



SHINING CITY

STUDY GUIDE

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DIRECTED BY
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BURNING COAL THEATRE

THE PLAY

Synopsis

Have you ever had something you needed to tell someone, but couldn't figure out how to do it? *Shining City* is, in essence, a ghost story about this exact problem and the complications, difficulties, and explosive pressures that come with it.

Taking place in the sparsely furnished flat (apartment) where Ian is setting up his fledgling practice as a therapist. Ian, a former priest, is meeting his newest (and first) patient, John. John, a widower, is seeking psychological help because he feels that he is being haunted by the ghost of his recently deceased wife. Believing that he has seen her standing behind the door, John is currently living in a hotel because he is too frightened to return to the house.

Later, Ian is visited by his fiancée, Neasa. Though he left the priesthood for her, their relationship has been rough. They live with Ian's brother and also have a baby together, but Ian has left her there alone. Neasa finds this unbearable, particularly feeling that she is being judged by Ian's sister-in-law, to the point that she cannot go back to the house alone.

Meanwhile, John makes progress as his sessions with Ian continue. He recounts the troubles that afflicted their marriage, leaving distance between Mari (his wife) and himself and also socially isolating them from other couples. Ian will then seek comfort with Laurence.

In his final visit, John brings a gift only to find Ian preparing to move. John is now dating and no longer feels haunted by the ghost of his wife. Ian expresses his opinion that John hadn't seen a ghost, but was instead punishing himself psychologically. John then departs, leaving Ian to come to terms with his new situation.

Production History

Shining City first premiered in 2004 at London's Royal Court Theatre to great acclaim. It would open on Broadway at the Biltmore Theatre in 2006 and be nominated for two Tony awards including Best Play. This production would run for 80 performances. It would also be performed at Bolton's Octagon Theatre as a part of their 40th anniversary season. Other notable productions include Chicago's Goodman and Boston's Huntington (directed by Robert Falls) in 2008, and Los Angeles' Fountain in 2009. At current, despite McPherson's work in both theatre and film, there appear to be no plans to adapt it for cinema.

THE AUTHOR

Conor McPherson was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1971 and his home city figures prominently in his dramatic works. Educated at University College Dublin, he began writing his first plays there as a part of the Drama Society (or UCD Dramsoc). He would later found the Fly By Night Theatre Company, which would produce a number of his works as well.

He is generally considered one of Ireland's best contemporary playwrights, with his plays attracting favourable reviews and enjoying commercial success outside of his native land and being performed in venues on Broadway and London's West End. His play, *The Weir*, would open at the Royal Court and then move to more commercial venues after winning the 1999 Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play. The Broadway production of his *Port Authority* had New York Times critic Ben Brantley claiming, "I found myself holding on to what these actors had to say as if I were a 5-year-old at bedtime being introduced to *The Arabian Nights*." While the Royal Court premier of *Shining City* had the Daily Telegraph hailing him as "the finest dramatist of his generation..."



McPherson boasts several awards and nominations, including multiple Tony nominations for best play and best director, and a host of awards from the United Kingdom and Ireland. He also directed the Beckett on Film edition of *Endgame* featuring Michael Gambon and David Thewlis.

THE COMPANY

Eric S. Kildow (Dramaturg)- For Burning Coal: Man of La Mancha, Brigadoon. Eric chairs the drama program at Coastal Carolina Community College in Jacksonville, NC and works as a freelance dramaturg and director. He has been featured in Southern Theatre Magazine for his work with Study Abroad programs and he has published in the Texas Theatre Journal and presented to the Theatre Symposium. He is a member of the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas, and the Lincoln Center Theatre Director's Lab.

John Allore (John)- Last appeared as Bardolph in Playmakers Repertory Company's The Making of a King: Henry IV and V. For Burning Coal: Henry V (On Trapeze), Enron, Shape of the Table, Blue. For The Alley Theatre: As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Danton's Death, Ohio Impromptu, A Christmas Carol, When We Dead Awaken. For Yale Repertory Theatre: Pygmalion. For Deep Dish Theater: Mi Vida Loca, A Moon for the Misbegotten, Lobby Hero, Arms and the Man, Catspaw. Selected credits: Romeo & Juliet, Taming Of The Shrew, Edmond, Balm in Gilead, Hot L Baltimore, Burn This, The Elephant Man, Danton's Death, Woyzeck, Frankenstein, Arsenic & Old Lace, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Front Page, The Seagull. John spent last summer working with puppet master, Basil Twist. In 2013 he will be featured in Deep Dish Theatre's production of Next To Normal.

Nic Carter (Laurence)- Nic is delighted to be working with Burning Coal once again. He was last seen at Burning Coal understudying for Tetuphany/Ensemble in Jude: the Obscure (Pt. 1 + 2), and is thankful to be given another opportunity to story-tell. Some of his previous stage credits include Der Struwelpeter: A Haunting, Disco Pigs, The Lion in Winter, Einstein's Dreams, An Oak Tree, The Last Days of Judas Iscariot, Bobby and the Chimps, Spring Awakening (play), Brighton Beach Memoirs, & Metamorphoses. Last year, Carter pioneered with his better half, Kim, from St Petersburg, FL up to Raleigh. A year later, he's still glad they made that decision.

Jerome Davis (Director)- Jerome is a member of the 2012/2013 Burning Coal Company. He founded the company in 1995 with his wife, Simmie Kastner. For Burning Coal: Rat in the Skull, Pentecost (twice), Winding the Ball (American premiere), Steward of Christendom, Night and Day, Company, Juno & the Paycock, The Weir, Road to Mecca, Accidental Death of an Anarchist, Taming of the Shrew, Hamlet, Inherit the Wind, The Seafarer, The Prisoner's Dilemma and The Shape of the Table (American premieres both), Enron and Jude the Obscure, Parts 1 & 2. As an actor, St. Nicholas (twice), Love's Labours Lost, The Mound Builders. In May, he directed Benjamin Britten's Turn of the Screw for NC Opera at Durham's Carolina Theatre. Elsewhere, he has directed Twelfth Night, Of Mice and Men, Keely & Du, The Elephant Man and The Time of Your Life. In January, he will direct John Logan's Red at Lexington Actors' Guild. He has acted or studied with Uta Hagen, Ellen Burstyn, Adrian Hall, Richard Jenkins, Oliver Platt, Hope Davis, Steve Harris, Ralph Waite, Julie Bovasso and Amanda Peet.

Maegan Mercer-Bourne (Stage Crew)- NRACT: Wind in the Willows, Cary Players: And Then There Were None, Bare Theatre: Much Ado About Nothing, NLT's A Midsummer Night's Dream, Center Stage: A Christmas Carol. Maegan works as a writing tutor and loves to spend her free time working on her masters degree and playing with her pets.

Hellena Schiavo (Assistant Stage Manager) For St. John's College Chrysostomos Players: Man of La Mancha, The Bald Soprano, Sweeney Todd, Cabaret, No Exit, King Lear, The Importance of Being Earnest, Little Shop of Horrors, All In The Timing. For THEATERWORK Santa Fe: Inventing Van Gogh. Hellena is a member of the class of 2012 at St. John's College Santa Fe, as well as the camp coordinator for Creative Arts and Music Performance in Santa Fe.

Loren M. Watson (Sound Design)- Loren hails all the way from Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he worked for years as a freelance sound designer after college. He attended the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee studying Architecture, Music, Scenic Carpentry, and Sound Design. New to Raleigh, this is his first of many shows with Burning Coal Theatre. Favorites of his past designs include Art of Murder, Freakshow, Dead Man's Cell Phone, Scrooge in Rouge, & Neighborhood 3.

Laura Tratnik (Neasa)- Laura is a professional actress from Berlin, Germany where she was a company member of the Berliner Ensemble and the Schaubühne. She moved to Asheville, NC in 2011. This will be her first production with Burning Coal.

Trey Morehouse (Assistant Director)- This is Trey's first Burning Coal Production. Trey is a recent graduate of the theatre department at University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Previous directing credits at UNCW include: Mr. Marmalade, Dogs Sees God, America Remembers: American Voices on 9/11, and I Am My Own Wife. Other production credits include stage managing Southern Girls, Our American Cousin, and acting as producer for the student production of As You Like It. This summer Trey was a Critics Fellow at the National Critics Institute at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center.

Josephine Hall (Vocal Coach)- Shining City is Jo's first collaboration with Burning Coal. She has worked as an actor, director and vocal coach throughout the United States, with companies such as Barter Theatre, Illinois Shakespeare Festival, American Shakespeare Center, Arvada Center, B Street Theatre and, most recently, North Carolina Theatre. Jo is certified as an Associate Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework®. She currently teaches Acting and Voice at Greensboro College.

Charles Murdock Lucas (Scenic Design)- Charles is thrilled to work with Burning Coal Theatre Company. Recent designs: Vita and Virginia (Luna Stage), Guys and Dolls, The Mikado, and Blossom Time(Ohio Light Opera), The Whipping Man (Curtain Call Theatre), Oleanna (Duke City Rep. Theatre), and Così fan tutte (A. J. Fletcher Opera Institute). Master of Fine Arts in Scenic Design from University of North Carolina School of the Arts. A. J. Fletcher Opera Scene Design Fellow. 2012 USITT Scene Design Award. Exhibited in 2011 Prague Quadrennial. Special thanks to Dina and family. He is based in the Greater New York City area. www.charlesmurdocklucas.com

Alyssa Breeden (Costume Design)- Alyssa is a recent graduate of Appalachian State University, with a degree in Apparel Design and Merchandising. Alyssa has just returned from Notre Dame University, where she worked as a first hand for their professional summer performance of Hamlet. With the experience gathered from both school and her recent work she hopes to someday excel at making costumes for highly imaginative performances that reshape the way people think of garments.

Matthew E. Adelson (Lighting Designer) Previously for Burning Coal: The Shape of the Table, The Seafarer, The Prisoner's Dilemma, Inherit The Wind, Pentecost, Einstein's Dreams (1998 and 2006 productions) Miss Julie, James Joyce's The Dead, The Man Who Tried To Save The World, Travesties, The Doll's House, and Romeo and Juliet. Other credits include: Berkshire Theatre Festival, Shakespeare Festival of St. Louis, Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, Florida Studio Theatre, Shakespeare and Company, Portland Stage, Merrimack Rep, Miniature Theatre of Chester, Yale Rep, American Music Theatre, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Berkshire Opera, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, The Joyce Theater, Hopkins Center, Lincoln Center and New York City Center, among many others. Matthew is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama; and is also the Lighting Designer for the Dance Department at Williams College (Williamstown, MA) and the Production Manager/Lighting Designer for the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center (Great Barrington, MA).

James Anderson (Ian)- James most recently appeared in Burning Coal's Brigadoon as Jeff. Also for BC: Enron, Man of La Mancha, Shape of the Table, Much Ado About Nothing, The Laramie Project:10 Years Later, Prisoner's Dilemma, and The Lovesong of J. Robert Oppenheimer. He plays Billy in the locally produced indie short, Spoked, which just premiered at Spark-con. New York theatre includes Richard III, After that Platform, An Exile on Jupiter, Region of Shadows, If Columbus Does Not Figure, and The L Play. Also in New York, he taught theatre at PS 51 in the Bronx and appeared with Gotham City Improv. A graduate of the UNC School of the Arts, he has performed extensively throughout the southeast, San Diego, and Moscow. Favorite credits include Curse of the Starving Class, King Lear, You Can't Take It With You, As Is, and The Crucible. James is a company member of Burning Coal. For my dad.

Jessica Woodworth(Assistant Director)- Jessica is a member of the 2012/2013 Burning Coal Company. Currently a Senior at Wake Forest - Rolesville High School she is new to the Burning Coal team. Shining City will be her first assistant directing job with the theatre. Elsewhere, she has Assiatant Directed and Directed numerous plays, including:Little Shop of Horrors, Comedy of Errors, Art of Rejection, *Alice, Charlotte's Web, Shakespeare and the Lamb, and Chaired.

Barry Jaked (Technical Director) Barry made his return to technical theatre in 2006 and is the technical director of the Halle Cultural Arts Center in Apex. This is his third show with Burning Coal. Previous credits include Jude the Obscure and Brigadoon

Timothy Domack (Props Design) Tim has worked professionally in theatre for the past thirteen plus years. Tim worked as a props artisan and assistant prop shop supervisor at The Juilliard School in New York for seven years before relocating to the Raleigh area with his wife and three kids. He currently teaches technical theatre at Wake Forest Rolesville High School as well as works professionally building scenery and props with William Peace University and NC State. Tim also works with a stagehand company at PNC Arena, Walnut Creek Amphitheatre, and Raleigh Amphitheatre in the load in and load out of various music concerts. He is pleased to be working with Burning Coal for the first time.

Molly Eness (Scenic Artist) has been painting for Burning Coal since the fall of 2010 and has painted all of the main stage shows that required painting since then. She also designed the set for Blue. She has an MFA in set design from the University of Oregon. Locally she has designed sets for Raleigh Charter High School and Owl Tree Theatre for the People. Before moving to North Carolina she designed in Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Prague, upstate New York and New York City. Favorite projects were The Blessed Apple Tree as part of the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab, A Thread in the Dark for Lost Tribe in NYC, and A Christmas Carol for Artists for Prague.

Steph Scribner (Asst. Stage Manager) is pleased to be working with Burning Coal for the first year of her post-grad life. She is from St. Croix, US Virgin Islands, but came up to the states for college. She recently graduated from Elon University where she received her two degrees in BFA Acting and BA Theatrical Design & Production. Some of her Elon Credits include: Getting Out (Arlene), Whale Music (Fran), Snapshot Memories (Director), Hedda Gabler (Stage Manager), Ajax (Ensemble), Bangarang (Alyssa), Area Actors Perform Monologues (Stage Manager). Other Credits include: Burning Coal's Brigadoon (Dialects Coach, Asst. Stage Manager), Burning Coal's Jude The Obscure (Asst. Stage Manager), Triad Stage's New Music (Asst. Stage Manager).

Kim DiPiano (Stage Manager) is excited to be working with Burning Coal once again. Previous works include with Burning Coal, Jude the Obscure Parts I and II (Stage Manager), with Raleigh Ensemble Players, Struwelpeter: A Haunting (Stage Manager), with Theater in the Park, Santaland Diaries. She is newish to the Raleigh area, most recently coming from Florida where she studied Theater Arts at the University of South Florida. She is very happy to have made the move with her best friend and other half Carter and is beyond pleased to be able to work with him once again.

STAGES OF GRIEF

In dealing with the death of loved ones or other major traumas, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross hypothesized in her book *On Death and Dying*, that there were five major stages of grief. This hypothesis, which grew out of her work with terminally ill patients, claims that there are distinct phases to dealing with major life changes, and the "Kubler-Ross Model" forms the backbone for medical curricula when dealing with death. This hypothesis, having gained widespread acceptance, is not meant to be either complete or chronological. Not everyone experiences all five stages, nor do they necessarily happen in the order in which they are commonly listed.

Denial- Denial is generally an initial and temporary defense mechanism for an individual. Essentially, the individual is faced with a fact which is too uncomfortable to accept and therefore they will insist that it is not true. Sometimes, denial can continue in the face of overwhelming evidence. Denial can take a number of forms, from simple denial of the reality of the situation to rejecting the seriousness, or even simple responsibility for a situation. The important thing is that the person engaging in the denial tries to minimize or neutralize the situation. Denial can be difficult to pinpoint for the sufferer, as they can also deny the denial.

Anger- Generally following denial, anger is a normal emotion that is a strong and uncomfortable emotional response to the provocation. In terms of grief, the sufferer can be angry at themselves, family, or even the person who is lost. There is a real loss of self-monitoring capacity and objectivity in anger, and as such the sufferer can be difficult to deal with or communicate with. They generally view the emotion as being caused by an outside force as opposed to coming from within.

Bargaining- This stage hinges on the idea that the sufferer can postpone, delay, or even reverse the loss that has been experienced. Though they accept the nature of the loss, they seek to ameliorate the circumstances and possibly come to some form of compromise. The negotiation may be with another person, or a higher power to buy more time or "keep the door open." Such compromises, when possible, rarely provide sustainable solutions in any way.

Depression- During this stage, the sufferer accepts the inevitability of their loss. They may become silent, refuse visitors, and spend much of the time crying or otherwise grieving. This state of low mood and aversion to activity indicates that the sufferer is accepting the situation and is beginning to process it. It is an opportunity for them to disconnect from things of affection. Feelings of sadness, regret, and anxiety are natural during this stage.



Acceptance- Here, the sufferer comes to terms with their loss. Though it can vary from person to person, it is essentially an assent to the reality of their situation. They do not attempt to change, protest, or exit from the situation. As opposed to a simple outward form, there is implied a certain cognitive or emotional state as well.

Activities

- 1.) Make an outline of the play's scenes. Do the actions of any of the characters resemble any of the stages of grief?
- 2.) Choose one of the scenes that include one of John's therapy sessions. Recast that scene as if John were bound by the traits of one single stage of grief. Try using another. What differences do you notice in the scene each time?

IRISH GHOST CULTURE

Every culture has its ghosts. From the hauntings of Amityville, NY to the Shirime of Kyoto, Japan, the spirits of the departed have formed a part of the culture of just about every people. However, folklorists and storytellers alike have noted that while the folklore of Continental Europe focuses on figures like princesses, trolls, and talking animals, Irish folklore features the ghost, and other allied spirits, in a far more prominent role. Spirits, ranging from malign tricksters and helpful ancestral spirits to vicious dogs and slain heroes form the stock in trade of Irish folklore.



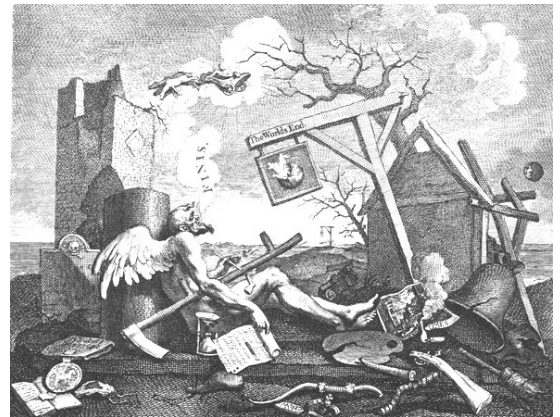
Banshee- Perhaps the most famous Irish spirit is the Banshee. Authorities do not necessarily agree if she is a fairy spirit or the ghost of a deceased woman, but she is purported to wail at the walls of a house where someone is about to die. In some stories, she appears once a person has died in order to warn people about the tragedy. Interestingly, the only banshee story from the United States in the Edgecomb County (North Carolina) banshee, which sprung up in an area heavily populated by Irish immigrants.

Activities

- 1.) Find a ghost story from your hometown. Compare it with Shining City. How do they work similarly? Is the story from your town more scary? Why or why not?
- 2.) Pretend that you are the therapist who is talking to John. What notes do you make as he tells his story?

THE BATHETIC

Ian has left the priesthood in order to become a therapist. John forsakes his wife in a failed fling with another woman. Throughout Shining City one finds a strong impulse of the bathetic, or a bringing down of the sacred to the commonplace. Where once Ian heard confession and provided spiritual absolution, he now simply provides a sounding board for the troubled. As each character has lost the element of the sacred in their life, they must then struggle to fill that gap using other means.



Activities

- 1.) Choose two characters from the play. How do they both struggle to fill the void left by the departure of the spiritual elements in their lives?
- 2.) Pretend you are either John or Ian's brother. Write them a letter giving advice about how to get out of their current struggles.
- 3.) Bathetic impulses are often used in comedy to create humor and tension. What effect do they have here?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 1.) John and Ian are actually the same name (Ian being the Gaelic derivative of John). Chart out the similarities and differences between the two characters. How do their journeys resemble one another? Where and how do they differ?
- 2.) Notice the use of profanity throughout the play, particularly f***. Examine how different characters use this word at different times. What purpose does it serve? Does the same character use it differently at different times?
- 3.) Enact a scene at Ian and Neasa's house in Limerick. How do you think things are going six months after the move? How about a year?
- 4.) Sketch a picture of Mari as John saw her. What was so terrifying about it?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pre Show

- 1.) Upon hearing the *Shining City* was a ghost story, what were your expectations? Did the play fulfill them, or not? What did you expect of a ghost story?
- 2.) Have there been times you felt it was impossible to tell someone what you were thinking? How did you handle the situation?
- 3.) Have you ever seen something you thought no one would believe if you told them? What was it?

Post-Show

- 1.) Having watched the play, what do you make of the ending? Does this bode ill or well for Ian?
- 2.) Would revealing the end of the play decrease the impact of the piece? Or would it make no difference at all? Why or why not?
- 3.) How did *Shining City* match (or not) your expectations? Were you pleasantly or unpleasantly surprised?

NC STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

The state of North Carolina values the skills and competencies of Arts education due to their applicability to other disciplines. This production of *Shining City* is designed to give your students exposure to the competencies and specific standards listed below.

This production and related study materials will provide students with specific knowledge and skills to address the following Standard Course of Study Competencies and Objectives in the Theatre Arts.

- **COMPETENCY GOAL 1:** The learner will write based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 1.02: Recognize the beginning, middle, and end of a story
 - 1.03: Infer lessons from multicultural stories, fairytales, tall tales, legends, and myths.
 - 1.06: Refine reading comprehension by using verbal and non-verbal communication.
 - Grades 6-8
 - 1.01: Recognize and explain unique characteristics of the dramatic script such as dramatic structure and dialogue.
 - 1.04: Produce written, verbal, and visual responses to written and/or performed dramatic material.
 - 1.05: Identify themes and plots from multicultural literature.
 - Grades 9-12
 - 1.03: Compare and contrast play structure in relation to other forms of literature.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 7:** The learner will analyze, critique, and construct meaning from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 7.01: Build skills to critique self and others in a respectful and constructive manner.
 - 7.03: Convey personal reactions to various texts.
 - 7.05: Communicate emotions and thoughts evoked by performance.
 - 7.07: Suggest alternative characters, settings, or events after viewing or participating in a performance.
 - Grades 6-8
 - 7.01: Recognize and practice audience etiquette.
 - 7.03: Develop verbal, visual and written responses to works of informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions from various cultures.
 - 7.04: Express meaning perceived from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.
 - Grades 9-12
 - 7.02: Develop and relate a world view of theatre in society.
- **COMPETENCY GOAL 8:** The learner will understand context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and present.
 - Grades 3-5
 - 8.04: Experience live or recorded performance
 - 8.05: Discuss the similarities and differences between live and recorded theatrical events.

Shining City is also designed to address the following Core Curriculum Anchor Standards in Language Arts Literacy and Social Studies.

- Reading Anchor 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Reading Anchor 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Writing Anchor 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Writing Anchor 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Lady Francesca Speranza Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, 1887