

MARIST CLS - THE
POWER OF
READERS THEATRE,
VOL #2
SPRING 2024
CLASS #3

CONSTELLATIONS BY NICK PAYNE

ROLAND AND MARIANNE, A BEEKEEPER AND A THEORETICAL PHYSICIST, MEET AT A BARBECUE AND STRIKE UP A CASUAL CONVERSATION.

FROM THERE, WHAT CAN HAPPEN TO THIS ATTRACTIVE PAIR IN NICK PAYNE'S LAUDED "CONSTELLATIONS"?

IN A "MULTIVERSE" WHERE CHANCE AND WILL AND RELATIVITY ALLOW FOR INFINITE PERMUTATIONS OF BEHAVIOR, WILL THEY HAVE A PASSING ACQUAINTANCE? A GRAND ROMANCE? OR SOMETHING BETWEEN AND BEYOND?

A woman with glasses is shown in profile on the left, looking upwards. The background is a stage production of the play 'Constellations', featuring a large, illuminated, geometric structure resembling a constellation or a network of lines, with two people standing on a stage below it.

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CONSTELLATIONS PREMIERED AT THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE IN LONDON, TRANSFERRED TO THE WEST END IN 2012, AND RECEIVED THE LONDON EVENING STANDARD THEATRE AWARD FOR BEST PLAY AND THE OLIVIER AWARD FOR BEST NEW PLAY.

IN 2015 *CONSTELLATIONS* TRANSFERRED TO BROADWAY, AND HAS BEEN SEEN IN REGIONAL THEATRES ACROSS THE US, CANADA AND AUSTRALIA. PAYNE WON THE HAROLD PINTER PLAYWRIGHT'S AWARD AND AN OLIVER AWARD NOMINATION FOR *CONSTELLATIONS*.

PAYNE STUDIED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK AND WAS A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COURT YOUNG WRITERS PROGRAMME.

NICK WRITES REGULARLY FOR FILM AND TV. HE HAS ADAPTED JULIAN BARNES' PRIZE-WINNING NOVEL *THE SENSE OF AN ENDING* FOR BBC FILMS, AN ADAPTATION OF DAVID NICHOLLS' *US* AS A THREE-PART TV DRAMA FOR THE BBC, AND *WANDERLUST*, HIS ORIGINAL SIX-PART TELEVISION SERIES FOR THE BBC.

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Nick Payne was initially excited about the idea of colony collapse, so he studied the bee world and was deep into it before realizing that writing a play about bees was going to be hard.

Then he saw a documentary, *The Elegant Universe*, which talks about possible solutions to the problematic relationship between Einstein's **Theory of Relativity** and **Quantum Mechanics**: this became the jumping off point for his play.



INSPIRATION FOR THE FORM OF THE PLAY

“IT WAS PROBABLY ABOUT BEES AND BEEKEEPING. I WATCHED A DOCUMENTARY CALLED *VANISHING OF THE BEES*, AND IT WAS ABOUT HOW BEES ARE DYING OUT IN THE US AND HOW THEY ARE FARMING BEES TOO INTENSIVELY, AND THAT WAS THE STARTING POINT.

I SORT OF WORRIED ABOUT HOW YOU COULD DO BEES ON STAGE. SO I DECIDED NOT TO GO DOWN THE BEE PLAY ROUTE, SO BY CHANCE I WATCHED A DOCUMENTARY CALLED *THE ELEGANT UNIVERSE*.

IT WAS A HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY THEORETICAL PHYSICS AND RIGHT AT THE END HE TOUCHED ON THIS IDEA OF THE MULTIVERSE.

NICK PAYNE



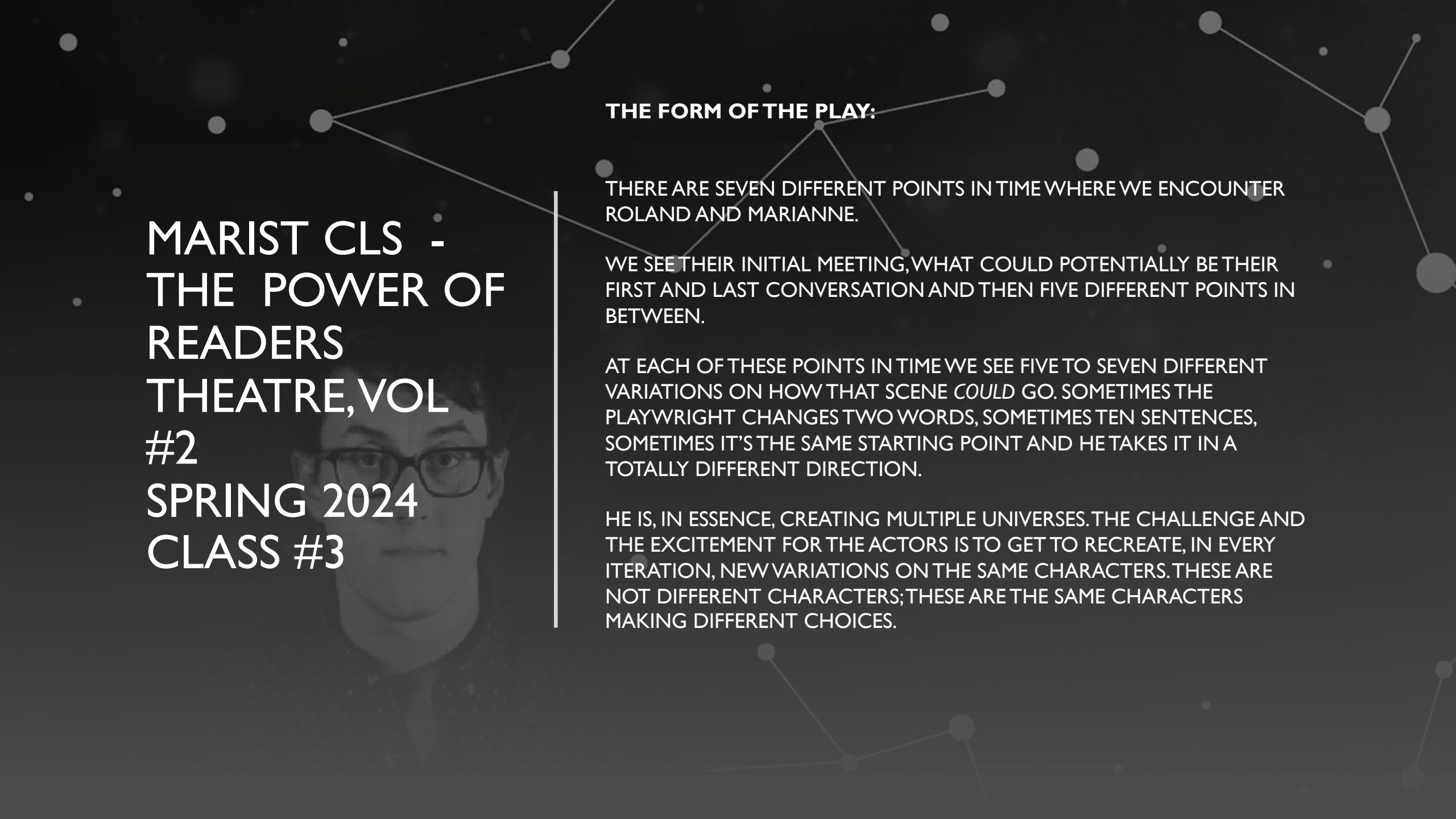
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Einstein's **Theory of Relativity** is about gravitational pull. **Quantum Mechanics** is about the way the interior of an atom behaves.

Constellations is a relationship play sitting underneath the umbrella of these two universal scientific ideas. In the end, it is a simple play about how hard it can be for two people to come together in the world.



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THE FORM OF THE PLAY:

THERE ARE SEVEN DIFFERENT POINTS IN TIME WHERE WE ENCOUNTER ROLAND AND MARIANNE.

WE SEE THEIR INITIAL MEETING, WHAT COULD POTENTIALLY BE THEIR FIRST AND LAST CONVERSATION AND THEN FIVE DIFFERENT POINTS IN BETWEEN.

AT EACH OF THESE POINTS IN TIME WE SEE FIVE TO SEVEN DIFFERENT VARIATIONS ON HOW THAT SCENE *COULD* GO. SOMETIMES THE PLAYWRIGHT CHANGES TWO WORDS, SOMETIMES TEN SENTENCES, SOMETIMES IT'S THE SAME STARTING POINT AND HE TAKES IT IN A TOTALLY DIFFERENT DIRECTION.

HE IS, IN ESSENCE, CREATING MULTIPLE UNIVERSES. THE CHALLENGE AND THE EXCITEMENT FOR THE ACTORS IS TO GET TO RECREATE, IN EVERY ITERATION, NEW VARIATIONS ON THE SAME CHARACTERS. THESE ARE NOT DIFFERENT CHARACTERS; THESE ARE THE SAME CHARACTERS MAKING DIFFERENT CHOICES.

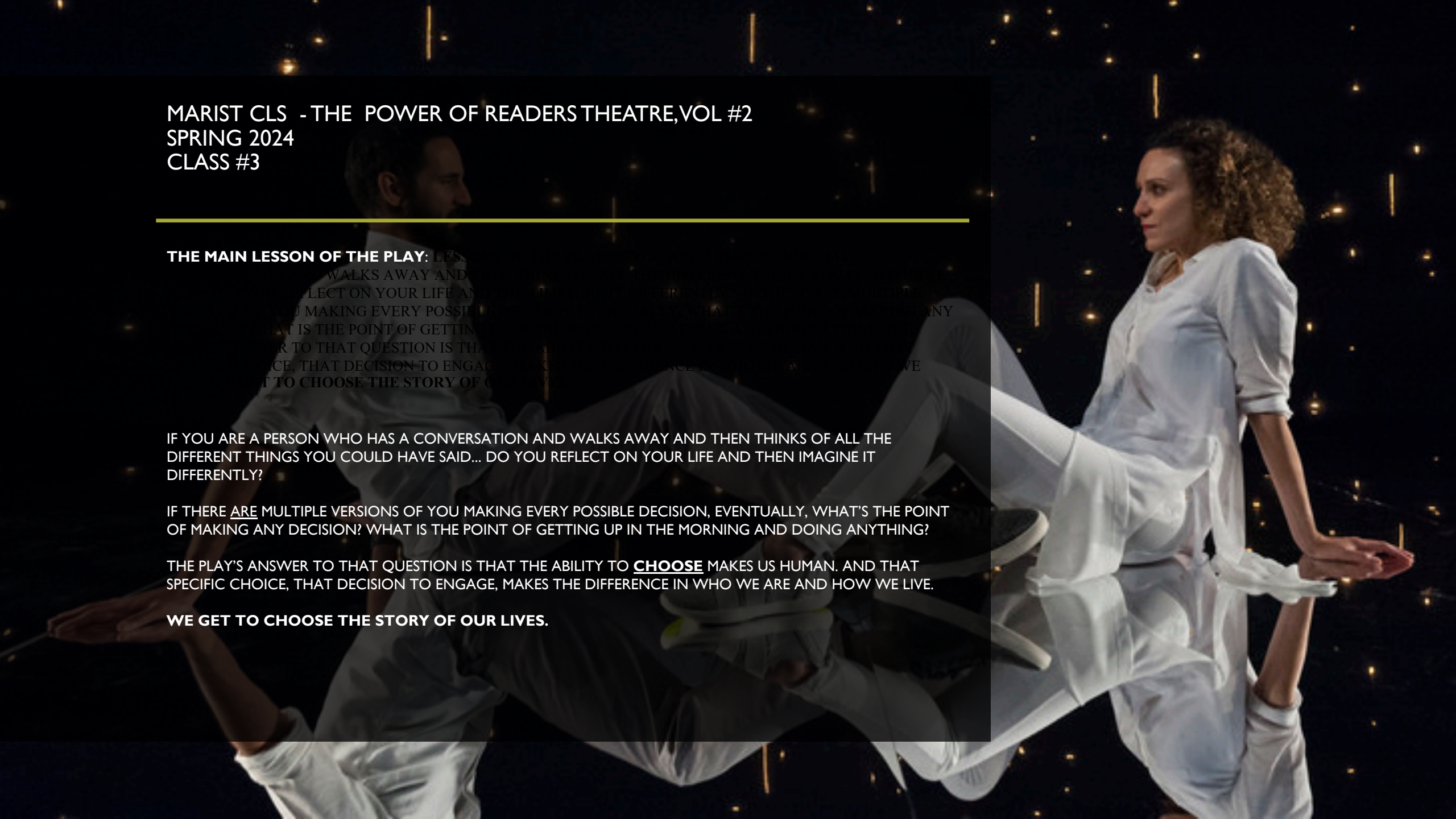
HERE'S THE PLAY'S MAIN DILEMMA –

EITHER YOUR ACTIONS MATTER TOO MUCH OR NOT AT ALL.

WHERE IS THE MIDDLE GROUND? MAYBE IT COMES DOWN TO ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH RESPONSIBILITY.

EITHER WE RECOGNIZE THAT OUR LIVES ARE ULTIMATELY A RESULT OF THE CHOICES THAT WE'VE MADE OR WE WAIT FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN TO US TO MAINTAIN PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY. ON ANY GIVEN DAY, WE ARE ALL CAPABLE OF EITHER OF THOSE BEHAVIORS.

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THE MAIN LESSON OF THE PLAY: LESSON 1: IF YOU WALK AWAY AND THEN THINK OF ALL THE DIFFERENT THINGS YOU COULD HAVE SAID... DO YOU REFLECT ON YOUR LIFE AND THEN IMAGINE IT DIFFERENTLY? LESSON 2: IF THERE ARE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF YOU MAKING EVERY POSSIBLE DECISION, EVENTUALLY, WHAT'S THE POINT OF MAKING ANY DECISION? WHAT IS THE POINT OF GETTING UP IN THE MORNING AND DOING ANYTHING? LESSON 3: THE PLAY'S ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION IS THAT THE ABILITY TO **CHOOSE** MAKES US HUMAN. AND THAT SPECIFIC CHOICE, THAT DECISION TO ENGAGE, MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE LIVE. LESSON 4: WE GET TO **CHOOSE THE STORY OF OUR LIVES.**

IF YOU ARE A PERSON WHO HAS A CONVERSATION AND WALKS AWAY AND THEN THINKS OF ALL THE DIFFERENT THINGS YOU COULD HAVE SAID... DO YOU REFLECT ON YOUR LIFE AND THEN IMAGINE IT DIFFERENTLY?

IF THERE ARE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF YOU MAKING EVERY POSSIBLE DECISION, EVENTUALLY, WHAT'S THE POINT OF MAKING ANY DECISION? WHAT IS THE POINT OF GETTING UP IN THE MORNING AND DOING ANYTHING?

THE PLAY'S ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION IS THAT THE ABILITY TO **CHOOSE** MAKES US HUMAN. AND THAT SPECIFIC CHOICE, THAT DECISION TO ENGAGE, MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE LIVE.

WE GET TO CHOOSE THE STORY OF OUR LIVES.

COPENHAGEN



A FASCINATING MYSTERY: WHY DID GERMAN PHYSICIST WERNER HEISENBERG VISIT HIS OLD MENTOR AND DANISH COUNTERPART NIELS BOHR IN 1941 WHILE THEIR COUNTRIES WERE AT WAR?

WAS HE LOOKING FOR CLUES TO ATOMIC SECRETS, ASKING FOR ABSOLUTION, OR SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING UNKNOWNABLE?

AS THE CHARACTERS WRESTLE WITH THEIR MEMORIES AND MOTIVES, WHAT BECOMES CLEAR IS THE ULTIMATE UNCERTAINTY OF WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO.

PERHAPS THE GREATEST PLAY WRITTEN ABOUT SCIENCE, MICHAEL FRAYN'S RIVETING DRAMA PUTS US IN THE HEART OF THE GREATEST MORAL DILEMMA OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

Next Week: Copenhagen by Michael Frayn

AND NOW...

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