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Schrödinger's man: why I want to both die and try : a cognate, historic apology of narratology, structuralist narrative theory and character theory via the gateway of theatre text creation and reception & presenting the play Double Shot

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Schrödinger's Man

Why I want to both die and try

A cognate, historic apology of narratology, structuralist narrative theory and character theory via the gateway of theatre text creation and reception.

&

Presenting the play

Double Shot

Authored By

Craig Eisenstein

0402504T

A Thesis and Play submitted to the School of Arts and Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters in Drama by Creative Project: Playwriting.

"Do what you will this life's a fiction, made up of contradiction."

- William Blake.



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Abstract

Schrödinger's Man: *Why I want to both die and try. A cognate, historic apology of narratology, structuralist narrative theory and character theory via the gateway of theatre text creation and reception.*

Craig Eisenstein.

March 2015.

The present study examines the ways in which a creative text can be created purely through theoretical elements generally first brought to the fore by way of the Russian formalist school of literary thought. Presented with the thesis is a full theatrical play (to be found on page 106) spawned solely as a product of the theoretical tenets set out under the components of structuralist narrative theory - a literary field often referred to as narratology. The play *Double Shot* is the creative artefact that is built from and inhabits the areas formulated by structuralist thought.

Additionally, narratological theory operates as a framework with which to deconstruct the play *Double Shot* as to determine the efficacy and meaning generated through its precise theoretical provenance. By determining the success, and varying degrees thereof, of *Double Shot's* finality, it is possible to draw conclusions that a modern formulation of structuralist narrative theory is a viable gateway via which it is possible to generate a creative artefact. By touching on the following processes, *Schrödinger's Man*, establishes the pathway for this cognate apology and vindication of narratology.

Both the historic forms of formalist narrative theory are considered as well as the different forms of structuralist theory that consequently evolved over several decades. The strident, contemporary applicable elements from various incarnations of the literary theory are highlighted, and the failings, or less congruent elements, are given over to more *modern* and better fitting considerations. In this way the proposed form of *Receptive Narratology* is defined and is subsequently used as the primordial soup to give life to the play, *Double Shot.*

Following a modern conceptualisation of narratology, a synopsis of *Double Shot* is presented, revealing the entire plot of the play while also illustrating several of the key scenes chosen for examination in later chapters. While a full copy of the play is reproduced with the

thesis, the inclusion of the synopsis benefits the theory by means of rendering the critical aspects of the play (with its underlying, foundational theories) patently and provides the possibility for the thesis to be read as a standalone work if it were required.
Ultimately, all the constituents of structuralist narrative theory are delineated and ordered in their presentation. A narrative text is classified according to its story and its discourse, the story forming the *message* of play and discourse occupying the mechanisms by which that message is conveyed and altered as it passes to an audience or reader. The story component is further broken into events (plot) and existents (environment) which are finally arrayed into four elements: actions, happenings, characters and settings.

Each of these aspects, from action to discourse occupies its own chapter and demonstrates the theory informing its makeup. From this, the technique in appropriating the theory into the creative text's narrative is disclosed and analysed as to its effectiveness. By means of this setup, the modifications required by theory to contort to a theatrical text (which are minor) are given some attention despite the main focus on establishing the puissance of narratology constructing and deconstructing a narrative within a literary modern milieu.
The thesis concludes with a declamation that the aegis granted by a modified, contemporary form of structuralist narrative theory is a stalwart armour with which to don a narrative text, for it well safeguards fundamental storytelling techniques and multiple forms of audience interpretation, while fending off barbarous hordes of time-shifting literary forms of text analysis, allowing a classical theory Platonian origins to remain sturdy and sound where modern Gauls abound.

Dedication

To ***my mom and dad***, to whom I owe everything that is beautiful in this life, and without whose love and support I would not exist... at times I consider this to possibly have been the better outcome, we all know far too well the burden of a mortal consciousness, and I grief daily that one of us have shrugged it off already. For the rest of those days, I could not have hoped for a better pair of human beings on this planet - you made life worth living.

To ***Craig Higginson***, for being an unyielding guide on the start of my writing journey.

To ***Warren Nebe***, for being that charismatic being taking a chance on a quasi-academic, creative soul.

To ***Sao Mendes***, for always safely leading me through intricate labyrinths of bureaucratic woes.

And a truly special thanks to ***Samuel Ravengai***, for arriving at the eleventh hour and heroically taking pity on an adrift M.A. student, and building a bark for me to command and sail upon these tempestuous waters. Without you, your wisdom, your sedulous, caring editing, and your patience, Sam, I may have been lost forever, thank you.

ilmoce

Preface

When I first began my journey into a Masters in playwriting I will freely admit I was not entirely certain of where I desired to direct the academic pursuit, and not entirely confident that an academic thesis was the correct outlet for the seed of a creative project I had in mind - owing, in large part I believe, to being a twenty-eight year old jaded academic. Initially I had concepts of penning a narrative that told the tale of the last desperate day of a modern cowpoke and a computer programmer set within a post-apocalyptic context. Verily, some of the remnant of that still remains in the title of the thesis: 'why I want to both die and try' is a direct reference to my original intention of the piece that dealt with the killing and suicide of both the main protagonists. Luckily, the thematic concerns of this title well translated into the play presented with this thesis, *Double Shot*.

During my Honours year I found myself drawing upon structuralist theory often in order to present and codify various ideas I cogitated upon in my creative writing thesis that dealt with the formulation of narrative and character within the context of a possible novel world. When scouring the dregs of my intellectual barrel in search for a, at least somewhat, piquant Masters topic, the Russian formalists would not let my neurons free and I found myself in an intellectual gulag. Rather than oppose the imprisonment, I found the beauty of those confines and sought a way to reconcile a creative imagining within that world - for as cold as one may believe a Siberian gulag to be, using its boundaries as a circumscribing agent, what I found was an infinitely warm and inspiring environment to ply my scribing trade within. It would furthermore be wise to add that while recounting this narrative journey as Ivan Denisovich, I have taken quite a bit of liberty (the irony of this statement juxtaposed to the metaphor is not lost on me) in terms of my creative approach to the thesis that follows. While I certainly believe that a fine product of academic worth should form part of a longstanding tradition of succinct, logical and keen incisiveness of writing, and while I hope at least some of what I offer may be considered trenchant, I desired to leave my own personal hallmark on this thesis that in the very likely chance of it remaining forevermore as a bound tome within the bowels of a University library and perhaps only skimmed over with an askance appreciation every decade by some overly diligent and naive student, that in spite of this quite palpable buffet against several years of my mortal coils, I will be content (probably, at best, tranquil and on the border of serene) in the knowledge that the words I have cast into posterity are as verbose, flowery and loquacious (possibly tautologically tedious) as I craved

my sole, creative Masters designs to be - or, as my medieval history professor would and did declare of my work on many occasions, rife with verbal masturbation.

Reorienting back to the main topic at hand, as with most undertakings in life, much of what I wished to enhance formalist and structuralist notions with had already been written by academics far greater than I could ever hope to achieve - if man already has fire, is there truly a need to alter its incarnation if the lighter already exists? Possibly, it is indeed a noble undertaking to do so, but without the desire to analyse the molecular structures of fire and Prometheus, I, as any intrepid privateer would do when a British or Spanish flag could be gleamed in the offing, had to alter my tack.

While numerous theorists had and continue to bolster, morph and contribute to the aggregating considerations of structuralist narrative theory, I found a possible niche, a hole in my gulag's mattress that had yet to be discovered by the authorities, or at the very least, had only been found out by a few guards that were amenable to a good bribe of dry bread and cold porridge. Little work, at the time of the commencement of this Masters, had been conducted on the merging of the creative artefact with the principles of structuralism. That is not, however, to state that creative texts are not the constant subject matter of the literary school, but rather that using the principles of structuralist theory in order to fully realise and incarnate a work of art had not been frequented by many scholars.

It was from this state of niche discovery that the weary academic, of a decade already at my university, was given a whiff of fresh air, or an inhalation of second-hand breathe, which, should be proclaimed, in an academic environment is tantamount to sniffing the pristine air of an undiscovered country, even if there are hints of its sulphuric trans-metamorphosis. With such invigoration I elected to delve into the depths of structuralism, as far as the realms of a Masters was concerned, and emerge with a quintessence of structuralist soil that I could plant a seed of creativity into each constituent of that fertile literary school; and from a land with only structuralist nutrients, give rise to a crop of creativity that may be reaped - my only hope is that such a harvest is an aperitif of bread and olive oil, and not a grim reaping.

- Craig Eisenstein

March 2015

Chapter I - Digging Trenches - An Introduction

> Any narrative plot, in the sense of a significant organization of the life story, necessarily espouses in some form the problematic of the talisman: the realization of the desire for narrative encounters the limits of narrative, that is, the fact that one can tell a life only in terms of its limits or margins. The telling is always in terms of the impending end.[1]

It is oftentimes an illecebrous way to weave a tale by beginning at its end, much like the very use of the enticing word illecebrous having come to the end of its modern day usage; it destroys unities of time[2] and replaces them with narrative intrigue by planting semiotic hints that seek to encourage audience captivation until an end point is revisited. This is the framework that the creative work with which this theoretical vindication is concerned with, as the text, a written play, occupies a sequence of events that implies an ending from its unreliable narrator,[3] but is in fact merely the onset for the action that is to follow. In the greatest cohesion of meta-narrative, so too does this introduction, in kinship with the creative work, begin where it ends.

FRANK: So, so goodbye my friends, we started at the end I'm afraid[4]

The purpose of this Aristotelian playfulness (although it occurs that he may not find much humour in the fact of his unities being jostled about) is to deconstruct a completed text in order to bring about an elucidation of how structuralist narrative theory and dramatic theory of character contribute to the construction of all the elements involved in the playwriting process.

As will be demonstrated, structuralism well suits the purposes of a creative dismantling of a text, but it should also be acknowledged that any disassembly is only a

[1] C. Gillie, *Character in English Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965) p. 52.
[2] J. Gassner, 'The Legacy of Greece' in *Greek Drama,* ed. M. Hadas (New York: Random House Inc., 2006) p. viii.
[3] C. Watts, 'Heart of Darkness', in *The Cambridge Companion to Conrad,* ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 46-48.
[4] C. Eisenstein, *Double Shot* (2014) p. 111.

single half of the reagents needed to cause a writerly[5] reaction. The second major component that (perhaps paradoxically) is revealed through the post-mortem theoretical analysis of a text, is the genesis of the work – through the lens of structuralist reverse engineering, the thought processes involved in the very establishment of the elements that are plot, narrative and character are brought to bear and their provenance made patent, or at least as patent as a writer's mind may permit.

The end goal of such an analysis, is a theoretical proof of the validation of structuralism and character theory and its integral nature during the conceptualisation and formulation of narrative, character and playwriting. The charted path of this journey will consequently follow a very particular route as to facilitate the discovery, observation and recording of all the critters along the way. The first issue to consider is that of the fundamental basis of an academic approach to the application of a theoretical framework to that of a creative text – what is the purpose of such a quest? Will it bear an inkling of fruition? Or will it end without meaning when police officers arrest intrepid, gallant knights? This is the impediment that the problematisation of the research question will reveal. Secondly, from this questionable revelation, a proclamation of literary theory will be voiced by espousing the virtues of narratology of old as well as narrative theory of the present day. As part of the third port of call on this theoretical expedition, a precise *précis* of the creative text, *Double Shot*, will be set out in such a manner as to highlight the narratological key points forming the basis of all that is to follow it. Fourthly, a general methodology surrounding narrative theory will be given, a macro view of the entirety of the theory's composition as to position its tenets in a knowable way. Subsequently, the prominent, applicable aspects from *Double Shot* will be focused on and their puzzling form given shape as to how they will be fixed into the previously stated methodology of narrative and character theory. Finally, the heart of the matter (possibly of darkness and horror) will be orchestrated via the harmonisation of a close textual reading of *Double Shot* and relating it constantly to narrative and character theory, whereby recurring themes and facets will be taken from the text and justified through the theoretical process from their original generation through to their finality. This stepped approach will each then be accentuated with highlights of interpretation and the mechanisms in which, and by which, the audience, the recipient of the creative text, is able to alter and create meaning from the narrative on offer. As to succinctly

[5] A writerly reaction differs from a readerly one whereby the latter requires little cognitive input on the part of the reader; meaning and intent are straightforward. The former requires of the reader an ability to often decipher and disambiguate the text through its conscious use of literary awareness. This concept was first defined by Roland Barthes. Reference: R. Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

recapitulate these notions: the play *Double Shot* is presented for analysis; through the deconstruction of its presented content and reality, these various planes of content both espouse the structuralist theory that assess them and connects an audience to an identifiable creative artefact; and within that object, the text, are recognisable kernels of action and emotion to be interpreted by its recipients.[6] With a course plotted it is time to untie the moorings and embark upon this narratological expedition.

[6] A. Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 10.

Chapter II - Socrates and Sisyphus with Tea and Crumpets - Research Question & Problem

While a blanket introduction into the whys and wherefores offers a useful method of understanding the intention of a narrative analysis of a creative work, it does not quite delve into the intricate academic concepts underlying the given aforementioned intention. The notion that a creative text can be examined in terms of a formalist theory is not particularly striking or novel; however, what is a more intrinsic process is developing an understanding of how particularly apt structuralism and character theory is to the very inception of a work. The way in which this inception of this goal can be presented is through the idea of intention and desire, much like how these two concepts propel a protagonist through a narrative.[7] Utilising structuralist narrative theory and character theory in juxtaposition with a written play immediately allows the careful dissection of its core components, but it is this action that is combined with authorial intention that delineates the movement from play conceptualisation, via theoretical manipulations, into a state of creation and subsequent finality – reverse engineering each facet of a play and then merging it with original desire, is the aegis with which a defence and vindication of structuralism may occur. As M. Rohmer[8] intimated, it is the breaking down of an object (a creative text) into various components in order to illustrate how the underlying structures may be offered up for analysis and reception. While such a course could be considered to be a speculative one due to the innate subjectivity that is present through any creative work's deconstruction, the ability to temper the flaw with creative authority[9] serves to mitigate this unbridled and pure postulation that may well have otherwise been rampant.

The core then of this distilled consideration of deconstruction becomes the salient question: How does structuralist narrative theory, combined with elements of character theory, facilitate and alter the way in which an original creative text, a play, is written? Through answering this question an implied, secondary, query is too answered: In this modern/postmodern world, does Vladimir Propp's original concepts and founding[10] of structuralism retain its value in the current epoch of theatre, narrative, plot and drama making?

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[7] P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) p. 29.
[8] M. Rohmer, *Theatre and Performance in Zimbabwe* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University Press, 1999) p.18.
[9] For I am the author of this particular analysis, its theoretical dialectics, and the author of the creative text.
[10] V. Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

Given this purpose of Propp's vindication of theory and the creative substantiation for the choices elected in the writing of a theatre play, two problems must first be overcome, their perilous paths precisely penetrated, before the methodology surrounding the intended theory and practice are fused into academic absolution.

The first problem that may arise when cogitating upon the stitching together of a play and structuralist theory, is one of the application of narrative theory in terms of its lock-substrate congruence – whether or not a theory that, primarily, has been applied to the medium of literature and film[11] [12] [13] as opposed to theatre retains its *veritas* when translocated. The answer to this consideration is to be found in the facet of discourse.

Discourse is that mechanism of a narrative whereby the story (essentially the content of a text) is expressed. While discourse will be assessed at far greater length in subsequent sections, it is important to note it at this juncture for one reason: the indication that a means of transmission via a narrator is not necessarily the purview of the novel (and its ilk) gamut only. For all intents and purposes, discourse can largely be subcategorised into three general areas: narrative transmission, point of view and the 'act of speech and thought'.[14] As much as each of these distinguished facets explore different aspects of narrative discourse, a common link exists between them, and it is this link that provides the validation for the use of structuralist discourse as a lens for theatre and play deconstruction.

In brief, narrative transmission uses a 'framed' narrator (a literary construction that transmits story) in order to position various designs of the creative text; point of view tackles concepts of voice and perception and how these devices influence the existence of the narrator; 'act of speech and thought' establishes an identity between character and narrator (at some points it may be the same, at other points it may be quite altered), the purpose of 'speech and thought' is as a distinguishing mechanism between these two facets, if one indeed does exist.[15]

While these three categories offer different ways of assessing discourse, the common tether that concatenates them is the prevalence of the narrator or the narrating figure. In

[11] By dint of the fact that a significant portion of structuralist narrative theory is dedicated towards types of narration prevalent in literary and overt, diegetic means.
[12] S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (London: Cornell University Press, 1978).
[13] M. P. Ginsburg, *Free Indirect Discourse: Theme and Narrative Voice in Flaubert, George Eliot, and Verga* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
[14] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 147.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 146-166.

literature this can take the form of a character, a particular imagined perspective or an omniscient presence that can inhabit any person of style from first to third – this is very much the situation that discourse analysis tackles; however, in theatre the same principles can be applied to a character breaking the fourth wall (similar to a Greek Chorus) in order, at key moments, to establish a verisimilitude of a narrator, a doppelganger narrator[16], that sets about to fulfil the purposes of discourse in terms of expressing the content of a story. In this way, the main character of the play, *Double Shot*, uses this feature of structuralist theory to frame and express the tale, possibly his tale, that is being told. By means of discourse theory being applied through the protagonist of the play, the inherent transferrable capabilities of structuralist discourse analysis becomes pertinent to the theatre environment. Yet, while this takes a step in the direction of validating this theory's application to *Double Shot*, the remaining prominent problem is whether or not structuralist theory as a whole fits the creative mould. To solve this situation a historic positioning and elucidation as to the evolved advantages of structuralism will be considered.

This is, indeed, the historic apology (a word of cognate defence) of structuralist narrative theory in application to modern day theatre creation.

[16] The position of an actor, a character, being at play within a text while oftentimes occupying the role of a narrator, directly transmitting story content to a reader or audience.

Chapter III - Juxtaposing Sun Tzu's Concubines When Kepler and Frankenstein Walk Into a Room - Positioning Narratology and an Overview of Structuralist Narrative Theory

The task of positioning narrative structuralism, or narratology[17] as it is also ubiquitously known,[18] in the contemporary, modern world is a relatively straightforward one, in that structuralist narrative theory may be applied, and is applicable to, any narrative artefact,[19] across any literary movement, from the classics, to the Romantics, through the modernists and maintaining its *veritas* into the postmodern, and what some scholars have a penchant in dubbing the post-postmodern;[20] the difficulty is in electing upon which tributary to journey down towards the heart of this atavistic beast. While the garnishing of narratology with such floral descriptors as atavistic may seem an embellishment and an absurd epithet used for the sake of authorial playfulness more than anything else, there is a certain truth seeded in its core: that in these *modern* times there have been attempts to reconcile classical narratology (that which first began with Vladimir Propp) with more modern theoretical conceptions, yet, interestingly, it is the structuralism that regresses slightly from the utterly modern that possesses the most profitable framing for narrative construction and disassembly. By and large, four existing forms of narratology shall be expounded upon; these include: the Russian formalist considerations of binary narrative elements, synchronic structuralist narrative theory, and diachronic narratology. Each of these various forms of narratology contains within them a wealth of keen and useful aspects in order to comprehend and disassemble a narrative artefact. Yet as with any theory that is constantly refined, each school of thought has various aspects that are perhaps not as congruous to a contemporary literary milieu as they could potentially be, especially when consideration needs to be given to the fact that a creative text is to be born of this very principle. For this reason, key facets of each school shall be extracted, with the less fitting constituents temporarily relegated, in order for a new

[17] W. Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2010) p. 1 & 2.
[18] The terms, for the most part, depending on the ascribed meaning and theoretical underpinnings, may be used interchangeably; the attribution of the type of narratology will be herein set forth shortly.
[19] H. Whittmann, "Théorie des narrèmes et algorithmes narratifs" *Poetics* (4.1, 1975) p. 19-28.
[20] A. Kirby, 'The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond', in *Philosophy Now* (58, 2006).

form of narratology, bound within the framework of this thesis, to be created - that which shall be titled, *receptive narratology*.

As Brian Richardson declaimed: "narrative is everywhere".[21] It is a useful base from which to launch as it speaks to the applicability of narratology to understand most, if not all, narrative texts that are offered to an audience for reception and interpretation. Narratology was initially conceived by the structuralist school of thought as a means to apply a type of identifiable, empirical methodology of approaching the content that a narrative has to offer. It is of little astonishment that such a quest for vigorously classifying systems and breaking an artistic entity down into strict scientific components would originate in Russia; it is not difficult to imagine that living one day in the life of Ivan Denisovich would turn one into a structuralist.

The first well-documented, *modern* conception of narrative structuralism began with the Russian formalists, and most notably, Vladimir Propp's foundational work separating a narrative structure into the binary classifications of *fabula* and *sujet*[22] - essentially, this arose as the first incarnation of story and discourse, and due to the division of the two, allowed for the independent theoretical exploration of each in order to establish the functionality of a text.[23] Leo Tolstoy also used similar systems of classifications in what he dubbed as 'the novelist's poetry', wherein he considered that any narrative has several inherent elements, including: 'interest of the arrangement of occurrences', 'presentation of manners on an historic background', 'the beauty and gaiety of a situation' and 'people's characters' - components exquisitely portrayed in the growth of narratology.[24]

As narratology evolved as a theory, the classifications matured: *fabula and sujet* grew in their semiotic functioning of definable narrative elements; the thematic (plot, action) and the modal (voice, point-of-view, transmission) took their place until its final classic-based, current incarnation of narratology emerged that defined the key differences between the *newly* coined nomenclature of *story* and *discourse.*[25] [26] From this terminology, the current

[21] Quoted in: S. Heinen. & R. Sommer. 'Introduction: Narratology and Interdisciplinarity', in *Narratologia: Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research,* ed. S. Heinen & R. Sommer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2009) p. 1.
[22] A direct translation of *fabula* and *sujet* may be considered to be *story & narrative discourse* and *subject*. A more modern evolution of the terms is provided later in the text.
[23] R. Ronen. 'Paradigm Shift in Plot Models: An Outline of the History of Narratology', in *Poetics Today* (11.4, 1990) p. 817-842.
[24] Quoted in: M. Bradbury. 'Character and Characterization', in *The Creative Writing Course Book*, ed. J. Bell & P. Magrs (London: Macmillan, 2001) p. 123.
[25] J. Culler. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2001) p. 189.
[26] *Paradigm Shift in Plot Models: An Outline of the History of Narratology*.

embodiment of narratology's story and discourse is to be found: where the former delineates the events and existents, the plot, actions, happenings, setting and character; and the latter is constituted by the medium framing and transmitting the story. This essentially forms the foundation of receptive narratology; the interplay and connections that each of these elements weave maps the very route to be followed in order for a text to be constructed and for it to be critically examined. Each of the aforementioned aspects will, in of themselves, become dedicated chapters that follow.

Yet as with any theorem developing over time, different branches of thought began to develop; the *contemporary classic* positioning of narratology, as chiefly set out by Chapman,[27] is no exemption from that, and so can receptive narratology benefit from additional underpinnings.

Impacting upon structuralist narrative theory, are generally two schools of thought concerning its use. The first is known as the 'restrictive' form, the *synchronic perspective*, where narratology is strictly governed by a set of defined terminology and its implementation. As an alternative, the second form is more contextually focused, being the opposing *diachronic*, whereby the interpretation of structuralist narrative elements is as important as the theory's core elements as well.[28] This poses an intriguing dilemma for the utilisation of narratology in both the construction and deconstruction of *Double Shot*; if the examination is too restrictive, a significant portion of meaning-making would be removed, to the detriment of the play, and interplay between reception and presentation would be lost; it is as S. Ravengai[29] suggests that a sound writerly text[30] requires this keen connection between the message (the narrative) and its receiver - the multiple-meaning capability of an audience. Conversely, leaning upon the whimsical, perspective-truth crutch that is interpretation, would hamper the very empirical designs and strengths that narratology offers. In order to come to a form of structuralist narrative theory that would best serve the constructive and investigative perspectives craved for *Double Shot*, a movement through structuralism's branches would be beneficial as to cull the desired facets from the synchronic and the diachronic and continue the movement towards a definition of receptive narratology.

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[27] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film.*

[28] 'Introduction: Narratology and Interdisciplinarity', in *Narratologia: Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research,* p. 5.

[29] S. Ravengai, *"Thoughts that Think in Straight Lines Cannot See Round Corners...": Transgressing the Realist Narrative Form* (University of Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001) p. 13.

[30] One where meaning is produced by the recipient; a hallmark of contemporary, modern fiction.

Bo Petterson offers the first progression to a desired framing of narratology, a combination of both the aforementioned forms of theoretical framing. Petterson, using this post-classical morphing of narratology, titles this aggregate as *contextual intention inference*, as a means to better frame an examination of a text.[31] This progression of narrative structuralism is certainly one that is helpful; within *Double Shot*, as explored in later chapters, there is not a definite cut off between story and discourse, and on occasion, manifestations of character and happenings can overlap with discourse and narration, as is revealed in subsequent chapters. This is a particularly useful consideration, for aspects of the two lead characters within the play express action, and consequently the plot and its sequencing, through their own autonomous[32] spoken words that are coloured through their individual mindsets - essentially, this negotiates meaning through the story information filtering through the consciousness of character, thus demonstration a means by which story and discourse are textually interwoven.

Two further considerations of post-classical, modern narratology also come to the fore and are outlined in the academic text, *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research;* it is with these two additional foci that the framing for *Double Shot* is better served with a slightly more regressive outlook that will be regarded shortly. Extracted from the above volume on narrative research, Kindt proposes an argument whereby the interpretation of narratives need not be based on a revision to classical, segregated narratology; theories of interpretation should not necessitate an alteration of classical structures.[33] To some extent this is certainly true. The use of further theoretical interpretations of narrative components would not be vastly curtailed by a steadfast narratological structuring; however, it would be foolhardy not to acknowledge potential sites where story and discourse may overlap, and especially zones where events - actions and happenings - may, indeed, be part of some quantum Venn diagram. Using theories of character, discourse analysis, plot and setting, to name a select few, would still be a viable 'plugin', as it were, used in conjunction with Kindt's supposition, yet those loci (which are not all that commonly found; and which in itself is a precise validation of the classifications classical narratology has provided) that have that infinitesimal chance to create interpretative meaning from an overlapping, would be lost to an academic ether. As a consequence, the utilisation of several external theories of character,

[31] 'Introduction: Narratology and Interdisciplinarity', in *Narratologia: Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research,* p. 5.
[32] The significance of this term with reference character and discourse is detailed in Chapter 7.
[33] 'Introduction: Narratology and Interdisciplinarity', in *Narratologia: Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research,* p. 5.

setting and discourse become natural and useful extensions that are easily attached to the mould already established by classical structuralism and used in the manufacturing of receptive narratology. It is then, by these means, possible for a more holistic form of narratology to emerge as it incorporates additional theoretical, contemporary aspects of literary design and analysis.

Continuing the extended metaphor of the straw man argument for the sake of neatly vindicating what the authorial desire is for the most valid framing approach to structuralist narrative theory (if nothing else, at least a modicum of earnestness may be found in this thesis), a swift mention of Nünning's[34] form of narratology would also prove deviously logical. In our contemporary age it has become increasingly popular that an analysis of a particular subject should be conducted with reference to the social and contextual landscape framing that subject; one of the more notable aspects of this, and thoroughly contentious, is a movement in the historical field where any understanding of a period has to be achieved through understanding the social and contextual machinations at play at the time - history cannot be analysed by mere facts alone, it has to account for its surroundings as well. Similarly, Nünning's branch of narratology informs a contextual approach, where it is required to be alert and sensitive to the 'real world' social aspects present during the formulation of a narrative text. As an example, it would be a fatuous endeavour to apply structuralist narrative theory, and subsequent theories of interpretation and meaning-making to a post-colonial narrative without accounting for that milieu - how can issues of enslavement, diaspora and occupation be removed from the social frameworks that originated them? And especially the contextual voices attempting to give them a narrative shape? While it would appear, at first, that this is a compelling methodology with which to progress, as it clearly has modern, applicable gravitas to analysis, the difficulty (particularly with reference to *Double Shot*) is that it is anachronistic and retrospective. It is common practise now to unravel classical texts according to Grecian or Roman sensitivities, or to give greater meaning to displaced authors' works through a lens of post-colonialism; yet in all these instances it is the progression of time beyond the social context that permits an observable, calculable social clime to be seen, and thus, retrospectively to be applied. The case of *Double Shot* then may at some, unknown future date be able to be framed with criteria that bespeak the situation in which it was created, but to account for the contemporaneous play presently would be to infer meaning that may be quite irrelevant to the messages and thematic core of

[34] *Ibid.*

the narrative - would transcribing Western excess wealth, the capability of mental postulation over physical struggle, the Prozac nation, and the high suicide rate amongst Japanese salary men have veracious bearing on the play? As creator unto the work; as Victor unto his Monster:

> Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind, when it has once seized on it, like a lichen on the rock. I wished sometimes to shake off all thought and feeling; but I learned that there was but one means to overcome the sensation of pain, and that was death... [35]

For while the authorial interference remains clinging to mortal vestments, Scandinavian self-mortality shall be 'shaken off'; yet perhaps, in an unknowable, forthcoming offing, *Double Shot* may be worthy of a doubtful, retrospective glance.

By sheer, fortuitous, unplanned chance, ensorcelled by what can only be imagined writerly playfulness, the journey of structuralist narrative theory brings us to David Herman's station - quite possibly the last regressive-defiant, post-classical, narratological, well-adjusted, *compos mentis* way station that exists.

In his article, *Narrative Ways of Worldmaking*,[36] reproduced in the aforementioned academic text, Herman bioengineers Petterson's evolution of synchronic and diachronic narratology into its next powerful form: and while Herman does not succinctly title his form of narratology, it would not be amiss to position it as *receptive narratology*. Should Herman consider this an egregious error, let it be known that it was egregious in the most admiring fashion possible.

Receptive narratology bolsters the position of the interpreter; for as much as the theory of narrative structures hold weight, so too does the audience receiving those structures in order to manifest their own form of meaning-making. Interpreters (the audience) possess, across all mediums of narrative, the inherent ability to establish mental projections and models of narrative, from character[37] to situations and events, for all intents and purposes, the world of the play; all of this is first offered for reception, the classical narratological

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[35] M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994) p. 85.

[36] 'Introduction: Narratology and Interdisciplinarity', in *Narratologia: Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research,* p. 5-7.

[37] Receiving the presented character and imagining that presentation into a more fully embodied individual with his or her own mental conceptions.

elements, and then from this structure, interpretation and possible understanding arises. This form of meaning-making applies to any manifestation of world-making brought into being by means of a narrative. Receptive narratology extends the diachronic notions of narrative structuralism to allow for a fully realised inheritance of meaning transmitted and given substance through the reception of the envisioned and presented world of the text. Consequently receptive narratology highlights a 'shallow' pitfall of adamant, classical structuralist narrative theory; as such by incorporating notions of Herman's allowance for audience meaning interpretation, a channel for the character-given narrative plurality within *Double Shot* is made possible. This, to some degree, alleviates one of the weaknesses of classical structuralist analysis and reinforces the new conglomeration that is receptive narratology; however, as Yoda famously said, "No... there is another..."[38]

The aforementioned weakness is essentially in the creation of the narratives at play; it is important to note the plural usage of narrative, as that is potentially the very key to the shortfall of classical, and to some extent modern, narratology. By and large, forms of narrative creation from extra-textual communication are excluded where the focus of classical narratology is upon the intra-textual *domain* of the text. Expanding this thought: the narratological deconstruction of a text focuses solely on the narrative artefact itself, and little attention is given to the concepts that were fundamentally planned in the creation of the text - this being those concrete, prepared ingredients of plot convention, dramaturgical planning and the circumscribing factors of the world built for the text to revolve within; all of these elements fall outside of the play's scope and are thus considered as those extra-textual protuberances. What the extension of Herman's receptive narratology allows for is the consideration of these origin-bound reagents and the examination of their worth and contribution to the narrative. As a means to more holistically assess a text, the application of both the layers of receptive meaning-making as well as extra-textual analysis, provides an entirely new, and needed, 'textuality' to a narrative, and one that is supremely beneficial to the construction and disassembly of *Double Shot.* By using classical foundations for narratology as a base and attaching modules of particular refined manifestations of structuralist narrative theory, receptive narratology is created as a rather useful conglomeration of story, discourse, reception, interpretation and intention with which to both approach the construction and deconstruction of an original narrative text.

[38] G. Lucas. *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope* (1977).

Upon arrival at this last narratological positioning way station, the discovery of a regressive Kurtz-like figure is not as shocking as a narrator would have one believe.

Structuralist narrative theory maintains a solid foundation in its classical roots, but as with all things modern and human, the human species is prone to meddling (setting aside the fact the ability to theorise over a narrative are all cognisant constructions to begin with); and an untarnished Russian formalist conception of narratology, in the modernist poet's words, 'the centre cannot hold'. Yet not all imposed morphologies are advantageous to specific ends, and changes (or lack thereof) to narratology that propose rigid adherence to the past or a re-envisioning of them according to contextual approaches, forge a lens that is slightly out of focus for purpose. In the precise case of the creative text, *Double Shot*, a degree of meddling is enthusiastically welcomed, with the ability to connect focal points of story and discourse together, while maintaining an acceptable segregation that exists enough to extol the triumphant qualities of narrative structuralism - it is of course good to be minutely regressive and primal; there is power in that.

Furthering the desired form of narratology for the play at hand, applying theories not only of interpretation onto structuralism, but the ability to cogitate upon intra-textual and extra-textual entities with relation to the placement of classifications within structuralism, is a keenly cherished Darwinian adaptation. Previously cast aside details such as the planning of action, environs and characters are given an authorial validity from this modern, postmodern, post-postmodern (at the very least contemporaneous) conception of *Double Shot* divined structuralist narrative theory.

With the incarnation of the Kurtz narratological conceit waiting upon a jungle throne, emanating power of a beneficially evolved atavism of a theoretical reimagining, there is little need to replicate *truthful* last words; instead with receptive narratology there are strident whispers in the dark, echoing: "The glory. The glory."

It is a difficult process transferring the methodologies of an academic clockwork creature to one that is more creative and whimsical in nature; attempting to sequester the mechanisms through which a play is created, and the subsequent means by which that play can be analysed, into the formula of pure research is not entirely impossible. For this reason the subsequent chapter headings, as well as their content, will be adapted to a creative disassembly purpose.

This section, now concerned with research methods and narratological makeup, will instead delve into the general features of narrative theory (particularly the recently created

receptive narratology) and the way in which its varied components fit together; it will be followed by a synopsis of the play, *Double Shot*, which should accompany any reading of this narratological thesis. The proceeding chapters shall be modified to illustrate certain key sections of the dialogue and character creation within *Double Shot* as to highlight them for their narratological worth. The true crux of this framework, however, will only emerge from shadow in the section: Research Analysis and Interpretation; as it is within this area that everything that is built up until that moment is ultimately concentrated and focused on through a close textual reading of the play and via deep level structuralist theory applied on the 'data' hinted at within, as mentioned in the preceding chapters.

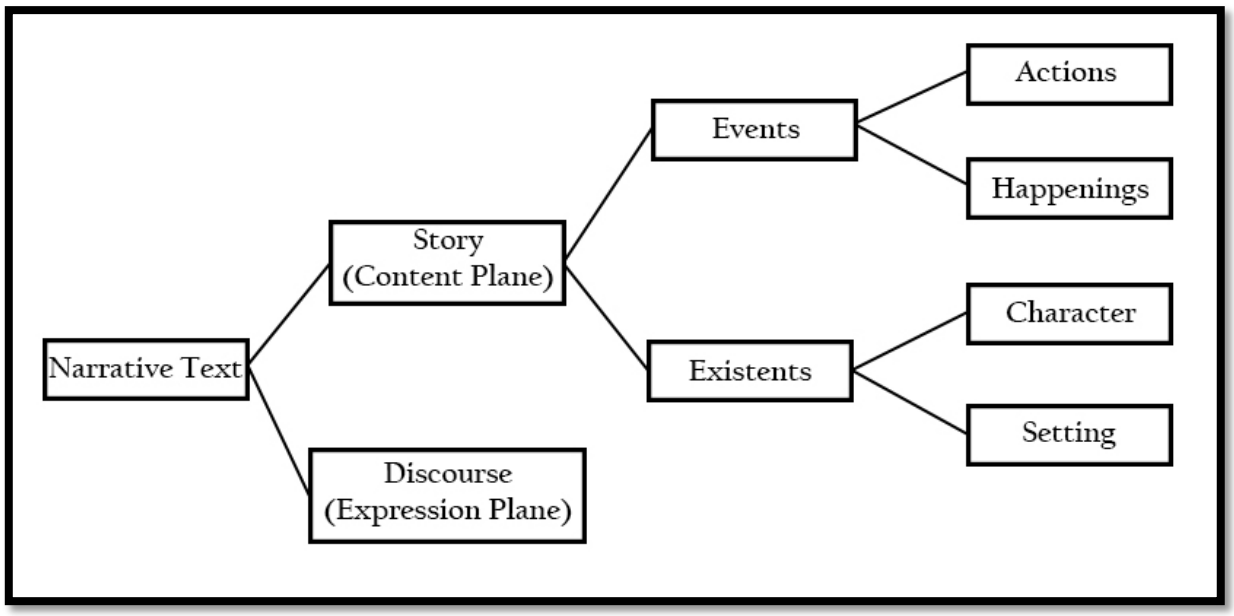
While the preceding sections do not present any additional evidence as to the construct of structuralist narrative theory over and above the detailed breakdown that will follow (the historical foundations of narratology aside), what was presented was a validation of the theory with regard to other possible frameworks that could be used to dissect a work of theatre. Consequently, structuralism is well poised for its focal length of theatrical genesis examination.

Certain aspects of narrative theory have been flitted over thus far, but each glimpse has been portentous. It is a crucial consideration then to detail a holistic overview of structuralist narrative theory as to promote a more readily digestible globular mass when the close textual assessment is conducted, for none truly desire a borborygmus bout when consuming literary theory.

Structuralist narrative theory, at its core, poses several questions that, by and large, determine its makeup. One branch of the theory revolves around content and consequently questions the ways in which plot operates within a narrative; from the origin of plot, character and setting become the two further significant features of how the story unfolds – it questions the extent to which these variables influence, and exactly how they influence, the operation of the play's content. The second branch of narrative is queried by the idea of framing questions concerned with form and expression; from this, the channel by which poetics and literary discourse, the two key ideas of expression are explored: who and what is the narrator? How does this affect and, ultimately, effect point of view?[39] This is the dual path array[40] that structuralist theory uses to assess a narrative text; as a means of making a verbal description less opaque, a

[39] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 16-19.
[40] A bifurcation of narrative text into story and discourse.

graphical representation of the theory has been created (inspired by Chatman's work[41]) and is reproduced below.



A brief explication of the diagram would then well serve the disambiguation of how the puzzle of theory clicks into place.

The narrative text, in this instance the play *Double Shot*, is the epicentre for the entire theory. Two primary aspects that feed this text are: Story and Discourse. Story is the content of the narrative, all those components that render the 'plot' and the 'plot space' – the general sequencing and relation of those content components to the overall text. Discourse, however, tackles issues of form and modes of expression; it is, by its very nature, intangible as compared to the more physical, knowable constituents of story. Much in the same manner as the unreliable narrator in Joseph Conrad's, *Heart of Darkness*,[42] [43] operates, so too does discourse craft the frame of how a text is conveyed – discourse itself brings to the fore the structure within a given medium while its inseparable ally, transmission, explicates the nature of authority and voice within the creative work.[44]

[41] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 19 & 23.
[42] J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).
[43] The narrator in *Heart of Darkness* functions in such a way as to position itself outside the views and perceptions of Marlow's; this enables a narrative that could be considered disenfranchising of the events and actions it describes, but the manner of the implementation of the framed narration, does not impose these descriptions on the character of Marlow himself. This permits a duality in the narration and a duality in the discourse at play; thus the means by which the narrative is received is altered depending on the framing of the narration, whether the framed narrator or Marlow is to be trusted - the discourse, by means of this, is fundamentally altered.
[44] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 22.

The content plane of *Double Shot*, is broken into two further nodes that are eventually also subdivided as to precisely pinpoint the functionality of the story's *modus operandi* within structuralism, as evidenced by the above diagram. The first major divergence of story is that of *events* – an array of occurrences, both internal and external to character, that progresses the plot, the story, the narrative worth, of the text forwards; it does this by one of two means: *actions* and *happenings*. Actions, with relation to events, are changes in story that are brought about directly because of the affect of an agent with the narrative, whereby an agent is any active, knowable participant within the story and, primarily, may be considered that aspect known as character. Happenings, conversely, are those qualities whereby a character is the subject to changes by dint of narrative desires – characters become the affected, a situation in which agency has no impact on how the events are altered and character and setting are manipulated by narration for a story-specific purpose.[45]

The alternate path of story structuralism is that of *existents*, the (especially in the case of theatre) visible, observable and, at times, knowable constructs of story, namely: *character* and *setting*. As the very word existents denotes, these are objects and environments that exist within the world creation of the play. Characters are the players within the story of the narrative text, inhabited beings that are defined by several more theoretical features that will be explored in more detail in subsequent chapters. These characters then operate within the environment, the setting that the story offers, both in terms of the physical limitations of theatre space and how that theatre space has been manipulated in terms of story space. Essentially, setting is the circumscribing existent that is the confined sandbox in which the characters of the content plane conduct their lives, or at least that portion of space-time that the audience is subject to for narrative purposes.[46]

This is a largely encompassing overview of the facets that comprise a narrative text when viewed with the lens of structuralism. While many of its depths may seem murky at present (including notions of meaning creation through reception), as soon as each node that has been stated is explored in greater and more exacting detail, the interplay between all these constituents and the creative text will become increasingly pellucid; as it stands this brief distillation should hopefully act as a propitious map and reference.

Before the valued art of generalisation is lost to the fell ways of deep scrutiny, an overview, much like that of structuralism, is required for the play *Double Shot*, in the hope

[45] *Ibid.,* p. 44 & 45.
[46] *Ibid.,* p. 101 & 109.

that even if the savvy reader were to chance upon this framework, its existence would not be utterly obtuse without the accompanying play.

Research Analysis & Interpretation – Close Textual Reading and Findings

Chapter IV - Condensation Reaction - Synopsis

Double Shot tells the tale of Frank Mortimer on the day of his suicide. The play opens with Frank dodging imaginary throngs of people and narrowly avoiding a fictitious end by a bicycle running him through. Frank, after collecting himself, begins to address the audience, as if they were a confidante, or perhaps, a jury to whom he is attempting to vindicate his decision of the day. He expresses to them the woes and impediments that life harangues and imposes upon him; he vehemently announces the anxiety within him this produces. With wit, charm and a touch of sinister guile, these difficulties are imparted through story and parable; through anecdotal little daily perfunctory occurrences; and through epicurean envy! There is, naturally, an aspect of this public address that he withholds and, through a lie of omission, he neglects to offer the entire heart of the matter; yet what the audience is unaware of, cannot be held against Frank. As if Frank were Scalierre, and existence the Mozart, there are 'too many notes' and silence from the cacophonous chorus of reality is the only escape from the nettling noise. But Frank, being the modern faux-intellectual, sententious, sophist philosopher that he is, quite rightly decides that partaking of a cup of coffee as his final pre-Brutus, Caesarean act would be as paramount as a Coptic jar is to the afterlife.

Upon arrival in the coffee shop, Frank neglects to notice the comely, composed... espying figure of Lia Marina Thalinoe sitting at a table near the cafe's entrance. Heading straight to the barista, Frank declares that his final drink will be a blend of coffee that he has never sampled. Genna, the known and sympathetic coffee clerk, guides Frank through all the possible permutations, percolations, combinations and variations; Frank and Genna both come to the surrendering conclusion that his usual will have to suffice. Desperately, Frank adds a third sachet of sugar to his black cup of coffee already containing two spoonfuls of crystallised glucose. For all his posturing of uniqueness, Frank leaves, coffee in hand, with his insignificantly modified regular brew.

As Frank is striding Pilot's path to the coffee house's exit, he does not notice the conveniently placed handbag jutting out from underneath Lia's table. In a flurry of limbs, Frank trips over the bag, sending coffee spurting everywhere; splashes land on Lia's notebook, her dress and the floor. Frank manages to keep his balance, aided by Lia, but is distraught by the chaos he has caused. Frantically he effuses apologies to Lia, wiping up the

mess as best he can, and even so far as offering to replace her dress. Lia is amused with the scene, absorbing it all with a smile, and despite her assurances to Frank that all is well, he continues to be in a state of distraught compunction. Genna arrives to clean up the spill and under the calm guidance of Lia, Frank slowly calms down to the point of receptive communication. Lia suggests that as just recompense, Frank purchases two additional cups of coffee for them, and that Frank joins her for a spell. Although taken aback by his misfortunate fortuitousness, he gladly assents, enraptured with how such a geometrically perfect, precise, resplendent woman has asked for his company, especially in lieu of his caffeinated mishap.

What follows is whimsical, wit-infused, garrulous, enchanting, endearing, mythological, soul-entwining, amity-inspiring badinage. As Lia and Frank come to know one another, there is a significant sense of a connection between them. Several cups of coffee later, Lia avails herself of the facilities to counter the diuretic properties of their ground libations. While Lia is indisposed, Frank chances a look at the desktop background she has on her notebook and is taken in by a photo Lia has of herself and another woman, clasped together as if they were lovers. When Lia returns, more coffee ensues, and while conversation flows freely once again, Frank questions why an elegant, exquisite exemplification of womanly kind would want to share a social space with a self-defeating, pseudo-nihilistic, loquacious depressive. Lia's answer is simply that she finds him appealing.

Their conversation gains a transient shadow when Frank, needing to counterpoint their delightful conversation, proclaims that he has a firearm and intends to use it before the day is done to remove life's hounds that beleaguer him so. Frank is bewildered by Lia's response. There is no surprise, or shock, or fear. She giggles, corrects Frank that a gun is in fact a pistol since it is on his person, and that firearm nomenclature is an imperative aspect to its proprietorship and utilisation. Not knowing how to proceed from a station where Lia has deflated his grand ideals for the day, Lia probes him with questions about his adamant decision. Their conversation takes a more serious tone, and the difficulties of life in the face of death is brought up for examination, even to the extent that Lia reveals the woman on her notebook background as her partner that, as she precisely uses the term, died and did not pass away. Travelling through this more contemplative and morbid valley, the register of their engagement increases by degrees and concludes by an invitation to have tea at Lia's abode. Frank, still tempted by his original afternoon plans, places them into moratorium, and keenly accepts Lia's invitation, pulled towards an inexorable, enamouring rock.

Entering Lia's home, Frank is guided and invited to make himself comfortable; he is taken in by it all: her home, the decor and Lia's company. As Frank takes a seat, Lia busies herself in the kitchen, preparing tea to drink. She calls a suggested combination of tea flavourings; Frank is bewitched at how she knew, precisely, the combination with which he enjoys his tea; she responds, coyly, that it is the same way she partakes of it as well.

Lia returns with the tea and offers Frank a cup; they sit down together. Short, playful quips are exchanged and suddenly, for a brief moment, not every pressure that finite, corporeal reality is one piping the flute to the grave. Frank absorbs it all, and drinks not only the beautiful image of Lia sitting across from him in, but the delicious honey-scented tea too. It is true Indian resplendence. He remarks on the magnificent redolence and asks Lia if that particularly enticing fragrance is a hint of almond. Lia smiles and Frank's consciousness becomes hazy; he lapses into darkness.

When Frank awakes he finds himself lashed to what appears to be some grotesquely fashioned crucifix. Gazing at his body, he is startled to see that his chest is bare and that upon trying to raise alarm, discovers that he has been gagged by a ball chain. Finally Frank's vision glimpses the figure of Lia dancing around him; she is transformed. Where there once was a composed, Socratic figure of divine beauty, now stands an aesthetically majestic, deranged, erratic, violently discursive prophetess of torture. Lia dances to a silent, haunting melody in her mind, and twirls and flutters around Frank in some horrendous inversion of a moth to the flame, where the fire itself is the fey victim.

She begins verbally: striking Frank with aspersions, demeaning his weak existence, his frailty, his inability to cope from day to day. Lia hacks at his heels until Frank is born of dust and mud; then she slowly, taking an inordinate amount of pleasure from her power, turns Frank the mud into Frank the clay - her artistic substance; Lia transforms herself into a carnal, primal artist, a tanner, a carpenter, a painter, and Frank is now the medium. While her words increase in their opprobrium, her hands journey to an assortment of torturous implements resting on a nearby table; her strikingly verbal assault morphs into one more physical in nature. Knife in hand, she dances, and lashes with her tongue, and plays at Frank with her knife as if she were a cat. The point of it dances across his flesh, from neck to nether; yet not one drop of blood is spilled. The flat of the blade constantly caresses his chest as she regales Frank with her designs of artistic genius; she will be a savant of the human arts. Gradually, inch by inch, Frank is brought closer and closer towards the edge. The pinnacle is reached when Frank cries out that he does not truly want to die; it was the loss of

his partner that threw him down an ever-increasing rabbit hole of despair and depression. At those very words declaiming that Frank does not wish to die, Lia alters once again.

The charade of sadistic torment falls from her body as if it were a robe. The knife drops from her hand as the destructive linguistics unravel from her tongue; what is left is the coffee house Lia: elegant, composed and lovely. Frank, conversely, is utterly dismayed and confused; unaware and unknowing as to what has transpired. To compound this disorientation, Lia confesses her sudden love of him; she unties Frank and offers a seat to him. Shakily, Frank stumbles over to it and once more they sit across from one another.

Lia explains her role as an immersive therapist; that it is her job to bring clients to the edge of their wills and determine the root cause of their mentality and emotional being. Some are beyond hope, and crave death as a release from their Earthly anguish and those are the clients she releases back into the world to do what they will. Others, much like Frank, do not inherently wish to die, but are brought to that abyss by another cause; Frank's deceased partner was his. As Lia's account continues, she reveals that it was his sister that hired her for this task and the handbag in the coffee shop was purposefully placed and their interception brought about by her own machinations. While Frank is abashed by this news, Lia amends their interaction as purely vocational, for something else, something unexpected, unbidden, came upon her.

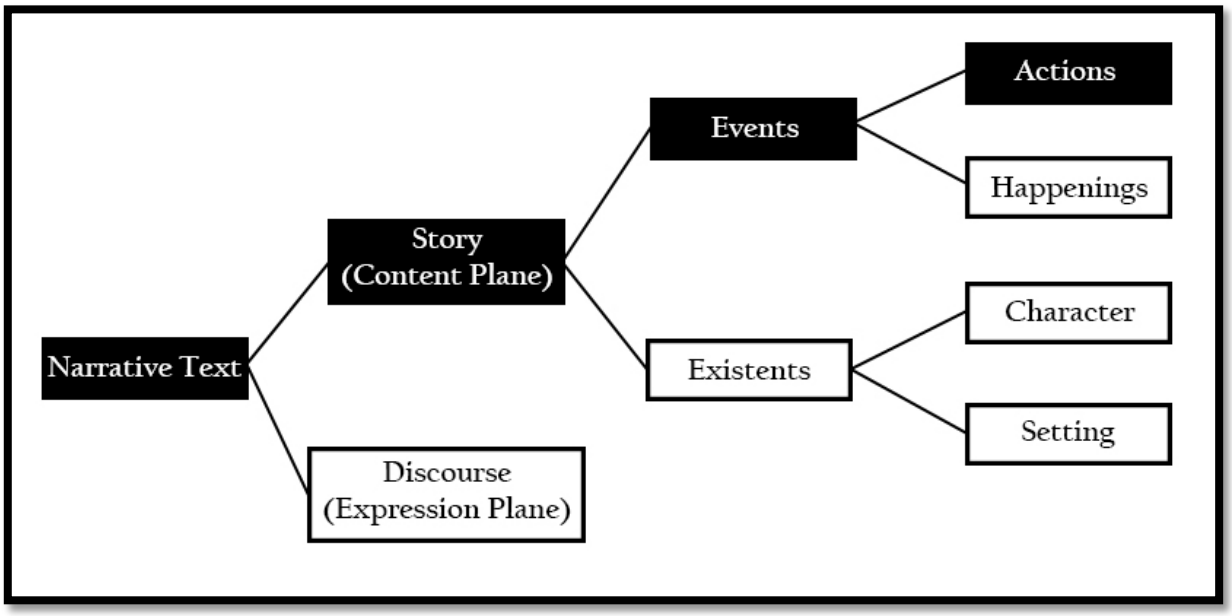
Since the death of Lia's lover, she had managed to make sense of life not through love again, but through her ability to occasionally aid others move past their own emotional and cognitive impediments. Yet when they first began to converse in the cafe, there was a sensual awakening within her that she had not felt since her partner; an intellectual wit, a truth of perception, a rambunctious, oral charm and a presence that was playful, kind and deeply compassionate. While Frank is processing these points of data, Lia presents his clothes back to him, along with his pistol. Frank dresses, but purposefully leaves the firearm on the chair.

Beyond any terror that Frank was subject to under Lia's torturous endeavours, he too is smitten with that kindred spirit residing in Lia's breast. Wry smiles are shared, and so too are clasped hands. And amongst a crucifix, deadly knives and a chamber of blood-delighting arts, there is a blossom of love between them.

Alone, Frank addresses the audience, and explains to them that life is an extremely dangerous ocean to navigate, and that at any particular moment in time an iceberg is but a second away from sinking you. He turns from them and calls out to Lia, telling her that he will bring her the knives presently. Once more Frank addresses the audience. Remarking how easily it all

ends, and how onerous and painful existence can be, there is always hope that one day a cup of coffee can truly save a life.

Chapter V - A Rocking Chair Gets You Nowhere - Actions



As Maria sung to her wards in *The Sound of Music*, "let's start at the very beginning / A very good place to start."[47] Accordingly, the most auspicious locus from where to begin a close textual assessment of *Double Shot* is upon the first branch of the structuralist story tree, events.

As previously indicated, events are an array of occurrences that serve to progress the plot forward. What was, however, disregarded when events were considered, was their arrangement. When the two components of events; actions and happenings, are fulfilled, they feed the node of events and, consequently, the positioning of event points (the array of events) is considered to be the plot of a narrative. Yet, plot is not merely the sequencing of these actions and happenings; events can partly become plot through the filter of discourse for it is when the story's narrator and voice of authority (the method of presentation) is known that the plot takes on a deeper gravitas and significance than the simple arrangement of actions and happenings.[48] Thus for a close textual understanding of *Double Shot*, with regard to events, two ideas need to be considered: the functional usage of actions and happenings; and how these are then subsequently resolved into plot through discourse. First, let the consideration of actions take prominence.

[47] R. Rodgers & O. Hammerstein, *The Sound of Music* (1959).
[48] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 43.

Basing an interpretation of a narrative on the fact that actions are incidents that occur (and change a state of the story) due to an act of agency brought about by a character,[49] there are several key points that are paramount alterations caused by characters in an order that allows the play to progress from one sequence to another.

Given the knowledge of the story, Frank has his own totality[50] in the form that he wants to commit suicide; from this desire his actions constantly try to move towards that goal, at least ostensibly they do. His first major action[51] is when he decides to enter the coffee shop for a final drink before taking his life.

> FRANK: So, so goodbye my friends, we started at the end I'm afraid, but, but I do want a drink first – no need to journey into the heart of darkness parched. [52]

From an intention point of view, this was the authorial[53] infusion of action into Frank's character as to initiate every subsequent action that would occur; this is the action (suicide is the totality) that is the genesis for every other event that is to follow. As Seymour Chatman[54] expresses, actions are not simply linearly arranged, but instead are causative to one another. *Double Shot* is a play that is linear in its temporal and action arrangement, but the actions that are taken by both Frank and Lia are strongly causative to the overall story of the text.

The best way to further assess the use of action within the play is through the juxtaposition of original writerly desire,[55] the functional character-based use of that action and then finally the resulting consequences of that action – using this type of methodology for analysing action (and later happenings) offers a functional litmus test as to the applicability of narratology. As to concisely convey the actions that contribute the most significantly to the overall narrative of the play, only those actions that have the greatest consequence after Frank's decision to buy coffee will be included; while many minor actions exist throughout the play, to assess each one individually would obviate the worth of this aspect of structuralism rather than promote its cornerstone nature.

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[49] *Ibid.,* p. 44.
[50] A character's overarching desire – an aspect explored in depth under character theory.
[51] This may or may not be congruous to his totality depending on the believability and reliability of the narrator.
[52] *Double Shot*, p. 111.
[53] Although any authorial desire should be masked by the narrator, or at least unperceived. Reference: *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 150.
[54] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 45.
[55] Desire giving purpose to the narrative.

The moment when Lia pushes her handbag in front of Frank, resulting in his tripping and spilling his coffee around her, signifies the next major action of the text.

> *He walks away from the counter, about to pass just in front of where the woman is sitting. Her leg possibly nudges the green handbag a touch, into the path of FRANK. FRANK stumbles over the bag spilling his and her coffee on the floor, a bit on the table and a bit on the chair. LIA jumps to her feet out of the way of the coffee but also tries to grab FRANK lightly to stop him from staggering too much. FRANK is distressed.*
>
> FRANK: *(rapidly)* I'm, I'm so, so sorry! I, I, I was just, just walking, and, and, and my feet, and, the, the bag, out of nowhere, bicycle, train *(looking at LIA)* Are, are you okay?! You're, you're not burnt are you? Just, just my luck to burn some, something as radiant as the sun. *(stopping, starts holding onto LIA)* You, you saved me from falling, are you falling? You, you okay? *(looking at table and chair)* Ahh! Coffee, coffee everywhere and not a drop to drink! [56]

The primary intention when writing this action was that of the famous (often thematically romantic) meet-greet – that point where the two main protagonists, often with a romantic tension between them, is finally brought into play, or at least made evident to the audience. The action is there to introduce the circumstances under which they meet and install that element of doubt into the story – whether or not tripping over Lia's bag was accidental or an intentional manipulation on the part of her own character. As it is later revealed the handbag was purposefully placed into Frank's path by a small movement of Lia's foot; and although (as will be proven during the section on discourse) the story is chiefly that of Frank's, this action symbolises the first complication into his totality brought about by another character. Thus the action at this juncture is of Lia's agency and her own motivations; in essence, the writing of this action was to introduce her character and schemes into the narrative. With the precepts of structuralist action in mind, her agency at this moment establishes (or comes to establish, as her foot movement is a revelation at a later point in the plot) not only her

[56] *Double Shot*, p. 112.

character, but also promotes itself as a semiotic sign[57] indicative of the plot and actions to follow, essentially, the story. These were, indeed, the writerly intentions surrounding that moment.

The next problem to resolve is whether or not the action that was taken by the character conforms to the ideals of structuralist action. The salient point to be taken from any action is if that action brings about a change of state. If the action achieves this, then it has succeeded with reference to its structuralist construct. In this instance, Lia's action of ambushing Frank does in fact alter the entire dynamic of the play. It is an action that forces each of their respective spheres of character to begin interacting with one another; even if it were a ploy on the part of Lia, the result does not diminish the efficacy of that action. The action then brings about a state of change in both the direction the narrative continues and with regard to Frank's sudden compulsion to have to adapt to the new situation. It may be concluded then, that in terms of the presented logic, the action functions in accordance to the prescriptions of bringing about an altered state in some fashion.

Four further actions are a direct result of this action, and unlike any media-generated text there is no concern for spoilers, which, as an authorial interjection, are amongst the worst words that a potential audience can be subject to, for once (to paraphrase originality) the seeing have seen unfortunately moves on with memory. The four further pillars of this action are: the revelation of Frank's firearm, Lia's poisoning of his tea, Frank's impending torture at Lia's hands, and Frank's ultimate decision to push on with his existence. It is due to Lia tripping Frank that they initiate their conversation, which in turn leads to Frank's admission of carrying a firearm. From Lia's action changing the state of their relationship, Frank's revelation is brought about; otherwise, it would have gone unacknowledged.

As a sample case of what is to be revealed in the next few extracts, it is possible to glean from this exemplification the way in which *Double Shot* was written with the theoretical precepts of structuralism as a basis and how its construction conforms to this with each subsequent action being spurred on by the previous.

Frank's initiation of his topic revolving around the firearm on his person and suicide functions as the next prominent action within the play.

[57] U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) p. 20-26.

There is a pause between the two of them. They're both looking at each other; there are faint smiles. FRANK's visage becomes pensive, sad. LIA takes another sip of her coffee.

FRANK: I, I... brought a gun today.[58]

Of what purpose is Frank's revelation to the writer? What purpose is there in the author of the work asking himself this very question? The story of *Double Shot* is essentially one of grappling with the difficulties of mortality, with the emotional hardships that wither away character and equanimity until the point is reached from where there is no return from the abyss where supposed serenity may once again be found. Upon Frank's revelation, this intention is made clear. The reason Frank offers this testimony to Lia is twofold. Firstly, it is about Frank staying true to his desire, his story, his narrative; it is a tale of his suicide and up until this moment the method of his lethiferous action has remained unspecified and hidden from the audience. With the imparting of this knowledge, the credence of (what until this point has been jocular) Frank's goal is made clear; the second reason to this testimony, however, opposes this, even if only slightly. Through the process of telling Lia, Frank possibly[59] is not yet beyond mortal coil salvation, but whether this unacknowledged cry for help is just that or a way to prolong the fate he had elected upon is not known, not even to his own character.

With the purpose of Frank's action made patently tenebrous, the alterations to the state of Lia's and Frank's conversation may be considered. Lia's response to Frank is one of bewilderment to the male lead:

LIA: Did you? Is it in your pants?

FRANK is taken aback by her responses.

FRANK: What?-

LIA: *(gesturing)* "This is my rifle; this is my gun. This is for fighting; this is for fun."

[58] *Double Shot*, p. 129.
[59] Only 'possibly' as the author, ideally, never imposes prescriptive ideals onto an audience.

FRANK is still mute in surprise.

LIA: It's nothing, a little ditty my father used to sing.

FRANK: I-

LIA: You brought a pistol then? I don't see enough space anywhere for a rifle.

LIA sips her coffee.

FRANK: Ye.. yes, a, a pistol-

LIA: From the way you're sitting it must be small one – the pistol, not the gun *(smirking).* I'm thinking a *(pausing)* thirty-eight special, and because you seem quite at ease; and sitting forwards and then leaning backwards, it's a snub-nose.[60]

Telling Lia of the weapon certainly changes the state of their relationship: in the long term, Lia is hastened to spring her trap on Frank; in the short term, there is an immediate jump between their playful dialogue before and after the revelatory moment. At its most basic level, a power reversal has been achieved with respect to Frank having full control over his own suicide; that control has suddenly become tenuous as the gravity of the deed merely becomes a point of playfulness to Lia – she has taken the higher status away from Frank and this is the cause of his distress. In this way, the writerly purpose merges with structuralist intention: Frank's movement towards his end point[61] brings about this difference in status relations.

It is a difficult task to separate logical action consequence from simply reducing it to the notion that the actions occur because that is the very way the narrative intended them to transpire. It is at this juncture a caveat regarding this should be made: it may be that, to a

[60] *Double Shot*, p. 129.
[61] Whether this end is suicide or life is irrelevant as there is meant to be that tension between which of the two is in fact the innately desired outcome.

degree, actions are predetermined by writerly intention; however, no action, nor its consequence, must be separated from a logical pathway[62] that in some fashion can be deduced by an audience. In this way, it follows that Lia (as per her occupation) is hastened to invite Frank home to speed him on to his entrapment – Frank's declaration directly necessitates Lia's task of poisoning him.

> FRANK: This, this tea is lovely, 'cause, 'cause you made it, and that would make any tea the, the Ceylon of the world. And, and I love this, this *(sniffing, eyes blinking, slowly)* uh... this, this... added scent with the... the, honey. What is that? It's, it's... a hint of chamomile, yes?
>
> LIA: Almost. Try again.
>
> *FRANK inhales another bouquet of the tea and then takes a good mouthful of it, swishing it around.*
>
> FRANK: It... it... *(speech slowing)* tastes like... almonds...
>
> LIA: *(smiling)* Does it now?
>
> FRANK: It... I... uh....
>
> *FRANK's head collapses in the chair; he drops his cup of tea. LIA takes another sip of hers while watching FRANK.*
>
> *Fade to black.* [63]

The most pellucid artefact in this scene is the shift in state that occurs. The relationship between Frank and Lia is changed dramatically and without forewarning. The situation presents a hidden aspect to Lia's character through the conscious demise of Frank; this in turn

[62] I. Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*, translated by T. K. Abbott (Seattle: Amazon Kindle Publishing, 2012).
[63] *Double Shot*, p. 138.

reflects on the impending torture Frank awakens to, a torture that could only occur due to the 'heinous' act of agency on the part of Lia poisoning his tea. It is also a moment that precisely tunes itself to the writer's vision, as it represents that pivotal point where possible comedy is twisted into something deeper, something darker made all the clearer when Frank regains his sentience... ball gag in place, and lashed to a device.

> *The interior of LIA's room has remained the same except for two oddities: the coffee table has been moved U. C. and has a vast array of knives and other torturous implements neatly spread out on top of it; off to the R. is a large wooden construction angled at approximately seventy degrees to the horizontal. Trussed up on this wooden board is FRANK. He is topless and asleep; he has a red ball-gag in his mouth. Adjacent the knives is FRANK's thirty-eight special. LIA is standing over her keen instruments, honing one of the blades. After a few moments FRANK slowly begins to regain consciousness.LIA continues to sharpen her knife. His eyes finally focus and he sees LIA; he tries to speak. Suddenly he realises there is something stopping him from speaking; he becomes aware of the ball-gag; then his legs; then his arms; then his entire state. He tries to yell out, but it only materialises as a soft mumble. In the background the two leather chairs still sit. LIA looks at him for a second then returns to her knife.*[64]

As considered in the opening paragraphs of the actions chapter, one of the highly distinguishable features of actions is their ability to both render the plot and to give it a logical, causative sequencing. Bearing this purpose in mind, the plot-altering change of agency between the two characters ripples violently in their interactions and the overall outcome of the narrative.

Lia's conscious manipulations of character and setting grant her a new authority over Frank. To some extent, in Lia's torture chamber, Frank has his agency removed and becomes an object of plot, readily manipulated by Lia's increased standing, resulting in two chief outcomes.

[64] *Ibid.,* p. 138.

Firstly, the action and the agency previously afforded to Frank is lost; Lia removes this potential choice of Frank's, notably the suicide, but also the growing amity from him to her, at least temporarily. With Frank's agency, and ability to alter plot arrangement, vanquished, the text itself becomes reliant on the covert, intertwined, decisions of authorial intention hidden, yet influenced, by Lia's forthcoming actions.

Secondly, fed by the situation in the aforementioned point, the subsequent arrangement of events, of narrative plot points, dynamically alters as well. The progression that follows, Frank's terror, abyssal admission, confusion and revelation, are a direct consequence of Lia's gained, transient, action and agency omniscience. All that befalls the latter acts of the play are owed to the fact that Lia obtains this advantage over Frank. It certainly could be argued that it is merely an extension of writerly intent that occurs, and that the changes brought about by Lia's agency are merely an authorial tool; to fully invest in this line of thought would not only be interpretively cynical (bearing in mind cynics often root out the truth of the matter), but it would ignore that blurred existence between autonomous character behaviour and extratextual design. To do so would unfairly diminish the discourses available to interpret Lia's actions, at this point in the text, and that would in turn be a failing in the consideration in how the theoretical constructs of *Double Shot* operate.[65] Whether this is taken to heart by the savvy interpreter or not, it is difficult to gainsay that the sudden rise in Lia's agency over Frank has reverberating repercussions for the direction and reception of the plot and its arrangement.

While the situation openly displayed the change in Lia's and Frank's relationship, the important facet of the torturous vignette is not the spectacle itself,[66] but rather what the peculiar situation results in: a second revelation.

> *LIA stands and strides purposefully towards FRANK, knife at the ready.*
>
> LIA: Let me make you wet with desire.

[65] A more pellucid classification and distinction of autonomous character behaviour and plot manipulation will be made in the subsequent chapters on character and discourse.

[66] As this merely is a continuation of similar underlying intentions established via Frank's poisoning.

LIA draws close to him; breathing on him; like an animal sniffing, seeking the perfect place to bite.

FRANK: No! No! No! No! No! Stop! I don't want to die!

She withdraws her head, slightly.

LIA: What?!

FRANK: *(near sobbing)* I don't want to die!

LIA: You don't want to die?

FRANK: No! ... Yes! ... No! ... I, I don't know!

LIA: *(shouting)* You don't know?! What is it that's confusing?!

FRANK: There're too many notes! I can't bear the sound!

LIA: Why is there noise?! I am the only voice here!

FRANK: My partner! My love of my life, she died! Years ago! Dead! Dead! Dead! And, and what have I become? What?! A, a, shell?! I, I can't do it anymore, I can't choose the toilet paper we used to buy! I, I can't decide the food we used to order! I'm, I'm not, not that strong! I'm done! I'm finished! Let. Me. Go!

LIA: I can take that all away! One little slip!

FRANK: Do it!

LIA: That's what you want?!

LIA inches closer.

FRANK: No! I... I-

LIA: I- I- I- what?!

FRANK: I just want to be happy again![67]

The extract contains one of the single most important actions that occurs throughout the entire play, as this revelation, this action, is intensely fundamental in altering the state of play not only between Frank and Lia, but Frank's totality of suicide as well.

In terms of the relationship between Frank and Lia, the action discharges the totality that drives Lia via the fulfilment of her hired occupation. It is from this moment[68] that Lia's state can begin to move from one of calculated work to a more emotionally, personally driven one. Consequently, Frank's state of being is irrevocably reformed by his simple declaration of: "I don't want to die."[69] The proclamation symbolises the pivotal change of Frank's own character as it is not only a mental state that is potentially altered by the words, but rather, it utterly redirects the totality that had been driving him throughout the play. The action is the fulfilment, or at least counter-fulfilment, of Frank's totality – he strove for death, but in its pursuit found a new desire for life; it is this reversal of cognisance that, while induced by an outside force, suggests that Frank's change is brought about by his lone agency, and it is this fact that poignantly validates his alteration of character; his alteration of state. Furthermore, the resulting actions from this alteration are inextricably linked to the intentions with which they were written.

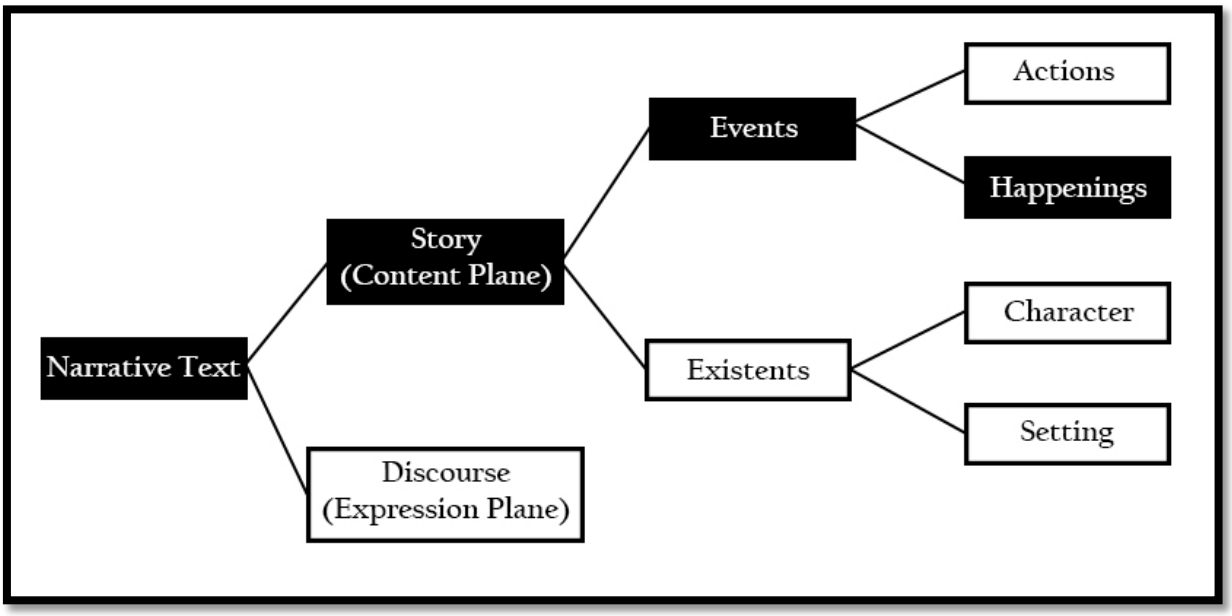
The first notion to assess at this ultimate juncture of the play is the intention. Within the given framework utilised thus far, two prevailing forms of resolution may be widely considered to resolve a text: a traditional narrative resolution, what Roland Barthes[70] dubbed 'hermeneutic'; and a more *contemporary* method of finality, where the resolution is not as much of a solution as it is a closing of a display of action. Both these mechanisms achieve a structuralist conformation, and the intention behind each proves this through their contemporaneous usage within *Double Shot*.

[67] *Double Shot*, p. 143.
[68] Even though other feelings between Lia and Frank have already possibly occurred before this point.
[69] *Double Shot*, p. 143.
[70] Quoted in: *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 61.

The more traditional approach to a resolution, the hermeneutic, requires an unravelling, a revelation, to achieve this – it is a process typically accomplished by posing problems throughout the work, responding to these problems and subsequently answering those problems. In the work at hand, Frank's change of mind, his desire to live, is the fulcrum of this method. The intention with the text had always been one of comedy drama, in that while Frank's character tackles the issue of mortality and the haunting, pernicious tendrils of memory, the denouement is seeded with a hope that, at least for Frank, the harassing cries of life have been quieted - this offers the structuralist hermeneutic conclusion to the narrative. Contemporaneously, what occurs beyond the time-scope of the play, the narrative into the far extra-textual, is left open as to cast doubt on the resolution itself; it may be that Frank has achieved a shadow of happiness, but whether that shadow still provides him with shade when the dark nights begin anew, and anxious cogitations return, remains quite uncertain. Regardless, both interpretations speak to the strength of action through the lens of receptive narratology.

Much like the text itself, so too with the assessment of action within *Double Shot*, it draws itself to a purposeful conclusion. The primary point of the analysis at play is a defence of worth of structuralism and its applicability to the construction of a modern creative work. While many more of its branching subsets have yet to be vindicated, the investigation into the role of action demonstrates the contemporary resonance of structuralist narrative theory. From Frank's first encounter with Lia, through all the resulting action, Frank's thought and gun revelation, his poisoning, the torture, and finally Frank's decision to live, the calibre of the theory shines through. Via validation of writerly intention against resultant action, this theoretical worth demonstrates its own applicability. Each action sequence that was analysed was bred from the seed of textual desire and it is due to the nature of structuralist theory that these seeds were able to be cultivated into theatrical coherence as a result of structuralism; moreover, and perhaps far more telling, authorial intention could also be deconstructed by structuralist action, validating this particular branch of its existence.

Chapter VI - Is That You God? Or Is It Zeus? – Happenings



Given the validation of structuralism's action component, it follows that the second branch of the story-event tree be explicated as well; thus the next aspect of examination is that of happenings. While the assessment of actions revolved around the taking of chronologically sequenced events and assessing them individually according to the criteria stated in the previous chapter, the tact for declaiming the success of structuralism's happenings will occur differently.

As previously stated,[71] happenings occur when a character becomes the narrative object and consequently is affected in such a way that the plot[72] progresses forwards. Essentially, for happenings to operate, agency of characters within the narrative is removed and they become subject to the manipulation of writerly desire. For this reason it is much more difficult to assess the mechanisms in which this functions, for the lines between the 'real author' and the 'implied author' and/or 'narrator'[73] become rather blurred.

Narratives tell of desire, they are constructions of plot in order to express to an audience these desires, whether they are character-based desires or authorial ones.[74]

[71] As briefly touched upon on page 24 & 25.
[72] Plot being constructed through actions and happenings.
[73] The theory behind these concepts will be further dissected during the chapter on discourse; however, it should be noted that happenings are wholly subject to narration, and the desire of that narration, and therefore are brought into being by either the physical author of the creative artefact, or (in a more textually-constrained manner) by the implied author/narrator. In the case of *Double Shot* this is the character of Frank Mortimer.
[74] *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative,* p. 37.

Happenings occur when a character becomes the object of these narrative desires and is thus altered because of them. It follows then that in order to highlight happenings within *Double Shot* a macroscopic and microscopic point of view is required: The macroscopic view encompasses how both Lia and Frank become objects for the desire of the narrative as a whole, this assessment includes the ways in which the thematic concerns of the plot work in such a way as to make patent Frank and Lia's objectification; the microscopic view takes a key setting, the coffee shop in particular, in order to address how the coffee shop itself is a *happening* place.

If a macroscopic examination of the happenings in *Double Shot* is to occur, the themes that propel the narrative forward should be elucidated; for it is via the pathway of themes that desire occurs and through which, the mechanisms of how character-based agency is manipulated in order to follow these themes, marks the existence of happenings.

Themes begin to resolve themselves into more easily identifiable concepts when the creative text is considered as a whole instead of a part; essentially, that which manifests itself as the overarching subject matter.[75] For *Double Shot* the thematic concerns are readily available; of course this is more easily stated when authorial intention is known.

Consider first the character of Frank Mortimer. He begins his journey in one definite state, proceeds into a cognitive limbo, and then ends his journey upon arriving at a state at the opposite end of the spectrum from his initial onset. In a basic distillation, the movement is this: Frank wants to commit suicide; Frank becomes hesitant about committing suicide due to an external force; Frank no longer wants to commit suicide as hope begins to return. While the role of Lia is crucial in the play's thematic concerns, the initial read excludes her value to fully demark Frank's personal, philosophical *Bildungsroman.* Briefly, a recapitulation of this arc from the text itself would be helpful.

> FRANK: That's the problem! I'm- we're human, mortal and, and finite and and nothing matters – candles, a glimmer then poof![76]

> FRANK: I, I... brought a gun today.[77]

[75] J. Peck & M. Coyle. *Literary Terms and Criticism* (Southampton: Camelot Press Ltd, 1984) p. 141.
[76] *Double Shot,* p. 117.
[77] *Ibid.,* p. 129.

FRANK: Well, I, I was thinking about shooting myself [78]

Established here is Frank's first phase of existence within the timeline constrained by the play's scope. His immediate purpose for the day was to take his own life and end his personal suffering; however, this changes upon revelation.

FRANK: No! No! No! No! No! Stop! I don't want to die![79]

LIA: You don't want to die?

FRANK: No! ... Yes! ... No! ... I, I don't know! [80]

These two declarations are the volta of Frank's arc; it is his movement from a resolved locus to a more hesitant one. Frank's initial desire becomes muddied and he then becomes placed in a limbo - the midpoint towards the ultimate resolution to live.

FRANK: ... Sometimes, there's a chance that caffeine can kill you...
but a cup of coffee....

FRANK begins to walk away. He waves his index finger and becomes thoughtful; the ball-gag is being held loosely at his side.

FRANK: ...a cup of coffee...[81]

The sentiments contained herein offer to the recipient of the text an indication of Frank's alteration of desire; coffee, previously positioned, would kill one, but now, at least for Frank, the right cup of coffee offers a sip of redemption, an analogy indeed! - and this is where the very theme sheds its concealing robe so that it may be rendered in its naked glory.

[78] *Ibid.,* p. 131.
[79] *Ibid.,* p. 142.
[80] *Ibid.,* p. 142.
[81] *Ibid.,* p. 158.

As the author of the work, and through the sequence of Frank's personal journey, a key theme of *Double Shot* is that of redemption; not just the redemption of the self through inward revelation, but also of imposed and exterior redemption. As Frank progresses, through this redemption, from a state of welcoming the end to one where it is better off on the fringes of thought, the movement has an alien quality attached to it, that of Lia.

Lia's thematic role is threefold: first, she, like Gandulf in Tolkien's, *The Hobbit*, serves as a guiding star and a boot out the door, so to speak - she is the impetus for Frank's changing mortal ennui; second, Lia, in great meta-happening reference, becomes the object of Frank's redemption, for it is through her relationship with Frank that reason and rhyme can be reunited within Frank's cognition; third, redemption is a theme and experience which Lia herself undergoes, for her own hidden agendas[82] are brought to the fore again, possibly resolved and with quantum certainty, redeemed.

The connection with happenings can soon be drawn, but redemption needs to coalesce into the final, macro theme of play, for redemption is a crucial sub-theme that feeds the play's primary trope, that of 'ways of living'.

The redemptive qualities noted above are a cornerstone of the main theme of ways of living. The problem occurs when the nature of redemption is considered, for redemption implies a previous state needing to be redeemed, which is certainly true in the case of both Frank and Lia. However, before the characters in the play initiate their forms of redemption, they are living lives to the best of their ability, be it for the better or worse. Both Lia and Frank have suffered loss.

> FRANK: What... what happened to her?
>
> LIA: She died.[83]
>
> FRANK: My partner! My love of my life, she died! Years ago! Dead! Dead! Dead! And, and what have I become? What?! A, a, shell?! I, I can't do it anymore, I can't choose the toilet paper we used to buy! I,

[82] One exemplification being the death of Cassandra and her progress through this anguish by means of vicarious torture.
[83] *Double Shot,* p. 128.

> I can't decide the food we used to order! I'm, I'm not, not that strong!
> I'm done! I'm finished! Let. Me. Go! [84]

These losses for both characters define them innately and prime them for that journey of redemption. Of key importance though is the fact that before this spectrum in time witnessed by these two confessions, Lia and Frank were both living their lives the best way they could possibly given their mental frameworks. Frank's methodology became one of fixation on loss and the mortal condition that inevitably led to the conclusion to shake those mortal coils that suffocate him - this was his form of grappling with the pain of loss within life until he finally succumbed to its war of attrition. Lia, with a duality of parallelism and opposition, manages to continue through life without the finality of suicide; she does this through her work as a writer, the expression being an outlet for her, and through her occupation as an 'immersive torture therapist'. While Lia is able to operate within the world more effectively than Frank, she too copes with loss and mortal pain in different ways.

The nature of these two characters' survival in combination with the previously articulated redemptive trope manifestations, engenders the importance of 'ways of living' as the salient theme for the play. Furthermore, it was the very authorial intention for this notion of ways of living to be at the fore not only upon the play's retrospective analysis, but in its conceptualisation as well. It was with that theme in mind (the similar yet different struggle of getting through life in the wake of the catastrophic loss of love) that the work was originally forged, and it was constantly through this crucible that it was moulded. And it is this intent that gives rise to how the happenings of structuralism were considered through creation and drafting as to demonstrate their importance and existence within an artistic milieu.

Through thematic purpose and orientation, happenings are presented in such a way as to progress the narrative plot upon that thematic course of 'ways of living'. The value of actions has already been established by this analysis, but it must be noted that actions, which are products of character agency, occur within permitted bubbles and spheres that are created by structuralist happenings.

It is oftentimes difficult to fully separate action from happening, as it could be argued that to a large extent, actions are the prevailing level of interpretation for plot progression, but

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 143.

at least to some degree, are fed by happenings. Consider the case of Frank's 'way of living' at play's opening:

> FRANK: I tried to, to buy a gun don't you know; and *(gesturing)* not a big one like a bazooka or a tank like that, just a small one like a gumshoe from the thirties would use, a little one, a, a snub nose, I thought that would be a good entry point and, and it fits into the, the theme of the gun, like an actress named Scarlet being in the Scarlet Letter... And, and I wanted one with only one chamber but they said they only make them with six; I, I didn't want to waste the other five, I wanted to, to fertilise the environment not damage it. Then, then they said I had to write tests and have training and bolt a safe into my floor! I, I didn't want to hurt anyone...it's that bullets encounter lots of friction... no, no gun for me. I go into a convenience store and they have a gun, bigger than the one I wanted; does that, that seem right to you? But there, there are always choices, always options for the things that define us:... toilet paper, food, guns... like Neanderthals we, we just hide it a little better. Too many notes! Time, time for one note: a,a swan song; Gargantua thought that a goose neck was the best for toilet paper, is, isn't that quite interesting?
>
> *He begins to walk away, F. R.*
>
> FRANK: []... but, but I do want a drink first – no need to journey into the heart of darkness parched.[85]

Throughout the opening, Frank has explicated his stance on life, of his attempts to wade through it, the difficulty with each of those steps and existence, and finally relates to the audience the solution to the conundrum he faces - all very telling qualities of character and agency. Yet in spite of this, there is a subtle juxtaposition of intent, and quite possibly, an injection of 'real' author manipulation into the implied author.

[85] *Ibid.,* p. 111.

Although Frank is armed and committed to the task ahead, he declares he requires one last cup of coffee to see him to the underworld. As a veneer this decision falls within the purview of action and character desire, vying away from the defined notions of happenings. Upon sanding away this surface it may be contended that Frank is subject to this last wish because of a complete destruction of agency, masking itself as agency. In order for the narrative to progress along the redemptive and 'ways of living' lines set out, Frank was required to avail himself of certain character desires to permit this thematic aggregation. While it may well be that Frank's sudden decision to have one last cup of coffee is a free choice of agency, there is certainly the possibility that like an H.R. Geiger alien, there is a foreign body purposefully implanted with him. Frank becomes the object, the affected, of the happening to have one last cup of coffee for pure, unadulterated plot movement; and if that desire lies wholly in the manipulation of narrative, then that desire transforms Frank from an agent of free will to one of servitude to structuralist happening. As the examination of happenings moves towards the coffee shop, two more manifestations of happenings, relating to ways of living, reveal themselves.

These two facets present as the losses that Frank and Lia have suffered. With the loss of Frank's partner and Lia's lover, Cassandra, both characters are progressing through life as well as they can during the time that is presented within the play. Despite the occurrence of this loss beyond the circumscribing nature of a story's presentation, the noticeable aspect of this tragedy lies in the point that their loss was beyond their agency of control; their respective losses were plot aspects brought about by pure narrative design and as a consequence Lia and Frank are merely the pawns of the history they are subject to. This conceptualisation of their character as objects precisely slots into structuralist narrative theory of happenings; it is then that these two event plot points become two rather critical happenings of the narrative as a whole.

As the thematic concerns of 'ways of living' have woven their way into the thread of structuralism's happenings in *Double Shot*, it bears bringing to attention the different levels at which happenings operate; while the previous paragraphs dealt with a macro consideration of thematic happenings, a more focused look would also be beneficial to the use of structuralism in the play, and this is where the coffee house burgeons into presentation as the happening turning point of plot.

Previously mentioned was that aspect of happenings being a locus, a bubble, of change; this is prevalent in the presence and functionality of the play's coffee shop. There is

certainly justifiable evidence to support the theory, that to a large extent, the actions and desires at work within the coffee shop are an aspect of agency, and consequently fall more in line with narratology action than happening; however, if one were to re-imagine happenings as that sphere in which actions occur, a different picture begins to render.

Although Frank and Lia live very separate lives, and that until the point they meet in the play they had never met, their presence in the coffee shop presents some interesting narrative plotting. Frank's existence in the coffee shop has already been established as one more of a happening than of action. Lia's existence at the same location also owes itself to an event of happenings.

> LIA: [speaking of how Lia knew of Frank and his whereabouts] Your sister.
>
> FRANK: Kayla? [86]

As with Frank's choice to have coffee one last time, ostensibly, Lia's vocation which brought her to entrap Frank at the coffee shop was an act of action, but from an authorial intention aspect, the inverse is in fact true. Lia being hired by Frank's sister resolves itself as a happening for it is a compulsion of the narrative that Lia is hired, and that she decides to take the job, and that the inciting incident between them occurs in the coffee shop - all agency is removed from this trinity of plot points in order for the coffee shop to become this sphere of action. As a consequence, like Frank, Lia's occurrence then in the coffee house is a happening.

By extension, the coffee house becomes that sphere of happening, for both characters were compelled and brought to its setting through narrative desire of a certain plot direction; they were robbed of agency, objectified, and forced to a particular locus for purpose of plot progression. Furthermore, two additional manifestations of happenings within the coffee shop seal its fate at this locus.

Lia's act of springing her trap upon Frank through the use of her handbag is certainly an act of agency; yet the impact upon Frank is most certainly a happening.

[86] *Ibid.,* p. 152.

> *He walks away from the counter, about to pass just in front of where the woman is sitting. Her leg possibly nudges the green handbag a touch, into the path of FRANK. FRANK stumbles over the bag spilling his and her coffee on the floor, a bit on the table and a bit on the chair. LIA jumps to her feet out of the way of the coffee but also tries to grab FRANK lightly to stop him from staggering too much. FRANK is distressed.* [87]

In this way, Frank's path for the day is fundamentally altered. Lia's actions upon him are in no part related to Frank directly; Frank becomes the object of Lia's actions (a derivative of authorial action) and it is this event that further propels the narrative forward - a happening, within a bubble of happenings that was permitted to occur via the use of extra-play[88] happenings.

From this happening, an additional one is sown into Frank's core; in this moment, this meet-greet, Lia, even though a product of Frank's character and possible agency, materialises as the object of Frank's redemption and way of living, even if it is only insipient. Unknown to Frank in that precise moment in time, Lia becomes the affected in relation to Frank as she transforms into the mechanism through which Frank, both at the time in the coffee shop and at the play's climax, staves off the desire of suicide - a plot happening, in response to a plot happening. And it is through these means that the coffee house offers itself up to be beheld in its happening glory.

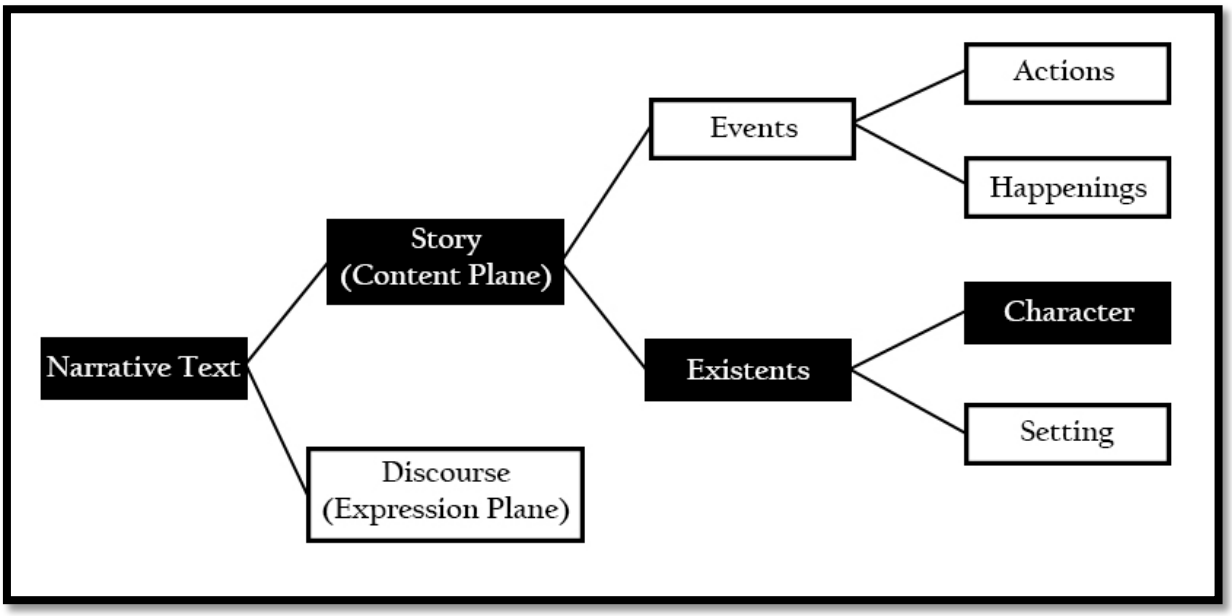
Through this macro and microscopic inspection of happenings and themes, the prevalence of their existence and intent, with regard to the structuralist validation, of these items towards a functional play is clarified. Through the creation of the thematic thread of *Double Shot*, dubbed 'ways of living', the strands by which the narrative sews together the objectification of character, and the manner in which certain actions becomes slaves to plot progression, additionally serve to vindicate the aggregation of happenings in the play from concept to a post-complete deconstruction. Together with the chapter surrounding the presentation of structuralist actions, the events branch (the time-space)[89] is finalised in its depiction, and

[87] *Ibid.,* p. 112.
[88] Occurring outside the scope of the timeline presented.
[89] Events constitute the progression of plot within a narrative and thus manage the way in which the play's time is manifest on stage.

hopeful validation, of how structuralist theory contemporarily provides a strong device with which to both create a work of art and to successfully dismantle it.

The subsequent chapter will begin to explore the *existents* of structuralist theory, those elements of character and setting; and how through their initial design and understanding, further credence is cast upon structuralism as a *modern* art-creating and meaning-making tool.

Chapter VII - Cogito Ergo Sum - Character



As the structuralist network of nodes grows ever larger, the next branch of the theory offering itself up to the aegis of a cognate apology is that of existents,[90] and in particular for this chapter, its aspect of character.[91] As with the previous vindication of events, the proof of the importance of structuralism's character is validated in two ways. Firstly, by exploring conceptions of character and then denoting how these concepts were used in the formulation of Frank and Lia's character. Secondly, through the deconstruction of character, the ways in which the conceptual elements gave birth to rounded, full characters, which are defined by knowable, notable and prescribed sets of data, will also be made evident. This functions as to validate the worth of defined structures creating compelling and true characters, for it is suggested[92] that only true characters that offer to an audience a serious experience of life can possibly present a truth of existence. It is through this truth, that convincing identification with the audience is made.[93] [94]

[90] Please refer to page 25 for existent clarification.
[91] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 101.
[92] *Character in English Literature,* p. 19.
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] M. Jakubowski, 'Introduction', in *100 Great Detectives*, ed. M. Jakubowski (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers Inc, 1991) p. 12.

The initial step in delving the depths of character is to give thought to the process of conceptual characterisation.[95]

> A man's nature, environment, habits, emotions, desires, instincts: all these go to make people what they are, and the skilful writer makes his important people clear to us through a portrayal of these elements.[96]

The above excerpt well serves as an encapsulation of the fundamental ingredients of character. It is as C, Gillie in *Character in English Literature*[97] suggests that enticing and well-defined character stems from the individuality of character as comprised from the above extract's reagents coupled with the idea that any one particular character can possess multiple internal roles; the more articulated this tension between these roles, the more truthful and experiential is the ability of that character to portray a meaning to an audience.[98]

Originally, a strictly formalist view of character did not permit any of these structures to be present within a character; characters were to be the slave of plot; mere objects to energise the plot, to the erosion of defined character.[99] While this might seem a chief aspect of structuralism due to its relegation of literary features to mere components, what this vindication of structuralism seeks to accomplish is the validation of narratology in a contemporary milieu. It is certainly true that formalism played a significant role in structuralist mindsets, but a bit of leeway needs to be allowed in order to accommodate a more 'modern' thought process. Again, as Gillie makes note of, characters are born of plot desire, but become more than mere erosions through the injection of a more open theory of character.[100] Owing to this formalist inception of character, it is possible to buttress the age-worn ideals of structuralism with a more reasoned approach to character. Before partaking of this reasoning offered by the recipe from the previous excerpt, the base of formalist character, Gillie's origin of character makes for a useful starting point for the conceptualisation and further evolution of Frank and Lia.

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[95] In opposition to deconstructing characterisation.
[96] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p 109.
[97] *Character in English Literature,* p. 19.
[98] *Ibid.,* p. 18.
[99] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 111.
[100] *Character in English Literature,* p. 19.

When diluted to mere constructions of plot Frank has but one purpose: an agentless being to embody the narrative of a man oppressed by the world and seeking a way out. As a corollary, Lia is simply a means by which to prevent Frank's suicide. Yet as is evident in their beings, Lia and Frank are more complex than this; their actions and dialogues confer more meaning than simple event progression:

> FRANK: *(addressing the audience; he speaks with a certain haste)* I,
> uhh, I'm not a nervous man by nature-[101]
>
> LIA: I'm alright and the dress is fin-
>
> FRANK: *(removing money and offering it to LIA)* For, for your dress,
> I have no need for worldly goods.
>
> *LIA looks at the money, grinning.*
>
> LIA: *(wry)* Do I look like an escort? [102]

In these few lines the characters present those crucial, basic words that separate from the staid formalist view of character, the statement of self; the identification of self; the statement of 'I'. Though this may appear at first to be jocular, the ability of a character to comprehend the self, and then attach desires and emotions to that self, instantly transcends a character from an event into a true consideration of an existent character. This struggle for a character to encompass a more veracious representation of human existence and experience, and then tension of cognition and emotions in so doing, are what engenders self-identification and in turn the solidification of autonomous individuals as characters.[103]

When *Double Shot* was first conceived, various notions of character informing the structuralist character branch were considered in their creation; the first of these character portraying devices was that of 'totality'.[104]

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[101] *Double Shot,* p. 109.
[102] *Ibid.,* p. 114.
[103] *Character in English Literature,* p. 19.
[104] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 122-124.

The introductory phase towards character self-identification is totality. Totality is an aspect of a character's mindset, a goal, a purpose, that is constantly striven unto and journeyed towards but, critically, one that is never reached, an asymptote of character design.[105] The logical concern with this facet of character is to its purpose, and much like all the subsequent aspects that make up the unifying trifecta of characterisation, what is its function?

Apart from more wholly constructing a character totality seeks to create a truth for a character, almost as if it were a quest; it is within this truth establishment that an audience is able to better identify with a character, for the movement towards a truth is a representation of a relatable human desire.[106] For Frank there are two totalities, an open one, and a second hidden one. Primarily, Frank wants to die - this purpose of Frank has been dissected in the previous chapter concerning actions, and need not be focused on too heavily again. Stemming from this surface totality is a deeper one: Frank wants to love again. Between these two totalities that are never completely reached within the time-scope of the play, give that human ability of truth to Frank's character; Frank deals with two qualities that, for a large part, dominate our cognition as sentient beings, death and love. These two involvements create that 'relatability' with an audience and in the process further the integrity of a character's self-identification.

For Lia, her totality was initially created to be that (as explored in themes and happenings) of Frank's redeemer, yet through the process of Lia's totality formulation, a second, more important, totality emerged to the fore: Lia's conception of self-healing via the punishment of the self through the torture of others.

> LIA: I do. *(pausing)* I did mean it when I said you were different; unique. You understand so much more than anyone else does; you know what it is to feel fettered by a loss - not depressed, not sad, but truly fettered; manacled; tortured. *(reminiscing)* When... Cassandra died I thought that was the end of me. I wanted to blow my brains out in a coffee shop...[107]

[105] *Ibid.*
[106] 'Introduction', in *100 Great Detectives,* p. 12.
[107] *Double Shot*, p. 146.

> LIA: I drowned myself in coffee and writing after I watched her slip away... Some days it helped; other days I wanted to find that pistol.
>
> I started doing this then as well - this art of mine, and they truly were my tapestries, and each of them became my keepsakes. I'd bring them to the razor's edge and I'd push and push and push, until they bled every last drop to me, bearing their souls open to my craft; and then I would weave and stitch and sew, and this *(gesturing to all her objects)*, this became my life's penance, my own divine catharsis. *(giggling)* A bit theatrical, but utilitarian.[108]

Her truth, her drive, was towards a self-reparation that could never be obtained; no matter the frequency of the immersive therapy she conducted no amount of the torturous facade could secure this totality for her; yet until Frank, it was a goal she invariably strove toward, guiding and projecting her character arc through the narrative in the play. This totality, this truth of human experience, of mental self-harm in the light of tragic loss, then became Lia's totality - an exoneration of the moulded sense of structuralist theory in relation to character incorporation, from both a conceptual condition as well as a post-mortem one.

The second portal on the Janusian quest from a plot-derided sense of character towards a perfect trifecta of truthful character is that wartime-open temple of 'traits'. Traits offer a compelling way to articulate a character more fully, for it adds that sense of compulsion to a character - those notions and considerations that are deeply lodged within a characters psyche that they affect both discernible speech and action.[109] Although slightly context insensitive, the sentiment of H.R.F. Keating when referring to the character of Sherlock Holmes is that Sherlock transmutes into a compelling character when the more 'human-like' mindsets, movements and thoughts are brought to the fore.[110] It is this regard for character that Keating touches on that is so intricately linked to the functionality of traits within character definition and operation. Traits establish those human-like qualities that connect character and audience together. This then moulds into the perfect formulation of character relatability and character truth - for the truth, the mind, of any character is unique and self-identifying, and consequently not universal. In turn, a connection is forged between audience and character -

[108] *Ibid.,* p. 146.
[109] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 122-124.
[110] H. R. F. Keating, "'On Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 'Sherlock Holmes'", in *100 Great Detectives*, ed. M. Jakubowski (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers Inc, 1991) p. 114-115.

as the audience is offered a very human conveyance of a shared, common individuality that is identifiable, observable, and relatable in terms of the presented character's autonomy. As is evident in that process of 'othering',[111] traits often work in relation with one another; they induce a perceptible differentiation between characters: if one character were to be aggressive, and have violent action associated with that aggression, it is easier to observe a character with a counterpointed trait such as stoicism in relation to that aggression. This quality of traits contributes to the identification and holistic makeup of a character through the setup of contrasting, or more subtly shaded, traits.

Entwined with the use of traits within characters, is the more traceable presentations of action, known as 'habits'. Traits and habits are mutually inclusive of one another, as they each inform the other; however, habits are often an action, a mannerism that characters demonstrate that are as a result of the trait that they have at the core of their being. If one were to continue the previous analogy, a habit of an aggressive trait would be to punch holes in a wall. If, in a text, an audience were presented with this wall, it is possible to decipher the physical action, the habitual action that brought about the many holes; from this deciphering, attributes as to qualities of character, mindsets, traits, are then connected to the character itself from these habits.[112] The essence of traits and its branches of habits are fundamental blocks on which the characters of *Double Shot* were founded.

> Difference between art and life is that the former is articulated - presented as parts in relationship. What possesses relationship can receive it; we can relate ourselves to a work of art, and give form to our own experience by doing so.[113]

The excerpt is a marked summation of traits and habits, and offers a useful encapsulation of their overall attributes and also provides a useful window through which to view the characters of Lia and Frank. As it is put forward, art, that aspect of portrayed human experience, encompasses the procedures of traits, individually and with reference between characters. In turn, this shapes audience experience and appeal via the demonstrable trait-bequeathed characters that are presented.

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[111] Othering being that analytical lens that permits the definition of self through the observation and delineation of features that are different in others: "*I* am a black man, for *you* are a woman and *your* skin is alabaster."

[112] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 122-124.

[113] *Character in English Literature,* p. 15.

When the character of Frank was first conceived, there was a certain air, a defined comportment that was needed to convey his concepts of the world he inhabits, the fears, the pressures, the mentality that this induces within him, and mindset that his life had generated in response to his mechanisms of thought. In order to create Frank's individuality, he needed to be the pensive, he needed to be the 'bastardised, pseudo' stoic, he needed to be the borderline, fervent existentialist, he needed to be a mask of Woody Allen. Neurotic, paranoid, witty, lugubrious, affable, appealing, ringed by mortality, all of these were foci in Frank's evolution from formalism into that open character - each aspect informed by this importance of traits. Yet to find these traits, the habitual clues it leaves scattered around an asymptotic, blood-drenched text, offer the choicest of routes to their discovery.

> *He begins pacing back and forth, gesticulating.*
>
> FRANK: You go into a grocery store and, and you want to buy something simple, like toilet paper, 'cause, 'cause it's the most basic function that we do [114]
>
> FRANK: You're *(gesticulating)*, you're very observant – have a sharp eye and, ear in fact. [115]
>
> FRANK: I have a,a lot of trouble seeing you as a force for good with all the *(dramatically gesturing LIA's body)* and charm *(gesturing to her head)* and, and hair! [116]
>
> *FRANK gestures the outline of LIA's body.*
>
> FRANK: I, I'll focus on the art – the, the undulating geometries, I'm a, a liberal, western, non-Pollock traditionalist.[117]

[114] *Double Shot,* p. 109.
[115] *Ibid.,* p. 119.
[116] *Ibid.,* p. 120.
[117] *Ibid.,* p. 125.

> FRANK: ‘Cause of my, my dashing good looks? As, as if I were a Picture of Dorian Gray, *(gesticulating)* before all the, the fornicating and smoking and drugs and, and murder, and what not. [118]

One of the most noticeable outward actions of Frank's cognisance is his habitual genuflection. The above extracts outline the most overt instances of this, but within the confines of the play, this continuing action is implied through the majority of Frank's role. If not orally, then physically, Frank is constantly expressing himself; he has a need to be constantly in motion, never still, expressing a defiance of being at rest or at ease, as if the world were throwing its slings and arrows at him and his arms were the shield against the assault. This is the habit, the inexorable, visible existence of a physical manifestation of some mindset; the key is what does this habit feed into; from where did this crimson drop originate?

If habits are the signifier, then traits are the signified. Disquieted, ill-at-ease, frustration, are some the attributes it is possible to mantle Frank with, and certainly many of which would make for compelling traits that inform the rest of his character, especially when one begins to consider speech patterns.

> FRANK: You go into a grocery store and, and you want to buy something simple, like toilet paper, ‘cause, ‘cause it’s the most basic function that we do, we, we’re excreting all the time, we excrete so much we can’t even wait until we’re out of the womb to do it. And, and, and you go, go to the isle and then what do you do?[119]

> FRANK: ...So how do you, you even go about choosing toilet paper? Too many options; too many notes! *(pausing; thinking)* [120]

> FRANK: Look, existentialists would, wouldn’t be so, so frightened if we knew what happened when candles go out; we’d be able to think about that, and, and it’s a good thing we’re all cowards or there would

[118] *Ibid.,* p. 127.
[119] *Ibid.,* p. 109.
[120] *Ibid.,* p. 110.

> be none of us left. But we're very mysterious, we're unknowable, we're, we're too lofty for mere mortal minds to comprehend. [121]

It is important not only to note the rapidity, frequency, and way in which Frank speaks, but also the content - Frank's speech is one that is carried by the melody of it all, yet has its richness in the lyrics. As demonstrated above, and as a mirror to the extensive gesticulation his character makes use of, Frank's narration is one that again is restive, constantly expressing his displeasure at the world - a mind so full of thoughts and punishments and pressures that they all orally bubble out in a frenzy of trait indication. This hints at the deeper, more rooted, trait of stoicism; or, in Frank's character, inverted-stoicism.

The classic sense of a stoic is the ability to suffer the enumerable hardships of the world, but give no voice to them; to curtail harming and destructive thoughts through self-control and the correction of self-established errors in cognitive judgement.[122] Frank is of an opposing mindset; he endures and suffers, and ploughs onwards as best he can for awhile, but with each dissatisfaction of the mind offered up for the audience to consume. It could be argued that fourth wall breaking address at the opening of the play cannot be considered to accurately reflect Frank's inner machinations as it is vocalisation of mentality for the benefit of the audience as opposed to any accurately portrayed naturalisation of character within Frank's milieu. While such a consideration may hold value, the ultimate effect is moot as Frank, both to the barista and to Lia, habitually informs them of his life turmoil, even if they are expressed in a slightly more poetic and subtle manner. All of Frank's habits, his speech, his movements, are slaved and systemic from the root trait of being the inverse-stoic. This trait also allows the progression of character, however, and the journey that Frank undergoes with Lia is one that morphs his trait from inverse-stoicism to contentment-fringed-stoicism. Consider the movement from:

> FRANK: So, so goodbye my friends, we started at the end I'm afraid, but, but I do want a drink first – no need to journey into the heart of darkness parched.[123]

to the play's denouement:

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[121] *Ibid.,* p. 118.
[122] S. Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[123] *Double Shot,* p. 111.

FRANK: But, but maybe sometimes being a little nervous is a good thing. You know, coffee can kill you – maybe not today, or tomorrow, but one day, and it can be fifty years from now; your system will be so inculcated with caffeine that your heart will go into a tachycardia overload and explode within your breast, like MacBeth's unseated heart knocking against his ribs! It's a bitter end...

He walks to the F. C. of the stage and speaks as if he is sharing a secret with the audience.

FRANK: ... Sometimes, there's a chance that caffeine can kill you... but a cup of coffee....

FRANK begins to walk away. He waves his index finger and becomes thoughtful; the ball-gag is being held loosely at his side.

FRANK: ...a cup of coffee...

FRANK exits S. R. Lights dim.

END. [124]

In terms of language, thought processes and world concerns, Frank is still very much a stoic, where he sees hardships and the possibilities of impending ends at every corner of the circumscribing room of existence; yet there is a melodic alteration to Frank. No longer is there gratuitous genuflection; no longer is there unyielding stutter; no longer are there musings without a mote of hope. Frank's one set of habits contort into another; the invert-stoic transforms into a contented stoic. To a fair extent, the entirety of Frank's character that is presented to the audience within the scope of the play is informed by this distinguishing trait. Often though, as indicated by the very definition of character theory traits, they exist to

[124] *Ibid.,* p. 158.

both individualise a character and also to observe more patently the difference between characters. If Frank is the trait-embodying character of inverse-stoicism, Lia is something else entirely.

Much like Frank, there are many adjectives that could be cast upon Lia; where Frank was expressive and verbose, Lia was precise and pithy. For the majority of the play, excluding her *showwomanship*, she is very calculated with her responses, calm with her words and overtly demonstrating equanimity of character.

> [of Lia] *(sitting slightly forward; poised)* [125]

This composure of thought filters through her physicality as well; Lia's movements are careful, minute, invariably proper and discernibly elevated above how an average member of the human race would carry oneself. Moreover, each word she uses, each secretive movement of her legs are measured and calculated with care.

Within all of these possible affectations and habits, there is one that is salient; more revealing than all others and bespeaks of the trait informing her sentience.

> LIA: Isn't that a little old fashioned? We don't go around asking for a 'can of coke'; we ask for a coke.[126]

> LIA: That couldn't be wonderful, wonder wouldn't exist. Isn't that a shame?[127]

> LIA: Did I? Then before it's extinguished altogether, what's its name?[128]

> LIA: As a philosopher of the classics, you of all people should know that's a narrow view. Why can't I be waiting for a woman?[129]

[125] *Ibid.,* p. 115.
[126] *Ibid.,* p. 115.
[127] *Ibid.,* p. 118.
[128] *Ibid.,* p. 120.
[129] *Ibid.,* p. 126.

> LIA: I see. What sort of reaction were you after?[130]
>
> LIA: Has anything about our meeting been traditional?[131]
>
> LIA: It's a peculiar thing is it not? To be... thinking you're seeing and experiencing something knowable, when in fact the reality of it all is, different. [132]
>
> LIA: Which can you change *(emphasising his name)*, Frank? Life or death?[133]

What do all these excerpts bear in similarity? That was dastardly; a momentary indulgence in meta-theoretical jocularity. As is evident, Lia's parlance is of a very specific nature; one that also hints at the uniqueness of her name and role that will soon be deciphered. This speech through question, prompted discovery through investigation, elucidation through inquiry, is a philosophic approach bred thousands of years in the past - Lia is a creature of *elenchus*, the Socratic Method; this is her trait, both in conception and conclusion.

Lia's most defined habit throughout the text is that of her questioning nature. Inexorably, she poses questions to Frank, responds to queries with further ones and never reveals an answer directly, always prompting Frank to discover what he seeks through his own internal investigation. Questions are not only Lia's shield for her own personal troubles (as explored previously as she attempts to find her own form of redemption), but also are her methodology of succour and treatment for Frank. This habitual inquisitiveness stems from her distinguishable being as a partial embodiment[134] of the Socratic Method.[135] Whereas Frank is the expressive stoic, Lia is the modern, comely Socrates. Elenchus informs a vast array of the ways in which Lia conducts herself as a character, informing her cognisance without overrunning it. Her actions, thought patterns and mannerisms, to a large extent, are

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[130] *Ibid.,* p. 130.
[131] *Ibid.,* p. 130.
[132] *Ibid.,* p. 139.
[133] *Ibid.,* p. 144.
[134] As a component of her character, not an overriding plot-fulfilling device in opposition to an experiential, *truthful* character.
[135] The Socratic Method being that form of critical thinking and enlightenment brought about through the use of individuals repeatedly asking questions of one another as a form of answering them, knowledge seeking, and the illumination of the subject matter at hand.

owed to this trait and in turn this trait establishes Lia as an exclusive character brewed from different spices especially when taken in juxtaposition with Frank's own concoction.

It is presented then that traits, while only an element of character construction, offer a fruitful way to flavour the coffee of their individuality and visceral tangibility in the play at large. Before drawing to a close this modern imposition of character on structuralist theory, one final, brief aspect of character creation should be touched upon.

As the *coup-de-grace* of character rendering there exists a uniqueness only possible in the infusion of meaning into the name of character;[136] it is from the name that such a vast quantity of distinctiveness can be contained, that it would be remiss not to garnish this chapter with a sprinkling of it.

A name, not only of an artefact but of any character, is the first entry point that is discoverable and portentous of what is to come; there is meaning in a name, even if the Bard, on occasion, would argue the case. Lia Marina Thalinoe was a name carefully constructed and chosen to be as semiotically-loaded as possible, while maintaining a believability of existence in the contemporary world. Lia, by and large, has two derived meanings, one from the Hebrew, and the other from Greek origins. Lā'āh, the Hebrew form of Lia, bears the meaning of 'to tire' or 'weary', which by itself would stand against Lia's character, but when taken into account with her second name (presented in a moment) the significance increases. Lia, from a Greek provenance, carries with it notions of conveying good and prosperous news; a truism that Lia discovers in herself with regard to her lost partner Cassandra, and one that is an augur to Frank as he moves from one locus of being to the locus of redemption by the play's finale.[137]

Marina, taken from the noun of the same name, offers a location to safely moor a ship from the perils of the ocean. It is exactly this concept that the character of Lia comes to play for Frank; she becomes his marina. With reference to Lā'āh, the signified becomes apparent: the secure, comforting protection of a harbour to a weary sailor almost lost to the rapacious tendrils of the sea.

The surname of Thalinoe came about from the desire to give a Grecian significance to Lia's name by means of relating her role in the plot. Thalinoe is a construct from two of the three Sirens' named in Homer's *Odyssey:* Thelxiepeia and Peisinoe.[138] The amalgamation of

[136] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 124.
[137] L. Wattenberg, *Baby Name Wizard* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2013).
[138] Homer. *The Odyssey* (Project Guttenberg, 2013).

these two names into Thalinoe is an augural creation hinting at the entrapment of beauty and lyricism that Lia ensnares Frank with, only to bring him to that deathly betrayal of deep consequence.

Frank's naming system was easier in its conception, as it needed to be prominent and transparent in its applicability; Frank is frank; he is earnest about his feelings and worldly conjectures; he is the everyman that is brought low by what life has to offer; he gives voice to possibilities that are too often thought, whispered and ostracised as a malignancy. Mortimer integrates into the former embodiment of Frank - chosen for its close relation to mortality, it presents the very core concern that Frank, the character, wrestles with and becomes pinned under for a significant scale of his existence as an autonomous character and as the individual presented within the scope of the play.

The uniqueness of names may not be the most scientifically grounded notion upon which to base theoretical insight into narrative and character theory (this could also be said about any theory that falls outside the confines of pure science), but what it does offer is a compelling view into authorial intention and meaning-making from a character-based perspective; and, at the very least, it is a diverting methodology to nod at prospects in the offing.

Unlike the field of science, it is difficult to quantify and qualify the theories of character as definite facts. The artistic side to theory-making and theory-proving is one that relies more heavily on interpretation, consideration and, for better or worse, poignant cogitation, or misdirected consideration. While declaring character theory intention in *Double Shot* - then examining formal and open products of character in relation to Frank and Lia - may not be as tangible as clutching to a nuclear isotope, it is no doubt safer that the vindication of such a declaration, through expressing the trinity that makes for rounded, true, experiential characters, comes without the cost of a generation of deformed offspring; and instead allows the revelling in the fact that while proving a structuralist theory of a fluidic study (in opposition to an unmoving, concrete science) the applicability of any of these pseudo-quantum notions is at best, at the behest of the watery intelligence attributing meaning to a slightly less porous palimpsest that is phobic of splashes as much as it is phillic of them.

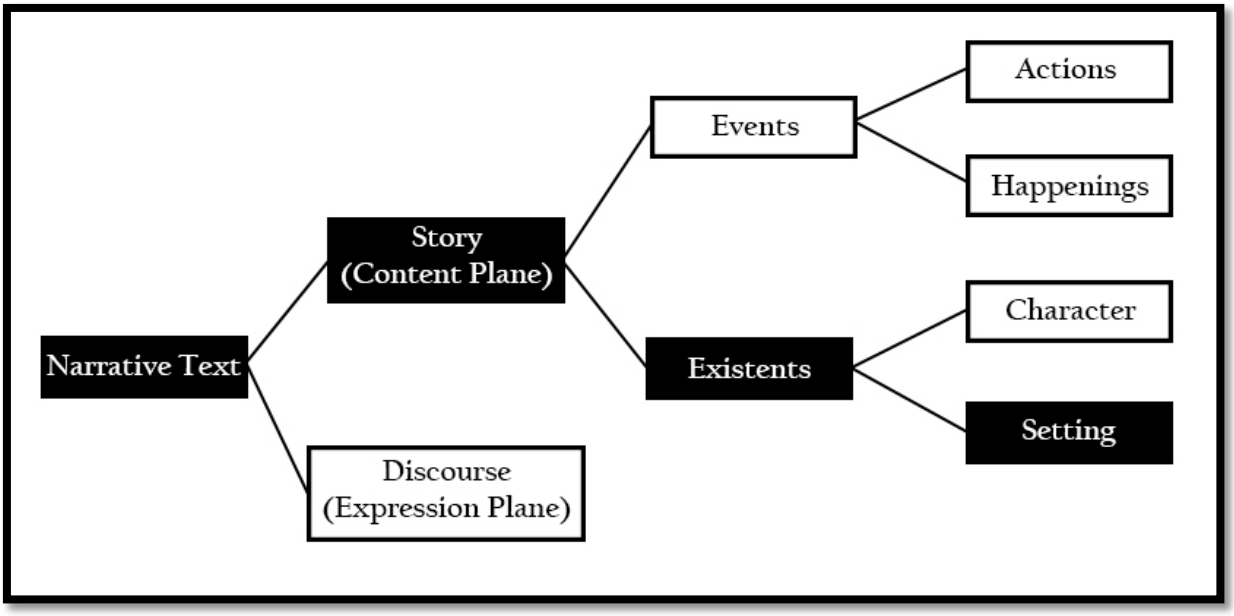
Character theory offers that possibility to promote imagined plot beings into life forms that if removed from the confines of some fiction, could be placed into the perceived real world and function (or be as dysfunctional, as it were) as any resident of this third solar planet. André Gide postulated and succinctly encapsulated this idea:

> The poor novelist constructs his characters, he controls them and makes them speak. The true novelist listens to them and watches them function; he eavesdrops on them even before he knows them. It is only according to what he heard them say that he begins to understand who they are.[139]

The uniqueness, traits, history and totalities that an author (or authoress) can infuse into an imagined creation, exceed the premise that characters are but plot imaginings for a forward momentum, and are instead a form of literary, dramatic singularity.

[139] 'Character and Characterization', in *The Creative Writing Course Book*, p. 130.

Chapter VIII - So This Is Utopia? - Setting



With the events of story set out, it is necessary to explore their counterpart, existents. Existents are the characters and settings (environments) of a narrative text; they are not only the space in which actions and happenings unfold, but are the 'mental projections', the resulting imagination, painted by the narrative;[140] they are those constituents of the text and staging that bond the reader to the action through empathetic characterisation and world creation.[141] Before an exploration of the world, the setting and the environs, circumscribing the journey into that last way station of story structuralism, the character within the world-at-play should be appreciated in all its profound theoretical measure.

Setting is a pinnacle foundation upon which the story is built, as it is the quantities, phenomena and artefacts present within the character's world that influence, shape (and in turn are shaped by) the character's experience of and with them – a character exists in tension with these elements.[142] It is an idea given credence by the work of Lotman wherein he declares that narrative is the product of character crossing the boundaries present by a symbolically charged space.[143] Nancy Kress, in her work, *Dynamic Characters*, supports this idea, whereby she indicates that through establishing setting, and character within setting, obstacles that a character would face, as well as the desires of characters, grow naturally from

[140] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 96 & 101.
[141] *Character in English Literature,* p. 15.
[142] *Ibid.,* p. 18.
[143] J. M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, Translated by G. Lenhoff & R. Vroon. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977).

the environment and setting in which they are to be found [144] - a whole new dimension of understanding of plot construction and deconstruction is made possible by this position. Due to this, story (the content of a narrative text) is girdled by the space of the story, be it topographical, geographical or environmental.[145] It is this space that models the story of the text as the image painting of the narrator's discourse;[146] it is a result of the environment in which the narrator - being either Frank or Lia - is to be found, the world of the story can only be as great as the 'perceived story-space'.[147] As Kress defines it:

> The setting of your story holds all the larger forces that will in turn determine what he perceives as both desire and obstacle.[148]

This in turn speaks back to notion of the perceived story-space, as it is the conflict and juxtaposition between character and setting that permits 'incidents'[149] to arise, effectively, the generator of plot. And thus:

> Setting, then, is the actual birthplace for desire, character, obstacle - all the things that cause conflict for your characters and hence generate plot.[150]

Consequently, as James Thomas expresses,[151] it is of paramount importance that the physical environment [setting] be wholly comprehended, for it forms a fundamental aspect of the meaning of a narrative text. It follows then that an understanding of the setting of a narrative not only allows for the creation of layered, purposeful and textual characters,[152] but also is a key factor in extracting meaning and the plot-determining qualities of a text.

Taking all of the above considerations into account, it is the purpose of this chapter to emphasise the mechanisms by which setting and the environment contribute to both the construction of plot, the layering of character design, and the overall meaning generation of

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[144] N. Kress, *Dynamic Characters* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2004) p. 31.
[145] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 101.
[146] For *Double Shot,* this narratorial discourse would take the form of mimetic, direct discourse.
[147] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 101 & 102.
[148] *Dynamic Characters*, p. 29.
[149] *Ibid.,* p. 31.
[150] *Ibid.,* p. 31.
[151] J. Thomas, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers* (Boston: Focal Press, 1992) p. 17.
[152] *Dynamic Characters,* p. 29.

the text.[153] Through the exploration of setting, the ways in which the environment influences character, and consequently plot, become more apparent. Equally, by understanding the specific creation and utilisation of setting, plot direction, plot intention and character desire are also brought to the fore and offered a more revealing light with which their intricacies and purposes are made clearer.

Place, setting, the physical, corporeal, imagined environment, is a key sub-division of any understanding routed within the formalist framework.[154] In order to begin a comprehension of this, the key locales within *Double Shot* should be scrutinised in both their original, creative intention and their ultimate effectiveness.

Before, however, moving on to the exemplification of setting within *Double Shot* itself it would be prudent to first set out the language of space in order to better comprehend the meaning and type of setting that a character is found within. It is as Marie-Laurie Ryan indicates, that for the meaning between character, plot and setting to truly be clear, there is a need for refined definitions of space that have the ability to account for the multitude of spaces that may exist inside a narrative text.[155] In total, Ryan presents five varieties of space that encompass a vast range of possibilities for the existence of narratives, from theatre and play, to media reports and sweeping literary epics. As such, two of her classifications fall outside the purview of what *Double Shot* and its analysis through receptive narratology extends to; yet, three of her categorisations are keenly applicable to the creative text herein assessed.

The first, and most general, definition of a space type is that of 'setting'. Ryan moves to narrow the definition of setting from what has already been considered the circumscription of play space for character, to the general 'socio-historic-geographical environment' in which the action and plot of a narrative occur. While not a definition that greatly improves an understanding of *Double Shot*, what this particular form of setting does promote is an instant ability for the audience to reconcile visual imagery to their imagined realities in order to make sense of a time period and cultural, sociological aspects related to that time and place. By having Frank wear sneakers, dodge bicycles, enter a coffee shop and pass a woman busy on a laptop, one is immediately placed within a contemporary, urban, middleclass framework.

[153] A more direct relationship between these elements and meaning is examined within chapter 9, concerned with discourse.
[154] *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, p. 17.
[155] M. L. Ryan, *Space and Narrative.* 24 Dec. 2008 (users.frii.com/mlryan/spaceentry.htm).

From these descriptors, Ryan's definition of setting becomes established and automatically provides a knowable reality for interpretation even without the use of speech and action.

'Story space' is revealed as the second classification of general setting and environment. According to Ryan, story space consists of the entirety of all environmental surroundings as they are displayed to an audience, but additionally includes all spaces and locations that are also imagined into being by a character within a text. Essentially, story space is both the physical, experienced space as well as the imagined, conjured space.[156] The primary importance of this classification is the use of the word in order to better comprehend the language of setting so that occurrences within *Double Shot* have a grammatically sound structuralist use of language that is able to elucidate the instancing of setting at play. Several noticeable presentations of story space exists within the text, including Frank's imagining of suicide and Lia's torturous, artistic fantasies; however, the salient realisation of this occurs during the opening of the play and Frank's dodging of imagined entities and his direct address to the audience - the significance of which is discussed as the first examined example below.

Thirdly, and most prevalent through most narratives, *Double Shot* not excluded, is Ryan's classification of the 'spatial frame': these are the immediate surroundings of the events and scenes revealing themselves before an audience; they shift and sequentially, temporally sequence themselves into an understandable hierarchy. Typically, these are individual scenes that sequence together to reveal action, create experiential space and inform all other definitions of setting, as spatial frames are the most basic unit of the language of space.[157] Through spatial frames, the majority of *Double Shot's* environment, setting and action is presented that establishes plot and the textual, multifaceted nature of the characters inhabiting those frames.

It is via the language of space that it becomes possible to more readily perceive the form of setting existing in each of the pivotal moments considered for the construction and deconstruction of *Double Shot*.

As expressed in the synopsis, the story space of *Double Shot* is largely limited to three key manifestations – three instances of tangible and environmental circumscription of space and one occurrence of imagined space. The pertinent position to propel a proper probe into this is to proclaim a piece of prose, predictive in its postulations for the possession of environmental

[156] *Ibid.*
[157] *Ibid.*

purpose. Christopher Gillie offers the term 'wishfulness',[158] which is the component of character that impels the character forward, and with it the narrative events, while more closely associating that character with audience through established expectations that may arise. In essence:

> [of wishfulness] seeks to reconcile its audience to their environment by extracting from that environment what is alien, disagreeable, unacceptable, and substituting what is soothing or titillating – at all events, what is wished.[159]

As the play opens with Frank, let the environmental insight begin there. As put forward by Gillie, the environment, the setting, the scene, allows for an audience to place the character within a particular milieu and attempt an understanding of that space, but more than that, what Gillie allows for is the notion that from this perceived story-space,[160] qualities that are foreign, possibly taboo, can be taken and then 'wish' them to a better state of being, although this is not always the case.

A significant number of Frank's actions are measured against his environment and are bounded by it. When Frank first appears, he is narrowly avoiding being knocked to the ground by an inexorable, thronging mass of pedestrians and cyclists; they are imagined into existence by Frank, his mime-like behaviour with them, and are thus transposed to the audience's consciousness through this fictitious interaction. As has been stated previously and will be explained in later chapters, Frank's monologue is filled with the 'slings and arrows' of life and the constant haranguing pressures that therein abound. Two prominent features of environment, within this opening space, offer themselves as a focal point for Gillie's 'wishful' framing.

The flurry of envisioned people assaulting Frank as he attempts to cross the street enables the first glimpse of how a *normalised* environment is contorted from the real world into the theatre's play space. What may in fact be a simple task of navigating through a large body of ambulant corpuses is turned into an experience that extracts, for Frank, all that is disagreeable and internally alien. Resultantly, it is a form of setting that reveals additional complexities of character and mindset, and as Kress indicates, the stronger the character, the

[158] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 16.
[159] *Ibid.,* p. 17.
[160] Being laced with all the qualities of Ryan's 'story-space' definition as well.

stronger the plot, which is all derived from an incident provided by the setting of a presented scene.[161]

> *He is dressed in trousers and an off-white button shirt that hangs over his marginally hunched frame; he has a decent head of fair, not a particularly noteworthy head of hair, but a decent one; slightly dirty white trainers are on his feet.*[162]

> LIA: Why do you wear white trainers?

> FRANK: So that I'm, I'm always ready when someone tries to knock me down; people are, are always bumping into each other, jostling, and, and knocking down! Also to, to know when I need to clean them, so they're, they're always ready to parry at any moment.[163]

Frank's conversation with Lia related to the very shoes he is wearing, which are explicitly expressed during the opening stage directions, support the notion that the mere act of navigating through people imposes such a great stress on Frank's being. C. Stanislavski suggests a character existence whereby he maintains that the external appearance of a character should convey not only an image of that character, but the spirit of the character as well; it concurrently reveals inner aspects of a character.[164] Frank has altered both his attire and his attitude in order to find a means to deal with the harassments that the situation presents him with. He manages to distil what could be considered a contemporary norm into an aspect of existence that is utterly, moustache twitching, top hat curling, disagreeable. This is the initial glimpse that the audience has of the frustrated tension existing between characters imposed by an environmental space.

The second envisaging of vocalised, imagined story-space may be found in the simple toilet paper narrative that is related:

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[161] *Dynamic Characters,* p. 29.
[162] *Double Shot,* p. 3.
[163] *Ibid.,* p. 28.
[164] C. Stanislavski, *Building a Character* (London: Reinhardt & Evans, 1949) p. 5.

FRANK: You go into a grocery store and, and you want to buy something simple, like toilet paper, 'cause, 'cause it's the most basic function that we do, we, we're excreting all the time, we excrete so much we can't even wait until we're out of the womb to do it. And, and, and you go, go to the isle and then what do you do? Do, do you buy one ply? Or two ply? Or, or three ply? Is it too hard? Is it too soft? Is, is it absorbent enough? Who, who knows? My anus and I haven't had this conversation yet; we don't see each other often, he's, he's always facing the other way. Then there is paper with aloe, for added softness! I mean, I mean I know it's a rough job down there, but aloe? It's all prickly and what if one of those... those *(trying to diagram a thorn on an aloe plant)* thorns slipped through the, the sifting?! Then there'll be an unpleasant prick up there and I don't mean that in the happy sense. And then you, you get those ones that are fragrant, have a... a beautiful scent to them, like lavender or vanilla; just seems to me where they're going it's a waste of their talent. And, if you, you navigate past all these rolls of cornucopia then you have to try and decide how many you're going to use. One? That's, that's not going to last you too long unless you have a reliable... reliable, disburthening schedule like the clockwork Swiss; I'm more Soviet down there – cold and frigid and it comes when it comes. Then they're packs of six, and, and that'll last you awhile if you don't eat too much curry, but only a little more of your income you, you can get twelve or twenty-four – we're starting to get into apocalyptic territory now. And then if you're a thinking person, a, a careful person you can get a veritable pallet *(miming a mountain)* , the, the mount Everest of toilet paper and you'd never have to worry about IBS again. You'd die trying to get it off the shelf, but, but you wouldn't have to worry about shitting again I can tell you that...So how do you, you even go about choosing toilet paper? Too many options; too many notes! *(pausing; thinking)* [165]

[165] *Double Shot,* p. 109-110.

A common, visceral task for most, is morphed into a debilitating psychological infringement for Frank. Much like the physical imagined space of the pedestrians, the story of Frank's toilet paper distress is a further imagining of an environmental story-space to support the juxtaposed jostling of Frank with the world he inhabits. It is the very act then that becomes the focus point of this ordeal: common, rote, without forethought, are mindsets of applicability to the process, by and large, of procuring toilet paper; yet Frank is absorbed and his normalised mental barriers wiped away (authorial puns completely intended) by the internal cognitive processes involved in the choosing of the paper. The action, and cognition governing the action, is Frank's distillation of the ordinary into the foreign, and within this distillation the audience is able to sample the aged whiskey of Frank's Darwinian adaptation to his clime.

The second setting that jostles the text's players is the coffee shop that encapsulates a significant scope of the time Lia and Frank spend with each other; this is the first critical spatial frame that exists outside the sub-classification of Ryan's story space. As set out in the very premise of the environmental importance of the story, it is an aspect of text fidelity for the characters to find a hidden significance, an alien significance, in their surroundings, joust against it and offer that physical and emotional dialectic to the audience to enhance the story plane of the narrative. The situation between Frank, Lia and their coffee shop is not one of friction, but rather unusual succour, which is just as potent as a setting inducing unwanted difficulties; this is especially true when the coffee shop is later contrasted to Lia's torture chamber.

First, the case of Lia Thalinoe: the coffee shop is her locus of, like Frank, survivability. It establishes a sphere in which she can observe the bustling about her, turning those observations into writing as part of her internal mechanisms (explored more fully under her character chapter) of coping. Furthermore, it is a hunting ground - particularly with reference to Frank and the nature of their relationship together - for Lia to monitor, plan and ensnare her prey. As a consequence, through the space that the coffee shop provides, Lia is able to ply her immersive therapy on her intended and thus alleviate her own fears of the world by way of evincing the same fear in others; all of this as a result of the confining nature that she moulds the coffee shop into.

Second, the coffee case of Frank Mortimer: despite all else that Frank's character exhibits during his introduction of a character, and whether it is intrinsically truthful or not, he has but one desire, to kill himself. Yet there is a defining part of his personality (and for

sake of argument, let the authorial intention be exculpated for a trice) that compels him to crave a cup of coffee as his last worldly delight - it is this impelling thought that is bestowed with such powerful significance. By channelling this intention through character, the setting of the coffee shop for Frank, as a corollary to Lia, also becomes his last refuge of life - as replicated in the thematic scene titling of coffee production in the play, Frank extracts from the shop that which is beyond the perfunctory procuring of coffee and is rather a final vestige of sanctity.

Putting aside Frank's interactions with Lia, there are two prominent points of environmental clues that illustrate the above assertion. At first appearances, the case of Genna, the barista, could be considered a character, but in terms of the theatre milieu and conceptions of character[166] Genna is rather a product of environment as opposed to setting. According to the principles stated in character development, Genna displays none of these, but it could be contended that Genna may still be an example of the more closed school of character, whereby characters are designs of plot progression. Yet it would be wise to acknowledge that Genna is not embodied in the play and is instead imagined into reality by Frank; the audience believes that Genna exists through his mimed interactions with her, and to a degree Lia's interactions with her, and as a consequence, through imagined interactivity and a lacking of character creation, Genna is the resultant of environment rather than character. Accordingly, the afore-touched upon two points arise: Frank is known and knowable in the coffee shop environment, and, there is a comforting routine within that knowing which moves beyond the constraints of the physical and common.

> FRANK: Also milk! Those, those cows, this is their revenge for, for all the burgers I've eaten. .. black filter coffee please.
>
> *He is downcast.*
>
> FRANK: Yes *(defeated),* my regular. [167]

There is a familiar acknowledgement between Frank and Genna, between Frank and the environment he is within, while this familiarisation is not in itself unique, and is rather

[166] Referencing notions of uniqueness, totality, trait, habit, self-identity and autonomous processing. See Chapter VII on Character for further details.
[167] *Double Shot,* p. 112.

contrary to the idea of extracting the alien from an environment, the contrast of Frank's thoughts must be perceived. From ordering dinner to navigating the street, these all produce anxiety within Frank as is revealed to the audience through his monologues and conversations; in opposition to these abrasive worldly pressures, Frank knows exactly how he likes his coffee, and Genna knows, precisely, the coffee that Frank enjoys. In a time-scape that is beyond just the portrayal in the theatre space, Frank is not only fond of a particular coffee, but within the scope of all other varieties of coffee, is able to select that individual one that appeases him. Crucially, if this particular style of coffee is ever forgotten or Frank has difficulty in deciding to purchase it amongst the other ranges that are offered by the store, Genna focuses his consciousness back to the black cup of coffee with two sugars - the knowing coffee.

This process of Frank ordering coffee and Genna assisting him within the coffee shop extends past the observable and tangible; it transforms into a metaphysical action, where Frank, like a caffeinated Prospero, conjures an environment into being that is a haven for him inside his pressurised world, an island amidst an ocean of squalls; it is a locus where a single cup of knowing coffee, poured from a transfigured, unique environment, provides transient happiness beyond all else.

The final spatial frame environment contributing to the functionality of the narrative is that of Lia's torture chamber in the basement of her home. On a first level of artistic reading, the environment of Lia's dungeon is exceedingly congruent with its conceivable purposes - Frank is tortured by Lia through fear and the constant taunting of physical pain until a state of truth[168] is wrought from him - and when this is placed against environmental purpose, there is a symbiosis, an expectedness that prevails between them. In order to best address the conveyance of an uncommon bond with the environment a second reading is required.

LIA: I don’t want to kill you anymore

FRANK: *(broken)* Huh?

LIA: I feel... almost diametrically opposed to the idea now.

[168] It could be argued that this statement of truth overlaps into the category of story space: for the information wrought from Frank, along with the story told by Lia, extend past the tangible spatial frame into a more encompassing contextual relation of the story as a whole, and thus could well be considered another occurrence of story space existing concurrently with the exemplification of the spatial frame.

FRANK: Uhh... Good! Stick with, with, with that feeling!

LIA: I feel a different emotion though; it feels so foreign, lost... alien. I wasn't sure earlier, but I think I'm in love with you.

LIA turns and faces FRANK, the knife is still being held at her side.

FRANK: What?

LIA: I know it seems quick, and maybe it is; you of all people understand acute, Wildian love – something so sudden does not mean it is insincere.

FRANK: *(aback)* You, you love me?

LIA: I do. *(pausing)* I did mean it when I said you were different; unique...[169]

Positively exuding from this extract is that Pinta-esque sense of dramatically sudden reversal. Unknown to this point, but always growing in the shadows, the pernicious environment finally blossoms the declaration of Lia's love for Frank and initiates the rekindling of his for her. The essence of the alien relationship between character and environment is, therefore, to be found in this amorous proclamation.

For serious, truthful, experiential story-telling, reconciling the alien, the disagreeable and the unexpected to the audience is paramount.[170] In the penultimate torture scene, the environment itself is first presented as that chaffing entity, jarring the badinage between Lia and Frank inside the coffee shop with the possible forthcoming murderous occurrences. However, as the scene unfolds the unpleasant relationship that both the audience and Frank has with their new setting is initially heightened, the movement towards Frank's breakdown begins to resolve the abrasive environment into one that is possibly soothing and certainly redemptive. Via this reimagining, the space that serves as the medium of meaning-making

[169] *Double Shot,* p. 146.
[170] *Character in English Literature,* p. 19.

between the audience and the text being presented vibrates between the contentious and the sympathetic - this is largely dependent on the point-of-view and discourse the audience is sympathetic towards (as discussed in the chapter concerning discourse). Lia's ultimate confession of love is the turning point of the friction between character and environment; when this *truth* is revealed the deviant aspect of the setting diminishes, and while the physical juxtaposition between intent and presentation remains patent, the connection of the mentalities at play (both that of the characters and the audience) to the environment are altered utterly.

While the environments in *Double Shot* are limited, their inherent properties, and those properties that come to the fore when Frank and Lia inhabit each surrounding, offer both nettling, abrasive qualities deriving from situations typically devoid of such attribution, and also concurrently heighten the importance and succour bequeathing ability of environs not commonly associated with such traits, but are given the power through the cognitive association of the character with the setting at hand. In the fullest capability of their relationship with their surroundings, Frank and Lia are able to convey the most alien conceptions of represented, staged areas to an audience and attempt to frame and reconcile them to a particular perception of that space.

Lia’s and Frank's retrospective tale cannot exceed the impositions that their environments have imposed upon them; they are the major elements that govern the protagonists' growth, actions and ability to interact with their world. In this way, setting, as a subsidiary of existents, influences and contorts both events and characters. To some extent, character is enslaved to the facets of structuralist setting; yet it is important to note that as much as an environment operates with the purpose of circumscribing the autonomy of a character, the atmosphere and setting that a character is to be found within may be altered by that player as well, especially marked by the overt vocalisations of the perceived environs. As Emerson stated:

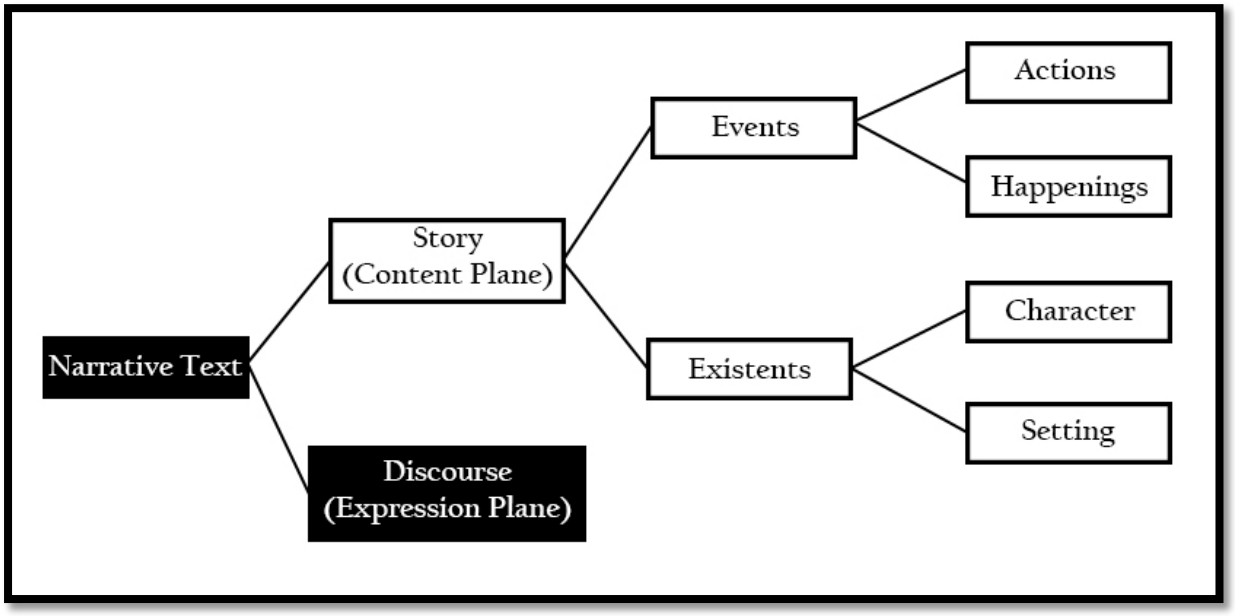
> Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Saviour rode. It

> offers all its kingdoms to a man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful. Man is never weary of working it up. [171]

While the contextual applicability may be somewhat anachronistic, and the sexual equality of its syntax of a different epoch, the sentiment elicited by Emerson's words are poignant indeed. The environment in which an actor is at play is shaped by the perception of it; Lia and Frank, to some degree, receive this nature that confines them and they shape, form and mould it into what is, to them, equally destructive and redemptive. The destruction and redemption is also only made possible by the allowance of the environments in which Lia and Frank operate; their perception and interaction with setting, through spatial framing and story space, is what allows for their plot to be more fully realised, generate additional meaning behind their action, and most importantly, further layer the intrigue of their characters. For both Frank and Lia, Emerson would be proud, for they are the truest sculptors of their land that could be.

[171] Quoted in: R. B. Goodman. 'Emerson, Romanticism, and Classical American Pragmatism', in *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy, e*d. C. Misak (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Chapter IX - The Stanley Parable - Discourse



If story is the essence of content for a narrative text, then discourse is its form, the structure that informs the content and story - story is the content plane; discourse the expression plane.[172] It is for this reason that discourse is of paramount importance to that of story and, where form exceeds function, it is possible that it is of more significance. Where story has within its makeup degrees of meaning, exhibited through the elements of action, happening, character and setting, the narrative structure, a text's discourse, has its own substances of semiotic meaning-making and signification. Due to the complex composition of discourse within story, the forms of structure can broadly be broken up into two titular systems: *narrative discourse*, the actual structure of a text and its discernible, knowable presentation in the literary medium itself; and *narrative transmission*, the less transparent relationship between time, story and the recounting of a tale, and how these parts interact with one another to achieve features of authority, voice and point of view.[173] The most facilitating method into tracking the tell-tale footprints of narrative expression is through the tracking of the more physically-inclined attribute, *narrative discourse*.

One salient means of expression for narrative discourse is presented through the use of the narrator. Narration stands as a telling constituent of style as it has within it many contained identifying features that either work towards developing and overtly presenting a

[172] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 146.
[173] *Ibid.,* p. 22 & 23.

narrator to the audience or, oppositely, makes use of stylistic features in order to shift the focus away from any awareness of a narrator and *present* one that is hidden and covert[174] - in theatre use, this could be the lens and framing through which the audience beholds what is at play before them. The purpose of this difference in narration is essentially related to the authorial affect, where a narrator is easily discernible and a degree of authority is established in the narrative arc as they are controlled and manipulated by such an overt figure. A concealed narrator, however, presupposes a lack of authority from an overarching literary element and consequently emphasises the 'unreliability' and the perceptions of characters over a formal recounting of events and actions.[175]

The noticeable details of an overt narrator typically feature characteristics of: explicit description, use of literary devices such as conceit and metaphor, direct forms of communication, and information related to the *narratee* and the story's setting. This results in a uniquely apparent syntax where the audience may be aware of the authoritative narrator. Conversely, a covert narrator minimises the aforementioned qualities of the text with the purpose of concealing the exact source of the force driving the plot forward – a 'speaking voice' guides and presents action, happening, setting, character and events, but the owner of this voice often remains unknown, and as a result the authority of the concealed voice may be brought into question.[176]

This may at first appear to be contextually out of place, as structuralist narrative theory has largely dealt with literary analysis and has been less focused on theatre-oriented texts; however, it would be a gross oversight if one were not to draw parallels between the possibilities offered between traditional literary application and play application. It is compelling to observe that with a minute amount of tweaking and jerry rigging of structuralism, that its synthesis with theatricality becomes rather poignant. It is at this juncture that it behoves one to declare that structuralist theory in its purest form is not possible to be vindicated unequivocally. But it is only the staunchest, myopic luddites that cling to tradition simply for nostalgic traditionalism; in an apology for structuralist narrative theory, a branch or two of its largely powerful tree, need to be broken; a jot of topiary to indulge the metaphor.

[174] *Ibid.,* p. 196.
[175] *Free Indirect Discourse: Theme and Narrative Voice in Flaubert, George Eliot, and Verga*, p. 31.
[176] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 196 & 197.

To first address the notion of the overt narrator: Frank, both at the play's opening and closure, may easily be qualified as an overt narrator, for he demonstrates the majority of the facets comprising the role.

> FRANK: *(addressing the audience; he speaks with a certain haste)* I, uhh, I'm not a nervous man by nature-[177]

> *Enter FRANK from S. L. He is dressed how he usually appears except for a new pair of comfortable, canvas shoes. The stage is bare apart from the red-ball gag remaining where it was. He walks C. and picks up the ball-gag and looks at it for a second or two. He then turns to the audience.*
>
> FRANK: I'm, I'm not a nervous man by nature, don't you know?
>
> FRANK: But, but maybe sometimes being a little nervous is a good thing. You know, coffee can kill you – maybe not today, or tomorrow, but one day, and it can be fifty years from now; your system will be so inculcated with caffeine that your heart will go into a tachycardia overload and explode within your breast, like MacBeth's unseated heart knocking against his ribs! It's a bitter end... [178]

Frank directly addresses the audience, he frames his views for them, and through wit and register invites those onlookers to wear the spectacles he has created for them through his wry conceits and neurotic charm as he paints the picture about to be unveiled. It is clear that in these moments Frank is the overt narrator of the story that is unfolding and has unfolded. This setup then presupposes the inverse for the remainder of the play. If Frank frames the introduction and resolution of the text, a covert narrator occupies all that lies between.

The interaction between Lia and Frank throughout the majority of the work, as put forward in the previous chapters concerning actions and happenings, is ostensibly one that is

[177] *Double Shot,* p. 109.
[178] *Ibid.,* p. 158.

controlled by their individuality and autonomous behaviour as characters, with only a degree of authorial infringement guiding those actions. The system then occupies two spaces: first, one that offers Frank control over the story; and second, one that removes Frank's authorial power. This theatrical dialectic jostles to form a sense of unreliability - Frank may frame the story of the play, for he emerges as a creator, the founder of all that is to be beheld, but this power is only fictitious; the lack of control Frank suffers during the body of the play removes his ability to manipulate any story pieces at play; his authorial puissance is vanquished; yet to whom is it surrendered?

It would be foolish to instantly declare Lia as the victor of this narrative control, although the case could be well argued that she is in the director's chair as to the tack taken by Frank; however, it has been explored how Lia and Frank are both individuals acting according to their own sentience within a prescribed, happening environment. There is an intentional vacuum then: Lia may have a modicum of the play's plot propulsion at her behest, yet as much as this is true, she lacks this manipulation and she and Frank are instead at the mercy of a contextually unknowable and a meta-referenced hidden power, the ambiguity of the covert narrator. As an audience, the content of the play is imbibed through a struggle for power, and with that struggle comes the question: is the story being portrayed reliable in any form if the narrators at play are unreliable in their presentation?

The use of covert or overt narration is also tied into the existence of the text's discourse – the way in which a character or narrator 'speaks' to the audience.

A useful encapsulation of the various existent discourses may be found in Plato's conceptualisation of binary opposition.[179] The first method of narration that Plato posits is that of literary and theatrical *Diegesis*, or how it has come to be known in contemporary times, *indirect discourse*. It is, according to Plato, a simplification of narration, as the entirety of a text is subordinated to a single authority, the narrator.[180] In this sense, all action, plot, sequencing, character thought and character speech are enslaved to the desire and intention of an external, omniscient, narrator; this form of discourse functions almost as an assimilation of other narrative components in order for a single *voice* to be overtly present in a text. The expanded contemporary idea of indirect discourse is that this use of the 'simplification of narration' is a means to achieve a certain effect – the qualification of speech, thought and setting instead of a basic reproduction of them (as will be seen in the case of direct

[179] *Free Indirect Discourse: Theme and Narrative Voice in Flaubert, George Eliot, and Verga,* p. 31.
[180] *Ibid.,* p. 31.

discourse); and consequently, the narration present lends itself slightly less to interpretation, as there is an intermediary between the audience and the events occurring that attempts to portray and convey a certain mood.[181] *Direct discourse*, Plato's conceptualisation of narrative, literary and theatrical *Mimesis*, on the other hand, informs the audience of a text with the use of a characters' own speech, thoughts, and at times, narration. It is through this method that characters become more independent in the text and begin to offer a plurality (differing viewpoints) in the narrative that would not be present under the manipulation of an overt narrator.[182] [183]

Taking the framework of binary opposition into account, one would be tempted to offer (much like the previous expansion on overt and covert narration) Frank's meta-narrative as a form of Diegesis; and it is not entirely incorrect to do so. While Diegesis mainly holds sway in the written novel form - unlike Mimesis which has depths of applicability to staged texts - the manner of a story's transmission through a more singularly powerful narrator certainly has some appeal. Frank utilises several elements of indirect discourse in an attempt (possibly) to entice and trick the audience at the play's initialisation into a world, setting and understanding warped by his own perceptions - a means to focus the lens of the narrative's story; altering its discourse by way of a more authoritative figure interpreting the play's world to the audience's world.

While this spectrum of colour assuredly holds a degree of discourse sway, it still tackles various obstacles that hold little bearing on theatre creation, especially notions relating to the subversion of action and actuality through a more omnipotent alteration of narrative manipulation. In this case Mimesis, borrowing from the introductory conceit, is a substrate perfectly aligned with the enzyme.

If Frank's opening monologue were to be placed under a Mimetic limelight, different conclusions can start to be drawn: Frank no longer attempts to warp the play's world for the audience, but instead offers his own perceptions of it as a lens for the audience to see his station and the difficulties faced while guarding that station. As Frank offers this framing, his role as a Diegetic, authoritative and overt narrator is diminished; instead, what remains is a further strengthening of autonomous character through the conveyance of the narrative (the discourse of structuralism) via a perceived, vocalised mindset - this notion especially becomes more pronounced when considered in contrast to the mimetic behaviours of Lia.

[181] Georgetown Wiki, "Discourse". *The International Society for the Study of Narrative.* 07 Oct. 2011 (narrative.georgetown.edu).
[182] *Ibid.*
[183] *Free Indirect Discourse: Theme and Narrative Voice in Flaubert, George Eliot, and Verga,* p. 31.

One of the conceptually compelling ways that Mimesis subverts an omniscient narration[184] is through the opposition of framing lenses. In stark contrast to Frank's views, Lia offers to the audience another spyglass through which to view the actions unfolding. Whereas Frank's thoughts constantly strive to reveal the invisible, ever-tightening coils of mortality, Lia's present the possibility of an introspective survival within the world of loss that is presented. What is fundamental to the way in which the discourse offers the story for reception is not entirely linked to the content of Lia's and Frank's conceptions, but rather how they are in an opposition with each other. Due to their vastly differing cognitions - initially - the audience is given multiple means through which to digest the story, evoking the pluralism that Mimesis has its core; does one relate the narrative according to Frank, positioning his desires and the conversation between himself and Lia through those espoused views? Or is it more compelling to measure the narrative against Lia's more Socratic embodiment? It, additionally, nurtures that seed of doubt that both the mediums through which Lia and Frank offer their views is flawed and the discourse encourages a more removed and appraising reception of the narrative engendered via an entirely different lens.

Structuralist narrative discourse has more applicability to a written form of narrative dissemination than a staged one, due to the increased congruence it shares with theoretical components relating to authorial control and an overt, controlling, separate narrative voice; yet there is a degree of applicability of such literary-focused tenets upon *Double Shot*, and certain aspects of Diegesis can be transposed into a different medium. The true strength of structuralism lies within the musculature that innervates direct discourse - Mimesis. Direct discourse grants a multiple complexity to understanding a narrative free from a rigid medium through which the transmitted message is delivered. A final exploration of the more subtle uses of authority and perspective, which support discourse, would be a useful exercise to stave off eyes in the forest that threaten the safety of this structuralist bark sailing down the river to the heart of narrative darkness.

Narrative transmission, in terms of narrative structure and overarching discourse, is a component with certain key elements that should be reflected upon with the point of firmly codifying the discourse at play and its presence within *Double Shot*.

[184] This is not to say that authorial desire, as considered in structuralist happenings, is not of vital importance; it is merely a framework by which the discourse is able to minimise the conspicuous air of a creator's guidance in the text, permitting a piece a possibility of operating in its own artificial milieu.

Point of view (henceforth referred to as POV) is the key facet within narrative transmission that best serves to edify the structure of the proposed text's discourse. But before POV can be applied to the narrative text, a process of 'othering'[185] needs to first occur – the need to define POV in opposition to the concept of voice with which it is often thought synonymous.[186] Voice refers to the apparent and explicit use of speech, and overt means that existents, events, actions and happenings are relayed to the audience – it is a mode of expression that *characterises the character narrator;* subject to the frame used by the audience, being either sympathetic with Frank, Lia or neither. POV is different in that (and this is a difference unmarked by Georgetown's literary classification and definition system)[187] unlike voice, it is not a mode of expression, but is rather the 'perspective in terms of which expression is made'.[188] Hence, POV is literally the encapsulation of a character's eyes, their perceptions, within which are contained: ideologies, world views, interests, desires, ambitions, survival and interests; it is the orientation that all narrated events are brought in comparison against.[189]

In terms of *Double Shot*, the play's voice is the result of the mimetic choice of either Frank's or Lia's vocalisations - it is the combination of the overt and the covert forms of narration as described in previous paragraphs; although it has been argued that the use of overt, diegetic means of narration is minimal in the staged environs. The POVs present in the way in which the discourse is transmitted to the audience however are slowly weaved together through the maturity of both of the text's characters. For Lia, a select number of incidents and oral offerings indicate what constructs her POV:

> FRANK: [Speaking of Cassandra] What... what happened to her?
>
> LIA: She died.
>
> FRANK: You, you don't often hear that anymore.

[185] Please refer to footnote 111 for defining the notion of 'othering' as it functions similarly from self-identification to discourse - highlighting how a text does not function is as important in discovering how a text does, indeed, operate.
[186] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 152.
[187] "Discourse". *The International Society for the Study of Narrative.* 07 Oct. 2011 (narrative.georgetown.edu).
[188] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 153.
[189] *Ibid.,* p. 150-153.

LIA: I say it because it’s true. Passing away, it sounds too peaceful. She died.

FRANK: How-

LIA: It doesn’t matter, does it? Choose a tragedy: accident, murder, suicide, cancer – they all end up the same, agony, long or short, then gone.

FRANK: So, so how do you do it then? How do you sit here looking so enchanting when, when there’s misery everywhere. A mall of misery; lots, lots of misery to choose from. I, I don’t understand.

LIA: I work. I write. I almost have coffee spilt on me.[190]

LIA: I drowned myself in coffee and writing after I watched her slip away... Some days it helped; other days I wanted to find that pistol.

I started doing this then as well - this art of mine, and they truly were my tapestries, and each of them became my keepsakes. I'd bring them to the razor's edge and I'd push and push and push, until they bled every last drop to me, bearing their souls open to my craft; and then I would weave and stitch and sew, and this *(gesturing to all her objects),* this became my life's penance, my own divine catharsis. *(giggling)* A bit theatrical, but utilitarian.

FRANK: No, no, no, there are other callings! Don't listen to harps or minarets or, or passion! Shoot the eagle! Kill the auspices! Thomas Moore yourself even... I'm a terrible canvas... I'm, I'm a canvas with no easel!

[190] *Double Shot,* p. 147.

> LIA: I couldn't stop then; I can't now! I worked and I painted, and I painted for so long, and no one knew what it was like for me on the inside. Cassandra clawing at me, and me clawing at them, angry, furious, vengeful, for what they desired when my Goddess, my sliver of Olympus, was taken from me. Oh this wrath I welcomingly fed, and it became glorious, and masterpieces I wrought with each of them... then you...
>
> *(changing tone)*... and we spoke, and I felt my own eyes sparkle again, and I laughed, I truly laughed, and I saw her in you; but you were not her, you... you... were Frank.[191]

Presented here is Lia's dichotomy of mind - an opposing, initially, yet hopeful aspects of her perception that inform her voice of the play, and in turn the discourse already established.

Ideologically, with Lia's first interactions with Frank, she appears possessed of a manner and a construction of the world that allows her to operate within it with a high degree of functionality (in stark contrast to Frank's lack of ability to do so). In order to subvert the manacles of misery rapaciously reaching from the ground of Cassandra's death, Lia uses her work as an immersive therapist and her creativity as a writer as a purification as to not be imprisoned by travesty and her own mentality. Yet this is ultimately an illusion that is revealed to her through her attempts to treat Frank for a similar condition: her vocation with her ostensibly lethiferous therapy was a cloak and not a cure; through Frank she discovers this and it marks her journey as one moving from a place of perceived knowledge to one where she was in fact ignorant to her own cognisance. The most notable aspect of this is that the way in which she allowed herself to move through life in spite of Casandra's death, and the activities (her Socratic parlance and therapy) that this prompted, were ideologies that then framed her voice and direct discourse of the play. This, essentially, manifests itself as the perspective that Lia's expression (her voice and mimesis) is expressed through.

Frank's POV, or at least those aspects that form his POV have been detailed at some length during his creation as a character.[192] With the risk of tautological negligence waiting to pounce, it is only necessary to swiftly re-encapsulate the paths that inform Frank's forest-like perspective.

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[191] *Ibid.,* p. 146-147.

[192] Please see Chapter 7 on Character for the ideologies that inform this point of view; in particular: pages 56-57 and 59-61.

Frank sees but one road through the woodlands: a suicide to escape the clawing ravages of his life after the death of his partner, Miranda.

> FRANK: My partner! My love of my life, she died! Years ago! Dead! Dead! Dead! And, and what have I become? What?! A, a, shell?! I, I can't do it anymore, I can't choose the toilet paper we used to buy! I, I can't decide the food we used to order! I'm, I'm not, not that strong! I'm done! I'm finished! Let. Me. Go! [193]

Frank's academic and philosophic history, in combination with the loss of Miranda, feeds back into his autonomy as a character, but it also focuses his perspective of the text's world. This perspective (also taking into consideration the burgeoning desire within Frank) is then responsible for the voice that is offered to the audience; Frank's view point is one of finality and frustration, and this is expressed rather openly at the play's introduction. To lend credence to how this form of narrative transmission feeds into the discourse, it is possible to reassess the situation when it is altered by Lia's influence.

As Lia begins to alter Frank's philosophical imaginings, his speech, his voice, the way he offers his narrative to the audience is altered; Frank diverts from the stammering pessimist into a charming, witty spark, with almost buoyant conversation; his voice, his expression, contorts into something quite different.

Narrative discourse allows for very keen and specific ways for a story - the events and existents of a narrative - to be conveyed to, and perceived by, an audience. Certain sub-elements of discourse, contribute to this dissemination of story, most notably narrative transmission with its components of voice and point of view. The narrative transmission determines, to some extent, who the narrator of the story is as well as identifying the thematic concerns of the story.[194] Voice offers its orator as a possible narrator for the events unfolding and this voice is in turn shaped by the point of view, the perspective that the character uses in order to assess and understand the world at large. These facets coalesce into a modified instance of structuralist discourse analysis that contributes to the functionality of the play's direct discourse and framing while ignoring more literary focused aspects of indirect discourse.

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[193] *Double Shot,* p. 143.
[194] *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* p. 149.

How a character thinks, how a character speaks, what words a character utters dramatically alters the medium of understanding the narrative that is presented to an audience. Being able to explore each of these criteria enables an understanding of the potential mechanisms through which the content plane of narrative is moved to its receiving agents via this ambiguous, and shifting, expression plane of discourse. As effortless as it would be to declare that the story presented is Frank's, it would be erroneous to do so, for it is one of several possible ways of intercepting the narrative that is being transmitted. The discourse of *Double Shot* manoeuvres to frame understanding by shifting points of identification; whether it is through Frank, Lia or neither, the overarching story may be the same, but the reckoning of it is far more vast.

Chapter X - 'Well, I'm Back' - Conclusion

As with all journeys, voyages and discoveries, arriving at the end is but a mark to signify the end of newfound experience; the return home is rote and drab (Odysseus, however, may disagree) but offers that moment for reflection and the space for the interpretation and creation of meaning - much like an intricate play, which even upon wine and social graces enlivening the audience at a fine dinner at that exquisite boutique restaurant around the corner from the theatre, there is an effervescent bubbling of the mind, and unconscious cogitations of what has befallen those characters in those enrapturing rings of limelight, and with each roil, with each mental effusion, new possibilities, considerations spring to the surface long after the curtain call - it is within such a space that receptive narratology constantly asks of its partaker to make new meaning.

Upon arrival at the end of the end, as opposed to the end the beginning of the thesis alluded towards, the end is now one of permanence - an arc of thesis evolution, that much like character, has made a journey from a starting point, has had its belief systems tested against alien qualities, jostled against them, and even though the thesis may end near where it began, because of this testing, growth and a truth was yielded during the journey.

As Luther wrote his *95 Theses*, so too is this thesis, *Schrödinger's Man*, a vindication, a cognate apology, a defence of structuralist narrative theory in the modern, contemporary age. In such an aegis, two questions were wrought in the forging of the armour. The first: is a classic, formalist notion of narrative analysis still valid in this post-modern world; does it remain as a valid methodology of critical worth? And the second: is it possible for an original creative artefact to be conceptualised and fully rendered using only tenets of narratology and character? And in what ways is the creative process altered by using this mechanism?

Both of these theoretically fundamental questions have a superficial and rather easy answer being at the end of all things. Indeed, structuralism still maintains a precision of evaluation that is trenchant in modern analysis - this result proven through the very creation and disassembly of a play by means of narratological constructs. If there were some ringing discovery to take from what all the previous pages have presented, then the former sentence encompasses it all. Yet leaving a defence in such a state would be irreverent to all that has come before, and particularly facile, for the surface interpretation of it neglects the key

processes that led to the Darwin-esque discovery, and that would be a sadness not easily forgiven by the Galapagos turtle.

As a means of research to vindicate and explicate the hypothesised questions, the theatrical text, *Double Shot*, was created. The narrative, which revolves around Frank and his desire to commit suicide, and Lia, who is hired to cure Frank of his depression, serves as the academic vein of research data used to assess and be assessed by the interpretive tenets offered by structuralist narrative theory; especially that which was titled *receptive narratology*. Through the utilisation of a contemporary positioned form of classical narrative theory, and using its constituents in order to formulate the plot, circumscribing settings, environment and character, the ability to validate the congruence and applicability of receptive narratology to an original creative artefact was made possible. With such a conceptualisation in mind, the initial foundation was set for the authoring of *Double Shot* - each scene, character, action, happening and their arrangement was considered according to the elements offered by narratology before the play was written. Upon completion of the play the inverse was then used, and the categories of structuralism reapplied as to deconstruct the narrative through two planes (of content and of discourse), revealing as to whether or not the problematised question regarding structuralism was valid and to ascertain the degree of this validation. The theoretical operation, from an authorial standpoint striving for academic *objectivity*, but constantly infused with subjectivity, was indeed successful as each part of this conclusion illustrates.

The first portion of analysis pertained to the examination of *Double Shot's* story - the expression plane of structuralist narrative theory. The first branch delved into the relation of actions (as part of the structuralist event branch) and how their arrangement formulates the plot of a story. As to examine the efficacy of receptive narratology upon *Double Shot*, actions were presented in relation to both original authorial intent and a retrospective, deconstructive filter as to determine the success of the end result as compared with the inception of thought brought about through the elemental classifications of structuralist theory. Through the inspection of several key actions - Lia's handbag trap, the declaration of Frank's pistol, the poison-laced tea Lia serves Frank, the physical act of torture Frank is subject to, and the desire of Frank to continue living - the intention of narrative design is juxtaposed to the critical theory analysis of narratology in order to vindicate the research question at hand.

In each of the event actions, the authorial intention was stated, and the way in which it was formulated in relation to structuralism was expounded upon. As each analysed moment

illustrates, action (a change in plot, the sequencing of events, brought about through an act of character agency) was considered as a means to direct the original path of the narrative; however, the instances of action were tempered with character autonomy in mind. In this way the omniscient power of the writer is diminished, and the action at play occurred not as a driver of the plot, but rather as a conscious character choice within the framework that would later be established for both Frank and Lia's psyches. Furthermore, each action undergoes a narratological litmus test, whereby each action is assessed as to its potential to bring about an alteration in the state of the play itself. As is made evident in the chapter, each particular form of the event well exemplifies the tenet test of structuralism that is applied in a deconstructing sense. Through these varied means, not only was the logical causative sequencing of actions (and by extension, plot) highlighted, but with each action, with a fair degree of success in both intention and post-completion functionality, a shield of considerable defence for a contemporary creative artefact was smithed.

The second branch of receptive narratology is to ascertain the results of happenings' successes or failures within the creative text - happenings being the condition that occurs when characters become objectified for plot purpose, generally at the loss of their self-actualised agency. In order to offer this interpretative analysis, two areas were, by and large, considered.

Firstly, that which was dubbed the *macroscopic* presented the notion that a means by which to understand happenings is through desire, as made conspicuous through the apparent themes of the narrative - if theme and desire can be understood, then the authorial intrusions behind them force their tacit happenings from the shadows. This thematic concern was presented through discerning two crucial objectives for the characters within the narrative: redemption and 'ways of living'. Both Frank and Lia function in a play-constrained world that provides the opportunity for them to live out their lives as best they can in the face of their personal loses; yet this autonomy is a constrained one, for the agency-filled choices that they make fall within the impervious bubbles of happenings which circumscribe them. Frank's desire for a last cup of coffee, and the loses that both characters have suffered, demonstrate the prevailing occurrences of this happening confinement; while actions occur due to these conditions, the conditions themselves were brought about through intentional, authorial design. It is this fact that grants this manifestation of happenings to fall within the achieved purview of structuralism, as the methodology for character objectification and servitude to plot is made stark. Testimony to this is further given through exploring how Lia's character

suffers an utter divesting of her agency as to ensure her presence with the text's coffee shop - exemplifying how a locus, the shop, becomes a bubble of happenings due to authorial intervention to bring about such a situation.

In these ways, the congruence of *Double Shot's* happenings to those of structuralism's was made evident, and only with the slightest imposed conformations, by means of receptive narratology, it may be deduced that the intention and the deconstruction of happenings within the narrative artefact permit the flow of plot and action throughout the work. Essentially this state codifies the time-space of the play and grants characters the freedom of their own individual autonomy through circumscribing conditions, via authorial design, as to best fit with their innate individualities - this is where the true power and forged armour of happenings is created.

The case of establishing theories of character as sub-branches of structuralism's own classification of character was perhaps (and again this is where authorial injection is squeezed in; if anything, receptive structuralism loves to blur the line between the real author and the implied; these interjections are no different) the most fulfilling part of the Kurtz-seeking quest. There is a poignant quintessence, a god-like *je ne sais quoi*, in raising from dust, a malleable medium in which one desires to breathe the very seed of life into; yet not just moulding a character for story, but rather a fully sentient, self-aware, self-questioning human being that could be no less real than any *true* woman or man reading these very words.

Throughout the centuries there has been a creative movement to remove characters as pure agents of plot and, in the *modern* milieu, to create them as autonomous, rounded individuals. As mentioned in the positioning of receptive narratology, certain ideas needed to be reformed to allow for this climate change of structuralism - character is indeed one of these alterations. By means of this adaptation, new tenets became prominent in their applicability to structuralism's branch of character; a new objective was rendered: self-identifying and self-functioning characters. With this notion at heart, five general character features were added to reinforce structuralist theory of old's armour: totality, traits, uniqueness, point of view and voice. Through the conscious creation of character by means of the five stated criteria, the capability to give birth to the re-forged, desired goal of structuralist character was made possible. To briefly exemplify the in-depth process occurring within the chapter itself, the character of Lia is offered for examination.

For her conception, Lia was given that overarching desire, never to be reached, of finding redemption and being a redeemer for Frank. Her very name, Lia Marina Thalinoe,

being a safe harbour for the weary, combined with her Socratic trait, provides Frank a place of safety from the world through her being. This in turn encourages Frank to find his own redemption through her questioning nature, and it allows for her own desire for redemption, to move past her lost partner, to occur. All of this coupled with her calm deportment and her considerations of the world and its eccentricities, solidifies her character beyond a product of plot, for her interactions with Frank, her thoughts, her confessions, her desires and her wishes, all emanate from her being, and to a large extent, the nuances of her character developed from herself - five structuralist points of character were considered, and from them arose a phoenix of self-identifying character.

Through reconstituting narratology's formulation of character into a contemporary version, character-based structuralism is given an additional gravitas of worth and significance. By intentionally creating characters based on five critical components, individuals with their own agency were rendered into being. The puissant consequence of this creation is the entire plot itself: for apart from the injected happenings within *Double Shot*, it is the interplay of individualised agency between Frank and Lia that propels the plot forward in a way that the author may have only dreamt of in but a single philosophy. And this is the true, core power of the structuralist sword: the ability of a plot to have an identity not fully of the maker's mind.

The final content plane assessed in the above chapters was that of setting, the physical, confining environs in which the characters of the narrative text operate within. Much the same as Frank's search for meaning throughout *Double Shot*, the setting of a narrative within structuralism is given a significance as well. This worth is one of formulation, in that the environment, in relation, opposition and juxtaposition, to a character, allows for an understanding of how a particular character functions inside a given habitat. The importance of this is that it displays an increase in the appeal and *veritas* of the story by presenting the tension between a character and the environment to an audience in order to demonstrate rigours that a character must face.

By elucidating various occurrences of character-environment tension and accord, a greater depth is bestowed upon each character, and the story plane as a whole is precisely enhanced as a keen blade for the defence structuralist narrative theory. Frank achieves this transference of environ friction in several ways: through an imagined space of thronging people and espousing the difficulties he faces in making everyday choices - both of these difficult circumstances are given to the audience via mimed and imagined interactions that

Frank has with the setting. Additionally, Frank and Lia enter altered states when existing within the confines of the coffee shop: Lia, through watching and writing, is able to ply her art in order to cope with life, whereas Frank finds a modicum of comfort in the regularity that is his usual beverage. This typifies the way in which character is granted added complexity by the alien qualities (the word alien not invariably implying something disagreeable, but rather something foreign, outside, of the character's own mental state) that are to be found in an environment, for the setting to a large degree alters character cognition, and this alteration, this synchronicity and tension, is made available for audience reception.

Furthering this idea, the locus of Lia's torture chamber was examined, notably in a double reading fashion: superficially, the torture chamber provides anxiety and fear into the character of Frank; however, more significantly on a second reading, is that qualities of solicitude, love and redemption become available in the environment. Essentially, disagreeable qualities of torture are transformed by character interaction with the environment into something psychologically (for both character and audience) pleasing and congruent.

By all these means, common settings are mutated into ones that bring anxiety and pain; typical locales are transmuted into golden havens of succour; and dens of turpitude bloom into proud pedestals of love. All of these states are brought about through the interactions of character, their psyche, and their vocalisations, within, between and about the space that they occupy, constantly extracting from it unexpected elements and presenting the resultant, re-framed occurrences for reception. It is within setting that circumscription can lead to the most powerful freedom possible, if only the mindset is willing to reform it so - much the same way that Ivan Denisovich is able to have a *good* day within a Russian gulag. Does the character of a pious Smith, in the environment of a forge, not extract from it, through ardent effort and work, a sword valiant for the defence of any land? Perhaps, if the perception and will to do so drums within.

As this way-worn vessel is moored at the ultimate way station, even if the impending Kurtz-esque end is known, there is time for that final cup of tea, that last touch of civility, before the end grants a full, gratuitous display of that atavistic beast of receptive narratology.

Of all the concise recapitulations up until this point, each had dealt with products of content - the narrative itself, the precise artefacts of plot and story-making. The final aspect of receptive narratology, framing that which is dubbed story and plot, is that of discourse, the methods and results by which a transmitted narrative is received and its meaning formulated

by a receiver, and most importantly, how this received message is altered by the actors and players within a narrative. As to best demonstrate the theory and efficacy of the previous notion, discourse was classified according to two principles: *narrative discourse* and *narrative transmission*.

The main discernible entity of narrative discourse appears in the form of the narrator. By slightly altering structuralist tenets, as mentioned in the chapter positioning receptive narratology, the aspect of the narrator becomes a powerful, edifying force for vindicating the theory. The opening and closing of the play reveals Frank as a strident, overt narrator, framing the information of the plot ahead for the audience according to his own mentality and references, thus colouring the message in a way to portray events to the audience. Conversely, apart from Frank's framing, the majority of the play unfolds without an overt guiding hand, bespeaking the qualities of covert narration - minimising apparent authorial direction, and instead permitting characters and their autonomy to guide the decisions and course of the narrative. In this way, parallels are drawn to Plato's concepts of Mimesis and Diegesis, whereby the significance of indirect discourse that Diegesis has to offer (where all action is a slave to a single authority) is diminished to allow for the receptive lens that Mimesis offers in that all events and information an audience receives is not filtered through, but rather put in relation to the characters offering their musings of the action at play within the text. *Double Shot* exemplifies this by either requiring the audience to digest information in relation to the slings of the world that Frank's character has to offer, or instead to use Lia as a North Star and place interpretation of the play's themes and conversations next to notions of survival and inner truth discovery. Yet at the same time it bestows the audience with power to reject both assessments from the characters and instead formulate their own meaning, granting a significant form of plurality to the understanding of the play.

If one slightly bends the branches of the narrative discourse tree, there is compelling evidence to suggest that, especially through Plato's conceptions of Mimesis, a fundamental link between traditional considerations of structuralism's discourse and that of its theatre applicability exists.

A more strongly reflective form of structuralist discourse presents itself in the form of narrative transmission. In this category of message modulation, the notion of point of view (POV) is paramount. Similarly to the way in which the previous concepts of Mimesis operate, POV extends the theoretical tenet into an aspect that drastically alters the means by which any information offered by any character is received. POV, over and above what Mimesis offers, tempers every word a character produces to the audience by processing the character's

experience through their own mentality before any vocalisation. Intrinsically, any word the audience receives is one that is laced with meaning and subject to the perversions and configurations that a character's cognisance would subject it to. This in turn effects the meaning-making capability of any receptor, as every detail extracted is moulded not to the understanding of the receiver, but rather the character itself; therefore, this forces any receiver of a character's words to decode significance through several layers of their own internalised meaning-making capabilities.

While such an application may sound whimsical in its theoretical construct, the physical, examinable manifestation of it simplifies it somewhat. On an exceptionally basic level, Frank presupposes a world that is sinister, imposing and deadly. Due to this, everything Frank offers outside of his dealings with Lia are taken as placed against the idea of an impending end. In so doing, the way in which Frank builds an understanding of the world is always tested against those internal constructions. Furthermore, any experience Frank undergoes is subjected to the same internal biasing before he offers voice to that experience; subsequently, what the audience visually and aurally ingests is not only the action of Frank, but the alteration and colouring of that action as well. By this mechanism, the message that any receiver is subject to is altered by Frank's medium of POV. This permits the significant aspect of receptive narratology's multiple meaning-making through the manner by which the audience decodes the information afforded to them. As easily as one could empathise with Frank's plight, it is quite possible that the opposite end of the spectrum, where Frank's nihilistic subjectivity engenders loathing, could be conceivable. POV establishes the structuralist capability of receptive meaning-making and this, when taken with the plot and thematic concerns of the play, engenders vastly different readings of the narrative action portrayed. As to close off the smith conceit utilised for the vindication of structuralist narrative theory, if the expression plane of story availed its wearer of the shield, arms and armour available, then discourse and its transmission are the very joints that hinges together that fine, burnished, reinforced set of plated mail.

Using the explicated, evolved tenets of structuralism to form an aegis for the cognate apology of the theory through a more contemporary incarnation of the ideology, in the form of receptive narratology, was a, by and large, successful endeavour. From a critical, retrospective positioning, the qualities that the new form of the theory possessed managed to effectively break down an interwoven text of theatre into core components, rendering each constituent and their functionality, and explicating its use with its connected elements.

Moreover, the second success rests in the achievement that a play, a creative artefact, was conceptualised and wrought using, as its base, only the theoretical aspects that character design and receptive narratology had to offer. While any inference of success is assuredly subjective, the strength of the defence of narratology was through the logged journey of stating original intention of design and its ultimate manifestation into the functionality and meaning-making of the narrative text, *Double Shot*. With as much and as little authorial biasing and interjection as possible, within this contemporary, passing modern, time, the worth of a modified structuralist narrative theory for a critical understanding of a text and for the burgeoning creation of a narrative is not only fully justified, but is one of the sturdiest aegises defending an adapted formalist tradition in a contemporary milieu. And that is a classical denouement that requires no modern apology.

Time is that most haunting of linear entities, always trumpeting a tune onwards that ignores all the pleas for variations along the way. At points in its infinite song, melodies of human cognition are added; some fade and disappear into the ether; others ring out for longer. While some of the most exciting products of human society come in the form of grand new ideas, others are worthy of reformation. A Tesla electric motorcar is a glorious representation of divergent advances taken with reference to its auto-combustion founders; yet there is nothing quite like the hum, the roar, the shriek of aural ecstasy that a finely tuned, supremely engineered, fire-breathing combustion engine can offer. Classical structuralist theory may be that original, gangly, imperfect design, but the enhancements that additional human voices bring to that trumpeting tune, give it a modern rebirth that brings Latin veracity to an age of modernity. Receptive narratology may not be a new idea, or a vastly different evolution from its origins, but with the perfectly forged arms and armour it has a Spartan power that vindicates it through the test of time... at least until the bow is invented. But with the worth proven throughout this journey into the heart of structuralist narrative theory, it can easily be declared that the colour of Kurtz's eyes are not yet Yew.

Here at the end of all things, with Sam back in his sturdy, rooted, grounded and structurally sound Hobbit hole, and with all the referential, modernist, Bloomberg group implications it brings, we see through the Forrest: that's all I have to say about that.

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~End of Thesis~

The Creative Project

Presenting the Play

Double Shot

Double Shot

Cast of Characters

If gods and mythology and philosophers were real.

Frank Mortimer - half Woody Allen, half Sisyphus; sometimes the man wins; mainly, the boulder wins.

Lia Marina Thalinoe - she is Socrates; she is Athena; she is Aphrodite... she is touched by Hades and Nemesis; she is still human.

**Always treat my parentheticals as if they were parents: listen to them or feel free to ignore them; above all else, find your own truth.*

Roasting

On a sidewalk, faint sounds of vehicles, city life and people are heard. FRANK enters from B. R. He approaches F. C, at least he is trying to. FRANK appears apprehensive as he tries to make his way through the thronging people constantly cutting him off. He is dressed in trousers and an off-white button shirt that hangs over his marginally hunched frame; he has a decent head of fair, not a particularly noteworthy head of hair, but a decent one; slightly dirty white trainers are on his feet. He is hesitant and a little timid. He extends his hand to try and get through.

FRANK: Oh, excuse me-

His attempt is rebuffed. He tries again, this time walking into the busy street a foot or two.

FRANK: Sorry, so sorr-

FRANK gets turned around briefly, is jostled around slightly by people bumping in to him. After slightly stumbling back and forth a bit and trying to apologise to everyone he collides with, he finally makes it through the masses. As he makes his final approach to F. C. he constantly looks from side to side and behind him making sure no one is on an imminent collision course.

FRANK's gaze stops over the audience.

FRANK: *(addressing the audience; he speaks with a certain haste)* I, uhh, I'm not a nervous man by nature-

A bicycle's bell is heard. FRANK desperately jumps out the way.

FRANK: Bicycles! Always sneaking up on you! They, just, they just, come out of nowhere, charging at you with those bells... and those... tyres and the metal and the spokes... and the handle bars, like battering rams! And you can never tell how fast they're going; they, they defy physics don't you know? But, uhh, I'm not nervous around bicycles, oh no, I own a bicycle you see. Yes, yes I do, and it has three wheels, at the back for that added... friction. Friction is just, just, a wonderful thing; slows things down, doesn't let things go too fast. And, and three wheels add stability, you never have to worry about falling over, isn't that wonderful?

(pondering) Unless a car hits you, or, or someone pushes you over, or a typhoon... I'm not a nervous man by nature, I'm just, just, careful. It's... it's like this...

He begins pacing back and forth, gesticulating.

FRANK: You go into a grocery store and, and you want to buy something simple, like toilet paper, 'cause, 'cause it's the most basic function that we do, we, we're excreting all the time, we excrete so much we can't even wait until we're out of the womb to do it. And, and, and you go, go to the isle and then what do you do? Do, do you buy one

ply? Or two ply? Or, or three ply? Is it too hard? Is it too soft? Is, is it absorbent enough? Who, who knows? My anus and I haven't had this conversation yet; we don't see each other often, he's, he's always facing the other way. Then there is paper with aloe, for added softness! I mean, I mean I know it's a rough job down there, but aloe? It's all prickly and what if one of those... those *(trying to diagram a thorn on an aloe plant)* thorns slipped through the, the sifting?! Then there'll be an unpleasant prick up there and I don't mean that in the happy sense. And then you, you get those ones that are fragrant, have a... a beautiful scent to them, like lavender or vanilla; just seems to me where they're going it's a waste of their talent. And, if you, you navigate past all these rolls of cornucopia then you have to try and decide how many you're going to use. One? That's, that's not going to last you too long unless you have a reliable... reliable, disburthening schedule like the clockwork Swiss; I'm more Soviet down there – cold and frigid and it comes when it comes. Then they're packs of six, and, and that'll last you awhile if you don't eat too much curry, but only a little more of your income you, you can get twelve or twenty-four – we're starting to get into apocalyptic territory now. And then if you're a thinking person, a, a careful person you can get a veritable pallet *(miming a mountain)* , the, the mount Everest of toilet paper and you'd never have to worry about IBS again. You'd die trying to get it off the shelf, but, but you wouldn't have to worry about shitting again I can tell you that...So how do you, you even go about choosing toilet paper? Too many options; too many notes! *(pausing; thinking)*

Speaking of scatology, then you want to go to dinner, and, and you sit down ready for a nice meal and you get this menu and it just goes on for pages without end, like Russian literature you, you get to the end and you can't remember what happened at the start and by that time you're just sad and depressed and what to throw yourself in front of a train – a Swiss one, otherwise, you'll, you'll be sitting, shivering in the snow. So you leave that restaurant and go to a joint with, with a one page menu and you consider and weigh up your options and, and look at the pros and cons of bovine-avian sentience and, and you think you've made the right choice that would fill your, your hierarchy of needs; but then while you're waiting you see someone else's food being conveyed away and you suddenly want that instead, 'cause you should've ordered that but then it's too late and your food arrives in front of you but it now has the appeal of saltwater to an ancient mariner and all you're thinking about is that you should've ordered what she was having, and you just go home miserable and looking for a train. *(throwing hands over head)* Too many notes!

It's just, just, there are too many choices, and, uh, you must simplify life, it's too complex, too enigmatic, like a, uh, German Enigma Machine, wrapped in a wet blanket and tied with a Gordian knot and, and buried in a grassy knoll. We, we need to make things, simpler, less, less complex. It's... it's very difficult, so, so very... tiring being careful all the time. I need to make one choice; simplify it all.

He stops pacing for a moment and looks at the audience with his head tilted.

FRANK: I tried to, to buy a gun don't you know; and *(gesturing)* not a big one like a bazooka or a tank like that, just a small one like a gumshoe from the thirties would use, a little one, a, a snub nose, I thought that would be a good entry point and, and it fits into the, the theme of the gun, like an actress named Scarlet being in the Scarlet Letter... And, and I wanted one with only one chamber but they said they only make them with six; I, I didn't want to waste the other five, I wanted to, to fertilise the environment not damage it. Then, then they said I had to write tests and have training and bolt a safe into my floor! I, I didn't want to hurt anyone...it's that bullets encounter lots of friction... no, no gun for me. I go into a convenience store and they have a gun, bigger than the one I wanted; does that, that seem right to you? But there, there are always choices, always options for the things that define us:... toilet paper, food, guns... like Neanderthals we, we just hide it a little better. Too many notes! Time, time for one note: a,a swan song; Gargantua thought that a goose neck was the best for toilet paper, is, isn't that quite interesting?

He begins to walk away, F. R.

FRANK: So, so goodbye my friends, we started at the end I'm afraid, but, but I do want a drink first – no need to journey into the heart of darkness parched.

He walks some more, stops briefly and turns his head to the audience.

FRANK: Just, just so you know, I'm not a nervous man by nature.

FRANK exits R.

End Scene.

Grinding

Inside a coffee house; it is morning outside. There is a table with two chairs C. The chair on the right is empty; the chair on the left is occupied by a woman. LIA is tall and beautiful; she has long hair and a sparkle to her eye. She is wearing a summer's dress and sitting in front of a laptop with a cup of coffee resting next to it. Next to her feet rests her handbag – it is commodious, not overly so; it is green with yellow stitching. Behind the table and off to the right there is possibly a shop counter, on top of which are several cardboard coffee cups. FRANK enters from L. with his bicycle that has three rear wheels. He parks it outside the cafe. He considers fastening it with a chain but doesn't see the point. He enters the coffee house with his usual gait and approaches the counter. LIA notices him casually as any person would notice another entering a room.

FRANK: *(to the fictitious barista; he speaks to her as a regular would)* Good morning Genna. No, no, not the usual today *(thinking and looking at the menu board).* What's a good last drink? I'm, I'm... going away for awhile.

Pause.

FRANK: A latte? That has, has milk doesn't it? I, no,no, I'm lactose intolerant; it'll give me indigestion... what else?

Pause.

FRANK: A chiller? Sounds frightening; it is nice outside, but I don't have my jersey, maybe something warmer? Somalian blend? Have they, they bean torn from their home? Just, just a little conflict joke, no, no need to get steamed up about it.... How about... a Mocachocachino? What's that?

Pause.

FRANK: Also milk! Those, those cows, this is their revenge for, for all the burgers I've eaten. .. black filter coffee please.

He is downcast.

FRANK: Yes *(defeated),* my regular.

FRANK takes a cup from the counter, it has his name on it in small print, and places it back down.

FRANK: *(constantly looking between the cup and the barista)* Needs more sugar, has, has to be a sweet end no one likes a bitter finale; leaves that unpleasant taste in, in your mouth.

From the counter, FRANK takes another sachet of sugar.

FRANK: *(to the barista; triumphantly showing the three packs of sugar)* See! Three packets of sugar! That's one more than usual!

He tears open three sachets of sugar and stirs them into his cup, tastes it, then nods at the barista.

FRANK: Just, just the right amount of sweetness, mind you saccharine would've been more truthful.

He walks away from the counter, about to pass just in front of where the woman is sitting. Her leg possibly nudges the green handbag a touch, into the path of FRANK. FRANK stumbles over the bag spilling his and her coffee on the floor, a bit on the table and a bit on the chair. LIA jumps to her feet out of the way of the coffee but also tries to grab FRANK lightly to stop him from staggering too much. FRANK is distressed.

FRANK: *(rapidly)* I'm, I'm so, so sorry! I, I, I was just, just walking, and, and, and my feet, and, the, the bag, out of nowhere, bicycle, train *(looking at LIA)* Are, are you okay?!

You're, you're not burnt are you? Just, just my luck to burn some, something as radiant as the sun. *(stopping, starts holding onto LIA)* You, you saved me from falling, are you falling? You, you okay? *(looking at table and chair)* Ahh! Coffee, coffee everywhere and not a drop to drink!

FRANK starts trying to mop up the coffee with napkins. He taps all over the chair and table and handbag. LIA is bemused by the scene.

FRANK: I, uh, I, I, I'm sorry, when I get nervous I get all Coleridgey; but, but I'm not a nervous man by nature, you know. *(realising he hasn't checked LIA for spilt coffee; grabbing her limbs and checking them top and bottom)* This, this in hindsight I probably should, should've checked first, I'm, I'm going to feel dreadful for having stained the Vitruvian Woman!

LIA tries to speak. She is enjoying the spectacle.

LIA: I'm-

FRANK: *(interrupting)* Your, your computer!

FRANK hastily searches the laptop for any spills and pads the napkins all around it.

FRANK: This is, is a tragedy! I now know what MacBeth felt like with all that blood!

LIA: The laptop's fine-

FRANK: *(speaking very quickly)* How's your dress? Is it stained? I'll get you a new one; a better one! I, I, don't mean your current dress isn't lovely, I, I mean we'll get you the same dress! A, a, new same dress! A, uhh, same old dress, but new!

LIA and FRANK see the barista approaching with a mop and cleaning implements; they step aside to allow her through.

FRANK: *(to GENNA the barista)* Oh thank god!

FRANK moves to help her but LIA tugs him back. They both briefly watch as she cleans and then leaves.

LIA: *(to GENNA as she is leaving)* Thank you!

FRANK: *(echoing, holding up his fingers)* Thank you!

FRANK suddenly turns to LIA; his hands are waving in front of him.

FRANK: I, I'm so sorry! Everything's okay! We're okay. I, I, I'm okay. Are you okay?

He takes out his wallet.

LIA: I'm alright and the dress is fin-

FRANK: *(removing money and offering it to LIA)* For, for your dress, I have no need for worldly goods.

LIA looks at the money, grinning.

LIA: *(wry)* Do I look like an escort?

FRANK withdraws the money.

FRANK: Yes, yes you do, but, but, but take that as a compliment; escorts are beautiful women you know. And, and men, we want to be PC about this. They, they are like partnership glue; keep marriages happy... until someone finds out, but, but until then they keep everyone happy. So, so, so saying you're an escort is, is high praise! And a testimony to your mighty Aphrodite exquisiteness.

LIA: Aphrodite? That's putting me on Grecian pedestal that no one could ever reach.

FRANK: Then, then they should learn to fly... Bellerophon upon Pegasus.

LIA: *(playing along)* Admirable, but that's using someone else's horsepower. Isn't Aphrodite worthy of a person's own willpower and choice *(slowly)* and desire?

FRANK ponders for a moment then raises his finger excitedly with an answer.

FRANK: Perseus!

LIA: Hermes.

FRANK: I would, would have been your Hephaestus; I, I would have made them just, just to fly to you.

LIA: And then you would have forged ahead with your plan?

FRANK: Yes, as if I, I were flying up Mount Olympus.

LIA: *(smiling)* Creative, but Olympus is just a big rock, I could be a Siren, luring you to your doom.

FRANK: You do have a sweet, irresistible voice, as if it were, were filled with honey! Mellifluous some would say. But you can't be Siren.

LIA: Oh? Why is that?

FRANK: You, you have far too many clothes on – if you were out of that dress I might say you're a,a Siren; they're always nude, nude and have harps! In, in which case that's the kind of tragedy I could get behind, and, and welcome in fact.

LIA: Dresses are very easily overcome.

FRANK: I, uhh...

LIA: You're right though, Sirens do the assaulting; they're not the ones assaulted by coffee.

FRANK: I'll get you coffee!

LIA: You don't-

Before LIA can respond FRANK hurries towards the counter. He stops half way and turns about to ask something.

LIA: Black. Two sugars.

FRANK smiles, nods his head in approbation, and fetches a cup from the counter. While FRANK is purchasing the coffee LIA returns to her seat. FRANK sets the cup down in front of her, purposefully avoiding the green handbag this time, and tries to make LIA's table exactly how it was before he interfered.

FRANK: A cup of coffee for, for the maligned non-Siren.

LIA: *(sitting back)* Thank you. *(sitting slightly forward; poised)* It's strange: why do you say 'cup of coffee'? Not many people say that any more.

LIA takes a sip of her coffee, looking at FRANK.

FRANK: Well it, it grates my eardrums when people say, "I'll have a coffee", it throws me off balance; I, I feel bad for them, what are they going to drink it in? You, you don't see the British going around saying, "I'll have a tea" – they go into their tea rooms and politely request a 'cup of tea', 'cause, because, you're certain then what you'll be drinking your tea out of. And, and it's good to be certain about these things, I don't want to be drinking my coffee out of my hands, or, or a coconut bowl.

LIA: Isn't that a little old fashioned? We don't go around asking for a 'can of coke'; we ask for a coke.

FRANK: That's because everyone's in a rush, rushing everywhere, rush, rush, rush. They, they don't take the time to value the container of their drink; they're just too many types of drinks now, too many choices, for, for them to, to worry about the vessel. Anyway, it's peculiar to hear, "I'll have a coffee", peculiar like meeting a German that laughs, it, it happens but it's strange when it does.

LIA: You have strong feelings about this.

FRANK: I, I, spend a lot of time thinking.

LIA: *(smiles archly)* That's good, not a lot of people do *that* anymore. So where's yours then?

FRANK: My what?

LIA: Your 'cup of coffee'?

FRANK: I, I'd think it's in the back somewhere in a bucket that it wasn't meant for – see what I mean about containers; that's why I say cup, I, I wouldn't want a bucket of coffee.

LIA: It's a good that we live in a very disposable age; I'm sure that there are more cups on the counter.

FRANK: You're, you're sharp for an Escort-Siren, smartest one I've ever met, but I don't want to, to impose; I've already imposed once and it wasn't a sweet affair for you, and if I were a selfish man I'd, I'd say otherwise 'cause you've candy coated that which was otherwise very bland. But, I must-

LIA: It wasn't an imposition; it was an invitation. Or do you need to 'rush, rush, rush' off someplace unknown?

FRANK: *(considering)* I-

LIA holds up her finger to pause FRANK while taking a sip of her coffee.

LIA: But for now, less thinking, more acting.

FRANK motions with his hands towards the counter while continuing to look at LIA. She smirks and nods her head. FRANK goes to purchase another cup of coffee, the cup again has his name on it in small print. While he is procuring the coffee, LIA turns in her chair briefly to look at FRANK's bicycle. She takes another sip of her coffee. FRANK returns, hovers a moment behind the empty chair, LIA nods and gestures with a smile; he sits.

FRANK: You, you know less thinking is a, a very dangerous thing; if I thought any less I wouldn't be here today.

LIA: *(sipping her coffee)* Is that so? Thinking too much can be even more dangerous; you'd never want to get out of bed in the morning otherwise.

FRANK neglects his coffee for now.

FRANK: Exactly! You, you understand it! Not everyone does. How, how do you do it?

LIA: Usually because I want to drink a cup of coffee and write; I enjoy the taste of it while I work. Is that your bicycle out there?

FRANK: The red one?

LIA nods.

LIA: And the one with... four wheels.

FRANK: It, it's for stability and friction. I, I don't want to fall over, I don't like pain, it, it scares me like, like dentists and having your prostate checked.

LIA smiles faintly.

LIA: Pain is scary; doesn't that let us know that we are alive? And couple it with cognition, then does it not highlight our condition of humanity?

FRANK: That's the problem! I'm- we're human, mortal and, and finite and and nothing matters – candles, a glimmer then poof!

LIA: Would it have been better if there was no candle?

FRANK: Yes!

LIA: *(wryly)* That's a bit dark isn't it?

FRANK smiles.

FRANK: That, that's life: dark and gloomy, an albatross around your neck.

LIA: So not knowing life would have been better?

FRANK: Precisely!

LIA: Because ignorance is bliss?

FRANK: You have it! Gorgeous and, and smart!

LIA: If ignorance is a state of mind, and a mind can only be achieved through knowing, then bliss can't be achieved because ignorance, and in turn bliss, could never be known.

LIA sips her coffee.

FRANK: Tha- uhh- we, we wouldn't exist in the first place, and that would be wonderful; nothing would ever be known.

LIA: That couldn't be wonderful, wonder wouldn't exist. Isn't that a shame?

FRANK: No... no... then none of this would've been – no worries, no, no choices, no notes.

LIA: You're lying, a little bit.

FRANK looks at LIA questioningly.

LIA: You flirted with me. 'Gorgeous and smart' - why would you say that if you were so certain? Surely that would be a candle because flirting is a flame of life.

FRANK: It's, it's the last sparks of a dying flame... Did it work?

LIA: Not knowing is bliss.

FRANK: *(teasingly)* You're a, a fiendishly good thinker for a lowly writer.

LIA: I'm a fiendishly good thinker since I'm a writer. Writers are so... perspicacious because we're a little bit of art, a little bit of science; a little bit of everything the world has to offer; also a little bit of nothing.

FRANK takes a sip of his coffee and plays along.

FRANK: Sounds to me as if you're just indecisive.

LIA: Coming from a scarred existentialist, isn't that *wonderful* irony?

FRANK: Look, existentialists would, wouldn't be so, so frightened if we knew what happened when candles go out; we'd be able to think about that, and, and it's a good thing we're all cowards or there would be none of us left. But we're very mysterious, we're unknowable, we're, we're too lofty for mere mortal minds to comprehend.

LIA: I know all about you.

FRANK: About me?

LIA: Yes, philosophers – *(slowly)* they think too much.

FRANK: What makes you believe I'm a philosopher?

LIA: *(grinning)* Only two people think this much: philosophers and academics

FRANK: Sometimes they're one and the same.

LIA: Sometimes, but you're a philosopher who hates academia, I know.

FRANK: Care to, to enlighten me into your, your clairvoyant, mystical, truth, sooth-saying mind?

LIA: Nope; enlightenment needs light, there're no candles in here; it's frightfully dark.

They both take a sip of coffee.

LIA: If I told you, would you get out of bed for a cup of coffee in the morning?

FRANK: If, if you're going to torment me into finding point to existence, then, then I must decline.

LIA: There is no point; there's only coffee.

FRANK: I teach undergraduates all day long, and, none, none of them are as wily as you.

LIA: That's because I'm a Siren; I know how to play with minds.

FRANK: Anymore of this and I'm going to start believing it, and, and we all know how it ends for those sailors, and, and there's lots of agony before they go under, and I, I don't like pain.

LIA: Are you nervous around a Siren?

FRANK: No... yes, no; I'm not a nervous man by nature.

LIA: You stutter a little.

FRANK: You're *(gesticulating),* you're very observant – have a sharp eye and, ear in fact. I like to think of it as having too many words in my head and, and my mouth can't say them fast enough like a urethra that's too narrow and it *(hands shooting out)* spurts every now and then.

LIA giggles.

LIA: It's true, you are a man; these things happen. Did you know that a woman's urethra has a larger diameter than men's?

FRANK: I, I believe it, they always have a lot to say and can get it out pretty quickly when, when they have to – I have a landlady that never stops peeing.

LIA: You're interesting. I like you.

FRANK: You, you picked a bad day to take a liking to this, this sputtering flame.

LIA: Did I? Then before it's extinguished altogether, what's its name?

FRANK: It's a, a mystery like the point to coffee.

LIA: At least coffee has a name

FRANK: But to know something's name is, is to have power over it; you could call on that power at any time, and, and maybe for evil!

LIA: True power is subtle and unseen; summoning it through your name would be far too obvious and, besides, you're a philosopher, good and evil can only exist in contrast; your malice could be my benevolence.

FRANK: I have a,a lot of trouble seeing you as a force for good with all the *(dramatically gesturing LIA's body)* and charm *(gesturing to her head)* and, and hair! We, we men are weak you know; we're easily taken advantage of; we're just newborn babes and we all want exactly the same thing.

LIA: *(playful smile)* A warm place to call home?

FRANK: Mamillae!

LIA: Breasts.

FRANK: Boobs!

LIA: You're a fan then?

FRANK: Before... before ill-fated cognisance, the biggest.

LIA: *(slyly)* Until about two years of age for you then?

FRANK: Yes, and, and that brief time in my teenage years; it's all I could think about, those, those were happier times!

LIA: We're very simple creatures aren't we?

FRANK: We hide it well... sometimes.

LIA: The same as your name.

FRANK: There's mystery and, and intrigue and excitement in not knowing my name; as, as, soon as you know it you'll be off and then I'll have to get on with my day.

LIA: Would you? Is that a good or a bad thing?

FRANK: I'm a philosopher, everything, everything is in contrast: what you may think is, is heinous, I believe is succour.

LIA sips her coffee.

LIA: If you presume to state what I think is heinous then you've established a correlation with what a societal norm may be; for by 'you', you assume the 'other' and by 'I' you assume yourself as an outlier.

FRANK: That's far too postmodern for me, be, besides, I try not to think that much anymore; make things simpler.

LIA: It *is* a dangerous business. Although, you're lying to me again: I find it hard to believe that you don't think a lot.

FRANK: It's, it's a new philosophy! A,a sudden consolation of philosophy if you will. And by lunch it will be science.

LIA: Will it?

FRANK: Yes, most assuredly. And, and, anyway I still have my cup of coffee to drink, and your company is not entirely... a hindrance to my grand schemes.

LIA: Oh? I'm pleased to hear that. We won't forget though who the subject and object were of your little, audacious, *brew-tal* assault.

FRANK: Well, uhhh, *(thinking)* well my name could be Eugene, and then you'd, you'd head for the hills before I was done, like, like running from the Mongolian hordes.

LIA: They had horses; there was no running from them. And I like Eugene; it's a strong name; it's a name that would build character. But you're not a Eugene.

FRANK sips his coffee.

FRANK: And how do you know I'm not a Eugene? I, I have very strong character I'll have you know, it's, it's so strong in fact that, that when I walk down corridors everyone always whispers, "who is that man?" See, they're, they're flabbergasted by my character that is so strong - I could be a Eugene.

LIA: No... no. You're more of a... Jeffry, as if you were made of rubber bands; bouncy and elastic so you can't get hurt, and nothing quite sticks to you.

FRANK: Jeffry?! Jeffry sounds like, like a name that doesn't think enough.

LIA: Oh? So you do think?

FRANK: No... yes, no. More than a Jeffry! I, I think more than basically Jeffry; my, my views are not quite so stretchy. They're firm, and unyielding – Gibraltar-esque.

LIA: A very unwavering name then?

FRANK: Yes!

LIA: Isolated and protected?

FRANK: Yes, a name of one!

LIA: You're not being very *Frank* about your name.

FRANK: You, you are a soothsayer! Is, is this a consequence of, of all the sulphur and ash you, you inhaled while you were cavorting with the, the gods up there on, on Olympus; I hear Ares can be quite the, the life of the party.

LIA: *(pointing)* It's written on your cup.

FRANK: Occam's razor!

LIA: I never assume, don't you think that's a good philosophy for life... Doctor Frank?

FRANK: Mister.

LIA: Where's your title?

FRANK: I don't have one, just plain old mister.

LIA: Don't you have your PhD? Aren't all philosophers meant to be doctors these days?

FRANK: *(flippantly)* I, I never started it; I finished my, my Masters on Kierkegaard and, and suddenly after that I didn't see the point anymore.

LIA: Reading philosophy is a very perilous affair, you may not come out the other side alive.

FRANK: That's, that's what I was hoping.

LIA: Your day is still young.

FRANK: And our cups of coffee are almost done.

LIA: There's a lot more coffee just behind you.

FRANK: That coffee is for someone else; someone, someone, less thinking, who wants more coffee.

LIA drains the last of her cup.

LIA: *(smiling)* Then please fetch me another cup.

FRANK is about to protest. LIA holds up her finger.

LIA: Uh ah. I feel as if almost having my dress and laptop destroyed by your cup of coffee deserves at least two in return; then we can call it even, don't you think?

FRANK: *(acquiescing)* I try not to...

LIA: *(smiling)* Now I need to go and have a conversation with your landlady.

LIA stands and walks past FRANK. As she passes him, she momentarily places her hand on his shoulder before continuing to stride just in front of the counter. After a few steps she pauses and turns around. FRANK is still reeling from the touch; he turns as she starts speaking.

LIA: I'll be back quicker than a man.

FRANK: That's only because you're, you're biologically gifted!

LIA grins and exits R. After a moment FRANK stands up, takes LIA's old cup of coffee to the counter and orders another cup. He returns to the table and places the cup of coffee next to her laptop. The laptop catches his eye. FRANK looks around him suspiciously with a sly grin on his face. Deciding that the coast is more or less clear, his finger swipes at the touchpad to remove the laptop's screensaver. He looks at the screen. Enter LIA R. She has a sprightly spring to her step. As FRANK sees her he dashes for his chair, hopefully the world none the wiser. LIA grins as she walks past him and sits down.

LIA: Thank you kindly for cup of coffee.

FRANK: You're very welcome, it's, it's the least I can do.

LIA takes a sip of her coffee. Shortly afterwards FRANK takes a sip of his. LIA begins to speak while FRANK is still drinking.

LIA: Something strikes me as odd.

FRANK quickly lowers his cup and tries to clear his throat; he thinks she is on to his prowling.

FRANK: And, and, what's that?

LIA: You haven't asked me my name.

FRANK: *(slightly relieved)* You're, you're a wonderful Siren and I mean that with the utmost sincerity, and, and you're most attractive creature I've ever seen and you have a voice that, that makes me want to listen to your audiobooks all day long. But, but I just don't see the point-

LIA: It's Lia.

FRANK: That's beautiful: short and sweet.

LIA: Sort of like you.

FRANK: *(smiles)* I'm, I'm not that short.

LIA: *(knowingly grins)* Aren't you now?

Momentary pause.

FRANK: ... thank you for telling me your name.

LIA: Why? It's not going to matter after we leave.

FRANK: No, no... it won't I suppose.

FRANK shakes his cup; it's empty. LIA notices this but doesn't say anything. She takes a sip of her own.

FRANK: What were you, you writing earlier?

LIA: I was writing a play.

FRANK: I can, can see you as a playwright, you have the aesthetic aura about you, like, like Gaudi's Casa Batllo exuding Art Nouveau or, or a Gulag being all cold and and concrete... and cold! It, it all just fits together so well! You, you in your summer dress, and being so at ease with this lightness, this sense of being at-ease, glowing from your face, and the elegant manner of your, your posture - it, it declaims erudition! You, you look like a playwright, is what I mean to say.

LIA: *(archly)* A Siren and a Gulag? I'm positively imprisoning.

FRANK: You, you have to choose what to focus on.

FRANK gestures the outline of LIA's body.

FRANK: I, I'll focus on the art – the, the undulating geometries, I'm a, a liberal, western, non-Pollock traditionalist. And you'd never, never see me going out for a drink with Solzhenitsyn; I'd imagine he'd be a bit of a, a frigid man.

LIA: That would be Aleksandr's loss, if only he were like The Great, he would know what brilliant lands are ripe for the taking.

FRANK tries to hide his merriment by taking a drink of his coffee, but he realises it's empty after picking it up and places it back down, leaving his smile unhidden. LIA takes a sip of her coffee.

FRANK: What's your play about?

LIA: Two people meeting in a coffee shop.

FRANK: That's, that's awfully prophetic.

LIA: I am a clairvoyant.

FRANK: What happens to these people?

LIA: They fall in love.

FRANK looks down at the table, seemingly a touch despondent. LIA sips more coffee.

FRANK: He's not coming you know?

LIA: Who isn't?

FRANK: The, the person you're waiting for.

LIA: What makes you think I'm waiting for someone?

FRANK: Look, look at you, you're beautiful and, and poised, and, and witty; you're exactly who I'd be if, if I were a woman, and, and I'd be waiting for someone a lot more Casanovian the, the the, the non-womanly version of me. You, you have to be waiting for someone else.

LIA: As opposed to sitting around waiting to have coffee spilt on me?

FRANK: You're waiting for that handsome man to fall in love with.

LIA: That's only a play.

FRANK: I, I think it's more than that.

LIA: Do you now? What makes you say that?

FRANK: You're, you're far too lovely to be talking to me, this, this is unprecedented; an anomaly; I, I don't trust it, someone's going to come along at any moment; some, some chiselled man that's, that's a,a paediatric neurosurgeon that, that works pro bono in a economically underprivileged neighbourhood and, and who goes to Africa every three months and, an, cures cholera with the left hand and summons wine with the right; and he has lots of money and everything he does, he, he does to better the less-thinking human race and, and steal you away from this table.

LIA: Sounds as if he's a wonderful man, even if a little dull; a little boring; a little predictable; a little cliché. Well, besides, you are leaving anyway, so that chair is going to be open for him.

FRANK: Yes! I, I am resolved on that now.

LIA: Are you? That's a very Gibraltar-esque stance you're taking; very bold. Certain it's the right decision?

FRANK: Yes... no, no doubt!

LIA sips her coffee.

LIA: What makes you think I'm waiting for a man?

FRANK: Pardon?

LIA: As a philosopher of the classics, you of all people should know that's a narrow view. Why can't I be waiting for a woman?

FRANK: I, uhhh-

LIA: You saw my computer's wallpaper?

FRANK is dreadfully embarrassed that she caught him.

LIA: Snooping is a part of who we are; we're nosey and curious; if it were truly a secret I would've had a password.

FRANK: It, it was like staring at two Sirens; they're usually two of them you know. You, you both are very pretty in that photo.

LIA: *(nostalgic)* She was, wasn't she?

FRANK: Were the two of you *(attempting and failing to gesture intimacy and lovers)*

LIA: *(smiling)* Lovers? Partners? Yes... yes we were.

FRANK: *(smiling weakly)* That, that explains it.

LIA: And what's that?

FRANK: Why you're talking to me; you're, you're... – my hair is, is too short and, and I lack breasts, well except that one time years ago.

LIA: Lesbian? Sometimes; with Cassandra, every day we were together. Sexuality is a fluid state; too many people think it's a solid.

Pause.

LIA: What do you think of it?

FRANK: Love? Sexuality? It's, it's like it's a, a *(excited)* vessel and, and if you Wildian love the person inside and the person outside, it, it makes no difference if, if they're convex or, or, Alexander, or concave! And, and this time I mean the other Alexander, that, that Great, I know my classics.

LIA: I like that; it's geometrically sound and dynamic! Isn't science great?

FRANK: Science is, is great! But science tempered by philosophy, that, that is sublime!

LIA: This is why I like you, Frank.

FRANK: 'Cause of my, my dashing good looks? As, as if I were a Picture of Dorian Gray, *(gesticulating)* before all the, the fornicating and smoking and drugs and, and murder, and what not.

LIA: *(tongue in cheek, grinning)* That doesn't hurt, but also your brain... it just *(pausing)* works.

FRANK is taken by the flattery. He looks down; LIA sips her coffee. After a few moments FRANK looks at LIA again.

FRANK: What... what happened to her?

LIA: She died.

FRANK: You, you don't often hear that anymore.

LIA: I say it because it's true. Passing away, it sounds too peaceful. She died.

FRANK: How-

LIA: It doesn't matter, does it? Choose a tragedy: accident, murder, suicide, cancer – they all end up the same, agony, long or short, then gone.

FRANK: So, so how do you do it then? How do you sit here looking so enchanting when, when there's misery everywhere. A mall of misery; lots, lots of misery to choose from. I, I don't understand.

LIA: I work. I write. I almost have coffee spilt on me.

FRANK: It's, it's that easy?

LIA: No. I was similar to you once upon a time.

FRANK: *(trying to insert levity)* I, I knew you were a princess from a story I read once.

LIA smiles.

FRANK: How'd you get over this similarity?

LIA: I wrote a play.

FRANK: You did?!

LIA: I did. No one came to see it; apparently it was depressing.

FRANK laughs.

FRANK: There is only coffee?

LIA: Only coffee; and if you're lucky enough, a *cup* of coffee.

FRANK: I, I don't think that's enough. Still... still so many notes.

LIA: That's the danger of it.

There is a pause between the two of them. They're both looking at each other; there are faint smiles. FRANK's visage becomes pensive, sad. LIA takes another sip of her coffee.

FRANK: I, I... brought a gun today.

LIA: Did you? Is it in your pants?

FRANK is taken aback by her responses.

FRANK: What?-

LIA: *(gesturing)* "This is my rifle; this is my gun. This is for fighting; this is for fun."

FRANK is still mute in surprise.

LIA: It's nothing, a little ditty my father used to sing.

FRANK: I-

LIA: You brought a pistol then? I don't see enough space anywhere for a rifle.

LIA sips her coffee.

FRANK: Ye.. yes, a, a pistol-

LIA: From the way you're sitting it must be small one – the pistol, not the gun *(smirking).* I'm thinking a *(pausing)* thirty-eight special, and because you seem quite at ease; and sitting forwards and then leaning backwards, it's a snub-nose.

FRANK: *(reeling)* How, how, do you know so much about gun- pistols?

LIA: In my line of work I get to learn about all sorts of things.

FRANK: *(trying to laugh)* Did, did you write a play about it?

LIA: No, not this. *(almost playfully)* Are you uncomfortable?

FRANK: Uhh, ah, not, not at all; I'm the, the very picture of calm and, and equanimity and, and serenity, like, like a pawn on a, a chessboard.

FRANK humorously squirms in his chair.

FRANK: I'uh, I... I'm not, not a nervous man by nature!

LIA: That's good. Then why are you wriggling around?

FRANK: It's, it's just not the, the sort of reaction, I, I was expecting

LIA: I see. What sort of reaction were you after?

FRANK: Well, you, you know, a, a, bit of theatricality, bit of shock and horror would've been nice; you know, some, something a little more traditional!

LIA: Has anything about our meeting been traditional?

FRANK: Well, uhhh, the, the coffee shop, that's, that's pretty traditional, all we need now is, is Paris.

LIA: *(grinning wryly)* Apart from the coffee shop?

FRANK: Not, not particularly.

LIA: Then you shouldn't have expected a traditional reaction; you set yourself up for failure.

FRANK: I, I see your logic; you'd, you'd think that since I, have the pistol I'd have the, the upper hand in this revelation.

LIA: *(nodding)* Oh, but you do, don't you see? I'm very shocked and horrified by what you just told me.

FRANK: You, you know it's bad luck to, to mock a man with, with a gun.

LIA: Pistol.

FRANK: Pistol!

FRANK shakes his head in disbelief.

LIA: Why'd you bring a pistol?

FRANK: Well, I, I was thinking about shooting myself but the, the histrionics of it all seem a, a, touch lost now.

LIA: I'm sorry. If you'd like to go ahead I promise I'll be most distraught after the fact.

FRANK: *(waving his finger about)* I, I'm still thinking about it.

LIA: As we've said, that's a very dangerous thing.

FRANK: I, I am resolved to, to do this; you, you should go.

LIA: You are? Good.

FRANK: Good?! Wha.. bu...!

LIA: You have a busy day; you need to get on with this. Let me just pack up my notebook, I don't want it getting messed on.

LIA sits forward momentarily as if she is about to pack away her computer; she is only teasing. She sits back.

LIA: Before I go. Why do it in a coffee shop?

FRANK throws up his hand in exhaustion and collapses onto his forearms on the table.

FRANK: it, it seemed convenient. I had to make a choice, so, so many choices. I, I thought maybe here at least some, somebody would remember me a spell longer: "did you hear about that man in, in the coffee shop; he, he died like Titus Lucretius Carus!"

LIA: No one knows who that is.

FRANK's head collapses onto the table.

LIA: Besides.

He languidly lifts his head and posture back up a bit and looks at LIA.

LIA: Wouldn't that be awfully messy? And a little rude; the barista over there has already cleaned up your mess once today, are you really going to make her do it again?

FRANK: *(sitting back and throwing his hands around)* I, I hadn't thought about the, the great, big mess I'd leave! I, I, I apologise for, for my own suicide!

LIA: See, now not thinking enough is dangerous. She has lots of student loans. We spoke earlier, she's an international student, she's having a tough time studying abroad; are you really going to make her life that much worse?

FRANK: *(shaking head)* You, you'd think I could be a, a tad selfish when, when it came to my own suicide.

LIA: I thought philosophers tried to think about the greater good, no?

FRANK leans on his head again.

FRANK: *(grumbling)* Platitudinous Aristotle... Socratic... Siren! *(exasperated)* what a bloody mess.

LIA: Exactly: a bloody mess. Do it on a bridge or in a forest; least you'll feed something.

FRANK: Nothing would eat me; I'm, I'm too stringy and, and if ravens plucked out my eyes they, they'd see the world differently and also throw themselves off a bridge. The, the world being rid of me is, is the greatest good I can think of. I, I'm the truest humanitarian by removing myself from this, this, animated anabolic reaction of, of living.

Pause.

LIA: So are you still going to do it? Or have you *(circling with her finger)* revolved?

FRANK: Yes, yes it ends today! The, the line must be drawn here! Not one step further!

LIA: That's very resolute. It's too bad though, I was about to ask you home for a cup of tea. But blustery suicide risks tend to dampen such social trappings.

FRANK: *(slightly shocked)*

LIA: You're interesting, and this conversation is stimulating. Humans, we're very selfish creatures; I want more of your stretched conceits and... surreptitious, stumbling solicitude, and by that what I truly mean is: *(smugly)* I want that new dress that's owed to me.

FRANK: Ahh! But you said your dress was fine.

LIA: I could be lying due to social niceties; women see the finer details that your species often misses.

FRANK: I, I would agree with that; I, I've been saying for years I'd make a, a much better woman than a man; they, they are superior creatures in every regard.

LIA: A modern, Mary Wollstonecraft, are you?

FRANK nods his head, proudly. LIA smiles and takes a final sip of her coffee and shakes the cup.

FRANK: It, it seems you're out of coffee.

LIA: You know, your cup of coffee has been empty for awhile now.

FRANK: I could buy us another round.

LIA: You've more than made up for earlier with two brews. If I had another cup, pressuring things might start to happen.

FRANK: Tachycardia?

LIA: Your landlady may visit me again.

FRANK: She is a pesky creature.

LIA: Always gets you at the worst times.

Pause. FRANK is reflective.

FRANK: Why... why me? After Pistols, and, forests, and, and bridges.

LIA: How many men are there with a bicycle that has four wheels? You're unique; I like unique things; they're good for sitting around with.

FRANK: Unique things are, are often fragile, like, like fine China.

LIA: I'm not a bull.

FRANK: You're far too delicate.

LIA: A spider?

FRANK: Yes! Just less hairy.

LIA: *(smiling)* I don't live far away. Come' we can walk together and hold your bicycle on either side, for stability.

FRANK: You, you know I'm still going to, to do it; this doesn't mean that's changed. Like, a, a heroic epic I have to have one last hoorah, one more adventure, more drink before

going into the grey. And, and it's not even noon yet so, so there's still plenty of time to find a forest.

LIA: Afterwards I'll even help you plant a tree.

They both begin to stand.

FRANK: *(pointing)* You're very strange! Elusive, like a little brown bird.

LIA: Hidden until I want to be seen?

FRANK: The bane of a birdwatcher!

LIA: I don't flash like other birds; I keep their interests tied up until I'm ready to be identified.

FRANK: Mystery creating intrigue!

LIA: I am a playwright; it's what I do.

LIA and FRANK walk towards his bicycle. She regards his shoes.

LIA: Why do you wear white trainers?

FRANK: So that I'm, I'm always ready when someone tries to knock me down; people are, are always bumping into each other, jostling, and, and knocking down! Also to, to know when I need to clean them, so they're, they're always ready to parry at any moment.

LIA: Isn't that a little counterintuitive considering you were going to shoot yourself?

FRANK: I, I wanted to be gone not in pain; you know I don't like pain.

LIA: We could be bumped while we're walking.

FRANK: May... maybe I could tolerate just, just a block or two of pain. You know for, for such a cafe goddess – as, as long as I don't end up like that, that Prometheus fellow and, and the pain and, and the eternal torment.

LIA: I can promise you that I'm no raven.

They smile.

FRANK: Tea.

LIA: Tea!

Each of them takes one side of the bicycle. They exist S. R.

End Scene.

Brewing

Inside LIA's home. There is a small coffee table and two home-craft leather chairs around it. Enter FRANK and LIA from L. FRANK wheels in his bicycle and deposits it just inside the entrance to the room.

FRANK: Now are you, you sure I can bring it inside I, I , don't want to impose...

LIA: *(teasingly)* You stand on etiquette to bring a bicycle in a home but weren't too concerned with depositing your brain matter all over the cafe?

FRANK: No one wants to steal my, my brain matter.

LIA: No one wants to steal your four-wheeled bicycle.

FRANK: They, they might! They might think it's a new fade, hip, trendy; I'm, I'm leading a trend of vehicular stability; like Twiggy leading a generation of anorexics!

LIA: It's going to be a short trend; its frontrunner is departing soon.

FRANK: Some, sometimes the brightest flames are the, the ones that are short lived.

LIA: Are they? Flames don't choose to extinguish themselves, a natural course does that.

FRANK: You're very persistent about, about my bridge designs.

LIA: I'm like Gibraltar

FRANK and LIA share a smile, but there is a touch of tension beneath it.

LIA: Have a seat; make yourself at home.

FRANK: Thank you.

LIA is still standing as FRANK takes a seat.

LIA: Do you really have a pistol?

LIA sits. She sees FRANK look down at the floor ashamed.

FRANK: *(guiltily)* Maybe it's, it's like Schrodinger's Cat, until one of us sees I both do and don't have a firearm.

LIA: *(grinning at use of word)* You're a thought experiment then?

FRANK: *(softly)* Only because, you, you've thought of me...

Pause.

LIA: You know, I've never brought an armed man home before.

FRANK hesitantly makes eye contact.

FRANK: Do, do you bring lots of men home?

LIA: Only when I'm working; I work from home often.

FRANK: Oh.

LIA: We discuss what we need to; they're in and out. But that's only business.

LIA jumps up as if she has forgotten something.

LIA: We did say we were going to have tea. Would you like a *cup*?

FRANK: (*smiling)* Oh, yes please.

LIA: Black with honey?

FRANK: How, how did you know that's how I like it?

LIA: Because that's how I like it.

The very essence of the words brings a long forgotten joy to FRANK; he sits back in his chair, oddly content and comfortable. His annunciation briefly reflects it; he closes his eyes. LIA walks offstage R. Clinking noise is heard while she prepares the tea.

FRANK: How did you know I was a philosopher jaded by academia?

LIA: *(from offstage)* Apart from the augurs I read and my innate clairvoyance?

FRANK: Yes, apart from those.

LIA: Genna the international student barista told me.

FRANK: Genna... of course she did. Why would you ask about me? How did you even, even know who I was?

LIA: Simple. I had seen you in the coffee house before; you looked interesting and I wanted to get to know you.

FRANK: I don't ever recall seeing you there; a woman like you, I would have noticed.

LIA: You've been too lost in thought to notice me.

LIA returns with two cups of tea. She hands the right hand one to FRANK.

FRANK: Thank you very much.

LIA smiles and nods.

LIA: You know that chair was open and waiting for someone.

FRANK takes a sip of his very hot tea.

FRANK: You were? I knew, it, it was all too good to be true.

LIA: You.

FRANK: Me?

LIA sips her tea.

LIA: I said you were interesting when I had seen you before. I sat facing the counter and when you walked past I was hoping you would say hello.

FRANK: *(embarrassed)* ... I tripped over your bag...

FRANK sips his tea.

LIA: Happy coincidence.

LIA sips her tea.

FRANK: Coincidental happiness.

FRANK sips his tea.

LIA: *(smiling)* Pardon?

FRANK: *(nostalgic)* Something I used to say to, to somebody I... once knew.

They both sip their tea.

FRANK: Why... why me?

LIA: *(with a sincerity that surprises herself, almost laughing)* Your walk; your gait at first; it said so much about your character; I was intrigued. Then we spoke: you're funny and witty and smart, and your mannerisms, they're adorable; and just different from all the others.

FRANK is grinning from ear to ear and avoids eye contact; he focuses on drinking his tea and takes a decent mouthful.

FRANK: This, this tea is lovely, 'cause, 'cause you made it, and that would make any tea the, the Ceylon of the world. And, and I love this, this *(sniffing, eyes blinking, slowly)* uh... this, this... added scent with the... the, honey. What is that? It's, it's... a hint of chamomile, yes?

LIA: Almost. Try again.

FRANK inhales another bouquet of the tea and then takes a good mouthful of it, swishing it around.

FRANK: It... it... *(speech slowing)* tastes like... almonds...

LIA: *(smiling)* Does it now?

FRANK: It... I... uh....

FRANK's head collapses in the chair; he drops his cup of tea. LIA takes another sip of hers while watching FRANK.

Fade to black.

End Scene.

Extraction

The interior of LIA's room has remained the same except for two oddities: the coffee table has been moved U. C. and has a vast array of knives and other torturous implements neatly spread out on top of it; off to the R. is a large wooden construction angled at approximately seventy degrees to the horizontal. Trussed up on this wooden board is FRANK. He is topless and asleep; he has a red ball-gag

in his mouth. Adjacent the knives is FRANK's thirty-eight special. LIA is standing over her keen instruments, honing one of the blades. After a few moments FRANK slowly begins to regain consciousness.LIA continues to sharpen her knife. His eyes finally focus and he sees LIA; he tries to speak. Suddenly he realises there is something stopping him from speaking; he becomes aware of the ball-gag; then his legs; then his arms; then his entire state. He tries to yell out but it only materialises as a soft mumble. In the background the two leather chairs still sit. LIA looks at him for a second then returns to her knife.

LIA: Comfortable?

Mumble.

LIA: I know you must be; it's not often these days we get tied up with such good company.

Mumble.

LIA: It's a peculiar thing is it not? To be... thinking you're seeing and experiencing something knowable, when in fact the reality of it all is, different.

Mumble.

LIA: *I* think it's peculiar.

LIA puts down the knife and dances her fingers over several others.

LIA: Maybe it isn't? I do suppose it is quite fitting with what you wanted from the start; this way we'll both get what we want; yours just not as quickly as you had wished.

Her hand hover over the pistol, her fingers twinkling. She picks up the pistol, points it at FRANK. His eyes go wide. Mumble. She beams and tries to suppress a giggle; she throws the pistol backstage.

LIA: I'm not that quick. 'This is my pistol; this is my knife.'

The knife LIA is holding flits through the air.

LIA: "That is for shooting; this is for fun."

Mumble.

LIA: It's frightfully rude to mumble like that. I don't like you mumbling; I like you bleeding.

LIA walks to FRANK; their eyes constantly locked. She runs the tip of the blade from his crotch to his chest and then suddenly looks at the knife. She walks back to the table.

LIA: This isn't my fun knife, no.

She delicately chooses a thicker blade.

LIA: Thickness means a lot to a woman, you know? It's all about pressure you see: the thicker it is the less effort it takes; it has a certain smoothness to it. But then when you do increase the power the results are climactic.

Mumble!

LIA: *(strongly)* I told you I don't like you when you're mumbling!

LIA sniggers and smiles sheepishly.

LIA: It was all so easy pushing a handbag in your way. A handbag – your world brought down by a woman's vessel, isn't that beautiful?

She grows darker.

LIA: Do you realise how difficult you made it today? Do you, as a man, have any remorse for the pain you put me through?

Mumbles.

LIA: *(cringes)* All those silly repeated words and blathering on with meaningless metaphors. If I weren't so sedulous I would have let you done yourself in right there! *(mocking)* But, but, but I have work to do; a painter needs to paint! You're going to be my greatest tapestry; my greatest canvas to date!

LIA almost as if she is dancing with herself.

LIA: I am not maniacal; I'm not revealing it all to you, but you have to know what you're doing for me – the clay has to know what it's being moulded into; it gives purpose to the clay; clay is there to be moulded! You're my fucking muse; you must know that; know that you're my chaffing muse! And I need to fucking cut you out!

LIA stops twirling and turns to FRANK.

LIA: I will cut you and you will bleed, and it will be beautiful. And with your bloody fountain I will paint a never ending smile on your countenance and you will beam down at me as I reveal from your body the sculpture beneath; and then be resplendent and beloved once again. And then we will dance and our steps will sing out a carnal ecstasy that will show us the way; and we will walk that stepped path, and it will be divine!

She adopts a sultry demeanour.

LIA: *(whispering in ear; emphasising her tongue)* I will transcend you.

Suppressed mumble. Pause.

LIA becomes sprightly again. She taps the flat of the blade against the red ball gag.

LIA: *(sing-song)* Four pounds of pressure is all it takes – four pounds! What weak, pathetic, unimportant creatures we are. Four pounds!

Mumble.

LIA: That! Stop that! Your mumbling is bad enough, but that incessant stuttering of yours today! It almost did my head in! 'Too, too, too, too many words' – babble, babble, babble is all that is! *(yelling)* Speak properly!

LIA rips off the ball gag.

FRANK: *(frantic; implausibly quickly)* In Hartford, Hereford and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly happen!

LIA: Better! With so few words left you might as well pronounce them properly.

FRANK is frantic.

FRANK: Why, why, why are you doing this?

LIA: Why? What a peculiar question. Why? Because I want a new chair. That's pretty obvious at this point. Come now, Frank, I thought you were smart.

FRANK: What?

LIA: What? Why? Where? When? Are you in school again? Are these the only silly things you can say now? Where's that brain of yours? I'd very much like to see it one last time. Don't leave me unsatisfied, sweety, I promise I won't leave you without the same... satisfaction.

FRANK – 160bpm.

FRANK: ... chair?

LIA: You... you really don't know?

LIA is genuinely shocked.

LIA: That's so quaint!

LIA does a little twirl and then runs over to one of the leather chairs and sits, daintily. Her free hand strokes the fabric.

LIA: With your blood I shall paint my soul in red – a canvas brought to life by a thousand shades of you! But with your skin, your glorious skin, that I will take from you slowly and as I do so my pots of paint shall runneth over! But with your skin, that supple body wrap embracing us, with that, oh with that, I will treat you kindly like you have never known care before; I will stroke it and I will massage it *(more aggressive)* and I will stretch it! And I will pull it taught! And I will puncture it! And I will nail it! And I will transform you into a beauty beyond this mortal veil! And you will be the greatest in my collection – *(gesturing the two chairs)* a throne to rival your two servants! And I will sit on you every day and we will be forever close! Forever, intimate! For is that not what all men want?

LIA runs her hand down her hips and over her groin.

LIA: Bonded with each other! For eternity you will always be able to see that gateway you and your ilk crave *(softly)* but you'll never be able to enter it – a carnal, tormenting... fleshy prison. My magnum opus.

LIA stands and strides purposefully towards FRANK, knife at the ready.

LIA: Let me make you wet with desire.

LIA draws close to him; breathing on him; like an animal sniffing, seeking the perfect place to bite.

FRANK: No! No! No! No! No! Stop! I don't want to die!

She withdraws her head, slightly.

LIA: What?!

FRANK: *(near sobbing)* I don't want to die!

LIA: You don't want to die?

FRANK: No! ... Yes! ... No! ... I, I don't know!

LIA: *(shouting)* You don't know?! What is it that's confusing?!

FRANK: There’re too many notes! I can’t bear the sound!

LIA: Why is there noise?! I am the only voice here!

FRANK: My partner! My love of my life, she died! Years ago! Dead! Dead! Dead! And, and what have I become? What?! A, a, shell?! I, I can’t do it anymore, I can’t choose the toilet paper we used to buy! I, I can’t decide the food we used to order! I’m, I’m not, not that strong! I’m done! I’m finished! Let. Me. Go!

LIA: I can take that all away! One little slip!

FRANK: Do it!

LIA: That’s what you want?!

LIA inches closer.

FRANK: No! I... I-

LIA: I- I- I- what?!

FRANK: I just want to be happy again!

LIA: Happiness is a twist away!

FRANK: Not... not like this!

LIA alters the position of the knife, angling it, making it appear more menacing.

LIA: Then how?

FRANK: I- I, don't know!

LIA: Come on Frank, you're a clever man, a bit of a prick too *(she pricks him with the knife),* but clever - what do academics call it? Othering? Fucking other me Frank, what do you know about your death?

FRANK: *(a sudden yell)* It terrifies me!

LIA: And life Frank?!

Silent pause.

LIA: We're playing a game of honesty here, we all know the outcome...

She moves in closer; uncomfortably so.

LIA: I'm your priest, Frank, this is my collar!

LIA locks the fingers of her free hand around FRANK's throat.

LIA: And you have my keen attention. Confess! What of life?!

FRANK: It terrifies me more!

Suddenly LIA kisses him deeply on the lips. FRANK's eyes are wide. LIA's hand moves from his throat to his crotch.

LIA: Are there no pleasures left in it?

LIA strokes. FRANK is in a stunned silence.

LIA: Which can you change *(emphasising his name),* Frank? Life or death?

FRANK: Neither! I tried!

LIA slaps him.

LIA: Which one Frank?

FRANK: *(momentarily defiant)* Rhetorical!

LIA starts clamping his throat again, hard.

LIA: Entertain me!

FRANK: *(struggling)* Life!

LIA releases her hold, then playfully plants a quick kiss on his lips. She does a twirl, her knife orbits her like a wondrous moon.

LIA: Don't you see, Frank? *(euphoric)* I'm your heuristic heroine - am I not so gallant? Oh, don't worry, I won't compel you to answer that one, I know I am your divinity...

FRANK: *(at the edge)* What the fuck are you?!

LIA, still euphoric, presses the flat of the knife against her lips.

LIA: Don't you know, Frank? I'm an angel, an angel that loves leather chairs; an angel that loves art; an angel that strokes with only the purest of paint.

FRANK: *(trying to fix madness)* You're not an angel!

LIA turns to face FRANK.

LIA: *(shouting)* Then there is nothing you don't know, is there?!

LIA uses her knife to draw an imaginary circle over FRANK's exposed belly.

LIA: Now we are full circle Frank, and circles are boring! Watch: I can prick you.

LIA pricks FRANK again with the knife.

LIA: I can kiss you.

LIA kisses FRANK.

LIA: I can choke you.

LIA chokes FRANK for a few seconds.

LIA: See, dear Frank, it's all been done before.

LIA draws an imaginary, vertical line down FRANK's chest.

LIA: Let's make a line; a different narrative for us; go into your abyss with a little bit of truth. *(whispering)* I'll be the only one to ever hear it... See, I am your angel. *(loudly)* You just wanted to be happy Frank? How do you want to be happy?!

FRANK: *(broken)* I want her back.

LIA: It's good to see things broken before the end; there's satisfaction, in that - it's fitting. You can't have her back Frank.

FRANK: I just want her love again.

LIA: There is no her, Frank.

FRANK: I want... that love... *(shattered)* ... finish this, please.

FRANK's head is hanging low. LIA sniffs seductively around his neck and places the tip of the knife between two of his ribs, as if ready to plunge the blade inwards.

LIA suddenly backs away.

LIA: I don’t want to kill you anymore

FRANK: *(broken)* Huh?

LIA: I feel... almost diametrically opposed to the idea now.

FRANK: Uhh... Good! Stick with, with, with that feeling!

LIA: I feel a different emotion though; it feels so foreign, lost... alien. I wasn’t sure earlier, but I think I’m in love with you.

LIA turns and faces FRANK, the knife is still being held at her side.

FRANK: What?

LIA: I know it seems quick, and maybe it is; you of all people understand acute, Wildian love – something so sudden does not mean it is insincere.

FRANK: *(aback)* You, you love me?

LIA: I do. *(pausing)* I did mean it when I said you were different; unique. You understand so much more than anyone else does; you know what it is to feel fettered by a loss - not depressed, not sad, but truly fettered; manacled; tortured. *(reminiscing)* When... Cassandra died I thought that was the end of me. I wanted to blow my brains out in a coffee shop...

LIA is on the verge of crying. FRANK is thoroughly confused as to what to do.

FRANK: I, I’m sorry? ...

LIA emits a sad laugh, then sits on one of the chairs.

LIA: That’s very sweet of you to say.

Pause. FRANK tugs at the bonds a bit.

LIA: I drowned myself in coffee and writing after I watched her slip away... Some days it helped; other days I wanted to find that pistol.

I started doing this then as well - this art of mine, and they truly were my tapestries, and each of them became my keepsakes. I'd bring them to the razor's edge and I'd push and push and push, until they bled every last drop to me, bearing their souls open to my craft; and then I would weave and stitch and sew, and this *(gesturing to all her objects),* this became my life's penance, my own divine catharsis. *(giggling)* A bit theatrical, but utilitarian.

FRANK: No, no, no, there are other callings! Don't listen to harps or minarets or, or passion! Shoot the eagle! Kill the auspices! Thomas Moore yourself even... I'm a terrible canvas... I'm, I'm a canvas with no easel!

LIA: I couldn't stop then; I can't now! I worked and I painted, and I painted for so long, and no one knew what it was like for me on the inside. Cassandra clawing at me, and me clawing at them, angry, furious, vengeful, for what they desired when my Goddess, my sliver of Olympus, was taken from me. Oh this wrath I welcomingly fed, and it became glorious, and masterpieces I wrought with each of them... then you...

(changing tone)... and we spoke, and I felt my own eyes sparkle again, and I laughed, I truly laughed, and I saw her in you; but you were not her, you... you... were Frank.

FRANK: I- I don't want to be him anymore; we're so confused.

LIA: Then I knew it was you; you were to become my magnum opus, and I loved you for that. I couldn't save her... but you... with you I didn't have to be weak anymore!

FRANK: You can't save me! I can't save me! Fifty police officers would be nice though!

LIA: No, Frank, I can; I already have; I will.

FRANK tugs on the bonds feverishly. LIA doesn't pay him any heed; she is far off... for a moment. She comes back.

LIA: *(on the cusp of standing)* Well, we had-

FRANK becomes distressed at her moving again; he tries to delay time.

FRANK: Tell me about her!

LIA smiles at that; FRANK tugs on the bonds.

LIA slouches over a bit, as if leaning in to tell a story to a friend.

LIA: Did you know how beautiful she was? Not only physically but emotionally, and she was so smart. She was that rare combination of wit, intelligence and knowledge; I could listen to her for hours talking and talking... and learning.

FRANK tugs.

FRANK: *(still trying to wriggle free)* She sounds as if, if she would have been a, a perfect for the, the Greek forums. Was... was she an academic?

LIA giggles.

LIA: Cassandra? *(laughing)* She was the furthest thing from an academic you could imagine; she loathed the sophistry of it all; she was a biologist. *(pausing)* She would have liked you though, I know she would have. I miss that...

FRANK: I miss it every day...

FRANK: *(trying to think something to say; buying time; nervous)* There, there are two realities: one where the, the world is seen without memory; the other seen through it.

LIA: Yes, that's exactly it.

FRANK tugs.

LIA looks at FRANK and stands.

LIA: I do love you, but it's time, isn't it? We had better get on with it.

FRANK is startled all over again, tugging furiously.

FRANK: I, I, I thought you weren't going to kill me? I, I, know, know I was resolved earlier, in, in the cafe, but, but things are so uncertain-

LIA: *(confused)* What?

FRANK: A man can, can change his mind; he, he, can be a coward!

LIA takes a step closer, baffled by FRANK's words.

FRANK: But, but, but, you said-

LIA sees FRANK's eyes focused on the knife she is holding as she draws closer. Suddenly, LIA stops and looks at the knife.

LIA: *(embarrassed)* Oh! The knife! *(laughing)* I'm sorry; completely forgot I was holding that! I get so used to it you know.

LIA drops the knife.

LIA: *(smiling)* It's only an act.

FRANK stops trying to escape.

FRANK: An, an act?

LIA: Oh, yes

FRANK: What?

LIA: *(returning to previous character)* What?! Are these your silly, stupid words again? Mindless questions, like some dog staring at me uncertain about its own existence, too fucking afraid to do anything without permission. Are you a dog? Huh?

LIA moves in closely and runs her hands over FRANK's stomach. FRANK is tugging again.

LIA: A worthless scab that needs to be ripped open; your puss pouring away like the fetid, meagre thing you are. You think if I dug in deep enough...

LIA grips the flesh of FRANK's stomach just above the groin, and pushes.

LIA: ... that I would break through. I can play with your innards; I'll wear them like your Albatross as to never forget what a pathetic *thing* you are.

Releasing her grip, LIA smiles and strokes FRANK's cheek.

LIA: See? It's not too bad is it?

FRANK is once again caught between terror and recovery.

FRANK: I, I, I'm very confused; I don't want to be Schrödinger's cat anymore, I, I, don't, don't like it.

LIA kisses FRANK on the lips and then proceeds to untie him. FRANK staggers on his feet, too uncertain to move.

FRANK: This is, is the strangest performance I've ever seen, and, and that means a, a great deal coming from me; I've seen a lot of physical theatre!

FRANK listens to what he just said and tries to stand up straight. The bottle bursts.

FRANK: What's going on?!

He spins around and looks at the wooden contraption.

FRANK: Who the hell builds something like that?

He spins to look at the coffee table.

FRANK: What?! What?! Do you outsource torture for the government?! Are you schizophrenic?!

Breathing deeply, he places his hands on his thighs. He sees the knife on the floor and looks at LIA, suspiciously. LIA smiles and approaches him without trepidation. She puts her arm around him and guides him to one of the chairs. She also sits.

FRANK: You, you've turned me into an alcoholic; I need al, alcohol, in an I.V. stat. *(frantic)* Tabula Rasa! Newton is an apple, or is an apple Newton? The world! The world!

LIA: I have been told this can be quite traumatic.

FRANK: Trussed up, ready to, to be a,a human Picasso piece? No... no, nothing unnerving there. I still don't even-

FRANK looks at the seats they are sitting on.

FRANK: Are they?

He gestures someone being flayed with his hands.

LIA: *(grinning)* My friend made them.

FRANK: Not from humans?

LIA: Not from us.

FRANK slumps back relaxed.

FRANK: This, this isn't some triple, quadruple bluff is it? A, a nesting doll in a Trojan horse?

LIA: If it were, would you be my Troy?

FRANK: You're, you're a, a tricksy Siren, but I've had enough Greek tragedy for a lifetime. I know what Odysseus felt like.

LIA: What happened to Odysseus at the end?

FRANK: He became king again.

LIA: *(smiling)* Did he?

FRANK gazes into LIA's eyes, evaluating.

FRANK: You're very good at, at this *(gesturing around).* Who are you?

LIA: Lia.

He tries to hide a smirk in spite of himself.

FRANK: And, and what is it you do Lia?

LIA: I am a playwright.

FRANK: And what else do you do, Lia?

LIA: I learnt to drink coffee everyday in spite of myself, and paint.

FRANK: And when you, you have these visitors in your home that come in and, and leave, what do you do Lia?

LIA: I have a session.

FRANK: Very professional then? Business-like?

LIA: *(playing)* Yes... or I thought so. It was a bit selfish though, in... newfound hindsight.

FRANK: And, Lia, what sort of, of sessions are these?

LIA: Intense ones.

FRANK: What sort of, of issues do these intense sessions address?

LIA: I mainly undress them.

FRANK looks at himself.

FRANK: Speaking of which.

LIA: Yes? But I do enjoy you without your shirt on; you're less intent on suicide without clothing; your true feelings were laid bare.

FRANK: That, that was not the, the bare laying I was envisioning when I, I met you; mine were more of the future tense conjugation variety; less of the bowel eviscerating one. At the, the very least from this immersive theatre staging I, I won't need to worry about being constipated for the, the next fifty years.

LIA: See? It's made your sphincter less tense; that's the kind of release my sessions give.

LIA reaches under her chair and retrieves FRANK's shirt – it is neatly folded. She hands it back to FRANK.

FRANK: It's very neat.

LIA: I was looking after you, and not only because I was paid to.

FRANK looks at LIA.

FRANK: Who paid to send me into the, the wolves?

LIA: Do I look like a wolf?

FRANK puts on his shirt and starts to button it.

FRANK: Brutally, brutally lycanthropic.

LIA: I'm only a sheep in a wolf's clothing – I have to be.

FRANK places his hand on her shoulder.

LIA: Your sister.

FRANK: Kayla?

LIA: She told me about how you had been behaving since Miranda - the unanswered calls, the subtle turns of phrase at dinners; she knows very well how you think and knew it wouldn't help one little bit if she tried to speak with you about it; *(jokingly)* It's impossible to speak to a philosopher: they're always so rational, and this world often isn't, and that's where every problem comes from.

Pause. FRANK is pensive.

LIA: You know how smart she is? And she really loves you.

FRANK: Sometimes that isn't enough.

LIA: And now?

FRANK: I, I couldn't kill myself if I tried. I attempted to, to do it today don't you know?

LIA: You did?

FRANK: Yes, yes! But I was foiled, like, like Guy Fawkes, before there was any, any big-bada-boom. My, my gun has been taken-

LIA: *(teasingly)* Pistol.

FRANK: Pistol! Disarmed and, and disrobed like an emperor in new clothes! I, I feel as if I might take up after Thomas More now and, and go home and flagellate

LIA: I'm surprised that a man so intelligent and witty could be disarmed by little ol' me.

FRANK: I'm, I'm only a human without a god... but with a penis.

LIA: Gun.

FRANK chuckles.

LIA: It's dangerous combination that. How do you cope?

FRANK: From our current context I don't.

LIA: You are now.

FRANK: I, I suppose it is a different now – torture will do, do that to you.

FRANK's gaze drifts over the wooden device.

FRANK: What is it exactly you do?

He turns to face her.

LIA: I'm a suicide therapist.

FRANK: You, you're the worst therapist I've, I've ever met!

LIA: A little bit of theatre, a little bit of role-playing – it's immersive therapy. The only way to find the truth of a person is to bring them to the void; sometimes they'll jump; sometimes they'll step back.

FRANK: What do you do about those that, that take the plunge?

LIA: I let them go and they do what they have to do. I'm only a signpost not a path.

FRANK: That can't be easy.

LIA: It's all brutal, either way.

FRANK: Why do you do it?

LIA: *(chuckling)* As you heard, I had my reasons, as ill thought as they were, besides, the money is good, found a bit of a niche really. It also allows me to keep writing most of the time.

FRANK: I, I imagine that you, you have a very select group of clientele. I'm not so sure I, I'd want to use your expertise again - tissues and, and a comfy couch! And no rapid bowel movements is more my setting.

LIA: You would have just rationalised a traditional therapists until you made them suicidal. You'd have set the world into a tiss; who would shrink the shrinks?

FRANK: I would.

LIA: You?

FRANK: Then none of us would be left!

LIA: A cunning plan!

Pause.

FRANK: Why did you tell me about Cassandra? Do you tell all your clients about her?

LIA: No. Just you.

FRANK: Why?

LIA: Because you're something I've missed for so long without properly recognising it.

FRANK: I... I'm... not her.

LIA: I know. And I'm not Miranda.

Pause.

LIA: We're not meant to be anyone other than who we are, but we're with someone because they have qualities, an essence, that we are attracted to.

FRANK: That's, that's difficult when every mote has been blown to the four corners.

LIA: *(repeating)* It's brutal.

FRANK: Then what?

LIA: If the wind decides to scatter a few back... we put them in an airless vacuum.

FRANK grins. Pause.

FRANK: Was everything at the cafe an act?

LIA: What do you think?

FRANK: That's a,a dangerous thing, don't you know? But I'm beginning to, to try it again... Regarding Lia...

FRANK beholds her. Pause.

FRANK: I think... I, I hope it wasn't... *(playfully questioning self)* I think...

LIA: I thought it was going to be, before I had even met you, but the truth of it was very different. It was my character at first; then a bit of me; before I even knew it my character had gone and what was left... was me. And there was truth in it, my own truth that I had hidden.

LIA gently places her hand on his.

LIA: *(grinning)* I still had to seduce you of course, I had a patient to help, yet somewhere between Perseus and Gaudi... it changed.

FRANK looks as if he is weighing up the entire day in his head.

FRANK: There is, is something I've been wanting to say to you since this morning.

LIA gazes at him expectantly.

FRANK: You have a fine nose.

LIA: *(laughing)* Only fine?

FRANK: Don't, don't get me wrong! Most people in, in this world have terrible noses; they're always out of place, or, or too big, or too small, too high, too low, too thin, too wide; the, the very best people can normally achieve is, is a nose that matches their face. So, so to say that your nose is a fine nose means it's, it's the most perfect one ever created!

She smiles and slowly they turn slightly more towards one another. After a moment LIA looks down at the floor.

LIA: Cassandra would really have liked you.

FRANK also looks a bit sheepish.

FRANK: Miranda would have felt the same about you, I think - the non-psychopath you that is.

LIA: *(archly)* You think?

FRANK: *(archly)* I think.

LIA: It's a dangerous thing that.

FRANK: It's brutal.

Pause.

FRANK: You could lose your license, you know, for seducing a patient.

LIA: Could I?

FRANK: I've been told such things about shrinks, breach of the professional boundary.

LIA: It's a new field I'm in, there aren't any boundaries yet.

FRANK: I, I can attest to that.

LIA: It's more of a passionate hobby really; I wouldn't have been able to stomach all those years of study and academics.

FRANK: Would you have eviscerated them? And painted a, a canvas with their souls?

LIA: Naturally, who wouldn't? It would have been my thesis.

Pause.

LIA: You know it's only mid-afternoon?

FRANK: Is, is that so? I couldn't tell having been drugged and all, which, which was quite pleasant let me tell you up until the point I regained consciousness and soiled myself!

LIA: Why don't we ensure your consciousness? *(winking)* You could go for a shower, or... the cafe would still be open; we could go and get a cup of coffee.

FRANK: I think you owe me one this time.

LIA: Only one? I thought torture would at least be two. We could have another session if you wish?

FRANK: Two cups! Shall we?

They both stand.

LIA: What about your pistol?

FRANK: Leave it.

LIA: Chekov wouldn't be happy.

FRANK: He's Russian – he's used to it.

They start to walk towards S. L.; towards the bicycle. They stop.

FRANK: I, I was right about one thing.

LIA: *(smiling)* What's that?

FRANK: You are a Siren.

LIA moves closer, as does FRANK. They embrace and kiss.

LIA: I was only trying to set off some alarm bells.

FRANK: *(laughing)* You certainly woke me up.

They hold hands and leave LIA's home. FRANK pauses with LIA for a moment next to the bicycle. He looks at her; they move on. Exit S.L.

End Scene.

Separation

Enter FRANK from S. L. He is dressed how he usually appears except for a new pair of comfortable, canvas shoes. The stage is bare apart from the red-ball gag remaining where it was. He walks C. and picks up the ball-gag and looks at it for a second or two. He then turns to the audience.

FRANK: I'm, I'm not a nervous man by nature, don't you know?

LIA: *(from offstage)* Sweetheart, can you bring me my knives please, I have a client this afternoon.

FRANK: Sure honey!

He's lost in dreamy thought for a moment.

FRANK: But, but maybe sometimes being a little nervous is a good thing. You know, coffee can kill you – maybe not today, or tomorrow, but one day, and it can be fifty years from now; your system will be so inculcated with caffeine that your heart will go into a tachycardia overload and explode within your breast, like MacBeth's unseated heart knocking against his ribs! It's a bitter end...

He walks to the F. C. of the stage and speaks as if he is sharing a secret with the audience.

FRANK: ... Sometimes, there's a chance that caffeine can kill you... but a cup of coffee....

FRANK begins to walk away. He waves his index finger and becomes thoughtful; the ball-gag is being held loosely at his side.

FRANK: ...a cup of coffee...

FRANK exits S. R. Lights dim.

END.