THE LIFE BEHIND LITERATURE TO LIFE: A HISTORY AND NARRATIVE OF WYNN HANDMAN, THE AMERICAN PLACE THEATRE, AND LITERATURE TO LIFE

A THESIS IN
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Presented to the Faculty of the University of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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THE LIFE BEHIND LITERATURE TO LIFE: A HISTORY AND NARRATIVE
OF WYNN HANDMAN, THE AMERICAN PLACE
THEATRE, AND LITERATURE TO LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Literature to Life is a performance-based literacy program developed under the auspices of The American Place Theatre in New York City (1994). The American Place Theatre was founded in 1964 and stewarded by the artistic mission of Wynn Handman. It has earned its own place in American theatrical history. Prior dissertations have chronicled specific elements of the American Place Theatre (APT), but no account has bridged the history of APT and Wynn Handman’s privately-run acting studio to the significant history of Literature to Life. The once New York City-based program that promoted English, cultural and theatrical literacy to students within the city’s public
school system, now has a strong national following and continues to inspire students and adults across the country. This thesis will chart an historical and narrative account of Literature to Life as it emerged from the embers of the American Place Theatre and rekindled the original mission of Wynn Handman, in a different setting and for new audiences.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a thesis titled “The Legacy behind Literature to Life: A History and Narrative of Wynn Handman, The American Place Theatre and Literature to Life,” presented by Tracy L. Terstriep-Herber, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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It was exactly a year ago, January of 2012, when I embarked on the research and writing of this thesis…. when Professors Felicia Londré and Jennifer Martin took precious time to write recommendation letters for the pursuance of grant money for research travel…when The American Place Theatre staff opened up their offices and archives for my study…when Wynn Handman turned off the phones, closed the doors to his theatre and took me on a fascinating trip down memory lane…when my husband and children lovingly agreed to take on more responsibilities and receive a lot less of their wife/mother’s time. It has been an arduous and rewarding year and simply could not have been possible without the additional generous support of the following:

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A most sincere acknowledgement goes to the tireless support of Dr. Felicia Londré. Her keen eye and availability as a sounding board has kept this documentation on track. Moreover, her exemplary spirit and feats of scholarship will inspire my own path towards excellence for years to come. Amongst the dedicated faculty of UMKC Theatre, I am especially grateful for the mentorship and support of Dr. Jennifer Martin, Carla Noack, Lindsay W. Davis and Victor En Yu Tan.
In 1994 the artistic director, stage director, and acting teacher Wynn Handman was 71 years old. His not-for-profit American Place Theatre in New York City had been in operation for over 30 years, nurturing the talents of burgeoning playwrights, authors, actors and designers. His acting class for professional actors had been going strong since 1952, when Sanford Meisner entrusted him with his students at the Neighborhood Playhouse. One might have thought the waning years of the twentieth century would signal a reprieve for this devotee of theatre. But the confluence of a talented and ambitious young actress, a staff on the hunt for a new *raison d’être*, and Wynn Handman’s theatrical vision, established the breeding ground for a rewarding venture. In 1994, Tanya Little premiered in *The Bluest Eye*, and APT’s performance-based literacy program Literature to Life was launched. The educational program initially sought to fulfill a local need in the New York City public high schools. Today it has grown to respond to the needs of young adults and adults in over 25 states, with sights set for all 50 states in the coming years. The quality of acting and direction, a commitment to verbatim adaptations, and the utilization of specially trained teaching artists, conspire to make this educational program distinguishable and worthy of documentation. Moreover, it is worth framing Literature to Life as an extension of the historic American Place Theatre, and as one of the last theatrical legacies of Wynn Handman. But who can say “last”? At the time of writing, he is 90 years young—and still teaching four classes every week.

While Literature to Life has received topical coverage in local newspapers, and a chapter is dedicated to Literature to Life in the upcoming publication of Jeremy Gerard’s
book, *Wynn Place Show*, it has not been documented comprehensively. This thesis will give both a narrative and historical account of Literature to Life, offering a macro look at the program, its mission and its challenges. A micro look at Literature to Life’s educational methodologies, or the actors’ work and impact on the thousands of students, might provide additional avenues for discovery and documentation. A through-line and touchstone to the thesis is the guiding figure of Wynn Handman. He has always wanted his work to speak for itself; hence I have documented the work. If this endeavor can simultaneously illuminate the unique elements of Handman’s personal contributions…the "life" that Handman has brought to Literature to Life, then I will have completed this thesis in the richest way.
CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE TO LIFE’S ROOTS: WYNN HANDMAN AND THE AMERICAN PLACE THEATRE

Literature to Life, as it lives today, is best summarized in the passage printed in the celebration program of The American Place Theatre’s 45th anniversary (2007) and Wynn Handman’s 85th birthday:

The American Place Theatre’s performance-based literacy program presents professionally staged verbatim adaptations of significant American literary works. This educational program gives students a new form of access to literature by bringing to life the world of books with performances that create an atmosphere of discovery and spark the imagination. Literature to Life encourages reading, writing, and critical thinking,…[providing] a catalyst for learning and self-expression.

Artistic director Wynn Handman never set out to produce theatre in education however. Since 1964, his American Place Theatre (APT) was widely admired by the finest playwrights, directors, actors and critics. Likewise, the quality of new American plays produced at APT attracted a base of discriminating New York theatre-goers. In 1994 an adaptation of Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye presented a discovery for APT, one that would, over time, effect a paradigm shift for the role of Handman’s theatre. This collaborative venture between Handman and actress Tanya Little played to New York City public school students and the potency of these performances was impossible to ignore. Morrison’s characters and complex story jumped off the page. “Pre” and “post” show discussions maximized the experience for the young adults. Electrifying connections were made with, what was to The American Place Theatre, an untapped demographic of audience. Handman came up with the name Literature to Life and let the performance-based literacy program take on its own life.
Eighteen years later the “under the radar” pilot project has become the bread and butter of The American Place Theatre. As journalist and Wynn Handman-biographer Jeremy Gerard aptly observed, Literature to Life became the “lifeline” to the thirty-year-old non-profit institution. In retrospect, Literature to Life has not blurred nor diluted the legacy of The American Place Theatre, but rather evolved as a natural extension of the aspirations set forth by Wynn Handman fifty years ago. And it continues to evolve, as I witnessed during a concentrated few days in the New York office in January 2012. Consequent chapters will detail the selection, development, acting and directing process of the program’s repertoire of contemporary literary classics. The emerging role of the specially-trained Literature to Life teaching artist will also be chronicled. But to fully understand Literature to Life today, it is important to see it in context. Literature to Life’s unique offering within the realm of ‘educational theatre’ is inextricably tied to the passions and mission of Wynn Handman. It is worth delving into his biography and the rich history of The American Place Theatre to trace the roots of this legacy.

**Wynn Handman**

On May 19, 1922, Nathan and Anna Handman brought their second child and only son into the world, naming him Wynn. They must have had a premonition of who this child would be: both the Indo-European meaning of “to desire and strive for” or the Old English origins for “pleasure” and “joy” are attached to the word “wynn.” They are equally attached to the character behind this narrative.

When Handman was still a toddler, his family retreated to the sprawling “countryside” of Upper Manhattan. The area surrounding Fort Tryon Park and the Cloisters
is bustling with city life today, yet Handman remembers the dirt roads and open horizon as an ideal atmosphere for boyish hijinks. His father owned and ran a printing plant in the heart of the city; coincidentally located on the auspicious cross street of W. 46th (both locations of The American Place Theatre would grace the same street). A short walk south led one to the clamorous thrills of Tin Pan Alley where Handman’s older cousin Lou plunked his way to American music notoriety. His 1926 composition “Are you Lonesome Tonight?” would set the female population aflutter when Elvis Presley later recorded it. “One Night of Love” (1928) became the title and musical inspiration for the 1934 film starring Grace Moore.

Though Wynn Handman the director and acting teacher does not revisit his childhood much in class or interviews, one particular instance has been recounted to dramatic effect. His mother, hanging her head out of their walk-up apartment, badgered “Wynn, the milkman’s horses are wearing their coats, put your coat on!” Handman was alive and thriving, obstinately coatless, when horses still occupied the streets. Wynn shares his personal stories judiciously, with the wit and grace that leaves everyone wanting to hear more. Students and actors have pieces of Wynn ingrained in their minds, not because he flaunts his formative years, but rather just the opposite. His personal anecdotes and musical outbursts come as sidebars, drizzled over historic dramaturgy that has the potential to get actors and students into a character, an era, a mindset...immediately. With the twinkle of his eyes and the endearing strain of his throat, Wynn Handman to this day breaks into a depression-era “Puddin’ Head Jones,” a Cole Porter chestnut, or 1950s folk song, and charms one into another world.
Handman was an adolescent and teen during most of the Great Depression. The New York City public school system chose to advance students whenever possible to higher grade levels in an effort to shorten years in the school system and cut costs. Wynn graduated from high school two years early (1938), and was admitted as an English major into the college of his choice, the City College of New York. “In the Depression it was a hard school to get into because you didn’t have to pay. That era was known as the Golden Age for City College’s English Department. They had a wonderful staff that really reached me” (Handman). Handman was indeed at a highly coveted institution during a special period. Dubbed the ‘Harvard of the Proletariat,’ City College offered a “world-class higher education to an increasingly diverse student body” (CCNY Website). Between the years of 1935 and 1954, nine Nobel laureates studied and graduated from CCNY; the thirties introduced women graduate students to the previously all-male campus; and a decade of the most concentrated campus political activism dovetailed into the controversial appointment and dismissal of economist/philosopher Bertrand Russell in 1940.

Handman earned his bachelor’s degree from City College (1943) and was “gigging” as tenor saxophonist in a jazz band. But he still did not know what the world had in store for him. “Fortunately, I had time to think while I waited for my ship to be decommissioned and I would return to civilian life” (Handman, U of Miami Address). The young saxophonist was inducted into Officer Candidate School at the US Coastguard Academy. He spent much of World War II on the U.S.S. Storis’ anti-submarine patrol off the coast of Greenland.

Boston was Handman’s home port and offered many forms of entertainment and diversion. A certain performance at the Brattle Street Theatre in Cambridge made a deeper
impression than nightly escape. Handman witnessed Paul Robeson, José Ferrer and a young Uta Hagen unleash their legendary production of *Othello* on American audiences, after a 12-year-push to transport it from London. Wilder’s *The Skin of our Teeth* and live Shakespeare productions whet Handman’s theatrical appetite, if only subliminally. “All I wanted to do was live through the War and get out and then [I’d] figure out what I wanted to do” (Handman interview).

That time did come; Handman outlasted the war and now had the G.I. Bill to help his transition.

My thoughts went to when I felt most alive during that 3½-year period, it was when I created characters and entertained my shipmates with take-offs, impersonations, and stories. That was when I felt my best, most alive. So, I decided to pursue acting. It was a big surprise. I had only seen a few plays and certainly had never been in one. (Handman U of Miami address.)

A friend steered him to the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre. Sanford Meisner, a founding member of The Group Theatre, had been leading the school since 1935. The Group Theatre’s close work and studies with Russian theatrical great Konstantin Stanislavski introduced the Method technique for actor training to America. The founding members of The Group Theatre were then the first string of proponents for Method training. Meisner was heralded as a brilliant teacher and used the Neighborhood Playhouse as a venue to develop his branch of American Method training.

Meisner interviewed Handman personally and opted to overlook his lack of experience. The soon-to-be mentor whose acting technique was based on “finding truthful impulses in imaginary situations” (Handman), saw parallel talents in Handman’s jazz improvisations. Meisner’s own foray into the performing arts was as a concert pianist. Perhaps a musical background provided the basis for their simpatico relationship.
Regardless, Handman found a home at the Neighborhood Playhouse and Meisner found a star pupil with the potential to do more than take the stage.

Winter of 1948, Handman was in his second year of training when he was introduced to Barbara “Bobbie” Ann Schlein at a party. The Philadelphia-born political activist and writer made a lasting impression on Handman, and vice versa. Within the year, wedding bells were on the horizon, but Handman was at a crossroads. The tall, handsome actor was exploring all avenues of work as an actor, including singing and radio-acting lessons. Yet employment was inconsistent: “Once television exploded in the 50s, there was plenty of work to go around, but this was the end of the 40s…not as much available” (Handman). It was important to Handman personally, to convince the new in-laws that he was equipped to provide for their daughter. They were amongst the “country club set” of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, and would expect no less. Simultaneously, Handman acquired a Master’s degree from Teachers College at Columbia University. With it he could teach speech at the university level and perform speech therapy in hospitals. He conceded the joy his future in-laws would get in saying that their son-in-law was “working with patients three times a week!” (Handman).

Sanford Meisner had other plans for Handman. He witnessed a gift in Handman’s work with actors and his effective ability to facilitate the physical exercises and heavy improvisation that were going on at the Neighborhood Playhouse. He strongly urged the young actor to follow in his own path of director and teacher. It is important to clarify that Meisner’s teaching at this point did not involve the repetitions that would later dominate the “Meisner technique.” Handman and Meisner would eventually drift apart in their approaches to teaching and acting. Handman’s approach resisted any rigid dogma
and came to be an instinctual synthesis of the many mentors and colleagues he collaborated with. Lee Strasburg, Vladimir Sokoloff, Harold Clurman are examples of note. Appendix D provides a sampling of notes written by Handman during a Harold Clurman lecture (circa late 1940s).

Nevertheless, three days before Handman’s wedding day (March 30, 1950), “Meisner came to [him] and said, ‘I want you to direct the 1st year students’”(Handman). Appendix E is a scanned copy of the letter Meisner gave to prospective students, recommending Handman’s class. The letter was recovered in Handman’s archives recently by Handman’s protégé and personal assistant Billy Lyons. It serves a purpose today as the basis of a form letter passed on to prospective students who are not at the working level of Handman’s class but are encouraged to develop their craft with Mr. Lyons.

Along with the Neighborhood Playhouse appointment came the opportunity to head a summer repertory theatre at Crystal Lake Lodge in Chesterton. It was there in the Adirondack Mountains that Handman got a glimpse of his potential: “I found myself—my calling—that summer. I have an aptitude for directing” (qtd in Gerard 15).

Biographer Jeremy Gerard adds:

It’s a ridiculously modest statement for someone whose nose for talent, unsurpassed teaching and technical skills, and inextinguishable passion have had an impact on a stunning number of actors, writers and directors. A short list would include Robert Lowell, Frank Langella, Roscoe Lee Brown, Dustin Hoffman, Faye Dunaway, Raul Julia, Michael Douglas, Dennis Quaid, Marian Seldes, Ed Bullins, John Leguizamo, Eric Bogosian.

For the next few years Handman led the actors at the Neighborhood Playhouse and also branched out on his own. He rented a studio in a carriage house on W. 56th St. across
from Carnegie Hall. On the day I interviewed him (5 Jan. 2012), Handman pointed out “right now, this month, at this time, I began these classes 60 years ago.” His harried schedule juggled jetting out to Adelphi College on Long Island to teach speech, running the Neighborhood Playhouse, participating in a director’s group with Lee Strasberg, and holding court at his private studio. Then came the welcome arrival of Laura Handman, born December 5, 1951. Devoted students like Joanne Woodward and Steve McQueen jumped in line to babysit the “Neighborhood Playhouse Baby” (Handman interview)!

The 1950s saw Wynn Handman’s teaching and coaching career grow. Hollywood beauties were being shipped back to New York to train with Handman before their screen tests. Comedian Red Buttons was able to make a successful crossover to dramatic film with Wynn Handman’s coaching and character work. The carrot-topped entertainer had a career trajectory that went from Borscht-belt stand-up to Broadway personality to television variety host. Buttons’s name fell into obscurity after the cancellation of his variety show, but it was resurrected with the role of a lifetime. He was studying with Handman at the time and prepared for the role in class. The film was Joshua Logan’s Sayonara (1957). Buttons portrayed serviceman “Joe Kelly” alongside Marlon Brando and consequently received an Academy Award that year.

Wynn Handman helped Myrna Loy make the reverse journey. By the late 1950s, She was in her 50s and could boast a prolific and prestigious Hollywood career that spanned exotic vamp roles in silent film to the legendary “Nora” of The Thin Man films and dozens beyond. But Loy had yet to cross over to the stage. It was a latent aspiration that was crushed when long-time friend Noel Coward, during an audition for his production The South Sea Bubble, “kept interrupting to remind Myrna that her voice
could not be heard and that this was the ‘theatah’ and she must learn to project. She became so humiliated that she crawled away, convinced she should give up all thoughts of ever performing on the stage” (Leider 294). Handman had come to know Loy outside of her Hollywood persona, through her devoted work for the Red Cross, UNESCO, and the Democratic party…causes that his wife Bobbie Handman and Loy shared. But as the director of Loy’s theatrical debut, he took it upon himself to undo Coward’s haunting critique.

_The Marriage-Go-Round_, a bedroom comedy by Leslie Stevens, had already proven its allure on Broadway with Claudette Colbert and Charles Boyer. The combination of light fare with sophisticated wit was perfectly suited for the determined actress and the discriminating audiences of the straw-hat circuit—a string of New England and New York regional theatres. Beyond cast rehearsals, Handman coached Loy several times a week in her Eastside apartment, giving her roles from classic Greek drama to build her voice and stage presence. The venture was a success on many levels. The box office receipts testified to the smash hit; Loy established a presence on stage that made her a contender for future theatrical productions; most importantly she established an indelible relationship, a life-long friendship with both Wynn and Bobbie Handman that extended far beyond the straw-hat circuit. Handman would later find an opportunity to honor Ms. Loy (and her dedicated service as an APT Board member) in APT’s 1987 benefit production _When in Doubt Act like Myrna Loy_, written by featured APT playwright Cynthia Heimel.
The American Place Theatre

“If anything is done, and something is done, than somebody has to do it.”

-Gertrude Stein

Regardless of its success and sheer delight, The Marriage-Go-Round was not indicative of Handman’s theatrical aspirations. Tolstoy’s The Power of Darkness (1959), was an earlier off-Broadway production that he directed, and wife Bobbie Handman adapted. It’s scrutiny of morality and class, though not always praised for its dramatic chops, gave Handman the kind of challenge that he was craving. He set a precedent in this production that would continue to be upheld: to tap the very best talent. Handman persuaded Stanislavski descendant and Max Reinhardt company member Vladimir
Sokoloff to play the leading role. He procured the York Playhouse on East Sixty-fourth Street (which would eventually be known as the site of Maxwell’s Plum). Handman’s take on Tolstoy connected to many on intellectual, moral and emotional levels. *New York Times* drama critic Brooks Atkinson championed it as “brutally powerful on the stage;” United Nations General Secretary Dag Hammarskjold quipped “my European heart was warmed” (Gerard 23).

For the emerging director it was an attempt to uphold the ideals of his ‘second-to-favorite’ playwright and critic, George Bernard Shaw. (Handman undoubtedly admits that Shakespeare is “first favorite.”)

The theatre is as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages. This would be a very good thing IF the theatre took itself seriously as a factory of thought, an elucidator of social conduct, an armory against despair and dullness and a temple of the ascent of man. (Shaw as qtd by Handman, interview)¹

Handman quotes excerpts of Shaw’s dramatic and musical criticism often, with an undying zeal. I remember this from my own days in his class. Another such one that leaves his lips with reverie, and reflected Handman’s personal opinion of American theatre at the time: “‘The play is an entertainment; not a serious revelation of humanity to itself’…Wow, did that hit me! And it hits me all the time …[Shaw] was very lofty, but I was available to be inspired by that kind of lofty, it was always with me” (Handman)².

As the second half of the twentieth century set sail, Handman was seeing a glaring discrepancy between these inspiring words and what Americans were calling “theatre.” On a purely economic level, the rising costs of real estate, overhead, salaries and demands of a growing number of unions all stymied post-war Broadway. “Even the established playwright found it difficult to secure production for a play markedly
different from [his/her] previous successes” (Hewitt as qtd in Selby 31). The theatre found itself competing with America’s growing passion for nightly television, rock and roll and the American musical, in both film and stage form. It found itself consequently, compromised.

On an artistic level many elements factored into a comprehensive watering down of material. What struck Handman the most was a deterioration of literary quality in America’s contemporary theatre. He was not alone in his assessment. The theatre critic Robert Brustein would write just a few years later:

One of the unique features of postwar American drama is its cheerful isolation from a central literary tradition. A successful playwright today may think of himself as a craftsman, an entertainer, even a creative artist, but only in very rare cases would he call himself a literary man. He does not share at all in those common interests…which unite the novelist, poet, and essayist. In his writing style, his associations, his attitudes, and his ideas, the dramatist is far removed, if not completely cut off, from the mainstream of intellectual and literary discourse. (Downer 245)

In stark contrast Handman was keenly aware of the artistic achievements and inspiration of George Devine and Louis Jouvet. In London, Devine’s English Stage Company was committed to the emerging playwright, in particular the counter-cultural voices of John Osborne and Arnold Wesker. On the subject of American theatre, Devine was quoted, “The dominant people in any theatre must be the minds behind theatre. This principally means the writers. I see a theatre which has a formula; a theatre which depends a great deal on noise, even skillful noise” (Devine). Jouvet took the already-established novelist Giraudoux and handed over the resources of his Athénée theatre to the untested dramatist. Giraudoux’s *Tiger at the Gates* and *The Madwoman of Chaillot* were examples of the powerful products of that venture.
In his own backyard, Handman was less than impressed with the current state of theatre. He relied on yellow legal notepads to voice his growing frustrations:

While they are rolling down the hill, Americans are entertaining themselves to death. Movies, TV, Ball Games, stupid records, Bowling etc. and BROADWAY. They must stop and look, examine, learn, understand the truth of themselves. The Theatre can be a Place of serious revelation to Americans. It is less and less this, it is not a serving, it is a calling. Nor are we, the serious artists in the theatre, serving the purpose we were created for. If the serious plays are not written or done, we are leading meaningless lives; unless we do something now it will be too late. We will look back and say, ‘we should have,’ ‘why didn’t we?’ and be bitter, dull and frustrated. (Handman, 2007 celebration program)

1960, 1961, 1962…the yellow pads piled up. As he queried his acting students in search of a character—“What is the NEED?”—so he queried American theatre at large. Summer getaways to Fire Island helped crystallize these needs… and a plan. While lobbing tennis balls to friend and actor Michael Tolan, the two lobbed ideas for a new theatre. This new theatre had to be inherently American and representative of a diverse America, not a pandering of ideas for the insular, New York, theatre-going America. This theatre needed to address the growing opinion that American literature in theatre was becoming obsolete: not to simply find new plays, but “to find the missing writers—the profound spokesmen for today” (Selby 78). This theatre needed to cast its net wider and bring together outstanding players in the fields of the sciences, business, politics, history, philosophy, art, and theology. In doing so, intellectual, secular, moral and religious dialogues could be sparked and find their way onto the stage in new dramatic forms.

Ultimately this theatre needed to take the lead from another American trailblazer, Alfred Steiglitz, who nearly thirty years earlier established the gallery An American Place.

It [APT] was a place where American artists: poets, playwrights, philosophers, and others gathered. It became a center of excitement, of talk, of argument, of renewal of purpose. Gertrude Stein was one of the writers first published by
Steiglitz. She contributed one page which began “if anything is done, and something is done, then somebody has to do it” I was inspired by Steiglitz’s concept and achievement and Gertrude Stein’s words “somebody has to do it” challenged me. Don’t just talk—DO! (Handman, U of Miami Address)

Wynn Handman and Michael Tolan were in agreement as partners; their mission statement was taking form; the addition of one more partner would allow the pieces to fall into place. Sidney Lanier, an Episcopal clergyman, was an acquaintance to both Handman and Tolan through Lanier’s first wife at the Actors Studio.3 “I [Handman] was very religious in the theatre, and he [Lanier] was getting very theatrical in religion,” remarked Handman in an interview for “Theatre New York” (Selby 51).

Lanier felt that the church and theatre were nearly mutually exclusive in America, and as a result, were furthering their respective states of decline. In his position paper on the ideas for The American Place Theatre, Lanier expressed his view that the church should rather embrace the artist. In “describing and commenting on the human condition, [the artist] deeply influence[s] our moral and spiritual environment” (Selby 55). He pinpointed a particular Episcopal church with a dwindling congregation and convinced the Bishop of a mutually beneficial idea. Lanier would act as vicar and attract new membership to St. Clement’s Church; the church would house a non-denominational theatre that would bring exposure to civilians of multiple faiths. But it was made clear from the get-go: plays produced at St. Clement’s would not be tied to the Church’s religious dogma in any way. Lanier’s words were convincing.

When a writer of ability is writing his best, he is bringing to the surface problems that might not be directly expressed in Christian terms. But simply by being in the place where the writer is, the Church has great power. One cannot help but absorb something from its presence and vice versa. (Selby 57)
A space was found under the most heaven-sent conditions. Rent was not required. Furthermore, taxes and maintenance were absorbed by the church.

Permission to use the name “American Place” was granted; and by 1963 the three gentlemen had an organizational chart drawn up to distinguish the various titles and responsibilities within The American Place Theatre. Handman was to be artistic director; Tolan, associate director; Sidney Lanier, president and chairman of the board of directors, which also included Russell Banks, Myrna Loy, Jr., Robert M. Pennoyer, Richard Shepard, Jean B. Webster, and Tennessee Williams. The not-for-profit theatre established goals to produce four complete productions per year, to foster ten writers per year through the “Writers Development Program,” and build an endowment fund through federal and foundation grants, private and organization donations and subsidiary rights. The Rockefeller and Ford foundations were notably instrumental in the creation of APT and in promoting its sustained excellence over the years.

The American Place Theatre’s primary purpose, to find and foster new playwrights, dictated how the theatre would function. The theatre would choose playwrights and their plays based upon the quality of writing alone: “Is this writing of consequence?”/“Is it workable for the stage?” There were to be no allegiances to social or political programs. And when the theatre chose a writer, trust in his voice was cemented at that time. His/her ideas were never to be “modified, never softened, never trimmed to fit the constrictive framework of ‘what seems to go this season’ (Handman as qtd by Selby 80). Similarly, this respect for the artist’s voice would be one of the unique characteristics of Literature to Life. The theatre would not dilute or alter the author’s text for simplification or censorship.
Handman and his partners felt that the most constructive audience for this mission would be a membership-only audience. Great lengths were taken to market the membership drive to audiences of varying race and socio-economic status. The more ‘theatre-going,’ progressive crowds might be the first to fill the house, but the goal was to broaden the audience with material that resonated with alternative groups. A guaranteed audience and income would be one benefit of a subscription-only membership. And with an established audience, the theatre could avoid being at the mercy of critics and their ‘sacred’ reviews that inadvertently drove or killed ticket sales. In lieu of the critic making a one-night, de facto judgment, the committed members would be part of the process, part of the dialogue between playwright and audience:

Members will become participants in the life of our place rather than ticket holders to a single show. They will contribute more than financial assistance to make this work possible; they will contribute something of themselves to the renewal of theatre. (Handman qtd by Selby 68)

A fifteen-dollar subscription promised members three to four full-scale productions in addition to a number of works-in-progress readings. The ticket-to-ride promised nothing more than the highest quality of theatrical talent and vision: the chance to witness an earnest re-direction of American theatre.

In October of 1963, the New York Times theatre column let the cat out of the bag. APT was to open the following season with a bang. The Writers Development Program would include William Goyen, James Leo Herlihuy, John O. Killens, Philip Roth, Robert Smiddle, May Swenson, Niccolo Tucci, Mary Lee Settle, and Robert Penn Warren. They might have been ‘newbies’ to the stage but this group comprised some of America’s brightest stars on the page. The icing on the cake was to be The American Place
Theatre’s inaugural production. The Pulitzer prize-winning, poet laureate Robert Lowell, had written a trilogy of plays under the title *The Old Glory*. They were adapted from two short stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne and one by Herman Melville. Paired together, the plays tackled universal themes of oppression, tyranny and freedom during pointed periods of American history. Lowell’s foray into the theatre was in the hands of his heavy-hitter literary agent Audrey Woods. She was shopping the trilogy out to potential Broadway producers. Handman got his hands on a copy of the script and salivated at the possibilities: “It was dripping with themes in American history…what I was dreaming about was right there!” Fortuitously the Broadway producers all turned it down. “I was the lunatic who wanted to open with this play that ran 4 ½ hours” (Handman qtd by Gerard 29).

For many burgeoning talents, this was a breakout production. Former Wynn Handman student Frank Langella auditioned and earned the title role of the centerpiece play, *Benito Cereno*. He portrayed the broken-spirited captain of a slave ship, flanked by veteran actors Roscoe Lee Browne and Lester Rawlins. Handman and Robert Lowell stepped out on a limb and hired the British physician/comedic performer Jonathon Miller to direct. Miller had recently arrived on Broadway (as actor) with the British comedy revue *Beyond the Fringe*. Lowell connected with Miller on an intellectual level and appreciated his overall vision for the three pieces. While the director’s work was not what was most recognized in *The Old Glory* (under the radar, Handman stepped in to work with the actors on areas where Miller’s directorial skills were deficient), this opportunity paved the way for Miller’s continued career in theatre and opera direction. One member of the design team who was very recognized, earning her first Village Voice
Obie Award for outstanding costume design, was Willa Kim. The now legendary designer was beginning to step out on her own, having worked as assistant to Raoul Pène du Bois in Hollywood film and Broadway musicals. In an interview for the New York Times, Jonathon Miller recalled, “the flaring invention of Willa Kim’s extraordinary costumes…were being made and designed in the theatre itself so that the actors could see their future selves growing daily before their eyes” (Owen 29).

Ms. Kim was not the only one to receive an Obie Award for The Old Glory. A total of five were earned, including three “best performance” awards for the leading actors and most importantly, “best American play of the season.” Benito Cereno, the second play of the triptych, was such a stand-out that commercial producers sponsored its move to the Theatre De Lys under Handman’s direction. A full recording of the original cast was featured on National Educational Television in 1965 and it went on to various stagings in resident theatres across America and in England.

In The New York Review of Books W.D. Snodgrass summed up the event as “an immense success. I have never been in a more excited and hopeful audience. We may yet have a theatre of our own, and a body of plays which later times will want to preserve.” Certainly not all reactions to The Old Glory were so ebullient, but no one decried the over-all product and integrity of this production. Vineta Colby’s comment for Park East captured and echoed many opinions:

After several dismal seasons it is heartening to see the off-Broadway theatre returning to its original purpose of using the best non-commercial drama that can be found…Good writing could hardly be more felicitously fostered than with a play by a distinguished American poet like Robert Lowell. He is not a theatre man, and there is probably much about theatrical technique that he does not know. But he is something a good deal more important—a vigorous, creative, literate and articulate talent. And how the theatre is starved for that. (Selby 103)
Handman could not have been more pleased with this first of APT’s forthcoming firsts. *The Old Glory* established a precedent of both intellectual and soulful theatre; a striving to raise the bar in terms of literary drama. It drew upon America’s literary and historical roots, simultaneously pointing up an urgent contemporary relevance. Opinions like that of Robert Brustein, clearly articulated in the 1959 *Harper’s Bazaar* piece: “Why American Plays are not Literature,” were beginning to be challenged. Wynn Handman was charged for the challenge and so was a vast majority of theatre cognoscenti.

Subscriptions increased dramatically and continued to do so daily. The Rockefeller and Ford Foundations made public their trust in this new institution by awarding it nearly three years of operating costs.

With a cursory look at the artistic choices and highlights of The American Place Theatre one can trace the experiences that would shape and fortify the emergence of Literature to Life. The second production of the inaugural season exemplifies the type of risks that Handman would continue to take. Unlike the immediate notoriety that accompanied Robert Lowell’s work, Ronald Ribman’s *Harry, Noon and Night* was virtually unknown. Handman, by this time, was acquiring a large pile of scripts. Writers and their agents were very well aware of this new theatre that was seeking plays with a certain intellectual and cultural cachet. Amidst this pile was a one-act that Handman remembers…it made “my Geiger count go berserk” (Handman class). After listening to students read it in class, Handman was convinced of its potential and invited the second-year assistant professor of English literature at Otterbein College to take his own risk: leave his academic position and participate in APT’s writers development program.

Ribman was also promised a full-fledged production of his play.
Harry, Noon and Night was set in Munich, 1955, and followed the story, or rather “breakdown” of a young ex-painter doubting his talents and validity in the shadow of an older brother/Air Force pilot. It featured a ‘pre-Cabaret’ Joel Grey and an even lesser known Dustin Hoffman. Though the production did inspire a move to commercial off-Broadway house, The Pocket Theatre, it’s second run lasted a mere six performances. One critic found it a “thoroughly disgusting play which I recommend to no one,” while another snarled that “it not only erred but offended in a noisome bit of nonsense from the Theatre of the Absurd” (Selby 114 115). Howard Taubman of the New York Times, however, saw a glimpse of what Handman saw: “Ronald Ribman…can write. He can build a scene full of mad invention.” And in the years to come, despite the din of many critics, The American Place Theatre would go on to produce five more of Ribman’s plays.

Ribman’s second play Journey of the Fifth Horse premiered at APT in 1966 and earned the Obie Award for “Best Play of the Season.” This adaptation of Turgenev’s Diary of a Superfluous Man was brought to life with the help again of actor Dustin Hoffman alongside Michael Tolan and Susan Anspach. It was taped for National Educational Television and gave many television audiences a first taste of the soon-to-be iconic “graduate.” Though the playwright would go on to work with other theatres, including four premieres at American Repertory Theatre, he shared with Jeremy Gerard: “The American Place was my home. I always offered my plays to Wynn… [He] was bold in his judgment. Adventurous. Brave. Damn the tastemakers. He was never overwhelmed by reputation. He always looked at the work” (Gerard 43 50).

That same sense of home was offered to many playwrights who have since added their names to American dramatic history. Sam Shepard premiered his first full-length
play *La Turista* at The American Place Theatre and went on to premiere seven more under Handman’s roof (*The War in Heaven* was co-authored with Joseph Chaiken). Maria Irene Fornes developed and/or premiered four plays at APT, including the 1977 iconic piece *Fefu and her Friends*. Playwrights Steve Tesich, Ed Bullins, Philip Hayes Dean, William Hauptman, Jonathan Reynolds have all seen multiple plays of theirs first produced at APT. A comprehensive production history is provided as Appendix A.

The American Place Theatre’s contribution to the emerging black playwright of the 1960s and onward is historically significant, worth a thesis exploration on its own right. The theatre’s inaugural production of *The Old Glory* introduced a commitment to the issues of blacks in America. That commitment was perennially revisited at APT and remains prominent amongst the artistic choices of Literature to Life.

In 1964, a young, ambitious, fresh-to-New York from Detroit, Woodie King Jr. auditioned and was cast in APT’s *Benito Cereno* (the second piece in the Lowell triptych). In his zeal to be involved in all ways possible, he worked not only as actor and aspiring director, but stage carpenter too:

> I was in and out [of The American Place] as carpenter. Did readings of plays. Wynn had me sit in on all major discussions with everyone from Robert Lowell to Ralph Ellison, Robert Penn Warren, Jonathon Miller. It was an unbelievable entrée into the New York theatre world. My sense of Wynn was that, in his earlier days he had been a jazz musician and that made him very comfortable around black artists. With his politics and as an acting teacher, well, he had really delved into the human condition. Although he didn’t go as far as the radical left, he did not turn away from the radical left. I did a film on black theatre in America that Wynn was an integral part of. Ed Bullins was minister of information for the Black Panthers, and he was comfortable in The American Place Theatre. (King as qtd by Gerard 53 54)
As a result of the home that Woody King Jr. found at The American Place Theatre, Detroit playwrights Ed Bullins, Ron Milner and Charles Russell, were introduced to Handman. And through Handman and APT, these promising playwrights were introduced to new audiences. In offering readings and full-fledged productions for many of their plays, APT served as a bridge between an emerging genre of theatre for blacks/by blacks and what had up until then, at least in midtown Manhattan, been a venue for the predominantly white, middle to upper class. Oftentimes it was not until such productions were taken uptown to the New Lafayette Theatre or King’s New Federal Theatre that the plays were fully resonant and critics saw their potency. But Handman remained resolute in his mission to serve the promising playwright and expand the palettes for American audiences.

The first mainstream production of an Asian-American play was also staged at APT, nearly a decade before David Henry Hwang’s rise to fame. Handman and associate director Julia Miles brought a young Frank Chin to New York (from San Francisco) to work on his play *Chickencoop Chinaman* with director Jack Gelber. The grab bag piece of comedy and satire dealt with stereotypes of Asian Americans and Chinese folklore in the larger framework of a search for personal and group identity. It brought to the stage another young Asian American, actor Randall Duk Kim, whose quixotic performance catapulted a remarkable career. Kim’s talent was showcased at APT many a season. Some of his most memorable roles were non-traditionally cast, including that of Friedrich Engels in Rochelle Owens’ *The Karl Marx Play* and his featured character in Steve Tesich’s *Baba Goya*. 

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In 1974, when The American Place Theatre was well into its new home on West Forty-Sixth Street and Sixth Avenue (and well into the pressures of producing for multiple spaces), Handman’s friendship with American humorist S.J. Perelman proved creatively fruitful. Discussions about the differences between “humor” and “stand-up” led to the birth of the American Humorist Series at APT. These smaller scale productions were perfectly suited for the Subplot Space, which also became a venue for cabarets and other site-specific smaller theatrical stagings. The American Humorist Series produced pieces into the early 90s and brought to stage the unique wits of Jean Shepherd, George Ade, Robert Benchley, Donald Barthelme, Jules Feiffer, Alexander Woollcott, H.L. Mencken, Calvin Trillin, Dorothy Parker. (This is an abbreviated list; see Appendix A for complete history.)

The American Place Theatre was also devoted to promoting female playwrights or the poet/novelist-turned-playwright. May Swenson and Mary Lee Settle were participants in the first year’s ‘Writer’s Development Program.’ Anne Sexton, Joyce Carol Oates, Elaine Jackson and Maria Irene Fornes all had full-scale productions of theirs come alive at APT. In 1978 Julia Miles started “The Women’s Project” as a response to the small proportion of women playwrights in American theatre. It continued to flourish under the umbrella of The American Place Theatre, offering a home to such playwrights and directors as Emily Mann, Lavonne Mueller, Anne Bogart, Anna Deavere Smith, Julianne Boyd, to name just a few (fully represented in Appendix A). By the mid-80s Miles was running The Women’s Project as a separate entity. In 1986 she broke ties completely and incorporated the female offshoot to be run out of its own theatre.
During the 1960s, APT’s status as a first-class alternative to Broadway theatre buffetted the mix of critical excoriation and praise that accompanied its risks. However the 1970s saw a cropping up of many theatres driven by similar aspirations to untap new talent and new plays: The Manhattan Theatre Club, The Roundabout Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, and of course there was the revolutionary theatre of Joe Papp, The Public Theatre, which had been going strong since its 1967 premiere of *Hair*. Regardless, at a time when much of this competition threatened the survival of APT, a few new discoveries and collaborations recharged the life on West 46th Street.

Bill Irwin brought his evolving post-modern clown act to the theatre in 1982. Having played to predominantly modern-dance audiences, the self-directed tour-de-force did not initially realize the potential that would come out of collaboration at The American Place Theatre. *The Regard of Flight* at APT instigated Irwin’s meteoric rise. Two years later he would be the first performing artist to earn the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship; *The Regard of Flight* would go on to play at Lincoln Center and on public television through the “Great Performances” series.

It should not go without mentioning that two years later Doug Skinner, straight man and pianist to Irwin in *The Regard of Flight*, received his own solo production. *Pay Attention* was directed by Handman as an offering of the American Humorist Series and in a one-hour period managed to incorporate a ventriloquist act, a three-act doll’s play, the “first ‘travelogue slide show musical’” and a first-act-finale that prepped the audience for a 30 second intermission…among other whimsical oddities. Critic Mel Gussow wrote that Skinner’s “zany post-modernist cross between Edgar Bergen and Victor Borge…both promises—and delivers” (Gussow).
On the heels of Irwin’s big shoes came another stand-out solo performance production. *Drinking in America* was Eric Bogosian’s second monologue-based show. The first, *Funhouse*, was produced at the Public Theatre but left Joe Papp reluctant to churn out another. *Village Voice* senior critic Michael Feingold suggested that Bogosian seek out Wynn Handman. Handman saw considerable potential in the writing and in Bogosian himself, but felt the characters were not sufficiently investigated. He offered to take the piece to the next level under his direction. The actor, who had seen and described Richard Gere’s performance in *Killer’s Head* (by Sam Shepard at APT) as “seminal” for him, was more than willing to work with Gere’s former coach:

It was a chance to work with a great teacher. I remember Wynn watching me. He was insightful….He basically asked questions specific to the character, like ‘Who is this guy?’ ‘Where does he come from?’ or my favorite, which I had never considered before with this monologue work ‘What’s his name?’ (Gerard 113-114)

Bogosian’s career took off as a result of the “airtight 80 minute show in which his gifts for acting and social satire collide to their most incendiary effect yet” (Rich). Columnist Frank Rich went on to question whether it was Bogosian’s coming into maturity or the addition of Handman’s direction that wrought an evening of “highpoints” with “no real valleys.” Regardless, it was a coup for APT and a harbinger of yet two more noteworthy theatrical successions.

John Leguizamo and Aasif Mandvi began their careers as students of Handman. They both were well aware of Handman’s work with Eric Bogosian, and specifically sought out the teacher to hone their own material in his class. Leguizamo brought in characters from his Hispanic-American upbringing, ripe with both social commentary and visceral comedy. Handman could see from the start that this panoramic of Latino
characters displayed a poetic vernacular that was a perfect fit for The American Place Theatre. Once *Mambo Mouth* was developed in class it was handed over to director Peter Askins for production in the Subplot space. The 1990 premiere garnered immediate attention and was soon moved to the Orpheum Theatre for an extended commercial run.

Aasif Mandvi’s American perspective through the lens of an Indian immigrant was no less powerful and worthy of its own production at The American Place. *Sakina’s Restaurant* was developed in Handman’s class in the mid-nineties and saw its premiere in 1998. Not unlike his predecessors Bogosian and Leguizamo, Mandvi earned glowing reviews and has gone on to enjoy a rewarding career that traverses theatre, film and television.

The mention of these last productions by solo artists in no way detracts from other theatrical productions produced at APT during the same years. In spite of growing costs to produce full-scale, multiple-actor plays (either linear or nonlinear), the theatre did continue to seek out and mount such works. Sam Shepard’s *States of Shock*, Kia Corthron’s *Come Down Burning*, Jonathon Reynold’s *Stonewall Jackson’s House*, Julia Dahl’s *Wonderland*, and multiple works by Tom Strelich, are examples of larger scale plays deemed “of consequence” by The American Place and subsequently produced. The one-person plays however were a product of APT that were done well and often, as both mainstage productions and pieces within the American Humorists Series. They were an ideal milieu for putting other literary forms on the stage—from poetry to journalism, humor to personal correspondence—which was always part and parcel to APT’s mission. In practical terms it is undeniable that the one-person shows were a viable answer to economic pressures of producing for a multi-space theatre. In the heart of midtown
Manhattan amidst the spectacle of Broadway theatre, this was undoubtedly the most expensive theatrical region of the country.

In a theatrical context, the post-modern monologue performance is deeply rooted in the history-making works of The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre and the Performance Group. In her book *Postmodern Theatrics*, Deborah Geis traces an evolution of monologue performance from classical and modern theatre to post-modern theatre, where it is at its most subjective, fragmented, marginalized:

Postmodernism has theorized a fragmented and dislocated speaking subject that is more open to *replication* and dissemination—through a highly technologized culture—than it is to the dynamic of *response* inherent in dialogue.

She goes on to introduce the center of her study, Sam Shepard, “whose work emerged directly from the off-off-Broadway experiments in theatrical narrative”…and has maintained an “infatuation with the monologue form throughout his career.” While her fascinating examination falls short of mentioning Handman’s aid in bringing an off-off Broadway experimentalist into the fold of prestigious American theatre, her focus on Shepard’s legacy of poetic monologue, as a bridge to the modern monologue performance, certainly corroborates the organic evolution of theatrical narrative at APT.

While the focus of this thesis is not to pin down the genesis of the monologue in post-modern drama, it does intend to track the substantial work in this form produced at APT and carried forth with Literature to Life. It furthermore intends to connect the dots between APT’s commitment to the writer, on the page and on the stage, and how that commitment is playing out today with Literature to Life.

Whether Snodgrass’s quote –“we may yet have a theatre of our own” – proved to be entirely true, is debatable. The onset of the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam, rock and
roll, space exploration...they were all catalysts for an era of debate and protest, reflected in America’s culture at large. From the 1960s onward, remarkable theatres across America were finding new missions, new voices and new audiences. Regardless, Wynn Handman’s American Place Theatre stood out as one of the beacons of change, amidst the change. At a time when post-modern and experimental theatre blurred the boundaries between high art and provocation, The American Place Theatre strived to uphold the distinction of both dramatic and literary integrity. Woodie King, Jr. of the New Federal Theatre echoes such sentiment in his 2007 letter to Handman:

In 1964 when I arrived in New York, searching for a place to create, to share, a very young energetic Wynn Handman welcomed me to The American Place Theatre. Both Wynn Handman and APT meant much more to me than a place where great American novelists, poets and short story writers wrote for the theatre...APT was for me, an oasis; Wynn, a light...“when darkness begins to settle around you, a friend can be detected by the candle that he carries” ...With the same energy exhibited 45 years ago and each difficult yet glorious year thereafter, Wynn, you’ve kept The American Place theatre a major voice in the American theatre. I salute you!
CHAPTER 2

A TRIFECTA: THE CLASS, TANYA LITTLE, AND THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN PLACE THEATRE

Part I - The Class

Wynn Handman’s Acting Studio had been going strong since 1952, when Handman began moonlighting from his teaching position at the Neighborhood Playhouse. As referenced in Chapter 1, the first location was in a carriage house on West 56th Street. By 1984 the carriage house was destined for the city’s wrecking ball, uprooting Handman and his students momentarily but no farther than a stone’s throw across the street. Carnegie Hall Studios were the commercial and residential studios that towered above the famed music hall. The location alone had the capacity to inspire. The 118-year-old edifice once housed the Authors Club where Mark Twain would smoke his pipes. Isadora Duncan was known to dance through the halls, paving the way for the likes of Leonard Bernstein, Marlon Brando, Norman Mailer and many more artists (Robbins “In Apartments…”). While Handman’s studio 808 was inhabited by a list of artistic purveyors before him, the space was christened by Genevieve Stebbins. The American actress founded the New York School of Expression (1893) in this studio, furthering the French techniques of François Delsarte in dramatic expression (Lyons interview).

Handman’s acting studio now resides on the 10th floor of 244 W. 54th Street, abutting Nola Studios and its constant flurry of actors waiting to audition for upcoming plays and musicals. The move to this space was initiated by the publicized and controversial eviction notice that went out to all Carnegie Hall residents in 2007. Regardless of where his studio has been situated, Wynn Handman has shown up to a
semiweekly day class and night class for 60 years. The class is a devotion that has kept
Handman artistically charged; it is an offering that generations of students have cherished
and consider pivotal in their careers. As we will see, there is a considerable overlap
between Handman’s acting class and the evolution of Literature to Life. With that in
mind, the nature of Wynn Handman’s acting studio will be briefly addressed.

An organic crossover has always existed between Handman’s students and
professional actors at The American Place Theatre (APT). The current artistic director of
Lincoln Center, and former Handman student, André Bishop recalled “[Wynn] was great
about having students audition … I waited tables in the Subplot,” before advancing on to
minor acting roles at The American Place. The roles Bishop would go on to play were
those of literary manager and artistic director for Playwrights Horizons. His memory of
the acting class highlights Handman’s particular attention to the literature behind great
theatre:

What Wynn had for André, as opposed to someone else, was his passionate
interest in text, which is not true with every acting teacher. He was brilliant at
finding a play and giving it to you. He knew I was very good at language and
gave me a great deal of Shaw and O’Casey. He knew Shaw was mind and heart, a
fever pitch of emotion. Wynn would talk about jazz, verbal riffs. He did not give
me O’Neill or Williams. He was also brilliant at pairing you up with someone not
necessarily the best for you but who had something you didn’t. Wynn was not
into gropey-feely, he was into delivering the goods. And he was great at getting
new plays, by Donald Barthelme, Sam Shepard. I learned more about writing than
acting….(Gerard 90 91)

Another personal memory of the class was contributed by Anna Deveare Smith and
printed in The American Place Theatre’s 45th Anniversary Celebration program, which
coincided with Handman’s 85th birthday. The award-winning playwright, actress,
professor and MacArthur Fellowship recipient studied with Wynn Handman after
completing an M.F.A. at the American Conservatory Theater. Amongst her greatest contributions to American theatre are the documentary style montages of *Fires in the Mirror*, *Twilight: Los Angeles*, and *Let Me Down Easy*. The kernel of their inspiration is evident in the following excerpts of her recollection:

It seemed to me that Wynn loved teaching. I expect teaching is an art form for him. And part of Wynn’s art, was exactly that he was a magnificently engaged audience. Acting teachers all have a style. A lot of acting teachers watch scene work and then stand facing the group to give lengthy, histrionic notes – thus becoming performers themselves… Though Wynn surely faced us to put forth his theories or examples, I don’t remember him that way…Wynn also appealed to me as a unique mix of kinds of knowledge. I was relieved – after having been in a conservatory where it was rare to hear of, or from, black American dramatists – to be assigned to do the work of Ed Bullins, Phillip Hayes Dean and of course the great Lorraine Hansberry. Interestingly, in those days, the late seventies, these characters allowed me to not only explore my ethnicity, but also to explore my femininity. The well-made plays by white authors of the time, oddly, did not give such expression to African American women. And Wynn offered many alternatives to the well-made play with the well-made scene. He must have known its limitations. Most precious of all, was that Wynn re-introduced me to Studs Terkel, whose work I had encountered in my last year of college, but who I had not thought of as a dramatist…He introduced me to the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay. How exciting it was to locate the inherent drama in her poems – poems such as that testament to commitment – “The Conscientious Objector.” It was clear to me that he loved words, he loved people, he loved ideas, and he loved people in words and ideas. All of that love changed the way I looked at theater. Wynn showed me the possibility of a more democratic, embracing theater. HIS CLASSROOM WAS A UNIQUE AMERICAN PLACE IN AND OF ITSELF. There we thought and worked and re-understood human-ness. His knowledge-ful, joyful, compassionate imprint taught me so much. I learned not only to be in the theater, but the possibility of making theater, in part, by sitting behind him, in that studio while he crowded his largesse over that small wooden, old fashioned school room desk.

As André Bishop was inspired by the concentration of literature behind great theatre in Handman’s class, Ms. Smith points to an inverse inspiration: the theatrical possibilities behind great literature, and, what would be most evident in her own artistic output, the theatrical possibilities in exploring humanity and history itself. From either direction,
Ms. Deveare Smith’s observation hit the nail on the head, “[Handman] loved words, he loved people, he loved ideas and he loved people in words and ideas.” That multiple affinity has always been palpable and infectious in the class.

Beyond masterpiece works of the great European, Russian and American playwrights, literature in the form of poetry, song lyrics, and letters are always strong components of the class. At any given time, one might see an actor working on a Shakespearean sonnet, characters from *Spoon River Anthology* (Edgar Lee Masters), *Company K* (William March), *The Fuhrer Bunker* (W.D. Snodgrass), or on the letters Sylvia Plath wrote to her mother (adapted into the play *Letters Home* by Rose Lehman Goldberg). The pieces referenced are a sampling; there is not a prescribed or limited list. If Handman agrees that a particular text or poetry has dramatic potential, students are welcome to bring in their own sources.

Likewise literary fiction is a perennial source of creative stimulus in the class. Capote’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Wolfe’s *Look Homeward Angel*, Salinger’s *Franny and Zooey* and *Catcher in the Rye*, are a sampling of “go-to” literature that Handman draws from for scene work. Although stage or film adaptations of such examples might exist, the work done in Handman’s class often comes directly from the original sources. With literary fiction, the depth of the iconic literary characters is, of course, already provided by the author. But the combination of great characters in great literature, a director who respects the text above all, and “suggestible” actors, seems to be a recipe for something special. This would be the case when actress Tanya Little joined the class.
It should not go without saying that a majority of the students in Handman’s class are professional actors and/or have often been through strong training programs. Wynn Handman is then able to fine-tune the actor. That is what former student Barnaby Spring remembers from his audition for the class. “I was a Rutgers graduate who had studied with Bill Esper. When I auditioned for Wynn’s class his response was, ‘young man, I am going to take you on. And I will move you forward from where you were with Bill—not craft work but art work.’” This leap from “craft” to “art,” like any artistic process, is often individualized and in conjunction with personal growth. Handman does not standardize a model for this leap. But the space he creates in the studio; the way he speaks to an actor; his emphasis on a character-driven process…provide a combination of elements that catapult inspiration and empowered acting. The following paragraphs will attempt to define some of the tools and rituals Handman uses to get the best work out of his students. It is not to say that these elements are necessarily unique to Handman’s class alone. However the combination, as ex-student Tony Roberts reminisced, “created an atmosphere where people could risk [with] their imagination” (APT website). Similar techniques are often brought to the rehearsal process in adapting Literature to Life books. Furthermore, most of the Literature to Life actors have studied with Handman at some point in their careers.

The studio space is set up as a mini-proscenium theatre with students sitting as audience members on risers and Handman just off left of the first row. Within arm’s reach he has a very basic lightboard that he can adjust before and during an actor’s work. Actors present whatever they are working on, at whatever stage they are at in the process (table read, character interview, on feet, full performance) on the stage and under lights.
The approximation of a theatrical setting and experience ups the ante at each stage of the work.

Before each class begins students sign up for a time slot to work. Students observe as audience members during the run of performance/work sessions, except for the one or two sessions before their own slot. At that point they exit the studio to prepare in the halls. If the walls of those halls could talk! A Chekhovian “Sonya” staring helplessly into a mirror; a yet-to-be enlightened “Nora,” licking crumbs off her fingers; an Albee Manhattanite pacing to an internal tic…these are merely examples of what an actor will do, given the time and place to self-suggest. A light in the hallway, above a door that opens to the back stage area of the studio, serves as a signal for the actor getting into character. Wynn Handman changes it from red to green when the previous actor’s work session is over, a visual cue for the actor (or pair of actors) “on deck” to enter. This simple ritual of stepping out of class to step into character is easily transferable to the professional actor’s work in the wings. Acting teacher Ron Van Lieu of N.Y.U. and currently Yale University, has been quoted “People simply walk through doorways. Actors like to think they are making entrances” (Simpson 140). Handman’s class procedure provides each student with the opportunity to be the character from the moment an entrance is made.

A particular tool employed by Handman to ignite character work is the character interview. I do not presume to know how many gifted coaches have come to create and use similar tactics. However in my own exposure to various acting classes, I have rarely seen this exercise used in such a way or to such potential. Handman typically uses the character interview to segue from table-read to being “off-script” and up on one’s feet.
He also uses it to great effect with writer/actors who are creating their own pieces in class. Particularly for Literature to Life adaptations, the character interview strengthens an actor’s ability to differentiate and present a multitude of unique characters coming from a single novel.

When an actor brings a character into class for a character interview he/she enters from backstage, in a wardrobe that is not costume per se but suggests the essence of a character. Of greatest import is that all questions are responded to in the first person. Handman does not speak to the actor as himself, but to the character. He initiates the character interview by thanking the character for being there. Beginning questions address the character’s given circumstances, or as Handman says “WHEN am I seeing you?” The benign interrogation usually meanders into deeper areas of personal needs and social desires of the character. Handman does not draw upon an actor’s personal experience for substitution as ‘method’ acting often encourages. This provides a healthy delineation between character and actor, and keeps any similarities between the class and the psychiatrist’s couch at bay. As the actor stays in first person, answering unanticipated questions, a spontaneous commitment to physicality and speech pattern of a character comes out. Handman’s carefully chosen questions can help shape this, but character choices flow out naturally, including character-driven defense mechanisms. Often when questions come to an emotional head, Handman will invite the character to sing a song or release the pent-up energy in some physical manifestation. “What do you want to do?” he will ask of the character in the heat of a moment. The discovery of a character-specific action can give an actor a physical way into a character or a particular scene. Likewise,
the work that is done in character interviews can elicit verbal or physical mantras which often sustain an actor’s connection to a character throughout rehearsals and performance.

After sixty years of teaching, Handman has devised a multitude of ways to speak to and ignite the actor. Beyond the character interview however, there are few “exercises” involved in the process. Most of the work is centered on the text at hand and imagination. “[Wynn] was really great to bring back to reality the playwright’s words; that’s what you have to respect” (Allison Janey, APT website). Are the many layers and nuances of the text being conveyed? More importantly, are they being DONE, rather than recited or acted? One of Handman’s simplest admonishments that cuts to the chase and connects an actor to truthful acting is “do the words!” Whether it is O’Neill’s words or a newer playwright’s, exploring extremes of a cultural vernacular, Handman is hyperconscious of the words “playing” on an actor and henceforth playing on an audience.14

The forward to Jeremy Gerard’s book Wynn, Place, Show is an investiture of this very idea, that the writing and crafting of words is sacrosanct for Handman and his theatre. John Lequizamo writes…

I remember testing out Mambo Mouth in his class… I come in as my character Pepe, an illegal alien who is entrapped by a scheme the INS used to use back in the day. Wynn sat there laughing and carrying on like any other audience member, but when I was done he cut into it like a surgeon trying to save an organ without killing the patient. He sat there quietly for a moment then began to make suggestions. He told several anecdotes about Eric Bogosian and Spalding Gray; totally making a meal of it for us all. Then he got in to the history of one-man shows, and the difference between my writing and what Gray or Bogosian did. (qtd in Gerard, forward)

Handman understood innately the evolution of the one-person, multi-character play. He contributed to that evolution. After the successes of Spalding Gray, Eric Bogosian and
Leguizamo, aspiring actors came out of the woodworks to study with Handman and actualize their own dreams.

Figure 2. Wynn Handman’s acting class in the carriage house circa 1970s. Handman is behind his desk down right. Courtesy of Cliff Lipson Photography.

**Enter Tanya Little**

In 1991 an ambitious young actress sat in the audience of The American Place Theatre, viewing John Leguizamo’s *Mambo Mouth*. “It was one of those moments in my life…I decided I wanted to perform in this theatre. If John could do it, so could I” (Little). This self-imposed challenge was nothing too presumptuous; Tanya Little had been presented with and had overcome challenges all her life. Far younger than her five older siblings, she felt like an only child when the family moved to Darien, Connecticut. To
compound feelings of loneliness, her family was one of the first African American families to move into the “well-to-do white community.” From her impressionable perspective she was not just the singular black student, Tanya was looked upon as the “poor black child” at her elementary school (Little). She also was far behind in literacy. “The special reading classes made me feel awful. I didn’t like to read because I never read stories about me…I had a great memory and would ask friends to describe details of books so I could complete book reports.”

Despite her reluctance to read books, the driven young woman made her way to Brown University where she studied Theatre Arts. After undergraduate studies Ms. Little traveled to France to work with Théâtre du Frêne. She completed a year’s stint with the company and returned to the States to make her mark in New York City.

Seeing *Mambo Mouth* set Ms. Little on an immediate path. Leguizamo’s metamorphoses from one savage character to the next; his ownership of “body language and vocal inflection” (Holden); his promise as a theatrical writer for the next generations…. all convinced Tanya that she had yet some more work to do. A few inquiries led her to the artistic director of The American Place Theatre and an audition with Wynn Handman. She auditioned for Handman’s class and spent the first six months working on assigned scenes and exercises. Once settled in the class it was time for her to take the reins and bring in the character, and ultimately the cast of characters, that Tanya had been dreaming of developing for over six years.

I was a freshman at Brown when I read *The Bluest Eye*. It was love. How did this woman (Toni Morrison) know? How did she know that she was writing a story just for me? A story that described so many of my experiences? I KNEW the women that she described in the book. Most importantly, I knew Pecola… everything she felt! I became a voracious reader after that. (Little)
In the process of writing this thesis I have had the opportunity to read and compare Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* beside Little’s adaptation. It is clear that Little became more than a voracious reader; she developed an eye and ear for effective adaptation. Granted, Morrison’s gift of storytelling in the particular structure of *The Bluest Eye*—a third person omniscient perspective which travels in and out of first person extended soliloquy—practically cries out to be enacted. But to turn this rich and layered story into a 90-minute performance that is not reductive required judicious care. The extended monologues that would comprise the theatrical piece stay within the parameters of Morrison’s language, nearly verbatim, like so much of the literary material used in Handman’s class. But they have been woven from various chapters, and distilled to the first-person excerpts that most dramatically tell the story. The following text is the cover page/table of contents of Little’s original adaptation.

**PECOLA**

*Each night Pecola prayed for blue eyes. In her eleven years, no one had ever noticed Pecola. But with blue eyes, she thought, everything would be different. She would be so pretty that her parents would stop fighting. Her father would stop drinking. Her brother would stop running away. If only she could be beautiful. If only people would look at her. When someone finally did, it was her father, drunk. He raped her. Soon she would bear his child.*

---Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Cast of Characters

**CLAUDIA MACTEER**
Friend to Pecola

**MRS. MACTEER**
Claudia’s Mother

**MAUREEN PEAL**
Pecola’s classmate
 Ms. Little follows the initial structure that Morrison set up. She has Claudia MacTeer introduce the story through her adult’s perspective of childhood memory. And true to the book’s order, Pecola— as a living, breathing character—emerges last, after her story has been revealed in bits and pieces through the supporting characters.

Ms. Little takes a few liberties, however, with the order in which the secondary characters appear. To establish the world that Claudia MacTeer sees first, Little introduces Claudia’s new classmate Maureen Peal just after Claudia MacTeer’s mother appears. Geraldine, the self-described “colored” woman, as opposed to the town’s “dirty and loud niggers,” precedes the introduction of Miss Marie, one of the three town whores. The memorable but non-essential character of Henry is sacrificed for the sake of a dramatic through line. And the rapist/father Cholly Breedlove, though he gets his own chapter in Morrison’s narrative, is limited to reference in Little’s adaptation. “So when Cholly come up and tickled my bad foot—just as gentle as could be—it was like them berries, and them streaks of green the June bugs made, all come together.” Though Cholly’s ominous
presence is equally represented, this particular excerpt comes verbatim from Mrs. Breedlove’s chapter and is included in Mrs. Breedlove’s monologue, capturing the degeneration of the couple’s love and life together. The penultimate character Soaphead Church is crucial to Pecola’s story and likewise the crux of Little’s adaptation. However, the layers of Church’s history that render his subsequent perversions are not given the weight that the novel offers.

The final character then is Pecola, and with the inherent dramatic structure of Ms. Morrison’s last chapter, very little needed to be done in the form of adapting. The newly pubescent child who has already witnessed the death of her own child has “stepped over into madness” (Morrison 206) and engages in a dialogue with the only friend she has left, herself. “[Pecola] is not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self” says Morrison in the book’s afterward. Tanya Little heightened the impact and characterization of this scene by framing it with a Shirley Temple song. Pecola sings “On the Good Ship Lollipop” as she looks into her mirror, admiring the blue eyes that Soaphead Church helped her acquire. While Toni Morrison references Pecola’s idolization of Shirley Temple earlier in the book, the Hollywood starlet is not mentioned in the book’s Pecola/Pecola ‘dialogue.’ Ms. Little’s use of the song to both step into character and step into the scene captures an essence of the grotesque disparity between Pecola’s dreams and Pecola’s reality. Musical ‘ways in’ to a character are pivotal in Wynn Handman’s class, and the device of framing a character with a song has been used often in Literature to Life adaptations. Whereas Morrison returns to the frame of Claudia MacTeer’s perspective to close, Little fades out on Pecola with the Shirley Temple song. Both devices effectively serve their purpose. The
discrepancy is merely cited as an example of Ms. Little and Handman’s creative license in turning *The Bluest Eye* into a stage-worthy piece.

Now, twenty years later, Tanya Little Palmer remembers the ease of bringing Morrison’s characters to life. “The younger characters were a breeze. Each one was so different; they sounded different, walked different and talked different.” But capturing the texture and history of the older women required a bit of Handman’s assistance. “I was in my mid-twenties and these black women were older with children, husbands, etc. The thing [Wynn] had to help me with was developing their inner life and experience.” Ultimately the characters ‘arrived,’ edits were complete, and Handman gave his stamp of approval.

The characters in their entirety needed little more to comprise a stage-worthy adaptation. Tanya had devised simple signature pieces that could effortlessly be donned and doffed to suggest character change. As for light cues, the theatre was readily equipped for the mood and transitional lighting that had been executed by Handman during acting class and rehearsals. The model of simple production values had been established in previous one-person shows at The American Place Theatre. Wynn would have it no other way. “It’s done very delicately, very sensitively and by his strict demand, very simply. It has to be the words and the book and not the production and the spectacle. We do not do Spectacle Theater,” remarked APT executive director David Kener in a 2004 interview.

But what next? Handman felt the piece was strong enough to play professionally on the main stage at The American Place Theatre. On January 7, 1994, *Pecola* (as it was initially titled) got a one-night trial run at APT in hopes of getting Toni Morrison and
other prospective supporters in the house. The show, of course, could not run commercially without Morrison’s consent. Ms. Little was also actively targeting Oprah Winfrey for her support. Winfrey had recently bought the rights to Morrison’s *Beloved* for film development, even before it had earned the Pulitzer Prize. Though she would not start “Oprah’s Book Club” until 1996, Winfrey’s high profile connection with notable African American authors was established in the film adaptations of *The Color Purple*, *Native Son*, and *The Women of Brewster Place*.

The American Place Theatre was indeed filled with warmth and electricity that winter night. Many of Tanya’s acting classmates came to see the culmination of her year’s work of character development. Handman’s coterie, industry folk, family and friends were all present too. But Toni Morrison and Oprah Winfrey were not among them. “Just around that time Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and you couldn’t even talk to her agent,” Handman remarked. He said this after persistent letter writing by himself, Tanya and influential members of the theatrical community. Excerpts from one such letter, dated January 11, 1994, was found in the files of *The Bluest Eye* in the APT archives:

Dear Toni Morrison:

I am writing to express my enthusiasm for Tanya Little’s work and my keen interest in her project of developing characters from your book “The Bluest Eye” for the stage. She has been working on them as acting exercises in my professional acting class over the past year, but I now feel the characters are sufficiently developed and have taken on a theatrical life of their own that warrants exploring presentation on stage.

In [The American Place Theatre’s] thirty-year history we have always placed strong emphasis on performances for students drawing on the African-American experience. Recently I directed “Zora Neale Hurston: A Theatrical Biography,” which won the Audelco awards for excellence in black theatre for best
production, actress, and director. Other pieces which grew out [of] my acting students’ work in my class and were first presented to student audiences are “Love to All, Lorraine,” based on the life and writing of Lorraine Hansberry, and John Leguizamo’s “Mambo Mouth.”

At The American Place Theatre there has always been an equally strong emphasis on producing the work of great writers, writers who are not primarily known for writing for the stage: Robert Lowell, Robert Penn Warren, Ann Sexton, Maye Swenson, Donald Barthelme, and Joyce Carol Oates to name a few. A few years ago I directed a theatre piece that I created with Joyce, “I Stand Before You Naked,” which has become one of my favorite works of recent years.

My respect and wonder for your words are immense as well as my delight at seeing them course so vibrantly through this extremely talented actress. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Wynn Handman

Afterwards, ICM agent Alice Lee “Boaty” Boatwright was persuaded to pursue the rights for Ms. Little (Handman letter). Staff writer and copy editor of Back Stage magazine Ben Alexander was compelled to write to Morrison and Winfrey, lauding Ms. Little’s work: “Tanya brings a deep sensitivity and a well-developed performance technique…I urge that she be given support and permission for her effort” (Alexander).

Tanya was not willing to accept the two rejections that came impersonally from a third party. The piece that she had worked on so passionately had too much momentum, too much positive buzz to walk away. And as she will readily admit today, this was going to be her “break through” vehicle. It was an artistic endeavor to be sure, but she also needed this opportunity to catapult her career. Little knew Ms. Morrison was presently at Princeton University; perhaps in the university setting Morrison might be more approachable:

I got on the bus in the middle of a snow storm, went to Princeton, snuck on campus and waited outside [Morrison’s] afternoon class. She thought I was a
student and gave me five minutes to talk—enough time to help her back to her
car. I explained the situation and of course she said “no,” but she said that I could
do it for students in an educational setting (Little).

Handman and Little might have been disheartened that the show would not acquire the
rights for a commercial production. But they were not about to look a gift horse in the
mouth. Handman instantly came up with the idea and name of “Literature to Life” and
said “let’s do it.”

Part III - The State of The American Place Theatre

In 1991 Elise Thoron came onto the scene at The American Place Theatre. She
now balances a position as artistic associate at APT with a vibrant cross-cultural career in
the arts. But at the time, a literary manager suggested she meet up with Handman and
fill a void at the theatre as literary advisor. Sam Shepard’s States of Shock was currently
premiering at the theatre. The energy surrounding his eighth play at APT (sixth actual
production taking into consideration one-acts, double billed), coupled with Thoron’s
vivid memories of attending the APT as a child, convinced her that this was “the kind
of work [she] should be doing” (Thoron interview). But once she accepted the job and
sidled up with the day-to-day realities the theatre faced, she had to admit…it was going to
be an uphill battle.

There was a charge to find the new play, but the theatre was also having financial
difficulty and many, many problems and trying to find a powerful ‘raison d’être.’
At this point there were so many other theatres doing what was uniquely The
American Place in the early sixties. The need was no longer there. Other places
now had more powerful resources….For me, it seemed like bringing young
people into the theatre in a powerful way was a real need. (Thoron)

Some of the “many, many problems” Thoron referred to stemmed from a slow erosion of
identity, instigated by the 1971 move to the multi-space theatre at 111 W. 46th Street.
When the developers and the city came to Handman with an offer to build him a state-of-the-art theatre in midtown Manhattan, with a thirty-year lease for five dollars/per month, Handman, and more emphatically The American Place board, could hardly say “no.” The offer was considered an honor. His theatre was specifically chosen, out of many, for its outstanding mission and merits. However Handman had misgivings from the beginning. He knew that the original mission of The American Place went hand in hand with its geographical location at St. Clement’s Church. The grassroots nature of the original space spurred on creative juices of the participants in the writer’s development program. Sam Shepard, who had seen his plays produced at both the original space and the new theatre, admitted to biographer Jeremy Gerard that the second space was comparatively “wide,” “concrete” and “cold” (Gerard 101). Shepard’s sentiments did not deter him from coming back for future productions. But they do exemplify a reticence amongst some of the artists, critics and patrons towards the new space.

Coupled with what some felt was an aesthetic challenge for the theatre, there was an enormous economic challenge. Despite the unbelievably low rent, the costs of maintaining such a large, multi-theatre space, within a stone’s throw of the most commercial and lavish Broadway theatres, were still monumental. By 1980 foundations were significantly scaling back from their commitments to nonprofit theater. Likewise the Reagan years saw considerable change in the structure and budgets of the National Endowment of the Arts. While some within the Reagan administration wanted to abolish the NEA entirely, others proposed a 50 percent budget cut. Neither proposal was actually effected to such a degree; however, much of the appropriation for national grants in the
arts shifted to arts education (Bauerlin 69). This shift would be advantageous for APT when it made its own shift towards the arts in education program Literature to Life.

In 1980 The American Place Theatre was forced to make its first big artistic concession in order to fight an increasing budget deficit. It decided to rent its main stage to the commercial production *Really Rosie*, the children’s musical collaboration between Maurice Sendak and Carole King. This was the first of several rentals that affected the impact and perception of APT. “You always try to bring in tenants that are aligned with what you are trying to do, but they are tenants, they don’t care about the building as much…its really tricky. So amid all these challenges, I needed something that had a pure spirit to it“ (Thoron). The ‘pure spirit’ needed to be new life, in the form of young life at The American Place.

It was not that The American Place had never included youth in its outreach before. *The American Place Theatre’s Student Program* invited local English teachers to attend previews of American Place productions to “evaluate the possible utilization of the current play in classroom work” (Selby 239). When productions were applicable to the teachers’ curriculum, special performances could be scheduled, prepared with accompanying study guides, and followed up with post-production discussions with director, playwright and/or actors. As early as 1969, to complement Charlie Russell’s play *Five on the Black Hand Side*, APT provided a sophisticated study guide for attending students (Selby appendix).

Study guides, though well-executed and certainly not unappreciated by teachers and students however, were tangential to the work at The American Place. In *Exploring Theatre & Education*, editor and contributor Ken Robinson admits there is a general

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“recognition that theatre work which did claim an educational function—children’s
theatre, Youth Theatre and Theatre in Education—was still thought by many of those in
‘mainstream theatre’ to be unconnected with and unimportant to, what they themselves
were doing.” Thoron’s recollection suggests that Handman was in a similar mindset:

I did a dramaturg’s evaluation and a general organizational soul searching. I
started an educational committee that examined what other theatres and arts
organizations were doing in New York. It felt like, to me, The American Place
should have a strong program. Wynn’s initial response was “this isn’t a social
service organization, we’re in the arts.” But he also has this wonderful quality of
empowerment—“if you want to go do it, go do it.” (Thoron)

So she did, or in the very least, she paved the road for what would become Literature to
Life. Thoron gathered a few passionate writers, actors and administrators—all affiliated
with The American Place Theatre or students of Handman’s—and created the round
table.

According to Thoron’s recollection, and corroborated by fellow participant
Barnaby Spring, the volunteers for this enterprise were Thoron, Spring, Earl Hagan, John
Michael Garcés, Rinne Groff, and Lenore Pemberton.

In a conference room next to Handman’s office the round table would gather on a
semi-weekly basis. They would report on their attendance of other city educational
round tables and visits to other theatres that were successfully bringing youth and the
community into their programming. They collectively researched and wrote grants. They
tried to mold an ideal program for The American Place Theatre. In the first year of their
“churning and plowing,” as Thoron is quoted, the group initiated a dialogue with
Humanities Preparatory Academy in Chelsea. ‘Humanities Prep’ as it is referred to, is a
small lab school under the larger umbrella of the innovative High School for the
Humanities of New York City. Its mission has continued to provide “a philosophical and practical education…for students who have previously experienced school as unresponsive to their needs as individuals” (Humanities Prep). In more plain terms, the students at this school were the product of inner-city schools in underprivileged communities, hoping to find an alternative mode for learning. Barnaby Spring remembers initial exploratory meetings with administrators at the school, where one quipped “you’re very optimistic.” To this he responded, “well look around you. We have no choice but to be optimistic” (Spring).17

Humanities Prep was lucky to have the dynamic and progressive social studies teacher Vince Brevetti among their faculty. He would eventually go on to become the school’s principal and prove instrumental in the movement to break up New York City’s monolithic public school system (Thoron). But at the time, his classroom welcomed the fervor of APT’s artists and together they found the most constructive and educational work could be done alongside a social studies curriculum. “We were doing what we now call a residency, where our ensemble was creating, in conjunction with the teachers, a lesson plan…by exposing the students to some of the great American plays in an interactive way, we were very effectively teaching social studies and history” (Thoron). They titled this particular outreach Teamworks.

One project grew out of the presence of a handful of students from another New York City high school. These students were assigned community service hours to fold programs and the like. When the students ran out of things to do, playwright Dean Mitchell offered to devise a piece around their lives. Soon the experiment became an
after-school program. Within a few months *This Shit is Real* was a realized production, performed at APT and featuring seven new theatrical devotees (Thoron).

A component of the grants received allowed for the playwright/artist practitioners to be compensated for their time in the classroom (2-3 days/week), but also to develop their own new works at APT. Barnaby Spring was in the throes of writing *The Mayor of Boys Town*. The one-person play was directed by Thoron, premiered at APT in 1993, and broached the subject of child abuse “at a time when it was rarely spoken of” (Thoron). Michael John Garcés, whose original plays and directorial credits have since taken him all over the world, in addition to his current position as artistic director of Cornerstone Theatre in Los Angeles, would premiere *Agua Ardiente* at APT in 1999. Rinne Groff, though she did not premiere any of her plays at APT, went on to write many plays that earned national recognition. *Saved!* (musical stage adaptation), *Compulsion, Orange Lemon Egg Canary, Moliere Impromptu, You Never Know* (co-written with Charles Strouse), *The Ruby Sunrise, What Then*…these are amongst the titles that have premiered at The Public Theatre, Actors Theater of Louisville, Trinity Rep and Yale Repertory Theatre. Earl Hagan was acting and directing many productions around the city at the time and has since founded the successful non-profit Creative Connections. For both Barnaby Spring and Hagan, the collaborative work between students and artists sparked a passion for a life long career bridging education to the arts. In a phone interview Hagan credited his rewarding career today with the exploratory groundwork of APT’s round table. This round table was a new generation on the move, trying to reach New York City’s next generation through what they knew best, theatre.
By year’s end of 1993, the theatre could boast the following added educational programs in an APT summary review (APT archives):

**TEAMWORKS** takes theatre into New York high schools as a living, participatory medium of education. TEAMWORKS introduces actors into social studies classrooms on a daily basis to provide curriculum enhancement workshops for special education students.

**DRAMATIC EXPEDITIONS** offers selected high school students the opportunity to work in theatre. Our pilot group of 15 students became involved in many aspects of theatrical life and their experience culminated in a performance for their peers of their own piece, *THIS SHIT IS REAL*.

**INTERPLAY** reaches thousands of “at risk” high school students of New York City’s diverse communities through theatre. INTERPLAY provides students with subsidized tickets to attend selected performances at The American Place Theatre.

In less than a year the addition of Literature to Life would be added to this list. Within a few years Literature to Life would be the one program that kept The American Place Theatre alive. While Thoron’s efforts did not directly produce *The Bluest Eye* or the forthcoming Literature to Life, her charged initiative to include New York City’s schools and youth in APT’s programming allowed this next chapter to take root.
CHAPTER 3
FROM THERE TO HERE, 2012

“On your imaginary forces work”
--William Shakespeare

At this point in time Literature to Life is nearing a twenty-year anniversary. It has gone from a New York City-based program on the periphery of The American Place Theatre’s main stage programming to a national enterprise that is now synonymous with The American Place Theatre (APT). Since The Bluest Eye’s inaugural production, APT has developed more than 25 adaptations, drawn from a diverse selection of contemporary literature. Literature selected for the program adheres to the same criteria Wynn Handman designated for productions at The American Place Theatre: Is this writing of significance? Is it of consequence? Does it give a voice to characters and issues that express the diversity and complexity of the America we live in today? Of those 25 productions, ten are on the roster today, available for bookings at schools, theatres, community centers, libraries and museums nationwide. Whether they live on the roster or are put in the “vault” is based on many factors, mostly pragmatic rather than artistic.

Literature to Life is defined as a “performance-based literacy program,” and this has remained a constant. However the program has grown and evolved, contracted and morphed in order to keep its mission, integrity and productivity alive. This chapter will capture in broad strokes the evolution of Literature to Life, documenting the path it has taken in artistic choices, development choices, and educational outreach. The term ‘evolution’ suggests that the organization has had to adapt to a changing economic and
social climate. At present time (2012), APT has been responding to significant funding reductions…”an economic impasse,” to quote Managing Director Jennifer Barnette (Barnette). Sacrifices and tireless efforts to keep the program alive are under way, namely an anticipated merger with Young Audiences-New York. The merger is nearly finalized, with the promise to ensure APT’s original vision and to keep the program strong in the New York City schools, where it should inherently thrive.

Despite the fact that APT is an organization in flux, Literature to Life is not on hold. APT’s website is flush with information on the current bookable productions, including the drop down tab “Go Backstage” which allows one to read postings by students and teachers who have seen the productions. A schedule of upcoming bookings is also provided. Recent, quantitative data on American Place Theatre/Literature to Life can be accessed via the website Great Nonprofits.org. Its listing is flagged as a 2011 “top-rated” organization and includes the following assessments:

- Literature to Life provides 5,000 hours of creative education instruction and 220 performances of high-quality theatre to 30,000 students across America annually.

- Target demographics: Underserved students (ages 7 and up) in the New York Metro area including Title 1 schools, charter schools, community colleges, and alternative schools. Rural and urban community and educational audiences in all 50 states.

- Following a Literature to Life performance, 85% of students want to read or re-read the book, and after a Literature to Life in-school Residency, over 90% of teachers report a positive impact on students’ critical thinking, cultural awareness, and reading comprehension. (greatnonprofits.org)

This chapter does not focus on information that is readily available on APT’s website, but rather the undocumented leaps that were taken by APT during the last eighteen years.
The Bluest Eye as a Model

It did not take long for Wynn Handman to get behind the idea of educational outreach when it was offered in the form of Literature to Life. *The Bluest Eye* (1994) became an ideal model for launching the program. Handman believed that literature as inherently dramatic as Toni Morrison’s should be brought to the stage. ‘Inherently dramatic’ infers a number of things, but most importantly the literature must be character-driven and story-driven, rich with first person, present-tense dialogue. If the literature does not have this, and cannot be easily changed from past tense to present tense, then verbatim adaptations will not have the urgency and drive necessary for the stage.

Like other works developed at APT, *The Bluest Eye* was an artistic choice, not an educational, or commercial one. It was intended for APT’s mainstage, not targeted to young audiences specifically. Nor was a ‘watering down’ of the material ever considered. Through earlier programs like TEAMWORKS or the student-devised work *THIS SHIT IS REAL*, APT understood that their target student audiences were savvier in some ways than their suburban counterparts. Generally speaking, the New York public school students were not as exposed to literature or theatre, but they could sense in a heartbeat pandering storylines, censored language, or overreaching moral messages (Thoron). No work has ever been added to the roster that presents simplified, fable-like storytelling, which is sometimes unfairly attributed to the realm of educational theater.

Handman was equally convinced of Tanya Little’s interpretation of the text. Little was compelled to bring Morrison’s characters to life because of her deep connection to them. Moreover, the novel was the singular literary work that turned Little on to reading. If that spark, connection, and ultimately—affinity—for literature could be
ignited through the power of theatre, and carried forward to a demographic of young adults who were turning less and less to books, then it was worth exploring.

Though the piece was not intended for educational purposes, when looked at through a lens of educational possibilities, a staged adaptation followed by discussion and exercises held enormous potency. From groundwork referenced in Chapter 2, building connections and experience with the high school students at Humanities Prep and other New York City schools, APT had a starter audience, a purpose, and a means to share works like *The Bluest Eye*.

A House Manager/Moderator’s outline (APT archives) for the first offerings of *The Bluest Eye* gives us a glimpse of the original format. Just as actors are trained to “live in the moment” and respond accordingly, this outline was built for flexibility and has indeed changed over the years. Regardless, the following was the initial procedure, a model for audience participation and interaction, helping generate Literature to Life’s success locally and then nationally.

**HOUSE MANAGER/MODERATOR FOR THE BLUEST EYE**

I. HOUSE LIGHTS UP; STAGE LIGHTS DOWN

II. MUSIC PLAYING AS STUDENTS ENTER. *Shirley Temple songs*

III. TEACHER(S) ASKED TO ASSIGN FOUR STUDENTS TO READ INSERTS.

IV. STUDENTS SEATED; CLOSET OPEN; HOUSE LIGHTS DIM; STAGE LIGHTS UP.
V. MODERATOR INTRODUCES THE SHOW/ASKS STUDENTS TO REFER TO FACT SHEET (DO NOT USE TANYA’S NAME)/INTRODUCE CLAUDIA MACTEER AND FIRST SCENE IN GARDEN…

ENTER CLAUDIA MACTEER

…INTRODUCES STORY, MAKES STUDENTS COMFORTABLE

CLAUDIA’S MONOLOGUE/EXIT

-2 VOLUNTEERS SHOW PICTURES OF SHIRLEY TEMPLE AND BOGANGLES.

-MODERATOR HAS 2 FEMALE VOLUNTEERS SIT ON STAGE

TRANSITION I: STUDENT READS INSERT I*, CENTER STAGE.

ENTER MAUREEN PEAL –DELIVERS MONOLOGUE TO “CLAUDIA” AND “FREIDA” VOLUNTEERS ON STAGE.

-MODERATOR GETS STUDENTS PASSING AROUND PICTURES.

-2 VOLUNTEERS RETURN TO SEATS.

TRANSITION II: MUSIC

ENTER PAULINE BREEDLOVE-MONOLOGUE

TRANSITION III: MUSIC FOR SOAPHEAD, FADE OUT WHEN SOAPHEAD ENTERS.

ENTER SOAPHEAD CHURCH-MONOLOGUE

TRANSITION IV: 3 STUDENTS TO CENTER STAGE TO READ INSERT II*. FIRST STUDENT READS THROUGH ONCE. THEN ALL THREE READ THROUGH AS A ROUND. MODERATOR MUST
GIVE EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS.

ENTER PECOLA

LIGHTS DOWN AT END OF PERFORMANCE

PECOLA EXITS

LIGHTS UP FOR TANYA’S BOW

TANYA EXITS

MODERATOR STEPS FORWARD FOR DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS FOLLOWING PERFORMANCE:

How many here have read *The Bluest Eye*?

How did it translate to the stage? How was it different?

How many who have not read it yet want to read it now? Why?

What was interesting to you about this story?

It is set in 1940. Do the experiences of these characters come up in today’s world? Could you relate, through your own experiences or those of people you know, to the lives or stories of these characters?

What were your reactions to the characters? Did you find yourself liking or disliking some? Did they make you angry? Or make you sad?

Who was Pecola talking to in the last scene?

Let’s compare the 1940s to the 1990s in terms of images of beauty. What images did people see in the 1940s? Which role models did black people, or Hispanics, or Asians, or Native Americans have in the media in those days? What was the 1940 image of success? What did success look like?

What color, skin, hair, eyes?
What about today? Can success look different today? What other models are available to us today?

What is your image of beauty today? Has it changed from the 1940s version? If so, how?

If standards of beauty have changed since 1940, have they changed enough? Do you feel that there is a role model available to you in every area that you need? What images are accessible today? What is still missing?

COLLECT PICTURES

CLOSE CLOSET DOOR

AUDIENCE EXITS

I have italicized the mention of *inserts I and II* in the outline above. *Insert I* was expository text, nearly verbatim from Morrison’s book, serving to introduce the character of Maureen Peal and the urgency of the monologue that would ensue.

*Insert II* was biblical text from Ephesians, Chapter 6. This passage is the backbone of Geraldine Smith’s character and highlights a contradiction between the values that are preached to Pecola and the depraved value system she actually sees.

Any stage manager might note the simplicity of the production: one actor, one set piece—if any (in this case the hint of a closet), minimal lights, music for transitions (and the occasional a cappella singing of the actress). Considering Literature to Life was born in a generation when technology and spectacle in the theatre were on a steep rise; considering it was developed for an audience scarcely acquainted with the term “theatre” beyond the blockbuster screen offerings at local cinemas…the scenic restraint of
Literature to Life was an audacious concept. But Handman and his team were confident from the start that the story and the language, brought to life, were an antidote for the threats of anti-literacy amongst future generations. Handman acknowledges that his bare-bones Literature to Life productions might seem unique by today’s standards. But he credits someone far before his own time: “Shakespeare knew it way back when he wrote the prologue to Henry V,” and went on to quote:

On your imaginary forces work. . .
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i’ th’ receiving earth,
For ’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings . . .
Carry them here there, jumping o’er times,
Turning th’ accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass.

Handman continued, “I ask my teaching artists to quote this before every Literature to Life performance because that is exactly what we do…we ask the students to ‘work,’ ‘think,’ ‘carry’ themselves with their imagination for one hour…their investment provides them with an experience that stays with them” (Handman).

A spring 1994 Literature to Life schedule lists 17 performances for New York City schools and community groups. All but one were staged at APT. Ticket prices were established at 5 dollars-per-student/ 4 dollars-per-teacher (with some variation depending on the needs of the particular group). Center School, Harry S. Truman, Erasmus Hall High, Brooklyn College Academy, University Heights High, Bronxborough High, Satellite Academy, Choir Academy of Harlem, International High, High School Redirection, Humanities Prep and Phoenix Academy were among the first New York City high schools to bring students to participate in Literature to Life’s The Bluest Eye. Other education and social service organizations on the audience list were Career
Education Center, Youth Dares, and Covenant House. Individual community organizers Bala Konkoth and Nancy Butler brought in audience members as well. With a total attendance of 740, and outpourings of appreciation by teachers and students alike, APT was encouraged to find other literary possibilities.

**Building a Roster**

While *The Bluest Eye* happened organically, before Literature to Life was in place, following productions were created with Literature to Life in mind. New York City teachers that accompanied their students to The American Place Theatre were given surveys fielding ideas for future endeavors. APT wanted to know what was on the schools’ reading lists, for if a particular book met Handman’s dramatic standards, then it could be considered for development. Alternatively, Literature to Life could supplement a reading list with the introduction of an overlooked work, one that might challenge and broaden a student’s palate for literature.

Within a year of *The Bluest Eye*’s debut (1994), APT adapted and staged three more literary works for its newest venture: Claude Brown’s *Manchild in the Promised Land*; Ntozake Shange’s *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo*; and Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*. *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *The House on Mango Street* have been two of the most enduring additions to the roster.

*The House on Mango Street*, a story set in a 1960s Chicago barrio, was one suggested by high school teachers. APT’s Associate Artistic Director Elise Thoron was enlisted to direct. She remembers her immediate attachment to the “delicate poetic vignettes” that provoke thoughts on cultural identity, neighborhood, and the difference
between a house and a home (Thoron). Thoron brought in actress Josefina Bosch to collaborate and they created an adaptation that played in New York City. When director Michael Garcés (one of the original participants in APT’s round table) became Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theatre in Los Angeles, he enthusiastically brought the production to his Latino rich community. In 2004 Literature to Life’s *House on Mango Street* was offered in partnership with the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. By this time actress Lidia Ramirez was now interpreting the piece and can be seen gracing the cover of an exquisitely produced *Cuesheet* (Kennedy Center’s resource packet and teacher’s guide).

Claude Brown’s *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1995) was a natural choice to offer to New York City students. The autobiographical piece is “a gallery of vital characters roaming the Harlem streets on which Brown was raised, populating the correctional institutes to which Brown was sent, and spilling into Greenwich Village” (Finkle *Theatremania*). Beyond a plethora of stage-worthy characters is the true, redemptive story of a Harlem delinquent saved by books. Brown’s writing shares in a visceral way his discovery of the biographies of Mary McLeod Bethune, Jackie Robinson, Albert Einstein and more. The production held such resonance that it was featured as an APT mainstage production in 1999 with actor Joseph Edward.

Edward, a bulky, graceful actor who looks like the photographs of Brown taken at the time, does a top-notch job of slipping in and out of his character's skin…Under Handman's always inventive direction, Edward also does deft impersonations of a stern white judge, the hooker who gave Pimp his name, and Pimp and Danny in varying stages of drug addiction. The performance is ultimately most remarkable for its depiction of a young boy growing into a man of equal parts pride and humility—in other words, a gentleman. (Finkle “Manchild…”)

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The story and your performance were absolutely unbelievable. I have never seen a movie, play or Broadway musical better than your solo performance.

-Maggie, high school student (Teacher’s resource guide, APT archives)

Review/responses like the ones above suggest that works developed for Literature to Life are of the ilk and artistic integrity that they can, and often do, run seamlessly in both professional and educational mediums. Many presenters will team up with local schools to bring productions to the students during the day and then offer additional performances to a paying public in the evening. Ticket prices are usually set by the presenting host and can range between five and 30 dollars per ticket.

A rich, collaborative relationship was initiated between Handman and Edward during Manchild. It would continue with another important addition to the Literature to Life roster, an adaptation of Richard Wright’s Black Boy (1996). Under the auspices of APT, Edward would also write and star in his own piece Fly, produced in 1997 for the mainstage. And when APT revived a production of Laurence Holder’s Zora Neal Hurston (1999), also for the mainstage, Edward portrayed the many significant male figures in Hurston’s life, Langston Hughes and Richard Wright included.

The 1995/96 season added to the roster a production of The Kitchen God’s Wife by Amy Tan. Wynn Handman adapted and directed actors Tina Chen, Linda Shing and Dawn Akemi Saito for various performances. Handman was excited to introduce to the stage and to New York City students a story that shed light on a female Chinese-American perspective. Perhaps it was not as direct a match to the city’s cultural demographics as The House on Mango Street or Manchild in the Promised Land, but the familial narrative held a strong thread of universality that could broaden the urban
students’ understanding of the human condition. Nevertheless, the long-term life of these productions rests on the demands and requests of the schools. Despite its artistic integrity, *The Kitchen God’s Wife* stayed on the roster for a second season before being retired. A similar fate would befall the adaptation of Gus Lee’s *China Boy* in 2003.

Through the latter half of the 90s, APT continued to place more and more emphasis on Literature to Life. The theatre still produced the rare script that tickled Handman’s fancy, for instance Jonathan Reynolds’ *Stonewall Jackson’s House*, or Julia Dahl’s *Wonderland*. And Handman could still do wonders with coaching and shaping new voices for solo performance theatre. Assif Mandvi’s *Sakina’s Restaurant* and Michael John Garcés *Agua Ardiente* are good examples. Nevertheless the ratio of new works developed at APT was beginning to favor Literature to Life productions.

An adaptation of Christina Garcia’s biographical *Dreaming in Cuban* premiered in 1998. With actress Eileen Galindo, Handman brought Garcia’s story to life; one that focuses on three generations of women from Cuban descent, divided by the politics surrounding the revolution in Cuba, Fidel Castro and the United States. The narrative is a key to unlocking a deeper understanding of historical events such as the Spanish American War, Bay of Pigs, the Mariel boat lift and the U.S.-Cuba immigration agreement. Thematically, Garcia’s poetic and intimate language provokes questions on individualism, revolution amongst generations, or against our inherited cultures.

Also brought into the fold of Literature to Life were pieces that could more accurately be titled “Life to Literature”: oral histories turned into script/poetry/text and staged. This was not a new model for APT of course. Handman’s original mission statement for APT… his early work with Anna Deveare Smith, Spalding Gray (*Rumstick*...
Road, 1980) and Emily Mann (Still Life, 1981)... was always in the spirit of bringing new voices to the stage. It made sense that Literature to Life would broaden its format to include this mode of dramatic storytelling. In 2000 APT’s earlier mainstage production of Coming Through: Ellis Island to JFK (1994) was added to the roster. The commemorative piece was adapted from interviews recorded for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. In the original 5-person cast were two important Literature to Life figures, David Kener and Mara Stephens. David Kenner will be addressed in more detail by the chapter’s end. The former acting student of Wynn Handman, Mara Stephens, made her professional debut at APT in Coming Through. Stephens’ performance was highlighted by the discriminating Ben Brantley in his New York Times review:

In the evening's one real coup de theater, Mara Stephens, who plays a 13-year-old Polish girl, re-emerges as the card-playing, joke-telling, feisty (and fascinatingly xenophobic) old American woman the girl became.

Ms. Stephens continues to collaborate with Literature to Life today; she is the featured actor in The Giver.

The year 2000 also ushered in I Love America which premiered on APT’s mainstage and was simultaneously added to the Literature to Life roster. Lydia Ramirez’ one-person show presented dramatic monologues of the personal interviews she recorded of her people: the “Dominicans who flee their island of Hispaniola by “yolas” — small boats —[only to] face more challenges once they reach the U.S.”(Dominguez). Elise Thoron directed the piece, but Handman spent months working with Ramirez in class on the many characters. I was a student of Wynn’s at the time and witnessed the gradual transformation of one-note sketches to fully fleshed-out character monologues. Many reviewers and students alike connected with the crafted text that danced in and out of an Hispanic vernacular:
If you understand no Spanish, you still won't be sorry you saw "I Love America" but you will experience it as a movingly tragic portrait of one of our city's largest immigrant groups — interrupted surreally by frequent peals of laughter. (Dominguez “Aliens…”)

As with Manchild in the Promised Land and Coming Through, themes of hope and promise in America, undercut by cultural and economic injustice could be explored. These oral histories were an ideal way to extend APT’s artistic endeavors out to the classrooms and bring to life an important facet of New York’s cultural tableau.

In a similar fashion, Laurence Holder’s Zora Neale Hurston: A Theatrical Biography was another stand-out production at APT that morphed and made its way onto the Literature to Life line-up. Premiering in 1989 under the auspices of APT’s Jubilee Festival, the original production warranted a mainstage revival in 1998. Actors Elizabeth Van Dyke and Joseph Edward were noted for their “on fire” character work while using the verbatim words of Hurston, Hughes and Wright respectively. Some of that fire was said to be lost, however, in the playwright’s narrative contributions (Gates). This issue was addressed when the Holder play was edited for Literature to Life purposes. It was re-titled Zora and became a one-person piece that distilled the narrative through Hurston’s words. It is precisely the ‘verbatim’ approach that drives Literature to Life’s mission and resonance. Zora is on the Literature to Life roster today (2012) featuring Cheryl Howard, a long-time Handman student and professional actress.

A New Decade; A New Millennium

Y2K—the great scare that the world’s computer systems would cease to function with the dawn of a new millennium—was on the forefront of most New Yorkers’ minds during the last months of 1999. About this time, The American Place Theatre was threatened by an entirely different situation, only unawares. A New York Magazine
article dated Sept. 18, 2000, started off “Wynn Handman didn’t know what hit him.” Journalist Robert Kolker went on to profile the imminent usurping of APT’s theatrical space by Todd Haimes and the Roundabout Theatre Company. The Roundabout, a theatre on a meteoric rise, owing to its star-studded productions of theatrical classics, held the cards. A Roundabout board member knew the building’s new owner and negotiated a deal to take over the space without any option for renewal offered to APT. "I've spent more time on real estate in this job than I have on any of the shows. I mean, art is irrelevant if you're out of business," remarked Haimes. To this Handman’s reply was quoted: "The American Place Theatre will go on. We're now actively looking for another space. Each of us nonprofit institutions has a vision of what it does -- and we are two very different institutions" (Kolker “Top Banana”).

By November of 2002, The American Place Theatre had found and moved into a new space. On the 22nd floor of a far less tony building at 37th Street and 8th Avenue, the theatre would soldier on… not unlike the soldiering on required of the city at large after the atrocities of 9/11. Added to the roster were adaptations of James McBride’s *The Color of Water* (2001), Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* (2002) and Gus Lee’s *China Boy* (2003).

The new space did have a black box theatre attached to the offices, which meant that New York City students could still visit for in-house performances. But by this time, the effects of 9/11 were felt in ripples of all kinds.

Everybody was nervous. There was much less traveling from schools to the theatre. Schools were more and more resistant to bus students across town…All of a sudden we had to go to a high school auditorium, terrible venue, or a classroom, and put up with the announcements on a school intercom…you say
“well I’m either going to go along with it because I want to reach these students, or I don’t.” (Handman)

Handman went along with it because of the pay-off. I was a professional actor in Wynn’s class during these years and clearly remember the verve he would bring to our sessions after coming from a Literature to Life presentation. The man who was then in his early eighties, blindsided by the type of theatre he had been in competition with for the last 30 years, was still ebullient when he spoke about his actors and Literature to Life. My old class notes are sprinkled with quotes similar to this more recent one of Wynn Handman’s…

It is the most important audience you can reach…This is an audience that, some have never seen live theatre, it awakens things in them, nourishes them and plants seeds that stay with them….someone might say ‘your gonna take something from this book, for an hour with one actor, and your gonna hold the attention of 12 and 16 year olds….come on….just go there and see what happens….boom…..once it starts you don’t hear a sound (Handman).

Regardless of Literature to Life’s impact on audiences, the program and organization was faced with some big decisions if it wanted to proceed.

Fortunately a new dynamic was taking hold. Literature to Life remained lean but was growing mighty. Brooklyn-born actor, sculptor, screenwriter and teaching artist (the Rennaisance-man list could go on) David Kener was currently performing the role of APT’s Director of Education with zeal. His presence and vocal timbre are reminiscent of a young Wynn Handman himself. And it is no surprise the two seem to be cut from the same cloth. After graduating from New York University and the Neighborhood Playhouse, Kener became a working actor who continued to shape his craft in Handman’s class. He was hired for many a production at APT, as well as The Public, Signature Theatre, The Working Theatre and regional theatres nationwide. But alongside his
passion for the stage, Kener sought out community coalition, service and leadership opportunities that benefited many of New York’s arts-in-education and literacy initiatives. With the current (circa 2001) state of pressures at APT, and the reality of Handman’s octogenarian status, it seemed natural and auspicious to promote Kener to a greater role of leadership. As we will see, the role of Executive Director was a natural fit for Kener. His innovative and entrepreneurial acumen set the organization on new paths with new opportunities, ultimately on a road to national recognition.19

The newly hired managing director Jennifer Barnette was also a strategic boon to APT. Bringing with her a wealth of experience and commitment to arts organizations and councils on both the community and state level; a Masters degree in Arts Administration and Corporate Sponsorship in the Arts; and a true producer’s “get it done” drive, Barnette was a force to co-pilot Kener’s as they shepherded APT through the next decade. The scope of this thesis cannot address all the grants and partnerships they forged. But their efforts are clearly responsible for APT’s survival and growth.

Despite declining bookings with New York City schools, APT was encouraged by a few high-profile bookings of Literature to Life. The New York Public Library featured three adaptations for its 2002 Public Performance Series. And within the year, a relationship with the Kennedy Center was initiated, bringing to Washington D.C. premieres of Black Boy, Manchild of the Promised Land and Zora(2003). The quality of output and feedback from audiences was better than ever. This provided a momentum for Literature to Life’s mission, albeit in a new direction. Jennifer Barnette remembers distinctly the crossroads, “we had to go big or close the doors.” APT would shoot for national bookings if the citywide ones would not sustain the organization.
Awards, Partnerships, and the Living Library

2004 proved to be a banner year for APT and Literature to Life. Executive Director David Kener orchestrated a confluence of events that would propel the organization on a national level, deepen Literature to Life’s relationship with the authors and publishers that inspire their work, and introduce to more teachers the power of this program. It all centered on the debut of Literature to Life’s newest adaptation *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd. The book itself had only recently been released and was making waves within literary circles, including winning the 2003 SEBA (SouthEast Booksellers Association) Book of the Year, 2004 Book Sense Book of the Year and a nomination for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

Kener and Barnette sat at a table with the publishers of *Secret Life of Bees*, Penguin/Pearson, their marketing department, and Sue Monk Kidd’s agent. “It was amazing…we were able to pitch an idea from a support perspective and a publicity and marketing perspective…a win-win for everyone” (Barnette). APT wanted to throw all its focus and resources into an inaugural Literature to Life fundraising gala, the likes of which APT had not seen in over 20 years. Penguin/Pearson matched them with enthusiasm, and underwriting. Their underwriting would allow for 100 New York City teachers to attend the gala event, increasing exposure to new teachers. Penguin/Pearson also agreed to a book donation program, whereby they would provide gratis copies of the book to teacher and students. In return, book jackets of forthcoming editions would list author Sue Monk Kidd as recipient of the new and prestigious Literature to Life Award.

On April 27, 2004, at the New York Society for Ethical Culture, *The Secret Life of The American Place Theatre* unfolded as a most memorable and profitable event. The
title intended to publicly “endow Literature to Life as the new central mission of The American Place Theatre” and unveil its newest adaptation The Secret Life of Bees (Theatremania “The Secret Life…”). Many devoted Handman actors and captains of philanthropy rallied for the cause. Beyond the featured performance by actress Denise Wilbanks, the evening included appearances and testimonials by Nathan Lane, Roz Abrams, Sue Monk Kidd, Allison Janney, John Spencer, Richard Shif, and Whoopi Goldberg; live music by La La Brooks (whose songs are referred to in the novel itself); authentic Southern food graciously donated by the restaurant An American Place. Academy Award-winning costume designer Ann Roth donated her talents to the production. Honorary committee members included Morgan Freeman, Barbara Cook, Kathleen Chalfant and David N. Dinkins (TheatreMania “The Secret ...”).

The gala and premiere packed a star-studded punch, but a true highlight of the evening was Sue Monk Kidd’s response to the premiere (see Appendix G for Kidd’s letter). Actress Denise Wilbanks remembers…

[Kidd] was invited onstage after the performance to speak to the audience. She shared her experience of writing “The Secret Life of Bees” and how her daughter often served as her “private editor” to read chapters as the book progressed. They were both extremely emotionally invested into the story and who these characters were. It was very difficult, as an author, to let these characters go into the world and be realized by someone else’s interpretation. That night, she was going to immediately call her daughter and book a flight for her to come to NYC for the following night’s performance. She was so excited that after months and months of working on Lily’s story that she would be able to now introduce her daughter to Lily in person. (Wilbanks)

The first Literature to Life Awards Gala was rewarding on many levels, notwithstanding the primary level of raising funds. One hundred thousand dollars was raised that evening and would help sustain the organization in a tremendous way (Barnette).
I have delved into the details of this first gala because it became an anticipated, annual (sometimes semiannual) event for APT and Literature to Life. Future selections of book adaptations were made with this opportunity in mind and with the potential of engaging the authors in Literature to Life’s mission. APT was excited to find new works of significance that were on the cusp of literary recognition. In doing so, APT had a greater chance of solidifying a partnership with and endorsement from the author. As for the author, she would get a unique opportunity to see how her words brought to life, played upon untapped audiences. Appendix C lists the adaptations that coincided with Literature to Life Awards and their respective recipients.

Detailed in a forthcoming chapter is the adaptation of Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*. The addition of this literary work was an extraordinary bookend to Literature to Life’s banner year of 2004. The selection of both *Secret Life of Bees* and *The Things They Carried* reflected a pivot in the changing demographic of Literature to Life’s audience. These were the first titles that featured an American Caucasian’s voice as the framework for a particular story. Actress Denise Wilbanks (*The Secret Life of Bees*) remembers the care and concern taken by both herself and Handman as they interpreted a story that would be targeted to urban core, suburban and rural students alike:

Would [New York City students] be offended by a white Southern girl coming into their primarily African-American community and using the “n” word, etc.? Would international students even relate to this story from 1964 set in the American South? We were so pleased to see that our concerns were baseless. As long as I committed to fully and authentically telling the story — no holds barred, we were enthralled by the insight the students gained from the characters’ experiences. (Wilbanks)

Positive reflections like Wilbanks’ spurred APT to consider books outside the national experience too. Adaptations of the *The Kite Runner* (2005) and *Three Cups of Tea*
(2010) were added to the roster. Khaled Housseini’s work, the first internationally recognized novel about contemporary Aghanistan, has remained in high demand as a Literature to Life piece. *Three Cups of Tea* lived a short life on the roster because of the controversy surrounding author Greg Mortenson and his fallacious charitable organization.21

Of the nine Literature to Life productions added that coincided with awards, two were not considered “of the moment” literature. In 2009 APT decided to stage Ray Bradbury’s American literary classic *Fahrenheit 451*. It was one of the last adaptations that Wynn Handman would direct, albeit with no less passion. In an interview for the *Wall Street Journal*, upon a preview performance of the adaptation, Handman shared his personal connection to Bradbury’s timeless work:

The director spoke about a photo he had taken with Paul Robeson…During the Red Scare and McCarthyism, Handman took that photo and hid it in a suitcase which he buried in the [back of his closet] for nearly three decades…He felt the same shame and censorship terror as Guy Montag, the protagonist in Fahrenheit 451, who hides books in his home’s air vents despite his occupation as a book-burning fireman. (Cheney)

Moreover, the timeless thematic resonance of censorship is a monumental one for Literature to Life’s artistic approach. In an article written for Random House’s publication on censorship and banned books, David Kener used a recent production dilemma to ponder Literature to Life’s avowal to verbatim text:

The leadership of the school had just announced to our teaching artist that the actor could not, under any circumstances, use the “n” word as contained in the script. ‘If he says it even once we will have the police remove him from the stage’…The transformative power of both words and writers are at the heart of the work we do at American Place Theatre. Words are indeed sacred but also precious and vulnerable. They are powerful and must be heard…. Over the span of 15 years, we have adapted more than twenty works of great writers, But Ray Bradbury and [Fahrenheit 451] have been a sort of Holy Grail to us.
The article in its entirety gives a nuanced glimpse of the delicate balance Literature to Life must find in partnership with schools, teachers and students. For that reason a copy is provided as Appendix H.

Over time Literature to Life has solidified partnerships with schools and presenters across the country. Track records of presenters that book Literature to Life year after year were a testament to the quality of production offered. Handman was happy to see places like the Santa Monica Library (Southern California), Raritan Valley Community College (New Jersey), The Wells Fargo Center (Santa Rosa, California), The Whiting (Flint, Michigan), Playhouse Square (Cleveland, Ohio), booking student and public performances. Under Gwen Brownson’s leadership (National Director of Education), week long and extended residencies accompanied a Literature to Life production and could be tailored to a particular classroom’s needs. With remorse however, Handman also acknowledged the economically-charged drift from APT’s original urban base, “It breaks my heart that we’re not playing in as many schools in Brooklyn and the Bronx” (Handman).

Throughout APT’s life the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has played a crucial role in its sustenance, as it has in so many not-for-profit arts organizations. When Literature to Life started subsuming the functions of APT, the application of grant-writing became a bit muddied. Sometimes potential funding fell between the cracks of Arts and Education (Bradshaw). After the NEA introduced The Big Read program (2006), Literature to Life found itself aligned with a great opportunity. Libraries and public institutions were encouraged with NEA funding to promote and communally celebrate a selected book; Literature to Life was a perfect companion program.
After one performance of *The Things They Carried* in Washington, a partnering librarian said, ‘Billy’s performance was flawless and moving and transported us all. Manuel’s thoughtful discussion questions engaged the audience and really enhanced our understanding of the book. The Literature to Life idea is a great one and this particular performance was a perfect and major addition to our Big Read events.’ (Stone, APT News Archive)

By 2009 only a few of APT’s roster titles overlapped and could benefit from the symbiosis, namely *The Things They Carried, Fahrenheit 451, Their Eyes Were Watching God* (compatible with Literature to Life’s *Zora*). With some foresight and fortuity, this would soon change.

**Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back**

In 2010 an auspicious opportunity arose for APT’s staff, actors and teaching artists… a chance to workshop nine new titles (many of which were Big Read selections), in new innovative formats, and test them out with students and teachers….all under the big blue skies of a dude ranch. Cathy Weiss of the Del E. Webb Center in Wickenburg, Arizona, was the engine behind this residency. But a phone conversation with her showered all the attention back to Literature to Life. She was first exposed to the program through a 2009 APAP conference. “I saw Denise perform excerpts from *The Secret Life of Bees* and I HAD to bring this to our rural community.” The following year Weiss prioritized booking *The Giver*. “We apply for a WESTAF grant, because the pieces are considered ‘higher art’ …we always lose money on these engagements, but it is incredibly worth it…the performances and their interaction with the kids is amazing” (Weiss). When the Wellik Foundation initiated an artist’s residency program on its Flying-E-Ranch property, Weiss was enlisted to seek out worthy companies. After inviting dance companies like American Ballet Theatre II and Northwest Dance Project
to benefit from the creative space and time, Weiss enthusiastically proffered their largest and longest residency to The American Place Theatre.

Over a period of two and a half weeks— with a few horseback rides, hikes and campfires sprinkled in— an APT company of 10 staff members, directors, teaching artists and actors hunkered down for this rare think tank experience. They set out to create, using Literature to Life’s established methodology, a new model of interactive performance/educational outreach. This would differ from previous Literature to Life productions in the following way.

• More time spent on in-class residency than performance: 20 minutes of verbatim performance weaved in and out of enhanced Teaching Artist and Actor collaboration: a complete 90-minute experience as opposed to Literature to Life’s 60-minute experience.

• A more prominent offering of American literary classics. This spoke to the numerous requests of teachers and librarians to provide more innovative outreach within a classic repertoire. A secondary bonus was that many of these titles were part of The Big Read. Furthermore, rights issues that often surrounded contemporary works were obviated.

• The nine new titles included:
  Old Man and the Sea (Ernest Hemingway)
  As I Lay Dying (William Faulkner)
  Invisible Man (Ralph Ellison)
  Poems and Short Stories of Edgar Allen Poe
  The Grapes of Wrath (John Steinbeck)
  Poems of Emily Dickinson
  Their Eyes Were Watching God (Zora Neale Hurston)
  To Kill a Mockingbird (Harper Lee)
  The Bluest Eye (Toni Morrison)

• This subset of offerings would fall under the category of “The Living Library.” Living Library bookings cater to a maximum of 30 students, making them more costly to book, but as the team witnessed in the classrooms of Wickenburg, they provided an “incredibly rare experience for students.” (Barnette)
Another addition was made available in the Living Library model and takes a bit more explanation than a simple bullet point. In the Living Library model, the widely known drama-in-education exercise “teacher in role” can go a step further. It marries the dynamics of Wynn Handman’s character interviews, a process he started over 50 years ago, with this educational tool. Instead of the traditional setting of the teacher or teaching artist taking on a character role to stimulate deeper understanding and critical thinking, the post performance actor stays in the role to answer questions of the students. This has always been an irreplaceable creative stimulus in Handman’s actor training. In the classroom setting, students get the chance to improvise with the actor after having watched a visceral performance of an author’s text, and now they are part of that dynamic through their own questions and interaction. Depending on the post-performance atmosphere, this “actor in role” exercise can be explored or not at the Teaching Artist and Actor’s discretion. But when it happens organically it can be uniquely rewarding for everyone involved (Barnette). Interviews with Living Library actors Denise Wilbanks, Cherita Jones and Master Teaching Artist Piper Anderson have corroborated the sentiment.

To be clear, the original format of Literature to Life was still vital. The addition of The Living Library gave more options of residency and outreach over a broader spectrum of American literature. And yet, despite a stronger-than-ever team of staff, teaching artists and actors; despite an educational surround that only bolstered the established integrity of productions, larger forces were at odds with APT’s survival.

Ripple effects of the 2008 financial crisis weighed on schools, libraries, institutions, not to mention the foundations that helped to make partnerships and grants
possible. Without question, budgetary cuts in all these areas have affected the demand for Literature to Life. From an educational standpoint, the Common Core Standards initiative (2009) has been accused of de-prioritizing arts-based programming. “The public pressure on students, teachers, principals, and school superintendents to raise scores on high-stakes tests is tremendous, and the temptation to tailor and restrict instruction to only that which will be tested is almost irresistible” (Bond). All this could quite possibly be a macro explanation for the financial impasse The American Place Theatre hit at the outset of 2012.

A factor from the micro perspective might involve the entangled history of what was to be APT’s next lifeboat, the work of Lemon Anderson. The Brooklyn-born, Puerto Rican street poet spent more time in and out of jail than in school. His personal story is beyond the scope of this thesis, but has, within the last month (Oct. 2012) been the subject of the PBS featured documentary, Lemon. What is pertinent to APT’s narrative, is the investment made in Anderson’s future, one that APT believed would equally be a part of its future. David Kener was quoted “[We] fell under the Lemon spell…meaning, you want to take care of him at the same time as you want to celebrate him.” The American Place Theatre saw in Anderson a raw talent on par with earlier APT luminaries Eric Bogosian and John Leguizamo. APT offered Anderson an artistic home that included a living stipend, writing residency, teaching artist training, Handman’s acting classes, Handman and Thoron’s editing and directing of the one-man play that would become County of Kings. The theatre envisioned Lemon’s work as a monumental addition to Literature to Life, albeit more accurately “Life to Literature.”
“As the piece began to develop, and obviously it was very good, Lemon began to envision a bigger life for [County of Kings]” (Barnette). This involved bigger producers, with deeper pockets like The Public Theatre and Spike Lee. APT still hopes to add *County of Kings* to its Literature to Life roster in the near future. They have Anderson’s permission; but finding the right replacement actor for such a personal piece is much easier said than done. The truth remains…age-old theatre politics changed the tides for APT’s investment in Lemon Anderson, and to a certain degree its own future.

Time will put all of these factors more clearly into perspective. At the time I entered The American Place Theatre offices to begin research on this thesis, the staff was just beginning to quietly discuss alternatives for staying abreast. While I had my head in the rich history of APT’s archives, staff members were opting to take 60 percent salary cuts, or leave (Barnette). Wynn Handman has removed himself from the operating side of APT. But his spirit and origin of mission has infected many of the loyal staff; to the degree that most were willing to stay on and find a way to keep the organization alive.

Managing Director and interim Executive Director Jennifer Barnette was most instrumental in the courtship and eventual merger between Young Audiences –New York with Literature to Life. “Young Audiences continued to be impressed and surprised at the things we do;” eager to adopt some of Literature to Life’s methodology and practices (Barnette). She admitted that in order to provide a profitable model to Young Audiences, her own job would have to be cut from the budget. But with more conviction than the most invested actor, Barnette concluded “they are a national network that could really enable our educational outreach…and continue our dreams of being national……it’s ridiculously cool, we’re all really proud of it.”
"Stop the whining—the answer to perennial questions about engaging new audiences is getting professional."

--Eric Booth

In his 2003 article “The Emergence of the Teaching Artist,” Eric Booth points out the recent steps towards the professionalization of arts in education. And he defines the uniquely important role of the Teaching Artist: a professional educator with “a dynamic balance of skills in art and in teaching” that can boost learning, literacy, creativity, expressivity and interpersonal dynamics for general audiences. The teaching artist’s outreach spans from schools to prisons, business organizations to community centers (Booth). In the United States, arts in education, and one of its subsets, theatre in education, was beginning to define itself in the mid-1990s. Formalized training at the university level had taken hold by the new millennium. This is not to say that practitioners of arts in education were not plentiful or prodigious prior to this time. We need only review the writings of British practitioner Dorothy Heathcoate, to understand the advancements made between arts and education as early as 1960. However, for the historical purposes of this thesis, it is important to contextualize The American Place Theatre’s (APT) evolving educational models alongside the emerging roles and methods of a professional field new unto itself. While the focus of this thesis is not the analysis of the educational components, it is important to highlight the standards by which APT can
claim to offer a “catalyst for learning and self expression” (APT website) across curricula and amidst the modern landscape of common core criteria.

By the late 1990s, the role of the “stagehand/moderator,” as evidenced in *The Bluest Eye* performance outline (Ch. 3), was now given the title of a “teaching artist” (TA). Accompanying the new title were higher expectations and more sophisticated interaction between the students during pre and post show work. APT’s then Director of Education Paul Fontana made a concerted effort to offer the latest creative resources and tools to the city’s teachers, administrators and artists. He collaborated with actor and arts educator Joseph Edward to create the teacher training workshop *Teacher’s Place: Exploring Original Dramatic Work through Literature* (APT archives). Offered to teachers of grades seven through twelve, this professional development workshop introduced theatre-based exercises for the classroom, built around students’ reading of *Black Boy*.

Within the same year (1999) APT began producing Literature to Life *Process Dramas*: Piri Thomas’ *Down These Mean Streets* and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. For schools whose budgets would not allow for trips to The American Place Theatre, or for teachers whose students had experienced a Literature to Life production and wanted to continue introducing books in a similarly dynamic way, this alternative built an on-your-feet, creative curriculum around the aforementioned books. Such examples were the progenitors of APT’s commitment to professional development. Gwen Brownson, current Director of Education says that the New York Department of Education has gone through phases where they outsourced teachers to APT for professional development programs. “They have always trusted our work and
training, but depending on their own priorities (and budgets), our work fluctuates
between vital and merely ‘enrichment’” (Brownson). When asked about the 1999 process
dramas, Wynn Handman unassumingly smiled and shrugged, “my NYU education
staff...” He did not begrudge the aspirations of his staff. He entrusted them to do their
work while he did his.

There is no denying that a notable string of NYU graduates and faculty have long
been affiliated with The American Place Theatre. In 1995, a year after Literature to Life’s
inception, Russell Granet was named APT’s Director of Education, famously
implementing an NEA grant to integrate art into New York City school curricula.
Concurrently Granet created for NYU’s Steinhardt School, the graduate course Drama
with Special Education Populations. Granet’s mentorship (directly or indirectly) would
steer a next generation of educational leaders to APT.24 Introduced in the previous
chapter, David Kener filled the role before being promoted to Executive Director. As
Kener moved Literature to Life towards national recognition, Gwen Brownson was
chosen to create the new position, Director of National Education. Both Kener and
Brownson hail from NYU as well. The mention is not intended so much as a “who’s
who” of alma maters, but rather to point out that the work being done with Literature to
Life was evolving with some key constituents from a school that put educational theatre
on the map.25 More important than sharing an alma mater, the educational staff shared a
mission: to bridge a chasm between the theatrical art form and theatre in education
(Brownson). They worked from the “shared belief that the quality of artist educators who
provide direct student services must match the masterful level of acting in APT
productions”(Barnette bio, APT website). This mission drives them today, and is what
has kept Literature to Life abreast despite the increasing challenges of severely reduced school budgets. As Brownson builds stronger relationships with presenters nationwide, she is taking on “the inspired task of researching the social issues that exist within the communities locally” (Brownson).

APT strives to make each production and classroom residency pertinent to the specific culture that surrounds the students. For instance Brownson cites the continued work they have done with schools in Flint, Michigan, one of America’s regions hit hardest since the recession. The TA’s challenges, and true successes, come from connecting the artistic material not only to an educational curriculum of Common Core Standards but to the realities of the students’ day to day world. The federally founded Common Core Standards initiative (released June 2010) has been mentioned and is pertinent to the culture of working within schools today. Though adhering to the established national standards is voluntary, schools are now provided with baseline criteria for educational expectations. Common Core Standards has replaced the No Child Left Behind initiative which left many educators feeling unempowered in the classroom and narrowly ‘teaching to the test’ (Brownson). Brownson admits that era was especially threatening to a program like Literature to Life. Despite fervent approbation from teachers and students, funding strictly had to be appropriated for test-based learning. Over the past year and a half she sees promise in the efficacy of the Common Core Standards initiative. APT has put together a voluntary advisory board of teachers and administrators that meets semi-annually and gives the organization continued insight on the effects of CCS in the classrooms.
We believe that to achieve results it is essential to work as partners with our classroom teachers and to stay informed of the expectations placed on their teaching in the classroom. Our teachers report that APT residencies directly inspire the new units of study required by the city and state (New York) in the 2011-12 year. They assert that *Literature to Life* ensures achievement because we help students make deep personal connections to text. (APT website)

The current teacher advisory board crosses a diverse section of New York’s educational landscape. Included are Bernadette Anand, Margaret Borger, Cynthia Copeland, Matt Corallo, John DeMelio, Lee Klein, Ellen Kaplan, Julie Mann, Christine Olson, Rebekah Shoaf, Lisa K. Winkler. The board will soon include some of the outstanding educators Brownson has encountered since APT’s national expansion (Brownson).

To offer an educational curriculum that matched the level of APT productions and performances, the organization also had to scrutinize the quality of TAs they hired. Baby steps taken in the late 90s to offer professional development courses evolved to an APT teaching artist training program. The program was originally geared toward aiding in career transition of talented artists who might not have otherwise gone back to university. “Here we have Wynn’s class which is such a strong pool of talent. And we also knew as we were growing nationally, we could imagine a time where we needed trained Literature to Life TAs in other cities” (Barnette).

In 2004 APT applied to the Dana Foundation, a New York-based philanthropic organization dedicated to the support of grants and outreach in science, health and education. It received funding to establish a formal teacher training program, one that is in effect today. APT now offers two levels of programs. The first program offers a broad arts education technique, geared for the artist transitioning to teaching artist. The second program is targeted to professionals in the field wanting to master APT’s approach to
performance-based educational outreach. “It gives them an opportunity to become experts on the specific books on our roster and consider the methodologies unique to Literature to Life” (Barnette). Both programs can and often do serve as audition opportunities for professional TA’s hoping to work with APT.

As I shadowed the actor and TA for a performance of *The Things They Carried*, I had an opportunity to interview newcomer TA Erin Kaplan. Having spent undergraduate and graduate years working in varying capacities as a teaching artist in the New York City region, Kaplan was very aware of the APT Literature to Life program. “It is one of the top 10 places you want to be…you know they are good because of TA retention…they only add a few new TA’s every four years.” Kaplan was one of fifteen candidates accepted to the second level of Literature to Life teacher training in 2011. Although her Ph.D. program at City University of New York (CUNY) started the same week as the concentrated APT masters training, she sought permission to postpone start times and juggle wherever possible. She did not want to miss an opportunity to work for APT.

APT training is not a substitute for a graduate program. The professional development offering is gratis to accepted applicants. It typically runs as a two-week intensive. Candidates asked back for the second level program are given a stipend. Kaplan emphasized how beneficial the specificity of methodology and its application was in comparison to her Master’s work. It provides the tools to create the book-centered curriculum: a matrix of questions and exercises that feed off the group dynamic, specific group age range, and audience size. “You are somewhat limited creatively because you
have to maintain the structure they’ve given you, but on the other hand you know if you’ve maintained the structure you are going to have a successful residency” (Kaplan).

Beyond a focused methodology for the exploration of each book, APT has come up with an empowered partnership between the actor and teaching artist, in both performance and classroom. The Flying –E-Ranch residency (2011) allowed for actors, TAs and staff to be involved in the adaptation process of the many new works. TAs sat in on all actor rehearsals to have a keener understanding of the character process. This is especially important for facilitation of Actor-in-Role question and answer time (see ch. 3). The residency also allowed the actors to step into the role of the TA, and work directly with students in Wickenburg. “It made them much more in tune with the TA’s process”(Thoron). They were feeding off each other’s talents; the result was a deeper understanding of their identity as a company. Jennifer Barnette shared that one of the most attractive qualities to Young Audiences as they looked to merge with Literature to Life, was the pronounced respect Literature to Life had fostered between TA and actor. That sense of teamwork is picked up by the students and encourages their level of participation (Barnette).

On APT’s website there is a page entitled Reading Room. News, blogs and updates that pertain to Literature to Life are posted by various staff members, giving viewers a taste of the collaborative, scholarly culture of the group. One can share in the findings of their company ‘book reports’ and ‘article reports.’ Oftentimes the posts include reflection statements by the staff, giving further insight to the individuals within the team. It is inspiring to see, even in the midst of a financial threat of dissolution, their thirst to refine, contribute to and advance the burgeoning field of arts in education.
“The thing about a story is that you dream it as you tell it, hoping that others might dream along with you, and in this way, memory and imagination and language combine to create spirits in the head.”

--Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried

The Things They Carried (TTTC) was not on Wynn Handman’s radar when first published. However, one can see from the quotation above, that O’Brien’s writing is well aligned with the spirit of Literature to Life. In the absence of sets and costumes, but in the presence of quality literature and quality dramatization, audiences can access their own inspired faculties and “dream along.”

Handman was introduced to the book while attending a wedding celebration for friend Bobbie Greene McCarthy on the Potomac River just outside Washington D.C.26 Across from him sat an official from the Library of Congress who spoke of the newly initiated Veteran’s History Project. Knowing a bit about Handman’s own history and his educational endeavors with Literature to Life, this woman shared “well I have a favorite book…”

The conversation led to the commission of two performance pieces by the Library of Congress for the Veteran’s History Project. A shared bill of performances devised and produced by The American Place Theatre was performed at the Coolidge Auditorium, November 12, 22 and 24 of 2004, in honor of Veteran’s Day. “The [Library of Congress] gave me all these transcripts…with actress Annie McGreevey we focused on the story of one triage nurse, Prescott, who served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968” (Handman
Voices of War: A Vietnam Nurse’s Journey was presented alongside Handman’s adaptation of The Things they Carried (TTTC). Handman student and professional actor Dashiel Eaves brought to life the many voices of Tim O’Brien’s semi-autobiographical work. A 17-year-old boy sat in the Coolidge Auditorium that night, compelled to write to APT Executive Director within minutes of seeing the performance:

Vietnam was made real for us tonight. The youth of today do not know a lot about the tragedies that occurred during the 60’s…History classes fall short when teaching the effects of the war. Hopefully the youth can take what they learned and spread the truth that war never fades….War is war. Killing is killing. Death is death, and stories like the ones witnessed tonight burn images of the virtually unknown past regarding Vietnam, so that one day, when we become the leaders, we will not make the same mistakes. (Robert Capparelli electronic letter, APT archives)

Voices of War did not endure as a Literature to Life production but its partner piece The Things they Carried did. The following case study digs into the particulars of a production that continues to be one of Literature to Life’s most resounding triumphs.

After the high of its Washington D.C. premiere, APT was proud to add the adaptation of Tim O’Brien’s masterpiece to the roster. It was featured alongside other Literature to Life offerings at the annual APAP (Association of Performing Arts Presenters) conference. Unlike the thematic material of previous productions, TTTC spoke less to a specific ethnicity or urban demographic than to our nation at large…with a tacit urgency. The United States was in the throes of the Iraq War. Within the same year (2004) Americans were processing the news of the day: Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse, the trial of Saddam Hussein, Hans Blix and his assertion that weapons of mass destruction did not exist. The questions and controversies surrounding this war were profoundly parallel to the Vietnam experience. “But unlike Vietnam, skepticism of the
Iraq war does not seem to mean the surge in student political involvement it meant then.”

So began Anna Robinson-Sweet’s assessment of her fellow classmates during the Iraq war (Robinson-Sweet *PBS News Hour*). Literature to Life’s production could bring a very intimate perspective on war, eliciting perhaps, as it did with Robert Capparelli, an emotional response. And with a personal investment comes a greater opportunity of engaging in critical and contextual analysis… analysis that triggers deeper understanding of global crises in the here and now.

Everyone was in agreement though. *The Things They Carried*, in its 45-minute rendition (as a partner piece) was not realizing its full potential. “It needed to be extended to fit Literature to Life’s 60-minute model” — and more importantly—“we didn’t feel it was fully representing the book” (Barnette Interview). Playhouse Square’s Director of Education Colleen Porter, already a strong supporter of Literature to Life, likewise agreed and enthusiastically sought out the funding to host a workshop residency for APT. Porter strategically partnered with Cuyahoga County Public Library and Cleveland Public Library, and found the means to rally author Tim O’Brien, actor Dashiel Eaves, APT artistic staff and an exciting new component, musician (bassist) Martin Wind. Wynn Handman was present via telephone as much as possible; hip surgery precluded his physical presence.

Literature to Life’s adaptation process had always been an invested collaboration between Handman (or Thoron) and the actor. Adding the author and composer while workshopping the piece was an “historical first.”

It was a fascinating back and forth…there were so many chapters that could be covered and could change the impression of what an audience member felt at the end. I remember in particular…Tim and I both wanted the final chapter included.
Based on the memory of a little girl, a childhood friend…the reflection ties up what the book is about. Ultimately we decided it should not be included, it did not make the most sense given it was theatre and not a book. (Barnette)

Having read the collection of short stories and seen the live production, I can understand the dilemma. Public and critical reception of *The Things They Carried* lauded O’Brien’s work for many reasons… as a book “so searing and immediate you can almost hear the choppers in the background,” or for its “pulsating rhythms and nerve-racking dangers.” With a deft adaptation and a talented actor, those qualities could be transferred and even heightened on stage. But what set this book apart from other wartime literature, according to many critics, was O’Brien’s “exquisite rendering of memory,” his line between “fiction and fact…beautifully and permanently blurred.”27 The memory of O’Brien’s childhood girlfriend put a soft, poetic framework around the jagged edges of life and death, honor and humiliation, war and peace. Inclusion of the memory of a childhood girlfriend’s death—told in present time—in reflection of the weight of war, was one remove too many for this adaptation. Regardless, the residency granted trial-and-error time necessary to bring similar nuances of the book to the live production.

The script that came out of that 2005 residency is the one that is used today, the one I saw Billy Lyons perform for the Pingry School in New Jersey (May 25, 2012). Beyond playing to schools, libraries and community institutions, *The Things They Carried* (*TTTC*) has been the educational centerpiece for extended classroom residencies, for panel discussions at the New York Public Library and Joe’s Pub at The Public Theatre. It was the feature of the International Society of Bassists’ conference (2007), showcasing its novel approach to musical improvisation with performed text.28
The scope of this thesis, historically vast and contextual, has spent little time addressing editing choices for adaptation. What follows is an analysis of the adaptation of The Things They Carried, in and of itself; also as it played to one of its target audiences. Specifics of stage direction are pointed out in one instance as a sampling. I will not follow stage direction comprehensively. Most of the textual quotations appear both in the book and the script and are references through internal citations with script page and book page. Furthermore, in the following section I will refer to the segments of O’Brien’s The Things They Carried as chapters, which is how they appear in the book. However most of the chapters were first published as short stories in the various publications: Esquire, The Massachusetts Review, Playboy, Gentleman’s Quarterly, and Granta. The deft composition of the story collection took the individual prize-winning stories to even higher heights. The first short story in the collection “The Things They Carried” lends its title to the book.

The Things They Carried as a Literature to Life Adaptation
(Performed at the Pingry School–Basking Ridge, New Jersey)

I arrived at the Pingry campus with the actor and teaching artist (TA) an hour before performance time. Transportation was arranged in advance by APT. The actor and TA traveled on their own according to a printed itinerary. We were ushered into the school auditorium with less than an hour to tech and prepare. The school provided what was to be the requested minimal set: a table, chair, bench and stool. Actor Billy Lyons quickly set the pieces on the stage, forming three delineated spaces on the stage, and ducked behind a curtain to don a khaki shirt and pants. The clothing suggested a military uniform but was clearly civilian wear. Draped over the chair was a jacket, to be put on at
a specific moment in the performance. A canteen filled with water also sat on the table and served a much-needed purpose during the 60-minute, one-person play. Meanwhile TA Erin Kaplan found the lighting booth (an amenity rarely present at many locations) and hurriedly tried to coordinate the sound equipment with the lighting equipment. The two had less than 20 minutes to go cue to cue, cut short by the entrance of students.

The eighth graders had been reading parts of *TTC* to complement a five-week unit on Vietnam and Watergate. They sat and were introduced to Erin, and without much ado the pre-show began. According to APT’s educational outline the TA is given the power to assess the room and decide how much time needs to go towards stage etiquette reminders versus introducing a major theme or themes of the book, or discussing the historical and cultural context. For this performance, Kaplan dove into the latter option. “Who has read the book?” “When does it take place?” “How long did the Vietnam War last…specifically what years?”…As the students had been studying this, many of the answers came easily…”Do you know what it is to have ‘Declaration of War’?” A brief discussion ensued about why we were not technically at war. And then, “Any parallels today?” A few students attempted to lay out the similarities and differences between our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At this point Kaplan moved towards setting the scene, explaining that one actor would be playing multiple roles. The audience was invited to actively listen and imagine…in O’Brien’s own words, “to dream along” (*TTC* 230).

In the book, an extended list-poem-turned-prose comprises the first chapter. The introductory sentence begins: “First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried letters from a girl named Martha, a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey” (*TTC* 1). The specific focus on Jimmy Cross and Martha then moves to more sweeping statements:
“The things they carried were largely determined by necessity… P-38 can openers, pocket knives, heat tabs, wrist watches, mosquito repellant, chewing gum, candy, cigarettes…” (TTTC 2). And eventually the less tangible things are listed: the physical, emotional and metaphoric weights on the men. For the stage adaptation the list of carried objects does not open the play; it becomes the thread that weaves other segments together.

Theatrically, more strength and clarity was found in starting from the third chapter/story “On the Rainy River.”

*I’m Tim O’Brien. It’s June 17, 1968, a month after I’ve graduated from Macalester College. It’s a humid afternoon, cloudy and very quiet. My mother and father are having lunch out in the kitchen. My draft notice has just arrived. I’m being drafted to fight in a war I hate. I look at the letter, scan the first few lines, and feel the blood go thick behind my eyes… (Script 1/TTTC 41)

The italicized sentence is the only added text. The rest of this extended monologue is verbatim. The actor does not recite the entire chapter; internal cuts are made. However 13 pages of a 28-page script is dedicated to “On the Rainy River,” making very real for 21st century students the implications of conscription on one particular individual. The character “Tim O’Brien” proudly reveals “I have the world dicked—Phi Beta Kappa…president of the student body and a full ride scholarship to Harvard” He alternately confesses, “I hated Boy Scouts…dirt and tents and mosquitos… I don’t know a rifle from a slingshot” (Script 2/TTTC 41). But that is not a reflection on his work ethic. O’Brien’s summer job at the Armour meatpacking plant entails assembly line removal of blood clots in the necks of pigs. “I go home smelling of pig…It’s tough getting dates this summer” (Script 3/TTTC 43). The script introduces dramatic tension through the draft notice immediately then takes the time to establish who exactly this
young man is and what is at stake for him. Unlike the many jingoists of his town, the
“polyestered Kiwanis boys… pious churchgoers [and] chatty housewives”(Script 5/TTTC 45), O’Brien has studied the international conflict.

They don’t know history. They don’t know the first thing about Diem’s tyranny, or the nature of Vietnamese nationalism, or the long colonialism of the French - this is all too damned complicated, it requires some reading-- but no matter, it is a war to stop the Communists, plain and simple, which is how they like things…(Script 5,6/ TTTC 45)

Isolation and internal conflict confirm only one thing: “this summer is absolute moral confusion. It’s my view that you don’t make war without knowing why” (Script 3/TTTC 40).

True to the book, O’Brien on stage relives the paralyzing threat of ‘no way out’ unless he can make a run for it. He weighs the ramifications of fleeing to Canada to dodge the draft. What is worse, war or exile… exile from family, friends, country, career…life? O’Brien confesses his escape to the Canadian border, ultimately to an old fishing lodge and its shrunken, bald master of the house, Elroy Burdahl. While the majority of this segment involves the verbalized struggle within O’Brien’s racing head, moments of comic respite are supplied by Burdahl’s one-line responses. Actor Billy Lyons handled the switching of characters seamlessly, with a mere change in vocal timber and the suggestion of a hunch in the shoulders. This particular Literature to Life adaptation has fewer characters to be played by the actor. So when dialogue from other characters occurs, it is usually a short interjection and the actor’s shift is subdued; more akin to a story-teller moving in and out of dialogue than presentational characterizations.

“On the Rainy River” has a penultimate moment with Elroy Berdahl in a boat, tacitly devising a fishing excursion to row O’Brien to Canada. All O’Brien needs to do is
jump in the water and swim twenty yards to shore. But instead of a streamline focus, O’Brien senses an imagined “audience to [his] life…screaming… ’Traitor, Turncoat, Pussy!’…I will kill and maybe die. Because I am embarrassed not to” (Script 12, 13/TTTC 59). The adaptation shares the same denouement. The actor voices Berdahl’s omniscient remark “ain’t biting” and moves back into storyteller mode, turning the boat back toward Minnesota.

[The next morning I get into the car, and drive south toward home.] The day is cloudy. I pass through towns with familiar names, through the pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam… I am a coward. I am going to war. (Script 13, TTTC 61)

The bracketed sentence is one example of text added to the adaptation for narrative assistance. The rest is verbatim aside from an alteration of verb tense, which O’Brien originally wrote in past tense. The box around “war” is as it appears in the script to delineate the stage direction that accompanies the verbal cue. If Martin Wind or a replacement live musician is not playing, track six of Wind’s recording is to start. Stage left lights fade out, center light fades to 75 percent. Blocking for the actor is to “cross to upstage center stool, put on army jacket, drink from canteen and turn downstage center” (script). This sampling of stage and technical direction demonstrates that even the most significant stage transitions (from the Canadian border to Vietnam) have maintained a simplicity—a simplicity that allows the poetic resonance of Tim O’Brien’s language to linger with an audience as the character dons his jacket. The script transitions into O’Brien’s Vietnam stories via extracts from the book’s first chapter, the laundry list of “The Things They Carried.” Rather than start with the specific reference to a First Lieutenant and his girlfriend, it picks up with “They were called legs or grunts,” a strong
parallel to the adaptation’s opening line, “I am Tim O’Brien.” The parallel reinforces a sense of identity immediately lost once war becomes the backdrop. Men were given the dehumanizing name of a body part, or even worse, an animalistic bodily noise. Whereas in most Literature to Life adaptations the narrative is changed to first person and present tense, this segment purposefully retains the author’s use of “they,” in past tense. A switch to “we” might have insinuated a positive collaborative experience, rather than the gnawing, isolating effects of being dropped into the marshy fields of Vietnam. Adhering to the book’s past tense form exhibits a respect for the world O’Brien is now entering. It existed long before his arrival, and would endure for some time after O’Brien’s departure. Furthermore, adherence to a past tense reinforces the overriding conceit of the book that the thoughts are memory…memory sometimes re-lived in an expressionistic dream, other times, as is in this instance, considered after time and reflection.

Among the things they carried, the script pulls out the figurative elements rather than the physical and pragmatic (the original story riffs on both):

They carried the land itself—Vietnam, the place, the soil — a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. (Script 14/TTTC 15)

The sensory introduction to Vietnam then graduates to how one carries on in this surreal world:

…just humping, one step and then the next and then another… They had no sense of strategy or mission. They searched the villages without knowing what to look for, not caring, kicking over jars of rice, frisking children and old men, blowing tunnels, sometimes setting fires and sometimes not, then forming up and moving on to the next village, then other villages, where it would always be the same. (Script 14/TTTC 15)

…and how one carries himself,
…when the firing ended…They would touch their bodies, feeling shame, then quickly hiding it…“Scary stuff,” one of them might say. But then someone else would grin or flick his eyebrows and say, “Roger-dodger, almost cut me a new asshole, almost.” They were afraid of dying but they were even more afraid to show it. (Script 15/TTTC 19 20)

Another transitional scene occurs more than midway through the adaptation, referencing the tangibles soldiers carried.

Henry Dobbins carried his girlfriend’s pantyhose around his neck…Rat Kiley carried brandy…Kiowa carried three pairs of socks and Dr. Scholl’s foot powder. (Script 19, 20/TTTC 9)

This time the mentions are specific to individual soldiers. In line with the script’s narrative, O’Brien has now spent time with and knows his comrades. What does not transfer from the original chapter are the ubiquitous physical things that were carried, i.e… dog tags, ponchos, ammunition. In the absence of generality, unique characters, in a single phrase, are emitted.

There are a number of pre and post show questions/exercises built around the idea of carrying things. The first asks an audience to list some of the physical things the soldiers might carry (tangibles not included in the script) to estimate the actual weight, in comparison to what might be in the students’ school backpacks. “Raise your hand if you carried a picture of a friend or a relative with you today. Raise your hand if you carried a good luck charm with you today”(TTTC educational outline). The questioning moves towards non-physical and emotional things a soldier might carry, and then on to memory. “Do you think soldiers carry memories of home with them?”(TTTC educational outline). The In-class residencies based on TTTC go much farther with memory-based exercises, stimulating students’ literary and creative writing skills.
War-themed Literature is rarely written without addressing the implications of killing another human being. *The Things They Carried* does not shy away from the subject by any means. In the two chapters “The Man I Killed” and “Ambush,” author Tim O’Brien takes alternative stylistic routes to re-telling the same story. Whether entirely true or not, the double reference suggests the emotional weight bearing on the author. Though Literature to Life’s adaptation is viewed by students as young as 12 and 13-years-old, it purposefully includes excerpts from both chapters. The artistic truth of the book and the script is inextricably tied to them.

The script introduces the story by starting with the more narrative version in “Ambush.” O’Brien the author frames the narrative with a dialogue he has been having with his intuitive young daughter. He shares that the following story is the remembered truth he hopes to one day tell his grown daughter. This memory is “why [he] keeps writing these stories.” Though it is completely viable and compelling on the page, including O’Brien’s imagined grown up daughter as receiver of the story muddies an onstage through line. The daughter element is forfeited and the scene begins “It’s still dark when Kiowa shakes me for the final watch. We are working in two-man teams—one man on guard while the other sleeps” (Script 16, *TTTC* 132). The adaptation has shifted to present tense. Suspense is heightened in doing so.

In tiny slivers, dawn begins to break through the fog…the mosquitoes are fierce…there is no sound at all. …I try to swallow whatever is rising from my stomach, which tastes like lemonade, something fruity and sour. (Script 17, *TTTC* 132)

Part of the TA’s pre-show instruction advises student audiences to “listen and visualize; allow yourself to see, hear, taste, smell, and feel all that the actor describes” (TTTC educational
outline). One can imagine from the example above, if students are actively listening, their senses will be sparked too.

The character O’Brien’s descriptive and active words pour forth, in cinematic slow-motion fashion,

There are no thoughts about killing. The grenade is to make him go away, just evaporate… The grenade makes a popping noise—not soft but not loud either, not what I’d expected, and there is a puff of dust and smoke—a small white puff—and the young man jerks upward as if pulled by invisible wires… There is no wind. He lay at the center of the trail, his right leg beneath him, his one eye shut, his other eye a huge star-shaped hole. (Script 17, TTTC 133)

A sound cue (improvised music or Wind’s track) initiates a change in chapter and tone, the script then reverses the book’s order and draws from pieces of “The Man I Killed.”

More obituary-like in style, the point of view is respectfully objective, back to past tense.

The man I killed had been born, maybe, in 1946 in the village of My Khe near the central coastline of Quang Ngai Province… He was not a communist. He was a citizen and a soldier… His health was poor, his body small and frail. He liked books… He hoped the Americans would go away. Soon, he hoped… (Script 18, TTTC 125)

Another sound and light cue takes us to dialogue provided by a fellow soldier.

“Oh, man, you fuckin’ trashed the fucker,” Azar says. “You scrambled his sorry self, look at that, you did, you laid him out like shredded fuckin’ wheat. On the dead test, this particular individual gets A-plus.” (Script 19/ TTTC 125 126)

Note that the language is not softened for educational purposes. APT feels it important to give students the full essence of a writer’s work and the world that encompasses it. They trust that students, when engaged in the performance, have the capacity to contextualize the rationale behind mature language. If the productions, and I am speaking now about all of the Literature to Life pieces, elicit a rise over mature language, the TAs have permission to later examine with the students why particular language is chosen.
In the case of TTTC, a deeper delving occurs within the literary text itself:

Listen to Rat Kiley. “Cooze,” he says. He does not say bitch. He certainly does not say woman, or girl. He says, “cooze.” Then he spits and stares. He’s nineteen years old. It’s too much for him - so he looks at you with those big sad gentle killer eyes and says “cooze,” because his friend is dead, and because it’s so incredibly sad and true: she never wrote back. (Script 22/ TTTC 69)

It is an ideal example of the type of cultural literacy Literature to Life seeks to promote. APT felt it an important segment to include in the adaptation.

The penultimate vignette for the script is one that appears within the first half of O’Brien’s book. Rat Kiley and his company mates are attracted to a baby water buffalo that has surfaced seemingly out of nowhere. Rat Kiley’s reaction begins with a kindly pat on the nose. The action quickly devolves to utter depravity: a complete massacre of the animal with multiple guns. We are left with a stark visual of the remains: “just a light bubbling sound where the nose had been…nothing moved except the eyes, which were enormous, the pupils black and dumb”(Script 24, TTTC 79). The water buffalo’s literary or dramatic purpose is only alluded to in the text/adaptation:

We had witnessed something essential, something brand new and profound, a piece of the world so startling there was not yet a name for it… Well, that’s Nam. Garden of Evil. Over here, man, every sin’s real fresh and original. (Script 25/TTTC 80)

From witnessing the school performance and hearing the responses during the post show, it was clear that this scene made one of the strongest impressions on the students. As the actor delivered the vignette I looked back to a sea of 13-year-olds with eyes wide, mouths agape; I heard a hushed voice “oh gosh!” The impact of the story was furthered by Lyon’s committed portrayal of Kiley. His body pulsed with each imaginary shot taken. He had worked up an intense sweat by this time. The drops spurting off his face eerily
mimicked blood pouring forth from the water buffalo. Lyons later shared with me his experience, having performed TTTC in schools across the country. “Students are riled by this scene,” he said. They drive questions about its significance and purpose without prompting. It opens up an opportunity for the TA and students to explore the use of symbolism, to examine O’Brien’s raison d’être: “not the facts of what happened but the communication of the full emotional experience” (TTTC educational outline). And to further explore O’Brien’s statement, which also appears in the script: “A true war story is never moral…it does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior” (Script 22, TTTC 68).

Within the same breath O’Brien warns:

If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. (Script/ TTTC 68)

While the end of the adaptation dare not “uplift,” Handman and O’Brien (author) found a way for the script to close with an ambiguously figurative lift. It draws from a section of the book’s first chapter “The Things They Carried,” a flight of fancy the soldiers took during moments of respite.

They dreamed of freedom birds. At night, on guard, staring in to the dark, they were carried away by jumbo jets… And the velocity - wings and engines - a smiling stewardess - but it was more than a plane, it was a real bird, a big sleek silver bird with feathers and talons and high screeching. They were flying. (Script 26, 27/TTTC 22 23)

Audiences may intuit that the lift came from the prevalent drugs that aided soldiers to sleep. This excerpt goes on to quote O’Brien, “I’m sorry motherfuckers…I’m goofed on a space cruise, I’m gone!” A thorough examination of what the soldiers often carried home with them…drug addiction and psychosis; and a deeper look at why their
acceptance back into American society was less than seamless, is on the table for TAs and teacher to discuss.

With one last light cue and internal shift for the actor (a shift from second person to first), the character Tim O’Brien speaks reflectively…

Though its odd, you’re never more alive than when you’re almost dead…although in the morning you must cross the river and go into the mountains and do terrible things and maybe die, even so, you find yourself studying the fine colors on the river, you feel wonder and awe at the setting of the sun, and you are filled with a hard, aching love for how the world could be and always should be, but now is not. (Script 27 28/TTTC 81 82)

In the recesses of a gruesome book, tinges of hope are detectable. Ending with this last excerpt seemed an appropriate way to honor the book and the adaptation. Stage direction notes have the actor turn and walk upstage, grab his canteen, stop for a beat before lights fade and the longing bass notes dial up.

Post Performance Observations and Reflections

The performance at Pingry found its audience of middle-schoolers clapping enthusiastically with approval; one student broke from conformity to give a standing ovation. TA Erin Kaplan drew up the lights and ran center stage to take over. Without missing a beat, she instigated a “talk and turn” exercise: one where she throws out different moments from the script and asks the audience to share with their neighbor the first thought that comes to their mind. Once dialogue was flowing freely, she requested voluntary responses to “Do you think Tim O’Brien made the right choice to go to war?” “Is he a hero or a patriot?” These questions were answered by a handful of students, and opened up a continuous dialogue between audience and TA (this is where the Baby Water Buffalo questions came flooding in). Whether working in a more intimate setting or with
an auditorium-sized audience, the TA has studied and rehearsed a matrix of directions to take. The ideal is to have the energy and inquisitiveness of the audience lead the direction of discussion. The trained TA can implement re-framing techniques if necessary to capitalize on time.

Within a few minutes Billy Lyon, towed off and re-hydrated, came back on stage and entered the dialogue. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the TA and actor can decide at this point if they will execute an ‘actor-in-role’ Q and A. Lyons did not stay in character; he answered questions as himself. As is usually the case, the students thrive on hearing about the actor’s process. When asked “How many times did you have to practice to remember all those lines?… Lyons spoke of the need to break the script down into small chunks…tell one little story…then the next…and the next. He shared with the students the necessity of imagination and self-suggestion to make O’Brien’s world real for himself, over and over again. And that, after performing this piece for over six years now, he still gets nervous. Without elaborating, Lyons inferred that a special connection to his father was kindled in taking on this acting assignment. His father fought in Vietnam and had his own “The Man I Killed” stories. Like many of the Vietnam vets Lyons has encountered, his father had kept most of his experiences to himself, buried. Watching this piece has given many veterans ‘permission’ to unleash stories that have haunted them for decades.

I was reminded of my first thesis interview with Wynn Handman. He spoke with utmost respect for Billy, who has invested so much in the role of Tim O’Brien. “He carries these disturbing memories as if they were his, to be summoned up, from school to school, state to state, for years on end” (Handman). Handman holds this regard for all the
actors who have taken on the multi-layered, often deeply bruised characters that make Literature to Life memorable and enlightening. Handman acknowledges that their burden has enriched many lives. Billy Lyons, without doubt, says it has enriched his own life too.

The performance and post show talk was held to a strict 90-minute format. It was the end of the day; buses were waiting outside to receive the students. Their history teacher, Mike Webster, who had arranged the Literature to Life booking stayed behind to talk. “We don’t do anything like this through the year...I happened upon TTTC two years ago when it was performed at Raritan Community College.” Webster has booked it annually now and will continue to do so, “it complements the historical and textual work like nothing else.” The students were assigned many of the short stories within the collection, but not all, so that after seeing the performance they would have additional literary terrain to explore. Webster went on to share that he had been teaching this class for 20 years. In generations past, some of the parents had fought in Vietnam. And some had come in to speak. But even then there was a guardedness and reserve that did not facilitate the same kind of connection that this performance does. He continued on to emphasize the impact Literature to Life’s TTTC has on a Pingry School student—a ‘prep-school’ student—that is. O’Brien’s early confession of “smug removal…that killing and dying did not fall within my special province”(TTTC 41) hits home acutely for many of his well-fed, well-protected, well-educated students (Webster). Experiencing Literature to Life, they are encouraged to form stronger opinions on America’s military stance today, to perhaps consider that they are not “above it,” as O’Brien once thought (Script 2/TTTC 41).
Lyons spoke of the uniquely different student and adult responses based on location and demographic of where the piece is performed. In contrast to the scenario observed at Pingry (students less directly involved with the military), students in Brooklyn connect this performance to the active recruitment they are encountering today. “Why are these recruiters at our football games?” “Why are they contacting us on Facebook?” (Lyons interview). During the Pingry school post show discussion, a point was made after one student asked Lyons with sincere concern, “If you were in Tim O’Brien’s shoes, what would YOU have done?” It was clear that many of these students were considering, possibly for the first time, the heft of a personal debate: “If I don’t go to war, someone else is going in my place.”

The last question was asked, presumably by a student who had read the entire book, “Why were these particular chapters chosen?” Lyons had an opportunity to discuss APT’s method in staging rich, comprehensive works. “You build a dramatic arc the best you can, something that has a beginning, a middle and an end. By constructing the story this way, you have a journey that you’re going on with the character.” Kaplan interjected “Do you all feel like you went on a journey?” The audience replied with nods, raised eyebrows, affirming laughs and more than a few “oh yeah’s.” Appendix I provides a sampling of student and teacher responses from various TTTC performances nationwide.
EPILOGUE

As I commuted back to New York City with Billy Lyons and Erin Kaplan (an hour and a half excursion that involved trains, transfers and taxis), I had the opportunity to hear an array of reminiscences from memorable The Things They Carried (TTTC) performances.

One anticipated booking at a Seattle library brought Lyons in front of an audience of five women. Lyons could have mistaken each one for his grandmother. He had never considered substituting a single word of the written text (it goes against the beliefs of APT) until he looked out to this incredibly intimate, genteel audience. He and the TA agreed it seemed most appropriate to use the word “freakin” in place of its more vulgar sibling, for just one particular line. The performance ended and Lyons was excoriated by five women who saw right through his appeasing gesture. They set him straight.

At a New York Public Library performance for professional development and the general public, the actor was surprised to find that his typical set (as mentioned in ch. 5 consists of no more than a bench, table, chair and stool) was not provided. He had to improvise with two gorgeous marble tables instead. Kaplan chimed in “there were no lights, no set…it was fabulous.” Lyons nodded in disbelief, “was one of the best shows I’ve ever done.”

Presenting to adults or students, Lyons holds himself to the same standards he has long learned from Handman. He finds the material too precious to fall into rote delivery. During the train ride he asked Kaplan, “Did you hear me drop a line in “The Man I Killed” section?...I couldn’t go back and get them...I like to go back and get them.”
And one particular story will always stay with Lyons. During a post show discussion one Vietnam veteran confessed of his own brush with a water buffalo, an eerie parallel to O’Brien’s vignette. His unit was ordered to take an entire village out, mostly women and children. Orders were put on hold as the unit heard Americans might be in the village, so they took to the hills. But a troop of Korean Marines was brought in to finish the job the Americans halted. This veteran found a little girl crying beside a water buffalo, watching the event from afar. Koreans heard her and shot her, inciting a fierce retaliation from the water buffalo. A machine gun finally finished off the Water Buffalo. “This man was severely damaged, and revealing this in public for the first time…that’s what seeing this show made him do…How do you carry that the rest of your life?...I didn’t even know Koreans were there!” (Lyons).

A phone interview with Cathy Weiss of the Del E. Webb Center was arranged on Oct. 30, 2012 with a single purpose: to discuss the Literature to Life dude ranch residency which took place two years prior. I recorded a near 45 minutes of material on this enriching experience before Weiss shared with me why she was nearly bursting at the seams. The very next day would be the start of Wickenburg’s month-long tribute to Vietnam veterans, culminating with a production of Literature to Life’s TTTC at the Webb Center. Weiss had seen the production in New York a year before: “it pulled at my heart strings and inspired me to bring the entire community together for the Vietnam War’s 50th Commemoration.” Weiss rallied other arts organizations and non-profit groups to join her cause. Above all, she got the Chamber of Commerce involved:

During every war, the Chamber of Commerce added inserts to its weekly newsletters, naming all the men and women who went into service…except during Vietnam… I have combed the library and newspapers and held focus
groups to recover names and stories…I have arranged for the Chamber of
Commerce to create an insert that is 20 pgs long, with all of these forgotten
names, printed really big, and to include “Welcome Home!”(Weiss)

The consortium arranged for the traveling Vietnam Wall to make its solo stop in Arizona,
escorted in with a parade. Sculptor and Veteran Clyde “Ross” Morgan would lecture and
exhibit his work in the local museum. The library would hold a book panel discussion on
*The Things They Carried*. A climactic tribute would be APT’s production of *TTTC* at the
Weiss

community-wide discussions and work with the children before they saw a special school
production. She bubbled on about the Blue Star Flag that went back for generations in her
own family of American soldiers, and how that flag was to become the iconic artwork for
the city’s commemoration.²⁹

I wrapped up the interview bubbling with excitement myself. Here I was compiling
research for a portion of Chapter 3, and surprisingly found the end to this thesis. The
positive energy and productivity stimulated from a single Literature to Life viewing was
remarkable. And yet, that is only one story, from one of Literature to Life’s more than
twenty-four productions that have been adapted and performed for nearly twenty years.
The scope of positive impact that a theatrical experience can have on its audiences is
immeasurable, at times, exponential. The statement might be philosophically naïve or
optimistically Hegelian, but looking back to the original mission statements of Wynn
Handman and APT, it is evident that his life’s work has hardly been in vain. In New York
City, he created a “center of excitement, of talk, of argument, of renewal of purpose”
(Handman commencement address). Out of APT and Handman’s class, Literature to Life
grew organically. Protégés of Handman’s like David Kener, Denise Wilbanks and Billy Lyons continue to inspire younger generations; not to sit and watch theatre, but to become part of it...to relish the work of the playwright (in this case, author) and the possibility that arises from a visceral theatrical connection. Ms. Weiss’ commitment to bring organizations, generations, a community together because of a piece of inspired theatre, proves that the stage can still be “a place of serious revelation, an elucidator of thought and social conduct” (Shaw as qtd by Handman).

To best capture the spirit of Literature to Life and the legacy of Wynn Handman was to weave the fascinating narrative of Handman’s biography, his theatre, his teaching, and his artistic offspring. It is a history of passion for “people in words and ideas” (Smith ch. 3), and cannot be deduced to quantitative analysis. My dedication to this subject stems from the unforgettable stories and experiences I have had working with Wynn Handman as a director and teacher. It seemed imperative to record a throughline of his legacy while he is still with us, while he can contribute his stamp of approval (a most rewarding part of this process!).

There is one last memory that has stayed with me and seems most fitting with which to close. I am honored to be documenting it as Wynn has admitted that losing the original copy is “one of the biggest gaffes of [his] life” (Handman).

Wynn Handman and wife Bobbie have spent over 60 years sharing a life together, children and grandchildren. They also share an affinity for literature. I will let Handman’s memory take over…

…[Bobbie] and I would read Shaw to each other and we were big fans of Sean O’Casey’s writing. Anyway, she wrote a beautiful poem about Shaw and O’Casey as brothers. It was lying around the house. I said why not send it to O’Casey….so
she sent it…and in it she said, “I don’t know a lot about the technique of poetry, but here it is, it has these imperfections…..”

Months later he wrote back:

forgive the tardy hand that’s writin now, because much trouble come upon us (his son had recently died was in the British army and experimenting with nuclear weapons and attributed his death to that) …I don’t know that much about the technique myself…but I think there are too many measurements in this world. And who can put a limiting circumference around the heart. (Handman)

On rare occasions, when work performed in his class elicited emotion beyond words, Handman would wipe his tears away and quote the final sentence.
Chapter 1

1 Handman is quoting Shaw from his collection of literary criticism in *Our Theatres, I*, p. viii. Handman will substitute a word so that the quote fits into context of his own sentence. The intentions and effects remain true to the original observation.

2 Handman emphasized in the interview that he replaces the word “humanity” for “mankind” out of respect for women.

3 Sidney Lanier was cousin to Tennessee Williams and at one time an aspiring actor.

4 This is not to say that American Place productions were not reviewed. Two or three weeks into the run of a show, with permission of the playwright, critics were allowed to come to “invitational press weeks.”

5 Jonathon Miller also ran in the circle of the *New York Review/Paris Review* crowd, co-founded by Robert Lowell’s wife Elizabeth Hardwick (Gerard 31).

6 In a 2011 charrette at UMKC, Willa Kim shared with students (and myself as interviewer), that her experiences with Wynn Handman and APT were not only some of the most memorable, but also fundamental to her growth as a designer for the theatre.

7 In 1967 the New York City Planning Commission responded to a need for reinvigorating the Broadway theatre district as a balance to the real estate boom of midtown high-rises. The answer was to allow developers the ability to build higher if they included new theatres in their building plans. The Fisher Brothers of Manhattan real estate offered The American Place the chance to move into a state of the art mainstage
theatre, with a smaller second stage, offices and other amenities...for five dollars per year, for thirty years! If it sounds too good to be true, in retrospect, it probably was. By the 1971-72 season the move to West Forty-Sixth street was complete. With the much larger space, even at such a deal, the economic responsibilities that accompanied such a large space would increasingly impinge on the original mission of The American Place Theatre. A basic understanding of the economics and real-estate within the theatre district will eventually play into the evolution of Literature to Life.

8 Stand-up comedians like J.J. Walker and Jay Leno used the space. Actress Diane Keaton used the stage as a singer and according to Gerard’s interview with Handman “[she] was very insecure. She kept ducking behind the curtain for words of encouragement from her boyfriend, Woody Allen, who was very shy, apologetic” (92).

9 The Women’s Project is still going strong under the leadership of Julie Crosby (since 2006). It was reported in fall of 2011 that The Women’s Project would move into the historic Cherry Lane Theatre as a rental.

Chapter 2

10 Billy Lyons, as a student and protégé of Handman’s, has been and will be referenced again in the case study of The Things They Carried. Additionally, as personal assistant to Handman, he has become privy to Handman’s business and personal archives. His care in uncovering and organizing these artifacts has extended on to the history of Carnegie Hall Studios. In The New York Times article referenced, Mr. Lyons was touted “the unofficial building historian.” Many of his discoveries are beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless it is important to mention his efforts in salvaging much of the
architectural, cultural and artistic history that is attached to the building, which has since been gutted and transformed for perpetuity.

11 The eviction proceedings were accompanied by financial settlements, unable to be disclosed. The cited article (Robbins) vividly portrays the many artists who had lived in the building for over fifty years, set on staying put until their last breath. Two documentary films have since been released that focus on the historic building and its thwarted legacy: Josef Astor’s *Lost Bohemia* and Richard Press’s *Bill Cunningham New York*.

12 *The Fuhrer Bunker* and *Letters Home* are examples of pieces developed and produced at APT. Handman’s personal anecdotes of working with the respective poet/playwright brings invaluable dramaturgical insight to the students. It was especially exciting, during my own years in class, to sit beside fellow actor Andrea Masters, granddaughter to Edgar Lee Masters.

13 One of Handman’s most sincere compliments for an actor (and one of his primary criteria for taking a student on) was to describe him/her as “suggestible.” A suggestible actor had the capacity to be an open vessel for character and could impulsively respond to the demands of a play.

14 Handman often reminds actors to let the language and images in the text “play” on them. But he also re-directed this advice in a noteworthy editorial letter. In response to the public controversy between Howard Klein and Walter Kerr (over Kerr’s initial article “How to Pass Time When You Can’t Stand the Play”) Handman was “prompted to share [his] thoughts on the difficulties currently experienced by playwrights, critics and
audiences.” As he spanned an evolution of experimental writing from Beckett to Arrabal and Shepard, Handman’s closing remarks “suggested to the puzzled in the audiences at post-play discussions that they let themselves be available to the new worlds of these plays—do not work at finding meanings, let it happen to you, let the images soak in, let the spray play on you, let yourself move into a new space. Have room for the contemporary writers” (“Theater Mailbag” New York Times).

15 Since 1986 Thoron has worked on cross-cultural collaborations with Russian and American theater artists through the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and was one of the co-founders of A.S.T.I. (American Soviet Theater Initiative), facilitating and designing numerous theater exchanges. An abbreviated biography includes Thoron’s work as a playwright (Green Violin; Prozak and Platypus; Charlotte: Life? or Theatre?). Her plays have premiered internationally at the Prince Music Theatre, Hermitage Theatre in St. Petersburg, Soho Theatre in London, Jewish Music Festival in Amsterdam. Thoron’s adaptation and direction of The Great Gatsby played in repertory at the Pushkin Theatre in Moscow for over 7 years. She directed the first Sam Shepard play in Moscow and brought over Andrew Lippa’s Wild Party for the St. Petersburg Music Theatre Festival. Since 2009, Thoron began collaborating with Asian paper artist Kyoko Ibe, developing script and staging of Washi tales. The production premiered at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and traveled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Sept. 2011. In 2002 Thoron joined an esteemed panel of artists/producers for American Theatre Wing’s “Working in Theatre,” the World Theatre segment, which can be viewed at http://americantheatrewing.org/wit/detail/world_theatre_01_02.
16 Thoron nostalgically remembers her first impressions of The American Place Theatre. She would accompany her mother, who was both a single-mother and an APT subscriber, to productions on school nights. A pre-teen Thoron was exposed to Fefu and her Friends and The Fuhrer Bunker, and attended post-play discussions held by Handman. “I think people underestimate what kids can handle, both in terms of language and intensity of experience. It was so helpful to me to see that on stage and talk about it afterwards. The discussion was an integral part to the experience…”

17 A unique twist of fate would bring Barnaby Spring back to Humanities Prep years later when he was assigned his first job as principal within the New York Department of Education. He held the position at Humanities Preparatory Academy from 2006 to 2008, moving on to preside at East Brooklyn Congregation School in Bushwick until 2011. Spring now sits on a cluster team of administrators for the Department of Education, overseeing 300 New York City schools.

Chapter 3

18 Little’s adaptation was presented with the novel’s original title rather than Pecola once Tony Morrison granted permission “for educational purposes only.”

19 As of January 2012 during my office visit for archival research, David Kener still held court at the APT offices with a sense of innovative bravura. On the phone he was setting up and confirming meetings with various New York entities in education and the arts. He pulled managing director and educational director aside for concentrated pow-wows on restructuring APT’s working model: “The [New York] Historical Society’s template works—free for children, actors get paid…if it works for them there must be 30
other institutions that can follow this model…Can we add the authors into the
presentations? ” At strategic places in the cold, dark, winter’s day he would gather the in-
house staff of six and charge “push up time!” He knew the visceral challenge would
ignite something, be it laughter, anger, drive or creative stimulation.

20 APT has been successful in modeling this book donation program with other
publishers since. The relationship with and responses from each publisher varies, but the
pursuit is an important endeavor for the not-for-profit organization.

21 This was the only time a Literature to Life production needed to be removed
from the roster for reasons beyond lack of demand. David Kener included on the APT
website this immediate response: We learned of these allegations only when they were
made public, and we will continue to follow the story closely. We are proud of the
literacy and thematic outreach to young people that has resulted from our performances
and workshops based on Three Cups of Tea to date, and we continue to believe in the
relevance of its basic message regarding the promotion of education in Afghanistan and
Pakistan. At this time, we respectfully withdraw…Three Cups of Tea…from the roster
of offerings (APT website “Company Words…”).

22 By 2011, Tanya Little’s Literature to Life adaptation of The Bluest Eye was off
the roster.

23 The idea to follow Lemon Anderson’s trajectory as a documentary, not
knowing if it would end up a “tragedy or an American success story”(Levison qtd by
Sontag, New York Times) was instigated and produced by Laura Brownson and Beth
Levison. Brownson is sister to APT’s Education Director Gwen Brownson, and through her, was exposed to Anderson’s story.

Chapter 4

24 Granet has gone on to become an internationally recognized leader in arts education. For ten years he was the Director of Professional Development for Center for Arts Education (CAE), then founded the consulting firm Arts Education Resource (AER) and has since been appointed Executive Director of Lincoln Center Institute. He sits on the board of the Association of Teaching Artists and continues to serve APT’s board.

25 On its web page, NYU/Steinhardt’s Educational Theatre program claims to be the “the oldest in the country.”

Chapter 5

26 The social circles of Washington D.C. are not unknown to Handman. His wife Bobbie is a political consultant and arts activist, and has received the National Medal of Arts (1998) for her outstanding work as an arts advocate. For many years she served as executive vice president of People for the American Way. The Handmans’ daughter Laura founded People for the American Way and is married to Harold M. Ickes, former White House Chief of Staff for President Bill Clinton.

27 Quotations are extracted from the critics’ collection of reviews on the first pages of the Random House 1998 edition of The Things They Carried.

28 An interesting note about the model for musical accompaniment: the performance can be booked one of three ways. Martin Wind can be hired to play live.
Due to his performance rates and availability, this happens rarely. A venue can use a recorded track of Wind’s commission. Most schools choose this option for budgetary reasons. A third option has been very successful in particular situations. The venue can hire a local musician and give the musician a copy of Wind’s recording, so that he may be inspired to improvise in a similar but unique style.

Epilogue

29 “The Service Flag, also called the Blue Star Flag, was designed and patented by WWI Army Captain Robert L. Queisser of the 5th Ohio Infantry who had two sons serving on the front line. The flag quickly became the unofficial symbol of a child in service” (Blue Star Mothers website). Each blue star on the flag represents a service member in active duty. The blue star is embroidered over with gold if the service member has died in active duty.
APPENDIX A

AMERICAN PLACE THEATRE PRODUCTION HISTORY

1963-64
Robert Lowell: THE OLD GLORY; MY KINSMAN, MAJOR MOLINEAUX and BENITO CERENO
Ronald Ribman: HARRY, NOON AND NIGHT
A REMEMBRANCE OF JAMES AGEE

1965-66
William Alfred: HOGAN’S GOAT
Paul Goodman: JONAH
Ronald Ribman: THE JOURNEY OF THE FIFTH HORSE
May Swenson: THE FLOOR
Bruce Jay Friedman: 23 PAT O’BRIEN MOVIES
Robert Penn Warren: BROTHERS TO DRAGONS

1966-67
Ronald Milner: WHO’S GOT HIS OWN
Cecil Dawkins: THE DISPLACED PERSON
Sam Shepard: LA TURISTA
Niccolo Tucci: POSTERITY FOR SALE

1967-68
Frank Gagliano: FATHER UXBRIDGE WANTS TO MARRY
Ronald Ribman: THE CEREMONY OF INNOCENCE
Ed Bullins: THE ELECTRONIC NIGGER AND OTHERS
Robert Lowell: THE OLD GLORY; ENDECOTT AND THE RED CROSS

1968-69
George Tabori: THE CANNIBALS
David Trainer: THE ACQUISITION
Philip Hayes Dean: THIS BIRD OF DAWNING
Werner Leopolt: THE YOUNG MASTER DANTE
Ronald Tavel: BOY OF THE STRAIGHT BACKED CHAIR

1969-70
Anne Sexton: MERCY STREET
Charlie L. Russell: FIVE ON THE BLACK HAND SIDE
Charles Dizenzo: THE LAST STRAW
David Scott Milton: DUET FOR A SOLO VOICE
Ed Bullins: THE PIG PEN

1970-71
Joyce Carol Oates: SUNDAY DINNER
Steve Tesich: THE CARPENTERS
George Tabori: PINKVILLE
Sam Shepard: BACK BOG BEAST BAIT and COWBOY MOUTH
Ira Gasman and Cary Hoffman WHAT’S A NICE COUNTRY LIKE YOU DOING IN A STATE LIKE THIS?
1971-72
Ronald Ribman: FINGERNAILS BLUE AS NAILS
Steve Tesich: LAKE OF THE WOODS
Jack Gelber: SLEEP
Charles Dizenzo: METAMORPHOSES
Frank Chin: THE CHICKEN COOP CHINAMAN

1972-73
Robert Coover: THE KID
Philip Hayes Dean: FREEMAN
Rochelle Owens: THE KARL MARX PLAY
Steve Tesich: BABA GOYA

1973-74
Frank Chin: THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON
Ed Bullins: HOUSE PARTY
David Scott Milton: BREAD
FESTIVAL OF SHORT PLAYS: Lonnie Carter, CREAM CHEESE; Robert Coover, LOVE SCENE;
Maria Irene Fornes, DR. KHEAL; William Hauptman, SHEARWATER.

1974-75
S.J. Perelman: THE BEAUTY PART
(various authors and composers) STRAWS IN THE WIND
Sam Shepard: KILLER’S HEAD and ACTION
Jonathan Reynolds: RUBBERS and YANKS 3 DETROIT 0 TOP OF THE SEVENTH
AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: JEAN SHEPHERD AND THE AMERICA OF GEORGE ADE
AT SEA WITH BENCHLEY, KALMAR AND RUBY
JEAN SHEPHERD PLAYS
WE’RE IN THE MONEY-Humor and Songs of the Depression

1975-76
Steve Tesich: GORKY
Phillip Hayes Dean: EVERY NIGHT WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN
Robert Lowell: THE OLD GLORY; ENDECOTT AND THE RED CROSS; MY KINSMAN, MAJOR MOLINEAUX and BENITO CERINO
AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: CONVERSATIONS WITH DON B.- An entertainment with music drawn from the writing of Donald Barthelme

1976-77
Jack Gelber: REHEARSAL
William Hauptman: DOMINO COURTS and COMANCHE CAFÉ
Jeff Wanshel: ISADORA DUNCAN SLEEPS WITH THE RUSSIAN NAVY
Ronald Ribman: COLD STORAGE
AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: JULES FEIFFER’S HOLD ME

119
1977-78
Elaine Jackson: COCKFIGHT
Steve Tesich: PASSING GAME
Maria Irene Fornes: FEFU AND HER FRIENDS
Richard Nelson: CONJURING AN EVENT

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: WORD OF MOUTH- The Late Seventies Comedy Revue

1978-79
Annalita Alexander: THE GRINDING MACHINE
Steve Tesich: TOUCHING BOTTOM
Sam Shepard: SEDUCED
Jonathan Reynolds: TUNNEL OF FEVER OR THE SHEEP IS OUT

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: AMERICAN HUMORISTS ON FILM
Bruce Jay Friedman: A FOOT IN THE DOOR
John Rothman (adapted by): THE IMPOSSIBLE H.L. MENCKEN

1979-80
Rose Lehman Goldenberg (adapted by): LETTERS HOME (SYLVIA PLATH)
Adapted by Michael Zettler: PARIS LIGHTS: THE ALL STAR LITERARY GENIUS EXPATRIATE REVUE
Spalding Grey and Elizabeth LeCompte: RUMSTICK ROAD
Lavonne Mueller: KILLINGS ON THE LAST LINE

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: SMART ALECK-ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT AT 8:00
Howard Teichmann: SIM: One Night with a Lady Undertaker from Texas

1980-81
John Rothman (adapted by): THE IMPOSSIBLE H.L. MENCKEN
Richard Hamburger: MEMORY OF WHITENESS
Emily Mann: STILL LIFE
W.D. Snodgrass: THE FUEHRER BUNKER

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: SIM: One Night with a Lady Undertaker from Texas
William C. Osborne: THE AMAZING CASEY STENGEL

1981-82
Jane Stanton Hitchcock: GRACE
Roscoe Lee Brown/Anthony Zerbe (adapted by): BEHIND THE BROKEN WORDS
Bill Irwin: THE REGARD OF FLIGHT

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: SERIOUS BIZNESS (“Laugh at Lunch”)
A CROWD OF TWO (“Laugh at Lunch”)

1982-83
James De Jongh: DO LORD REMEMBER ME
Ronald Ribman: BUCK
Donald Barthelme: GREAT DAYS

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES: THE STAGE THAT WALKS
Bruce D. Schwartz: SPEAKEASY, AN EVENING OUT WITH
Michael Feingold (adapted by): DOROTHY PARKER
1983-84
Various authors:
James De Jongh:
Maria Irene Fornes:
Ted Talley:
    AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:
Richard Lettau:
Doug Skinner:
    BREAKFAST CONVERSATIONS IN MIAMI
    PAY ATTENTION

1984-85
Ira Gasman/Cary Hoffman:
Stephen Wylie:
    AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:
Conrad Pomerleau (adapted by):
    JUBILEE! FESTIVAL:
Elizabeth VanDyke (adapted by):
    WHATS A NICE COUNTRY LIKE YOU STILL
    DOING IN A STATE LIKE THIS?
    RUDE TIMES

1985-86
Jeff Wanshel, Lyrics by Michael Feingold
Eric Bogosian:
Vincent Smith:
    AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:
John Martello (adapted by)
    TIMES AND APPETITES OF TOULOUSE-
    LAUTREC
    DRINKING IN AMERICA
    WILLIAMS & WALKER
    ROY BLOUNT JR. (“Laugh at Lunch”)
    DAMON RUNYON’S BROADWAY

1986-87
Thomas Strelich:
Cynthia Heimel:
    AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:
John Valentine
    JUBILEE! FESTIVAL:
Shauneille Perry (adapted by):
Vinie Burrows (adapted by)
    NEON PSALMS
    A GIRL’S GUIDE TO CHAOS
    JAMES THURBER’S KINTYPES (“Laugh at
    Lunch”)
    CELEBRATION
    HER TALKING DRUM

1987-88
Alonzo D. Lamont, Jr.:
Tony Lang:
    AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:
Roy Blount, Jr.:
Various authors:
    JUBILEE! FESTIVAL
Shauneille Perry (adapted by):
Lonnie Elder, III:
    FIRST FLOOR THEATRE SERIES:
Stephanie Silverman:
Jane Gennaro:
    THAT SERIOUS HE-MAN BALL
    TALLULAH TONIGHT!
    ROY BLOUNT’S HAPPY HOUR AND A HALF
    ODD JOBBERS
    CELEBRATION
    SPLENDID MUMMER
    AT THE BACK OF MY HEAD
    THE BOOB STORY
1988-89
David Wolpe:
Clare Coss:

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:

JUBILEE! FESTIVAL:
Eduardo Machado:
Laurence Holder:

1989-90
Jeffrey Hatcher:

JUBILEE! FESTIVAL:
Laurence Holder:
Leslie Lee:

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:
Catherine Butterfield:
Margery Cohen (adapted by):

1991-90
Joyce Carol Oates:
John Leguizamo:
Joseph Chaiken/ Sam Shepard:
Sam Shepard:
Joseph Chaiken/Jean-Claude van Itallie:
W.D. Snodgrass/Faustwork Mask Theatre:

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:

1991-92
Theodora Skipitares:
Jane Gennaro:
Roger Rosenblatt:
Laurence Holder:

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES:
Roger Rosenblatt:

1992-93
Thomas Strelich:
Matt Robinson:
Steven Wade:

1993-94
Kia Corthron:
Barnaby Spring:

AMERICAN HUMORISTS’ SERIES
Roger Rosenblatt:

THE UNGUIDED MISSILE
THE BLESSING

CALVIN TRILLIN’S UNCLE SAM
A. WHITNEY BROWN’S THE BIG PICTURE (in words)

THE BURNING BEACH
ZORA NEALE HURSTON

NEDDY

ZORA NEALE HURSTON
THE GROUND PEOPLE

BOBO’S BIRTHDAY
THE CONSUMING PASSIONS OF LYDIA E. PINKHAM AND REV. SYLVESTER GRAHAM

I STAND BEFORE YOU NAKED
MAMBO MOUTH
THE WAR IN HEAVEN
STATES OF SHOCK
STRUCK DUMB
MIDNIGHT CARNIVAL and THE MASK MAN
CALVIN TRILLIN’S WORDS, NO MUSIC

THE RADIANT CITY
REALITY RANCH
AND
ZORA NEALE HURSTON

FREE SPEECH IN AMERICA

DOG LOGIC
THE CONFESSIONS OF STEPIN FETCHIT
ON THE WAY HOME

COME DOWN BURNING
THE MAYOR OF BOYS TOWN

BIBLIOMANIA
JIMMY TINGLE’S UNCOMMON SENSE

122
1994-95
Dael Orlandersmith: BEAUTY’S DAUGHTER
Norma Jean Darden: SPOONBREAD AND STRAWBERRY WINE
Wynn Handman (adapted by): COMING THROUGH
*LITERATURE TO LIFE premieres this season with THE BLUEST EYE; MANCHILD IN THE PROMISED LAND; SASSAFRASS, CYPRESS AND INDIGO; THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET (see separate Lit. to Life production history).

1995-96
Norma Jean Darden: SPOONBREAD AND STRAWBERRY WINE (return engagement)
John Hockenberry: SPOKEMAN
Carson Kreitzer: THE SLOW DRAG

1996-97
Jonathan Reynolds: STONEWALL JACKSON’S HOUSE

1997-98
Joseph Edward: FLY
Wynn Handman (adapted by): COMING THROUGH (encore), Queens Theatre in the Park
Thomas Strellich: BAFO Best and Final Offer

1998-99
Aasif Mandvi: SAKINA’S RESTAURANT
Laurence Holder: ZORA NEALE HURSTON
Cristina Garcia: DREAMING IN CUBAN: Rhythm, Rum Café con Leche Nuestros Abuelos!
Michael John Garcés: AGUA ARDIENTE
Julia Dahl: WONDERLAND

1999-2000
Sarah Jones: SURFACE TRANSIT
Aasif Mandvi: SAKINA’S RESTAURANT (Odyssey Theatre, Los Angeles, California)
Claude Brown: MANCHILD IN THE PROMISED LAND

2000-2001
Michael Bradford: LIVING IN THE WIND
Lidia Ramirez: I LOVE AMERICA

2001-2002
*APT partners with the New York Public Library to present...
Laurence Holder: ZORA
Claude Brown: MANCHILD IN THE PROMISED LAND
Wynn Handman: COMING THROUGH: ELLIS ISLAND TO JFK

... Productions after 2002 are LITERATURE TO LIFE exclusively, documented in Appendix B.
APPENDIX B

LITERATURE TO LIFE PRODUCTION HISTORY

*Productions are listed in the year they premiered. Many have stayed on the roster from year to year. Some move to the “vault” to be brought back for special tours or requests. 2012 shows a snapshot of productions still on the roster.

1994-95
THE BLUEST EYE, Toni Morrison (adaption Tanya Little/direction Wynn Handman)
MANCHILD IN THE PROMISED LAND, Claude Brown (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
SASSAFRAS, CYPRESS, AND INDIGO, Ntozake Shange (adaption Lenore Pemberton/direction Elise Thoron)
THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET, Sandra Cisneros (adaption/direction Elise Thoron)

1995-96
THE KITCHEN GOD’S WIFE, Amy Tan (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)

1996-97
BLACK BOY, Richard Wright (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)

1997-98
(BLACK BOY and DREAMING IN CUBAN continued to play in the New York area.)

1998-99
DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS, Piri Thomas (process drama)

1999-2000
COMING THROUGH-- ELLIS ISLAND TO JFK (adapted from found material/direction Wynn Handman)

2000-2001
I LOVE AMERICA, Lydia Ramirez (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
THE COLOR OF WATER, James McBride (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD, Zora Neale Hurston (process drama)

2001-2002
ZORA, Laurence Holder (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)

2002-2003
ANNIE JOHN, Jamaica Kincaid (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
CHINA BOY, Gus Lee (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
NATIONAL TOURS (WASHINGTON DC): ZORA, BLACK BOY, MANCHILD IN THE PROMISED LAND
2003-2004
LIBERTY CALLING, Peter Ruocco (adapted by Wynn Handman)
THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES, Sue Monk Kidd (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)
GROWING UP A SLAVE, Wynn Handman (adapted from found material)
NATIONAL TOURS: ZORA, BLACK BOY, THE BLUEST EYE

2004-2005
VOICES OF WAR (adapted from Library of Congress transcripts/direction Wynn Handman)
THE THINGS THEY CARRIED, Tim O’Brien (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)
THE KITE RUNNER, Khaled Hosseini (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)

2005-2006
EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE, Jonathan Safran Foer (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)

2006-2007
THE GLASS CASTLE, Jeanette Walls (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)
INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)

2007-2008
TEACHER MAN, Frank McCourt (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)
NATIONAL TOURS: all listed above

2008-2009
THE GIVER, Lois Lowry (adaptation/direction Wynn Handman)
COUNTY OF KINGS, Lemon Anderson (developed and directed by Elise Thoron)*
NATIONAL TOURS: all listed above
2009-2010
THREE CUPS OF TEA, Greg Mortenson (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
FAHRENHEIT 451, Ray Bradbury (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
FLIGHT, Alexie Sherman (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
   LIVING LIBRARY (created at Flying-E-Ranch)
      TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD, Harper Lee
      GRAPES OF WRATH, John Steinbeck
      POE STORIES AND POEMS, Edgar Allen Poe
      OLD MAN AND THE SEA, Ernest Hemingway
      AS I LAY DYING, William Faulkner
      EMILY DICKINSON POEMS, Emily Dickinson
      THE BLUEST EYE, Toni Morrison
      THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD, Zora Neale Hurston
      INVISIBLE MAN, Ralph Ellison

NATIONAL TOURS: all listed above

2010-2011
THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO, Juno Diaz (adaption/direction Elise Thoron)
DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS, Piri Thomas (adaption/direction Wynn Handman)
   -Existed as a Literature to Life process drama until this point

NATIONAL TOURS: Those listed above were available excepting THREE CUPS OF TEA.

2011-2012
THE GIVER, Lois Lowry (re-adapted and directed by Elise Thoron)
SOUTHERN VOICES – a montage of excerpts from Living Library pieces: TO KILL A
      MOCKING BIRD, THEIR WERE WATCHING GOD, AS I LAY DYING, produced for
      Raritin Community College.

2012-2013
No new adaptations premiered. Those that remained on the roster and booked nationally:
      EYE, TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

* COUNTY OF KINGS has since been produced by the Public Theatre and has played for
venues all over the world.
APPENDIX C

LITERATURE TO LIFE AWARD RECIPIENTS
2004-2011

2004
Sue Monk Kidd, The Secret Life of Bees
Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried

2005
Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner

2006
Jonathan Safran Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close
Jeannette Walls, The Glass Castle

2007--

2008
Frank McCourt, Teacher Man

2009
Lois Lowry, The Giver
Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451

2010
Greg Mortenson, Three Cups of Tea

2011
Junot Diaz, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao
Piri Thomas, Down These Mean Streets
APPENDIX D

HANDMAN’S NOTES FROM HAROLD CLURMAN LECTURE

Wynn Handman's notes from lecture given by Harold Clurman, circa late 1940s (Handman's personal files).
September 26, 1952

Mr. Jim Patterson
203 West 14th Street
New York City, New York

Dear Mr. Patterson:

I regret that I shall not be able to find a place for you in my class this season.

Last year, upon my request, Mr. Wynn Handman, who teaches with me at the Neighborhood Playhouse, organized Professional Acting Classes. His success with these groups prompts me to suggest his classes to you as excellent preparation for my class, if you are still interested when an opening is available.

Mr. Handman can be reached between 5 and 8 P.M. at MU.8-2067.

Sincerely yours,

Sanford Meisner

SM/3AS
APPENDIX F

THE BLUEST EYE TEACHER RESPONSES

Judith Rosenbaum
Brooklyn College Academy
I thought the production was excellent. It was powerful and
moving. The students felt free to ask questions and share
their thoughts. The interaction between the students and
actors was stimulating and informative.

Mary T. Feddeck
Truman High School
The production was presented in an immediately engaging and
enjoyable way. The audience witnessed the value of such a piece

Melissa Randell
Performance Artist
The production was strong, lucid, accessible. The pacing and
trauma from "beauty code" brainstorming was vivid and
meaningful.

Carmen Mason
Truman High School
It was great for the students to have the opportunity to speak
with the actors and to understand the process that she goes
through to bring art to life.

Karin Sandstrom
University Heights High
I thought the production of People was excellent. It was an
enjoyable and informative. The entire presentation was engaging and
educational tool.

Judith A. Hartman
The Center School
May 3, 2004
David Kener
American Place Theatre

Dear David,

What a grand evening! It is difficult to express the array of feelings I experienced last Tuesday at the gala benefit performance of The Secret Life of Bees. I am profoundly grateful to you and Wynn and the American Place Theatre for creating a truly spectacular evening. I sat in the audience, awed from beginning to end.

I hope you know how honored I feel to have been the recipient of your first Literature to Life award. The award itself is perfect: a whale necklace. Not only is it beautiful, but it is filled with personal meaning. Thank you again.

There is so much to commend about the evening. First and foremost, Denise’s magical performance, but also the wonderful opening video, you and Wynn speaking with such genuine feeling about Literature To Life, those precious students, Roz Abrams’ enthusiastic words, La La Brooks’ rousing Da Do Ron Ron (oh how I loved that), Nathan Lane, the fabulous website that was created, the beautiful invitations. You thought of everything, down to coke and peanuts at the cocktail party.

On stage with the students, I found myself unexpectedly filled with emotion, realizing that here were the students who would be seeing the performance. Your Literature to Life is an enormously worthy program. I have enclosed a check on its behalf. How could I look at Preston and the other students and not give at least a little something for this program? Rarely, David, have I seen anyone with such passion and dedication for his work as I see in you. That alone inspires me.

You have bestowed on me such generosity of spirit, such appreciation, such joy. Thank you for that luminous evening. It is with enormous pride that I join the company of authors whose work has been staged by American Place Theatre.

Sincerely,

Sue Monk Kidd
BRINGING LITERATURE TO LIFE
Staging Classic Works, and Confronting Authentic Language in the Modern Classroom
by DAVID KENER, Executive Director of The American Place Theatre

Not that long ago, I was seated in our intimate studio theatre in midtown Manhattan watching a dynamic, solo performance of *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien. Quite suddenly, I was called out to address an urgent phone call. Our educational partner in Cleveland had some difficult news.

Our production of Richard Wright’s classic novel *Black Boy*, one of the best-known in our Literature to Life series of great American literature brought to the stage, was to be performed for 1,600 students, 300 live and 1,300 via closed circuit TV into their classrooms. The pre-show would begin in a few short hours, and the leadership of the school had just announced to our teaching artist that the actor could not, under any circumstances, use the “n” word as contained in the script. “If he says it even once we will have the police remove him from the stage.”

My heart just stopped. Our Literature to Life Program prides itself on verbatim adaptations of selected text in order to provide new access to the author’s words and encourage deep personal connections to the material. How could a modern educational institution even consider removing any text whatsoever, let alone a word that is at the very center of the journey and moral significance of the story?

My first response was absolutely, no. It is not my place, or my right, to alter the words of the author. That is sacred ground. I vowed long ago not to allow words and ideas to be removed from our texts and our lives. Sitting in my office, I immediately thought of *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury (a classic we have since selected for our 2009 Literature to Life Award). Over the span of 15 years, we have adapted more than twenty works of great writers from Toni Morrison to Frank McCourt, Sandra Cisneros to Khaled Hosseini, but Ray Bradbury and that book have been a sort of a Holy Grail to us.

*F-451* takes a very passionate and essential truth—that ideas are sacred and necessary—and sounds the alarm. The transformative power of both words and writers are at the heart of the work we do at The American Place Theatre. Words are indeed sacred, but also precious and vulnerable. They are powerful and must be heard. For young readers with 21st century approaches to learning, having Monday come to his monumental realizations in a more visceral way, dramatically on a stage, is a consummation devoutly to be wished. To meet Captain Beatty in person and have him deliver his precise explanation of why it came to be
"The stage is not merely the meeting place of all the arts, but is also the return of art to life."

—Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) Irish poet and dramatist

that books, by necessity, be eliminated; to eavesdrop on Montag and Professor Faber’s crazy scheme to save the world—these are experiences that will remain with you forever. They are neither the same as reading nor a substitute for that very private experience; rather, they are a communal engagement that activates the imagination in critical and profound ways.

So put yourself in my shoes in regards to Black Boy. What would you do? What would Richard Wright do? What would Ray Bradbury do? While an actor must “live truthfully under imaginary circumstances,” American Place remains resolutely aware that the environment in which we present our work is not the real world, but the school world. We are partners in a very delicate balance with the teacher, the school, and the student.

Putting yourself in the shoes of others is at the very essence of drama-in-education and the Literature to Life methodology. It informs the surrounding activities of our In-classroom Residency workshops and our Professional Development activities. Adhering to that purpose, I investigated further and discovered the situation at the high school was more nuanced than it had at first appeared. The community had just experienced severe racial tensions that the school did not want to enflame. However, if I simply agreed to eliminate the “n” word, I would be denying the entire school the chance to see and hear all of the ideas and thoughts of Richard Wright as he battled racism and hatred in his own country.

We were ultimately left with a stark choice: either cancel the show and deprive the students of Wright’s work, or do the show without the offensive word. I asked to speak to my actor privately and, considering the circumstances, we decided we could not deny even one student the right to be inspired by Wright’s hunger for truth and equality. So we staged the play, albeit with a substitute word.

I vowed that day to push harder, to make bold our mission of “voices worth hearing.” We present this upcoming season of books to the stage, specifically Fahrenheit 451, in order to stoke the flame that is too easily extinguished. To learn how this and other great literature can be brought to life for you and your students, visit www.americanplacetheatre.org or call 212-594-4482 x22.

About the Writer

DAVID KENER’s long and multi-faceted association with The American Place Theatre began when he studied acting with APT’s Co-founder and Artistic Director, Wynn Handman. After performing in many of its productions, David served as the Theatre’s Director of Education before becoming Executive Director in 2001. He has brought APT’s Arts Education programs to national recognition through partnerships including the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., NYU’s Steinhardt School of Education, the Museum of Arts and Design, and many others. Widely acclaimed for his innovative approaches to arts education, theatre-based literacy initiatives, and building community coalitions, David Kener received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from New York University.
APPENDIX I

THE THINGS THEY CARRIED: STUDENT/TEACHER RESPONSES

Sampling of Student/Teacher Responses from The Things They Carried
(extracted from APT website, “TTTC/go backstage”)

Jacob Linder, Student
Billy Lyons’ performance of The Things They Carried was deeply moving. I’ve never seen a performance that had such a profound effect on me. I had never considered reading the novel until I watched Billy’s performance. It did make me think of Hamlet, on the basis of both characters experiencing tragedy and having to make decisions about acting or not. All in all it was a truly exceptional performance and I hope to see more in the future.

Santa Monica High School student
The fact that it was just one guy reciting the story made the little things, especially the emotion really vivid and clear. It was like he was reading me the story but he was expressing deeper than just the words.

Carry Mattern, teacher
Billy Lyons moved me to tears during the performance at Carman Ainsworth High School yesterday. His portrayal of Tim O’Brien was accurate and powerful. Thank you for sharing your heart with us. Additionally I would like to thank Emmanuel for his inspiring lesson today. My juniors were motivated to think critically but with a more interactive approach. In turn, it made me realize that more creativity is necessary within high school classrooms today.

Sue Bobalik, Assistant Principal, Carman Ainsworth High School
Thank you for bringing to life the story of Tim O’Brien and our Vietnam Veterans. Many of our students have not had the opportunity to see a live performance prior to this show. Bringing live performances to the students is important for the future of the arts. The workshop time in the classroom is invaluable and strengthens the connection between the literature and the performance. Through this experience our students have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the literature, the arts, and themselves. Thank you!
APPENDIX J

LITERATURE TO LIFE VENUES, 2007

A Philip Randolph Campus H.S.
Aaron Davis Hall
Academy of Environmental Science
Secondary H.S.
Academy of Finance and Enterprise
Academy of Mount St. Ursala
Academy of Urban Planning
Auxiliary Services For High Schools
Bank Street College of Education
Bank Street School for Children
Bayard Rustin Educational Complex
Baylor University
Bedford Stuyvesant Preparatory H.S.
Bronx High School of Business
Bronx Latin
Bronx Prep Charter School
Bronx School for Law, Government
and Justice
Brooklyn Adult Learning Center
Brooklyn Children’s Museum
Brooklyn Studio Secondary School
Calhoun School
Career Education Center
Chicago Humanities Festival
Children ‘s Aid Society’
Cincinnati Arts Association
City College Academy of the Arts
Clara Barton High School
Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University
Colby College
Cold Spring Harbor H.S.
Collegiate Institute of Math and Science
Columbia Grammar & Prep. School
Compton High School
Conselyea Preparatory School
Flushing High School
Fordham High School for the Arts
Fordham Leadership Academy
Frederick Douglass Academy
Girls Write Now
Grover Cleveland High School
Harlem Day Charter School
Harry S. Truman High School
High School for Law and Public
Service
High School for Media & Communications
High School For Public Service
Hospital Schools
Hostos CUNY
Hostos- Lincoln Academy of Science
Humanities and Arts Magnet H. S.
Humanities Preparatory Academy
Huntington High School
I S Bertha A. Dreyfus
Intermediate School 230
International High School, Kingsboro
Community College
Irvington Middle School
Irwin Altman Middle School 172
I S 027 Anning S. Prall
I S 077
I S 145 Joseph Pulitzer
I S 228 David A. Boody
I S 232 The Winthrop
I S 347 School of Humanities
Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis H.S.
Jamaica High School
JHS 044 William J. O’Shea
JHS 072 Cath. & Count Basie
JHS 074 Nathaniel Hawthorne
JHS 265 Susan S. McKinney
John F. Kennedy Center for the
Performing Arts
Junior League of Central Westchester
Kappa III
Kew Forest High School
La Guardia Community College
Lakeland High School
Lehigh University
Library of Congress
Life Sciences Secondary School
Linfield College
Lower East Side Preparatory H. S.
Manhattan Center for Science and Math
Manhattan/Hunter Science H.S.
Medgar Evers College
Middle College High School
Millburn High School
Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies
MS 203
MS 390
Museum of Arts and Design
Museum of the City of New York
Nantucket Athenaeum
New School for Arts and Sciences
New York Public Library
Newcomers High School
New York Historical Society
Nightingale-Bamford School
NYC Vocational Training Center
NYCDOE Alternative High Schools
NYCDOE Regions 10, 3, 8, 9
Ogdensburg Command Performances
Ohio State University
Pace University
Pathways College Preparatory School
Paul Robeson High School
Penn State Center for the Perf. Arts
Pennsylvania State University
Playhouse Square Foundation
PS O48 William Wordsworth
PS 076 A. Philip Randolph
PS 101 The Verrazano
PS 111 Adolph S. Ochs
PS 161 The Crown
PS 212, 214, 231K, 256Q
PS 238 Anne Sullivan
PS 721X Stephen McSweeney School
PS/MS 004 Crotona Park West
Queensborough Community College
Ralph R. McKee Technical H.S.
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Redwood High School
Repertory Company High School
Riverdale Country School
Riverdale/Kingsbridge Academy
Rodeph Sholom School
Rust College
Saint Joseph Hill Academy
Samuel J. Tilden High School
Santa Barbara City College
Sarah P. Duke Gardens
Satellite Academy High School
Shelter Island School
South Street Seaport Museum
Southern Oregon University
St. Luke’s School
State Theatre New Jersey
Teachers College- Columbia University
The Bushness Center for Perf. Arts
The Packer Collegiate Institute
The Urban Assembly Academy
Thousand Oaks Library
Townsend Harris High School
Trinity School
UFT Secondary Charter School
Unity Center for Urban Technologies
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Dayton
University of Missouri
University of Utah
University of Vermont
University School
Urban Assembly School of Design and
Construction
Virginia Samford Theatre
W.H. Maxwell Career and Tech. Education
School
Wadleigh Secondary School for
Performing and Visual Arts
Walt Whitman High School
Washington Irving High School
Wells Fargo Center for the Arts
Western Middle School
Western Reserve Links
Wings Academy
Women In Need, Inc.
World Academy for Total Community
Health High School
Young Women’s Leadership School
Youth Communications
APPENDIX K

THE ACTORS OF LITERATURE TO LIFE

“The actors are the real heroes of Literature to Life. Their dedication is extraordinary and what they are asked to do is highly unusual and challenging. The thousands of letters we’ve received are proof. The actors are deeply penetrating the interiors of these students.”

-Wynn Handman

THE BLUEST EYE: Tanya Little
MANCHILD IN THE PROMISED LAND: Joseph Edwards
SASSAFRAS, CYPRESS, AND INDIGO: Jou Jou Papaillier, Lenore Pemberton
THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET: Josefina Bosch, Lidia Ramirez, Ana Maria Jamolca
THE KITCHEN GOD’S WIFE: Tina Chen, Linda Shing, Dawn Akemi Saito
BLACK BOY: Joseph Edwards, Charles Holt, Tarantino Smith
COMING THROUGH—ELLIS ISLAND TO JFK: David Kener, Mara Stephens, Tom Pennacchini, William Schimmel, Shawn McNesby, David Warren, Emily Joy Weiner
DREAMING IN CUBAN: Eileen Galindo, Francisca Vargas
I LOVE AMERICA: Lidia Ramirez
THE COLOR OF WATER: Nancy Franklin, Jeffrey Joseph
ANNIE JOHN: Donna Duplantier
CHINA BOY: Andy Lee
LIBERTY CALLING: Virginia Thomas
ZORA: Kim Brockington, Elizabeth Van Dyke, Cheryl Howard
THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES: Denise Wilbanks
GROWING UP A SLAVE: Cherita Armstrong, Patt Franklin, Jarrad Skinner
VOICES OF WAR: Annie McGreevey
THE THINGS THEY CARRIED: Dashiell Eaves, Chris Carr, Billy Lyons
KITE RUNNER: Aasif Mandvi, Arian Moayed, Sorab Wadia
EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE: Halley Fuller March
THE GLASS CASTLE: Sarah Franeck
TEACHER MAN: Michael McMonagle
THE GIVER: Melissa Center, Geoff Stoner, Mara Stephens
COUNTY OF KINGS: Lemon Anderson
THREE CUPS OF TEA: Curtis Nielson
FAHRENHEIT 451: Rich Orlow
FLIGHT: Robert Spaulding
THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO: Elvis Nolasco
DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS: Jamil Mena
LIVING LIBRARY
TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD: Heidi McAllister Jackson
GRAPES OF WRATH: Emily Weiner, Billy Lyons
POE STORIES AND POEMS: Ana Maria Jamoica
OLD MAN AND THE SEA: George Crowley
AS I LAY DYING: Emily Weiner, Billy Lyons
EMILY DICKINSON POEMS: Vanessa Davis Cohen
THE BLUEST EYE: Piper Anderson
THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD: Cheryl Howard
INVISIBLE MAN: Tarantino Smith

*This list is as accurate as research has allowed. For a brief period, APT explored the idea of franchising Literature to Life to other theatres, namely Cornerstone Theatre. This list includes only the actors that worked directly with APT out of New York City.
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VITA

Tracy Terstriep was born 1970 in Anaheim, California; the first of three children to Mark and Joan Terstriep. An affinity for dance introduced her to the stage at an early age. Scholarships, student-teaching, and supportive parents allowed her to train at the highest level. As a student at Mater Dei High School and then University of Los Angeles-California, she moonlighted in productions at Disneyland and Long Beach Civic Light Opera. As a chorus dancer, she had the opportunity to work with directors Tommy Tune and Jeff Calhoun. Many opportunities ensued from there….national and international tours, television specials, commercials, classical actor training at New York Shakespeare Festival and ultimately a rewarding career on Broadway. Highlights include work-shopping and participating as original cast member of the Tony award-winning *Fosse* (1999) and Mel Brooks/Susan Stroman’s *The Producer’s* (2001); traveling to the West End with the Bebe Neuwirth/Ann Reinking cast of *Chicago*; choreographing the Emmy-award nominated PBS film *Winter Dreams*.

Intermittently from 1998 to 2002, Tracy had the great fortune of studying as a professional actor with Wynn Handman at his Carnegie Hall studio. The work she did in that tiny eighth floor theatre, under Handman’s direction, provided some of the most formative and rewarding artistic experiences of her life. Marriage, motherhood, a re-introduction to academia and teaching are providing continued blessings. With an expected Masters degree in Theatre History at University of Missouri-Kansas City, Ms. Terstriep looks forward to setting down artistic roots in her new hometown of Kansas City. She currently teaches at UMKC, the Kansas City Ballet, and serves as movement consultant for The Heart of America Shakespeare Festival.