

W&L DEPARTMENT OF THEATER AND DANCE

The

Written by Larry Shue
Directed by Joseph Martinez

NERD

Break From Reality:

Disturbing
Dysfunctions &
Making Sense of
the Senseless
through the
Character of Clelia
Oldgrave in Larry
Shue's *The Nerd*

Honors Thesis By
Lauren Howry

Supervisors:
Kimberly Jew
&
Joseph Martinez



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7:30 p.m.

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Lauren Howry
Professor Jew
Honors Thesis
12 September 2013

THE DISTURBING DYSFUNCTIONS OF COMEDY:
A DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF LARRY SHUE'S *THE NERD*

The Nerd, by Larry Shue, is a nonsensical take on conventions of domestic comedy in theater. This work examines the precursors and the frequently unfortunate aftermath of living life out of balance. Shue's textured precepts of space and time function as defining features of liminality within a comedic setting. The world, which contextualizes the characters within *The Nerd*, is geographically and temporally limited, restricted to particular social and gendered roles, yet oddly physically and emotionally cluttered. Thus, although both people and objects shatter throughout the course of events, it is in the analysis of humorous elements at the root of this play that one may begin to put the many broken pieces back together.

With the evolution of Greek theater around the 6th century B.C.E came a "changing landscape...a new vista of public and private" (O'Higgins 99). This creation of two separate realms of interaction was a feature that managed to survive well into what one now identifies as modern comedy, and such features are unmistakably interwoven into Shue's *The Nerd*. He often toys with the boundary line of his protagonist, Willum's personal space and the intrusive almost backwoods characteristics of the antagonist, Rick's supposed "rural" upbringing. Additionally his setting, Terre Haute, Indiana, provides an ideal for such notions, and proceeds to hammer them into one's mind through the

utilization of “coincidental” symbolism. Early in its history the Midwestern city was deemed the original “Crossroads of America,’ due to the fact that two national highways...intersected right in the heart of its downtown” (Roznowski 1). Yet the extent of this town’s peculiarly suitable reputation does not stop there. Terre Haute also uniquely serves as a symbolic representation of the individuals who survived the extreme societal shift from the pastoral years in America: “By the mid-1920s, Terre Haute... was completing the transition from being a rural nation to an urbanized one...” (Roznowski 1). One mark of this period as it is captured by Shue arises as Willum describes the place he believes Rick Steadman lives: “I got his address...he works in a factory, I think, in someplace in Wisconsin, town with an Indian Name I can’t remember” (Shue 14). Though vague, this description demonstrates the distinction between Willum, who resides in a middle-class neighborhood in the center of Indiana, and Rick who’s home is not even large enough to be memorable and is populated, it would appear, mostly by the factory workers who manage to keep it on the map.

Moreover, though, Willum’s own home is given a greater meaning as a place that similarly seems caught between one realm and another. After all “The feeling is one of adventurous rusticity, rather as if we were in a treetop ourselves” (Shue 5). His space also acts as a “transition zone,” one, which according to the architecture of the age was “characterized by one-story and one-and-a-half-story cottages” typifying the occupational class of Willum, an architect, as distinctly separate from the classical “Italianate-style houses”

likely popular to the upper classes in Terre Haute around the early twentieth-century (Bastian 179). Thus Willum appears not simply as an epitome of middle class life style, but quite frankly as someone who is stuck in the middle. Willum's abode also happens to share another characteristic with greater city of Terre Haute: namely, it remains dominated geographically by the banks of the Wabash River. It is into Willum's tree-house at the water's edge that a whole cast of characters stumbles on one rather unlucky evening in November 1981, only to have to rescue their shoes and socks from a watery fate of plummeting off their perch on "the sill of an open window" (Shue 41). In fact much of the tension in this scene revolves around the fact the Willum's place all too closely bridges a gap between the indoors and the outdoors, between the untamed wilderness and the weekly cleansed order of Willum's personal home. Through such contradictions many inopportune moments are created which each invite laughs, quite often simply due to the specificity of placing Willum's modest house in the woods.

Narrowing the focus even further, *The Nerd* may be seen to follow a more common trope of domestic comedy. The one room visible throughout the entire production is the living/dining room of Willum's home. This very typical setting provides a framework that is multi-functional. Considering that "the part of the house where the most activities are performed is the living room," it was a natural setting for the social action of Shue's play (Meesters 70). The secondary use as a dining room also holds certain significance seeing as throughout *The Nerd* comic situations surrounding dinner (as a particular social custom) occur

almost constantly, and connections to various roles within a dinner party for all those individuals involved become tantamount.

To begin this trend one should note that, regardless of the size of a meal being shared, when people gather together with the intention of eating, it means that human interaction will doubtless occur. In fact Menander, one of the founders of Greek comedy, set this as a standard for interaction in a dramatic work; for, it is said, "his focus was almost entirely on human relationships" (Walton 129). Although there are many times in which people may be drawn together, dinner serves "—both actually and in the cultural imagination— [as] the main meal of the day, the most socialized, the most likely to be ritualized" (McGee 9). Whether the meal spoken of is tangible or fictional, sharing of food tends to denote a certain amount of similarity between the persons involved. Additionally, the food itself may present a kind of symbology which may be deciphered for a deeper meaning. This is because "meals are potent conveyers of larger social and economic issues, issues arising both within the text itself and in the larger historical context in which the work of art was produced" (McGee 4). For instance, certain occasions dictate an undeniable degree of extravagance. It is as if there is a cry for statement-making when it comes to dinner. A worthy observation is one which states "there is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk" (Fisher vii). Consequently, one notes that making food from scratch is more prestigious than nourishment which is pre-made. The volume of the food prepared similarly signifies an expectation and capability to entertain many.

Hence, the situation presented by Larry Shue in *The Nerd* (Willum's thirty-fourth birthday), that apparently calls for enough macaroni salad to cause "a nationwide macaroni shortage", may be viewed as quite monumental (Shue 7).

Most relevant then are the people who prepare these monumental meals and present them to every other member of the dinner party: the hosts. Are the hosts then entertainers who must bend to the whim of their captive audience? Shue answers yes, and no. In Terre Haute, Indiana it would seem that these so-called host characters must be strategic pacifiers in addition to entertainment providers. Not surprisingly this protective act often falls into a female character's jurisdiction, perhaps due to its mothering tendency. It is for this reason that we see Tansy constantly trying to appease and repair the damage done by Shue's most egregious role-players, Rick and Axel, both of whom with various degrees of success, lie about their name, occupation, and general feelings. Quite frequently Tansy bridges the awkward gap between uncomfortable situations instigated by Rick or Axel by introducing a new course from the night's menu. This tactic can be seen played out in its entirety as she avoids Rick's absurd refusal to eat with the others by offering "to make something else instead?" (Shue 28). She thus demonstrates the importance of a woman's touch when it comes to dinner preparations:

The dinner can be an expression of creativity...The woman's abilities as a hostess may mean social, political, or financial success...A woman may be judged as a woman based on her dinners; the way she handles her role either as a provider of nourishment or as a social convener may be viewed by herself and others as indicative of her womanhood...in giving a dinner party, she may wield a formidable amount of power in her social set (McGee 5).

Yet, the power that Tansy holds is more nuanced than the broad distinction of simply being able to control her social set. Tansy also manages to make an impression upon the other woman present at the gathering.

Comparatively Clelia appears far less adept in her interpretation of social cues. Although, like Tansy, she does hold to the gendered roles of a domestic comedy, she does so in a very different fashion, ultimately behaving rather poorly. Nevertheless Shue “make[s] use of the...public arena as the man’s field of strife, [and] the home as the woman’s citadel...thus present[ing] the play through the narrow conventional lens of domestic ideology” (Krauth 74). In fact, Clelia is practically diminutive, dependant on getting-her-fix in order to save face. Although at times Clelia shows herself to be quite amiable and willing to come to the aid of others, her efforts in this area are short lived and ultimately rather selfish, not comparable to those of an estimable hostess. For example, when everyone at the party begins to play socks and shoes Clelia comes to her husband’s aide and arrives at a solution to his misplaced eye-hole issue: “Here, Here’s what we’ll do. We’ll just open the side of your bag—and pull it down till you can—see. There” (Shue 39). Yet in this singular instance of helpfulness, Clelia mars her hostess quality with hesitation and doubt: “I really don’t think—I can get this down far enough” (Shue 38). In this fashion Clelia proves to be far less tactful than her female counterpart, and actually somewhat reliant upon Tansy’s superior hostess quality. Even as Clelia leaves the first rambunctious dinner party, Tansy must offer Clelia “a stack of saucers” and Clelia’s only attempt at composure in the face of the horrors of their evening is

still a concession of defeat expressed in the response "Oh, *thank* you—one will be fine" (Shue 46). Here it becomes obvious that those characters in a play who live the majority of the time without the ability to draw upon an impenetrable mask are far more vulnerable to the harsh attacks of the world. Both women are illustrative of their female type, one the consummate hostess and the other a nervous wreck.

The nuances of these Shue's characters are not however aspects unique to his work. The layers behind these particular character's actions at dinner, as well as many actions of others within *The Nerd* also quite intriguingly mirror the structure and purpose of another more recognizably allegorical piece that also revolves around a set mealtime: T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*. Eliot's play also deals with dysfunctional people, and does so in a very similar manner to Shue's work. Not only does the action center around a pair of nightly engagements and a select group of partiers, but their celebration is interrupted by a character given the designation of the Uninvited Guest. Most notably, however, both *The Nerd* and *The Cocktail Party* share the same sort of twist in their respective dénouements. Within Eliot's piece it is revealed that since the first evening the protagonist's friend Alex and the Uninvited Guest have been co-conspirators in an effort "to start a train of events/Beyond your [the protagonist's] control" (Eliot 28). This situation is not altogether unlike Kemp and Axel's "anonymous favor" in *The Nerd* (Shue 82). These parallel gift-giving arrangements simultaneously mark the two plays as comedies that both dare to take pride in their knotted conclusions. After all, one "crucially important

element which came to the fore in the New Comedy concerned the nature of the 'recognition' on which the resolution of the story turns: the nature of what it is that has to be discovered or made clear before a change of heart can pave the way to a happy ending" (Booker 110-111). Additionally, the characters themselves are practically reflections of each other. This may be most obvious with the character Alex (of *The Cocktail Party*) and Axel (of *The Nerd*). One whose culinary work is warned of through the statement, "Anything that Alex makes is absolutely deadly. I could tell such tales of his poisoning people" and the other who jokes, "Me prepare food? Right, babe. You eat my food, you'll spill out onto the porch. Spill out onto the carpet..." (Eliot 57; Shue 7). Yet, these two are not the only ones who are apparently connected in the theatrical ether. Eliot's comedy also has a character named Celia who appears at the first party and is only spoken about at the second, much like Shue's neurotic housewife. It is Celia, who seems to illuminate the thought process of Shue's Clelia most effectively by declaring that "the one thing you care about/Is to avoid a break—anything unpleasant! ... To fatigue. And panic. You can't face the trouble." (Eliot 60, my underline). It is such a declaration that appears early on to manifest itself in Clelia and spiral out of control, ultimately leading to a woman who, if she "even sees a paper bag, she gets so nervous she has to break every dish in the house" (Shue 77, my underline). In this manner, though each story's individual acts of "doing-good" hold different end results, it remain apparent in both that dinner parties represent not just a simple social

gathering, but also a crossroads of personalities, where guests can dictate the success or failure of their host's labors.

Striking too is just how aptly many elements can call attention to the undertone of an evening. Difficult meals take skill, yet sometimes life doesn't let even the simplest of tasks turn out as planned. It is in this vein that Axel's query, "Is the cider supposed to be boiling over everything and turning black and hard?" foreshadows the unsettling mess that Rick Steadman causes when he invites himself to Willum's celebration (Shue 20). As Rick continues to offend and then to literally poke people in the eye, the patience of all the other characters is put to the test. Moreover, it soon becomes obvious that, much like the cider, Rick is quite adept at causing tempers to boil over. The embodiment of an overstayed welcome is also characterized in Shue's piece through the symbolic nature of food. He utilizes both sand (a la the "sands of time") and a browning apple core in his second act to represent how awful Rick's lingering persona as the rotten dinner guest has become. These culinary images duly correspond to the path of disarray which Shue's comedy eagerly follows. Yet the "uninvited guest" serves as a foil for the typical "friends", in that their unsought attendance at a dinner party is either coincidental or altogether irrational and without a doubt throws a wrench in the existent plans. Of course, Rick Steadman falls into this category by giving little notice in terms of his arrival and choosing rather to impose upon Willum by proclaiming Willum "said... I should come over for a visit and ... so here I am" (Shue 13). Larry Shue's work then demonstrates a propensity for his dinner parties to be

composed of characters who were either invited or most certainly not invited to celebrate the occasion. Thereby the parties within *The Nerd* span across not only multiple spaces but manage to include an array of persons from varied classes as well.

Prior to Mr. Steadman's audacity, there came another introduction, that of the Waldgraves, who are singled out in a long string of people for not wishing Willum a happy birthday during the telephone message they left upon his answering machine. Furthermore, Warnock "Ticky" Waldgrave has the nerve to declare his intention for visiting has nothing to do with Willum's birth, but rather that he is there "a., for business and b., for fun!" (Shue 12, 17).

Nevertheless, these few exceptional cases are all classifiable under the term of a guest, or one who is entertained at another's expense. They enter into the playing space in order to call upon one of the principle characters who they believe will help to fulfill some desire of theirs during their visit. Veritably, Warnock inserts himself into *The Nerd's* plot as a mode of increasing his personal mobility. As if to highlight this, Axel, bluntly calls attention to the precarious nature of Waldgrave's supposed purpose, by announcing just how novel that position is: "I've seen you on the finance page. The self-made man. Warnock Waldgrave, rags-to-riches—" (Shue 16). In the era that welcomed social climbers, it seems Warnock received the crucial push which set him at the top of the social order in *The Nerd*. He is introduced not as Willum's boss, but as "the man who's letting me [Willum] design his hotel" (Shue 16). In this way it seems almost a charitable act on the part of Warnock Waldgrave to help

those below him continue their little attempts at success. It then appears that while the Waldgraves may have made their mark on society and become the epitome of Indiana's "new money," they somehow they manage to assume a countenance of being even more out of their element by merely dropping in on the middle-class Willum Cubbert.

Still, in Clelia Waldgrave's case, she may be caught in more than just a brief encounter with rusticity. Her namesake, derived from the Roman maiden Cloelia, implies "that she was born of an illustrious family", which could explain her seeming distaste with the setting, as well as with her husband, Warnock or Ticky's rather brutish methods of child-rearing (Baccaccio 217; Shue 21). The ancient maiden, Cloelia, was sent out of her element to a city along the deep waters of the river Tiber. If, along a similar vein, Clelia comes from a separate social standing than her upstart husband, perhaps a more elite one, she may be ill-suited to her environment due to her class, in addition to being constrained by the obvious tension within her marriage. Such strain, from being forced to become a part of something unfamiliar does not bode well in this comedic work. As one soon recognizes, Shue's character often tries to assert herself with the plea of "—Ticky?" in an attempt to give her husband a little pause. Yet, she seems ultimately submissive to any of his responses and reproofs. Consequently, in the layers of restriction coating their relationship, Shue alludes again to the myth of Cloelia, who was "handed over, along with other leading Romans, as a hostage of peace to Porsenna, King of the Etruscans" (Baccaccio 217). Not only could their relationship allude to an

unspoken level of tension in these confrontations between husband and wife, but the status of Cloelia as a foreigner might very well translate into the state of being that Clelia upholds with Shue's work. If Clelia's heritage, thus, acts as any indication, her textual purpose within Larry Shue's world is to push the boundaries that are constantly surrounding her. Perhaps, it is her innate compulsion to rebel that gives her an excuse for party crashing? But what, then may be said of all the others?

Effectively, it is through character action, and imagery and also through self-presentation that the tone of any dinner party is set. The proper procedure would be to maintain a civil, if even somewhat distant, mode of interaction when speaking with and beginning associations with complete strangers. That is simply a set standard of etiquette or manners, either of which may be defined broadly as "the real or implied actions—in gesture, speech, decoration, dress—that provide form for individual expression, and within the social order these forms quicken public feeling by summoning up unspoken meaning and beliefs" (Lindberg 3). Sadly it is this supposedly understood decorum, which Kemp pretends not to grasp when portraying the obnoxious caricature he has invented of Rick Steadman. Such analysis only sheds light on the point that Shue's protagonist Willum, accurately articulates "...this [meaning either the evening's affair, or meta-theatrically Shue's play itself] wasn't really supposed to be a costume party" (Shue 24). However, what was *supposed to be* is a concept all too eagerly thrown out the window in *The Nerd*. Proper presentation of self is shed as easily as an oversized Halloween costume.

It is this tendency within *The Nerd*, to ignore the customs of the time which may be allowable for Clelia, simply due to her roots; ergo, some dated fallacies still exist in Shue's play such as "women and children are more sensitive and therefore more nervous, since their nerves are more tender" (Drinka 36). This notion is proposed more than once as an explanation of bad behavior on the Waldgraves part. One moment of high anxiety for Clelia leads to a point in which "she takes a handkerchief and a small butter knife from her purse, spreads the handkerchief neatly on the table, lays the saucer on it face down and using several small, efficient strokes, pulverizes the dish with the knife handle" (Shue 20). In doing so, Mrs. Waldgrave not only manages to destroy material belongings, but also to admit her individual weak-point, since "sometimes it's all that will help" (Shue 19). On a deeper level her actions mark her self-identification with the blatantly insecure followers of Victorian psychology. In a time of male domination, many Victorian methods of treating so-called "frayed nerves" bordered on the eccentric. Similarly, Clelia's overly meticulous rampage exposes the unraveling condition of a world, which from the exterior seems completely apropos. It is a terribly brittle place from which Clelia creates her dependency on destruction, but it is also this particular mode of venting emotion that marks Clelia distinctly as a horrible guest who has no respect for other person's property.

Yet, of all the external expressions of stress to choose from, it is also no coincidence that the mania Clelia clings to is one of obliteration of objects. Robert Waska describes how certain persons "tend to link up with deadened

objects that they can control” especially when control is desperately out of reach (61). This is the case for both Clelia, with her dishes and with Willum as well. Shue’s protagonist, more subtly finds strength and resolve in the materials he needs for his architectural renderings. In the same vein as Clelia and the demitasse plates, Willum begins one scene searching for his precious object only to have another character present it to him. Both Willum and Clelia end their respective exchanges with Rick and Tansy by causing greater havoc. For Clelia, her need to break something is rewarded with a final sigh of relief at the plate’s remains. As for Shue’s lead, when he reaches his final straw, “the [pencil] box in Willum’s hand suddenly shatters, crushed by his clenched fist” obliterating the thing he once held dear (Shue 57). Consequently, each moment concludes with one of Shue’s character’s breaking their treasured article into fragmented bits and pieces. The person who first proffers it to them is someone who, unbeknownst to either Clelia or Willum, acts as representations of the future for these two people who are hopelessly stuck in the ruin of the past. Both therapeutic methods rely on the belief of “projective identification...[or when a] patient put[s] their own broken, damaged, and rejected selves into the object so as to not have to live with and manage th[eir] toxic and overwhelming internal void” (Waska 61).

Overall, the parallels between Mr. Cubbert and his employer’s wife, from their vulnerable personality disorders to the significance of the objects they rely upon, are quite extraordinary. Both maintain a borderline obsessive quality in regard to material belongings. Historically, experts “saw luxuries as being at

the heart of neurosis”, a notion which gives more credence to the fact that Clelia, of all the characters, being the one who possesses the most in the physical setting of the play, would also have the most to lose in terms of mental possessions (Drinka 38-9). Yet, even living in luxury when Clelia Waldgrave takes part in her guilty pleasure she insists on it being “Nothing expensive...[and submits that she] usually carr[ies] little Woolworth’s saucers” (Shue 20). The specificity of this is interesting, particularly in that F. W. Woolworth & Co. was known for inexpensive dishes. “Cheap merchandize was sold through five-and-dime or variety stores” of which Woolworth was noted for its tradition accessibility (Venable et al. 126). It is in this manner that one discovers that there are cracks in the façade of picture perfect materialism that the Waldgraves attempt to present. Clelia may exhibit the airs of an upper-class woman, but when it comes to the root of it all she realizes that her urges are so prevalent that it is necessary to have an inexpensive solution that is simultaneously tailored to her more refined taste and mass produced often enough to keep up with her frequent demands. Even the original purpose of a saucer itself correlates to Clelia’s motives throughout the play. The saucer was invented to hold a cup stable and keep its consumer from burning themselves just as they keep Clelia’s head cool in times of excessive stress.

The equivalent of this phenomenon for Willum involves a certain reverence for the supplies which he utilizes during his work. From the very beginning of the play, Willum’s preoccupation with his architectural work is apparent. Before any birthday festivities may be discussed he abruptly cuts off

Tansy and Axel's well wishes by bringing up the fact that "Waldgrave is coming over..." (Shue 6). But instead of stopping there, Willum goes on to equate himself to the tools of his work. While trying to explain to Rick what he believes are "the main differences between you—and me", Willum's go to question is: "Rick, do you know what this is? It's a T-square" (Shue 55). By distinguishing himself through the persons and objects that encompass his body of work Willum fulfills the responsibility of the architect perfectly. To him, a picture is literally worth a thousand words and we see his moment of truth come when those sacred pictures that so aptly define his personal exactitude end up tarnished by crude marker and actual flames. Thus, Willum's tools and sketches foreshadow just how instantaneously his initially meticulous disposition may go up in smoke. Even the ultimate fate of Willum's work is symbolically linked to Clelia's end. After his empowering expulsion of Rick Steadman, Willum declares "I'm gonna come back here, I'm gonna put all my Regency stuff through the shredder..." (Shue 80). With this statement the parallelism completes its circuit so that all of Clelia's dishes and all of Willum's architecture work are obliterated by the end, all in order to make way for a romance. Nothing less could be expected in a comedy:

"Indeed we know that the general chaos of misunderstanding is likely only to get worse, until the knot the characters have tied themselves and each other up into seem almost unbearable. But finally, and to universal relief...everything will get miraculously sorted out, bringing a deliriously happy ending" (Booker 107)

Yet before a resolution one encounters this notion of complete and utter ruin interspersed throughout Shue's work and remarkably it appears, first and

foremost, as the basis of all successive action in the play. It is all constructed around a reunion between Willum and the man who saved his life in the Vietnam War, one, Rick Steadman. Thus, even the catalyst for all ensuing action in *The Nerd* focuses on physical harm afflicting the main character. Then, as if to add insult to injury, Willum's poor fate occurs while he was theoretically conducting the "safest job in the army" (Shue 14). It is in this way that a pattern is set into motion and it indeed becomes clear that any person's sense of constant comfort brings almost certain destruction in its wake. All of the beings in Shue's work prove that who a person is, the identity of one's present-day self is largely reliant upon that person's past and the baggage that comes with their previous group associations. In spite of everything, Shue's characters are continuously reminded that they are messy, lost beings. For instance, Willum feels obligated to take in the supposed "Rick Steadman" based upon his personal identification as an army veteran and as a patient who was hospitalized due to war wounds. The affiliation becomes such a strong point of reference to those within the group that outsiders cannot begin to fathom the source of that insider connection. Or as Willum puts it, "I can't hurt his feelings. I owe him too much" (Shue 51). Such strong feelings of fidelity are not altogether uncommon, it is, in fact, often that "Norms play a role [when it comes to group behavior...and] certain things are not done on moral grounds, even through it would be expedient to do them" (Herrmann and Shannon 622). With this principle in mind, the extensive hardships Willum puts himself through for the sake of one relationship may be more easily comprehended via

his loyalty to a connection which was established because of his own horribly damaged life. If the groundwork itself is incredibly imperfect how could one expect the results to be anything else?

The answer to this is quite simply: one cannot expect something to miraculously change, and that is exactly why not simply the physical, but also much of the emotional tensions within *The Nerd* stem from catastrophic failures. The weight they place upon their personal belongings, endowing them with a sense of self, takes an toll on their own sanity as well. Shue seems to say that "as the new animated domestic comedies display all sorts of domestic dysfunction, they speak to viewers who feel marginalized" (Tueth 203). In this sense, Willum really is an everyman type, only riddled with countless problems the stunt his ability to emote. For instance, signs repeatedly point to the depiction of Willum Cubbert as a Peter Pan figure throughout Larry Shue's work. Not surprisingly "a Peter Pan Syndrome victim [will] often dismiss his despondency as a normal part of the transition into middle age...His loneliness and his fear of rejection shield him from risk taking"(Kiley 170). It is then not far out of the realm of expectation to state, as Tansy does, that Willum is imperfect for the simple reason that "he could use a little gumption" (Shue 9). While many children grow out of the phase of tactile obsession Willum has made a career of coloring. Perhaps this seeming need to simulate his senses is what prompts Tansy's particular choice of birthday cards. After all Shue's protagonist even identifies himself, not by his own age of thirty-four, but by stating "God. I'm six little kids" (Shue 7).

Moreover, it can be seen that though Willum's age would qualify him most certainly as a man, he does not seem to be able to avoid many childlike characteristics, but rather is pressured into them by his environment. Much like Barrie's magical creation, Willum finds himself "caught in the abyss between the man he didn't want to become and the boy he could no longer be" (Kiley 23). Although the characters closest to him have moved forward with their life goals Willum has exclusively placed value on the presence of so many immature persons. Even Axel, who is not exactly worlds ahead of Willum when it comes to maturity, notes, "all Willum's friends have names like Pinky and Winky and Dean the Bean" (Shue 17). Yet even when Willum attempts to make strides to overcome his state of being perpetually stuck in a puerile fantasy, he is belittled. More than any other character in the play Willum is addressed as "kid". Both his own friends and a complete stranger (Kemp) adopt this term when speaking to him, and although it does not seem outwardly threatening, to someone in Willum's condition being called a "kid" only reaffirms his self-identification with childhood.

Adding to Willum's misguided self-view, Kemp Hall (or Rick) establishes himself as the unavoidable means by which Willum can achieve the end he was heretofore unable to achieve. The process by which this happens is highly predictable if one considers that "when confronted by a fully developed Comedy ...[characters] must in effect become a 'new' or different person"(Booker 116). Kemp, by portraying the overly dependent, insufferable chalk monitor from Wisconsin, shows Willum just what his future would be if he chose to remain

in Indiana. Shue captures the features of the supposed Rick Steadman when he demonstrates how Rick “adjusts” to city life. For instance, Rick adds multiple versions of a chimney to Willum’s Regency Hotel design and then adds insult to injury as he “takes Willum’s burning cigarette from the ashtray, gets a mouthful of smoke, and blows it slowly” through a hole he tore in the sketch (Shue 57). Rick, thus exhibits the “true” nature of his roots and threatens Willum’s pride while simultaneously showing Willum just how similar they are: they are both aspiring architect’s after all. Furthermore, Kemp draws on Rick’s foil, by taking on the persona of an upstart housing developer (Red Graham), and allowing Willum an excuse to finally “set up shop...and this time it [Willum’s next architectural rendering will] look by God, the way [he] want[s] it to” (Shue 80). This affirmation comes on the heels for Rick’s attempt to “help” design Waldgrave’s building and after persistent job offers from Red Graham to take work in Alexandria, VA. Hence, it is Kemp who becomes the provider of good fortune for Willum by returning the sketches that Willum was seeking when they were lost, and by providing an escape to a world where free will is actually an option.

Psychologically speaking however, the actions taken by Rick throughout the play do not exclude him from the realm of the emotionally damaged. Just as Willum and Peter were equitable, Shue provides Rick Steadman as a perfect foil to Willum’s childish reluctance. By displaying vulgarly how exactly not to be successful Rick dons the role of Captain Hook to Willum’s Pan. He proves that he is “capable of unconscionable foul deeds and can sing and dance as

[he] steal[s]" (Kiley 32) all treasured items and idealism from Willum. This is not all that shapes Rick's image into that of Barrie's infamous pirate. In the same manner as Hook, Rick is excessively conscious of time ticking down. Kemp is working on a deadline. His performance as "Rick" will inevitably conclude when Tansy departs for Washington, since his sole purpose for appearing was to urge her and Willum to be together. With this in mind, the final scene is hinged on Axel's notable remark that "...you [Kemp] were really pushing it! One more minute and I would have lost it!" (Shue 81). Thus, it is apparent that the ticking of the alligator-clock was drawing near and soon Kemp would have pressed his luck too far to succeed in compelling Willum to grow-up. Yet, even with this being said Kemp manages to weave a few more allegories into his version of Rick Steadman's personality. Key to his story are two Hook-like facets: a sense of displacement and the abandonment of Rick by his own family. Rick, himself, says, "...that's what I'm dooen', just travelleen' around...." and thereby displays a sad state of wanderlust very reminiscent of the Captain Hook character (Shue 31). In this way, Rick gives off a pitiful air which is perhaps rooted in the fact that he cannot seem to settle but must continue shifting his dependency from one victim to the next.

Another form of victimization rears its head in Shue's comedy through the conception and limitations females (not simply in their formerly discussed hostess/guest relationship) but also in other more allegorical conceptions. These notions of femininity take root when early on Tansy, describes herself as "a parody of a New Woman" (Shue 8). Although this comment seems arbitrary

enough, its significance is tantamount to Shue's conception and critical judgment of Clelia's neurotic behavior. It is said that "The New Woman sprang fully armed from Ibsen's brain" in reference to Henrik Ibsen who modeled his play *A Doll's House* on the repressive nature of Victorian England (Ardis 30). The allusion Tansy makes then, is one popularized by the 19th century notion that a woman may strive for self-fulfillment, and that doing so may even be deemed more appropriate than the frail expressions of the supposed feminine ideal. It is therefore substantially profound to note that when Clelia arrives she does not enter upon the scene with any dishes to break but instead has to request one from Tansy, thereby entreating the liberated woman's aid to her own situation. Thus, from the very beginning Tansy and Clelia are set up as opposites: one prone to hysterics of a bygone era the other representing women who were *not* limited by the stringent ethics of that once proper society.

Alongside this juxtaposition of historical and present day women, Shue also illustrates a shift in women's roles from housewife to career woman. The movement that most blatantly animates the persons he created began in the 1970s when the Second Wave of Feminism hit. The growing trend toward industrialization drew greater distinctions between home and work, especially when it came to the issue of a women's place in society. With stress placed upon such a dichotomous relationship, the two women in Larry Shue's work should have been at odds. When the way Tansy regards herself is expressly considered, when it is noted that her latest lifestyle decision causes her to confess "...oh, I know how I must look to you—like a parody of the New

Woman, casting off her chains to go be the Washington Weather Girl" it is a wonder that Shue's women find any topic on which to agree (Shue 8). Even if Tansy's statement is taken in jest, the point is clear. On one hand there is the enchained role of a woman who figures as the ideal of domesticity and on the other there is the newfound popularity of the working-class woman, who can leave her mark upon the world. Hence, it is at the turn of the twentieth century, with "American values deeply rooted in capitalism and individualism," that Tansy's view of the female role would have been novel; yet, miraculously the housewife stereotype persists throughout the entirety of Larry Shue's *The Nerd* (Neuhaus 4). The notion of the housewife pervades the general public to so great a degree that even Shue's self-proclaimed career woman spends "every day untangl[ing]" Willum's home and devotes most of her time playing the parts of both the cook and the hostess for the evening (Shue 9). She is ever the optimist writing off Rick's initially odd behavior by claiming, "No, he was a little confused, that's all. Here, now, food's ready, everybody follow me!" (Shue 25). It is this very act, Tansy's charade of perfectly balanced womanhood, which may be what draws her and Clelia together despite all odds prevailing against them.

Nevertheless, one may ask how Tansy's attempts to appear as a homebody can be considered a veneer when Clelia, who is quite far past the border of seeming togetherness, might, in turn, be construed as more thoroughly feminine. For that, it would seem to come down to their respective instinctual choices. Looking at the words both women select during their evening's game of "I went on a trip", even prior to the conspicuously incoherent

item provided by Rick Steadman, there seems to be a pattern common to the guests responses. Warnock, Axel and Tansy all provide items corresponding to a possibly edible commodity; however, Clelia Waldgrave supplies the answer of “a basket”, thereby revealing a tendency toward organization that is uniquely feminine (Shue 34). In doing so she expresses the same sentiment as that which was promoted via media, around the date of publication Shue’s work:

In advertising, the fundamental meaning of household cleaning has always been rooted in images and copy that define “home” as a space created and cared for by good wives and mother, linking housework products with love and care for the family (Neuhaus 12).

Since Clelia painstakingly selected a container used for the purpose of storing items as what she would take with her on a trip, she reveals a predisposition toward cleanliness and order that is typical of the American housewife trope. After all, “Clelia is a picture of tasteful, studied patience, but not because her life is devoid of anxiety” (Shue 16). So it follows that this specificity on her part may preclude a sort of prophetic telling as to her personal tipping point.

But if all Shue’s characters can have their respective psychoses analyzed via a fairytale persona then Tansy and Clelia must have fictional counter parts as well. In this way, one may then identify traits which mark Tansy quite apparently as a Tinkerbell type, feminine yet strong and fierce in a way that almost overshadows her excesses macaroni salad making. She is as a headstrong and independent woman:

[She is the type of woman who] wants spontaneity, growth and mutual adaptation in her relationship with a man. She...figures the guy will outgrow some of his juvenile behavior. However, when he fails to do so, this woman doesn't stick around...she never fully understands why the love went sour (Kiley 217).

It is on the cusp of this decisive action that *The Nerd* opens. Tansy has already made her ultimate life-altering decision yet the question that lingers in the air is "So, what, when you[Tansy]'re gone he won't still need someone?" (Shue 9). Tansy recognizes and adores many of Willum's traits even to the point when she is cleaning up after and waiting on him. However, therein also lies her greatest fault: self-sacrifice (or—if you will—a sort of "clap-if-you-believe" quality). The only thing that brings redemption to her sad state of constant hovering is her knowledge of her own circumstances. As she proclaims, partly for her own benefit, "it [moving on with her life] happens to be...that one chance that comes along in your life that you just gotta grab 'cause if you don't, then before you know it, your eyes glaze over—and whatever or whoever you gave it up for, you start to resent" (Shue 8). Not wanting to hurt Willum, out of love, Tansy chooses to remain her own individual person and let Willum go on denying that he should change anything at all about his way of life.

Besides this, Shue provides a parallel example of a victim of Peter Pan Syndrome in his text and it is through this second "Pan" that Clelia's role is revealed. Many of the infantile features that Willum exhibits throughout the play are also qualities that persist in the character of Warnock Waldgrave. Even Axel's critical description of Willum's choice in friends loses some of its

weight when followed by the questioning probe, "Doesn't that strike you as funny, Mr.—uh, Ticky?" (Shue 17). By insisting on the ridiculous nickname, Waldgrave lowers his credibility and by insisting upon getting his way above all else he reduces himself to a child. In fact, the way he describes his presence in the play he states, "I'm here...for fun! I'm in no mood for psychology!" (Shue 17). Yet, Waldgrave's subsistence throughout the plot additionally serves another, perhaps greater purpose. His life reveals one reality that Willum could choose to embrace. Not only is Waldgrave the dictator of all Willum's literal planning in his current job, but he has settled down with a family, and furthermore he introduces them to Willum, almost as a sign of what could become the protagonist's own future.

Truthfully, the case could be argued for this, since the role of Waldgrave's wife, Clelia, also fulfills another commonality for these Pan-like men. This is because there are "two types of women drawn to the victim of Peter Pan Syndrome. [One is the "Tinker" figure and one] is well practiced in taking a back seat to men and is quick to fall into the role of a protective mother figure...this type of woman [is] as "Wendy" (Kiley 216). Clelia presents herself singularly as a genuine parental authority in *The Nerd*. In fact it is motherhood that sets Clelia apart in this play. Though she makes a point of clarifying that she has a position in education, it is interesting that, even in terms of her career, Clelia felt the need to work with children. But more compelling still is how eerily close Clelia's and the actions of some other Waldgraves featured in Shue's play mirror the unstated agendas of

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advertisements around the 70s and 80s: "Many times the children even appear by themselves, with no parent in sight. These kids are not actually participating in any way...they serve no ostensible purpose...But as offspring, they define the woman...as 'mom'" (Neuhaus 14). Much like this depiction of early advertisements Clelia's child, Thor, often enters the playing space in *The Nerd* unsupervised and seems only to exist as a reminder that children too exist in this world Shue has created. In fact Shue seems very much at ease to perpetuate the stereotype of "housewife mom" through his manipulation of Thor. Although the child is sophisticated enough to address his school friend by his full name, "A.J. Morovek," he later refers to Clelia, almost petulantly as "Mom" (Shue 16, 46). Now, taking into account the fact that he is a child of only eight and that is now common endearment, "the term 'mom' itself, rather than 'mother,' reiterates the normative proscription of women's social roles" (Neuhaus 14). In this manner, Thor feeds the growing convention of Shue's era. Socialization has dictated that years of maintaining one form of terminology may make it ingrained in a culture, and it is only through bouts of hysteria that Clelia stops herself from tipping into the idyllic realm of the quintessential housewife mom, whom Shue seems to have used as his model.

Still despite all else, Clelia consistently but feebly acknowledges her husband's exceedingly childlike tendencies and is often reduced to begging, or worse—physical manifestations of her inner turmoil. Likewise she emulates Barrie's heroine by trying to appear civil not simply for Waldgrave's sake, but also for that of her kids. But, the balancing act she attempts to maintain in

this respect is not an easy one. "Every professional woman...with young children has two sets of competing urgencies" and it is only by burying her pain can she keep up the illusion of "tasteful, studied patience" that Shue describes (Maushart 199; Shue 16). Clelia performs the task of mothering not just two, but three children. She has to implore her own husband not to encourage her children's bad habits, yet continues to enable his own by jumping at his command. Her desperation shines through when her husband starts yelling at her son, "Ticky! Please—if you treat him as an adult he'll respond as an adult" (Shue 17). Yet, even here she shows her weakening fortitude because she continues to utilize her husband's pet name even in her chastisement. Repeatedly Clelia demonstrates this attitude is one verging on a distorted sense of motherly "strength", and one which she takes pride in due to her instructive abilities. She unequivocally testifies to this in the way she describes herself to different characters. To Willum, who she views as on par with the childish persons who surround her, she told that she is someone who "work[s] with slow learners" yet later this descriptive phrase she chose, for the benefit of Rick Steadman, to "I'm a teacher" (Shue 16; Shue 23). Thus Clelia remarks on her knowledge of both Willum and Rick's separate psychological states and clarifies her position as one that overlooks, or mothers to either one of their personalities. Perchance this is why the first reaction Clelia elicits from Rick is that she is "Stoopeen' all down" (Shue 23). In such a phrase he accurately characterizes her both physically and mentally; for, Clelia feels compelled to keep a careful watch over anyone who seems to need a mother.

But despite any seemingly redeeming features of the others in due course one sees that only Willum and Tansy's story can end with the same joy as a fairy tale. After all it is only Willum—not Axel, Warnock, or Rick—who manages to “go through the transformation which...straightens [him] out, [finally] bringing [him] into harmony with the loving” Tansy. Thus it appears that the optimal combination of horrid personalities can prompt anyone within a true comedy to actually grow up.

Therefore every facet of the play is seen to work in unison, telling a single story of a system becomes plagued by intentionally fragmented images. In such a system not everything fits together simply or beautifully, but when the remains of a shattered universe can be united, a new world of hope is illuminated. Be it through an tousled house, broken dishes, distressed paper, or even one's own mind, the divisive state of most relationships is captured through various traces of historical and textual evidence and embedded in Larry Shue's work *The Nerd*. Shue brings a new life to people coping with these torments both externally and internally, and in doing so demonstrates the comical nature buried in their many dysfunctions.

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Lauren Howry
Professor Martinez
Honors Thesis
7 December 2013

BREAKING APART PECULIAR REALITIES:
THE PROCESS OF CREATING SENSE FOR SHUE'S SENSELESS CLELIA

Being a part of Washington & Lee University's fall term production, *The Nerd*, was a bit like becoming comfortable with sheer madness. From the earliest moments of analysis until the final bow the character of Clelia Waldgrave from Larry Shue's ridiculous story offered many wonderful challenges to be undertaken.

Upon first reading the Shue's script, Clelia's character seemed to be nothing more than a woman who was a bit too far past the end of her rope. She came off as uppity and unkind, not to mention crazy and destructive. In spite of this outrageousness Clelia's personal insanity appeared to easily become overshadowed by that of the character Rick Steadman, and in this way, she seemed almost forgettable at first glance. Yet, in researching minute aspects of Clelia's life, I grew almost fond of her. She was almost certainly out of place: a rich woman in the architect's tree house, an uninvited guest at a birthday party, and a feeble natured woman in the midst of those who have or who are gaining their own sense of gumption. But, even considering this, Clelia was a character who forged strong emotional bonds. Without my early analytical research, I do not think I would have had the same appreciation for Clelia's relationship within the guest-host scenario, or with her frailty and its seeming origin in the concepts of simultaneously being both a woman and a mother.

Not surprisingly, I found myself preoccupied with the neurotic habit Clelia has of smashing dishes. Even while writing about other facets that contributed to Clelia's character I could not avoid the sense that overall she was simply broken. It was as if every other character had an achievable goal and her's was simply doomed to fall apart. After-the-fact, the paper I constructed even felt as if it concluded pessimistically, which I do not believe was coincidental. Clelia's character would have loved to have nowhere to go but up, but instead her strange tale ends quite pitifully.

Yet, it was this ever-malingering undertone of pity that really came to life as I started to work on the character of Clelia in rehearsal. Conceptually I began by noticing how very appearance, and family. oriented Clelia was. Behaviors and lines began to take on an almost constant note of apology. The notions of "perfect" that my previous research had distilled so evidently were soon manifested physically through Clelia's arrival, and furthermore in the delivery of many of her lines. I soon discovered that her power, like many maternal figures, was quite passive aggressive. She would never outright admit faults, but would instead gloss over the bad moments by suggesting a "helpful" alternative to anger. Rather plain instances, such as when Clelia happens to say "Oh yes, isn't it lovely" after Tansy begrudgingly returns to the kitchen to start preparing food for Rick, suddenly felt of extra significance to me. Clelia's incredible need to outdo the tension with pleasantries was lost in a reading of the material, but came alive when glares were exchanged and awkward silence filled the room, and could only be pathetically mended by Clelia's words. This

same slight quality was one, which I also think contributed to my occasional lapse into the characteristics of Martha Brewster. Though these two characters, I've played were distinct they shared this strange philosophy that sickening sweetness cures all horrors.

It was also during this rehearsal period that interactions became so much more revelatory. Beside her husband Mrs. Waldgrave became countless times more diminutive. Although partly due to the simple differences in body and vocal type between myself and the student playing Mr. Waldgrave, this distinction was also made apparent in our exchanges. On multiple occasions I began to physically demonstrate Clelia's timid nature by cringing in response to Ticky's aggressive verbal attacks. Until we began working together the strain between Ticky and Clelia had never been of particular interest to me. However as I delved into creating a logical guide to Clelia's movements I became more and more interested in Waldgrave and particularly in how he might make Clelia feel. Only by doing so was I able to draw upon unlikely sources of inspiration. For instance, the incorporation of squirrel-like movements and frenetic qualities were greatly dependent on how others viewed Clelia. It was only as we started to get the roles on their feet that I realized just how much influence Mr. Waldgrave, in particular, had over Clelia, and in return how horribly apprehensive and thankless her existence with him was during their time on stage.

Similarly Clelia's bond with Tansy was emphasized most aptly through staging. While I did have some sense of the these two women's connection

before I headed into rehearsal, it became more and more evident visually as our stage work progressed. Thus, constructing a feminine world within this story of absurdity and love was the theatrical attribute I felt most proud of in the days following *The Nerd's* performance. Not only did Caroline and I work together often to attempt create a bit of reality within the quality and pacing of our dialogues together, but particular blocking moments (such as our communal sigh or our greetings and farewells) heightened the existence of that connection for the audience as well. In fact, though the appeal of many jokes waned over the evenings based on who was in attendance, there were always a few spectators who commented on how sincere Caroline and I seemed during our mutual exchanges. Even if this validation may have colored my sentiments about our performance, I do feel that the introduction of the humor in femininity was one of the most commonly understood devices used to help our audiences relate to this odd 80's production of Shue's.

In spite of everything wonderful, I do have a few regrets looking back on my work with Clelia. I really wish I had examined more in depth how she might respond to Axel. Instead, I almost took for granted that she was merely perplexed by him. I remember noting on several occasions that Axel and Clelia barely speak. But never once did I ask why or really even look into Axel as a character, although many people came away from our production feeling that he was the protagonist. I also wish I had thought about a point that was brought up to me only after the fact: Why were paper bags so scarring to Clelia? Either of these two points could have created more clarity in how

particular scenes might have been portrayed. After all, I should know better than many people to what volumes omissions speak.

Beyond cryptic anthropological notions, however, I think this experience was by far the most valuable one I have had to date. I was never sure during the run of the show how I felt about it, because my feelings were very unique; however now with a bit of time placed between my written work and my performance I recognize that I felt uniquely prepared. Despite the few things I wished to continue working on, the way I delved into Clelia's character helped me more than ever to grasp both the conceptual and performative features that were necessary to craft a character who was not just a bizarre neurotic, but who was a woman that deserved the sympathy of everyone watching her plight.

Lauren Howry
 Honors Thesis: Clelia

Characterization Questionnaire

1. *What is the super-objective and major motivation of the character in the play?*

Super-Objective:

Clelia needs to ensure that her family remains together (in the level-headed sense of the word) for appearances sake.

Major Motivation:

Clelia is motivated by the idea that her family does not presently have a strong family bond (as Waldgrave put it p.12). She strives for this bond because it is what an ideal family "should" be able to maintain.

2. *What is the character's central action in the play?*

Clelia's central action cleaning up messes (both figurative and literal)

3. *What is the character's main action in each unit?*

Unit:	Main Action:
Unit 1: Clelia enters - WILLUM. "Thor?"	Making the best first impression
Unit 2: THOR. "Daa-yad" -Thor slams the bedroom door	Putting on airs
Unit 3: WALDGRAVE. "Damn it, Clelia" - WALDGRAVE. "Mark my words"	Soothing the irascible bear that is Ticky
Unit 4: CLELIA. "Oh dear- still hiding"- CLELIA. "Well- you're a blessing anyway"	Agonizing about men
Unit 5: CLELIA "Oh dear. I wonder..." -CLELIA. "Those are my favorites"	Craving a fix
Unit 6: She takes a handkerchief - CLELIA. "...I'll pass. Thanks."	Restoring the balance
Unit 7: THOR. "Gambee..." - TANSEY "I may join you"	Reconsidering
Unit 8: Axel enters - All exit	Returning the favor/Helping with someone else's mess
Unit 9: Clelia enters during the spanking - Waldgrave seizes cider	To apologize, chastising
Unit 10: WILLUM. "well sure" - Rick stands	Apologizing
Unit 11: RICK. "Excuse me" - Everyone stares	Hiding
Unit 12: WILLUM. "Uh. What?" -RICK. "It's your house."	Complimenting
Unit 13: WILLUM. "Right, Right" -CLELIA "I'm a teacher"	Helping Rick understand
Unit 14: RICK. "Ha. Ha" - WILLUM. "Uh—."	To look prettier, to seek others impression
Unit 15: RICK. "So who was..." -TANSY. "Probably"	Helping resolve confusion
Unit 16: RICK. "So is there a judgeen." -AXEL. "You're sorry"	Seeking reassurance
Unit 17: TANSY. "Well..." -TANSY. "Everybody follow me"	Appeasing Tansy
Unit 18: Entrance - CLELIA. "My goodness"	Sympathizing with Willum

Unit 19: WALDGRAVE. "What line of business" - AXEL. "I'm not gonna say it."	Admiring, then inviting pity
Unit 20: Rick enters with toilet paper - WALDGRAVE "What's it called"	Looking for a way to help
Unit 21: CLELIA. "The piano?" -WALDGRAVE. "No."	To encourage Ticky
Unit 22: WALDGRAVE. "The music" - WALDGRAVE. "It's the damndest thing"	Bragging
Unit 23: RICK "Yeah." -Waldgrave glares	Gaining Sympathy
Unit 24: TANSY. "Oh here's a plate..." - Everyone bites into the deviled egg	To give praise
Unit 25: Rick philosophically studies egg - CLELIA. "Well"	Helping people forget about the eggs
Unit 26: WILLUM "So uh...Rick," -RICK. "Lots of stuff"	Bolster Rick's self-esteem
Unit 27: CLELIA. "You were never married?" - CLELIA. "And how old were you?"	Consoling Rick
Unit 28: CLELIA. "Oh!" - Exit with dish	Appealing to Tansy for help
Unit 29: Clelia enters retrieves 2 dishes exits - WILLUM. "Oh..."	Alleviating Tansy's anxiety/Making friends
Unit 30: RICK. "Well!" - RICK "ra-a-a-a-at"	Hazarding a guess, trying to help Rick save face
Unit 31: WALDGAVE. "I think we're going" - TANSY "Here we go, don't worry"	Complying with orders
Unit 32:TANSY "We're going to play" -just before Clelia notices Rick	Gloating
Unit 33: TANSY. "Rick? What—what are you doing?" - WALDGRAVE. "What's the point of this if -?"	To tattle on Rick
Unit 34: TANSY. "Why don't we play something else?" -- Exit to kitchen	Fumbling
Unit 35: Re-enter -Covering head with bag	Yielding
Unit 36: WALDGRAVE "dammit! hell!" - WALDGRAVE "I am!"	Trying to be of assistance
Unit 37: CLELIA "Well, Ticky" -CLELIA "I really don't think -I can get this down far enough"	Teasing
Unit 38: RICK "Here, no problem" - WILLUM "...Okay?"	Allowing Rick to try
Unit 39: CLELIA "Here. Here's what we'll do" - "That should be all right shouldn't it"	Helping and trying to regain approval
Unit 40: RICK "I don't know" - THOR "EEEEEE"	To keep Ticky quiet
Unit 41: CLELIA. "What was that?" - WILLUM "Think of the hotel"	Looking for who needs help
Unit 42: The end of spinning—RICK "Kay"	Worrying about whoever screamed
Unit 43: TANSY "Are you all right?" - Exit to follow Ticky	Trying to save face
Unit 44: Re-enter - clunk of Thor's arm	Reaffirming Ticky
Unit 45: CLELIA "Thor!" -WALDGRAVE "...gone nuts"	Supporting/Reminding Thor

Unit 46: Tansy hands Clelia saucers -CLELIA
"Thank you—nice time"

Reassuring the hostess

Unit 47: WALDGRAVE. "Clelia—!" - CLELIA
"Well..."

Apologizing for Ticky, Resigning to his opinion

4. *What significant comments does the character make about himself or herself that reveal aspects of characterization?*
- "I work with slow learners"
 - reveals how she interacts with others
 - "...then [when Thor is difficult/Waldgrave is angry] it's all I can do—"
 - reveals that her relationship with her family is strained
 - "...sometimes it's more than I can—deal with. These men—"
 - reveals that she has a gendered view of the world
 - "I can do without"
 - reveals what she thinks her limits are as well as her desire to be polite above all else
 - "I usually carry little Woolworth's saucers, but I see to have used my last one at the orchard"
 - reveals the frequency of her neurosis
 - "Oh yes [I have played "I went on a trip"]!"
 - reveals her familiarity with "playing a game" as a good stalling tactic
 - "I really don't think I can get this down far enough"
 - reveals her lack of self confidence
 - "Fine"/ "We had a very nice time"
 - reveals her desire to appear perfect even in the face of disaster
5. *What significant comments are made about the character by other characters in the play*
- "I'll be out in your part of the country...picking apples. Clelia says it's supposed to strengthen our family bond"—Waldgrave
 - "A teacher, right! With your hair all pulled back and all, and stoopeen' all down, that's great!"—Rick
 - "And you spend all day, prob'ly, getteen' all dressed up like a little old teacher..." -Rick
 - "We have a daughter...she's just seventeen yet"—Waldgrave
 - Boy, I wish I'd had you there to tell her folks that it was sweet...But no, that really makes me feel better, though, that you thought it was sweet"—Rick
 - "I think she just needed a little time alone—Tansy
 - "My wife will help me!" -Waldgrave
 - "my wife, if my wife even sees a paper bag, she gets so nervous she has to break every dish in the house"—Waldgrave
6. *What external and internal obstacles exist which prevent the character from achieving his or her goals?*
- External: Rick, Ticky's anger problems, Thor's locking himself in various rooms, her lack of dishes

Internal: Feelings of incompetency, frayed nerves

7. *How does the character deal with the obstacles that confront him or her?*
 - Rick—tries to help him understand things and tries to keep Ticky from hurting him
 - Ticky's Anger—rationalizes scenarios as a psychiatrist would and uses his nickname as a warning to try and get him to quell his temper himself
 - Thor—enables his bad behavior by sanitizing it. She calls it "hiding" and thus avoids the truth
 - Lack of dishes—makes a confidante of Tansy and gets permission to break another person's property
 - Feelings of incompetency—almost literally shrinks away so as not to draw attention to herself (finding eye-hole episode)
 - Frayed nerves—breaks a dish
8. *What does the playwright say about the character?*
 - "Clelia is a picture of tasteful, studied patience, but not because her life is devoid of anxiety"
 - "on the verge of tears" when talking of her family with Tansy
 - "She takes a handkerchief and a small butter knife from her purse, spreads the handkerchief neatly on the table, lays the saucer on it face down, and using several small, efficient strokes pulverizes the dish with the knife. She sighs"
 - "With some reluctance, Clelia takes the scaly hand"
 - "Clelia, who hadn't realized she was 'stoopeen' all down,' is a little wounded
 - "with a mother's smile" to Rick during his 8-year-old story
 - "Clelia surreptitiously grabs a saucer and disappears into the kitchen"
 - "Clelia enters, barely acknowledges the others, picks up tow more saucers, and hurries back to the kitchen. In a moment, we hear violent smashing of crockery"
 - "Clelia smiles at her own cleverness" during I went on a trip
 - "Clelia is trying, as demurely as possible, to remove her stockings, but finding it hard to do so modestly
 - "almost amused" to find where Ticky made his eyehole
 - "massaging her ankle"
 - "Tansy is assisting Clelia, who is now limping noticeably"
 - "Remembering her manners, she speaks for the damaged limping trio"

Lauren Howry
Honors Thesis

CAREER

What is it like working with children with special needs?

Special education is essentially teaching in overdrive. A major challenge is trying to establish relationships with parents or with general education teacher, which I think is a facet very evident in Clelia. She pushes for collaboration almost more than anything.

One person I read about notes that "small successes often overshadow the negatives" which is essentially Clelia philosophy on everything, or at least what she tries to promote.

Interestingly it doesn't seem to be a relaxing job. It demands almost endless patience, they teach and re-teach basic life skills in addition to educational requirements, it is also necessary to remain positive and empathetic. Turn over for Special Educators is higher than most because of additional stress.

Is Clelia good at what she does?

I think she actually is, but there are many facets that work in her favor. She obviously likes kids, is very positive, knows how to establish routines and keep composed during behavioral challenges (granted in unconventional ways, but still).

What made Clelia choose her job?

Quite possibly, Clelia particularly needed a job that related to service in some way. She would be one of those overactive volunteers throughout college, because a) she excels at it and b) she recognizes the image of generosity and goodness that comes with it. She likely also has a personal connection: both her children seem a little more demanding than others (Gillian's practically a savant and Thor is a demon-child).

What level does she work at?

The most horribly perfect scenario would be if Clelia worked for an elementary school, to make Rick's proposal story all the more awful. Also if she is the only teacher of Special Education for that school it adds insult to injury, because she would be the person intended to stand between Rick and "Tina's" attempts at marriage.

Does Clelia break things at work?

After reading through a typical workday it seems inevitable that she would have to break a dish. Perhaps that is even why Clelia now carries saucers in her purse. She likely excuses herself during lunch or nap so as not to seem unusual and maybe even goes to a different room. This would also likely be where she developed her technique to be so efficient. She wouldn't be able to leave for long and would have to have a way to muffle the sound.

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Honors Thesis

Marriage

When/How did Clelia and Waldgrave meet?

They had to have met over 17 years ago, since that is Gillian's age, but I doubt it would have been much before that. Perhaps 19 years ago and they have been married for 18 of those years. Ticky doesn't seem like the world's most patient person so it would likely have been soon after meeting. I also feel as if they would have met at some sort of place like a country club, soon after he became rich, because then Clelia might be attracted to the idea of him gaining membership in order to appear like more than he was before.

Has their relationship changed? Is/was it happy?

I think, with each child their relationship grew more strained. Ticky speaks very fondly of Gillian which might be an indication that things were almost as good as he could ever imagine before Thor. Now it would seem that they derive happiness from different things because they have grown to a state in their relationship that is less spontaneous.

What does Clelia love about Ticky?

Above all else I think Clelia loves how Ticky makes her feel needed. With him she doesn't have to feel useless or uncared for he will ask her opinion or for her help when he encounters problems, this is perhaps why the spanking of Thor is so distressful to her.

How much do each of the parents contribute to parenting?

It is most definitely an uneven split, I imagine (just as in shoes and socks) Waldgrave is unwilling to do certain aspects of childrearing. However, tasks such as helping with homework might still be something he takes pride in almost on principle. Nevertheless I think Clelia would strongly consider Waldgrave's reaction to particular things, such as the way the children are dressed or what activities they take part in. It may not be to the point of her actually asking permission, but more of having a set image (Ticky's lifelong goal of success) in mind throughout the process. She wouldn't want Ticky to get angry over little things she could have controlled.

Were both children planned? Is she happy being a mother?

Gillian was likely a baby exactly when they wanted one. Not long after marriage, a bright girl is born. There is however such a large age gap between Gillian and Thor (10 years) and if, the couple is now in their forties raising an elementary school child must not have been on the agenda, unless some horrid event prompted them. I could easily see Waldgrave as someone who strays. Perhaps a public scandal for the family who is so image conscious meant that they had to prove they were a close-knit family once again. I personally like the idea that Thor was an unplanned

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Nerosis

When did Clelia start breaking? What was it she broke then/how?

Clelia's habit likely began around the time Thor was born. She equates how much she can bear to "these men" which seems so much more likely when it was the original trigger. Perhaps, the first time baby Thor was crying Ticky got angry and let after yelling so Clelia threw the bottle at the door and because it was glass it shattered. Of course it wouldn't be the throwing that brought her any joy but when she had to pick up all the little pieces that gave her some sick pleasure. Seeing how they fit together, but liking that she could now hold each individual part. The butter knife became her best breaking tool only after she tried to replicate the pattern of the broken glass—probably the same evening at dinner she pocketed a knife thinking first of cutting something up but realizing she needed a small scale shatter to get the same type of pieces. This would also help explain why Clelia carries the broken shards, after all that is the best part.

Why are demitasse saucers her favorites?

I think there could be a few reasons. There is a practicality to something small and also it would have a sort of relationship in her head to her small son. It is also possible that demitasse saucers, which are brought out usually at tea, would likely go unnoticed by Ticky if they suddenly started going missing.

In a typical day what sets her off?

Clelia would break things typically after she has time to reflect. She winds herself up to a point of frenzy repeating thoughts in her head about what Ticky said or what Thor did. However now that she is so accustomed to being relaxed in this way anything that scares her would warrant a moment alone (a scary movie, some child at school confessing sins of their parents). I do think, though that most commonly the breaking is a reaction to something about children (i.e. Rick's proposal), when Clelia knows she cannot help or protect a child the association is now so strongly linked that she can't avoid the desire to break something.

Has she ever had to ask for a dish before? Why Tansy?

She seems to know what she wants to say in order to get a dish to break, but is very uncomfortable, I doubt she has been in such a tight spot where there was no waiter or other service person to help her before, but it seems likely that she would have run out of dishes at some point.

I believe she asks Tansy because of Tansy was the only other fragile, female presence. She may also see Tansy as a kindred soul since by this point Tansy has taken their coats and helped Willum to show off the kitchen, both of which are presented as distractions to help calm Waldgrave, which is something Clelia would approve of greatly.

How has she kept the habit hidden from her family?

The fact that I'm sure the Waldgrave house is rather large probably doesn't hurt. She can slip away. Clelia likely replaces any dishes in their house so no one will notice. Since it is the men that set her off most often she may even excuse herself with classic female excuses (a migraine etc.) and no questions are asked. Since it is a habit rooted in fear and anxiety Clelia also may lie. As we see when Tansy asks if she is ok, although she is notably not, Clelia replies "Fine"

What is the next escalation after her dishes in her house?

I could see Clelia going to a department store (Woolworth's probably) to restock on dishes and having a store clerk pull out a paper bag making her break every single dish in the store.

accident, however because then Waldgrave almost blaming Clelia when Thor has "done it again" is more rational.

I think Clelia loves the idea of being a mother and isn't necessarily happy in the role herself, but wants so badly to be happy because that's what women do, they have children and care for them. Thor is described as difficult, stubborn, and whiney so perhaps their first child did not display those traits and was therefore much more that Clelia had in mind.

Is Clelia involved in Waldgrave's business? In what ways?

I believe so. Clelia is a person who would try to help in any situation even if she had no idea what it was. Mostly she is behind the public image of their family and probably even promoted the story about "rags-to-riches businessman". Obviously she doesn't consult with him on hotels since we see Waldgrave and Willum talking alone, but Clelia may be one of those wives who "translates" for her husband at opportune moments, and thus would have been entering to help Ticky. This of course would be something done in a way that makes her seem completely uninvolved and simultaneously bolsters Ticky's opinion of his own brilliance.

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Orchard

Why did Clelia think going to pick apples in Nov. was the best way to bond?

November is a bit after apples are technically in season, but I would bet that Clelia is naturally a bit late when it comes any sort of planned activity. Not because she wants to be, mind you, but just because coordinating all the people in her family is a constant battle. It seems likely that Clelia knew one family, perhaps it was her own that always goes to the orchard to pick apples in fall. She thus was inspired and has made it a tradition in her family even if, as Thor gets older he wants to be a part of the trip less and less.

Do we often "bond"? Is it ever successful? Is it always Clelia's idea?

Clelia is someone who would love the idea of constant bonding, but wouldn't be able to handle it often. Therefore, it is more likely that she has a few annual times that she is dead-set on spending time with her family. In her mind any time the bonding actually occurs would be a win, whether the other members of her family agree would be a completely different story. I doubt Waldgrave would come up with a notion about bonding on his own. However, random things he says (perhaps even sarcastically) might become the inspiration for Clelia's next bonding plot.

Why do the Waldgraves end up with only green apples?

One reason might be that there simply aren't many ripe apple because they are out of season, but I think more likely that it has to do with Thor, as I will explain below.

What makes Clelia use up her dishes? How does she break them while at the orchard?

What I have begun to imagine happened in the orchard begins with Thor pretending to be "Bimgimo the Great". At first simply stomping on apples that have already fallen from the trees and then taking the red apples and pelting them at other people from behind trees. This would be the first crack in Clelia's nerves. Then, when Ticky noticed the behavior and tried to stop it Thor ran away and finally began pelting apples at his father which made Ticky lash out verbally at Clelia before collecting their son, but while he was off running after Thor, Clelia ducked into a different row of trees and finding a relatively flat tree stump laid out her napkin and released a bit of tension. However catching Thor was only the beginning because then he squirmed in Waldgraves arms and started crying, which prompted Clelia to excuse herself while Ticky and Thor were busy buying their apples so that she could break her last dish

Why do Clelia and Thor enter so long after Waldgrave post-apples?

I believe Thor was still too upset to leave the car. Ticky tried to make a deal with him that if he stopped crying Thor would be able to play with A.J. Morovek. Thinking that settles it and Ticky left while Thor was still whimpering. However, Clelia wouldn't dare enter a guests house without having her son composed so she started

trying to rationalize everything with him and make sure he knew what he had done wrong earlier which only made him angry, but since he is stubborn like his father he was going to not cry anymore just so he would be able to see his friend, which is why that's one of the first things Thor brings up when he and Clelia walk through the door

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Daily Life

What is a typical day for Clelia?

On any non-weekday (those which would not be represented by Clelia's work life) We find Clelia at home. On Saturdays Thor is absorbed in cartoons. In my opinion Clelia would order meals to be delivered and spend time arranging and table dressing. She may also pass time shopping. During this experience it is likely she gives in to all sales people, especially those giving demonstrations. I could also see her attempting to, and at sometimes succeeding to organize a family concert so Gillian can play the harp and the piano. Thor may play "drums" or show something else off to Dad. Clelia also probably uses this time to create her lesson plans for the coming week.

Does she have hobbies? Friends?

I think Clelia would be someone who collects things as a hobby. She also likely makes mosaics (in order to use up all over her broken dish shards). Her friends might be other businessperson's wives or long distance friends from before she and Ticky married. He seems like someone who rubs people the wrong way and thus many of the friends may have been scared away. Because of this I think the friendships she does maintain are far away and keep in touch by mail because then she can control the impression that those people perceive.

What does her house look like? Does she have a favorite room?



Clelia's house is large, with many rooms perhaps in suburbia a bit extravagant so that it makes an impression even simply by looking at it.

Of all the rooms in the house I believe she must favor the parlor because it would likely not be invaded by Ticky and she may be able to store dishes/find privacy in such a space. Second to this I think he enjoys spending time in the children's rooms because they are really her pride and joy.

Is she the type to host dinner parties? Who is invited?

Clelia host dinner parties often to keep up appearances. The guests would first be selected from Waldgrave's cooperate circle, perhaps family (if any members live nearby), and the neighbors who may come around to having a better impression if they see just how lavish dinner at the Waldgraves could be. I would also bet that when Waldgrave signs someone onto a project he has them over to one of these affairs, hence how Waldgrave may have met Tansy prior to the play evening.

Does she personally cook and clean?

I really doubt Clelia ever cooks if she can help it. Throughout Shue's work she only seems to relish in enjoying other peoples cooking. She is personally quite tidy, in an overly conscious way, but it also seems unlikely she wouldn't simply hire a cleaning woman after been cared for her whole life, it would simply be tradition. The only exception to this may be if Ticky personally asks her to do something or notices a mess. Then she will jump through hoops rather than be scolded. We see this in the play since she never once moves to help tansy clean, but instantly tries to help her husband when he calls.











