

Drop

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Abstract

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Drop is a solo performance that examines the transformation of the addicts' mindset through the lens of the superhero's alter ego whilst looking at the impact of responsibility on their future. This examination comes from the question of "who is the real you" when looking at personality changes in the addict, as well as the impact that addiction has had in my family and thus my own history.

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Graduate Thesis – Drop

Jeffrey Fracé

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The tricky thing with dealing with the addict and the alcoholic is that simultaneously the subject suffers from a biological disease, hence the term alcoholism or addiction, as well as a mental transformation of the person's character. Because of the latter fact it can be unclear whether the person suffers from any form of addiction since the drug can manipulate the feelings and perceptions of the person in various ways. Angry drunk, happy drunk, flirty, philosophical, become personality traits adopted by the person or extensions of their own behaviors. My father, for instance, who has come out and is open about his addiction, never once exhibited the standard behaviors one would associate with "the drunk" but rather tiredness from the day amplified. The alcohol became a glaze over his personality that he needed to get through his day. My cousin who passed away was a rage-filled man who died of alcohol abuse, and my uncle, who also passed away from substance abuse, became gracious and

happy under the influence of alcohol.

I became fascinated with this addiction to the lie of becoming someone you are not, but in the core of your mind you firmly believe you are. It wasn't until a few years ago I watched Dick Van Dyke on The Dick Cavett show who articulated this theory perfected. The addict is addicted to the person they become under the influence. Immediately, I thought of the alter ego in superhero comics. I believe all comics are allegorical and that is the direction of where I wanted my piece to go. What if the superman was addicted to being the superman?

Years of research was already in my experiences, reading upwards of about 3,000 comics/graphic novels in my life, and being surrounded by the impacts of addiction. Wanting to stay original while nodding to creators who paved the way in the medium of comics, my playwriting honored "real life" stories hidden in the text. Therefore I could focus on the downward spiral of simply a man realizing he has a problem and needs help. Starting with the character name, Eugene "Flash" Thompson is a Spider-Man character, an alcoholic who becomes the anti-hero Venom. Tony, Steve, and Donald are the alter ego first names of the Avengers Iron Man, Captain America, and Thor. Jean is a reference to both Jean Gray and her profession to Lois Lane. Doctor Nemesis is an allegory for Doctor Doom. Eugene's place of work is in reference to Perry White and J. Jonah Jameson, two newspaper editors for the Daily Planet and Daily Bugle respectively. His attempted suicide, crashing into Mars, is in reference to Doctor Manhattan in Watchmen who goes to live on Mars when he comes to terms that he will never be a normal human being again. And of course the reference to "With great power, comes great responsibility" is the motivational line that drives Spider-Man's character.

For the solo show I wanted to put the text and acting above all else. I wanted very minimal tech and wanted to honor a motto I try to live by, simple, clean, direct, which was also spoken to me by Val in solo show class; keeping it simple and letting the story drive the piece. Staging it as a real time AA meeting meant I had to be present in my story and let the acting be the focus, which was the biggest mental challenge, knowing my story and myself was enough to carry through. The challenge in the acting was the internal struggle. I learned over my years in school, keeping the work out, especially in Amy's class, really trying to change the other person.

For me, it was the audience who I wanted to be a part of the circle, that they were in the room with me. My objective of infusing the empathy of responsibility in my stage partners. That responsibility can also mean knowing what is right for you becomes of what power can do to you, you might have the means to do something, but will that something positively or negatively harm yourself, even if it positively helps the other? The big trick in this is staying in the meeting room, while living the story as well. I used Alexander primarily for place, what that dank church basement surrounded by others would be like, but the reliving of that space, that sky, that elevator, places I've never been to personally, but using the Alexander Technique to get specific stimulus in order for the acting to then just be. The main influence for the acting of the piece was Jane's clown class. The clown has to love what they are doing, and despite the darkness of the piece, I did it for myself. I wanted to see a superhero on stage and I wanted to see that interview put up for people to experience, wanting it to happen selfishly while sharing that selfish fun with the audience was a great takeaway in clown, one that should be infused in all my characters. I believe I accomplished that and goal of sharing that tear in the addict's personality.

Going forward would be an extension of making the text about the other. It was too late in the process to change, but looking ahead to newer drafts, how to mold I statements into You statements? What can I do textually to turn a story about me outward? I speak on this because I wanted to give my actor more actions, rather than having him work harder to make the acting about the other person. I believe this can start with editing my I statements. This piece is an offering to those who want to know the wholeness of "with great power comes great responsibility", how that statement has affected my life. With this piece and my career going forward I still turn to simple, clean, direct, but a new philosophy, both on the writing, and on the acting is, it's not about you. Never was. And I hope to use my power and responsibility to serve the story, always and forever.

Drop

A circle of “heroes” in class room chairs in a church basement akin to an AA meeting. They all dress in relatively normal clothes, some more rough than others. Eugene is sitting center with sunglasses and a hat. This is not his first time here but he has not spoken yet at any meeting.

The voice of a woman speaks to him.

“Eugene would you like to say something?”

I’m good.

“Now Eugene. I can’t force you to say anything but this is your 5th time here and sharing your story might not only help you but also the others here in this room.”

I’ve already helped them.

“Excuse me?”

Eugene takes off his glasses and hat and others gasp quietly.

I’m sorry. I figured me being here would only be discouraging to others.

“And why is that?”

Because of who I am. I’m sorry I lied and left. The world cried but like always it moved on and the next thing took my place. I figured it would be better if I just stayed away.

“We loved you.”

Why didn’t you show it then?

“We did.”

In your way.

Long pause and Eugene stands up.

Fuck this okay.

Hi, I’m Eugene Thompson, I am powerless.

“Hello, Eugene”.

I was known as The Absolute for 13 years before I resigned. I am currently unemployed but looking at Junior college now. I worked in security for the last year until the last three bars started losing customers when I would go a little too far escorting people out. So I resigned from that and drifted a bit.

He sits down. Another silence and he stands back up.

You all were proud of me. Every act, every thing that even made you wince you saw that greater good. I wasn’t a person anymore, I was this symbol of power, this means to tell a greater story, this work of art, and my humanity quit more and more everyday and you never knew because you didn’t care and I wasn’t going to just open with that. That wasn’t my job. It was your job to ask. How are you. What are you doing after. No it was thank you. Give me a picture. We should screw. And damn that felt powerful. It led to the city offering me its key. After you applauded an idea. A monster. So I resigned. And I’m here.

“That’s not good enough.”

Was for Steve, Tony, Donald.

“It’s their first and second time. You now have a responsibility”

Yeah I get the saying.

He sits down.

They say 1 in 12 of us are super. My dad was. I would watch the TV and see Iconolad lift buildings and help people from the destruction, others, like me, would do. And I see my dad come home with no bruises, no scars, briefcase in hand, completely fine. He was the perfect

blend of fatigue and high. Look dad, it's Iconolad! And he would say yep. I wanna be just like him. And he said you will. We're all worthy, we can all help, that's the beauty of it. No I want to be like him. You don't. Because they know the truth of being worthy. They know how powerful power is. And every day I saw my tired, high father come home and play and pass out, hours before my bed time.

Then one day he was about 30 minutes late. My mom was furious. It was only six o'clock but he lost all the high. He was just tired. And at 1 in the morning he woke me up with a thump on the floor. I walked downstairs and he was lying there. "Flash", that's the nickname he used to call me. "Flash" let me tell you something. That feeling you have. That knowing you have something in you, a personality you know is the real you, well here it is. Look at me. This is what it is. Feels fucking good doesn't it? And I don't know what he meant at the time. I thought about his slurred voice and his happiness on the floor all the way to the hospital. My brother was furious and saw the unconscious father, while I saw his smile and the longing to make me proud just in his facial expressions. I saw my dad's true ego.

Iconolad died 3 weeks later holding a building above his head and it gave in on him. The world saw it. But I saw that happiness underneath his mask. The same alter ego. And I saw the muscle relaxation. The next decision. He saw his out. That successful attempt. He was too battered from fighting Doctor Nemesis and had no strength you said. Yes he did. His muscles were fine. Dad never came home that night.

Seems like a revenge thing right? I mean he was responsible wasn't he? That's what the world thought when I came on the scene. A hero's son justifying the actions of violence. Daddy's avenger! Because you all applauded.

I got my powers when I was 23. Very late for a lot of us. Steve here was cross-fading dimensions at 12 weren't you Stevie?

"Eugene."

Sorry. One day I couldn't reach a library book so I jumped and just stood there. In the air. I was petrified. Little doses in secret. Hovering in those weeks. Until the hovering became normal. I really can't describe those first few years. I developed everything really. The Absolute, the Times called me, because I was everything. I was a god in a child's body. A little kid doing a temp job at a firm and then a god. The flying was the drug though. Did you know 80% of people when asked what power they'd want they said flight? Did you know 100% of people when asked what hero they want to save them they said me? I know some of you were in the league but I didn't need it. Why would I?

I still worked at Jameson and White but got hired fully as an executive assistant. Basically they gave me more money to pour more coffee. I was like everyone else like us. We had our blocks of time. I wouldn't dare fly until 5 o'clock and then I would cruise and sleep. I got tired but I was flying.

The elevator wasn't working that day and Jean was with me when it stopped. A cable broke and it shuddered and stood there. She grabbed onto to me and I held her back. She didn't say a word to me. We were obviously going to be alright. I'm The Absolute. But she held on to me like I was more. Didn't say anything just held. And I held her back. We stood there for what seemed like hours. And when the firefighters crowed the door open we only missed lunch. She said sorry and left. No thank you. No you're my hero. Sorry. Like a burden. Eugene was the hero. For being there. Eugene was never going to save her. Only my ego could do that. But Eugene could be there.

The next day she was back and completely fine and asked me for coffee. Sorry what's your name again? Eugene. Friends call me Flash and I winked. And she rolled her eyes and went back. No personality there.

I started doing mornings. Flying to work. Hearing drug users, cats, late nighters in the dawn. And it felt good. Flying and living. Made the mornings hurt a little less. And every time I flew The Absolute would take over. I loved him. He would see the smiles, the laughter, he would get the girls. I started seeing chicks multiple times. Basically at that point I just flew by a bar, some redhead would see me and we would fuck in the stars, on the clouds, the thrill of newness. I was funny, charming, sensational. And even if I wasn't good, the next one was another chance.

Remember Iron's Day. Jamie knows this. She went with the League and nearly half of them killed off. That was the first time they asked me in, the night of. The monster stood there with a genocide of a bodies around it. People I knew. Or at least for a night. And at the last stand I jetted faster than I ever have toward its head and a mile out I saw that red hair standing in front. It was Jean with her hands out, as if to silence the monster. Standing there, waiting for doom to hit her. And I redirected and grabbed her. And she held as I flew away. Holding me not saying a word. And I held her back. We got into the burbs and I set her down. Thank you she said. Not sorry. Not I didn't mean to distract you. But thank you. Because that's what I do. But I remember the feeling I had when she held me in that sorry. It was acceptance. The thank you, this was fear. Are you okay? Yes. Would you like a coffee?

And then I would take her flying. I started working less for more time to fly. With her on lunch break. And every day I felt that rush, that power. I felt it routinely. And Eugene felt down. I flew everywhere and Eugene walked. Walked less and less until he asked for leave. The more I flew the more I could see her. The more I flew the more I saved people. The more I flew the more I started to chase the danger.

I could hear everything before and I would focus on what's important but now I turned off the silence. I searched for excuses to fly. People that deserved it. People that needed me to end them. I was saving people. Every broken nose, fracture, chokehold, villain or pretty crime, I was saving people. Until I forgot how to walk.

Every time I woke up I would lie there, hovering above the bed and zipped out.

And on our first anniversary I took Jean by the hands and lifted into the sky. We floated in the clouds, where the moon was a dream. We saw a rainbow. In the dead of night there was a rainbow. And I became transfixed. This high brought me to this. Staring at the face of god, only The Absolute could find. Darkness making love with light. And I turned to see her face, see her reaction to her gift. See the most beautiful moment only I could create. And she wasn't there.

I dropped her.

I plunged as fast as I could go. Breaking the sound barrier and diving into the crater of mush. She was gone. Literally. I found some pearls and her ring but she was like soup. And my feet never touched the ground.

I still felt good flying. I would slip and fall and my feet would graze the road and everything would flash back into my brain, so I soared higher. Day after day for years. Eugene was dead. "Car accident". I got Mesmerizer to deliver my watch to the firm. He had no family. No one really knew him, not even Jean.

And as I sailed, I passed the spot. But there wasn't any rainbow.

You know I never actually met Doctor Nemesis until that day. He was off world but came to New York with his Nemebots. And as he saw me he raised his hands. Turning himself in. No battle, no scene. He was the only one no one could truly defeat. And I relished in that. My high was going to defeat him. It was so quick. Just cameras and phones. I cracked his spine in a tackle in Times Square. Ripped off his mask and started. You all saw. It was my greatest accomplishment. His face became unrecognizable. His nose was a puddle, his jaw some bad knex toy. And when I was done he laid there. Like soup.

And you all applauded.

Immediately I flew up and didn't stop. I broke every barrier and aimed my head at Mars. How hard do I have to hit to do it? The rush of flight and adrenaline. Maybe I can be like Iconolad some day. Maybe I can be like Dad. And the sound I made defied logic. A meteorite on Mars. But no wound. No blood. No soup. Just me. A failed attempt. I was The Absolute. Nothing can defeat me.

So that was the last time you saw me. So I don't use my powers anymore. I have walked for two years. I do not need to let you know why, I do not need to be some poster for power. Like Steve, Tony, Jamie.

"Power. Responsibility."

Fuck that. But fuck yes. Here I am. I know my power, what I can really do with it. So I know my responsibility.

"Can you still fly?"

Of course. It's always there.

“Show me?”

Sorry.

Pause.

“Thank you. Thank you, Eugene. Anyone else?”

End of Play