



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

*GROUND*ED BY GEORGE BRANT

AN UNEXPECTED PREGNANCY ENDS AN ACE FIGHTER PILOT'S CAREER IN THE SKY.

REASSIGNED TO OPERATE MILITARY DRONES FROM A WINDOWLESS TRAILER OUTSIDE LAS VEGAS, SHE HUNTS TERRORISTS BY DAY AND RETURNS TO HER FAMILY EACH NIGHT. AS THE PRESSURE TO TRACK A HIGH-PROFILE TARGET MOUNTS, THE BOUNDARIES BEGIN TO BLUR BETWEEN THE DESERT IN WHICH SHE LIVES AND THE ONE SHE PATROLS HALF A WORLD AWAY.

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GEORGE BRANT'S PLAYS INCLUDE *GROUNDED*, *INTO THE BREECHES!*, AND *ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD*.

BRANT'S WORK HAS BEEN PRODUCED INTERNATIONALLY BY THE PUBLIC THEATER, THE ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY, CLEVELAND PLAY HOUSE, AND THE DISNEY CHANNEL, AMONG OTHERS.

HIS PLAYS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED BY THE METROPOLITAN OPERA, AND MCCARTER THEATRE CENTER, AMONG OTHERS.

HIS SCRIPTS HAVE BEEN AWARDED A LUCILLE LORTEL AWARD, THE KEENE PRIZE FOR LITERATURE, AND THE NATIONAL PLAYWRITING AWARD FROM THE KENNEDY CENTER. HE HAS RECEIVED WRITING FELLOWSHIPS FROM THE JAMES A. MICHENER CENTER FOR WRITERS, AS WELL AS COMMISSIONS FROM THE METROPOLITAN OPERA, AND CLEVELAND PLAY HOUSE.

GEORGE RECEIVED HIS MFA IN WRITING FROM THE MICHENER CENTER FOR WRITERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN AND IS A MEMBER OF THE DRAMATISTS GUILD.



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GEORGE BRANT'S PLAY *GROUND* WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PLAYS TO EXPLORE A NEW FORM OF WAR. WE HAVE COME TO ACCEPT THE IDEA OF DRONE WARFARE – DEATH DELIVERED BY REMOTE CONTROL. BUT WHEN *GROUND* PREMIERED IN 2013, THAT WASN'T THE CASE. GEORGE BRANT'S PLAY WAS ONE OF THE EARLIEST THEATRICAL EXPLORATIONS OF THIS UNNERVING NEW FORM OF WAR.

A MONOLOGUE, *GROUND* TELLS THE STORY OF AN UNNAMED FIGHTER PILOT IN THE US AIR FORCE WHO BECOMES PREGNANT UNEXPECTEDLY, FORCING HER TO STOP FLYING. ON RETURNING FROM MATERNITY LEAVE, SHE'S CO-OPTED INTO "THE CHAIR FORCE" AS A RELUCTANT DRONE OPERATOR. "I STARE AT GREY," SHE SAYS GLUMLY; 12 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. AFTER EACH SHIFT, SHE DRIVES HOME TO FAMILY LIFE, A PROCESS THAT BECOMES INCREASINGLY DISLOCATING. THE PLAY DELIVERS A FEROCIOUS CLIMAX, AS THE PILOT'S STATE OF MIND UNRAVELS.

BRANT SPENT SIX MONTHS RESEARCHING. THERE WERE YOUTUBE COMPILATIONS OF DRONE EXPLOSIONS SET TO HEAVY METAL, GLORIFIED LIKE GAMING FOOTAGE, AND A GOVERNMENT-ISSUED PICTURE BOOK AIMED AT SCHOOL KIDS. THAT DRONE OPERATORS WORKED ON AMERICAN SOIL CAME AS A SURPRISE TO BRANT, AS DID THE FACT THEY COULD GET PTSD. "NO ONE EVER DREAMED OF THAT WHEN THEY WERE INITIALLY USED. THE IDEA WAS TO KEEP THE PILOT SAFELY OUT OF THE WAY."

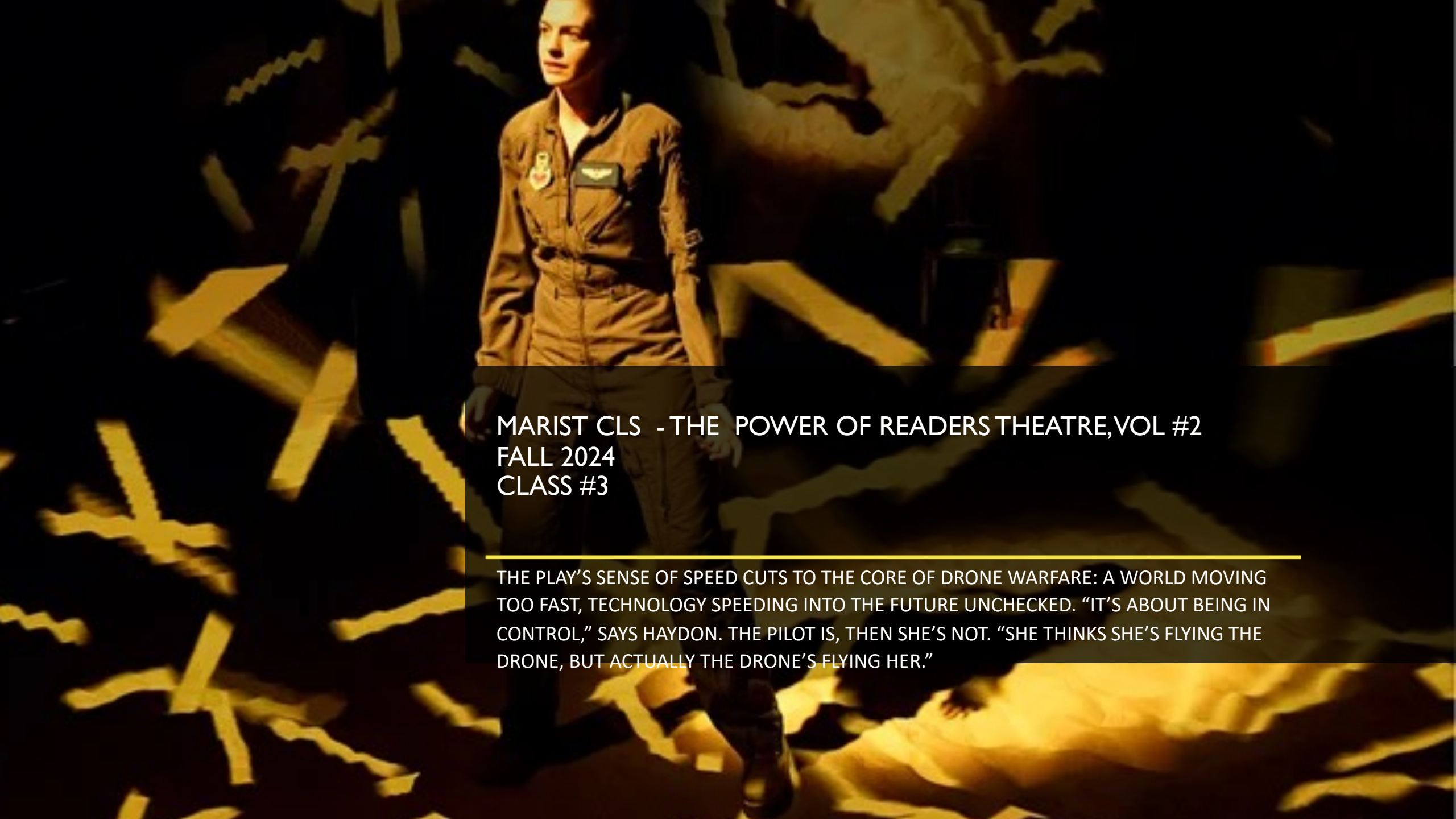


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BRANT CAME ACROSS A PHOTOGRAPH SHOWING A FIGHTER PILOT IN HER MID-TO-LATE THIRTIES. SHE'S IN HER FLIGHT SUIT, CARRYING A HELMET. SHE STARES DOWN THE LENS WITHOUT SMILING, BUT THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE IS HER BELLY. HER SUIT'S OPEN AND SHE'S PREGNANT. HER BUMP IS THE SAME SHAPE AS HER HELMET. "IT'S JUST THIS AMAZING PHOTO: MATERNITY, SEXUALITY AND THE WARRIOR."

BRANT HAD NEEDED AN "IN", A FIGURE TO EMBODY THE DILEMMAS DRONES POSED. AS HE SAYS, "IT'S VERY HARD TO WRITE A MACHINE AS A PROTAGONIST". THE IMAGE HELPED THE PLAY FALL INTO PLACE.

SPEED IS OF THE ESSENCE IN BRANT'S SCRIPT. WITH A MONOLOGUE, THERE IS THE ABILITY TO "CHANGE SCENES IN A SENTENCE." IT CAME TO DEFINE THE CHARACTER. "THINGS HAPPEN VERY FAST FOR HER, AS THEY WOULD FOR A FIGHTER PILOT GOING HOWEVER MANY MILES AN HOUR." THE PILOT SPEAKS IN HALF-SENTENCES, HALF-THOUGHTS, ALWAYS MOVING ON. "SHE MISSES THINGS," SAYS BRANT. JUST AS SHE DROPS A BOMB AND SPEEDS OFF BEFORE IT HITS, SHE GETS HOME AND HER DAUGHTERS IS IN A "BIG GIRL'S BED". IT'S AS IF TIME WARPS.

A woman in a brown flight suit stands in a dark, abstract environment filled with yellow light trails and geometric shapes. She is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background is a complex, layered composition of light and shadow, suggesting a high-tech or futuristic setting.

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THE PLAY'S SENSE OF SPEED CUTS TO THE CORE OF DRONE WARFARE: A WORLD MOVING TOO FAST, TECHNOLOGY SPEEDING INTO THE FUTURE UNCHECKED. "IT'S ABOUT BEING IN CONTROL," SAYS HAYDON. THE PILOT IS, THEN SHE'S NOT. "SHE THINKS SHE'S FLYING THE DRONE, BUT ACTUALLY THE DRONE'S FLYING HER."



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GROUNDING WAS A HUGE HIT IN EDINBURGH IN 2013. SINCE ITS PREMIERE, IT HAS HAD ALMOST 100 PRODUCTIONS WORLDWIDE. AT THE PUBLIC THEATER IN NEW YORK, ANNE HATHAWAY PLAYED THE PILOT, BACKED BY VAST VIDEO SCREENS. BRANT'S WORKING ON A SCREENPLAY FOR HER AND HAS ALSO TURNED IT INTO AN OPERA, WITH COMPOSER JEANINE TESORI WRITING THE SCORE. IT OPENS AT THE MET NEXT WEEK ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2024.

Stephen Massicotte



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NEXT WEEK - *MARY'S WEDDING* BY STEPHEN MASSICOTTE

A STORY ABOUT FIRST LOVE. TWO WANDERERS MEET IN A DESERTED BARN. SPEED OFF ON A GALLOPING HORSE, THROUGH THE RAINY NIGHT, TOWARD THEIR HAPPILY EVER AFTER. BUT WORLD WAR I BECKONS; THERE'S A SIEGE IN NEED OF SOLDIERS, IN NEED OF HORSES, IN NEED OF PEOPLE CAPABLE OF THROWING CAUTION TO THE WIND. LEAVING IN THEIR WAKE ONLY DREAMS OF FUTURE PLANS AND DISTANT, STORMY NIGHTS.





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