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AVOIDING SIMPLIFICATION:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS AND CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS IN FIVE FULL LENGTH PLAYS BY STEVEN DIETZ

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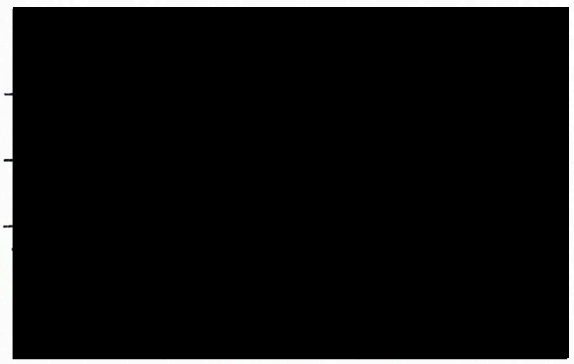
A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF DRAMA

BY



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Chapter I

Introduction

Background

Steven Dietz, a contemporary American playwright, who is a native of Denver, Colorado, has lived and worked professionally in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and most recently in Seattle, Washington. Much of his recent work has premiered at the Arizona Theatre Company in Tucson, Arizona under the artistic direction of David Ira Goldstein. Dietz is a prolific playwright whose works include: *Happenstance*, *God's Country*, *Foolin' Around With Infinity*, *Ten November*, *Burning Desire*, *Wanderlust*, *Random Acts*, *Handing Down The Names*, *Boomtown*, *Painting It Red*, *More Fun Than Bowling*, *Still Life With Iris*, *Lonely Planet*, *Trust*, *Halcyon Days*, *Brothers and Sisters*, *After You!*, *The Nina Variations*, *Pyramid Effect*, *The Rememberer*, *Private Eyes*, and *Rocket Man*, as well as adaptations of Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence* , Joyce Cheeka's *The Rememberer*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. His work has been produced at over eighty regional theatre across the United States including: Arizona Theatre Company, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle, Berkeley Rep, and Actors Theatre in St. Paul.[1]

Dietz has received awards for his work in theatre, including the 1994 PEN USA West Literary Award in Drama and the Outer Circle Nomination, a Drama League Award for his play *Lonely Planet*, the Yomuiri Shinbun Award, Japan, for his play *Silence*, the Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Award for *The Rememberer*, and the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award for *Still Life With Iris*.[2] He

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[1] Professional biographical information is available in playscripts handled by Samuel French, as well as in most playbills.

[2] Biography from *Private Eyes* published in Humana Festival '97: the complete plays.

was also awarded two playwriting fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, and a directing fellowship from the McKnight Foundation. He was the 1987-88 TCG/NEA Director Fellow. Most recently, Dietz's play *Trust* was voted one of the Ten Best Plays of 1995 by *Backstage.*[3]

In addition to his achievements as a playwright, Steven Dietz is also an accomplished director. He directed the world premiere of Kevin Kling's play *21A*, as well as the premiere productions of Jon Klein's play *T Bone N Weasel* and John Olive's *The Voice of the Prairie.* Other productions under his direction include: Len Jenkins's *A Country Doctor*, Jon Klein and Paul D'Andrea's *The Einstein Project*, Jaime Meyer's *Harry and Claire*, Jim Leonard's *The Diviners*, John Olive's *Standing On My Knees*, and Sam Shepard's *Suicide in B^{b}*.

Dietz's involvement in theatre is not limited to playwriting and directing. An active theatre practitioner, he desires to change the role of the theatre in society and to create a theatre for the future. He asserts that audiences demand more from theatre artists than their present trend of representing prevailing attitudes. In an article for *American Theatre* in 1993 he wrote:

> The highest challenge you, as an audience, can issue to your theatre artists is to demand that they run through the minefields before you do. To demand that they make the mistakes, confront the idiocy and revel in the excesses (social, sexual, religious, political) of the culture in the metaphorical safety of the theatre (where you can watch and judge), before it hits you in the bloody maelstrom of the world. (9)

[3] http://www.mc.peachnet.edu/planet/dietz.htm

Dietz tackles this challenge in his plays. He gives his audiences more than a mere story to pacify their desire to be entertained. Instead, he writes scripts that force directors, designers, and actors to take risks, and encourage audiences to think about the issues the plays deal with.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how Steven Dietz utilizes characters and character relationships to tell his story in five selected plays, and to introduce others to his works. The plays that this thesis will examine are: *More Fun Than Bowling*, *Foolin' Around With Infinity*, *Lonely Planet*, *Trust*, and *Private Eyes* . Although characters are a major part of any play, in the works of Steven Dietz they are the focal point. Through his characters, Dietz addresses social, sexual, political and religious questions that are common in contemporary society. Dietz shows that for theatre to be revolutionary it does not have to tackle monumental issues, just relevant ones. Dietz's voice and concerns echo through the words and actions of his characters. His characters are complex and are the quintessence of his plays. Dietz uses characters to create his plots rather than plots to create his characters.

Significance

The significance of this thesis is twofold. First, it addresses the work of a currently unexplored contemporary American playwright, Steven Dietz. Dietz is a prolific playwright whose works, with the exception of a few, such as *Lonely Planet*, remain largely unexplored. It seems appropriate to encourage theatres, both professional and academic, to also take risks and begin producing new works more frequently. And

second, it concerns the purpose of the thesis: to analyze how the playwright uses characters and character relationships in each of the selected plays. There are underlying themes in all drama, and it is through the characters that readers and audiences are able to access those themes. In addition, I hope to introduce more people to the work of Steven Dietz. By focusing on character, which I feel is Dietz's strongest dramatic element, I intend to expose not only the talents of a prolific writer, but also to encourage further analysis of his works.

Previous Research

After extensive research in library facilities and through internet search engines, I have been unsuccessful in locating any works -- books, articles, theses or dissertations -- that deal with Steven Dietz or his plays as written texts. Reviews from productions of his work at regional theatres do exist, but since this thesis will not deal directly with any specific productions, information and opinions in the reviews are not relevant for the purposes of this thesis.

Methodology

When dealing with character analysis in drama, most analysts approach the play as a written text, thus overlooking the inherent intention of performance. A playwright writes a play to be performed and when a play is performed it is open for interpretation by the director, actors, and designers. By merely probing dramatic characters from a psychological perspective one ignores much of the function of a character as a living being. It seems appropriate at this point to expand on the term character in order to define it more concretely. For this, I

will refer to the discussion of character in Alvin B. Kernan's book *Character and Conflict*: "[d]ramatic characters possess no qualities or attributes other than those the author endows them with . . ." (21-22). Though it is expected that one will conjecture about the playwright's intentions for the characters, it is not appropriate to assume anything unstated about the character. An analyst can only deal with the information given about a character through words or actions in the text. Characters are not living people, and had no life before nor will have any life after the play, other than that specifically stated within the script. In addition to this situation, an analyst must also address the issue of realism of character. Characters are often referred to as actual people who are capable of making conscious choice, but this is merely a convention for clarity. David Grote addresses this idea in his book *Script Analysis.* When discussing character choice we use the convention that allows us to say "character choice" when, in fact, we are actually dealing the choices the playwright makes for the character (61). Therefore, I approach each of these scripts considering the literary elements of the characters, as well as the theatrical elements of the characters. The supporting information that will be utilized in this thesis will come from the playscripts themselves, from the playwright's notes for the plays, if they exist, and from the playwright's interview in *American Theatre*, "Risking Sentiment" by John Istel about *Lonely Planet.* I will approach the analysis by answering each of the following questions in relation to each character:

1. How is the character introduced into the action of the play?
2. What function or functions does the character serve in

the action of the play? In other words, what is the playwright's purpose for the characters in the play?

3. How does this character interact with the other characters in the play? This includes not merely how an individual character affects other characters, but also the relationship between those characters.

By dissecting how Dietz constructs his characters and character relationships, I will then be able to discover the similarities between characters among the selected plays through their functions and development.

The following five chapters will demonstrate the findings of the analysis of each character from the selected plays. The concluding chapter will take those findings and draw comparisons and contrasts, and connections between the characters and the strategies Dietz applies to develop and reveal his characters.

Limitations

This thesis will be limited to five plays by Steven Dietz: *More Fun Than Bowling*, *Foolin' Around With Infinity*, *Lonely Planet*, *Trust*, and *Private Eyes*. When dealing with such a prolific writer it is imperative to be selective. The selection was determined by two methods. First is the issue of availability. Many of Dietz's plays are no longer in print, or have yet to be published. Second, of those available, the five plays that were chosen best demonstrate his use of character as set forth in the methodology section. Plays considered for this thesis but excluded include: *God's Country*, *Ten November*, *Halcyon Days* and *Painting It Red.*

I am also aware that many other contemporary playwrights, both

male and female, American and foreign, have significant works deserving of analysis, but I feel compelled to explore the work of Steven Dietz. Since I saw a moving production of *Lonely Planet* at the Equity Library Theatre in Chicago, Illinois in June 1996, I have been drawn to the work of Steven Dietz. Because of my personal experience with his work, I feel a need to expose others to his writings, and I hope to encourage further exploration of his works.

Organization

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction: the stated investigation at hand. The subsequent chapters focus on one particular play. Each chapter beings with a brief plot synopsis, followed by any necessary background information, and then examine how the playwright uses characters and character relationships in each of these plays. The plays are examined in chronological order by copyright. Since many of Dietz's plays were either workshopped or fully produced prior to publication, following copyright dates seem the most consistent means by which to examine them. They appear as follows: *More Fun Than Bowling* (1985), *Foolin' Around With Infinity* (1989), *Lonely Planet* (1994), *Trust* (1995), and *Private Eyes* (1997). The final chapter will draw comparison and contrast between the characters throughout the plays, as well as strategies Dietz uses to develop and reveal his characters.

Chapter II

More Fun Than Bowling

Plot Synopsis of *More Fun Than Bowling*

More Fun Than Bowling is a play that embraces life. It deals with the fear of living and losing, and the paranoia about dying in a comic manner. The play takes place in Turtle Rapids, a Midwestern town, over a day in the present with moments from the past. The play is presented by five characters: Jake, owner of a bowling alley; Molly, his daughter; Lois, a thirty year old woman and Jake's second wife; Loretta, a twenty-eight year old woman and Jake's third wife; and Mister Dyson, a twenty-eight year old chauffeur, former employee of Jake's first wife, Maggie.

The play tells the story of Jake, a man who is convinced he is being targeted for murder by an unknown man who he calls WHOEVER KNOWS THINGS. His paranoia is taking over his life, and his daughter tries to help him put things into perspective. He refuses to allow himself to love again, and is determined to wait for WHOEVER KNOWS THINGS. The play flashes to the past revealing Jake's relationships with his second and third wives, and his preoccupation with his first wife and Molly's natural mother, Maggie. Through the flashbacks Jake remembers the positive things in life: love, living, and, of course, bowling.

The play resolves when Jake relinquishes his fear and paranoia. He vows to love again despite the risks, and becomes determined to move forward with his life. At this point, Mister Dyson appears to give Jake a check for three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He also brings the news that Maggie has died. In the end, Jake and Molly throw a Frisbee back and forth over the graves of Lois and Loretta in a celebration of life.

Description of Characters in *More Fun Than Bowling*

More Fun Than Bowling focuses on the lives of two main characters: Jake Tomlinson, a man of forty who is the owner of a bowling alley, the Dust Bowl; and Molly Tomlinson, his sixteen year old daughter. Jake has devoted his life to his daughter, Molly and to his bowling alley. Since Maggie left, he has become dependent on Molly. And since the deaths of his second and third wives, his life has been ruled by fear. Molly assumes an authoritative role in their relationship that grows stronger as Jake's fear increases. She makes sure that Jake is where he needs to be when he needs to be there. Molly's need to be there for her father is reflected in her resistance to moving forward with her life. She fears venturing out into the world, but knows that eventually she will have to leave her father to make her own way in the world.

The secondary characters in this play assist in the audience's understanding of the facts surrounding the lives of Jake and Molly. Mister Dyson's presence justifies, and intensifies Jake's fear and paranoia; while the flashbacks with Loretta and Lois show Jake's ability to love and to live. The conversations Molly has with Loretta and with Lois bring up Molly's desire to move away from Turtle Rapids. Their subsequent deaths reinforce Molly's obligation to stay near her father. Only when Jake and Molly are ready to move forward does a hope for the future becomes evident.

A Character Analysis of *More Fun Than Bowling*: How Dietz Uses Characters and Character Relationships

More Fun Than Bowling is a play about living. Jake and Molly try to hold on to the past, and live in fear of the future. Each of them has

created a method with which to deal with their situation: Jake has thrown his life into his bowling alley, and Molly has focused her life on her father. Through the play Dietz forces the characters to confront their fears and sets them on their way to living productive lives. Through interactions with the secondary characters, Mister Dyson, Lois, and Loretta, Jake and Molly are able to come to terms with their fears and abandon them.

Character Introduction. The play opens on a mist-covered hilltop with three unmarked graves center stage. The stage, as described by the playwright, ". . . while being primarily realistic, should convey a sense of mystery, a sense of danger lurking somewhere about" (*Bowling* 94). This location will immediately relay a sense of mortality to the audience. Upstage of the graves is an area referred to as The Shadows, where Mister Dyson retreats frequently throughout the play. The sense of mystery and danger is reiterated through the first character Dietz introduces, Mister Dyson. The audience discovers Mister Dyson immediately in front of the center grave. He is a man of mystery, dressed in a black suit with a black shirt, a black hat, dark sunglasses, and a blood red tie. He carries a revolver in one hand and has a briefcase handcuffed to the wrist of the other hand. This initial introduction should leave the audience with a strong impression of the character. Dietz has established the strong presence of this character even before he speaks, and this presence tells the audience much about him. People associate certain colors with certain moods or intentions, by using the color black Dietz insures a feeling of negativity. Black denotes bad. Combined with the black of his suit, the red of Mister Dyson's tie also registers in a negative way. By adding the

gun and handcuff as accessories, Dietz succeeds in creating a sinister facade through all the components of the character's wardrobe.

Dietz further develops the image of the "bad guy" with the character's first action. As Mister Dyson begins to address the audience, he loads his revolver. A loaded gun does not allay any fear of maliciousness. The character then introduces himself and explains his presence:

> (*Directly to the audience.*) My name is Mister Dyson. Please call me that. I am here to find a Mister Jake Tomlinson. It is important that I speak to him. I must find the proper moment. Timing is crucial. As with driving a vehicle in heavy traffic, the moment of acceleration or de-acceleration almost exclusively determines the success or failure of a multi-lane maneuver. (*Pause.*) You can't just close your eyes and gun it. . . . That is all I can say to you right now. (*Retreats quickly and hides in The Shadows.*). (10)

This brief and cryptic introduction tells the audience who the character is without revealing anything concrete about him or his mission. First, he tells the audience his name, Dyson, which possesses a sinister sound of its own. Next, he states his reason for being there without stating why he is looking for Jake. This omission of information adds to his unfavorable impression. Last, the use of the driving metaphor encapsulates his dedication to precision. Everything must be approached and dealt with in a meticulous manner. It is this attention to precision that drives the play forward. Until the timing is perfect any attempt by Dyson to talk to Jake will, and does, fail.

Mister Dyson's speech to the audience is interrupted by Molly's

entrance. The ringing of her bicycle bell announces her imminent arrival. This sound sends Mister Dyson into The Shadows where he remains, watching as the action unfolds. Molly enters the scene on her bike. She gets off of the bike and locks the wheels of the bike with a chain and a padlock. She then begins to sing "Bye Bye Blackbird" as she places a bowling pin decorated with a pinwheel on each of the two outer graves. As she does this, she wishes each occupant of the grave "happy birthday." She reveals that the two outer graves are the graves of her mothers. She then examines the middle grave. She notices a discarded straw and removes it, and then, just as she came, she leaves via her bicycle. This action sets up an exacting nature in Molly, too. Everything she does for one of her mothers, she does for the other. Every time she enters on her bike, she meticulously locks it. She takes care of the things that are important to her. Through these actions, Dietz establishes a care-giving role for Molly.

The most interesting entrance of the play immediately follows Molly's exit. Jake, grunting and groaning, agitatedly emerges from the middle grave. His entrance lines reveal much about the nature of his character:

> (*Furious.*) J. C. CHRIST! THEY'RE TRYIN' TO KILL ME. I'M TRYIN' LIKE HELL TO SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE DEAD AND SOMEONE'S TRYIN' TO KILL ME! Don't turn your back on a person with a fetish for straws, let me tell you twice. They're the kind that walk by, look at a mound of dirt, see a straw, and yank it out of your mouth. (12)

This unlikely introduction expresses much about this character, but initially fails to reveal who his is. It is apparent that this person has

unresolved issues with death to have buried himself. Jake continues his tirade by telling a story about his mother and her philosophy on saving for a rainy day. Then, as he begins to calm down, he introduces himself:

> (*Pause, calms a bit, brushes the dirt off, tips his feed cap to the audience.*) Jake Tomlinson. You sorta caught the tail end of my experiment. See, WHOEVER KNOWS THINGS is fixin' to end my life and when that happens I'm gonna have to live there in that grave for a longer time than I care to think about. So, I thought I'd try to get the flavor of it so maybe I'd have a better outlook on gettin' killed. Didn't work. Pretty damn boring down there. And I even had a magazine. (*Looks at the two remaining graves.*) I got no idea how Lois and Loretta can stand it. (13)

This story, juxtaposed with the circumstances of his arrival, indicates a person who spends a lot of his time thinking. His speech not only identifies who he is, but it also establishes his fear of death and his paranoia that someone is trying to kill him. This, combined with the early presence of Mister Dyson, does not assist in mitigating the audience's sense of ominousness about the play. In addition to information about himself, Jake also identifies the occupants of the two remaining graves: Lois and Loretta. Though the audience does not know how Lois and Loretta died, it seems that their deaths are integral to the story.

As Jake continues in his monologue, he states his intentions to face off with death, "I've decided I've got no choice but to sit here and square off with whoever's lookin' to kill me. I ain't gonna go without a fight" (15). Dietz uses Jake's entrance to provide the essentials of the character. The audience knows why he is here, what he is planning to do, and why

he is planning to do it. He is a strong man who will not give up without a fight, but he is also a man whose paranoia rules him.

Unlike the first three characters who have been introduced consecutively, Dietz takes some time to establish the relationship of Jake and Molly before introducing Loretta. This may be connected to the fact that when Loretta enters the play, she is dead. At this point, the play is still in the present so Loretta's character has transcended her death and has moved into the action of the present. Mister Dyson, who has been hiding in The Shadows, is able to see her and watches in confusion. Loretta's entrance is marked by the turning of the bowling ball pinwheel that decorates her grave. As she enters she sings "Bye Bye Blackbird" as Molly did. Loretta begins to plant geraniums on her now flatten grave. She then addresses the audience. Unlike Jake and Mister Dyson who have revealed their identities in their addresses to the audience, Loretta discusses her friend Lois:

> (*To the audience.*) Lois was my best friend. I was her maid of honor when she married Jake. Even though it was his second time, it was her first, so she wore white and a veil, and Jake still had his dark socks so they saved a little money there. She knew she was getting used merchandise, but she loved him anyway. Now he's twice-used merchandise. Might be damaged for all I know. (24-25)

The audience has yet to be informed that this character is the deceased third wife of Jake. Not until the play moves into the past is her identity revealed. Through this monologue Dietz makes the transition to the past. For when it is completed, the audience witnesses an exchange between Jake and Loretta from the past. Dietz uses Loretta's entrance to introduce

important information about the past. The audience understands the circumstances under which Jake and Lois were married. The audience has an indication of their relationship before they see the couple together.

Since Lois has already been introduced by Loretta, her arrival comes with less mystery than the other characters. The audience has a sense of her personality because of Loretta's discussion of her. Her entrance mimics Loretta's entrance. As she enters, the pinwheel on her bowling pin begins to spin and she sings "Bye Bye Blackbird." As Loretta did, Lois addresses the audience. In her greeting, she tells the story of how she met Jake and how she came to marry him. Her monologue also serves as a transition into the past. The audience is transported to the moment when Jake proposed to Lois. By now, Dietz has established the bases of Jake's relationship with his second and third wives. The focus then turns to the catalysts for Jake's present state of mind.

Lois and Loretta have similar introductions, and Dietz utilizes them in a similar way; they each tell their own story. Instead of giving exposition through the recollections of living characters, Dietz takes the audience to the moments of importance in the past and allows them to witness the events.

Character Function. Mister Dyson serves two main functions in the play. In his first capacity, he reinforces the feelings of mystery that should ideally surround the entire production. From his constant hiding to his cryptic addresses, Dyson is a mystery. Throughout the course of Act I, Mister Dyson repeatedly emerges from The Shadows to remind the audience that he is still watching and waiting for Jake. When Dietz does

have Mister Dyson visible to the audience, it occurs at moments when important information or an important event is being revealed: Jake's declaration to face-off with death, the story of the death prophecy, the appearance of Loretta, and the appearance of Lois. By revealing Dyson at these moments, Dietz reinforces Mister Dyson's fixation on the perfect timing. Dietz also reinforces the importance of these moments for the audience. Unlike in Act I when he makes several appearances, in Act II Mister Dyson makes only two appearances: once at the beginning of the act and again at the end when he reveals his presence to Jake and Molly. Mister Dyson's diminishing appearances correspond with the waning of Jake's fear and paranoia. As Jake begins to overcome his fear and paranoia in Act II, Mister Dyson fails to appear.

Mister Dyson is also the character who takes the audience into intermission. The intermission serves to prolong the action of the play. Mister Dyson indicates that he will pursue Jake, but something always interrupts him. This time that interruption is the intermission. Again Mister Dyson says that soon he will act, but first he must take a break:

> Mister Tomlinson has now run away. He will not get far. I intend to pursue him and carry out my orders expediently. In the meantime, however, I intend to eat my sack lunch. In much the same way a high performance vehicle must pull off the road, enabling the driver to rest and refuel, you are now encouraged to do the same. Thank you. (55-56)

The impression of Mister Dyson's pursuit of Jake carries the audience through intermission. And to insure that the audience considers Mister Dyson while they take their break, Dietz has Dyson remain onstage throughout the intermission, eating his lunch as stated. After the

intermission, Dyson resumes his pursuit of Mister Tomlinson, but is interrupted by Lois. Again, the audience must wait to find out the goal of his mission. All of these reminders and interruptions reinforce the sense of mystery and danger.

In his second function, Dyson serves as a messenger. For the majority of the play Mister Dyson directs his messages, however incomplete, to the audience:

> I am good at what I do. I always get what I go after. There is no way at this time that Mister Tomlinson will be able to escape me. The situation is somewhat akin to that of a vintage Thunderbird with mags and headers pursuing a 1967 Rambler. The Bird will toy with the Rambler for a few blocks ... and then gun it. (*Stopped by the sound of a woman's voice, singing.*) That is all I can say to you now. (23)

Because he speaks in elusive metaphor, his addresses take on a sinister tone. Even in his capacity as a messenger, Dyson still exudes an ominous demeanor. At the end of Act II, when Dyson finally approaches Jake, he takes his time in revealing all of the information surrounding his purpose. Dietz utilizes all aspects of this character to help create the desired sense of eminent danger.

It is at the end of the play that Mister Dyson finally explains his real purpose for being there. Even as he is revealing his presence to Jake and Molly, there is still a sense of threat. The moment Dyson comes out of The Shadows immediately follows Jake's reversal. Now that Jake has given up his fear and paranoia, the timing is perfect for Mister Dyson. Jake does not let his guard down as Dyson explains his job. Through their exchange the negative image of Mister Dyson begins to dissipate:

DYSON. Are you Mister Jake Tomlinson?

JAKE. Yeah - uh, NO.

DYSON. I'm Mister Dyson. Please call me that. I was sent for you. I have been waiting here.

JAKE. Where?

DYSON. In The Shadows.

JAKE. Look, Mister -

DYSON. Dyson.

JAKE. - you haven't got a chance. I am a - (*Pause.*) I am a well known - (*Pause, looks at Molly.*) My *daughter* is a well known black belt.

DYSON. (*Glancing at Molly.*) Are you serious?

JAKE. Absolutely.

DYSON. Great. I'll have someone to practice with.

JAKE. Look, uh, buddy - I don't want to have to call my goons.

DYSON. Feel free to call. I have all day. And I have a phone in my briefcase. (*Pulls antenna out of t the top of his briefcase.*)

JAKE. Look, uh, old friend - you don't really want to shoot that gun, do you?

DYSON. What?

JAKE. The gun. Why don't you put it away?

DYSON. I can't.

JAKE. Sure you can.

DYSON. No, I can't.

JAKE. WHY?

DYSON. It's for you. (*DYSON hands Jake the gun. JAKE takes it, disbelieving.*) Thanks. Those things give me the creeps. . . . (77-78)

Mister Dyson continues by explaining that until recently he worked as Maggie's chauffeur. He brings the news that Maggie died. Her death was the result of a boating accident; she drowned. He gives Jake an envelop from her containing a check for three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. To Molly, he gives a sealed letter from her mother. He also informs them that under the conditions of Maggie's will he now works for them. In a matter of a few lines Dyson switches from a dangerous presence to helpful friend. He reveals his full identity and his purpose for wanting to see Jake; the information the audience has been wondering about since the beginning of the play. Dietz resolves the play in a few moments. Though the audience may feel cheated, it is impossible not to share in Jake's and Molly's new-found fortune. Mister Dyson is the catalyst that changes Jake's and Molly's lives. With his arrival, they are able to move forward with their lives. Dietz uses a simple resolution to show the audience that change can be simple. If one resolves to do something it will happen.

Molly's objectives throughout the play center mainly on maintaining Jake's happiness. Since her mother left them when she was ten, Molly has been the one person on whom Jake can depend. She takes care of her father, making sure that he keeps to his schedule, but she also tries to help him keep things in perspective. In their first encounter in the play, Molly has returned to the graves after retrieving a third bowling pinwheel for the additional grave, which she has assumed is Jake's grave:

JAKE. . . . What's that?

MOLLY. (*Putting it ceremonially in his lap, mock serious.*) Bowling pinwheel.

JAKE. I can see that. Didn't know we had any left.

MOLLY. Made a hundred for the County Fair.

JAKE. Thought we sold 'em all.

MOLLY. All but three.

JAKE. Why'd you bring it up here?

MOLLY. To decorate your grave.

JAKE. Yeah?

MOLLY. Yeah.

JAKE. You think that's funny, don't you?

MOLLY. (*Giggles a bit.*) Sort of, yeah.

JAKE. Why?

MOLLY. I came up to visit Lois and Loretta and there was a grave between them - so I figured you'd forgotten their birthday, felt bad and died.

JAKE. You're kidding me, right?

MOLLY. Yeah. I knew it wasn't you. Thought maybe you'd got married again. (15-16)

She plays his game, but does not allow Jake to take himself too seriously. By playing along with him, Molly shows him that he is behaving irrationally. Likewise Jake proves to be be Molly's stability. Both of them could look at the events in their lives and be negative, but instead they work to keep the other in a positive frame of mind.

Dietz also uses Molly as a source of encouragement for the other characters. Molly encourages people to take chances. First, Molly helps

her father in his quest for Loretta. Since her attention is usually focused on her father, it would follow that this is true when talking with Loretta. Molly likes Loretta and wants her to be happy, but she interferes mainly for her father's benefit. After his less than enthusiastic proposal to Loretta, Molly convinces her to accept the proposal, assuring her that Jake is a good man. And because Molly knows him so well, she also knows the truth about him. She shares these truths with Loretta:

MOLLY. Well ... there's a couple things I've got to tell you. Don't let Dad tell you a big sob story about Louie Twinkler and the Wyoming Conservatory of Music. Lois believed him. But it was love. Pure and simple. He won't admit it, but it was love.

LORETTA. Okay.

MOLLY. Don't ever get rid of my bike. Even if I leave home. Hold onto it for me.

LORETTA. All right.

MOLLY. And, at the reception, no matter how much he begs and pleads and even if he offers you a custom-made Voit with your initials on it, *do not* let him put Fresca in the punch bowl. I could've killed him last time he did that. (31-32)

This segment reinforces Molly's desire for her father's happiness, as well as welcoming Loretta into their lives. In addition to her father's happiness, Molly is also insuring her own future. The guilt she feels about the possibility of leaving her father keeps her in Turtle Rapids, but by helping him find someone to share his life with she can hope to one

day leave without regret.

Even though Molly mainly focuses on her father, she does direct some of her attention to giving information to the audience. Molly tells the audience exactly what happened to Lois and to Loretta. In this revelation, she also shares how these events have affected Jake and his outlook on his life:

> He got what he wanted ... and he lost it. Lois outbowled everyone. The Mudler team left town in shame. The trophy was ours once again. And Dad was in all his glory. So, when Lois suggested we drive up to Gleason to celebrate, Dad said, "Bring that trophy along with you. Let's show it off a little bit." (*Pause.*) The storm had started a few minutes earlier. We all ran out in the rain, across the parking lot to the Rambler - with Lois holding the trophy high above her head. (*Pause.*) For a second. (*Pause.*) That was the brightest light I have ever seen. (*Pause.*) We buried her up here. And a few weeks later, Loretta became a victim of only the second bowling ball rack collapse in modern history. That was a year ago and Dad has hardly said a word about it. Till today. (73)

Molly knows Jake better than anyone, and though she refuses to allow him to give in to his pessimism, she understands it. Molly divulges this information because she wants the audience to understand her father's present state of mind. It is because of these circumstances and events that he has become jaded. But her explanation also precipitates Jake's reversal. Molly's love and commitment has sparked a change in Jake.

Until the end of the play, Jake assumes a more passive role than the

other characters. His job is to supply the information that supports his fear and paranoia. As the play opens, he is trying to adjust to being dead. And even though he proclaims his intention to confront death, he waits passively instead of planning aggressively:

> I've decided I've got no choice but to sit here and square off with whoever's lookin' to kill me. I ain't gonna go without a fight. (*Leans back.*) AAAAAHHHHHHHHHH. This is nice. Sun coming up. Birds chirpin'. Leaves rustlin'. Brand new *Reader's Digest* that's never been in a bathroom. The whole town of Turtle Rapids laid out below me. God, if I had a Fresca right now I could die happy. (15)

Even as he says that he will not go without a fight, he is talking about "dying happy." This contradiction symbolizes his current state of mind regarding everything in his life. Jake has dedicated his life to Molly, and she has become his only reason for living. He does not want to die, but he is afraid to live. At this point in the play, the audience does not possess the information to understand Jake's resignation. Like the audience, Molly also does not understand, and Jake must reveal the story of the prophecy. This story is the first indication the audience gets as to Jake's state of mind:

> When your mother and I were on our honeymoon, we went to the State Fair and had an authentic gypsy woman read our palms. She read Maggie's and then mine. Without saying a word. We waited. Then she said, "Sky and Earth and finally Water. You, my friend, will be the Third." (*Pause.*) We asked which one of us she was talking to. She wouldn't say. I offered her a buck. She wouldn't say. To this day, I'm not

sure if that prophecy belongs to Maggie or me - but when I look at these graves and hear "You, my friend, will be the Third," I get more than a little bit of a chill. 17

Though the story seems innocuous and somewhat humorous, it becomes apparent that Jake takes it quite seriously. And it has become more haunting since the deaths of Lois and Loretta. Lois was killed by lightning, from the sky; and Loretta was killed by a wooden bowling ball rack, from the earth. Whether or not his paranoia is justified, Jake believes it. Dietz may utilize the idea of a prophecy because of the modern view of mysticism. Many people believe in these types of predictions while others believe they are foolishness. No one knows with certainty if it is possible to predict the future, and because of this uncertainty it is possible that the prophecy may very well come true.

As Jake harbors a paranoia about death, he also harbors a fear of being alone, and deeper than that is his fear of loss. Dietz illustrates this in the proposal scene between Jake and Loretta:

LORETTA. You love me?

JAKE. I *really* like you.

LORETTA. I don't want a man who doesn't love me.

JAKE. Quote me, Loretta - love is serious.

LORETTA. So am I.

(*JAKE sets up the lawn chair a little too near Lois' grave.*)

JAKE. Sit down, will you , Loretta? (*Softens.*) Please.

(*SHE does.*)

JAKE. Now, look. Love is a very big thing. It's an overwhelming condition. Like being too drunk to go bowling. It just doesn't happen very

often. (*Pause.*) Do you understand what I'm sayin'?

LORETTA. Yes.

JAKE. Good.

LORETTA. And my answer is *no.*

JAKE. Now, wait. Love is also something you shoot for. Love is the three-hundred game, Loretta. It's twelve strikes straight to the heart and when it happens there's nothing left standing. (*Pause.*) Do you see that?

LORETTA. Yes.

JAKE. Good.

LORETTA. And if this isn't that, then my answer to you is *no.*

JAKE. Damnit, Loretta, I've bowled three hundred twice now in my life and I lost both times. I can't do it again. (28)

Jake's argument for getting married is that he would be a good provider and that he likes her. His reasons for a union may seem trivial, but they are a clue to what he really wants. Through this exchange Dietz illustrates that Jake is afraid to love someone for fear of losing them, but that he is as equally afraid of being alone.

Not until the end of the play does Jake overcome this fear of love and loss. At this time he also takes an active role in his struggle against death. During this shift, Jake tends to the graves of Lois and Loretta. Molly has just revealed to the audience the condition of her father since their deaths, and from offstage come the voices of Lois and Loretta

singing. As they sing, a change begins in Jake. Their singing continues throughout his speech and he becomes more confident and more determined. Jake needed to relive these moments from the past in order to remember the positive things that resulted from them and not just the negative outcomes.

It is this need to remember that brings Lois and Loretta into the play. Lois and Loretta serve in a similar capacity, both return because Jake needs to see the positive things that came from the relationships he had with them instead of focusing on their deaths. The moments from the past with Loretta and Lois that Dietz shows focus on the nature of their relationship with each other. The first moment relived with Jake and Loretta is the day that he proposed to her. Though the topic of their conversation is serious, both discuss it in a playful way. The proposal is less than ideal and Loretta needles Jake about his approach, but it is obvious from her tone that she does care for him. Jake is equally as playful. He says to her, ". . . I *really, really* like you, Loretta. And at my age, that's so damn close to love that I could hit it from here with a rock. (*Pause.*) Think about it will you? *(Pause, smiles.*) I already got my suit and everything" (29). Dietz shows that Jake does want to marry her, but he is afraid and so he approaches her in a humorous manner. Jake fears the results if he admits to loving her, but he does love her. The moment is not weighed down with seriousness. And, in the end, Loretta does marry Jake.

The atmosphere around Jake and Lois is similar to that of Jake and Loretta. In the scene when Lois decides to bowl for Jake's team, Jake is less than enthusiastic. She decides to bowl in spite of his objection. It is her opportunity to prove something to him. When Jake gives Lois

instructions on bowling, he tells her to think of the five pin as him and the bowling ball as death. This will insure that she will hit the five pin every time. He wants her to do well, not just so that he can win but because he loves and supports her. And after the bowling lesson, the couple shares a nice moment in which the audience witnesses their affection:

JAKE. . . . Don't be nervous. You'll be great.

LOIS. What if they laugh at me?

JAKE. Laugh right back.

LOIS. What if you laugh at me?

JAKE. (*Pause.*) I never will.

LOIS. (*Pause.*) That's nice.

JAKE. (*Pause.*) 'Cause you're not very funny. (71)

Jake knew what his wife needed because the team went on the win the tournament because of Lois. The connection between them speaks to the audience, and thus helps reinforce the sense of Jake's loss. It also establishes Jake's commitment to a relationship.

In one respect, Loretta plays an additional purpose in the play. She brings the audience information about Maggie. During her marriage to Jake she continues her job as a hairdresser. On one occasion Loretta has the opportunity to serve Maggie. Loretta cuts her hair, all the while talking about Jake and Molly though not realizing that she was speaking to Maggie. Loretta's encounter with Maggie shows the audience that Maggie keeps up with Jake and Molly. Maggie knew exactly where to find them and who to ask to find out about them. Jake's reaction to her visit reveals Jake's indifference toward Maggie, and strengthens his feelings for Loretta. After he heard of Maggie's visit, he came looking for Loretta.

He wanted to see how *she* was, not Maggie. His other concern was for Molly. When he finds out that Maggie did not see Molly he focuses his attentions on tending to Loretta's feelings. This moment of affection is followed by Loretta's accident, again reinforcing Jake's loss.

Character Relationships. Since this play deals with the fear of living and losing, and the paranoia of dying within the scope of the family, it follows that the majority of the relationships in the play are familial in nature. The most obvious of these would be the father/daughter relationship of Jake and Molly. The two characters are extremely close, and because of what they have been through in regards to Maggie, they have become dependent on each other. Molly needs her father, but she also needs for him to pursue other loves. Molly eventually wants to leave Turtle Rapids, but she is afraid that she will be abandoning her father as Maggie did. Likewise, Jake needs Molly but understands that she must go out and see the world. In their new circumstances, they also serve to balance each other. Molly tends to accept things with a certain casualness, while Jake tends to take things to the opposite extreme. Jake's influence causes Molly to look deeper into her life, and Molly reminds Jake to have fun in his life.

Molly's relationships with both Lois and Loretta demonstrate her casualness. When faced with her father's remarriage, she wants to know if they wonder about the world outside of Turtle Rapids. She wants her father to be happy, and so easily accepts the marriages and her new mothers. She befriends these women, and trusts them completely with the heart of her father. She has no reservations of her father's remarriage because of a loyalty to her mother.

Jake is a man who is afraid to be alone; he needs companionship. After Maggie left, he focused all his energy on Molly and the bowling alley. As Molly got older, Jake began to realize that she needed freedom and so he let go a little. He then met Lois. After her death, he turned to Loretta. Loretta and Jake shared a common love for Lois, and so he felt a connection with her. When he loses her, he begins to question the point of love. In the end, he overcomes his fear because of the great love he shared with both of these women, and the love he shared with Maggie. He has relived the special moments he shared with these women, and it is now that he realizes what he had:

> . . . (*Proudly.*) Me, I've fallen stupid-face-first-on-the-pavement in love three time so far this life. And I expect to wake up in the morning, walk down to the mailbox or somewhere, look up ... and catch a glance from some woman with out-of-state plates. And if there's enough *glance* in that glance and enough gas in my Rambler - I just might have a new name on my lips come nightfall. (76)

He understands that it is because of his ability to love that he has been happy in his life.

Dietz creates a strong relationship between Lois and Loretta. Although they are not family, they are best friends. There is only one scene when the two women are seen together, but there are other occasions when one discusses their friendship with another character. In the scene that they share, the two discuss men. Lois warns Loretta to stay away from the men from the Vo-Tech. She relates a story about a date she had with a man who went there. The tone of the amusing tale reinforces their relationship. The two women are best friends and feel

open to share any story, no matter how embarrassing, with each other.

The character who shares no prior relationship to the other characters is Mister Dyson. Because of the nature of his character, for the majority of the play Mister Dyson only has contact with the audience. When he finally does interact with Jake and Molly, his attitude is strictly professional. He is there to carry out his task. Since Maggie, his former employer has died, Mister Dyson knows that he is now the employee of Jake and acts accordingly.

With *More Fun Than Bowling*, Dietz comments on the importance of living life to the fullest. The main characters in this play, like many people, have allowed their lives to be hindered by fear. The characters learn to overcome those fears by remembering the positive things in their lives. Dietz reminds the audience that life is not measured by what people have, but rather it is measured by what they do. It is easy to focus on the negative things in life, especially the loss of a loved one. In this way, *More Fun Than Bowling* shows that despite these kinds of losses, people must rejoice in life and be thankful for the time they have. In its simple way, the play celebrates life, love, and bowling.

Chapter III

Foolin' Around With Infinity

Plot Synopsis of *Foolin' Around With Infinity*

Foolin' Around With Infinity deals with the issues raised by modern society's increasing dependence on technology. The play revolves around the relationship of Mac, a crew commander of an underground nuclear missile silo, and his daughter, Luke. To create the play, Dietz positions Mac and Luke on opposite sides of the issue; Mac is ruled by honor and duty, while Luke questions everything.

As the plot unfolds, *Foolin' Around With Infinity* takes the audience through the worlds of Mac and Luke. It opens on two distinct environments: Mac's world, the Command Post of an underground missile silo; and Luke's world, a Fallout Shelter. Mac and his partner, Jesse, pass their time playing Monopoly and trying not to talk about their lives. Luke works more directly with the audience explaining how she came to live in the Fallout Shelter and describing her relationship with her father over the years. She cannot come to terms with her father's occupation, and so she leaves his home and seeks lodging in the Fallout Shelter.

The play culminates in a standoff between Mac and Jesse in the Command Post. The alarm sounds and they receive the correct codes to launch their missiles. The two men have their guns trained on each other as Luke speaks in broken, meaningless sentences. The play ends offering no resolution.

Description of Characters in *Foolin' Around With Infinity*

Foolin' Around With Infinity focuses on the lives of three characters: Arthur "Mac" McCormick, a man in his fifties who is the crew

commander of an underground missile silo; Luke, his daughter, a woman in her twenties; and John "Jesse" Randall, a man is his twenties and Mac's partner, a deputy. The play also includes YOU, a woman of any age; and Mr. Anderson, a man of any age.

Luke is the character who has been bred and raised in the Information Age. Her knowledge is her strength and her weakness. Mac is a keeper of the keys whose goal is to do his job well.[1] Jesse's need to control his destiny is reflected in his career choice. Jesse is a questioner who has not rebelled against the establishment, but instead tries to work within it. Through these characters Dietz raises the questions of our nuclear age. They are the audience's window on contemporary society.

The remaining characters play a more abstract role in the play. YOU represents an audience member on stage. She is the audience's guide through the play. She provides information when necessary, and directs the audience's attention. This simple device insures clarity in the production. Mr. Anderson is a character who appears throughout the play in different roles and guises. He is an outsider who continually invades the lives of Luke, Mac, and Jesse. Each role that he assumes illuminates a new aspect of the situation, or brings forward an aspect that Luke, Mac, or Jesse has overlooked.

Development of *Foolin' Around With Infinity*

In *Foolin' Around With Infinity*, Dietz looks at the world in a chaotic manner, not to confuse the audience but to reflect the absurdity of the modern age. In a culture where government controls technology and society is seen as separate from government, it is important for citizens to

[1] *Keeper of the keys* refers to the men who control the keys to launch the nuclear arsenal.

ask the right questions.[2] In this play, humanity and technology collide, and the question of future remains unanswered.

The play began as two file folders. In one file was the information Dietz collected on the keepers of the keys. He says, "I have read about these guys, the keeper of the keys. Having a preoccupation with people of bizarre occupation, I did what I always do - I started a file" (*Infinity* 111). The other folder contained the collection of notes he made about his character Luke. Luke is a character who grew out of *Survive*, a collaborative work that Dietz developed with fellow Minneapolis playwright David Erickson in 1982.[3] The idea they had was for each playwright to create a character: Dietz's character was ruled by Free Will, and Erickson's character was ruled by Law and Order (112). For years after their collaboration the notes on Luke stayed on file until Dietz combined these notes with the information he collected on the keepers of the keys. According to Dietz, they had a lot in common (115). From this merger grew the play *Foolin' Around With Infinity*. The play opened on November 4, 1988 at Brass Tacks Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota under the direction of the playwright.

A Character Analysis of *Foolin' Around With Infinity*: How Dietz Uses Characters and Character Relationships

Foolin' Around With Infinity is about survival. Dietz's goal is to educate the audience about our technological society. Each character creates his or her own method of dealing with the affects of technology on modern society. Dietz addresses his concerns about the prevalence of

[2] For the purposes of this discussion, the term *government* includes the Pentagon, the White House, Congress, and FEMA.

[3] See Playwright's Note in *Foolin' Around With Infinity* beginning on page 111 for the full account of their work process.

technology in a manner that is as preposterous as society's over-reliance on technology. Through his characters, he effectively portrays the irrational manner in which contemporary society deals with its problems and its solutions to these problems. A preoccupation with the technology of nuclear weapons and the politicians who support the existence and need for these weapons persists throughout this piece. The awareness of the possibility of ultimate destruction is what motivates the characters in the play.

Character Introduction. The play begins with the introduction of the character YOU. YOU is an actor playing, literally, you. YOU is an audience member, a narrator, and a character in the action. YOU, dressed as a typical audience member would be, is brought to her seat by one of the theatre's ushers, as the other audience members have been. YOU is given a program, and is then seated on stage in a chair identical to the seats in the audience. YOU begins to speak, "YOU sit comfortably in the theatre. YOU look around YOU. YOU read from your program" (10). YOU opens her program and begins to read from it, aloud. She recites the beginning of the playwright's note which explains the keepers of the keys and the other information Dietz collected. It is essential for the audience to be aware of Dietz's note in order to fully comprehend the ideas addressed in the play and the intentions of the script. Whether or not the audience has previously read the program, Dietz insures that they will be familiar with it through the character YOU.

YOU reads the playwright's note to the audience; however, she reads it in pieces. At the moments when more information is necessary, when she begins to read the next section. She provides necessary

information for the audience, including information about the time line of the play, the duration of the events, the location of the events, and, of course, the location of the nearest Fallout Shelter in the theatre's community. Dietz gives little character exposition, so the audience must rely on YOU to give background information. She also introduces the characters. At the opening of the play YOU reads from the program note, a note that includes a description of Luke, "I invented a character based on Free Will. Instinct. Zen in overdrive. This character became a young woman. I named her Luke" (11). Then when Luke actually appears on stage, YOU announces her arrival, "A small shaft of light comes up on Luke in the Fallout Shelter. Luke is twenty. YOU see her" (12).

Luke is actually the third character Dietz brings into the play. She is the first of the main characters introduced into the action. Initially referred to by YOU when YOU reads from the playwright's note at the beginning of the play, YOU formally introduces Luke to the audience. Because of the description given earlier in the play, the audience has a preconceived idea of who Luke is. She is discovered in the Fallout Shelter and addresses the audience:

> This is home. I live here and listen to the time walk by me. I can tell - from every creak and groan of the floorboards - what time it is, who is going where, and who is doing what. *(Brief pause.)* The time is now eight-oh-two. Roland Grant has dropped a dime on the tile floor of the elevator. Tails. (12)

Shortly after her arrival, Luke again addresses the audience and explains that her name is actually an acronym:

> Call me Luke. When I was born, my grandparents each

suggest a name to my parents: Linda, Ursula, Katherine, Elaine. I decided on Luke. It's an acronym. (13)

By using both of these conventions, Dietz is extending Luke's role from representing just one person and one point of view. Luke is an amalgam, who represents all the people who agree with the philosophies she conveys. Through her name, Luke has a connection to everyone and her voice becomes not one, but many. Through her acute sense of perception she is connected to everyone. Because of this, Luke asks questions of everyone and about everything. She is the most informed of all of the characters. A product of the Information Age, she seeks out information.

Mr. Anderson enters the action of the play immediately following YOU's recitation of the playwright's note. The character of Mr. Anderson plays multiple roles within the play. His entrance at the beginning of the show has him playing the role of the Popsicle Man. This is just one of his many guises. Throughout the entire play he is incognito, returning again and again as different people but always reinforcing a similar message: nothing is as it appears and things ignored do not disappear. Everyone has many roles at which they play, and these roles can change instantaneously to suit their needs or the situation. Dietz wants the audience to be aware of people's ability, including one's own ability, to alter their appearance and identity to play a role that suits their needs.

Mr. Anderson is the second person that Dietz introduces into the action of the play. Through the Popsicle Man, Dietz creates a mood of innocence, but also brings a level of expectation to the play. On one level the Popsicle Man is the epitome of innocence. The Popsicle Man dresses in white and has a bell that calls to all children. He is an image connected with childhood and associated with the carefree feeling which surrounds

it. When he first appears at the beginning of the play, he brings a message to the audience about the play, "Note: the play you are about to see contains poetry, profanity, infidelity and Monopoly. Nobody sings. Leave now or deal with it" (12). Dietz wants the audience to know what to expect so he uses Mr. Anderson to provide this information as YOU provides other necessary information.

Dietz introduces the characters of John "Jesse" Randall and Arthur "Mac" McCormick at the same time. As with Luke, YOU announces their presence, and they are discovered in the Command Post. When the audience first sees them they are already at work. The two men attach their combination locks to the small red safe that holds the keys to launch the missiles and discuss the reason for their tardiness:

JESSE. So what?

MAC. You made us late again.

JESSE. Two minutes.

MAC. I'll have to put it in the report.

JESSE. So what?

MAC. Watch your ass, Jesse boy.

JESSE. You call your daughter?

MAC. Got no daughter.

JESSE. How long's she been missing now?

MAC. I got no daughter and her name's not Linda. . . .
You look like shit.

JESSE. Shut up, Mac.

MAC. Out of uniform.

JESSE. You're kidding.

MAC. Third time this week.

JESSE. I'm so glad you keep track.

MAC. Not supposed to see the white of your t-shirt. You know that.

JESSE. Yes. I know that.

MAC. I'll have to put it in the report.

JESSE. Do that.

MAC. And where the hell is your tie?

JESSE. In the oven at home. (13-14)

This introduction serves three purposes. First, it establishes their occupation and the weight of it in concrete terms. The audience sees the Command Post with all its instruments and its red safe. Second, it establishes their commitment to their job. It is obvious that Mac takes more pride in his duty than Jesse does. Last, it established their relationship, both professionally and socially. Mac is obviously in charge, but does not intimidate Jesse.

Character Function. The character of YOU has several functions throughout the play. Dietz uses her to manipulate the audience in a variety of ways. One of her purposes is to guide the audience through the chaotic circumstances of the action. YOU thinks, speaks, and acts as an audience member but her thoughts and words are indicated by Dietz thus, through YOU, he is able to direct focus and to encourage thought in the audience members:

LUKE. Think about your kids.

YOU. YOU think about your kids. (65)

This is extremely effective in that the audience sees what YOU sees/says. The lines are simple, "YOU see her." By doing this, Dietz is able to control

where the audience focuses their attention. YOU extends this device by bringing the audience's awareness to the action of the characters, "YOU see Mac and Jesse look at each other. YOU see their eyes meet the way men's eyes do. Several feet in front of their faces" (29). She tells the audience exactly where the characters are looking, so they cannot misinterpret the focus of the character. Unlike some playwrights who wish their intentions to be ambiguous, Dietz wants his audience to follow the play, and to understand it.

YOU also serves as a narrator. There is no anticipation of what will happen because the audience is told of events prior to their occurrence. This dramaturgical strategy allows the audience to focus on the meaning of the actions, the characters' objectives, rather than the actions themselves. In this same vein, YOU also sets up scenes that take place outside of the two distinct environments created on stage. Through her words, past and future events are played out without the benefit of a separate playing area or boundaries identifying that the characters are in a different place. An example of this is first encountered early in the play, "Mac and Luke turn and look at one another. YOU imagine they are inside their modest, two-bedroom, inner-city home. Luke is nine" (17). The audience is able to imagine the environment in which the events take place because YOU sets up the scenario. Likewise, she also allows for the passage of time. In Act II, YOU states, "YOU see Jesse turn and leave. YOU imagine the passing of a year. YOU see Jesse return" (70). This allows the play to maintain a simplicity that is juxtaposed with the complexity of the larger issues at hand. Dietz deals with society's dependence on technology, so to use elaborate design elements would directly contradict the playwright's belief in the need of simplicity. Dietz uses a simple

solution; he has a character describe where the action moves.

Dietz also utilizes YOU as a means of reinforcement of the actions of the other characters. When there is a silence, YOU draws attention to it, "Following the long silence, YOU watch Commander McCormick throw the dice" (26). Not only is she drawing attention to the silence, but she is also breaking it which forces the play to move forward. Since YOU represents an audience member, the silence is broken when the audience, YOU, begins to react to the tension of the silence. She also reinforces what the characters have said or done, "YOU see Luke leave. YOU see Mac begin to comb his hair" (58). A simple action then takes on much greater meaning than normal by drawing attention to it. As a representative of the audience, YOU remains onstage throughout the performance. Even when she is not actively participating in the action, she is part of the theatre experience. She observes and thinks as an audience member. When she does speak, she articulates her thoughts, the thoughts of the audience, thus reinforcing what the audience is seeing and thinking. The continuation of the action is in the hands of this character. She breaks the silences pushing the play forward. It is also YOU who takes the audience into and out of the intermission, "As before, YOU imagine an intermission. This time, however, YOU are on your own" (61). From the opening of the play, YOU has controlled when the action starts, and when it ceases. This is also true after the intermission. YOU reclaims focus by telling the audience that they should take their seats, "A light flickers. YOU take your seat. As before, the intermission ends. YOU see the Fallout Shelter" (62). Dietz does not rely merely on the dimming of the house lights, or the raising of the stage lights to manage the audience and push the action forward.

Like YOU, Mr. Anderson serves many purposes in the play. As the Popsicle Man he represents something that everyone waits for, and that something is different for each person. For Luke, the Popsicle Man symbolizes her lost childhood. Through him, she hopes to reclaim her innocence, a time when she was close to her father and her mother was in her life. For Mac, the Popsicle Man represents his deepest desires. Unfortunately, the bell that Mac longs to hear is the signal notifying him to launch the missiles. Mac longs to do his ultimate task, for this will prove his importance. Luke lives in the past and Mac lives in the future. Occasionally, Luke suspects that she hears the Popsicle Man, but she never finds him. Mac always assures her that it is not the Popsicle Man, he tells her, "The Popsicle Man doesn't come by here anymore" (42). This statement quashes her hopes of a return to innocence. By the end of the play, when the alarm is sounding, Luke is certain she hears him:

LUKE. I HEARD THE BELL!

MAC. THAT IS *NOT* THE POPSICLE MAN. (107)

Dietz brings the Popsicle Man back at the very end of the play which indicates that there is no resolution for these characters. At the beginning and at the end he rides his bicycle across the stage, but stops for no one.

After his entrance as the Popsicle Man, Mr. Anderson comes to the Command Post as a traveling salesman who sells footballs. The football, in fact, is not a football, but rather it is a briefcase. In this instance, Dietz takes the government's metaphor of calling the briefcase that holds the launch codes "a football" and makes it his own. By utilizing this metaphor he comments on the government. Mr. Anderson explains the government's game:

The *football.* This football is made of leather, but it is not the type that Johnny Unitas used to throw during the days when Raymond Berry ran buttonhooks and America ran the world. This football is carried by four military aides - each representing a branch of the armed forces - they follow our President (bless him God) wherever he goes. Inside the football is a series of code words. It is with these code words that the President orders the Pentagon to give up its toys. (22-23)

Dietz's comparison of this procedure to a game and the missiles to toys shows the indifference to society's reliance on technology. Mr. Anderson continues by explaining the procedures of Mac's and Jesse's job:

MR. ANDERSON. The Pentagon sends the alert codes to the underground missile silos. At each site are two men - men very much like you. One man is the commander. The other the deputy. They are the keepers of the keys. . . . These two men very much like you decode the incoming messages separately. Then compare them to make sure they match. . . . They each open one of the two combination locks to the little red safe. . . . The little red safe cannot be opened by one man alone for neither man has the combination to both locks. . . . The locks are issued secretly and each man brings his own lock down to the silo each shift. . . . Once the safe is opened and the sealed authenticator inside matches the incoming message, the two men very much like

> you take out separate firing keys. The men carry their firing keys to consoles which are about twelve feet apart. . . . The men turn the keys simultaneously. . . . MoscowIwasn'tkidding- Pow. . . . Silence. . . . The most wise and wonderful thing about this system is this . . . If, at any time while working together in the Command Post one of these men suspects his partner of sabotage . . . He has orders to shoot and kill his partner on the spot. (24-28)

Mr. Anderson identifies the point of conflict between Mac and Jesse. It becomes obvious from their reaction to what Mr. Anderson is telling the audience that Mac and Jesse are there for different reasons. It also becomes apparent that they do not trust each other.

Another character Mr. Anderson portrays is a representative from Mr. Anderson's Walk-A-Pet. He arrives at the Command Post ready and willing to serve all of Mac and Jesse's needs, "Mr. Anderson's Walk-A-Pet service has a pet control device to suit every pet and every situation" (41). He brings a bag containing leashes of various strengths, handcuffs, a straitjacket, and a handgun. When Mac and Jesse inform Mr. Anderson that they have no need for him, Mr. Anderson states that his services work for children too. Mr. Anderson assures them that he will, "KEEP YOUR DOG IN LINE" (42). By introducing the comparison of pets and children, Dietz brings up the concept of loyalty. Loyalty is an issue with Mac. He feels betrayed by Luke and even insists that he has no children, but Mr. Anderson knows that he does, in fact, have a daughter. An

argument occurs between them regarding Luke. Mac was not able to control Luke, and Mr. Anderson reveals this point of weakness to the audience, and to Jesse. Mac sees Luke as disloyal to him, and so he has renounced her. Mr. Anderson reminds him of her betrayal. Betrayal is Mac's worst fear, and when Mr. Anderson leaves, he leaves the bag of control devices with Mac. Mr. Anderson's action, combined with the conflict between Mac and Jesse foreshadows Jesse's betrayal of Mac.

Next Mr. Anderson turns his attention to YOU during a simulated intermission. This simulated intermission occurs before the actual intermission and shows what YOU may do. During this YOU is reading from the playwright's note when Mr. Anderson takes on the character of a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) employee she describes. There is a transition from YOU merely reading the events described by Dietz to YOU and Mr. Anderson acting the incidents. By giving action to his words, Dietz reinforces the importance of the information. The FEMA employee provides information on the safety procedures during natural disasters, as well as safety procedures during nuclear fallout as a result of a nuclear war. The audience discovers that the majority of shelters remain empty until decisions have been made about where to move the populace in the event of a nuclear war. Mr. Anderson returns in Act II as the FEMA employee, though, this time he talks to Luke. This issue of the proper procedures in case of nuclear fallout comes up again. Dietz wants the audience to be conscious of how unprepared the government is to deal with the aftermath of this kind of catastrophe, but also of how citizens assume that proper measures have been taken to provide for us. Society's dependence on the government has made us lax in preparing for what technology cannot protect us from.

Mr. Anderson also plays the role of a "Neo-liberal E.R.A. pro-choice save the whales ban handguns bread not bombs" turned "Ultra-conservative N.R.A. feed Jane Fonda to the whales pro-life burn Huck Finn prayer in schools and a strong defense" character (55-56). The idea behind this character is that anyone can change to suit their needs or to suit society's expectations. Mr. Anderson enters the scene looking to rent a room, and when he senses rejections of his first persona he switches to the second persona, ". . . I can change my mind and turn on a dime and what would you like me to be?" (56). To get what they want, there are people who will be what they think others want them to be. Dietz uses this switch in identity as a warning to the audience that some people are not always as they seem.

Near the end of the play, Mr. Anderson appears as another traveling salesman; this time he sells umbrellas. He claims that his umbrellas will protect against the effects of nuclear fallout. The price he quotes for the umbrellas is not actually a dollar amount, but rather it is the combination to Mac's and Jesse's locks.

MR. ANDERSON. REGULARLY 29 - 5-
30. TODAY FOR YOU AND YOU
ALONE 17 - 20 - 11.
WE'VE GOT IT ALL. (103)

Mr. Anderson wants Mac and Jesse to turn the keys so that his product will be necessary. This character symbolizes all those who disregard fact in order to sell their interests, be their interests commercial or political. It is more important to succeed than to do what is most beneficial, or what is right. For a capitalist society, financial interests outweigh moral obligations. In his playwright's note, Dietz quotes then Vice President

George Bush as having said, "'Some people believe there can be no such thing as a winner in a nuclear war. But I don't believe that'" (115). Sadly, there are those in society who will believe just that because someone they view as powerful said it was true. Dietz wants society to question its leaders. Everyone needs to start their own folders and collect information about their society, and then see the entire picture, from all angles.

Throughout the play, Mr. Anderson remains persistent. Overall, he represents the effects of our technological age. As Dietz says in his playwright's note, "We are hounded by technology that, like Mr. Anderson, will not go away" (115). There is no getting rid of Mr. Anderson; instead he must be dealt with. Mac and Jesse refuses to do this. They try to ignore him in hopes that he will go away.

A person who does question society is Luke. The outside world frightens her and so she escapes. Luke ran away from her father because he frightened her, and has taken refuge in a Fallout Shelter. She said that it called to her like the Popsicle Man (30). The reference to the Popsicle Man reiterates her desire to regress back to her childhood; to go home again, somewhere she can be safe, but she cannot. In a scene with her father she tells him how she feels:

MAC. You want to go home, then?

LUKE. No, Daddy. I'm not going home, anymore.

MAC. What the hell are you -

LUKE. You scare me, Daddy. Some nights I sneak upstairs and watch you sleep. I eat pretzels at the foot of your bed. I watch your hairs crawl out of your head and lie on your pillow. When

you sleep, you look dead.

MAC. Don't run, Luke. There's nowhere to run.

LUKE. Bye, Dad. I left a note for you in the basement. *(Leaves.)*. (58)

Luke fights to isolate herself from her father, yet she remains very much connected to him. Both escape underground for sanctuary. Though she is the most honest of the three main characters in the play, she does lie to herself when it comes to her father. She blames him for the loss of her innocence when, in actuality, he fought to keep her a child. Dietz includes flashbacks to Luke's childhood in which Mac tries to give her a normal life. He fixes her sandwiches, attempts to get her to clean her room, and wants to take her to the movies. Unfortunately, his attempts are made in vain for Luke already knows too much about the real world. During the play, Dietz portrays Luke at different ages. The first of these is Luke at the age of nine. She plays a game with her father, but even at this young age she has lost some of her innocence. Her intelligence shows through and her need for knowledge is evident. She has access to more information in general than generations past and has retained it. She cannot reconcile what she knows with her father's occupation:

LUKE. You scare me, Daddy.

MAC. *(Turning to Luke.)* What?

LUKE. I think there are people that should never be given weapons and I think those people all look like you. (96)

Her fear of her father and her knowledge of her father's power and the power of people like him drive her to leave him and the world. This is why she goes to the Shelter.

Luke does, however, truthfully comment about what she sees, and that includes herself. Throughout the play much of her thought is a stream of consciousness expressed in incongruous monologues that eventually culminate in a point. She often spews lines consisting of the incongruous thoughts that clutter her mind, like she is trying to purge them. These thoughts are reflections of what surrounds her: red M&M's, bowling pins, perms. The things that keep her company are little things she takes pleasure in, things that remind her of her past:

> I want to find things I've lost. I want to jump more. When I was a kid I always jumped a couple times a day. I jumped because jumping was a thing I didn't need a ticket to. I jumped because I had not yet given in to gravity. I jumped because as a kid I was immortal. (30)

She eventually did give in to gravity, and now she sees the world and herself differently. She is aware that she gave in, and so she fears that eventually she will give up everything, "As I step inside and close the door behind me, I am thinking simultaneously about Dylan Thomas, nuclear winter, the cost of a perm, and my fear of turning into a McPerson" (30). This fear also comes out in the brief glimpse Dietz gives the audience of Luke in the future at age thirty-three. This occurs in Act I when Luke interrupts a telephone conversation with her father to address the audience:

> My radicalism was just a phase. And, like any phase, it had motion. I became disenchanted. I became a loner. I became a wind-chime artist. I became a mystic. I became an expert. I became an author. I became a lecturer. I became a cult figure. I became a media darling. I became a commodity. I

became a corporation, a conservative, a conundrum and a condo-babe. And the point is this: I do not think of *this* as a phase. This is a calling. (31)

With this statement, the audience sees the possibility of Luke becoming her worst fear, becoming someone generic, becoming a McPerson. Dietz is not saying that this definitely happens to Luke, but rather that it is possible. The possibility lies within everyone.

Luke introduces the idea that children are society's hope. Several times throughout the play she states that kids are immortal. When children allow themselves to give in to the expectations of adulthood their immortality runs out. Children have not yet given into the rules that bind adults, and when they do they risk becoming McPeople. Dietz shows that people become comfortable and secure, and, consequently, they stop fighting for their beliefs. Children are the ultimate questioners. They question everything, as this is what Dietz wants.

It is apparent throughout the play that Luke is a product of the Information Age. All her life she has been bombarded by the advancements in technology, and has witnessed society's reliance on them. The audience sees the effects of her knowledge in her incongruous thoughts that run throughout the play. The effects of living like she does become more apparent toward the end of the play as her ability to communicate begins to break down. This breakdown culminates in her final monologue which is a collage of slogans, songs lyrics, and announcements:

The following is a test of the ... a test of the ... a test of the time is currently oh forty-nine ... the forecast calls for ... calls four five six seven times seven is forty-nine was a very

> good year ... it was a very good year for the small town girls of independent means the state of not being dependent ... the state of not being Delaware Tupperware Anywhere .... (108)

A product of the Information Age, she has lost her capacity to formulate her own thoughts and has been reduced to regurgitating the clichés of popular culture. This is the final image of Luke that Dietz leaves with the audience. It reinforces society's confidence in technology to solve our problems, to live our lives, and to make us feel safe.

Luke is the one character who understands the entire picture of how society works. She understands who she could become if she let her guard down. Unfortunately, it is too late for Luke, but she passes what she knows on to YOU, the audience. At the end of play, as she recites the Declaration of Independence, Luke inflates a football. When it is inflated, she throws it to YOU. Through this action, Dietz metaphorically passes the ball to the audience. The football represents the Pentagon's football, the briefcase with the information and power to save or to destroy the world. The key to finding a solution is never to stop asking questions. Dietz does not attempt to answer the questions he poses through Luke, but rather he illuminates the need for the questions. He suggests that it is the responsibility of everyone to continue to ask the questions.

Luke's questions most affect the character of John "Jesse" Randall. With this character Dietz does his most obvious work of educating. Jesse is Mac's deputy, one of the keepers of keys. He is revealed as a man who does his job, but he does not seem over zealous about it as Mac is. Both Jesse and Mac have a vested interest in their jobs; they are different interests. At the opening of the play, Jesse seems to be one who does the minimum amount of work required. Rules seem to have no meaning for him. He is

ambivalent about his uniform. His stops wearing a tie because it has no meaning for him. Near the end of Act I, Jesse reveals a different side of himself. Dietz eloquently enlightens the audience to Jesse's real perspective on his job. The monologue describes a setting in which a group of inebriated college students, including Jesse, are speeding down the highway, when suddenly Connie, the driver, indicates that she is glad she is not the one driving. Jesse continues:

> The miles went by in silence as we barreled through the twilight. And there we sat. Seven panicked faces in a metal box moving seventy miles an hour. And Connie, happy and serene, holding the wheel. Secure in the knowledge that someone else is driving. (60)

For Jesse, Connie represents society as a whole. Dietz brings up the idea that society elects people whom we believe represent our views, and that we are content to let those select few do the driving. Through this humorous but agonizing monologue his true purpose is revealed, "I come to work now because I am afraid of who they'll replace me with. . . . I am terrified that someone else is driving" (60). His greatest fear, as everyone's greatest fear should be, is that someone else is navigating his life. His need to control his destiny is the motivation for his career choice. The rules do not hold the importance for him as they do for Mac because Jesse is not there for the same reasons. Unlike Mac, Jesse's need to control the key to the missile is so that he is in the driver's seat.

Though this change seems to come abruptly at the end of Act I, Dietz reveals its catalyst at the top of Act II. Dietz takes the audience back a year and reveals that Jesse knows Luke. Their initial meeting occurred immediately following Jesse's assignment at the Command Post with Mac.

Jesse wanders into the Fallout Shelter and discovers Luke living there. Luke attempts to discover why he is there. After Jesse notices her box of Quaker Oats, Luke tells him the story of when she first experienced the notion of infinity:

> Our first glimpse of infinity comes early. At 7:15 on a school morning as we sit in front of a plastic bowl with oatmeal steam rising into our face. We hold our spoon and stare at the Quaker Oats box Mom left on the table. On the box he is holding is a picture of a man holding a Quaker Oats box. On that box is a picture of a man holding a Quaker Oats box. At 7:15 on a school morning we understand infinity. (64)

The story is simple in contrast to the idea it is trying to convey. Dietz believes that infinity is the collision of humanity and technology (115). Infinity cannot be controlled or altered, and ultimately infinity wins over man's attempts to control it. Luke understands this, and she tries to pass this understanding on to Jesse. The audience sees the effects of this encounter at the beginning of the play, which begins after Jesse and Mac have been working together for a year. In the scene with Luke, Jesse wore his tie, but when he is with Mac he does not. Luke brings up the tie:

LUKE. Nice tie.

JESSE. Thanks.

LUKE. What's it mean to you?

JESSE. What?

LUKE. Your tie. What does it mean to you?

JESSE. It's just a tie.

LUKE. I'm sorry to hear that. (65)

He did not know why he wore the tie and so he stopped. This new quest for

meaning leads Jesse to question Mac's judgment at the Command Post. He begins to lose trust in Mac. Jesse's mistrust deepens over their year together.

Dietz provides little information about Arthur "Mac" McCormick. He is Luke's father; he is also a keeper of the keys. As Luke represents Free Will, Mac represents Law and Order. He is a man ruled by rules. He does not consider the repercussions of his actions; he only considers his duty. His first duty seems to be to his job. He is concerned by the fact that he and Jesse were late, that Jesse is out of uniform, both of which must go into his report. His life revolves around following the rules. This obsession is reiterated in his obsession with playing Monopoly. Mac insists that they follow the rules, "A rule's a rule. You agreed to it" (17). He also requires that they play by a rule established by his previous partner, Brady. Because Brady was his superior, Mac did not question the rule set by him. And Mac will only play Monopoly because he knows the rules. It is safe. Mac also followed the rules of fatherhood. His duty was to provide for his family, and he fought to do that. After his wife left, Mac assumed her role in Luke's life, playing both parents. This is why he is so devastated by Luke leaving home. He puts much weight in loyalty, but people betray him continuously. He never begins to neglect his responsibilities. He cannot understand why Luke treated him as she did.

As Mac cannot relate to Luke, he also cannot relate to Jesse. They have worked together for a year, but Mac knows very little of his partner's life. This is a conscious choice. He refuses to discuss personal information about himself, and refuses to listen to Jesse talk about his life. To know him would be to form a connection with him, and a connection

could interfere with the order to launch the missiles. He cannot let his feeling impede his duties, for control is the one thing he still has. Through Mac's relationship with Jesse, Dietz exposes Mac's need for control. Mac does everything by the book without deviation. He cannot accept Jesse's ambivalence toward his job. Jesse refuses to follow the rules, while for Mac, rules are written to be followed. It is irrelevant to him whether it is necessary to wear a tie. Mac does not question the validity of the rules, but knows that any deviation from them will result in the breakdown of the system. It is this system that Mac clings to; it is all he has left.

Character Relationships. Because of the role that Dietz has established for YOU, she has very little interaction with the other characters in the play. YOU is not personally involved with the action of the story that is being presented by Luke, Mac, and Jesse, but she participates in the action of the piece as a whole. This changes, however, when near the end of the play YOU becomes directly involved with the other characters on stage. For the first time, Dietz brings YOU into their world. The first time Dietz incorporates YOU is Act II in a scene with Mac and Mr. Anderson. Dietz uses her to play the role of a telephone sex operator. YOU is involved, but still remains physically separated from the men. She is only connected to them verbally, but shortly thereafter Luke acknowledges YOU's presence on stage and throws her a football. Soon after Luke approaches YOU:

> YOU. YOU imagine Mac walking down into the basement of his modest, inner-city home. As he does this, Luke turns and looks at YOU.

(Mac moves into the Shelter and finds the program. Luke moves close to YOU.)

YOU don't know what she wants. YOU don't want to be singled out. YOU try to dismiss her. YOU read from your program. (96-97)

Eventually Luke forces YOU out of the safety of her chair. With this accomplished, Luke sits. YOU's safe haven has been usurped, and she is forced to become a part of the action. By bringing YOU into the action, Dietz metaphorically brings the audience into the action. Ultimately, YOU is not just a member of the audience, but a member of society. Dietz reinforces this at the end of the play, when YOU is the last character on stage and says the final line, "As YOU hear nothing, and as YOU do nothing - the light on YOU goes to black" (110). Dietz has used YOU as a simple and ingenious convention to pull the audience into the performance from the beginning. YOU *is* you.

In the end, the one who interacts with Mr. Anderson is YOU. Near the end of the play, as a siren blares, Mr. Anderson hands YOU the umbrella and tells her, "Who knows, you may be that lucky person" (107). YOU may be the lucky one to survive. YOU is also the one who does not ignore Mr. Anderson. Through YOU's response to Mr. Anderson, Dietz suggests it is up to society to listen to Mr. Anderson, and decide whether or not to buy what he is selling.

Dietz creates a strong relationship between Jesse and Luke. Initially, Jesse does not want to hear what Luke is trying to tell him, and avoids her to prevent it. She persists and says to him, "The time has come to ask questions" (73). He, like Luke, begins to ask questions. He recognizes the reality of the situation though on some level he longs for

the bliss of ignorance. It takes time before he can accept the knowledge that Luke has shared with him because it is frightening, but eventually he accepts it. On the subject of change Jesse says:

> . . . Change is like a psychological paper cut: it is not just something you hate - it is precisely what you hate. I've changed my thinking before. I show the scars at parties during the holidays. It can be instantaneous. It can happen in a word. . . . Fine. Soon. Sorry. Yes. Never. Careful. Trust. Always. Words. Paper cuts. And change is part of the bloodletting. A word is spoken and suddenly I will have known her for years. (74-75)

This image is simple, but brutal. The pain caused by a minor yet painful injury mimics the harshness of the reality of which Jesse is suddenly aware. In this way, Jesse seems to represent Dietz. As Dietz gathered information for his file he gained new, yet troublesome insight. Jesse has an experience similar to this through Luke. And in the scene following this, Jesse begins to be able to know what Luke is thinking. It is as though they have known each other for years; he know her like he knows himself. They have created a bond where Luke and Mac have broken one.

The memory scenes that Mac shares with Luke present a simple life. He tries to be a father to his daughter, but is met by her constant resistance. He is unable to accept her need to ask questions, her need to understand things. He rejects Luke because of her constant craving for information. She begs him to tell her stories of projects he has been involved with; he takes her to work with him, but nothing appeases her. She cannot accept what he does, and he cannot accept her because he fears her like he fears reality. He tells Jesse that he has no daughter. He

refuses to see Luke as he refuses to see reality. Mac believes in his government. He needs to believe in his government. He survives through his faith in the knowledge that he is right.

There is no change in Mac. He follows his beliefs to the very end. In order to get Jesse to perform his ultimate duty, Mac points a gun at him. Mac has been trained to follow procedure, which he does even after Jesse usurps his control and has a gun trained on him. Mac's last line is, "WE'VE GOT THE FORCE RIGHT THERE IN OUR HANDS" (107). He never stops to consider the consequences of his actions. He never stops to ask questions. Consequently, it costs him his life.

In the present state of the world, technology is taking over and controlling our lives. Dietz illustrates this through characters who represent the differing attitudes of middle class America. The ideas that Dietz addresses in *Foolin' Around With Infinity* are ideas that transcend this particular situation. It is not just the existence of nuclear technology and nuclear weapons that should be questioned, but everything. The characters tell their stories, give their opinions, but leave the decisions in the hands of the audience.

Chapter IV

Lonely Planet

Plot Synopsis of *Lonely Planet*

Lonely Planet is the story of two friends, Jody and Carl, who depend on each other to get through their daily lives in the age of AIDS. Though AIDS is present in their lives it is not what this play is about. *Lonely Planet* is ultimately about friendship. The play uses comedy and sentiment to enchant the audience, and remind them about the beauty and necessity of friendship in their lives.

Jody runs a map store which he now refuses to leave. His friend, Carl, becomes his only connection with the outside world. Day after day Carl visits the map store, bringing with him the chairs of the friends they have lost to AIDS.[1] He has taken on the job of finishing the unfinished business of those who have died. Surrounded by a myriad of chairs, the two talk about the significance of their lives and the importance of their friendship. Eventually Jody reveals that he must leave the map store in order to be tested for AIDS, and with the encouragement and support of Carl, he does. The play ends with Carl's own chair arriving at the shop marking his ending and Jody's beginning. It is now up to Jody to continue Carl's work.

Development of *Lonely Planet*

In an interview with John Istel in *American Theatre*, Steven Dietz revealed the background of the play and his intentions in writing it. He wrote it in a period of two weeks and developed it from three fundamental inspirations: 1) Dietz's love of maps; 2) the two actors for whom it was

[1] *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*, disease caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).

written[2] ; and 3) friendship. Dietz explained that he used friendship to marry the first two sources. Dietz calls his play, ". . . an homage to friendship" (*Risking Sentiment* 38).

Dietz also explained that this play revealed itself very slowly to him, and thus he reveals it slowly to the audience. As he wrote the play, he says he did not know what the chairs meant until he arrived at the moment when Carl tells Jody what they mean. Dietz said, ". . . it's the way that a tragedy seeps into our lives - - it starts at a distance, as something we don't have a name for, and then sort of quietly appears in the room" (38).

The issue of AIDS is also revealed slowly into the play. Dietz never utilizes the actual term AIDS, but refers to it by the recognized synonyms: "the disease" or "sick." As Jody says in the play, "Now, you ask how someone is. You're told they're 'sick.' And you know exactly what that means" (*Lonely Planet* 44). Dietz consciously chose this approach, saying that, ". . . sometimes the very words itself can end discussion. . . . People have preformed opinions and a certain part of our ability to listen gets turned off" (38). By excluding the word itself, Dietz strengthens the power of the piece to highlight the relationship of these two engaging characters rather than focusing on the fact that they are gay and dealing with AIDS.

Description of Characters

Jody is a man in his forties who owns and runs a map store. Recently, Jody has become overwhelmed by the outside world. As a gay man living in the city, Jody's life has become consumed by the fear of AIDS. His friends are dying and he knows that he is at risk. In an attempt

[2] The play was written for Michael Winters and Larry Ballard, but is not their story.

to shut out this reality, Jody takes refuge in his store.

Carl is Jody's friend. Since Carl is younger than Jody, the issue of AIDS has been more prevalent in his life. It is something that he has probably always had to deal with, and so he accepts the responsibility by committing himself to his friends who are sick and dying. This same dedication is seen in Carl's relationship with Jody. Carl fights to make Jody face his fears and take an active role in his life. Carl is a person with little patience for most people, but he is patient when it comes to Jody. Carl shares with Jody his experiences in the outside world in hopes that Jody will overcome his fears and leave his map store.

A Character Analysis of *Lonely Planet*: How Dietz Uses Character and Character Relationships

In *Lonely Planet*, Dietz explores how AIDS affects the lives of two friends. So that the focus of the play is not overlooked, it is important to mention that although both men are gay, they are friends and not lovers. Jody and Carl have both developed their own methods of dealing with AIDS in their lives: Jody takes refuge in his map store while Carl takes on the unfinished business of his friends who have died of the disease. Through their interaction with each other the two realize how grateful they are for their friendship. As Dietz states in his playwright's note:

> . . . our legacy is our friends. . . . Our friends get our uncensored questions and our yet-to-be-reasoned opinions. Our friends grant us the chance to make our grand, embarrassing, contradictory pronouncements about the world. They get the very best, and are stuck with the absolute worst, we have to offer. Our friends get our rough

> drafts. Over time, they both open our eyes and break our hearts. . . . In a chaotic world, friendship is the most elegant, the most lasting way to be *useful.* We are, each of us, a living testament to our friends' compassion and tolerance, humor and wisdom, patience and grit. Friendship, not technology, is the only thing capable of showing us the enormity of the world. (*Lonely Planet* 55-56)

And it is this friendship that drives the play. Jody and Carl represent each other's legacy.

Character Introduction. The play opens with a shaft of light on a simple wooden chair. Jody stands next to the chair and looks at it for a long time. He then turns and addresses the audience regarding the chair, "One day I saw a chair here. I had no idea where it had come from. I looked at it. I sat in it. A chair. Nothing else" (*Lonely Planet* 9). At this point, the lights expand to reveal Jody's map store. Dietz allows the audience a moment to take in the store before Carl's sudden entrance. This opening does three things. First, it immediately establishes Jody in his element. Throughout the course of the play the audience learns that Jody has taken sanctuary in his map store and refuses to leave. By immediately establishing this location and establishing Jody here, Dietz sets up Jody's strong connection to his store. Second, Dietz begins the play by illustrating the main conflict: Jody and the chairs. Throughout the play, Jody must deal with the accumulation of chairs in his store, and what the chairs represent. The play opens with the arrival of the first chair, and Jody's reaction to it. The rest of the play exposes how Jody's reactions change as his feeling for the chairs and what they represent changes.

Immediately following this moment is Carl's entrance. Carl represents another obstacle in Jody's life. So, within the first few moments Dietz not only establishes where this play occurs, but he also introduces the symbols he uses to represent the issues that the play deals with.

The shop itself assists in establishing Jody's character for the audience. At the beginning of the play, the shop is neat and clean, but it is not overly decorated. There are numerous maps sitting in bins and hanging on the walls. Globes and travel books are also on display. A map table with drawers is also present. On a small counter sits an old vintage cash register. The shop is not modern, but rather it is functional. It houses Jody's merchandise which is what is important to Jody. He cares more about his maps than he does about presentation. As the play progresses the shop becomes more and more cluttered, as does Jody's life.

After Jody's short address to the audience, Carl makes his entrance. Before the audience can adjust to a new character on stage, Carl launches into one of his numerous observations about the world. In this monologue he reveals how he feels about people:

> Everyone is boring. How did this happen? *When* did this happen? At some imperceptible moment everyone became absolutely shuffle-your-feet, stare-out-the-window *boring.* I try, okay? I do my part. I strike things up. I toss out words to grease the conversation. But these people, these people at the bus or the market or the newsstand, these people bore me. Not just a little. They bore me a lot. I'm sure they all came from good families, but over time they've lost what small part of them was ever of interest to anyone. They are even sort of hard to *see.* (9-10)

This monologue tells the audience how intolerant Carl can be. He concludes this monologue with, "All I'm saying is this: Don't step out your door in the morning until you've thought of something interesting to say" (10). Carl has difficulty accepting the actions of the outside world, and he puts the blame on them for their actions, but he does try to interact with the outside world. This directly contrasts Jody who, as the audience discovers, no longer goes out into the world.

Carl also uses this diatribe to avoid Jody's imminent questions about the chair. When Jody does bring up the chair, Carl continues in his observation about how boring people are. When he runs out of things to say he rushes out of the store just as he rushed in it. This is how Carl works. Carl is a master of lies, but he has not prepared a lie about the chair. He abruptly leaves the store and shortly after reenters in hopes that this will distract Jody from the presence of the chair. Later in this scene, Carl diverts Jody's question again by feigning an appointment. He returns momentarily saying that he lied about the appointment. His intention was to rush out of the store and leave the chair behind. Through this action, Dietz establishes how Carl tries to manipulate Jody.

This first scene helps to reinforce the characters Dietz has created, as well as to establish the basis of their relationship. Jody avoids his problems. His fear prevents him from dealing with unpleasant issues and so he avoids them. He latches on to Carl's faults to divert attention from himself. Likewise, Carl lies in order to cope with his reality. Each character needs the other in order to get at the truth. Carl forces Jody to face his fears, and Jody forces Carl to tell the truth. An interesting point is that Carl admits that he is lying, while Jody does not acknowledge his tendency to avoid the unknown.

Character Function. Jody realizes that his fear runs his life. This realization is revealed in two ways: through his dream recollections and through his monologue about Greenland. The Greenland monologue exposes Jody's fear. He explains how the Mercator map was meant for navigational purposes, but has now been accepted as a reflection of the world. Because of its intended function, the map distorts the shapes and sizes of the continents. Jody divulges how his distortion of AIDS has affected him:

> . . . we've come to accept the distortion as fact. . . . Maybe it's comforting to us because we, too, have our blind spots. We, too, have things on the periphery of our lives that we distort - in order to best focus on the things in front of us. In order to best navigate through our days. Sometimes, though, these things on the periphery, these things that we do not understand, these *far away* things that grow to massive proportions - threatening to dwarf our tiny, ordered, known world. And when they get big enough, we are forced to see them for what they are. (21)

AIDS resides on Jody's periphery. He focuses on the day-to-day duties of his store, and the things he has ignored have grown to massive proportions. He has arrived at the moment when he sees things as they are. Jody knows that he must face what he has avoided, but he is afraid.

His dreams also reveal his avoidance of his responsibility to his friends. Carl repeatedly asks Jody if he has had any interesting dreams. It is as though Carl realizes their significance even if Jody does not. Jody recounts the dreams for Carl. In the first two dreams, Jody says that he has been mistaken for someone else. The first dream centers on a

fireman's shirt that Jody has bought second-hand. As he walks down the street a fire breaks out and the witnesses see him in the fireman's shirt and turn to him for help. Jody attempts to explain that it is only a shirt, that they have the wrong man. As Jody tries to make them understand, he sees Carl. Jody pleads with Carl to explain, "Tell them, Carl. Tell the I'm not a fireman. Tell them I can't save them" (13). Carl's responses with "don't let us down." In the second dream, he is mistaken for a boxer. The crowd sees him as their champion. Jody again tries to explain that they have the wrong man, but to no avail. Carl is there. When Jody tries to flee the ring, Carl's responses by pushing Jody back into the ring. Both of these dreams reflect Jody's refusal to get involved. His fear holds him back. And each time Carl is there to urge him to act. The final dream comes at the end of the play, after Carl's death.[3] Jody recounts a dream in which he is mistaken for a singer. As before, Jody tries to tell them that he is not the singer; they have the wrong man: this time Jody participates. The band begins to play his favorite song and Jody begins to sing. Carl is present, and the two sing together. In this dream, Jody accepts his duty to his friend. These people wanted him to act and he does. The reversal of Jody and Carl is complete. Jody will now take over Carl's job. He will take care of the unfinished business.

Jody also serves to enlighten the audience about Carl. After Carl's first extended exit, Jody turns to the audience and explains what Carl does. He relates the story of how the two met, and how Carl lies about his occupation. Jody tells what Carl does, but he is unable to reveal why. This leads to the other component of his function. Whenever Carl lies about his job, Jody questions him. It first occurs when Carl says that he is going

[3] Though Dietz never states that Carl is dead, I feel that the arrival of his chair at the end of the play establishes his death. Dietz has used the chairs to represent those who have died and so it would follow that he continues this convention with Carl.

to restore art. Jody challenges him by asking which piece of art. Jody tries to get him to face the truth, not realizing that Carl actually is. Jody does not realize that as he depends on his maps to get him through the day, Carl needs his lies.

Carl serves several functions throughout the play. In his dealings with the outside world, Carl takes care of the unfinished business of others. When his friends have died of AIDS, Carl adopts their occupation; he finishes their unfinished business. When Jody confronts Carl about what he does, Carl explains:

JODY. . . . And I don't have to make things up about my day like you do.

CARL. I don't make things up.

JODY. You don't.

CARL. No. I lie.

JODY. There's a difference.

CARL. There certainly is.

JODY. Do tell.

CARL. If I made it up, that would imply that I wished I was doing it. That I wished I wrote for a tabloid, or restored art or worked at the auto glass shop, or all the rest of it. But I don't wish to do those things. (25)

The unfinished business has become his responsibility. Through these lies about his occupations, Carl also reveals information about himself. In his first lie he is a restorer of art at an art museum. He tells Jody that he must cover the truth that is trying to take focus:

CARL. . . . We must keep her out. She does not belong.

JODY. Who is this other woman?

CARL. We don't know her name, Jody. We don't know everything.

JODY. How do you know she doesn't belong.

CARL. Because she is *behind the paint.* She is trying to butt in, trying to crash the painting because she is the one with the answer to the riddle.

JODY. What riddle?

CARL. The riddle of the painting. Who are these people, why are they gathered? Who is the woman, who is she there to see, to whom is she about to speak?

JODY. And the woman behind the painting knows these things?

CARL. This and more. She's clever Jody. She sleeps with her eyes open and always knows where you're parked. We must cover her back up. She must not give the answers.

JODY. Why, Carl?

CARL. Because, the painting *is* the questions. That's what it *is.* Without that, it's just cloth that's giving a frame a job. (18)

As Carl wants to cover the truth of the painting he also wants to cover the truth about himself. He is the woman behind the painting. Carl knows the truth, but at this point he refuses to allow himself to tell it. It is never revealed to Jody who Carl actually is, but at the end of Act I, Carl tells Jody why he does what he does. He reveals that he is looking for the worth of

himself. When Jody finally leaves the store in Act II, Carl admits to the audience exactly what he does and who these people were. No longer is he covering the truth:

> None of these people had time to finish their paperwork.
>
> Robert was too busy restoring art. The tabloid that Jeremy wrote for refused to pay his health costs. Eric watered the corporations plants but couldn't get a loan from them. Bridget had her tenure denied by the University. And Franklin ... Franklin just threw 'em all away. If it had a picture window, he threw it in the trash with all the other broken windows, then he cranked up his radio and installed another windshield.
>
> They say fame is when a lot of people you've never met celebrate your death. None of these people were famous. Like most of the people taken by this disease, we in the general public murdered them twice. First, by romanticizing them. Glamorizing their grief. And, then by ignoring them. (47-48)

Carl refuses to let these people be forgotten. This explains why he pushes Jody to get involved.

Carl serves to incite action in Jody. First, he encourages Jody to get involved. He does this by bringing the chairs into the store. At first the chairs number only a few, but as the play progresses chairs slowly take over the stage. The chairs represent these people who have died. And no longer can Jody ignore what is going on in the outside world, Carl will not let him:

JODY. What do you want me to do? You want me to march up and down the street shouting MY FRIENDS ARE DYING AND LOOK HOW MUCH I CARE? That does *nothing*, Carl. Do you hear me? *Nothing.*

CARL. Jody, you don't -

JODY. THAT BRINGS *NOONE* BACK. THAT CHANGES *NOTHING.*

CARL. It would change you.

JODY. *Carl?*

CARL. *What?*

JODY. Make someone else your mission. (*Jody slams the door shut. Long silence.*)

CARL. (*Softer.*) Do you recognize these chairs?

JODY. Some of them. (*Silence.*) Not that rocker. (*Silence.*)

CARL. Phillip. (*Silence.*)

JODY. Phillip Carter?

CARL. Phillip Taylor. (*Silence. He touches the back of of the last chair he brought in.*) This was Phillip Carter's. (*Silence. Carl sits in the chair and stares front as he speaks.*) I volunteer. I go help move these people - these people's things - out of their homes. And I can't stand the chairs. I can't stand all the empty chairs. Sitting alone in rooms. On the sidewalk outside. Or in the middle of a trimmed green lawn,

waiting to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. All these chairs, draped with empty clothes.

JODY. (*Soft.*) What does this *do*, Carl? Does it do something?

CARL. It does for me. . . . (27-28)

Jody's refusal to get involved is directly connected to his fear of leaving his store. To go out into the world would mean Jody would have to face the fact that these things are happening, that people are dying. Jody knows that if Carl knew that he did not go out Carl would take action, so Jody tries to hide the fact that he longer leaves the store, but Carl sees the signs:

JODY. I'm going home, Carl. It's been a long day. I'll see you tomorrow. (*Carl does not move.*) You can go ahead. I've got to close up.

CARL. I'll wait.

JODY. You don't have to.

CARL. I'll wait.

JODY. *I'll talk to you tomorrow, Carl. (Carl goes to the door and throws it open.*)

CARL. I'm waiting for you to leave. I want to watch you walk out this door.

JODY. For god's sake - (*Jody is putting mail and a few other items in a small shoulder bag.*)

CARL. I want to see you go home.

JODY. Don't push this, Carl. I'm warning you.

CARL. You certainly are. You've been doing it for some time, but I've been slow to see it. Ordering

in food. The sofa in the back room. Seldom a change of clothes. You've been warning me all right. (*Jody grabs his coat, and his shoulder bag. He moves toward the door, then stops, staring at Carl.*)

JODY. You're in my way. (*Carl backs away from the door and stares at Jody.*)

CARL. Go ahead. (*Pause.*) There's nothing in your way. (*Longer pause.*) Why don't you go?

JODY. I want you to leave, Carl. (*Silence. Standoff. Then, Carl leaves. Jody stares at the open door for a moment, then moves to the water cooler. He begins to fill a cup with water, as - Carl bursts back through the door, carrying several chairs. Jody, startled, drops the cup of water.*)

CARL. (*Moving, talking in a flurry.*) This is fine, Jody. If you won't go out, I'll bring things to you. I'll let you see what you're missing - . . . (25-26)

Carl does exactly what Jody expects. Carl knows why Jody is staying in the store, but has yet to realize the extent of Jody's denial. The audience discovers that it has been some time since Jody has been tested for AIDS. His fear has not only imprisoned him in his store, but it has also prevented him from being tested. Jody realizes that he must be tested, and he turns to Carl for guidance. In an attempt to force Jody to leave the store, Carl sets up an appointment for him at a nearby clinic. He assures Jody that the clinic does not make house calls and he must go there. Later it is revealed that the technician could have come to Jody's store. Carl's

lie helps Jody. He not only leaves the store, but he takes a week off from work. Jody reconnects with the outside world because of Carl.

Character Relationships. By focusing the play on two people, two friends, Dietz establishes a strong relationship. Dietz shows how the two can relate on many different levels. They specifically state that they are not lovers and never have been. The two need each other to get through their lives. They are each other's friend and yet they are also each other's greatest obstacle. Neither allows the other to forget who they are. They share interesting stories, and existential thoughts. Jody and Carl balance each other. Both are extremely different, but ultimately they bring out the best in each other. In a touching moment, Carl explains why he creates things:

> For the same reason I create you, Jody. (*Pause.*) So, I have something to hold onto. I don't know what chair *you* sit in, Jody. I don't know what song *you* hum - though, I suspect it's something pretty dated and embarrassing - I don't know much about you, either, except that you love your store and your maps and lately you will not leave, you *will not go out there.* (*Pause.*) So, I create you. I create the part of you that does stuff while I'm not around. (*Pause.*) That's what people do, Jody. That's the closest they get to knowing each other. (*Silence.*) (38)

At this point, Jody reveals to Carl the truth that he needs to be tested for AIDS. Their honesty with each other allows them to overcome what they fear. They know that they always have each other. And at the end of the play, while studying a picture of Earth taken from space, the importance

of their friendship is confirmed by both of them:

CARL. (*Softly.*) Hey, Jody?

JODY. Hmm?

CARL. You know what's great about us?

JODY. (*Smiles.*) No, Carl. What's great about us?

CARL. We never fell in love. (*Pause.*) All these years, all that's happened. We never did.

JODY. No. We never did. (*Silence.*)

CARL. And I'm glad, you know, because the thing is, the thing about meeting people is this: lovers are easy, *friends* are hard. The right combination of small talk and clothing will land you a lover. Friends, though, are a mystery.

JODY. Jackets with fringe.

CARL. Exactly. (*Silence.*) Why do you think that is, Jody?

JODY. Hmm?

CARL. That we never fell in love.

JODY. You're a nuthead, Carl.

CARL. Yeah, but at least I'm not a map-geek. (*Silence. They smile. They sip water.*) Let's never do. No matter *what*. Okay?

JODY. Okay. (*Silence.*) (46)

In their own way they confirm their friendship. They do not need to know every detail of each other to be connected to each other. Each one gives to the other what they need, and gets the same in return.

Lonely Planet is about friendship. Through these two characters,

Dietz explores how the age of AIDS has affected their friendship. Jody and Carl support and encourage each other. Devoted to each other, the two serve as each other's greatest friend and greatest obstacle. As Dietz states, friends get the best and worst (56). With these characters, Dietz explores how friendship gives people courage. With the support of friends, people take risks, face their fears, and expose their souls. Carl and Jody do this for each other. The play transcends these two men. Dietz exposes the beauty of friendship when two people have to face tragedy, and do it together.

Chapter V

Trust

Plot Synopsis of *Trust*

Trust is a contemporary comedy that examines a world that is characterized by love, lust, and a lack of trust. The play centers on six characters whose lives become intertwined in a web of attraction, seduction, and lies. Each character searches for someone they can trust. The six characters include: Gretchen, 35, a dressmaker; Becca, 25, a publisher's assistant; Cody, 25, a musician; Leah, 37, a musician; Holly, 19, a bohemian; and Roy, 29, a public radio announcer.

With this play, Dietz juxtaposes intimate scenes between two characters with public group scenes. As the play begins, Becca and Cody are planning their wedding, but problems already exist. Becca starts seeing other men and Cody ends up having an affair with Leah, one of his musical influences. Trying to hide their infidelity becomes a priority as the two attempt to hold onto their disintegrating relationship. Meanwhile, Becca has been going to Gretchen to have her wedding dress made and through their conversations a friendship develops.

Gretchen also spends time with her friends Leah and Holly. Leah and Gretchen have known each other for years, but had not seen each other for ten years until recently. The women gather at a local bar where they drink and discuss the dynamics of male-female relationships. Gretchen introduces Becca to the other women, and all of their lives become entwined as new relationships grow and other relationships change. As Becca and Gretchen become closer, Becca and Cody become more distant. Eventually the truth comes out after Becca witnesses Cody's infidelity and the two cancel their wedding.

The play deals with trust in both love relationships and friendship. As Becca and Cody move from lovers to friends, Becca and Gretchen move from friends to lovers. The other characters attempt to maintain their existing relationships. By the end of the play, new relationships form and old relationships try to redefine themselves as each character looks for someone to trust.

Description of Characters in *Trust*

Trust centers on the lives of four major characters and two minor characters. Gretchen is a divorcée who has started her own business. Since ending her friendship with Leah ten years earlier, Gretchen has done everything to avoid dealing with her feelings for Leah, first by throwing herself into her marriage and now by focusing on her work. When she meets Becca, memories about her relationship with Leah resurface and Gretchen must now deal with these feelings and with her new feelings for Becca.

Becca and Cody make an unlikely pair as both search for happiness in their lives. Both are trying to unify their careers with their relationship, to no avail. Their individual frustrations lead to their resentment of each other and to their ultimate breakup. Becca first looks for happiness in other men, but then finds it in Gretchen. Cody finds distraction in Leah, but then chooses to focus on his music. Both try to come to terms with their mutual betrayal and try to redefine their relationship.

Leah is a thirty-seven year old musician trying to make a come back after a period of misfortune in her career. Leah spends her free time with her friend Holly who brings with her a cynical opinion of men

and the world of dating. Holly is a character who is much like Leah was in her younger years. Dietz's descriptions of her paint her as a negative person, but actually she is afraid. This fear drives her to present a harsh exterior. A seemingly incidental character who plays the nice guy, Roy is honest about his feelings. Regardless of women's reactions, Roy refuses to give into the image he thinks women want. Instead, he remains true to himself and his true nature.

Development of *Trust*

In the playscript, Dietz indicates specific options about the physical set of the play which creates an atmosphere where nothing is hidden. He calls for an open area that is easily transformed into many different locales. The minimum amount of set pieces are called for, which focuses attention on the characters rather than on the environment. Another major specification is a type of "green room" area located to one side of the stage. He describes it as having:

> A few comfortable chairs. A small table with drinks, magazines, cigarettes, and an ashtray. When a character does not appear in a given scene, they may, from time to time, be found sitting in one of these chairs, watching the action of the play. They also may be drinking, smoking, reading, or ignoring the action of the play altogether. This is often the area from which the Scene Titles are announced. (*Trust* 6)

Knowing these specifications assists a director in easily segueing from one scene to the next, but it also serves to unite the audience with the actors since they all act as observers of the action. Even though every

scene has a title, the character or characters who announce it may or may not be present in the "green room" area when they say the line. Dietz leaves this decision to the director, thus allowing differing levels of realism depending on the director's concept.

The development of the play was made possible by the Playwright's Center in Minneapolis, as well as Circle Repertory Company and New York Stage and Film. It received its first production at A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle, Washington under the direction of the playwright. *Trust* opened here on April 30, 1992, and was subsequently produced by the Atlantic Theatre Company in Burlington, Vermont on July 15, 1992.

A Character Analysis of *Trust*: How Dietz Uses Character and Character Relationships

Trust is a play about trust. Each character deals with the issues of trust in a different way. They learn what it means to trust others as well as what it means to trust one's self. Through the play Dietz forces the characters to be honest with themselves and other people. By dealing with the issues of their relationships, the characters are able to come to terms with their situation. The play shows how jealousy can distort a relationship and even destroy it.

Character Introduction. The opening of the play introduces the three pivotal female characters of the play: Gretchen, Becca, and Leah. The play begins with Gretchen standing near a restaurant table watching Becca and an unseen man while music plays in the background. By eliminating the man from the scene Dietz does two things. First, he says that the man's identity is irrelevant to the events of the play, and second

he focuses the moment on Gretchen and Becca. At this point, the audience does not realize that Gretchen and Becca have never met. Off to the side of the stage in the "green room" area Leah sits watching the scene. As the music fades, Leah announces the scene title: "Do I really look like I need to be told another story?" (9). As she finishes her introduction, Gretchen takes focus as she begins narrating the exchange between Becca and the unseen man, Richard:

> She is tired tonight. Her lids are falling into his stories. She has spent the day nodding at pricks and buffoons. She has apologized for her beauty, swallowed her talent, and moderated her better instincts. She has watched men make careers out of mediocrity and bluster. She stares at him across the garlic bread and listens to the stories of his difficult day. She thinks: Why can't you be more my *size?* Why must I pander to the *midgets* that surround me? Will I ever listen, nod and *mean it?* (9)

Gretchen does not merely describe Becca's actions, she also reveals what Becca is thinking. Through Gretchen's observations, Dietz shows a strong connection between the two women, a connection that develops throughout the play. Through Gretchen's description of Becca's thoughts, the audience also gets an indication of Becca's personality. Combined with Gretchen's remarks, Becca's conversation with her date takes on a sarcastic tone. She is clearly not interested in this man, but the audience realizes that she is searching for a meaningful relationship. The audience has yet to find out that she is engaged to another man; information that is revealed in the next scene. So, this introductory scene illustrates one side of Becca's personality. When she is with Cody the

audience sees a more complete picture of her. And by juxtaposing this first scene between Becca and an unseen man with the second scene between Becca and Cody, Dietz shows the complexity of this character. She tries to present herself as supportive and caring when she is with Cody, but her behavior in the opening scene tells the audience the opposite. The audience knows that problems exist in Becca's and Cody's relationship and that these problems will have to be dealt with.

Leah's presence in the opening scene, even though she remains in the green room area, reinforces the connection between the two women. In the opening of the play, she acts as an observer which increases the focus on them. Then at the end of this scene she speaks directly to the audience about the women which aligns them even more:

> Gretchen swears that when she first saw Becca, stroking her hair across from that man at that restaurant, she knew that they would meet. She knew that they would know each other well. . . . I'll give her that. (12)

Through her lines, Dietz insures that the audience knows that even though the women have yet to meet, they will meet and they will be close. Leah's belief in Gretchen's prophecy also legitimizes it. She understands Gretchen from their past friendship and knows how deeply Gretchen's feelings for Becca run.

With Cody's introduction, Dietz shows a person who is different from Becca. His scene opens with him on a cordless phone having just come out of the shower. With wet hair and a towel around his neck, he takes a message for Becca as he sucks on a lemon wedge. Through his dialogue on the phone the audience realizes that he is talking on the phone with the man Becca was with at the opening of the play. His

reaction to the caller establishes his jealousy which surfaces completely when Becca comes home. Upon her entrance, Cody confronts her with Richard's message, and questions her about the entire evening. Initially Becca enjoys the attention. She manipulates the situation by lying to Cody about the incident. In the end he seems to believe her. It is as though Cody needs to believe her because to doubt her with force him to deal with problems of their relationship.

It is not until the audience has a strong sense of the first four characters that Dietz introduces the last two characters. Roy and Holly enter the action of the play at the same time. Much as Gretchen narrated Becca's introduction, Roy describes his first encounter with Holly as she enacts her actions. Even though Roy is in the present, he is describing an event that took place in the past, so Holly's actions are seen through Roy's interpretation of them. When Roy first saw Holly she was folding her clothes at the laundromat. He talks about her appearance as well as her wardrobe, which is entirely black. Ironically, Roy does not paint Holly idealistically, but rather he describes exactly what he saw:

> She is in black from head to toe. She is not in mourning for her life. She has *studied* this look, this notion to dress like a knife -- and she has found it to her liking. She has the look of a woman determined to spend herself before her stock goes down. She is the consumer and the consumed, and this week she is movin' like a sale item. (24)

Through this introduction the audience learns that Roy is not only observant and articulate, but also that he is attracted to Holly. The audience also gets an indication of Holly's personality. Despite Roy's optimism, the audience senses that Roy will never get Holly. Holly's

clothes also say a lot about her. Dietz calls for a specific wardrobe for this character, having her dressed completely in black. This type of wardrobe aligns her with the fringe of society. Holly is not like most people, and the audience knows to expect someone nontraditional before she ever interacts with another character.

Character Function. Throughout the play, Gretchen's main goal is to establish a closer relationship with Becca. Though she actively pursues a friendship with Becca, she is not aggressive in her pursuit. In the first scene the two women share, Gretchen measures Becca for her wedding gown. The two talk casually about weddings, but when Becca begins to ask more personal questions, Gretchen becomes defensive. She is able to talk about her own wedding, and even jokes that she made sure she had the wedding she wanted to compensate for not getting the man she wanted, but she cannot talk about anything personal. Their physical closeness is comfortable for Becca, but Gretchen does not feel the same comfort:

BECCA. When you're done. It will be my turn. Let me measure you. We'll compare numbers.

GRETCHEN. No.

BECCA. Why?

GRETCHEN. No.

BECCA. *Why?*

GRETCHEN. Because *I* do the measuring. That's what I do. I measure you. I make you a dress. You get married. It's what I do. (*Becca suddenly grabs the measuring tape from Gretchen. Gretchen backs away. Becca approaches her, playfully.*)

BECCA. Okay. C'mon. You'll like this. You'll stand on this stool. I'll lift your arms, tilt your head. It's like being pampered. It's like having your hair done. You'll like it --

GRETCHEN. Sorry. (*Gretchen yanks the tape back.*) Stand on the stool, please.

BECCA. Where's your sense of adventure?

GRETCHEN. I have plenty of that.

BECCA. Really?

GRETCHEN. Yes. But it doesn't involve having my body measured.

BECCA. (*Teasing, enjoying herself.*) By who? By me? Why? You have a beautiful body. You must know you do. (*Becca stands on the stool. Gretchen begins measuring her mid-section.*) You don't trust me. You don't like me?

GRETCHEN. I don't know you.

BECCA. I don't know you and you've got your arms around me. (*Gretchen pulls away, slowly. Becca laughs briefly, then stops.*) What?

GRETCHEN. Nothing.

BECCA. I was teasing. Gretchen. I was playing around. I just thought it'd be --

GRETCHEN. Play around another time. Okay. (*Silence.*)

BECCA. (*Nods, pauses.*) I still want your name. (23-24)

Though she desires to be close to Becca, Gretchen resists letting Becca into her private world. The discomfort she displays also alludes to her deeper

attraction to Becca. Dietz foretells of their future relationship in this scene by showing Gretchen's nervousness and by making Becca comfortable in Gretchen's presence and receptive to her friendship. And because Leah has told the audience that Gretchen knew she would meet Becca, the audience knows that they will cultivate their relationship.

Unlike Gretchen's scenes with Becca that are much more personal, Gretchen's scenes with Leah and Holly generally focus on men. In their first scene together in Act I, the women discuss how a man works a room. It becomes apparent through this conversation that Gretchen has had little experience dealing with men. She seems astonished by Holly's observations, and cannot fathom being brutally honest with a man. With this scene, Dietz further illuminates Gretchen's ignorance of the male-female relationship, despite the fact that Gretchen was married for ten years. Gretchen longs for a relationship without these games.

Becca, too, longs for an honest relationship. From the beginning of the play it is apparent to the audience that Becca is searching for fulfillment in her life. She has been successful in her career and longs for that same success in her personal life. At work she is in control, a luxury she does not have at home. The audience witnesses her contemptuous attitude toward men in the scene in the restaurant, an attitude that intensifies when she is alone with Cody. Her dissatisfaction in her relationship with him manifests itself in her destructive behavior. But there are two sides to Becca. In public, Becca presents a cheerful facade. When she mentions Cody, she talks about his fame but has little to say about their relationship. She also makes it clear that she is her own person and not merely his accessory. It seems as though she is torn; she enjoys the attention derived from his fame, but she does not want to be

mistaken for a groupie. Conversely, when the two are alone Becca's frustrations surface. Because of her inability to be confident in their relationship, she has come to resent Cody, but she is not comfortable showing this to the outside world.

When Becca is with Gretchen, the audience sees a different person than they see when she is with Cody. She shows a sincere interest in Gretchen and her life, and also shows respect for her. She strives to learn as much about Gretchen as possible, even to the point where Gretchen feels uncomfortable. Becca is motivated by a desire to know Gretchen; she wants to understand why Gretchen is the way that she is. Becca is searching for someone with whom she can be herself, and she feels that security with Gretchen. It is apparent that Gretchen grows to feel comfortable with Becca because she opens up to her unlike with any other character. Likewise, Becca confides in Gretchen about her break-up with Cody. She is not eager to admit what happened, but she needs to face the truth and Gretchen is there for her.

Leah's character challenges the other characters to face the truths about themselves and their relationships, thus becoming a catalyst for change in their lives. In her quest for honesty, she encourages them to be honest about themselves and their respective relationships. She says exactly what she thinks in order to promote action. She seems cynical about relationships because she knows most people are not honest with each other. The first character the audience sees this with is Cody. She wants him to be honest about his relationship with Becca, and so tests him during their first encounter by pursuing him even though she knows that he is involved with someone else. She is attracted to Cody, but her attraction lies more in what he represents from her past than who he is.

When she encounters Cody and Becca at the bar she makes a strong choice. After learning that Cody is engaged to Becca, Leah refrains from saying anything about meeting him until she and Becca are alone. Instead Leah plays along with Cody when he enters the scene and continues to act as though they have never met:

LEAH. Hi, Cody Brown.

CODY. You're Leah Barnett.

LEAH. You're right.

CODY. I'm a big fan.

LEAH. Yeah, I bet I was a real influence. (*Silence.*)

CODY. Yes. (*Pause.*) Yes. You were. (*Silence.*) (34)

Her comments to him seem innocent to the others in the scene, but Cody knows, as does the audience, exactly what Leah meant. She wants him to know that she realizes what he just did. And when Becca returns a few moments later without Cody, Leah indirectly tells Becca that she and Cody have previously met. She knows that it is impossible for Cody and Becca to have a successful relationship if they are not honest with each other. Her actions only further develop Becca's mistrust of Cody.

Leah deals with Holly with this same type of candor. Leah sees much of herself in Holly and understands that there is more to Holly than she shows to the world. Leah tries to bring out this other side of Holly in different ways. She points out Holly's inappropriate actions and after an evening of listening to Holly pontificating about men, Leah encourages her to talk to Roy when he approaches her. Holly refuses to be guided by Leah, and treats Roy rudely:

HOLLY. *God.* (*Silence.*)

ROY. What?

HOLLY. It's *past one.* (*Silence. He finally takes the hint.*)

ROY. Oh. Yeah, right. Early morning for me. It's Pledge Week.

LEAH. When does that end?

ROY. I don't think it does.

HOLLY. (*Looking away.*) Nice to see you.

ROY. Yeah. Maybe I'll see you next Thursday. (*Pause, Holly looks at him.*) At the laundromat.

HOLLY. It depends.

ROY. Right.

HOLLY. I might have something fun to do.

ROY. (*Trying to stay upbeat.*) Great. Okay.

HOLLY. Bye.

ROY. I'm Roy.

LEAH. Nice to meet you, Roy.

HOLLY. Bye.

ROY. Yeah, bye. (*Roy goes. Leah turns quickly to Holly.*)

LEAH. Jesus, Holly --

HOLLY. He just *walked up.*

LEAH. Was he making up the laundromat line?

HOLLY. No. I saw him there. But then he sees me here tonight and decides he has to just *walk up* and talk to me. Can you believe that?

LEAH. Yeah, that's hell.

HOLLY. It's such a game, you know?

LEAH. (*Sharp.*) Holly.

HOLLY. I'm doing it again?

LEAH. Mm hmm.

HOLLY. I'm being a little shit again?

LEAH. Yes.

HOLLY. Damn. (31-32)

Leah recognizes that Roy is a nice man and wants to give Holly the opportunity to see it too. She tries to prevent Holly from making the same mistakes that she made when she was younger. She tricks Holly into going out on a date with Roy, but then allows Holly to leave in the middle of it. Because she understands Holly, Leah chooses her battles. She realizes that Holly is destined to make her mistakes and Leah is smart enough to know when to let her.

Leah also tries to prevent Gretchen from repeating her mistakes in their past relationship in her new relationship with Becca. Leah and Gretchen were close friends in their younger years, but because Gretchen felt she could not be honest with her feelings the friendship deteriorated. Gretchen left their friendship, and went on to marry someone that she did not love. Now that they have reconciled, Leah is more observant of Gretchen's feelings. Through most of the play Leah plays the role of friend, but near the end of the play she finally speaks her mind:

LEAH. Gretch?

GRETCHEN. What?

LEAH. I think you should tell her.

GRETCHEN. Tell her what? She already knows --

LEAH. That's not what I mean.

GRETCHEN. What then?

LEAH. I think you should tell her what you never told me. (58)

Leah recognizes Gretchen's demeanor because she has been through this with her before. Leah wants Gretchen to find happiness in a relationship, and knows that honesty is the key to that.

Cody is another character who is trying to find happiness. As he becomes more successful in his career, he spends more time with his music than with Becca. He cares for her, but his music has become his main priority, just as her work has become hers. They take each other for granted because they have shifted their focus from each other to their careers. Now Becca is jealous, and Cody is unsure of a solution. The pressure on him dissipates when he is with Leah. Musically she has achieved what he strives for, but also there are no expectations in their relationship. Leah understands the demands of his profession, something that Becca cannot. Cody does not intend to hurt Becca, but that is what happens. The audience sees this when Becca confronts him about his affair. He only admits to the incidents Becca claims to have witnessed, but he is motivated more by a need to protect her from the truth than by a need to cover up the affair. This does not justify Cody's infidelity but his motivation becomes clear to the audience. He demostrates his caring for her again at the end of the play when he visits Becca after two months of separation. His visit serves as a starting point for a new beginning for them, but also serves as closure of the old relationship.

Holly is a strong woman who is ruled by fear. Much like Leah was in her younger years, Holly's contrary demeanor serves as her way of coping with her fears. All of her actions are intentional for she wants to strike against others before they strike against her. Her cynical attitude

about relationships is evident in the amount of time she spends talking about how men behave when in pursuit of women. Holly wants a man, but fears a relationship because she could get hurt. To make a commitment to someone requires too much risk and too much energy. Instead, she spends most of her energy criticizing and mocking men, placing the fault with them and not with herself. When she meets Roy, a man who is respectful and nice to her, she has no patience for him. She complains about everything that he does and says even though his actions are far from inappropriate. She searches for reasons not to like him. During their date Dietz provides a glimmer of hope for Holly. She apologizes to Roy for previously being rude to him, but then returns to her old selfish habits and leaves him to go to a party with Cody. At least now she recognizes when she was unfair to Roy.

Roy is Holly's antithesis. Whereas Holly acts as though she understands men, Roy freely admits he knows nothing about how women think. He represents the average man, kind and considerate,. Unfortunately Holly never realizes this. During his first address to the audience, he reveals he is the opposite of someone Holly would want to meet. This supports Holly's reaction to him when they meet at the bar. Her attitude reflects much of Roy's description of her, but he is not to be swayed. Roy refuses to let Holly's attitude deter him from pursuing a relationship even though it seems futile. Roy is just as afraid as Holly but unlike Holly he refuses to allow himself to give into that fear. Instead he channels his energy into positive efforts. It is not until his second monologue at the opening of Act II that the audience gets a true sense of Roy's insecurities:

She leaned close to me, looked in my eyes and said,

"This is what struck me, Roy. That all cats are grey in the dark."

I get nervous about that. (*He pulls a golf club with a little knitted "cap" from his coat and stares at it. He puts the end of the golf club in the basket.*)

So, don't be fooled, it's not a *jungle* out there. A jungle -- no problem -- you bring a guide, some bug spray and a big gun. But, this is *way* more than a jungle, man. *This* ... is a *mystery.* (*He pulls a daisy out of his coat, looks at it.*)

And, if this "grey cat" phrase is trying to say that, deep down, we are all *alike* -- that means to figure out how women think, all I have to do is figure out *myself.* (*He stares at the things in the basket. He tosses the daisy into the basket.*)

And I get nervous, *really* nervous, about *that.* (41)

From this address it becomes apparent that Roy is not like the men that Holly has described. He longs to have a relationship without the games of dating, and will not be defeated by Holly's rejection of him.

Character Relationships. At the heart of this play are relationships, both love and friendship. Everything the characters do works toward finding lasting relationships. The primary relationship in the play is between Becca and Cody. Because neither of them is satisfied with the current state of their relationship, it becomes increasingly more unstable throughout the play. From the beginning of the play, Dietz illustrates that problems plague their relationship and establishes its

dynamics. Becca is more intellectually driven, while Cody is driven more by instinct. During their first scene together, the audience sees the way they have come to deal with each other. Becca manipulates Cody and encourages his jealousy. She trivializes her date with Richard and even jokes about it. First she tries to deflect attention from her actions by saying that he probably sees other women, and when this fails, she creates elaborate lies and flirts with him:

CODY. Jesus. Don't play dumb with me. We all know the sequence. You flirt, you schmooze, you rely on the late night rate of attrition, you make the right glances, you touch the right shoulder -- and then the MOMENT comes. Right? (*Becca nods, slightly.*) So?

BECCA. So. The moment comes.

CODY. And ...

BECCA. And Kenny throws up. (*She takes a lemon out of the grocery bad. She sets it on the cutting board.*)

CODY. (*After a beat.*) On Richard?

BECCA. Bulls-eye. (*She begins to cut the lemon into wedges.*)

CODY. (*Pause, a wry smile.*) Must've ruined Richard's evening.

BECCA. I don't think so. He came up to my room and washed his shirt in my sink. Kiss me. (*She touches her lips, softly, with the wedge of lemon.*) He squeezed it dry with his big, rough

hands. Not publisher's hands. Hands with *weight*. Hands that should have *names*. . . . Kiss me. (*She touches Cody's lips with the wedge of lemon.*) These are lies. I want you. (14-15)

As she recounts the events, she becomes more and more flirtatious with him in an attempt to distract him from the truth. Initially, she enjoys the attention she gets from Cody because his jealousy reassures her that he cares about her, but it is also a sign of distrust. And when Cody presses her about Richard, she turns the conversation around to his actions. By the end of the scene she tells him that she is lying, which may or may not be true. It is this contradiction that diminishes Becca's credibility when it comes to Cody. She wants Cody to trust her regardless of whether or not she deserves it.

Cody deals with Becca in a different way. When she lies to him about Richard he needs to believe her even though his better judgment tells him that she is lying. When it comes to Leah, though, Cody's impulse is to hide the fact that he has ever met her. Cody does not encourage Becca's jealousy as she encourages his. He would rather avoid any conflict and lies to do so. This pattern of concealment continues when Becca confronts him about sleeping with Leah. Cody does not lie because he is trying to get away with having an affair, but rather because he does not want to hurt Becca. When confronting Cody with his infidelity, Becca makes a game out of it, first by pretending that she is on the phone with another man. This causes Cody to react with jealousy. It is not until after he discovers that she is actually on the phone with Holly that Becca reminds him that she was supposed to pick him up from the radio station:

BECCA. Well. What it's *about* is that sometimes you

forget things, Cody.

CODY. No. I don't think I do. I remember things. Things like Richard. Richard Akers. Kansas City. Unicorns and shit.

BECCA. Well, maybe to make room for the word Richard Akers in your mind, it was necessary to forget that I was picking you up at the radio station tonight. (*Silence.*) I *was* a little late. Sorry. (*Silence.*) It's been a while since you kissed me like that. (*Silence.*) Mind you, that's all I saw. But that kiss was enough. I turned and left the control room. A man named Stanley walked me to my car. (*Silence.*) It was odd watching from the other side of the glass. It was odd knowing I could scream and not be heard. (*Silence.*)

CODY. That's all it was, Becca. Just a kiss. It was stupid and impulsive. And I'm sorry.

BECCA. You're sorry I saw it?

CODY. I'm sorry it happened. (*Pause.*) It was just a kiss. (*Becca throw the glass against a wall -- it shatters. She turns back to Cody.*) (52)

Through her actions she hides the depth of betrayal she feels. Because she cares about him it causes her much pain. She wants him to lie for two reasons: first because it makes her feel in control and second because she wants him to comprehend how much he has hurt her. Becca makes him believe something did happen in Kansas City in order to get Cody to react. Ironically, when he does react he accuses her of lying. She then reminds

him that he lied to her. Becca needs to be in control and she easily remains so because she controls the amount of information Cody has about what she knows. Every time he lies, she tells him a little more of the truth. She manipulates him into doing the things she wants, and by the end of the scene he knows that she saw everything that happened between him and Leah. By using this technique, Dietz allows Becca to make him feel like an imbecile, much like she probably felt when she saw him with Leah. Becca is hurt, but it is more from the fact that he betrayed her than from the thought of losing him to other woman. Becca and Cody individually realize that their relationship is not working, but because they do care for each other they are unable to discuss the situation honestly.

In the last scene between Cody and Becca, Dietz gives the audience hope for the two. They are able to put their pain aside, at least temporarily, as they attempt to find common ground so that they may be able to salvage some part of there relationship. Dietz does not set up the scene as if they are trying to rekindle their love, but rather as if they are trying to build a new relationship. After spending two months apart, Cody visits Becca. They reminisce about their past, and for the first time are honest with each other about how they feel:

BECCA. How is the *tour*?

CODY. The show here tomorrow night, then New York, then we're done.

BECCA. I know that. That's not what I meant.

CODY. You meant how are the girls, how are the parties, am I fucking everyone I meet.

BECCA. Well?

CODY. (*Stops shaving her, stands.*) I don't have to do this, Becca. I really don't. I wanted to come over. I wanted to see you, but if you'd rather we pretend that each other is dead or something, then --

BECCA. Cody. (*He looks at her.*) Don't begrudge me my jealousy. I like my jealousy. It keeps me close to you.

CODY. I'll tell you about jealousy: I resent people who encounter you. Check-out clerks you hand money to. Waiters who bring you wine and French fries. Strangers who share your elevator and ride to your floor though it's five floors out of their way.

BECCA. You're the only one who ever did that.

CODY. I resent Jehovah's Witnesses who come to your door. They get you without caution. They get you straight ahead. (*He reapproaches and continues shaving her.*)

BECCA. And you get?

CODY. I get judgment and longing.

BECCA. Well, that's what's left.

CODY. I don't believe that. (63-64)

They still feel the pain from the circumstances of their break-up, but they also feel a need to come to terms with that pain in order to overcome it. There is even the possibility that they could learn to be friends. This scene leaves a lot open to interpretation, but it does give hope that not all

is lost with them. They have a lot of problems to work through and this scene represents their first steps in doing so.

Cody's relationship with Leah differs greatly from his relationship with Becca. Unlike with Becca, their relationship has no real depth. Superficially, his involvement with Leah may seem romantic, but in actuality both are caught up in what the other represents. For Cody, Leah represents an idol from his past. She accomplished with her career what he is working to do. This is obvious when they first meet as Cody continually tries to talk to Leah about music, while she toys with him about his success. For Leah, Cody represents all that she once had. She even tells Gretchen and Holly that the experience with Cody was nostalgic. She understands that his infatuation with her is because of who she represents to him and she uses this to tease him. She seduces him with mind games and flirtatious behavior:

LEAH. . . . You want another beer?

CODY. No.

LEAH. Good. Get me one while you're at it. (*He gets the beers, then stops and stands in the room, motionless.*) What?

CODY. I never thought I'd be doing this.

LEAH. (*A knowing smile.*) Where you're headed, that sentence will be proper attire. . . . So. I don't know who does what here. (*They kiss.*) That's nice.

CODY. Mm hmm.

LEAH. The lemon. That's very nice. (*They kiss, again. Longer. The Leah pulls her mouth away from*

him and looks in his eyes. Speaks, softly.) Tell me.

CODY. What?

LEAH. What does she kiss like. (*He looks at her, puzzled.*) Does she kiss like this? (*She kisses him -- delicately licking the corner of his mouth with her tongue.*)

CODY. What are --?

LEAH. Wait. Like this. (*She kisses him again -- gently biting his upper lip with her teeth. He pulls his head back, away.*)

CODY. Who are you talking about?

LEAH. How would I know? You tell me.

CODY. I'm kissing you. It's *just a kiss.* What?

LEAH. (*A soft smile.*) There's no such thing, baby. There's no such innocence. (*She kisses him very lightly on the mouth. Whispers ...*) Every kiss is a betrayal. (*He looks into her eyes.*) Smile. It's still early. (19-20)

Leah does not encourage Cody to betray Becca, but rather she encourages him to be honest with himself about what he wants and why. Since coming into fame, Cody has forgotten that everything has its repercussions. He must now decide what it is that he wants.

Through the course of the play, Gretchen and Becca become closer. By Act II, when Gretchen and Becca meet alone again, Gretchen is able to confide in Becca about her past. When Becca asks how she knows Leah, Gretchen tells her the entire story. By doing this, she allows Becca into

her world and reveals her true feelings for Leah:

BECCA. Where do you know Leah from?

GRETCHEN. Years back.

BECCA. She doesn't look like the Leah Barnett I remember from my album covers.

GRETCHEN. It was a hard ten years, apparently. She got famous before she expected. Then she got the impostor syndrome.

BECCA. The what?

GRETCHEN. "It's a fluke. I'm not really any good. They're going to find me out." She made a few bad albums, her record company dumped her, *Rolling Stone* lost her photo, she hit the skids. That's just the Roman numerals of it. I wasn't there. I don't know the details.

BECCA. You lost touch with her?

GRETCHEN. I stopped seeing her.

BECCA. Ouch.

GRETCHEN. Sorry.

BECCA. Three pounds. Got it. (*Silence.*) She was probably on the road or in the studio all the time. That's just like Cody. It's hard. I know.

GRETCHEN. I stopped seeing her because I fell in love with her. (42)

Through her candor, Gretchen relates to Becca on a new level. She is able to admit that she is capable of loving another woman, but does so in a way

that challenges Becca to react. This information does not phase Becca, but interests her. Because of this, the two become closer and Becca begins to see Gretchen in a different light. By their final scene together, Gretchen feels close enough to Becca to tell her about seeing her in Kansas City. She also gets Becca to admit that she and Cody called off the wedding:

BECCA. So, I'm glad we did this. I'm glad Kay gave me your number. It's been a nice surprise.

GRETCHEN. No, it hasn't. (*Becca looks at her, confused.*) I knew I'd meet you.

BECCA. (*Laughs.*) How?

GRETCHEN. I saw you at a restaurant in Kansas City. Months before Kay called me. (*Pause.*) I watched you, sitting across from this man who wouldn't stop talking --

BECCA. No, he wouldn't.

GRETCHEN. And you were stroking your hair. (*Gretchen is directly behind Becca now, helping her on with her robe.*) I saw you and I knew I would meet you.

BECCA. *How?*

GRETCHEN. I didn't know how. Or why. But I was certain it would happen.

BECCA. (*Soft.*) Really?

GRETCHEN. Something in us knows. (*Silence.*)

BECCA. You never told me that.

GRETCHEN. No, I didn't. (*Becca moves away, putting the jar in its place.*)

BECCA. Want some music?

GRETCHEN. Why am I here today, Becca?

BECCA. Why are you *here?* Because this is what you do -- you're making my dress. Because -- what? -- I don't know what you -- (*Silence. Gretchen keeps staring at her.*) We've called off the wedding.

GRETCHEN. I know that. Holly told me.

BECCA. How does she know?

GRETCHEN. Leah told her.

BECCA. How does Leah --

GRETCHEN. Cody. (*Silence. Becca looks away.*) So, what am I doing here? (*Silence.*)

BECCA. Why did you come if you knew?

GRETCHEN. I'm still deciding. (*Becca turns and slowly approaches Gretchen. They stand, their faces very close together. They kiss.*)

BECCA. (*Very softly.*) Wow.

GRETCHEN. Tell me.

BECCA. I just ... part of me ... ran to the other side of the room. (*Pause.*) Part of me is still there. Watching us.

GRETCHEN. Why?

BECCA. To see what it's like. (*Silence.*)

GRETCHEN. And what is it like. (*Silence.*)

BECCA. It's lovely. (60)

This conversation is the first time that Gretchen and Becca are completely

honest about their feelings. Since the beginning of the play Gretchen has known about Becca's infidelity and now that Becca and Cody have broken up she takes a chance on pursuing a relationship with Becca. And now that Becca is no longer involved with Cody she is able to make a commitment to Gretchen that Leah did not make. Dietz provides several indications throughout the play that the two are drawn to each other, but this is the first time they act on what they are feeling.

Gretchen's relationship with Leah is more difficult to define. The audience only learns about their past because of Gretchen's new-found confidence in Becca. From Gretchen's conversation with Becca about her history with Leah, the audience discovers that the two were actually close friends. She explains to Becca the circumstances surrounding the end of their relationship. As Leah was becoming more successful in her musical career she had to stop speaking for three months due to medical reasons. Because of this, Leah became dependent on Gretchen. She needed her to communicate for her and eventually began to confide in her about everything facet of her life:

> And for three months, Leah wrote me every single word she wanted to say. I spoke for her on the phone, I spoke for her in public. We spend every minute together.
>
> And, at first, it was stuff like "I'm hungry. Let's get a pizza." Or "I thought she paid the phone bill." But, as days went by, she got more comfortable with it. With me. She censored herself less. She let herself think out-loud onto that little plastic pad. We'd sit and drink wine till sun-up, me talking, she writing by the light of some bayberry candle.
>
> It went of from there. She started letting me read

everything. Not just her conversation, but her letters, her lyrics, her diary, everything. It seemed perfectly natural. It was who we were then. It was rope connecting us.

I gave over to it. And I lost sight of who was who. Where did she begin? Where did I stop? (44)

This powerfully strong connection is something that would have been difficult to sever. Because of this, when it came time for Leah to speak again, Gretchen lost part of herself. Just as Leah had become dependent on her, Gretchen had become dependent on Leah. Suddenly she had someone who needed her, and when that need was gone she did not know how to react. Gretchen choose to leave. In response to this story Becca assumes that Gretchen misses Leah. To this comment Gretchen replies, "I don't miss her. I miss how I felt with her. There's a difference" (45). This is Gretchen's most profound statement in the play. The audience knows that she is not pining for Leah, but rather she is searching for someone she feels that connection to, a connection she finds in Becca.

Trust encourages thought about the nature of relationships and what makes a relationship work. In the simplest terms it comes down to trust. Like life, Dietz's play does not leave the audience with a neatly packaged ending. It is unclear where the characters will go next, but they have all arrived at a place where they are being honest. They have begun to follow their hearts, and trust not only each other but themselves.

Chapter VI

Private Eyes

Plot Synopsis of *Private Eyes*

Private Eyes is written as such that it is a play within a play within a play within a therapist's office. At the heart of all these layers is a husband convinced that his wife is having an affair who begins to see a therapist. The play is a result of his attempts to convince his therapist and the audience of the affair. Dietz employs five characters to tell this complex tale; they are: Matthew, Lisa, Adrian, Cory, and Frank. Dietz uses the world of the theatre as a metaphor for life's illusions and forces the audience to become detectives and decide for themselves which version of the story is the truth, and which actors are merely playing roles.

Matthew and his wife Lisa are actors in rehearsal of a play under the direction of Adrian. Matthew believes that Lisa and Adrian are having an affair, but this scenario is also a plot twist in the play they are mounting. All of this suspicion drives Matthew to seek the help of a therapist, Frank, who constantly strives to get Matthew to tell the truth about what is happening with Lisa. Cory is the mystery character who shadows the rest of the characters. It is Cory who finally reveals the multiple layers of stories told by this single group of people.

Description of Characters in *Private Eyes*

Matthew is a man is his thirties who has become insecure in his marriage. He loves his wife, but the two have grown distant and now he has convinced himself that she is having an affair. Lisa, also in her thirties, is a talented actress who effectively plays every role she tackles.

Her own indiscretions have led her to have an affair with Adrian. But the affair ends, and Lisa fights to reconnect with her husband.

Adrian, a man in his early thirties, is a visiting director from England. His attentiveness charms Lisa, but he has his own secrets. Even though he tells Lisa he is divorced, in actuality he is not. This brings Cory into the play. She is Adrian's wife who assumes the role of private investigator in order to find her husband. Her disguises bring her into the action as a waitress at the restaurant where Matthew, Lisa, and Adrian go for lunch. The last character, Frank, a fifty year old therapist, attempts to help Matthew deal with his wife's alleged infidelity. Dietz notes that this character can be played by either a man or a woman.[1] Frank is the most straightforward of all the characters, for he is the only one who seems to tell the truth.

Development of *Private Eyes*

The easiest way to discuss the development of this play is to look at the playwright's note included by Dietz:

> *Private Eyes* began as a lie.
>
> Years ago I was sitting in a hotel room in Louisville, Kentucky, writing a scene in which two lovers fail to speak the truth. And, like a lie, the play grew. It began to go to greater and greater lengths to keep its own deceit afloat. It took my sense of structure for a ride and built a web of such complexity that clarity (aka "truth") was rendered virtually impossible. And even now, years later, sitting in a hotel room in Tucson, I think back to that first scene and say to

[1] For the purposes of this thesis, Frank will be referred to as "he" or "him" even though the character may be male or female.

myself: it started so simply. Doesn't it always. (*Humana* 62)

Because the play establishes itself as a well constructed lie, everything that the audience sees, from the sets to the characters, should seem real until that point in the play when it is revealed as something else. The play will initially be confusing to the audience until they begin to understand how the play reveals itself. It moves forward quickly and forces the audience to stay on their toes in order to attempt to discover the truth. Since theatre is based in illusion, it is only fitting that the play takes place in the world of theatre.

A Character Analysis of *Private Eyes*: How Dietz Uses Characters and Character Relationships

Private Eyes is a comedy of suspicion that involves the audience as much as the characters, for the audience must question the characters as much as the characters question each other. Each character takes on many roles in order to fully enact the play (whichever play that may be) they are doing. Dietz forces the audience to sift through the many layers of the action in order to discover what is real and what is illusion.

Character Introduction. The play opens in a rehearsal studio. The studio is set up as such that it can be transformed into several different locales, including a restaurant and a hotel room. The audience finds Matthew sitting at a small table in the middle of the room, adjacent to him is a long table. Resumés, scripts, pencils, and other items cover the longer table, thus identifying the space as a rehearsal studio. A moment later, Lisa enters the scene and presents her resumé to Matthew. Through their conversation, Dietz reveals that she has come to audition for a role. And

because of Matthew's actions, as well as Lisa's, the audience understands that Matthew is the director and Lisa is the actor. It is not until the end of the scene that the audience discovers the truth of this opening scene. In actuality, Matthew is an actor playing the part of a director who is auditioning an actress for a role in a new play. In this scene, Matthew and Lisa play director and actor, and so their real-life relationship as husband and wife should be undetectable to the audience. By establishing these two characters as actors playing roles, Dietz sets up the essence of the entire play. It is never clear when they are playing themselves and when they are playing a role. This is the key to a successful production.

The next character Dietz introduces is Adrian. He is responsible for revealing that Matthew and Lisa are acting. He stops the action of the scene at the moment when Matthew and Lisa are supposed to kiss. This action combined with his subsequent conversation with Lisa establishes his connection to her. She accuses him of being a bit obvious by stopping at that specific moment. With these lines, the audience gathers that the two had an affair that has since ended. Now the audience will buy into Matthew's suspicions because they have been substantiated. It also seems that all three characters are playing themselves. Adrian is director of the play that Matthew and Lisa are starring in, but this too is a play. However, Dietz saves this revelation until the end of the play. So, for the majority of the play the audience is led to believe that Matthew and Lisa are actors in a play being directed by Adrian.

Cory's introduction comes in the following scene when the three go to lunch at the restaurant. Her connection to these characters is less tangible. Initially, she seems like an innocent bystander, a secondary character used to create the illusion of a restaurant. When Cory enters as

a waitress with long black hair. But she too is playing a role. Because the role Cory plays in this introductory scene is minor, the audience receives little information about this character and thus cannot fully see the magnitude of her role in the play. Again, Dietz keeps the audience guessing about what is important and what is ancillary information.

Frank is the last character introduced into the play, whose entrance does not come until the end of Act I. With his entrance, Dietz reveals that the entirety of Act I has been a series of flashbacks. Frank stops the ongoing action and challenges Matthew's account of the events. He informs the audience that the preceding incidents have been Matthew's interpretation of the events and that he may or may not be telling the truth. Frank forces Matthew only to tell the truth, and when he lies, Frank makes him start at the beginning of the incident and begin again. Frank is also the only character in this play who is introduced playing himself rather than a role. With this, Dietz signals to the audience that Frank can be trusted to tell the truth.

Character Function. As Dietz says in his playwright's note, this play is a lie. The other thing that the audience must remember is that even though these actors are playing characters, for the purposes of rehearsal the director has them go by their real names. So when they refer to each other by their first names they may or may not be referring to the actual person, but rather to their character. This technique takes the idea of an actor becoming the character one step further. Through the course of the play, the actors fail to recognize where they stop and where their characters begin. Dietz forces the audience to make this distinction. He constructs his lie so tightly that it is uncertain whether

the truth is even knowable. And because it is a lie someone must tell that lie. Dietz assigns that role to Matthew. Matthew believes that he wife is having an affair with their director, and this has driven him to seek the help of a therapist. Matthew cannot reconcile himself to the fact that this affair could happen, but convinces himself that he is right even though he never receives concrete proof. He relates the events that have caused him to believe that this affair happened, and this is what the audience sees:

ADRIAN. You're early.

MATTHEW. Yes, we had a --

ADRIAN. (*Shaking his hand.*) Welcome aboard, Matthew! I'm greatly looking forward to the next six weeks. I think we're in for a splendid adventure. The company I run in London has often tackled projects of this magnitude and I quite fancy the chance of bring my aesthetic to America -- to the provinces, if you will. As soon as Lisa gets here, we'll make a start.

MATTHEW. She's here.

ADRIAN. Really?

MATTHEW. She came with me.

ADRIAN. Really?

MATTHEW. She's my wife. (*Adrian smiles.*) Really.

ADRIAN. I must say I didn't know that. (*Pause.*) Well, congratulations. (*Before Matthew can respond.*) Don't say it. Don't say "thank you." I withdraw my comment of congratulations.

Please forgive me, would you? I entreat you --

MATTHEW. Forgive you?

ADRIAN. That's trophyism, don't you think. "Congratulations on your wife" -- that's trophyism, it's caveman talk. It shouldn't be though of as an *accomplishment* that someone landed a strikingly beautiful woman as his wife.

MATTHEW. What should it be thought of as?

ADRIAN. What it more accurately *is.*

MATTHEW. And that is?

ADRIAN. Envy. (*Pause, brightly.*) Well, I've broken a few Commandments and I haven't even had my tea. Excuse me. (*Adrian goes, taking his coffee mug with him.*)

FRANK. *Matthew?*

MATTHEW. It happened, Frank. I swear it. You said you wanted to go back to the beginning. Well, here we are.

FRANK. Very well. Keep going. (92-93)

Matthew serves as the interpreter, but as the audience discovers, Matthew does not always tell the truth. He begins with the truth, but when he starts to lose control over the story he makes up lies. Matthew's lies are driven by a need to be in control, a need to be right. He cannot confront Lisa and Adrian, so he exacts his revenge in his mind. This is seen most blatantly at the end of Act I when Matthew, Adrian, and Lisa have gone for lunch at a nearby restaurant. At some point, Matthew hatches a plan to put poison into their salad dressings. After eating the salads, the couple

lies writhing on the floor dying while Matthew gets up on the table and dances. Cory, who has assisted him in the poisoning, join him. Their connection is unclear at this point and Dietz refuses to give this information to the audience. It is this incident that forces Frank to interrupt the story, thus bringing him into the action of the play. These fabrications are the only way that Matthew is able to stay in control of a situation in which he feels he has no control.

As the play progresses, the audience realizes that Matthew is more than a man whose wife may or may not be cheating on him. Because the structure of this play is that of a play within a play within a play within a play, Matthew is actually an actor successfully playing numerous roles. His major role in the play is that of Matthew, Lisa's husband and actor. This is the Matthew who tells the story to Frank. But Dietz first introduces him to the audience as Matthew the director. Matthew the director only appears at the opening of the play, when Lisa's character comes to audition, and again at the end of the play when Lisa returns. This Matthew is responsible for revealing that the entire episode has been a play. By opening and closing the play with Lisa auditioning for Matthew, Dietz has revealed his lie. Throughout the play the characters have been playing the roles assigned to them by Dietz. They have not been lying, he has.

Because Dietz uses Matthew in the capacity of the storyteller, Matthew is the impetus for the conflict in the play. He challenges Lisa and Adrian to reveal their affair, but uses the guise of theatre:

> MATTHEW. Our collisions with others are not measured events. They are *radical.* Our love and lust and all our aching wonder is radical. Affairs don't

accrue methodically, they spring up like lighting -- like lost tourists with cash in hand. They are *feverish.* They are *fast.* And if we try to come clean by Telling the Truth about them Slowly Over Time, we give birth to a *mutant truth.* A truth that bears no relation to the fierce hearts that we possess. *The truth we tell, and the way we tell it, must be as radical as out actions.* (*Pause.*) And so . . . Carol, Derek, what have you got to day for yourselves? (*Silence. Adrian and Lisa lean forward in their chairs* --)

ADRIAN. Who?

MATTHEW. (*A big smile.*) It's delicious, isn't it?

LISA. What is?

ADRIAN. Derek and Carol? (*Matthew happily pulls some folded script pages from his pocket.*)

MATTHEW. I'm sure I paraphrased it terribly. But you get the gist of it. It enables Michael to really nail Derek and Carol for the affair they're having behind his back.

ADRIAN. It's a *new page?*

MATTHEW. Yes, it came in the mail today. Bonnie is copying them. (78)

Of course, this device would be too simple for Dietz and later in the scene, after Lisa has left the room, Matthew shows Adrian that the pages are blank. Matthew lies again. He wants Lisa and Adrian to know that he knows about their affair, but he refuses to give them the satisfaction of

confronting them about it directly. By incorporating the illusional world on the theatre into his tactics, Matthew stays in control.

The key to understanding this play is not to assume that anything is as it seems. The characters of Adrian, Lisa, and Cory seem to have little motivation throughout the play. Matthew suggests to Frank some possibilities as to why Lisa has an affair, but no definitive reason is given. Lisa calls Adrian a "prick," and if the audience believes her then it may seem unlikely that she would have an affair with him. But the audience must remember that Matthew tells the story. Matthew cannot accept that Lisa would like Adrian as a person. He makes himself believe that the attraction is purely physical. And since he admits to Frank that he does not know the exact reason behind the affair, Lisa can never admit to the audience why she is unfaithful. The only wholly honest information Matthew can provide is about himself; everything else is speculation. He may believe that what he thinks is true, thus leading the audience to believe that it is true. And because he believes it, the characters play out his interpretation, and that is all that the audience sees.

Lisa's function in the play is to act the roles dictated for her by the script. At the beginning of the play the audience sees her as an actress named Lisa Foster. Lisa Foster is auditioning for the role of Carol Davis:

MATTHEW. Okay. Good. Thank you, Lisa. (*He makes some notes on a pad in front of him. She waits, hopeful for him to say something more -- but he does not look up. She gathers up her things and starts off.*) Are you in a hurry?

LISA. I thought you were done with me.

MATTHEW. I'm not done with you. Have you ever waited

tables?

LISA. (*Setting her bag down.*) Umm...

MATTHEW. *Umm?* There's no umm here. This is a simple question. Have you waited tables or not?

LISA. Well, I --

MATTHEW. People think there are things I want to hear. I don't know where they get that notion. I ask direct questions and then watch *glaciers* form on the faces of people that would eat me alive anywhere else. If we were at a bar and I introduced myself and asked if you'd ever waited tables, you wouldn't hesitate. You wouldn't try to read me for the proper response. You would say yes or no, wouldn't you?

LISA. Yes.

MATTHEW. And why do we think that is?

LISA. Here you have power. Anywhere else you'd have none. (*Silence.*) (65)

Lisa successfully lands the role and goes on to play Carol Davis, along with her other numerous roles. Depending on the circumstances of the scene, Lisa may play Matthew's wife, Adrian's lover, Lisa the actress, or Carol Davis. Each of these roles are played equally convincingly, for Lisa does not hesitate when she shifts from one role into the next. Oftentimes the roles may even overlap. Because she commits fully to each of these characters, the audience never knows which one is real and which ones are characters.

Adrian works in a similar way as Lisa. For the majority of the play, he plays Adrian the director. His actions lead the audience to believe that he manipulates Lisa into having an affair with him. The audience witnesses his lies to her as he talks about his divorce, and then is later confronted by his wife. Adrian's main function is to be Matthew's nemesis. Without Adrian, Matthew's suspicions are baseless. His haughty demeanor alienates the audience, and his alleged affair with Lisa gives many of his lines double meaning, especially during his conversations with her. When the two speak directly about the affair, Adrian seems disappointed that Matthew never found out. The possibility of discovery excites Adrian, not the affair itself. Adrian successfully portrays this role until the end of the play when Cory reveals that he is actually an actor named Derek Savage who impersonates a director named Adrian Poynter. The audience realizes that this he has also been playing a role.

Cory's role is much more illusive. Her disguises leave the audience wondering who she really is. Initially, she plays the role of the waitress who tells Matthew she is a writer. Later she says that she is a private investigator, and finally she admits that she is actually the wife of Derek Savage, a.k.a. Adrian. Cory's goal throughout the play is to find Derek (Adrian). The characters she plays are merely tools to achieve her goal of finding her husband. When she joins in Matthew's act of revenge at the end of Act I, Cory hints at her ultimate goal. After her discovery of Derek/Adrian at the end of the play, she exacts her revenge. When they replay the restaurant scene, the audience witnesses Cory's revenge instead of Matthew's. Adrian does not seem phased by Cory's presence until she draws her gun. The shooting serves as the climax for the play within the play within the play within the play. With the conclusion of

the performance, the rest of the layers soon resolve.

Frank seems to be the only character other than Matthew who is acting on his own free will. He is the only character who plays only one role: Frank the therapist. Frank is responsible for cluing in the audience about the events that led to Matthew's suspicions about Lisa and Adrian. When Matthew's lie goes completely out of control at the end of Act I, Frank interrupts and forces Matthew to admit that the account was false. The audience realizes that everything they have witnessed has been a patient's account of events to his therapist. And when the play resumes at the beginning of Act II, Frank forces Matthew to go back to the beginning, to the first day of rehearsal. This time, however, by having Frank act as an observer, Dietz reminds the audience that what they are seeing are Matthew's memories of what happened. Throughout much of Act II, Frank watches the action, sometimes commenting on it and sometimes questioning the events. When Matthew's recollections seem a bit colorful, Frank challenges their validity, and the audience begins to get a more accurate picture of what really happened. When Matthew returns to Frank later in the Act, he admits that in the process of making things up he has had a breakthrough. He now contends that the affair was a figment of his imagination, but in saying this he also reveals his true fear:

FRANK. Hello, Matthew. What's new?

MATTHEW. (*Happily.*) I've been making things up! (But you probably could tell -- you're a professional, you've got plaques on the wall.) I've been pretending to have an affair, get a tattoo, kill people who don't use their turn signal -- things

like that. And, in doing so, Frank, I've had a breakthrough.

FRANK. Of what sort?

MATTHEW. I was walking to the deli just now and it hit me: "Matthew, *maybe you're wrong.*" Amazing, isn't it? All these weeks you've been asking me: "Are you *sure*, Matthew? Are you *certain* that your wife is having an affair?" But, now I know that's not my true fear, Frank.

FRANK. It's not?

MATTHEW. No, my true fear is this: that Lisa has stopped loving me. (*Pause. More quietly.*) That is my true fear -- (108-109)

Because of Frank's efforts that Matthew has come to terms with his true fear. Now that Matthew has been honest, the play begins to resolve.

After Matthew leaves Frank's office, Frank takes the opportunity to address the audience about his role in the play:

> Odd. How brutal things begins so sweetly. How our greatest regrets take root, at first, as hope. (*Frank turns and addresses the audience.*) Pardon me for addressing you directly, but it seems that I'm the only one who can be trusted with this story. It's possible, of course, that what Matthew said is true. That it began between them on that day, at that moment. But, *why?* I am asked that often. And, frankly, I've come to believe that each reason is as plausible as the next. One client assured me her affair was caused by the curvature of the earth. What could I say? Did I know

> otherwise? So, tonight, I ask it of you. *Why?* You've all seen that person who caught you off-guard. Who stopped your breath, if only for a moment. That person you walked a little faster just to get a glimpse of. Or slowed your car ever so slightly to observe. And why? Just to see. Just to *take it in.* Perhaps this was years ago when you were young and hopeful and reckless. Perhaps this was at intermission. But, however brief, that glance registered. And you put it somewhere in your mind. And that ... may have been that. (98)

This address identifies Frank as the holder of the truth. He claims to be the only one being honest. But he is also forcing the audience to do the detective work. Matthew never arrives at a reason for the affair. Maybe that question is unanswerable, but Frank poses it to the audience anyway. Now the audience must take their detective work one step further.

Dietz manipulates the audience trust the most with the character of Frank. He establishes Frank as the one character that can be believed. Unlike the other characters, he plays one consistent role. After the climax of the play, Dietz reveals what he has done as Frank addresses the audience:

> Why? -- you may ask. I am asked that often. In this case, the common casualty was truth and the reason given was love. The bullet -- like Cory herself -- merely grazed Adrian's heart. No charges were filed. The wounds healed. And they returned, on separate flights, to London. (*The siren fades away.*)
>
> As for Matthew and Lisa: They stood side by side as the

ambulance took Adrian away. Then they parted, saying nothing -- and haven't seen each other in *years.*

Passion and suspicion -- they are twin fevers. Each blinds us to this, the most obvious of facts: in time, everything gets known. Everything. And, in the end -- (122-123)

He is then interrupted by Matthew, the director. Initially, it seems that Matthew stops Frank before he can reveal too much, but in actuality Frank has served his purpose. The audience becomes so involved in Frank's monologue that they do not realize that this, too, is a part of a play and Frank is playing a role. Dietz shows that even the ones that seem to be the most trustworthy may just be better liars.

Character Relationships. The one thing in this play that is not confusing for the audience is the relationship of the characters. The most dominant of these is Matthew and Lisa's. Throughout the play the audience is led to believe that Lisa is having an affair, and the couple's lack of communication encourages this notion. Not until near the end of the play do Matthew and Lisa relate to each other honestly, but they continue to hide behind their characters. After watching Adrian stand in for him during a bedroom scene with Lisa, Matthew cannot hold back any longer. He confronts them about his suspicions. Because Adrian is unwilling to discuss anything but the play, Matthew uses the play's circumstances to talk about his relationship with his wife:

LISA. (*Moving away.*) Shall we begin?

MATTHEW. One more thing: In the flashback scene -- the one in which her husband first declares his love for her -- Lisa's character says, "Be

careful what you're getting into. I'm trouble." (*To Lisa.*) Do you know the scene I mean?

LISA. Yes, I do. He should have considered that before he married her.

MATTHEW. But that's just the thing: When a man hears that a woman is "trouble" -- he doesn't take it as a warning. He takes it as a *dare.*

LISA. That's not her fault.

MATTHEW. It seems *nothing is.*

LISA. She was being truthful with him. Completely truthful. And she expected the same in return.

MATTHEW. (*Laughs.*) *Complete truth?*

LISA. Yes.

ADRIAN. Matthew, I don't think Lisa is --

MATTHEW. I'm sorry, but that would be brutal. You don't -- your CHARACTER doesn't want that much truth. No one does. Truth as a RULE -- yes. Truth MORE OFTEN THAN NOT -- yes. But not ALL THE TIME. Any good mate knows the value of the *comforting little lie.*

LISA. Such as?

MATTHEW. Oh, in the case of her husband: What he really thinks of her FAMILY. HER FRIENDS.

LISA. Hey, wait a minute, he LIKES her friends.

MATTHEW. (*To Adrian.*) There's the BEAUTY OF LYING! She really believes it!

ADRIAN. Let's get on with the scene, if we could --

LISA. No, let's *address* this. MY character sees it differently.

MATTHEW. (*Tossing the script at her feet.*) Do enlighten us.

LISA. (*Not picking the script up.*) I think if you look carefully at the TEXT you'll see that her husband lives in some kind of *dream world.* He can't stand the fact that his LIFE does not match his FANTASIES, his little THOUGHTS --

MATTHEW. What are you --

LISA. And not that she KNOWS his thoughts -- not at all -- how could she? -- when he *won't let her in.* He wouldn't dare trust her with his thoughts -- because that might SHOCK HER or SURPRISE HER --

ADRIAN. Lisa, let's move on --

LISA. He's never PUT HIS HEART ON THE LINE FOR HER, because that requires *courage* -- that requires --

ADRIAN. Lisa, please, stop it --

LISA. (*Turning to Adrian.*) And, then there's her lover. (*Pause.*) Or what *passes* for a lover in a *play like this.* His idea of courtship is to talk her ear off and then buy her a bathing suit the size of a bookmark.

ADRIAN. Lisa --

LISA. He thinks he can *chat* his way into her heart --

but this man's got nothing to say. He's pure noise. This man is *noon at a clock shop*!

ADRIAN. That's QUITE ENOUGH --

LISA. Look at it, both of you: it's all a *dirty mess* and she's CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.

MATTHEW. (*Simply.*) That explains the showers. It seemed so *odd* to him that she began to take a shower every night before she climbed into bed. In all the years of their marriage, she'd never done that -- until now. What did it *mean*? he wondered? Why this sudden need to be *clean*? (*Lisa stares at Matthew. Then, she picks up the script from the floor. Her voice softens, she moves closer to him -- holding the script in front of them both.*)

LISA. If you do, though, look at the text...this is what you'll find: That when the affair is over and done, four years later, *she returns to him.* (112-113)

At the end of this scene, the audience knows how the couple truly feels about each other. Not until the end of the play, when everything else is stripped away, do they face each other honestly. In this final moment, the audience knows that their is hope for their relationship for they now vow to be honest with, at least, each other.

Matthew and Adrian relate much differently. For the majority of the play, their relationship is confined to actor-director. The only occasion when Matthew relates to Adrian on a different level occurs

immediately following Matthew's diatribe about telling the truth. Rather than being submissive to his director as he has in the past, Matthew usurps Adrian's power. Matthew has led Lisa to believe that his accusations were merely new pages from the script, but in this scene Matthew reveals the truth to Adrian: there are no new pages. But instead of accusing Adrian of anything, Matthew merely leaves Adrian to ponder what exactly it is that Matthew knows. It is not until Matthew and Lisa have their honest moment, that Matthew again speaks honestly with Adrian:

> I don't blame you for loving her. She's a warm, smart, vibrant woman -- and you know as well as I that without the likes of her, the known world is a parking lot. I don't even care if you love her *better* than I do. That's for her to decide. But never...*ever*...think you love her *more* than I. For that, my friend, will be your undoing. I promise you that. (114)

This line not only asserts Matthew's resistance to Adrian's authority, but also affirms his love of his wife. This is the only time that Matthew declares his love for his wife. Matthew is more concerned with his relationship with his wife than to worry about Adrian.

The most puzzling relationship in the play is between Adrian and Lisa. Since Matthew tells this tale, the scenes between them reflect his suspicions of the affair but are almost devoid of a physical relationship. The audience witnesses conversations either before the affair began or after it ended, with the exception of one scene. In this, the two are sitting on a bed in a hotel room. Instead, though, of being shown in a compromising position, they are discussing Adrian's wife. This reinforces the aspect of betrayal of their spouses rather than their sexual

relationship. Dietz again delves further into the deeper effects of an affair.

The only character who relates to Cory is Matthew, despite the fact that she is allegedly married to Adrian. Their connection becomes more obvious to the audience as they talk. Their conversation has a familiar feeling to it even though the two have never met. Matthew informs Cory that he has seen her before on more than one occasion. His demeanor is flirtatious and Cory encourages this even after she discovers that he is married. The two talk casually, but there is more going on between them. They conspire to poison Adrian and Lisa but putting poison into their salad dressing. As Matthew does this, he tells Cory about Lisa's infidelity. Cory takes the salads and in the next scene serves them to Adrian and Lisa. As Adrian and Lisa choke to death, Cory joins Matthew atop a table and the two dance in celebration.

In Act II, Dietz shows the audience an exchange between Matthew and Cory again, though this time Cory is in a different disguise. She now plays a private detective and has run into Matthew at the restaurant. Again there is an obvious chemistry between them as the drink wine and discuss their nature of their careers. Cory questions Matthew about Adrian and Lisa. Her questions force Matthew to face the reality of what may be happening behind his back. Cory gives him an important piece of advice:

> It's odd. We think our lives will be changed in front of us -- that we'll be present when it happens. But, we never are. Our lives are changed in distant rooms. Without our knowledge or consent. Some word or glance, some quiet decision across town or across country is often the very

thing which comes back and does us in. Ignorance, Matthew, is not bliss. It simply postpones the inevitable. (105)

This advice seems to fuel Matthew's suspicions even more. He also becomes more confident with Cory for he tells her that she is gorgeous. As Cory exits she gives her phone number to Matthew. This action can have dual meaning: first, the two have been flirting throughout this scene, and second, Cory has told him that she is a private detective. This ambiguity adds to the tension of the scene. It also sets up the next scene between Adrian and Lisa which takes place in a hotel room.

Dietz successfully creates suspicion in the audience as well as the characters. As the play progresses the relationships become more convoluted, the truth becomes harder and harder to recognize until it is virtually impossible for the audience to believe anything on stage. It is the lack of trust between the characters and the breakdown of communication between them that has brought them to this state. And since Dietz has taught the audience not to trust what they see, the ending fails to answer the questions of the play.

With *Private Eyes* Dietz tackles two major topics: truth and fidelity. The characters in this play portray their characters to the fullest, believing that what they say is the truth. Dietz uses the world of theatre to illustrate how illusive reality is. People believe what they want and need to believe despite evidence to the contrary. All of the characters in this play created their own reality and let the audience sort it out for themselves. The ending leaves the audience wondering what has been real and what has been illusion. The play deals with adultery, and the lies and suspicion that surround adultery. Dietz wrote this play with a web of

lies. The audience's inability to recognize the truth mimics the inability of the characters to recognize the truth. The play within a play within a play within a play devices works only because the characters invest themselves completely. Dietz requires that the audience does the same.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

The major purpose of this thesis is to bring attention to the works of Steven Dietz by examining how he utilizes characters in his plays. When reading these five plays the similar characteristics and functions of his eclectic group of characters begin to emerge. Analysis of these characters leads to further understanding not only of how his characters work, but how his plays work as a whole. In each play, Dietz addresses a different issue concerning contemporary society, though he employs similar tactics to achieve his goals. Instead of putting his focus on plot or technical elements, his major tool in creating a successful play is putting the play in the hands of his characters. Similarities also exist among the plays themselves, not just between their characters. Further exploration of how these characters function reveal theses similarities.

The characters in *More Fun Than Bowling* work to enlighten the audience about the need of every individual to embrace life. By reliving positive moments of their lives, the characters learn to focus on the positive. In *Foolin' Around With Infinity*, Dietz tackles the issue of society's dependence on technology and the need to question that dependence. By reducing the characters in this play down to the essence of the perspective they represent, Dietz shows the audience the importance of self-education on issues that concern each individual. *Lonely Planet* focuses on the importance of friendship, not just in a world plagued by AIDS but in life in general. As Dietz says, friendships are our legacy. Friendships are what live on after us. *Trust* and *Private Eyes* both approach the issues of trust, fidelity, and suspicion, though *Private Eyes* extends beyond this. It uses the circumstances surrounding an affair to

go deeper to explore the essence of a lie and the effect that lie has. Each play deals with an issue relevant to contemporary society, and Dietz presents them to his audiences as a means to bring attention to them. Dietz forces the audience to invest more than just their attention, but to include their own thoughts, opinions, and contemplations.

Dietz works to involve the audience by using specific techniques that break down the barriers between the audience and the action onstage. Most frequently he utilizes direct address, thus obliterating the fourth wall. Direct address is used within each of these five plays, by nearly every character. The exceptions include: Mac (*Foolin' Around With Infinity*); Becca and Holly (*Trust*); and Matthew, Lisa, Adrian, and Cory (*Private Eyes*). Mac does addresses the audience indirectly when he address YOU. Since YOU represents an audience member onstage, his comments extend to the audience. In comparison to the other characters in the play, however, his address is different. By looking at his role in the play as the one who accepts his duty and does not question, it seems reasonable that Mac would not speak directly with the audience itself. Becca and Holly both announce the scene titles in *Trust*, so they too have contact with the audience, though it is not to the extent of the other characters. The other characters address the audience about those they are pursuing. Since Becca and Holly do not actively pursue another in this play, it follows that they would not have reason to address the audience as the other characters do.

One of the strongest similarities between characters is that between Mister Dyson in *More Fun Than Bowling* and Cory in *Private Eyes.* Initially, this may seem a tenuous connection, but looking deeper at the characters' introductions as well as their functions reveals they do, in

fact, have much in common. Dietz establishes Mister Dyson as a man of mystery. He does not have any recognizable connection to any of the other characters in the play, and his presence in the play remains a mystery until the end of the play when he tells Jake and Molly of Maggie's death. Cory is revealed in a similar manner. The audience never gets a clear picture of who she is in relation to the other characters in the play. Dietz first introduces her as a black-haired waitress who serves the others lunch. And then she returns as a red-haired private investigator who first converses with Matthew about Adrian and later with Lisa. Her true function in the play is not revealed until the end when she confronts Adrian about his pattern of infidelity. A sense of mystery surrounds both of these characters. Each reveals as little about themselves as necessary in order to get what they want. Although both Mister Dyson and Cory possess different intentions in their respective plays, both are created in a similar manner.

The character Molly from the play *More Fun Than Bowling* shares similar characteristics with Leah from *Trust.* Although Molly is a sixteen year old girl and Leah is a thirty-seven year old woman, both encourage those around them to to take an active role in their lives. Molly not only encourages her father to overcome his fears, but she also encourages Lois and Loretta to marry her father. She sees the chance at happiness and wants them to embrace life. Leah does the same thing with Gretchen and also with Holly. She urges Gretchen to take a chance with Becca, to not be hindered by the fear of rejection. She wants Gretchen to have the opportunity to be happy. Leah's encouragement of Holly is more indirect. Leah sees that Holly has an opportunity with Roy, but she knows that conventional advice is wasted on Holly. She still refuses to allow Holly to

miss an opportunity with someone who could make her life happy. Unlike Molly, who was successful in her endeavor, or even like her own success with Gretchen, Leah only manages to get Holly to go out with Roy, but fails to get her to give him a real chance. But there is hope, for Holly does begin to show signs of change for the better. Both Molly and Leah want what is best for those around them. Molly's wisdom comes from taking care of her father since her mother left, and Leah's wisdom comes from learning from her own mistakes. Despite the different paths they took to get there, each character does her part to challenge those around them.

Since Dietz deals with powerful issues, fear is a major part of many of his characters. While some, like Gretchen, Becca, and Jesse, deal with their fear in a more healthy manner, other characters allow fear to rule their lives. Two of the most obvious of these characters are Jake (*More Fun Than Bowling*) and Jody (*Lonely Planet.*) Both Jake and Jody suffer from extreme fear and because of this have unresolved issues surrounding these fears. Jake has suffered from much loss. First Maggie left him alone to care for their young daughter. Subsequently, his second and third wives died in freak accidents for which he feels responsible. So fear of death and fear of loss consumes Jake, preventing him from moving on with his life. Jody suffers from a similar fear, though his fear stems from the loss of many of his friend to AIDS. Where Jake fears death in general, Jody fears not only acquiring HIV and dying from it, but also losing more friends to this disease. Both men recognize their need to face their fears, but are hesitant in doing so. In this instance, Carl (*Lonely Planet*) and Molly (*More Fun Than Bowling*) work in a similar manner, for they encourage Jody and Jake to face their fears. Carl and Molly serve to balance out the irrational behavior of the ones they love even though

they too have their own fears. Their tactics are different, but the results are the same. In the end, Jake and Jody use what they have learned to take a positive step forward in facing life. Saying this is not to draw comparisons between the plays, but to show how Dietz uses strong relationships to help his characters deal with their problems.

Another set of characters that share similar traits from two strikingly different plays are Carl (*Lonely Planet*) and Matthew (*Private Eyes*). Both characters fail to face the truth of their situations: Carl and his life with AIDS and Matthew with his wife's affair. Both make up unbelievable lies in order to maintain, at the very least, an illusion of control. But their need to be in control stems from different needs. Carl lies as a means to cope with his reality. He takes over the lives of his deceased friends in an attempt to preserve their memory. He needs to believe that these people will not be forgotten. Matthew's lies come from a more self-centered need. He feels that he has lost control over his life, specifically over his marriage, and when this begins to overwhelm him he resorts to lying. As with Jake and Jody, these two characters have counter characters who balance them out and force them to tell the truth. Jody recognizes Carl's lies immediately. He allows him to lie when necessary because he understand why Carl lies, but Jody also knows when to make Carl face the truth. Unlike Jody, when Frank realizes that Matthew is lying, he abruptly stops Matthew and forces him to admit his lie. This act forces Matthew to tell the truth, which fails to be as interesting. This is especially important because as Carl continues to lie, his lies become more unbelievable signaling to the audience that he is a liar. Matthew's lies begin more gradually. He starts with the truth, but as he continues the truth evolves into a lie, and so the audience needs

Frank's intervention so that they know when to stop believing Matthew. In the end, the lies these characters tell are always revealed for the audience.

There are other characters within these plays that share similar traits, though they are not as strongly connected as the previously discussed characters. The first two of these are Mister Dyson and YOU. Dietz uses these characters to reinforce specific moments in their respective plays. YOU brings focus to moments by pointing them out verbally. She will tell the audience where to look and what to look at while Mister Dyson manipulates focus by revealing himself during important moments. Whether their methods are direct or subtle, Dietz relies on these characters to direct the audience rather than relying on technical elements, such as lighting.

All of the characters in the play *Private Eyes* work much like Mr. Anderson in *Foolin' Around With Infinity*. Mr. Anderson plays numerous roles, constantly reminding the audience that nothing is as it seems. Likewise, Matthew, Lisa, Adrian, Cory, and Frank do the same thing. Each character portrays numerous different roles, though they are fully committed to each so that the audience is led to believe that what they are seeing is true only to discover that it is not. Granted, the motivation behind the character of Mr. Anderson differs greatly from that of the characters in *Private Eyes*, but in both plays the audience receives a similar message.

Through his characters Steven Dietz has created a canon of plays that challenge contemporary society. He has bestowed in them a deeper connection to each other, as well as to the audience. These characters become the vehicle for his message, and even though many of them stray

far from realism, they all possess the ability to affect the audience. These characters strengthen Dietz's plays. They are responsible for informing the audience about what is important, what is true, and what needs to be questioned. His works allow the audience to experience a more human type of theatre in this age of technology. As he said himself, "Friendship, not technology, is the only thing capable of showing us the enormity of the world" (*Lonely Planet* 56).

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