

**OREGON PSYCHOANALYTIC CENTER COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM**  
**ARTS ON THE COUCH**  
**Summaries of Pre and Post-Performance Discussions**

*Destination Opera: From Music to Psyche with Portland Opera*  
*Formative Stages: Theater & the Life of the Mind, with Portland Center Stage*  
*Reel Minds: Insights, with Northwest Film Center*

**ARTS ON THE COUCH: 2009 – 2010 SEASON**

rev 3/23/2010

FORMATIVE STAGES: THEATER & THE LIFE OF THE MIND at Portland Center Stage

*The Receptionist*

21 February 2010

Discussants: Michal Drabanski, MA, MS and Tim DuRoche, PCS Community Programs  
Manager

Reporter: Richard Alden, MD

*The Receptionist* by Adam Bock begins as a seemingly droll take on the mundane stuff of office life, the mind numbing routine, the petty gossip, and the black hole that is voice mail. Midway through it takes a creepy turn, and the audience learns that hidden behind the tidy facade of this office is a grim, ruthless, and evil business.

Following a performance of *The Receptionist*, OPC's Michal Drabanski gave a thought provoking presentation, illuminating the play's themes of cultural paranoia, conformism, and the dynamic shifts between victim and victimizer. Set against the backdrop of post-9/11 America and the scandals of Guantanamo and Abu Garib, we see how easily complacency can slide into complicity with evil. Michal discussed how investing too much in a single perspective leads to a belief in infallibility and creates an atmosphere of contempt and mistrust. Michal suggested that by maintaining a sense of "fallibilism" – the constant awareness that there is more to be learned and that our understanding is always partial at best – we are better able to think afresh and avoid the paranoia that destroys reality testing. She explored the themes of loyalty and the role of loyalty in preserving trust, the dynamics of power, and how when we don't feel we can make a difference we turn to denial as a form of self-preservation. The lively and wide ranging audience discussion which followed Michal's comments included remarks by lead actor Robert Thomas on his interpretation of the role of a man who has made a "deal with the devil", willing to do evil in naive belief that some good will come of it. The discussion added up to a rich if unsettling meditation on the banality of evil and the dangerous assumptions that we sometimes make about others and ourselves.

FORMATIVE STAGES: THEATER & THE LIFE OF THE MIND at Portland Center Stage

*Snow Falling on Cedars*

24 January 2010

Discussants: Cynthia Ellis Gray, MD and Saskia Hostetler Lippy, MD

Reporter: Richard Alden, MD

What I like enjoy most about taking part in an OPC post-performance discussion is how hitherto unappreciated connections and themes in the work of art come into sharper focus. Like an interpretation that illuminates the latent meaning of given material, the collective experience engenders the discovery of something there all along but only dimly apprehended.

Following a performance of *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Dr. Cynthia Ellis Gray offered the audience her own illuminating interpretation. The play is an adaptation of David Guterson's hauntingly sad novel, set on an isolated Puget Sound island in 1954, interwoven with flashbacks, WWII, and the internment of Japanese-Americans. Kabuo Miyamoto, a Japanese-American fisherman is charged in the murder of Carl Heine, Jr. Through flashbacks, we learn that Kabuo's wife Hatsue had a teenage love affair with Ishmael Chambers who has grown up to be the local newspaper editor. When Ishmael stumbles upon information which could clear Kabuo, he is caught between his impulse to do the right thing and his bitterness over being spurned by Hatsue and losing his arm in battle against the Japanese during the war. The play pivots on this exquisite interplay of loss, prejudice, revenge, and reparation.

Taking off from a scene in which Ishmael seeks guidance from his mother and she tries to understand him, Cynthia focused on Ishmael's dilemma and how it illuminates broader issues about the influence of past, how people become stuck in a particular life trajectory and how they can change and move forward in their lives. Reeling from the loss of his love, his arm, and his childhood ideals, Ishmael withdraws from life and his own feelings, becoming an observer and reporter rather than participant. Drawing upon Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia", Cynthia explored the ways in which Ishmael's inability to acknowledge his losses and his anger leave him hating himself and cut off from his own feelings. He is unable to accept that Hatsue has moved on and remains stuck in his childhood wish to be held, treating her as a narcissistic extension of himself rather than as a separate person in her own right. It is through acknowledging his ambivalence about Hatsue, including his hatred of her that he is able to relate to her as a real and separate person and so is able act as a free and more autonomous individual.

The wide ranging group discussion, deftly moderated by Dr. Saskia Hostetler Lippy, who is also the liaison for OPC's outreach with Portland Center Stage, further highlighted themes of separateness vs. connection and the origins of prejudice.

REEL MINDS: INSIGHTS at Northwest Film Center

*Air Doll*

5 December 2009

Discussant: Naomi Steinberg, PhD

Reporter: Richard Alden, MD

*Air Doll* (2009) is the latest film by Japanese Director Hirokazu Koreeda, who also did *After Life* and *Still Walking*. It portrays the deceptively simple story of a life-size inflatable doll, named Nozumi ("hope") by its owner and used for sex and companionship. One day the doll

discovers it has a heart and sets out to explore the wonders and difficulties of being almost human. She falls for a video store clerk, but the relationship goes tragically awry.

OPC's Naomi Steinberg led an engaging post-screening discussion of this stark portrayal of urban alienation, loneliness, and a consumerist culture in which easy substitutes and disposability is valued. People having separate egos is, for the most part, viewed as "annoying", although there are glimmers of authentic connection, such as an elderly poet who takes a genuine interest in and is touched by Nozumi. Naomi explored the role of the other and the way the clerk makes Nozumi vulnerable, though a ritual of deflating and re-inflating her, in order to enliven himself. Naomi discussed the ways in which we so often seem to miss the mark in pursuing our desires and how the film underscores this idea. She talked about how a central concern of the film is loss and separateness, how we deal with it, and the ways we strive and struggle through relationships to become more singular rather than disposable. An easy back-and-forth with the audience ensued, ranging from musings on the post-war emasculation of Japan to the ways in which we all may succeed and fail in making connections with each other. The process of the group discussion was notable to this reporter for the way that audience comments seemed to build upon each other, details coalesced and hitherto unappreciated connections and new meaning emerged.

FORMATIVE STAGES: THEATER & THE LIFE OF THE MIND at Portland Center Stage  
*Ben Franklin Unplugged*

9 November 2009

Discussants: Nancy Winters, MD and Tim DuRoche, PCS Community Programs Manager

Reporter: Saskia Hostetler Lippy, MD

On November 9, 2009 the audience of Portland Center Stage's production of "Ben Franklin Unplugged" was in for a rare treat. As part of the ongoing collaboration of Formative Stages: Theater and the Life of the Mind, Dr. Nancy Winters along with PCS's Tim du Roche led the post-play discussion. It was a unique event in that actor and playwright Josh Kornbluth also participated leaving the audience with a unique insight not only into the production but also into the life of man who created it.

The play, a hilarious take on the similarities in appearance and history of Josh and Benjamin Franklin, proved rich psychoanalytic material, as Dr. Winters points out. The Josh character becomes intrigued with the rift that developed Ben Franklin and his son William, ultimately culminating in disinheritance when William sides with the British during the Revolutionary War. Dr. Winters highlights the complicated nature of the father-son relationship, especially as it regards expectations and disappointments. She framed the play as a journey of individuation for the Josh character to find his "own" Ben Franklin among the legions of impersonators of this famous man. With the help of Claude, a Ben Franklin scholar who as Dr. Winters points out also functions as a psychotherapist, she accepts Josh's "Bear" and so helps the Josh character to find his own voice. The post-play discussion was lively and having Josh Kornbluth himself to comment on the character Josh was exceptional.

REEL MINDS: INSIGHTS at Northwest Film Center

*Mary and Max*

1 November 2009

Discussant: George Drinka, MD

Reporter: Richard Alden, MD

*Mary and Max* (2009) is a unique clay animation by Director Adam Eliot. The film chronicles the relationship between two lonely pen friends. Mary is a lonely 8-year-old girl from Australia. Max is a 40-year-old man with Asperger's Syndrome living an isolated life in New

York. Through their correspondence over the next twenty years they share their common struggles for acceptance and love. Following a matinee screening, George Drinka spoke about Asperger's Syndrome, the interplay of nature and nurture, and the ways this poignant film weaves together themes of attachment, trauma, and loss in the lives of these two unlikely friends. Both characters seek solace in food; chocolate and sweetened condensed milk become substitutes for maternal love and sustenance. Feces signify shame, which appears in Mary's poop colored birthmark and further disrupts her painful efforts to flirt with a neighbor boy. George explored the way color is used as an emotional leitmotif. He also discussed the dynamic underpinnings of two crises that Max encounters, the first when Mary asks him about love and sex, and the second when he fears that she will visit and attempt to "cure" him of his Asperger's condition, sounding a cautionary note for us about the pitfalls of therapeutic zeal vs. understanding and compassionate acceptance. George also drew our attention to how Max is able to use what he learns from his own psychiatrist about loving and accepting oneself and pass that on to Mary in a paternal gesture. These are serious themes delivered with a deft comic touch, and George facilitated a wide-ranging discussion, which left us thinking about the film and the power of friendship and connection in new and unexpected ways.

REEL MINDS: INSIGHTS at Northwest Film Center

*Word is Out: Stories of Some of our Lives*

22 October 2009

Discussants: Kathryn Zerbe, MD and Kelli Holloway, MD

Reporter: Nancy Winters, MD

Kathryn Zerbe, MD, Director of Oregon Psychoanalytic Institute and her partner, psychodynamic psychotherapist/psychiatrist Kelli Holloway, MD, provided an after-film discussion of the evocative documentary **Word is Out: Stories of Some of our Lives**, originally filmed in 1979. Dr. Zerbe opened with comments about how much things have changed in the psychiatric and psychoanalytic communities since this film was made. The American Psychiatric Association had just finished its first wave of work on removing homosexuality as pathology. Now there are several openly gay Directors of psychoanalytic institutes. The film has historical and political value, documenting the tragic life experiences of gay individuals who were subjected to profound discrimination, including several who were committed to mental hospitals. Dr. Holloway discussed the fear expressed by the individuals in the film and commented on her experience being raised in the Bible Belt. She quoted a character in the film who described prevailing attitudes towards homosexuality, "if you're a lawyer it's criminal, if you're a doctor it's sick, and if you're a minister it's wicked." She spoke to the symbolic value of coming out of the closet, which "pushed back into consciousness a piece that society had tried to disavow and disown". They both acknowledged the damage psychiatry had inflicted by disavowing this aspect of human experience.

On a positive note, Dr. Zerbe added that our national organization has been on the forefront of confronting "Don't ask, don't tell" and formally recognized Barney Frank. There is an American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) dossier of research indicating that you cannot pathologize someone on the basis of sexual orientation. APsaA took an affirmative position on gay marriage equality and adoption rights. Dr. Holloway discussed the importance of healing through telling one's story, as happens in psychotherapy. "We [psychotherapists] are here", she said. "We encourage people to come in and be part of the journey." Dr. Zerbe mentioned the hopefulness of getting beyond the false self, adding, "We don't have an answer to why people are straight or gay." Both speakers commented on how liberating it was to move from the Midwest to Portland which has a more established Lesbian community. Dr. Beaumont from the audience mentioned that homosexuals have brought to the fore the issue of sexuality. Sexuality is difficult

to talk about, and heterosexuals don't have the answers. The audience participated actively in discussion after this moving film and the speakers' insightful comments.

DESTINATION OPERA: FROM MUSIC TO PSYCHE with Portland Opera

*Orphee*

October 20, 2009

Participants: Nancy Winters, MD and Alexis Hamilton, Portland Opera Outreach Manager

Reporter: Richard Alden, MD

*Orphee* (1993) by composer Philip Glass is based on Jean Cocteau's 1949 film of the same name, itself a fascinating retelling of the ancient Orpheus myth. Orphee is a slightly over-the-hill poet who is obsessed with listening to obscure radio messages, ignores his pregnant wife, and becomes infatuated with the Princess of Death. When his wife Eurydice is killed by the Princesses motorcycle-riding henchmen, he enters to underworld through a mirror to retrieve her, only to lose her again when he disobeys the injunction against looking at her. In this version however, Orphee gets a second chance and is reunited with Eurydice, while the Princess and her Chauffeur are led off to unspecified but horrific fates.

In a pre-performance presentation, OPC's Nancy Winters, together with Alexis Hamilton from Portland Opera, delivered a rich and thought provoking look at this tale through a psychoanalytic lens. Nancy illustrated several key points with film clips from the Cocteau work and a sample of a very moving piano adaptation of the opera by Glass. She explicated the multiple meanings of the mirror motif as a deft symbol of the relationship between narcissistic self-absorption and artistic creativity. On the other side of the mirror's watery surface lie mystery, imagination, and death. On another interpretive level, the mirror signifies a transitional space between primary creativity and objective reality, Nancy further drew the audience's attention to the links between the imagery of Cocteau's Underworld and Freud's Unconscious, where time, logic, and the rules of the physical world are suspended. The ominous tribunal of the Underworld becomes a stand-in for a harsh and punitive superego demands. Themes of looking, prohibitions against looking, and shame were also explored. Nancy gave us an extended improvisation in a Kleinian key on Orphee as an artist suffering for his his art, on the split in his love life between the dark, sexy Princess and his innocent, care giving wife, his ambivalence and guilt over killing the maternal figure and his efforts at reparation. Seen this way *Orphee* becomes a paean to the vicissitudes of loss in which mourning offers a way out of guilt, shame, and depression. Nancy reflected on the capacity of music to contain unfathomable grief and the way we as therapists help patients articulate difficult emotions, loosen superego strictures, and facilitate mourning and integration.

FORMATIVE STAGES: THEATER & THE LIFE OF THE MIND at Portland Center Stage

*Ragtime*

4 October 2009

Discussants: Scott Murray, MD and Tim DuRoche, PCS Community Programs Manager

Reporter: Richard Alden, MD

*Ragtime* is a sprawling musical adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's innovative 1975 novel that traces the intersecting paths of three American families at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We meet a white New Rochelle family; Coalhouse Walker, an accomplished jazz pianist, his lover and young son; and Tate, a Jewish immigrant who, accompanied by his young daughter, transforms a talent at animated silhouettes into a motion picture career. Historical personages make appearances as well, including Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, Houdini, and the scandalous Evelyn

Nesbit. The central climax centers on Coalhouse Walker's tragic bid for revenge after his car is destroyed by a group of racist firemen.

OPC's Scott and PCS's Tim DuRoche facilitated a lively post-performance discussion of *Ragtime*. Scott discussed the tragedy of Coalhouse's revenge and its psychodynamic underpinnings, particularly how to urge revenge may defend against overwhelming shame, loss, guilt, and powerlessness, which escalates to omnipotent rage. When the authorities do not respond, this serves to further bring home his powerlessness. These experiences of humiliation breed narcissistic rage. Scott encouraged the audience to consider Coalhouse's violent response to the loss of first his car and then his wife as efforts to restore his sense of self. He does have a moment of meeting with Booker T. Washington who encourages him to think about the future and consider his son, the young men with him, and future generations, even if he is ultimately unable to save himself. Scott's explication of the intrapsychic aspects of Coalhouse's predicament set up an fascinating counterpoint in the ensuing discussion with audience, actors, and Tim DuRoche about the interplay of personal revenge and social justice, the role of revolutionary action and community building in the dialectic of history. As one member of the audience pointed out, the mother who courageously takes in Coalhouse's orphaned child finds her own meaning through individual action. Sigmund Freud actually shows up in the original Doctorow novel, and although he does not appear onstage in this musical, his spirit of analytic inquiry and wonder were present in the discussion that followed.

#### DESTINATION OPERA: FROM MUSIC TO PSYCHE with Portland Opera

La Bohème

September 9, 2009

Participants: Barbara Drinka, LCSW and Alexis Hamilton, Portland Opera Outreach Manager

Reporter: Scott Murray, MD

On the evening of September 9, Barbara Drinka (OPC's chair of Community Outreach), and Alexis Hamilton (Education and Outreach Manager of Portland Opera), provided a stirring and informative introduction for Portland Opera's upcoming production of *La Bohème*. The audience of opera enthusiasts and devotees of psychoanalytic thought enjoyed an interplay of historical and biographical background, tinged with a psychoanalytic perspective, provided by Barbara, which was accentuated with musical excerpts and musicological elaboration by Alexis. The audience was animated in responding to these perspectives, as discussions ranged from the possibility of part-objects dominating the relationships of the protagonists, to the role of art in personal growth, the poignant farewell to the romantic idealizations of youth as revealed through Mimi's suffering and death, the dream-like aura of the opera, the historical social developments of that era, and the suggestion by the opera (and Puccini's personal history) that "man is the fuel, woman is the fire."

The 2009-10 Arts Community Outreach of OPC had a fine beginning to what promises to be an enjoyable and thought-provoking season. I encourage all of you to block out time, if you can, for the upcoming programs, as they are a wonderful way of experiencing opera and theater in a rich and mind-stimulating way.

#### **ARTS ON THE COUCH: 2008-2009 SEASON**

##### **Formative Stages: Theater & the Life of the Mind**

***Grey Gardens***

**June 14, 2009**

**Participants: Carol Stuart, PsyD & Portland Center Stage**

**Reporter: Saskia Hostetler Lippy, MD**

On June 14, 2009 the Oregon Psychoanalytic Center and Portland Center Stage held the last

event in the discussion series entitled “Formative Stages: Theater and the Life of the Mind” on the play “Grey Gardens”. Our own esteemed Dr. Carol Stuart led the discussion. This intriguing and at times disturbing play is about the lives of Edith Bouvier Beale and her adult daughter “Little Edie”. The Tony award-winning musical captures both the highs and lows of their life together in Acts I & II, condensing a very complex life story into a manageable narrative. For those of you not familiar with the story, Edith Bouvier Beale is the aunt of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and at the end of her life was living in virtually uninhabitable squalor in her dilapidated 28-room mansion called Grey Gardens along with her adult daughter. This is captured for “real” in a 1975 documentary by the Maysles brothers of the same title. This documentary has fueled both this musical adaptation as well as the recent HBO documentary by the same name.

In front of our largest audience to date, Carol led off the discussion by pointing out that this story is really about the dark side of the American dream viewed through the lens of a mother daughter relationship. Carol asks the question how do we understand that each of the two Edies, who came from wealth and privilege, end up living an existence of squalor, regression, co-dependency, fantasy, and shattered dreams for over 30 years? The social and cultural landscape played a major role in their development. The two women had their own aspirations but did not conform to the stereotypes of their class or their time and as a result were cast out by society and the men in their lives (Edith, the mother, was ultimately divorced by her husband and disinherited by her father leaving her penniless despite vast wealth in the family). Carol also pointed out the profound influence of the absent father/husband to the play, so symbolically represented by his huge portrait on the wall during Act One. Carol saw the dialectic tensions in the play between fantasy and reality and engagement and isolation in both these women's lives. She pointed out the play very clearly and painfully portrayed a relationship where the narcissistic needs of the mother overshadowed and even swallowed up those of the daughter. Like her mother, little Edie grows up confused about the life she is supposed to lead. She is bitter but devoted. It is this interpenetrating conflict that Carol saw as the central theme of the play. The discussion went on for nearly an hour with large audience participation. All in all, it was a wonderful way to end such a great season with Portland Center Stage. Many thanks to Carol and especially to Tim DuRoche, our PCS liaison, for allowing our continued participation in this very stimulating venue.

Please mark your calendars for next year as we kick off another season on October 8<sup>th</sup> with “Ragtime” discussed by Dr. Scott Murray. Thanks for all your support and please come out and see us in action next year!

### **Formative Stages: Theater & the Life of the Mind**

***Frost/Nixon***

**May 3, 2009**

**Participants: Scott Murray, MD & Portland Center Stage**

**Reporter: Redmond Reams, PhD**

Interactions between individuals in a relationship inevitably influence both individuals consciously and unconsciously in the relationship, whether they are baby and mother, client and therapist or interviewer and ex-president. This tenet of both developmental and psychoanalytic theories is borne out in the recent movie, *Frost/Nixon*.

This movie illuminates both David Frost's and Richard Nixon's character at particularly vulnerable times in their public careers. Frost had had his American talk show cancelled and had spent all his own money and borrowed more to finance his interviews with Richard Nixon; yet all the U.S. news networks had rejected his overtures to buy the interviews for broadcast ahead of time.

Richard Nixon, three years after his resignation as President, is grappling with his legacy and whether he could/would ever feel powerful and influential again.

These vulnerabilities were particularly telling as we see the narcissistic traits in both of their characters. Although quite dissimilar on the surface, Frost as charming, playboy talk show host and Nixon as a brilliant, arrogant politician, both show the narrowness of their perceptual and interpretive frameworks. Frost believes he can pull off the interviews by his charm and leaves the research to his assistants and refuses to acknowledge others' views of how poorly the first three interviews have gone. Nixon devalues Frost and surrounds himself with others who will support his view. Yet both characters are also presented more complexly – Frost hires a research

assistants who openly confronts him while Nixon can become interested in Frost's Italian-made loafers, at least until an aide describes them as effeminate. There are two pivotal interactions in the movie – the first is a drunken rambling phone call by Nixon to Frost between the third and fourth interviews. This phone call, in which Nixon describes both of them as men devalued by elites and fighting to avoid being humiliated and striving desperately to resume positions of fame and power, functions as an interpretation to Frost of his character structure. Frost shifts from an uninvolved stance of being above the work of preparing and takes a risk to his self-esteem by actually working hard himself to construct his approach to the final interview and by admitting the usefulness of an idea that the confrontive aide had had. This fourth and final interview is the second crucial interaction. When pressed by Frost, Nixon shifts and admits wrongdoing and regret. I believe this shift is set up in all their previous interactions, which Nixon had attempted defensively to cast as adversarial and a struggle, but Frost has interjected the idea of a “confidant” and listened intently and respectfully to Nixon's view of the world and his life. Through Frost's consistent interest in Nixon, Nixon was led to be interested in his own feelings and his tragic conflict with his view of himself as an exceptional person but who had made mistakes. Frost did not condemn – he drew out Nixon with his interest. We see the changes in each man through subsequent small interactions. Nixon, on his way to the car after the fourth interview, allows himself to stop and pet a dog and ask if it's a dachshund for no other reason than his own interest. Frost brings Nixon a gift later before he leaves town. The gift is a pair of Italian loafers that Nixon had apparently devalued to Frost but Frost read through the defenses and sensed Nixon's genuine interest. Nixon was not another talk show topic to be moved on past but someone Frost was connected to. In addition to be Frost and Nixon being influenced by each other, I believe, in our encounter with the movie, we can also be affected by its acceptance of its main characters' flaws (and thus also ours) and its highlighting of their and our capacity to change through meaningful interaction.

### **Formative Stages: Theater & the Life of the Mind** ***Distracted***

**Wednesday, April 22, 2009**

**Participants: Carol Arland, PsD, OPI Advanced Candidate; Sarah Bradley, MSW, Senior Instructor, PSU; and Artist's Repertory Theater moderator Megan Miller**  
**Reporter: Scot MacLean, MD**

*Distracted*, depicts two parents struggling with their son's behavior and his diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder as well as treatments suggested by a variety of professionals, friends, and neighbors.

Carol started the discussion by talking about how the boy's parents struggle with distractions found in our culture. She pointed out that the system that is trying to treat the boy does not make an effort to understand his hopes and dreams, or to see him as a whole person. This is the true societal deficit shown in the play. It is emphasized thematically because we do not get to meet the boy, Jesse, until the final minutes of the play, when at last we can see his joy, creativity, and spunk. Carol encouraged an analytic approach to our children so that we may understand them as whole people, and warned against checklist style diagnosing. She also cited Joel Stein's recent essay in Time magazine describing his own realization that much of the task of parenthood is trying to cope with the uncertainties of how to raise one's child in the face of an often overwhelming onslaught of opinions, methods, and schools of thought about how best to do it.

Sarah observed that the play shows the importance of understanding the family's perspective on who a child is and the meaning of his symptoms. She later discussed how we might understand children in the context of what modern life and education demand of children and parents, and

how different children may thrive in one type of family or situation, and flounder in another.

A lively discussion followed with perspectives from parents, teachers and one audience member who was diagnosed with ADD at an age when he could discuss the diagnosis and treatment options with his parents.

**Formative Stages: Theater & the Life of the Mind**  
***How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found***

**Sunday, February 26, 2009**

**Participants: Saskia Hostetler Lippy, MD, OPI Candidate and Tim DuRoche, Portland Center Stage Outreach Director**

**Reporter: Barbara Drinka, LCSW**

The 2/26/09 Sunday matinee at PCS was the scene of a riveting performance by Cody Nickell, as the protagonist, Charlie in "How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found." We in the audience followed the young advertising executive's emotional breakdown process of running away from himself and his life to its exhausting conclusion. The intimacy of Ellyn Bye Studio locale palpably accentuated Charlie's manic ups and downs.

Saskia Hostetler Lippy, MD, OPC Candidate, in company with Tim DuRoche, PCS Outreach Director, began the discussion by an interpretation of the chaos we had witnessed. "Yes," Saskia confirmed, "the play was about a mental breakdown of a young man for whom nothing was going well." Charlie was vulnerable to such an occurrence having no friends, having been recently fired from his job clouded by legal issues; having recently lost his Mom to death; and having been involved in multiple substance abuses. Saskia pointed out that no one really listened to Charlie, that people contradicted his perceptions, increasing his vulnerability. In an aside she confided that she "was aching to get the guy some treatment!"

As the discussion got going, one audience participant contributed that like in Camus' "Stranger" Charlie had not mourned his mother's recent death, which likely was catalyzing his massive destructive, decompensation. Saskia elaborated.

As Saskia referenced Eric Erickson's stages of development, she noted that Charlie seemed lost in identity and intimacy conflicts. A theme of the play seemed to make it clear that "wherever you go, there you are." Charlie could not run away from himself or the messes he had created. The hopeful light in the play was Sophie, the pathologist. She seemed the only character with constructive relationship abilities, the ability to face truth in her own life, and to offer some caring attention to Charlie.

DuRoche pointed out that Kennedy's intent was to explore alienation in our society, as well as to suggest that you "can tell about a person/nation by the 'stuff' he/it leaves behind. All in all, about 50 people stayed for the post-play discussion that added to the afternoon's enrichment.

Barbara Drinka, LCSW  
Chair, OPC Community Outreach

**Destination Opera: From Music to Psyche with Portland Opera**  
***The Turn of the Screw***

**January 20, 2009**

**Participants: Nancy Winters, MD, OPI Candidate; Jay Dickson, Assoc. Professor, Reed**

**College; and Alexis Hamilton, Portland Opera Outreach Manager  
Reporter: Lee Shershow, MD**

On January 20, 2009, Nancy Winters, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year OPI Candidate, and Jay Dickson, Associate Professor of English and Humanities at Reed College, presented a psycho-historical discussion of Henry James' ghost story and Benjamin Britten's opera. The evening was skillfully moderated by Alexis Hamilton, Education & Outreach Manager for the Portland Opera, because Britten's opera is being presented by the Portland Opera in February. This combination of three excellent presenters in a comfortable setting (Sherman Clay Piano's in the Pearl) led to a delightful and stimulating evening, and also reflected the growing collaboration between OPC and the Portland Opera.

About thirty people were on hand to hear the discussion, and many participated by asking thoughtful questions; most participants were not OPC members, allowing Dr. Winters the opportunity to show how psychoanalysis provides a way to understand the deeper psychological levels of this evocative story, especially its protagonist, "the Governess," who is never given a name. Ms. Hamilton first summarized James' complex story, and then Dr. Dickson gave a wonderful and very clear description of the literary climate in England in the 1890s, centering on growing interest in, and fear of, homosexuality. As Dr. Dickson put it, "it was a hot period for homoerotic phenomena." *The Turn of the Screw* was first published in 1897, and its temporal relationship to Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*, written in 1895, was noted by Dr. Winters. Dr. Dickson then added a third event: the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde in 1895, which clearly demonstrated the accuracy of his ideas.

Following Dr. Dickson, Dr. Winters presented an excellent review of Freud's early interest in hysteria and sexuality, leading to the writing of *Studies on Hysteria*. She feels that Freud's work and James' novel both reflect the themes of the 1890s: consciousness, unconsciousness, perception, motivation, sexuality. She pointed out that these themes were also shown in the work of Henry James' famous brother, William James, the noted psychologist, who had some passing interest in psychoanalysis. Dr. Winters suggested that the Governess could be seen as a severe hysteric, with delusions, denials, sexual repressions, and pathologic interpersonal relationships. At the same time both Dr. Winters and Dr. Dickson pointed out that the story can also be seen as a ghost story with real ghosts, as real external phenomena. We were left with ambiguity, about the story and about Henry James, but we were also left with a most satisfying evening.

Following the discussion, I heard people say as they were walking out "This was really interesting. When's the next one?"

**Formative Stages: Theater & the Life of the Mind  
*Speech & Debate***

**October 23, 2008**

**Participants: Kathleen McLaughlin, PhD, LCSW and Jerald Block, MD & Artists' Repertory Theater**

**Reporter: Richard Alden, MD**

Speech & Debate by Stephen Karam is a poignant and funny play about three high school outsiders—an earnest school reporter bent on muckraking, a transfer student anxious to create a gay-straight alliance, and a wannabe diva who can't get a part in the school musical. They become linked through their connections with a local sex scandal, but all three also have their own sexual secrets. How they share them drives the play's action. Following an Artists Repertory Theatre performance on October 23rd, OPC's Kathleen McLaughlin, PhD, LCSW and Jerald Block, MD led a thoughtful and lively discussion entitled "Should We Speak? –The Power of Information", in which they illuminated several pivotal themes. The stage set is a high school classroom and contemporary uses of technology are ubiquitous as the students reach out

through Internet chats, pod casts, and text messaging. Jerald spoke to how the Internet provides a source of secrets and power as well as a repository for expressed emotion. Technology plays a central role in bringing the three together initially but then shifts to the periphery as they forge relationships and deal with emotions in more vital and complicated ways. Kathleen addressed the importance of sharing secrets in forming and maintaining adolescent relationships. Sexuality is a special case of what we don't let others know or what we don't know about ourselves. Shared fears about inner desires, gay sexuality, teenage pregnancy, and abortion become the currency of power and relational meaning for these young people. In response to one audience member's view that teenagers cluster together because they are not welcomed into the world by adults, Jerald described the developmental task of adolescence being psychically equivalent to killing off one's parents as libidinal objects and assuming responsibility for one's own life. Kathleen added that youthful rebellion and the need to separate are intensified by our increasingly age-segregated society. That young people have text messaging or social networking sites where parents aren't go increases their sense of a secret life and the potential split between virtual and actual ways of being. While technology serves the adolescents' yearning for connection, it also isolates, and the play ends with a lingering question about the fragility of intimacy in this brave new world.

### **Formative Stages: Theater & the Life of the Mind** ***Blackbird***

**September 10, 2008**

**Participants: Lauren Berg, LPA, OPI Candidate, and Megan Miller, Outreach Collaborator, Portland Center Stage**

**Reporter: Constance Jackson, MD**

OPC's Outreach Committee has once again teamed with Artists Repertory Theatre and Portland Center Stage to provide speakers for eight post-play discussions this year. Heading off the 2008-2009 season, was third-year candidate and psychotherapist, Lauren Berg, LPA, accompanied by Megan Miller, ART's Education and Outreach Collaborator, following the September 10th performance of *Blackbird*, the Oregon premiere of David Harrower's Olivier Award-winning play, produced by Artists Repertory Theatre. This play is about a young woman, Una, confronting an older man, Ray, in his workplace some 15 years after their sexual liaison when Una was 12 and Ray was in his late 40's, and after Ray has served a prison sentence for his crime. Together, Lauren and Megan invited us to ponder the emotional power of the relationship between the characters Una and Ray, helping audience members metabolize the raw intensity of the difficult issues presented in *Blackbird*, and adding an analytic perspective to both the content and process of the play. Lauren believes that Una seeks Ray out not once, but twice: first as a 12-year-old, now as an adult, seeking relief from a painful loneliness. Una is not coming back for revenge, but to know herself, and in so doing, compelled to re-enact her trauma. Lauren suggests that Una's devastation is not from Ray, but from her own parents, who told her what she should feel: Una sees herself as a ghost because she has not been encouraged to explore her own feelings; they have been shoved underground. Lauren suggests that we are unsettled by our view of Ray, because we don't know or understand much of his internal story. Was he humiliated in his youth in a way that challenged his own masculinity? His expression of concern, shame and guilt, translate into a conscience and the possibility of working with Ray in therapy; his ongoing somatic symptoms suggest he still does not understand his own emotions. Lauren also postulates that there is a third character: that of society, which seems to treat with voyeuristic interest the subject of sexual boundaries, yet casts judgment and draws rigid and moralistic conclusions instead of asking us to open our eyes, ask questions, and find out who he is and who she is. The characters demand responses to questions that have not been asked over the last 15 years – answers known only by the two characters, Ray and Una, in the room together. Lauren points out that, like the jazz music that inspired the play, the dialogue parallels an analytic process, and as the characters get to know each other's rhythms, the flow of language between them smoothes out; there is a richer discourse as the "musicians" begin to understand each other, test

and set their own boundaries. The audience joined in the chorus with their own insights and questions, yielding a satisfying sense of depth to the evening. Like in an analytic process, it can be hard to know how to express painful feelings; the audience greatly appreciated the preparation and thoughtfulness of Megan's questions and Lauren's comments.

## **ARTS ON THE COUCH: 2007-2008 SEASON**

### **Carmen, by Georges Bizet**

Friday evening, 9/7/2007, Destination Opera

Pre-performance discussion with Ralph Beaumont, MD; Jeffrey Gauthier, PSU; and Alexis Hamilton, Portland Opera.

Reviewer: Barbara Drinka, LCSW

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This 2007-2008 season, the OPC Arts' Outreach Committee is partnering with Portland Opera to provide speakers for its intimate opera discussions.

Friday evening, September 7th, psychoanalyst Ralph Beaumont, MD participated in the first of these events, together with Portland University Assoc. Professor of Philosophy and Gender Studies, Jeffrey Gauthier, to discuss the forthcoming opera **Carmen**. Alexis Hamilton, of Portland Opera moderated a lively discussion that drew a full house.

Bizet's musical score written for Carmen's voice is exquisite. Carmen is one of several opera heroines who is made to pay with her life, as a punishment for openly displaying her passionate sexual capacities. The storyline depicts a tale of fearfulness of sexual intimacy between two people, if the woman was not weak, childlike or primarily vulnerable. It is apparent that Bizet was "Dead set on having Carmen dead!"

Given that, whose tragedy was it? Carmen's tragedy or Don Jose's loss? Ralph thought there was fatefulness in Carmen's death, as unconscious forces were being acted out. Carmen and Don Jose were irresistible to each other because they had each embraced in the other, their own least acceptable sides. Thus, sadism and masochism became the defining dynamic of their relationship.

Ralph mentioned Helena Deutsch's view of masochism as he continued to explore not just the sadistic side of Carmen, but also the masochistic yearnings in her dynamics. Carmen returned to the rejected and defeated Don Jose at the end to meet her death fate (wish?), just as she had sealed an apparently mutually equitable relationship with the bold, confident toreador, Escamino. Was that possibility of equality too much for her?

The final question from the audience following these rich and collegial offerings by Ralph and Jeff was a concern, "Was it possible that so many layers of meaning represented in this opera, might detract from simply enjoying the music? To that, Ralph commented in his wry signature way, that, to the contrary, understanding would increase the pleasure of the evening so that it was not just a three-hour performance, but more comparable to settling into an evening with a (deliciously complex) book such as *War and Peace*.

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### **La Cenerentola (Cinderella) by Gioachino Rossini**

Destination Opera

Pre-performance discussion with: Nancy Winters, MD, OPC; Katya Amato, PSU; Alexis Hamilton, Portland Opera.

Reviewer: Barbara Drinka, LCSW.

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This 2007-2008 season, the OPC Arts' Outreach Committee is partnering with Portland Opera to provide speakers for its intimate opera discussions. Representing OPC for the second Portland Opera discussion was psychoanalytic candidate and child psychiatrist, Nancy Winters, MD. Opera buffs gathered on a dark autumnal evening in the contemplative space of the Portland Japanese Gardens Pavilion. We were rewarded with stimulating, divergent views of the upcoming Portland Opera presentation of *La Cenerentola (Cinderella)*. Alexis Hamilton again served as moderator for the discussion. PSU Literature Professor, Katya Amato, began the evening by presenting her view that fairy tales did not have enough substance to maintain the interest of most adults. In her view, Cinderella is about a Barbie Doll with a wasp-like body, who could only helplessly get what she needs out of life by finding a prince or through materialism."

Nancy suggested several other possibilities. One is that fairy tales depict the fears of helplessness, isolation, and insecurity universally experienced in the inner lives of children, causing them to turn to fantasy and evolve magical solutions. At the time the Grimm's' tales were written, children experienced a prevalence of death or abandonment by a parent, with replacement of an idealized parent by a devalued stepparent. Taking the listener into the intrapsychic world, Nancy commented on the childlike solution of dealing with complexity by dividing the world into good and bad, where fairy tales aided the child's attempt to integrate the two.

She proposed that the tale of Cinderella was in part, a tale of envy. The goodness of Cinderella was so envied by (the other) her stepmother and her stepsisters that they ruthlessly tried to ruin her life and keep in rags at the hearth. Another explanation is that Cinderella wore rags and devalued herself as protection from the other's persecution. Or perhaps she wore rags because she had internalized the sisters' and mother's projected hate.

What was this goodness that led the sisters to primitive, envious acts of destruction? A possibility is that Cinderella had had a mother who, before her death, could recognize and foster Cinderella's "true self" development through unconditional love; while the stepsisters were pawns of a narcissistic mother who used her daughters as extensions of herself. In so doing, the sisters were trapped in an undifferentiated twinship state, developing aspects of falseness in their personalities.

Audience members posed their own reflective comments and questions. One suggested that the Prince character was an aspect of Cinderella's self and representational of her individuation -- Cinderella was embracing her own masculinity through her development of a more active, more assertive self. It was a lively, stimulating, evening! Kudos to Nancy for representing current psychoanalytic thought with skill and aplomb.

***The Clean House, by Sarah Ruhl***

Tuesday evening 1/29/08, Artists Reparatory Theater

Post play discussion with ART Education & Outreach Director Rebecca Martinez

Lauren Berg, LPA, psychotherapist & OPC candidate

Tom Lineart, MD, oncologist

Reviewer - Scott Murray, MD

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This year, OPC's Arts Outreach Committee has joined with Artists' Repertory Theatre and Portland Center Stage to provide speakers for post-play discussions. The play, "The Clean House", written by Sarah Ruhl and performed at Artists' Repertory Theatre, was the first of six locally produced plays to feature such a discussion. Capably representing OPC on January 29 was second-year candidate and psychotherapist Lauren Berg, LPA. She joined a panel that

included a member of the theatre's Education and Outreach staff and Dr. Tom Lineart, a local oncologist.

The play involves the relationships between Lane (a busy physician) and her husband Charles (an equally busy surgeon), Matilde, her depressed housekeeper (who hates to clean), Virginia, her sister (who loves to clean) and Ana, a patient of Charles' (with whom he has fallen in love). Matilde, from Brazil, and Ana, from Argentina, hit it off quite readily; Lane and Virginia remain firmly enmeshed in sibling rivalry; and Charles finds his soulmate in Ana, which means he must immediately leave Lane for her.

The panel opened with a statement from each of the discussants. Tom spoke of the differences between healing and curing, and the healing role of laughter. Lauren presented a concise and lucid interpretation of the play and its characters from a psychoanalytic perspective. Of particular interest was her likening the unfolding story of the play to an analytic experience and describing the role of Ana as "the good analyst" who empathically helps each of the other characters without judgment or criticism. The role of humor differed for each of the characters: as protection, escape, or succor. Dirt was an apt metaphor for the painful emotional states of Lane, Matilde, and Virginia. Lauren likened the role of art to analysis in the healing process, allowing people to look inside themselves, examine the parts avoided and not often understood, and coming to terms with what can and cannot be changed. Just as the analyst remains open to her or his own emotional responses as a means of understanding the patient, so too does the audience tune into their own individual experiences to understand and empathize with the characters.

The audience added their own insights and stimulated discussion about the role of humor, wondering about cultural/gender/language differences, and the notion of a life force. Overall, it was a great evening-

***A Feminine Ending, by Sarah Treem***

Sunday afternoon, 2/20/08, Portland Center Stage

Post performance discussion with Tim DuRoche, Portland Center Stage

Saskia Hostetler Lippy, MD, psychotherapist & OPI candidate

Reviewer - Barbara Drinka, LCSW

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On February 10, 2008 at Portland Center Stage's new home, the Gerding Theatre, I enjoyed meandering through the tasteful and Oregon "green," renovation of the historic armory before wending my way to the intimate Studio. I looked forward that Sunday afternoon to hearing Saskia Hostetler Lippy, OPC 4<sup>th</sup> year candidate, lead a discussion of "A Feminine Ending." Following the performance, Saskia spoke of her reactions to the play. Then facilitated by Tim DuRoche, of PCS, she engaged in discussion with audience members.

Saskia's ideas were informed by her professional expertise as psychiatrist, budding psychoanalyst, and through her life experience as wife and mother. Saskia told the audience that she understood first hand about the protagonist, Amanda's conflicting developmental issues. Saskia began by pointing out that the play demonstrated life truths: that finding and honing one's identity was a continuous struggle throughout the life cycle. Amanda at 25 years squarely exemplified Erik Erickson's age expected dilemma of intimacy vs. isolation. Fifty year old Kim, Amanda's mother, was having her own identity struggles based on having made choices when young, that now left her feeling invisible and in search of meaning. Saskia pointed out that with every choice comes loss, even if the loss is not obvious at the time. Kim appeared to be paying the piper 20 years later in her loss of not having developed a more differentiated identity prior to marriage and childbearing, Saskia made the point that "having it all" is not really possible, because every "yes" act of differentiation is a "no" act to something else. Both Kim and Dave, the

father, made their impacts on Amanda's eventual decisions, although in very different ways. Saskia likened Dave's even-toned ability to discuss his daughter's choices with her to the kind of help a patient might expect of get from a psychotherapist. Evidence that Amanda also identified with her mother in the matter was when we learned that Amanda's "feminine ending," her first serious musical composition, was dedicated to her mother. Saskia underlined the importance of identification for development.

With the audience clearly engaged, Saskia fielded their comments and questions, bringing in ideas from infant research, adult developmental theory, and linguistics. One appreciative couple, afterwards, told her they had enjoyed her offering so much that in the future they would choose their plays based on being coupled with an OPC discussant!

***Rabbit Hole*, by David Lindsay Abair -**

Tuesday evening, 2/19/2008, Artist's Reparatory Theatre

Post performance discussion with Richard Alden, MD, psychotherapist & OPI candidate

Steven Beck, psychotherapist at the Dougy Center

Rebecca Martinez, Educational Outreach Director, ART

Reviewer - Barbara Drinka, LCSW

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Tuesday evening, 2/19/2008, Artist's Reparatory Theatre, was the site of Richard Alden's discussion of "Rabbit Hole." The play was about a couple's traversing their individual and couple grieving experience, following the accidental death of their 4-year-old son. Richard Alden, psychiatrist and analytic candidate, and Steven Beck, psychotherapist at the Dougy Center, were given questions by Rebecca Martinez, Educational Outreach Director at ART.

How does a relationship become transformed in the grieving process? Richard posited that a relationship could be maintained by internalization of the lost person. Steven commented that the emotional chaos each parent suffered and acted out was not uncommon. Both men reflected on the grieving process, especially whether it could ever be expected to be finished. Richard surmised that the process would include initial acute grief, and upon subsiding would turn into wrenching pain, and finally would yield to poignant sadness. In response to other questions, it was pointed out that for a parent, the loss of a child includes a loss of parental identity, as well. He commented on the destructiveness inherent in a couple's blaming each other for what happened. Blaming aided denying the reality of their loss, taking some of the focus away from facing their loss; thus, delaying each parent's process of mourning. Other comments from both men addressed how best to support someone who is grieving.

Audience questions focused the discussion to their confusions, curiosities, observations, and reflections on various characters' reactions to the death and the destructive forces thus unleashed in the marital relationship. The play was a sensitive and powerfully realistic depiction of the external and psychic realities involved in working through a significant loss of one's child to accidental death.

***Sometimes a Great Notion*, by Aaron Posner, adapted from the novel by Ken Kesey**

Sunday afternoon 4/6/08, Portland Center Stage

Post performance discussion with Tim DuRoche, PCS Community Outreach Director

Scott Murray, MD, psychotherapist & OPI candidate

Reviewer - Jane Walvoord, LCSW

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Continuing the collaborative speakers series, Scott Murray, MD led an enriching discussion, following the Sunday matinee performance of *Sometimes a Great Notion* at Portland Center Stage,

The play, adapted by Aaron Posner from Ken Kesey's book of the same name, is set in a small Oregon logging community. We are let into the lives of the Stamper family who operate their own logging business. The story deals with themes of rugged individualism versus neighbors helping neighbors to build community. Scott began the discussion, addressing the Oedipus myth, sibling rivalry and narcissistic vulnerability that lie beneath the manifest story.

Scott also pointed out the themes of loss. The father, Henry Stamper had been abandoned by his own father. Upon the death of Henry's son, Hank's mother, Henry leaves for the East Coast and returns three months later with a twenty year old wife, Myra to which a son, Leland is soon born. At the age of eight, peeping through an unfilled knothole, Leland discovers Hank and Myra involved in a passionate love affair, representing an Oedipal victory for Hank and a loss for Leland. At age 12, Leland is taken by Myra when she leaves Oregon for the East Coast. One year before Leland's return to the family home, Myra jumps to her death.

Early in the story, the audience finds Leland in the act of attempted suicide when a post card is delivered requesting that he return home to help in a family emergency created by the need to fulfill a logging order. The job is made difficult because the Stamper family is breaking the union sponsored strike by the rest of the loggers in town. The order has become impossible to fulfill without Leland because Henry, in his stubborn determination, has seriously injured his arm. Leland arrives to find a new member of the family, Hank's wife, Vivian.

Scott pointed out, in everyday language clearly understood by the audience, the play's classic conflict of the narcissistically vulnerable unresolved Oedipal male son (psycho-jargon mine) by asking a question. Why has Leland returned? Is Leland planning to defeat his brother, as he does when Leland takes Hank's wife or is he also hoping for the reconciliation the brothers find when they decide to work together to finish the work and deliver the logs to the company by way of the river? Are the brothers hoping to recover their lost mothers? Are the Stamper men intent on denying their vulnerability by ignoring the need for help from the larger family, the community and the union?

The discussion turned to the point in the play when the Stamper men are forced to recognize their vulnerability. In a stubborn attempt to ignore the reality of chronic rain, a rising river and too few workers, Henry's arm is ripped off by a falling tree and the optimistic family friend and cousin, Joe Ben Stamper is killed, pinned under a felled tree in the river. And Vivian leaves to discover her true self saying, "It [the struggle] was never about me."

Tim DuRoche, the community outreach director for Portland Center Stage said that the story denigrates the rugged individual in favor of the good of community. However, in the end, as Hank is leaving with Leland to finish the work, Hank hangs Henry's severed arm out the upper story window of the Stamper house, with "all the fingers tied down, except for the middle one," indicating that he has decided to finish the job and deliver a final insult to the union. And the audience is left with the message that you can't beat human nature. Ambivalence between the conflicting desires for personal gratification versus the need to live peacefully among others is a perpetual struggle.

Before the discussion was complete, one member of the audience asked an important question. "Hasn't Freud and his teaching been discredited in psychoanalysis today? In what new directions have contemporary psychoanalysts moved?" This question provided an unusual opportunity for a relevant answer. It's not that Freud has been discredited; rather contemporary psychoanalysis is studying and developing those questions that Freud didn't address such as the role of the mother, childhood development with the emphasis on the important role of relationship. As in the play, the anticipated sweetness of Oedipal victory falls short of delivery from the pain of insult, trauma

and loss. The Oedipal struggle is nothing unless it also contains a method for the restoration of relationship with others.

***Streetcar Named Desire, by Tennessee Williams***

Tuesday evening 4/15/08 – Artists Reparatory Theater

Post Play Discussion with Jon Kretzu, ART Director; Rebecca Martinez, ART moderator

Barbara Drinka, LCSW, psychoanalyst

George Drinka, MD, psychiatrist

Reviewer – Richard Alden, MD

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OPI's own Barbara Drinka treated playgoers who caught Artist's Repertory Theatre's production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* on April 15, to a lively post-show discussion of the play's psychodynamic underpinnings. She was joined by co-panelist George Drinka, director Jon Kretzu, and moderator Rebecca Martinez.

Barbara focused her exegesis of Tennessee Williams's powerful drama on how the vicissitudes of desire play out in the complex relationships between the three principal characters – the faded belle Blanche DuBois, her younger sister Stella, and Stella's brutish husband Stanley Kowalski. She brought a developmental perspective to our understanding of the Dubois sisters' predicament. Barbara speculated that, as a young person, Blanche had repressed her sexual feelings, caught as she was between her identification with women whose mores deplored sexuality and men who squandered the family fortune through their profligate whoremongering. When her aesthetic choice of her young husband ends tragically in his suicide, she becomes a whore herself, in a futile search for a rescuing man to provided her early unmet emotional needs. Her sister Stella makes a different path for herself by embracing a sado-masochistic partnership with Stanley, a dynamic that was further explicated in George's comments. In the underlying sexual tension and desire between Stanley and Blanche, they are depicted as competing for the soul of Stella. Stanley hates Blanche for her lies, hypocrisy, and social condescension and finally destroys her fragile grip on reality when she is most vulnerable.

This production of *Streetcar* was set visually in the 1947 asylum where Blanche is headed as the narrative closes; a psychiatrist watches silently from the edge of the stage; and electro-shock therapy incorporated into the climatic rape scene. In considering how Blanche might be helped today, Barbara offered that in an intensive psychotherapy or psychoanalysis, with time and a trained listener, Blanche might be able to gradually face the painful truth and lies of her life, work through her losses and guilt and so experience the freedom to make different choices for herself.

Thoughtful contributions from cast members and the audience rounded out the multifaceted discussion, touching on the role of illusion as a defense, the effects of trauma and loss, and how Blanche might fare in today's managed care environment. Although the play was familiar to many, the discussion gave us new and illuminating ways to think about it.

***Doubt: A Parable by John Patrick Shanley***

Sunday afternoon 5/25/08, Portland Center Stage

Post performance discussion with Tim DuRoche, PCS Community Outreach Director

Duane Dale, MD, psychoanalyst

Reviewer – Nancy Winters, MD

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After attending Duane Dale's post-play discussion of John Patrick Shanley's "Doubt: A Parable", on May 25, 2008 at Portland Center Stage, I left the discussion feeling a new respect for my own doubts. Set in 1964, *Doubt* is a troubling and provocative play about the conflict between a rule-

bound nun and the more progressive parish priest whom she believes is sexually abusing a black student. No answers are given—the audience is left to wonder what the truth is. Duane offered a series of fertile analytic ideas to stimulate the audience. He set an introspective tone by normalizing doubting in his opening comment: “I’m filled with doubt as to what to talk about now”. He discussed the reality that our difficulty communicating with each other may relate to our fear of uncertainty and doubt, which are part of authentic emotional experience. He offered an image of a person as resembling an earth with a crust; the uncertainty within the core is like molten lava. There are occasions where something erupts through the crust and creates a cataclysmic event. This was an apt analogy for the play’s ending in which the nun (who had been puzzlingly certain throughout the play) collapsed into her own doubt. Duane’s discussion generously used analytic and poetic quotes. He cited Salmon Akhtar’s view that effective therapeutic listening oscillates between a questioning and credulous stance. He quoted Walt Whitman’s elegiac poem “Song of Myself”: “Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” Duane closed with a set of evocative questions about the characters’ motivations and finally with a quote from Shanley’s preface to the play: “There is an uneasy time when belief has begun to sleep. The beginning of change is the moment of doubt.” The ensuing audience discussion was one of the more strongly voiced OPC arts discussions of the year, a tribute to Duane’s opening remarks, and to the disturbing questions raised by the play itself. Themes of the discussion were wide ranging, from styles of teaching and authority, to the war in Iraq, to sexism and the role of women in the Catholic Church. More prominent, though was the debate about which character was in the right; some felt certainty, but others, encouraged by Duane, left feeling an acceptance of their doubt.