organizing and running rehearsals with my Fury, Aleah and Cullan were spearheading the direction of their Furies, until Cullan stepped down in December as a creative leader in the process. The three of us seniors had each placed an engagement ring in our minds symbolizing our commitment to each other and the project in the Spring of 2015, and Cullan had simply gotten cold feet. When a foundation is on fire, it is natural for heat to rise. However, our structure was sound. Aleah and I compressed the heat just between us in private and didn’t let it affect the rest of our cast emotionally. However jolting his creative departure was felt by the whole cast, it turned out that Aleah and I could pull our focus together in a much more efficient manner. With her extensive experience and confidence as a director, Aleah took over as a directorial role for Cullan’s Fury, Alecto to catch them up to the other two Furies’ progress. The shift in leadership resulted in fast paced creative decisions about the overall structure of our piece but also specifically with each Fury. In a guided conversation with our cast, Aleah and I were able to solidify our research and devised material about each Fury together. In our first

¹² Tumblr. "Biggest Thing." *Bad Kid Jokes*. Last modified November 25, 2015.
<http://badkidsjokes.tumblr.com/>.

rehearsal upon returning from a long winter break, with one month left before the show, we wrote out clear characteristics and traits for each world of the Furies and gave them to the cast to add to, question, explore, and embody.

MEGAERA <i>Mikey, Aniya, Brigid, Miles, Sam</i>	TISIPHONE <i>Aleah, Alex, Amanda, Ariel, Fran, Isabel</i>	ALECTO <i>Cullan, Elise, Evan, Jared, Lily</i>
Fury of Jealousy	Fury of Righteousness	Fury of Endless Rage
Child//Young	Mother//Old	Father//Old
Yellow	Red	Blue
Wind Instruments	String Instruments	Drums
Synchronized	Individuality	Primal
Snake, Spiders, Bees	Owl, Snapping Turtle, Dragon	Hulk
Inarticulate, Sing-Song	Disjointed Vocals	Screamo Sh** Opera
Daring, Coy	Socialized	Savage
External Awareness	Heady	Addictive
Impulsive	Wise, Intellectual	Black Hole
Quick Turns	Self Righteous	Vacuum
Control	Pride	Brewing, Boiling
Pure, Calm	Paradoxical	Quake
Web	Passive Aggressive	No Outlet

This template was not only a tool to help solidify acting choices; it was also a way for us to translate our design ideas to our cast. Our sound design was all music we knew, loved, made, or found to enhance the world of each Fury and the play as a whole. Our brilliant lighting designer, Jason Boyd lit up our design ideas with a spectacle of the primary colors, yellow, blue, and red, which represented each of the three Furies, climaxing to a wash of red, a universal tone for anger. These three colors were brightly reflected in the costumes of characters Megan, Alex, and Tiffany while the color palate of our ensemble of Furies was collectively ashy gray and burnt darkness symbolizing their time in hell and the physical

effects of the heat of hate and rage. As an example of the effectiveness of our design, when Megan, in an all yellow costume, was killed and introduced to the world of her Fury in hell, the audience perceived my yellow costume as camouflage in a stage flooded with yellow lights. This smokescreen effect with the primary colors made each human character appear to be enveloped by their respective creatures clothed in a grayscale. Since we had determined that each Fury's goal was to engulf the mundane discretely angry human characters, Megan, Alex, and Tiffany into their form as the raging Fury, Megaera, Alecto, and Tisiphone, respectively, the template of traits also helped clarify the distinctions and similarities between the Furies. It also created a stunning theatrical finale to our performance. Like a hurricane bringing with it the most ferocious flood after a drought, we hoped this mass of angry creatures would surprise the audience after a time and space of normalcy and naturalism.

Moving forward a few thousand years in historical research, while in a search to read more contemporary scripts surrounding anger, I discovered the book *The Angry Theater* by John Russell Taylor. In his compelling description about the evolution of British theater, Taylor described an era around the 1950's consisting of British playwrights and novelists producing the bulk of their passionate works. These writers were, fairly, coined "Angry Young Men."¹³ This phenomenon of upper-middle class men expressing their anger through writing was at once humorous to me and deeply influential to the greater development of contemporary drama. It irritated me that this seemingly powerful group of men filled with angst and anger became famous over plays that remain controversial with feminism and general morality today. At the same time, Angry Young Men playwrights assisted in the rapid advancement of naturalism, a form of theater that continues to prevail in prominent theaters in the Western world. Naturalistic theater has an important role in society because it is realistic and relatable

¹³ Taylor, John Russell. *The Angry Theater*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1962. 39.

to audiences of the middle to upper classes and others who can afford theater tickets. Because I was fortunate enough to bear witness to and participate in naturalistic theatrical experiences from an early age, I have always held a place for it in my heart. There are plays where naturalism blossoms naturally, like black humor for example. Unfortunately, the naturalism produced by the Angry Young Men were, in general, a savage (Angry), often ignorant (Young) portrayals of the “natural” order and hierarchy of the world at the time (Men). Thus, their name.

Among these tempered youth were British playwrights like Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker, and John Osborne. According to *The Angry Theater*, “To John Osborne belongs the praise (or the blame) of starting it all off ... the first of the angry young men and arguably the biggest shock to the system of British theater since the advent of Shaw.”¹⁴ As a leader of this movement of works, his play *Look Back In Anger* was brutal yet crucial. In a narrative between the husband and wife couple, Jimmy and Alison, playwright John Osborne makes a comment about the perceived inherent roles within a common household in Britain around the 1950’s. “Once Jimmy gets going [in the battle of the sexes, his rhetoric] generates its own force and conviction; those around him put up with him and listen entranced instead of briskly telling him to shut up and not be so silly, and his very real personal dynamism and magnetism come over to the audience as they do to the other characters on stage.”¹⁵ There is a lot of explicit rage in Jimmy’s lines that not only shocks Alison, but also most readers or audiences of today. However, Alison has moments of sullen anger especially when reflecting upon their fiery status as husband and wife who, together, slowly but surely burn their domestic life to ashes. After physically being scorched in a dispute involving her husband and a hot iron, she says,

¹⁴ Taylor, John Russell. *The Angry Theater*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1962. 45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 44.

“I keep looking back, as far as I remember, and I can’t think what it was to feel young, really young. Jimmy said the same thing to me the other day. I pretended not to be listening- because I knew that would hurt him, I suppose. And- of course- he got savage, like tonight. But I knew just what he meant. I suppose it would have been so easy to say, ‘Yes darling, I know just what you mean. I know what you’re feeling.’ It’s those easy things that seem to be so impossible with us.”¹⁶

I wanted to mirror not only this young angry playwright’s style but also his image of a relationship between two characters caught in an unpleasant brewing quarrel over the simple things.

Aleah and I spent a good deal of winter break writing, sending each other drafts, revising, and rewriting our domestic Life scene. This experience of playwriting was unlike any other due to its specific restrictions of time, space, objects within the space, with the objective of sticking to naturalism, and collaborating as writers. I sent the first draft, and she sent a second that we ended up tweaking to ensure for a more effective climax. What intrigued me artistically about *Look Back in Anger* were the moments of rage rumbling beneath the surface. Therefore, Aleah and I played with the mundane of domestic life as a mask to cover up jealous, endless, and righteous rage. In our performance of *FURY*, Cullan’s character, Alex, gives the most vague excuse for a brief gesture of fury. After hitting his wife Tiffany in an unexpected and senseless fit of rage, Alex says, “I’m so sorry. Just, that asshole Steve got the promotion today and the New York branch called and apparently they don’t like the last test batch we sent, and there was that stupid protest on Main Street so traffic was hell.”¹⁷ Each character utilized monotonous defenses to distract from their hellish reality. Aleah and I placed Alex, Tiffany, and their child, Megan in America in the 1960s making it so that the content and language was realistic and contemporary enough to still be relatable to an audience spanning

¹⁶ Osborne, John. *Look Back In Anger*. New York, NY: Penguin Plays, 1957. 28.

¹⁷ Please refer to attached *FURY* script beginning on page i.

from peers to parents. The device of displaying realism with surrealism, drama with melodrama, is something I hope to continue to work with in the future. For it is my opinion that there is a lot of avant-garde work today in the theatrical world that has only a vague hook or grounding in the real, to such an extent that the surreal cannot be appreciated or fully absorbed without it's dichotomy present. I am interested in a lot of the experimental art that has been presented to me at Bard and how it has inspired a lot of the art created by Bard students. However, I believe that most of the theater I've seen at Bard can appear more entertaining than it is engaging with material that is connected to human nature. At the very least, there needs to be space for the audience to settle, to absorb an unfamiliar world, wherever and however absurd it may be. This space can be created in multiple ways, not just with realism, and a calm control and sense of composure can arise at multiple moments within a given piece of theater.

As part of our Pre-Life scene in our opening sequence, we allowed time and space to settle in a movement like a calm swell of water. We got a great deal of feedback about the calm before the storm, the reference to the river Styx, the watery birth of the characters and the company in our opening sequence and how it put multiple audience members at ease. Especially considering that the audience had been thrown into the vastly different worlds of each play before us within the *Inferno* Senior Project Theater Festival, we wanted to create peace within our piece. We were not interested in rage fueling more rage, instead what we thought would be the more interesting choice was anger deriving from at least presentable peace. Aleah's knowledge of the ancient world sparked the beginning section of our play to life. In an attempt to introduce our work to the audience in a heavenly atmosphere, we commented on some classic Christian art, Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* and the Pietà. In the creation sequence, we established a family structure, father, mother, and child, through

slow absurdist movement with recognizable tableaux of Christian art, depicting our own ideas of a silly yet soothing heaven. Our first blackout left the audience giggling and motivated for the realism that came next. With soft and subdued humor, we gave the audience space to breathe before jumping into the kitchen sink drama, into our Fury sections, and finally into the lobby and outside the theater where we performed the kitchen sink drama and Fury section sped up, repeatedly burning brighter and brighter, hotter and stronger. This cycle of rage that extended beyond the stage was just the beginning of the heat we wanted to bestow upon our audience once leaving a theater space set in hell. Audience members were able to find themselves lost in a tranquil yet troubled world.

The Ceremony

The ceremony of *FURY* was performed for a total of approximately 90 minutes for the entire weekend of the festival. Fervor and Fury were present in me but never muddled my relationship with the workspace. Thank God we never left the honeymoon phase.

Till Death Do Us Part Again and Again and Again

In the end, there was a sense of mutual divorce from the product, knowing that we would all be committing to other artistic matrimonies in the future. The preparation, the performance, the processing were all positive, it was just systemic anger that persisted. When I made the promise to Aleah and the process, the vow from the department was not upheld in all the ways I had dreamed. The week of our performance, we were dealt more unexpected cards informing us that the shows were all sold out, before most of our family and friends were able to get tickets. Why did the house size shrink for a giant festival being produced by 20 seniors? Where were the

seats for my peers to see my culminating 25 minutes of work as a theater artist? I understand we were given resources we may never again receive in our lifetime as artists. We have been graced with such good fortune at a school that provides for us in a multitude of ways that I'm sure I've never even fully realized. But when I sit in one of our first production meetings for the Senior Project Theater Festival and am told that I will receive professional support and they expect us to be professional throughout the process, I hold high expectations for myself as well as the establishment. Fighting for tickets for our direct relatives during show week is not a professional way to treat any artist. (And honestly, I didn't make this art for my parents; I made it for my peers, for the multitude of my friends existing outside of the theater department who share the wonderful Bard language.) I felt like I gave every ounce of professionalism I had to offer and simply didn't receive the fullness of that respect in return. It's the only part of the process that's left a truly bad taste in my mouth. Perhaps though, it was productive preparation for the real world. In general, the audience members who were able to attend the Senior Project Theater Festival consisted of fellow theater majors and makers, theater professors, and upper-middle class families who were able to travel far and wide to attend. It led me to question what kind of audience is expected in American theater today. Does today's audience truly consist of an insular community of artist, creators, educators, enthusiast, and people who can afford the ever-rising prices of theater tickets? This doesn't feel right or fair or accessible in any way.

However, this was my only real qualm with my senior project and it ironically reflected the type of systemic anger found in couples of marital or legal status, the thematic material we used in *FURY* to depict domestic and bureaucratic anger. But my departmental frustration was the only spout of real anger I experienced throughout the entire process. Regardless, at the end of every play there is always a small ceremonial divorce from the process and the people.

My partnership with Aleah Black was the best marriage of two minds. Through the originally perceived restriction of collaboration, we found freedom together, balancing each other out and pushing each other to new levels. She is an absolutely incredible human being, offering an exuberant amount of insight and energy to any and every artistic process. She consistently takes risks, challenges thought, is always one step ahead of the crowd, and yet she soothes any assemblage with her extraordinary care and compassion. I will forever hold the lessons that she taught me dear to my heart. Her confidence and knowledge that charms and excites the multitude is something I aspire to pass along to whatever project I lead next in life. With deep fervor, we were able to attack fury together.

I feel proud of my collective accomplishments with Aleah, spearheading my first directorial experience, taking on a stage manager-like position in addition to my other roles within the rehearsal room, collaboratively writing a coherent, naturalistic, yet experimental script, cultivating a large company and community of devisers, creating a concise and congruent sound, lighting, and set design, asking deep and difficult questions, devising with brilliant Bard students, and having the pleasure to play. I hope to continue to strengthen my ability to direct a large group, to be an outside eye while also being on the inside, to write more freely yet efficiently, and to propose further acting challenges in future projects. My cast helped me through every moment of the process, challenging ideas, supporting me personally, reinforcing my work, and creating an environment onstage and off that was completely compassionate and enjoyable. The process of separating from a play and a collective is always difficult emotionally but also therapeutic and extremely productive as an artist.

Overall, I've learned that the people are the process. I was so extremely grateful for all that was given and the people who wholeheartedly offered themselves to our vision and the work

at large. The people do not only consist of the ones at the conception of an idea but those in the audition room, rehearsal room, production meetings, the box office, the environmental service workers maintaining the building, and those outside this Bard bubble who were willing to talk through the project with me. This is the reason I love theater, it is an art form intrinsically in collaboration between humans. However, the human beings in the process should never be contained to just the creators. Theater cannot sustain itself without an audience eager to play its role. I have ideas for future projects involving the audience and hope to strengthen my appreciation and involvement with those who sit opposite that fated fourth wall. I hope to join in holy matrimony with many more projects with my whole heart. I hope to continue this cycle of performance ceremonies to enhance my role in society as an artist, a mind and body in motion, a collaborator with all.

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FURY

by

Aleah Black and Michael Anna Gray

The world premier of *FURY* occurred on February 26, 2016 as part of the Senior Project Theater Festival, *Inferno*, at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Bard College.

Created by Aleah Black '16 and Michael Anna Gray '16

In collaboration with Cullan Powers '16 and the entire company:

Alexander..... Cullan Powers '16
The Fury: Alecto..... Elise Alexander '19
..... Evan Crommett '16
..... Lily Cummings '18
..... Jared Hester '16

Megan..... Mikey Gray '16
The Fury: Megaera..... Brigid Boll '17
..... Sam Harmann '19
..... Miles Messinger '18
..... Aniya Picou '18

Tiffany..... Aleah Black '16
The Fury: Tisiphonë.... Isabel Bennett '17
.... Franchesca Chorengel '18
.... Ariel Gillooly '17
.... Amanda Houser '18
.... Alex Koditschek '17

Jean Wagner, Advisor

Scene 1**State of Being: Pre-Life****Location: Utero, Womb, Water, Heaven****Time: Fluid**

[The stage is dark and quiet. There is a pause, silence. For a moment, a quiet swell of ocean sounds. Then, it too is gone. A spotlight, with a great hum, wakes and floods the up left corner of a stage with a hot, white, tiny circle of light. A noise in the dark. Wheels moving. A band of grimy misfits slowly pushes a piano into the pool of light and huddles around it. Following them a mother. She sits at the piano, turns and gives the audience a wide-eyed, impenetrable look, turns back, and begins to play a slow, melody-less music box tune.]

[Out of the darkness, from opposite sides of the space, begins to emerge two shapes. The lights begin to fade in and out, wet and warm ocean light. A mass of primordial blue and green. A troupe of misfits on both sides of the stage, each carries a figure. On the far right a child. On the far left a father.]

[They move slowly as the liters approach each other, as if in a dream, a trance, the womb. Underneath them, the misfits are a bubbling primordial stew, something waiting to be born. The music swells. The two are almost touching when the child is gently carried to her mother's arms down center stage. Then a great pause as the Furies land in a shape.]

[The lights go out.]

Scene 2**State of being: Life****Location: Home [Playroom, Kitchen, Bathroom]****Time: Fall 1964, America**

[Three spotlights up, and the sound of water running. In the center spotlight, a kitchen sink and a MOTHER, Tiffany. In the stage right spotlight, CHILD, Megan, bouncing on a mini trampoline. In the stage left spotlight, FATHER, Alex, reading a newspaper and sitting on a toilet.]

MOTHER

Honey?

[No response.]

Honey?

[No response.]

Hon -

FATHER

- Yes?

MOTHER

Did you leave the water running again?

FATHER

What?

MOTHER

Did you leave the water running?

FATHER

I can't hear you, the water is running.

MOTHER

Can you turn it off please?

[FATHER makes no effort to move, focus glued to his paper.]

FATHER

Uh huh.

MOTHER

Sweetheart dinner is in 10.

FATHER

Oh I was running a bath.

MOTHER

Can it wait till after dinner?

FATHER

The water will get cold.

MOTHER

So will dinner.

[Pause. He stands up angrily, pulls his pants up, and turns off the water. The sound stops.]

MOTHER (CONT.)

Thank you!

[He grunts, walks into the space, the full lights come up. He goes to kiss her cheek. She pulls away. Neither of them mention it.]

MOTHER

So how was work?

CHILD
Mom!

FATHER
Well, fine I suppose.

MOTHER
Just fine?

CHILD
Mama!

FATHER
Yes, fine.

MOTHER
Wasn't today supposed to be the big /

CHILD
/ MOM!

FATHER
Megan / get in here right now!

MOTHER
/ Sweetie give us a second.

CHILD
Oh! Dad I didn't know you were home!

FATHER
Were you playing on the tramp in the house?

CHILD	MOTHER
No.	Yes.

MOTHER (CONT.)
She was but I don't really see what the big / deal is with her playing in the house.

FATHER
She's going to break something. / Besides, the office is enough of a shit show // that I don't need
that kind of thing happening when I get back.

CHILD

/ I won't! I'm not going to break anything.

[Child sings "shit show" quietly.]

MOTHER

// Language please.

[A timer goes off.]

Hon can you please move I need to get to the oven.

FATHER

Did you even hear me Tiffany?

MOTHER

I just don't want to burn the roast. /

FATHER

/ Tiff

MOTHER

I heard you. But Alex please move.

CHILD

[Sing song.]

The office is a shit show.

MOTHER

Language

FATHER

Megan, outside!

[She pushes his shoulder slightly.]

MOTHER

Alex, move!

[The father lashes out and slaps the mother in frustration. The scene freezes. The mother raises a hand to her cheek.]

MOTHER (CONT.)

Meggie you heard your father. Take it outside.

[Beat. The child very quietly walks to the tramp and drags it off stage. Beat.]

FATHER

Hon / I'm so sorry.

MOTHER
/ No no no, it's fine.

[She goes to get the roast out of the oven.]

FATHER
Sweetie let me.

[He begins taking off her oven mitts.]

I'm so sorry. Just, that asshole Steve got the promotion today / and the New York branch called and apparently they don't like the last test batch we sent, and there was that stupid protest on Main Street so traffic was hell.

MOTHER
/ Oh honey.

MOTHER (CONT.)
I should have known something was wrong.

FATHER
It's fine. Don't worry. It was just a hard day.

[He takes her face in his hands and kisses her nose.]

Oh Tiff don't cry. *(Beat.)* Look, I'll get out of your hair, ok? Holler when dinner's ready.

[The child pokes her head into the kitchen.]

CHILD
Mama, can you come outside with me.

MOTHER
Hon I'm busy.

CHILD
Well I found a little house for goblins but it's maybe a can I think, / but it's not really a can, it's like a little house for them and I made it into an apartment because they can't afford the house with the pool-

MOTHER
/ A can?

Sweetie, please don't play with trash you're going to cut yourself up.

CHILD

But -

MOTHER

- Come wash your hands.

[CHILD washes her hands as MOTHER pulls out a cigaret. Beat.]

CHILD

Why did dad hit -

MOTHER

- Oh Meggie he had a really hard day.

CHILD

Why?

MOTHER

Cause life isn't fair sweetheart.

CHILD

Can I play music?

MOTHER

Quietly please.

CHILD

Ok!

[She goes upstage and plays an old record, "Only You" by The Platters. FURRIES ENTER AND BEGIN WREAKING HAVOC HERE. CHILD begins to try to get her mom to dance. She finally obliges and the two have a moment. The father walks into the room.]

FATHER

I haven't heard this since prom.

[The mother laughs.]

Look at you.

MOTHER

Alex stop.

CHILD

Look at me dad!

FATHER
Can I have this dance?

[FATHER sweeps in and takes CHILD's place in the dance. MOTHER looks left out, stilted.]

FATHER
I cannot believe you would settle for some sucker like me.

[The mother laughs.]

How do I know you won't run away to Boston and fall in love with a Chief Executive Officer in marketing of some hotshot firm that's working with Pan Am / and he'll take you to the range and teach you how to shoot like in one of those romance films you like so much.

MOTHER
/ Sweetheart, what?

CHILD
Mom do you smell that?

FATHER
Why stay with me when Mark in the cubicle over has a house with a pool?

MOTHER
Alex stop.

FATHER
He has a condo in Florida! Who needs a 4 bath condo?

MOTHER
Sweetheart stop.

FATHER
Or amazing, brilliant Steve. Vacations in Cape Cod Steve. Hole in 1 Steve.

MOTHER
Honey who is is Steve?

FATHER
Steve! Big promotion, kissass Steve!

MOTHER
I'm sorry you didn't get the promotion but -

FATHER

- It was one fucking hole-in-1 three summers ago.

MOTHER

Honey -

FATHER

- One hole-in-1!

MOTHER

Honey can you listen to me?

FATHER

Don't talk down to me Tiff.

MOTHER

It's not about the promotion!

FATHER

I know I didn't get the promotion / Honey.

CHILD

/ Dad what's a promotion?

MOTHER

Shush.

FATHER

I didn't get the money sweetie. The money to support this fucking house/ and this fucking pot roast / and your fucking absurd // private school and this whole little paper house of paper people and paper fucking pot roasts.

MOTHER

/ Language please.

// Language please!

CHILD

Is something burning?

MOTHER

Honey I love you so much but you're overreacting.

[CHILD begins to cry]

FATHER

Overreacting? You need to *calm* down Tiff.

MOTHER

Sweetie I am very calm I just think you're forgetting there's another promotion in a year.

FATHER

Oh so I just fucking wait another year?

MOTHER

YES!

FATHER

Or what? You'll leave me for the big house and the man and the pool?

MOTHER

That's not what I'm saying it's just hard that you don't -

FATHER

- That's not what you're saying? Then what are you saying Tiff? What are you saying?

CHILD

Please stop yelling!

MOTHER

Um, just that I really think that you -

FATHER

- Spit it out Tiff!

MOTHER

I know what it's like to be under a lot of pressure!

FATHER

Tiff how could you possibly know what that's like? They don't have promotions at your book club do they? / You don't understand the kind of pressure I'm under.

MOTHER

/ I do more than my book club Alex.

CHILD

I read a book today in school! I can read too!

MOTHER

I do more than by book club, Alex!

FATHER

This isn't about you Tiff!

MOTHER

Oh of course it's not! Nothing in this whole fudging house is ever about me!

FATHER

What the fuck does that mean Tiff?

CHILD

Language daddy!

[FATHER pinches CHILD's ear until she screams and runs to the protection of her MOTHER.]

MOTHER

Nothing Alex. Just drop it.

FATHER

No! Spit it out.

MOTHER

Spit what out?

CHILD

It is burning!

FATHER

Why are you angry?

MOTHER

I'm not.

FATHER

You are.

MOTHER

I'M NOT ANGRY. / I'm just disappointed that you're treating me like this for just trying to help. // I'm just overwhelmed.

CHILD

/ Mamma dinner's burning!

FATHER

// You're not trying to help! You're trying to control me!

MOTHER

I'm- you- you've just had a hard day.

[FATHER pulls out gun aims and points it at MOTHER.]

FATHER

Just say what you fucking mean, Tiff. Just say it.

MOTHER

Honey, I love you. But -

FATHER

- SAY IT!

[MOTHER stunned in silence. FATHER shoots gun. CHILD runs in the way screaming and takes the bullet, she falls in slow motion. FATHER drops the gun in shock. MOTHER pick it up, shoots FATHER, he falls in slow motion.]

Scene 3

State of Being: Post Life

Location: Hell

Time: Immortal, Cyclical, Unending

[The stage turns golden yellow. The sound of a recorder echoes throughout the space. MEGAERA catches the CHILD as she falls to her death. They reanimate her. They pull the bullet out of her gut and blow it away as fairy dust. Hide and seek ensues, CHILD is chosen to find the rest. When someone is found, they tell a joke.]

MEGAERA (MILES)

What is yellow black and orange? A newspaper.

MEGAERA (ANIYA)

What do you call fire water fire water fire water fire water fire water? A patern.

MEGAERA (SAM)

What is the biggest thing than god? One time I saw three gods.

MEGAERA (BRIGID)

Why do sankes have hands? Because they don't have hands.

MEGAERA (MILES)

Knock knock.

CHILD

Who's there?

MEGAERA (ALL)

Megaera.

CHILD

Meg- who?

[CHILD begins to cry]

Don't cry it's just a joke.

[CHILD wails. MEGAERA cries with child not knowing what to do. CHILD stops suddenly. MEGAERA stops. One of the MEGAERA Furies starts to sing and repeat "Only You", all join. The song grows into a dance, into a game. The CHILD is left out, angry.]

CHILD

I hate you.

MEGAERA (ONE)

I am you.

MEGAERA (ALL)

I am you. I am you. I am you. You are me?

CHILD

[Whisper]

Yes

[CHILD is absorbed into the Fury, MEGAERA.]

[Stage turns different hues of blue. The sound of drumming begins, increasing in rhythm throughout the scene. ALECTO Fury catches FATHER. Immediately they pull him to his feet and give him a slap to his face. They form a line facing him down stage center spewing insults and curses towards the audience. They antagonize each other. The insults inflate as they begin an aggressive, sexual, impulsive dance to the drum beat.]

ALECTO (ONE)

You with us?

ALECTO (ALL)

You with us? You with us? You with us? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

FATHER

YES.

[FATHER is absorbed into the Fury, ALECTO.]

[The stage turns a domestic and sterile shade of white. The sound of string instruments begin their soft, shrieking cry. TISIPHONE enters USSR. Beat. Begin disjointed babbling. Then all together...]

TISIPHONE

Him what you did deserved it. Hush hush pain.

[MOTHER turns and looks at TISIPHONE. They go silent, MOTHER turns away. She then turns back and looks at TISIPHONE. TISIPHONE begins babbling more frantically and overlapping. MOTHER runs away from them and falls to the floor.]

TISIPHONE (ALL)

Nothin worry cut yourself control. Water on again.

TISIPHONE (ONE)

It wasn't your fault.

[MOTHER stops running. She begins to cry and stand up. She sways back and forth. TISIPHONE observes, learns, and begins swaying as well.]

TISIPHONE.

Oh little baby just a day bad. Nobody gonna hurt tin can. Daddy got a pool at the office good heart sweetheart. New York jumpin outside branch just a little grownup only only only you gotta come in for dinner hot dinner hot water getting cold. Language! Run away ran with some hotshot potroast paper people honey baby summer ago. Just disappointed angry at me I'm sorry love you but I love you Mama but don't worry bad day say it Tiff.

[Beat. She recognizes her name.]

MOTHER

What are you doing?

TISIPHONE

Tiff we're proud of you.

MOTHER

Where is my family?

TISIPHONE

Under a lot of pressure.

MOTHER

Alex? Megan? Meggie?

TISIPHONE

Say it Tiff.

MOTHER
Get out of my house!

[TISIPHONE explodes and screams MOTHER into the ground. ALECTO and MEGAERA crawl from the sides and join TISIPHONE. MEGAERA goes to MOTHER and ALECTO retrieves the gun.]

TISIPHONE
I KNOW YOU'RE ANGRY I'M IN YOUR HEAD.

ALECTO/MEGAERA
And so they appeared, the three fiendish sisters, with smeared limbs of mud and ash.

[ALECTO passes the gun in a wave close to MOTHER. The Furies begin to pulse in a wave.]

MOTHER
I'm not. I'm not angry!

TISIPHONE
Do not be afraid!/That rage cannot be taken from us! It is a gift.

MOTHER
I'll be better, I promise! I'll be good!

TISIPHONE
Do not hope for heaven. I have come to guide you to the other shore. Why are you angry?

MOTHER
I'm not angry!

TISIPHONE
Abandon and enter. Spit it out, Tiff.

MOTHER
Where is Alex? Where's my baby?

TISIPHONE
They don't need you! You're free!

MOTHER
Leave me alone!

TISIPHONE
I am the way to go among the lost.

MOTHER
I'll be better.

TISIPHONE
He deserved it Tiffany! He hit you Tiffany! He killed your baby Tiffany!

MOTHER
He killed my baby.

TISIPHONE
You are the river of boiling blood.

MOTHER
He deserved it.

TISIPHONE
You are the poison of revenge.

MOTHER
He deserved it!

TISIPHONE
You are the infernal goddess.

MOTHER
I deserve this.

TISIPHONE
You are one of us.

MOTHER
No.

[The Furies are furious. They form a giant wave that envelops MOTHER. Blackout.]

Scene 4

State of Being: Pre-Life in Hell

Location: Utero, Womb, Water, Heavenly Hell

Time: Fluid

[Yet instead of killing her, they put her to sleep and place her on their back. THE FURIES begin a low song. The father and child are also lifted. They all slowly leave the theater like rotting leaves on a slow river. The father, mother, and child are placed down in the lobby.]

Scene 5**State of being: Life in Hell****Location: Kitchen, Home, Village in Hell****Time: Hellish Abyss of Real, Domestic**

[In the lobby, the bodies form a tableau of a sink, a toilet, a trampoline. Scene 2 repeats. They are in Hell, everyone knows but the mother. The child and father are like monsters living in human skin. The deaths happen again.]

Scene 6**State of Being: Death in Hell****Location: Hell****Time: Immortal, Cyclical, Unending**

[Scene 3 repeats, but the reanimated bodies need no time to be convinced. They try to win over the mother. She refuses. The cycle begins again in the Lobby of the theater and continues until the play is far away. Beyond the theater. In the snow. In the woods. Out of sight.]