Between Riverside and Crazy Study Guide

Between Riverside and Crazy by Stephen Adly Guirgis

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The play begins with a conversation between Pops and his son-by-choice, Oswaldo, who seems to be determined to move into a new phase of life: not drinking, not using drugs, and reconciling with his estranged father. He and another inhabitant of Pops' Riverside Drive apartment, the flirtatious and sexy Lulu, both call Pops "Dad", even though they're not related to him: he gives them free accommodation and food, though, which for both Oswaldo and Lulu, is more good fathering than they seem to have gotten from their own fathers. Pops' genetic son, Junior, seems less happy with Pops: as soon as Junior comes in, he and Pops rehash what seem to be old arguments about how Pops felt about his wife Delores (Junior's mother); about a long-standing, long-stalled lawsuit against the City of New York that Pops, a former New York City cop, has been holding onto for years; and about whether Pops should give up his cherished apartment. A short while later, Pops and Lulu (who is Junior's girlfriend) are up on the apartment building's roof, and Lulu reveals that she is expecting Junior's baby. The excited Pops looks forward to being a grandfather.

Some time later, Pops is visited by his former partner on the police force, Detective Audrey O'Connor, and her fiancé, Lieutenant Dave Caro. After a semi-drunken dinner, and after some reminiscing about Pops' days on the force (reminiscing that eventually / ultimately sends Junior from the room), O'Connor and Caro tell the story of how Caro was able to purchase an engagement ring; discuss the possibility of Pops walking O'Connor down the aisle at the wedding; and, eventually, get around to attempting to get Pops to compromise on the lawsuit. Pops angrily refuses. Meanwhile, Junior and Lulu get into an argument about whether Lulu should have the baby and whether Junior really loves Lulu at all. As tension builds, Junior makes plans to leave on a mini-holiday without Lulu, but as Lulu is preparing to walk out on him, he changes his mind and they go off together. Later that night, Oswaldo returns from a meeting with his father, drunk and hurt by his father's latest rejection. Pops, himself drunk, refuses to give Oswaldo any money. Oswaldo insists on taking Pops' credit card. This is the end of Act One.

At the beginning of Act Two, a recently-bandaged Pops has a visit from a Church lady, who says she's a friend and colleague of Pops' first Church Lady, the compassionate and thoughtful Glenda. The Church Lady attempts to get Pops to take Communion with her, but he refuses. Eventually, she takes off her clothes and straddles him, their intercourse increasing his heart rate and his respiration to the point where he feels like he's having a heart attack. He takes the Communion Host out of her moth with HIS mouth and then collapses, apparently in the middle of having an orgasm.

A short while later, Pops is receiving medical treatment at home when he's visited by O'Connor and Caro, who bring news that the City is ready to settle the lawsuit if Pops will. Saying he deserves more money than the settlement is offering, Pops refuses. Caro and O'Connor insist. Pops then demands to be given the engagement ring that O'Connor got from Caro. Initially, both O'Connor and Caro refuse, and attempt to force Pops to back down. He refuses. As the next scene (between Pops and Junior) begins, narration reveals that Pops has settled the lawsuit, on HIS terms. Narration also reveals

that Lulu is not, in fact, pregnant; that Oswaldo has again lapsed into drug and alcohol abuse; and that Pops and Junior have made up their differences … sort of. Finally, as Junior, Oswaldo, and Lulu appear to be settling into life on their own, narration also reveals that Pops has left home; that he has given the ring to the Church Lady (who has confessed that she is actually a con artist, who heard about Pops from Glenda and resolved to rob him. Pops gives her the ring anyway, hinting that there is someone, somewhere who could make good use of the money from its sale, and then leaves.

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 1

Summary

At the beginning of the script, stage descriptions outline the somewhat decrepit, definitely faded glories of Pops' rent-controlled apartment on Riverside Drive in New York City. As the play begins, stage directions indicate that "Pops … sits in his deceased wife's old wheelchair" and that as he eats some pie, "the fork is polished silver and his plate and teacup are fine china". He is also drinking both whisky and tea.

As Pops tries to concentrate on his pie, he is interrupted by Oswaldo, who calls Pops "Dad" even though they're not really related and even though his "caseworker" says that Pops probably finds it annoying. Oswaldo also talks about having changed his diet to something healthier on the advice of his "caseworker over at the place", and says that in the past, he had eaten badly as substitute comfort for a difficult childhood. He refers to having "emotionalisms", and suggests that because Pops is eating pie, he (Pops) is also having "emotionalisms". Pops argues forcefully that he has no such thing.

Lulu appears, wearing very little. She takes some food out of the fridge and as she bends over, Pops tells her to go put on some more clothes. Lulu says she's too hot blooded to wear very much, but when Pops asks her to take the dog for a walk, she says she'll put on more clothes for that. After she goes back into the bedroom, conversation reveals that Oswaldo is staying in the flat until he finds a place of his own and that he's prepared to eventually pay rent, but Pops refers to him as a guest and says guests don't pay rent. Conversation also reveals that Pops' wife has died; that Junior (Pops' son) bought Pops the dog to keep him company; and that Pops doesn't care a lot for it.

Analysis

This initial few pages of the play introduces its central character and protagonist (Pops) and some of its most significant symbols. First, there is the chair, the china, and the eating utensils, all of which suggest that, among other things, Pops is having difficulty letting go of his wife's memory in particular and, as later developments in both the scene and the play suggest, of the past in general. Another important symbol, one with a parallel metaphoric meaning, is the apartment itself which, in spite of being somewhat run-down and badly kept, is an important part of Pops' past that he is determined to fight for. The third and final symbol introduced in this scene is the dog, which is never actually seen in the play but which is referred to several times and which, by the time the play concludes, can be seen to be an important aspect of the play's thematic interest in grace and compassion. That theme is also evoked, in this first few moments of the play, by Pops' revealing that he doesn't charge the people staying in his house rent.

Other important elements in this scene include Oswaldo's references to how he is trying to move on with his life (foreshadowing both later revelations that he has failed to do so successfully and the urgings of other characters in the play that Pops should also be trying to move beyond his past) and the reference to Junior, which foreshadows his impending entry into the scene in the following section.

Discussion Question 1

How does the play's thematic interest in parent/child relationships manifest in this scene?

Discussion Question 2

What aspects of the scene, as described in stage directions, can be seen as reinforcing Oswaldo's suggestion that Pops is having "emotionalisms"?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Oswaldo means when he talks about those "emotionalisms"?

Vocabulary

organic, caseworker, inevitable, hindquarters, perpetrate, felony, compadre, appraise, merchandise, senile, horoscope, harass, hypertension, reckless, sociable, prompt

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 2

Summary

Junior appears, carrying a large box and a letter from the landlord, posted on the door. Initial conversation reveals that Junior is concerned about Pops drinking so early in the morning, and that Oswaldo is a recovering drinker who is trying to stay clean. Junior and Pops almost immediately get into a wide ranging argument: about whether Lulu is actually studying accounting the way Junior says she is; about whether Pops should keep his wife's wheelchair (he says it's "comfortable seating") and keep using her good china and silver (Junior thinks he shouldn't); and about whether Pops has any right telling Junior's ex-wife anything about Junior's life. Most significantly, they argue about whether Pops should keep up his business relationship with the lawyers Lubenthal and Lubenthal who are handling a lawsuit against the city that Pops has launched and that Junior feels Pops should have settled a long time ago. The argument contains references to Junior's time in prison; to Pops being able to afford a private nurse for his wife (Junior's mother) if he HAD settled; and to Pops having a private nurse when he got shot. Conversation also refers to a break that Pops paid for Junior to take that Junior is now canceling; and to Pops' difficult relationship with his landlord who seems to want to pay him to move out of his rent-controlled apartment. As the argument climaxes, Junior shouts at Pops that "Moms told [him] everything. About everything. So if you really wanna go all into it, I'll go in!" Pops falls silent. Junior apologizes. Pops tells him to "hurry up and become a fuckin' man already" so he can "drop dead in peace". Junior goes out, saying he'll drop off a rent check and telling both Pops and Oswaldo to not "mess" with his box.

After Junior goes, Pops looks closely at Junior's box and asks Oswaldo first to pass him a butter knife (Oswaldo doesn't) and then to do some shopping for him, including picking up some things to feed the "Church Lady" when she comes to visit. Oswaldo asks if he can do the shopping after he gets back from trying to make "amends" with his dad, and Pops agrees. Conversation reveals that Oswaldo thinks of Pops as more of his father than his own father, and Pops reveals that he thinks of Oswaldo as his "breakfast buddy". He then sends Oswaldo on his way, and again, while looking at Junior's box, asks for the butter knife.

Analysis

While the first part of this scene introduced the play's central character, some of its important symbols, and at least two of its themes, this part of the scene actually introduces important elements of the play's story. Most notable of these is the reference to Pops' lawsuit against the city, which plays a triggering role for important parts of the action later in the play. The never-seen characters of Pops' lawyer also figures later in the lawsuit-related storyline, meaning that both references are foreshadowings of later significant moments in the play. Other foreshadowings include the reference to the so-

called “Church Lady” (whose appearance in Act Two of the play proves to be a key turning point in Pops’ journey of transformation over the course of the narrative); the reference to Pops’ dispute with his landlord (another plot element that plays out later in the play); and the reference to Junior’s box. The specific contents of the box are never explicitly revealed, but later in the narrative, when Pops is confronted about the truths of Junior’s day-to-day activities, the action hints at what might actually be in the box and why Junior is so determined that it not be opened. Here it’s important to note the butter knife: without actually saying so, there is the clear sense that Pops is going to use it to open the box and find out what’s inside.

Also in this scene, the play develops one of its key themes, introduced in the first part of the scene through Pops’ father-like behavior towards both Oswaldo and Lulu. This is the play’s theme related to parent-child relationships: here, Pops’ flesh-and-blood son is added to the mix of what might be described as Pops’ family of choice, people (Oswaldo and Lulu) he treats like his children even though they are not. This can be seen as also evoking the play’s thematic interest in facades and reality: Lulu and Oswaldo keep up the façade of being Pops’ “children” when, in fact, the reality is that they are nothing of the kind. But the most significant evocation of the parent-child theme in the play is the relationship between Pops and Junior which is, as this scene indicates, full of resentments, anger, and frustration. All these aspects of their relationship foreshadow later developments taking place along similarly confrontational lines, and ironically foreshadow other later developments in which they actually come to a degree of peace with each other. Meanwhile, Oswaldo’s reference here to trying to make amends with his real dad can be seen as an ironic counterpoint to the tension between Junior and Pops; as a foreshadowing of moments later in the play when it’s revealed just how the conversation between Oswaldo and his father went; and as yet another evocation of the parent-child relationship theme.

Other foreshadowings include the reference to Pops being shot (a part of his history that plays a key role in the narrative later on) and the reference to Junior taking “a break”, which foreshadows later conversations just before he actually goes on that break.

Finally, a note of information: when an apartment is “rent-controlled”, it means that the rent paid by a tenant, by law, does not change from when the lease was signed: in other words, a landlord cannot legally increase the rent beyond that which is required to cover the cost of maintenance and improvements. This means that in the case of someone like Pops, who lives in what has become a desirable, wealthy part of the city, rent remains very low and the landlord is unable to make a profit, hence the landlord’s determination to get Pops to leave.

Discussion Question 1

Given the references to Junior’s criminal past and his determination that nobody should look into it, what do you think is in the box Junior brings in?

Discussion Question 2

What other elements of this scene relate to the play's thematic interest in parent-child relationships?

Discussion Question 3

Given what the play has revealed, to this point, about Junior, what do you think is the most likely reason he is concerned about Pops using the wheelchair, the china, and the silver?

Vocabulary

shyster, integrity, hypocrisy, grievous, amends, ergonomic

Act 1, Scene 2

Summary

Up on the roof of the apartment building, Lulu and Pops smoke a marijuana cigarette. Their conversation refers to how both Junior and Oswaldo are trying to stay clean and sober; to Lulu's plan to eventually graduate and be an accountant; and that Lulu is pregnant. She also reveals that Junior has told Lulu that she can make whatever decision she wants about the baby, but that she thinks he doesn't really want it. Pops offers to take Lulu to a doctor; wonders whether Junior is actually the father (Lulu reacts to that with shock and anger), and then assures Lulu that once the idea settles, Junior will definitely want to keep the baby. Junior, Pops says, happens to love kids. Lulu asks for Pops' help in convincing Junior that everything will be okay, and he agrees. Lulu says that she'll go to the doctor when Pops starts taking his proper medications, and she can watch him do it. Pops muses about the baby's gender, hoping that it will be a girl but believing that it will be a boy. He then tells Lulu to stop smoking the marijuana: "We having a baby!"

Analysis

In this short scene, there are further developments in plot elements (i.e. the baby, which plays a significant role in later action) and in the relationship between Lulu and Junior (which, later in this act, reveals itself to be quite volatile). There are also developments in the parent-child relationships theme: in how Pops relates to his biological son Junior; in how Pops relates to his child "of choice" (Lulu); and in the revelation that Junior himself is going to be a father.

One more important point to note about this scene is that it takes place on the roof which, throughout the narrative, can be seen as being a setting for explorations and visions of hope.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does the theme of hope, faith, and possibility manifest in this scene?

Discussion Question 2

Given what the narrative has revealed about Junior to this point, what do you think his true reaction to the news of the baby is?

Discussion Question 3

Have you ever had a relationship with a parental figure who wasn't actually a parent? What was that relationship like? How were you changed by it?

Vocabulary

sobriety, glaucoma, obstetrician, insensitive, gravitate

Act 1, Scene 3, Part 1

Summary

Stage directions indicate “a dead Christmas tree is fully lit. Pops, Lulu, Junior, Detective O’Connor and her fiancé, Lieutenant Caro, drink beverages in the living room after dinner.”

As the slightly drunk Caro tells a joke, and as Lulu laughs and Junior remains mostly silent, O’Connor (whose first name is Audrey) suspects Caro of having too much to drink. Caro, however, seems in a mood to celebrate and joins Pops in having more alcohol. Conversation reveals that the younger O’Connor and older Pops were once partners on the police force. O’Connor and Caro are partners in life, and have also both been promoted to administrative positions with the police. Also, it is revealed that O’Connor misses working with Pops. When Caro compliments Pops on his cooking, Junior starts talking about his mother having been just as good a cook and working just as hard, if not harder, and for a better salary. O’Connor tells him his mother would be proud of how he moved back home to take care of Pops, but Pops comments on just how much of a free ride he thinks Junior is getting.

Caro changes the subject, asking to hear one of his (Caro’s) favorite stories from when Pops and O’Connor worked together: the knife story. O’Connor and Pops take turns telling the story of an arrest they made once of a disruptive man who had a knife in his head, and how on their way to the hospital, Pops gave the man first a cigarette and then a beer. As Lulu reacts with increasing disbelief, Pops explains that he did what he did because he knew that as soon as the man had the knife removed, he (the man) would bleed out and die. “The man was gonna die alone,” Pops says. “I figured he didn’t have to drink alone too.” Caro describes him as having done “the wrong thing to do the right thing”, bemoans the fact that the police force doesn’t work that way anymore, and says that Pops was one of “the great ones”, bemoaning how things on the police force have changed. He also reminds Junior that it wasn’t easy for black cops like Pops to earn a great deal of money, but that Pops still managed to be both a good cop and a good man. Conversation also hints at Pops having been treated badly by the New York Police Department, but Junior deflects the conversation before it can go any further, announcing his departure on the break that Pops had urged him to take earlier. Everyone says their goodbyes, and Pops gives Junior some money – then tells him to not “get locked up”. Junior and Lulu leave.

Analysis

The first point to note about this scene is the indication of setting: specifically that the action is taking place around Christmas. It’s important to note that there is no reference to the time of year in either the dialogue or the action, meaning that the setting is important only through implication. The second point to note about the scene is the

sense that there is a sort of father-daughter relationship going on between Pops and O'Connor, an evocation of the parent-child relationship theme that develops even more in the second half of the scene. Meanwhile, the theme also develops in the contentious conversation between Junior and his father about Junior's mom's cooking, a conversation that reveals just how bitter and resentful Junior is of his father.

A significant aspect of this scene is the story that Pops tells about the man with the knife on his head, which is important for a number of reasons. First, it is the first significant evocation of another of the play's major themes: its interest in grace and compassion, manifest in Pops' revelation of why he did what he did for the man with the knife in his head. The second reason the story is important is for its metaphoric value: there is the sense, here and later in the play as the issue becomes more important, that the man with the knife in his head is, in fact, a metaphor for the "knife" that Pops has in his head – that is, the "knife" of obsession with his lawsuit that he seems unable to remove. What's interesting to note is that later in the play, when the question of the lawsuit is resolved, Pops, unlike the man in the story here, does NOT die.

Finally, an even more significant aspect of this scene is how it introduces its final major theme: the issue of race relations. Here, it is very important to note that at no point in the text, in stage directions, in dialogue, or in character descriptions, is it specifically noted that Pops is black: this scene contains the first reference in the published script to this fact. Granted, members of an audience will see for themselves what race Pops is as soon as the play starts: it's interesting to consider, though, why the author made the choice he did to omit Pops' race from the written, published script.

Discussion Question 1

Which of the play's themes are evoked, either ironically or directly, by the suggestion that the action is taking place at Christmas? What do you think is suggested by the reference to the Christmas tree being dead?

Discussion Question 2

How does the action of this scene explore the play's theme of race relations?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the author chose to omit references to Pops' race from earlier parts of the play, including character descriptions? What point do you think he was trying to make?

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Vocabulary

daiquiri, perp, indecency, laminate, gourmet, notable, exception, croquettes, adrenaline, leverage, bodega, triage, precinct, hemorrhage, embed, inactivity, pretentious, profanity, audacity

Act 1, Scene 3, Part 2

Summary

After Junior and Lulu are gone, O'Connor comments on how Lulu calls Pops "Dad", and he says everyone does - he's just used to it.

Conversation briefly turns to the fact that O'Connor and Caro have just gotten engaged to be married. They tell the story of how Caro got lucky in an after-hours poker game (that he says involved a famous celebrity), won $30,000, and spent every penny of it on an engagement ring. After Pops congratulates them, O'Connor says it's time to leave, but Caro wants to stay and talk more. O'Connor tries to get him to be quiet, but Caro insists, and eventually Pops agrees with him.

O'Connor then tries to convince Pops to give up his civil lawsuit. Conversation reveals that the lawsuit has been brought against the City because Pops felt that its response to his having been shot by a white rookie officer was not dealt with appropriately. Conversation also reveals that the shooting took place at an after-hours bar at six in the morning, a bar that the cops in Pops' precinct had been warned to stay away from and at a time of day that, O'Connor says, indicates he (Pops) had been drinking for a long, long time. As Pops tries to defend himself, Caro tells him that the City is aware of some of the things going on in the apartment: Junior doing illicit trade in illegally obtained electronics; Oswaldo's crimes; and Lulu's likely activities as a prostitute, with Junior as her pimp. All these circumstances, O'Connor says, invalidate Pops' lease, which he maintains gives him the right to stay in the apartment at the rent that was set in 1978. O'Connor also reveals that Pop's wife knew that his being at the bar indicated that he was drunk, suggesting that Pops was somehow culpable for what happened to him.

Pops erupts in anger, accusing the rookie that shot him of calling him "nigger", accusing the city of being racist in its response to what happened. In response to O'Connor's suggestion that he, like everybody else in the bar where the shooting took place, held himself "in contempt", Pops speaks at length about how no cops, of any race, "like themselves", and how difficult it is to be a black cop. He then accuses both Caro and O'Connor of trying to get him to drop the suit out of an ambition-triggered desire to impress the City – specifically, the people that would promote them. Caro admits that this might be true, but then, in an effort to defuse the anger of the situation, tells Pops that O'Connor wants him (Pops) to give her away at their wedding, and that he wants them all to stay friends so that can happen. Caro also speaks of having grown up with a father who was also a cop, and who killed himself. He says he knows a little of what Pops is going through and urges him to settle the suit, saying that the City needs an answer by Monday afternoon. Pops tells them both that there's no way he's going to sign: "Just make sure you tell whoever sent you," he says, "that Walter Washington is a man. They ain't crucifying some supernatural Jesus!" As O'Connor and Caro go, Walter again protests that he's in the right, but then suddenly collapses, quite ill. He drinks and remains onstage as the next scene continues.

Analysis

The first point to note about this scene is how O'Connor's comment about Lulu is the first of several variations on the parent-child relationship theme in this scene. The second key point about this scene is the introduction of an object that becomes essential and significant to the action later in the play: the diamond engagement ring, purchased for O'Connor by Caro as the result of his winning a poker match. Its appearance here, and the detail with which Caro speaks of its origins, foreshadow events later in the narrative when Pops puts the ring in the middle of a conflict between himself, his former partner, and her fiancé.

The third, and perhaps most significant, point about this section of the scene (and of this section of the play) is the development of the lawsuit issue. There are several key elements here: the revelation of the lawsuit's origins (which, among other things, echoes made earlier in the play to Pops being shot and also develop the play's thematic interest in race relations; Pops' apparently somewhat obsessive insistence not only on justice, but on a particular kind of justice (i.e. the money), all of which foreshadow later events in the play as the lawsuit and its resolution become increasingly important; and finally, Caro's efforts to get Pops to drop the suit. This is also an important piece of foreshadowing, in that it foreshadows similar efforts made by Caro at the play's climax.

The scene's climax, however, occurs after Caro and O'Connor are gone and Pops collapses. There is the sense here that both his poor physical health (hinted at in the previous scene, with Lulu's reference to Pops taking his medication) and the emotional strain of both the lawsuit and his determination to see it through have combined to bring him to a point of collapse under the pressure of trying to be both physically well and morally and psychologically strong.

Other important elements in this section include Caro's references to what the police know has been going on in the house (which, among other things, calls into question both the legitimacy of Lulu's baby and the fact itself of her pregnancy) and the references to Oswaldo's and Junior's apparent criminal activity (which can be seen as possibly answering the earlier question of what exactly is going on with Junior's box).

Discussion Question 1

Various types of parent-child relationships are referred to in this scene. How do these references develop or vary the play's thematic interest in those sorts of relationships?

Discussion Question 2

At this point in the play, what do you think Pops should do: settle the lawsuit, or continue to fight? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

At this point in the play, given the circumstances described, do you think Pops was in any way responsible for what happened to him? Do you agree or disagree with Caro? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

stipulation, joyous, palatial, affidavit, leverage, unsavory, allegation, larceny, substantiate, forensic, impeccable, incompetent, felon, precinct, uppity

Act 1, Scenes 4 and 5

Summary

Scene 4 - Up on the roof, Junior and Lulu smoke a marijuana cigarette before Junior goes to catch his bus out of town. As Lulu remembers other times they were together and wonders why she can't go with him, Junior tells her he needs to be alone. This leads Lulu into an eruption of anger in which she speaks of how the rough people she used to hang out with loved her more than Junior does; how he wants her to have an abortion (he says the decision is hers); and how fed up she is with him asking her to do things for him, including walking the dog.

Junior protests that he just needs some time away from his dad, telling Lulu that she's being just as much of a child as Pops is. Lulu demands to know whether Junior loves her, and he protests that he does. She doesn't believe him and prepares to leave. He begs her to go to Baltimore with him, saying he's stressed and saying the wrong things because of his dad. She continues to refuse. He says "Okay, don't go." She changes her mind and agrees. He says she doesn't have time to pack. She says she's already packed, adding that she loves him "so much, it makes [her] break out like … [she's] got chlamydia or something." He calls her crazy, and they kiss.

Scene 5 - This scene begins with Pops in the same position as he was at the end of Scene 3, "drinking heavily" and attempting to sing along with an old recording. Oswaldo enters, also drunk. He apologizes for missing dinner, vomits on the floor and apologizes for that, and then explains that he went to see his father, who called him "a bad fuckin' person, a scumbag … a weak addict just circling the drain … a First Class Piece of Shit of the Highest Order." He then says that his father grabbed the hammer Oswaldo gave him and threatened him with it. That, Oswaldo says, is when he left. He then says he wants to borrow some money to get some cocaine and a hooker. Pops refuses. Oswaldo tries to grab his credit card. Pops holds him off. Oswaldo accuses Pops of hitting him. Pops apologizes. Oswaldo demands the credit card, shouting repeatedly "Credit card! Credit Card! Credit card!"

Analysis

The first point to note about these scenes is that how they are intended to be perceived by an audience as taking place at particular times. The Lulu-Junior scene takes place at the same time as the second half of Act 1, Scene 3 is taking place – that is, during the O'Connor-Caro-Pops conversation that happens after Junior and Lulu have left the apartment. There is a sense that in terms of content (i.e. Lulu trying to get Junior to give her what she wants, Caro trying to get Pops to see reason) there are certain parallels in action and intention. There's a clear contrast here, in that Junior gives in to Lulu where Pops does not give in to Caro. Meanwhile, the author's intention seems to be that the Oswaldo-Pops scene takes place at some point after Scene 3, perhaps quite shortly

afterwards and perhaps quite some time afterwards. The key point of that scene is its ironic, dramatic, and quite intense dramatization of the play's thematic interest in parent=child relationships, which is also developed (as foreshadowed in previous scenes) in the revelation that O'Connor wants Pops to "give her away" (i.e. walk her down the aisle) at her wedding, an honor usually reserved for the father of the bride.

An important aspect of these scenes to note is the changing of mind in both Junior (who seems to be worn down by Lulu's begging) and Lulu (who here seems to be little more than volatile and manipulative), both of which contrast Pops' refusal to change his mind about the lawsuit. Also, Lulu's unusual comparison of her feelings toward Junior being like chlamydia suggests that on some level, Lulu sees the effect that Junior has on her as being similar to that of a sexually transmitted disease.

There was another reference to the unnamed dog, which once again metaphorically represents compassion.

There is also the ironic reference to the theme of grace and compassion in Scene 5 when Oswaldo seems to think that continued compassion from Pops is his right, and Oswaldo repeatedly demands the credit card. The sense here is that Oswald's insistence that Pops give him a credit card is foreshadowing of later events in the play in which Pops "insists" that any resolution of his lawsuit involve a substantial sum of money: both credit card and settlement suggest access to large sums of cash.

Discussion Question 1

How does the action of the scene between Junior and Lulu reinforce the idea that setting scenes on the roof is an evocation of the play's thematic interest in freedom and possibility?

Discussion Question 2

Given what Caro said in the previous scene about Lulu's means of earning a living, what are the implications of her comment here about the people she "hung out" with loving her more than he does?

Discussion Question 3

Narratives often define the themes they're exploring by presenting clearly contrasting elements. What themes are highlighted by the harsh reaction of Oswaldo's father to his presence?

Vocabulary

chlamydia, arrogant

Act 2, Scene 1

Summary

Stage directions indicate this scene takes place two weeks later. “The living room is in ruins. But the Christmas tree is still up and lit. Moving boxes are strewn about. Pops has a dirty bandage above his eye and is now holding a cane.” He is drinking. “Lulu serves juice and cookies to a beautiful woman dressed all in black”. This is the Church Lady.

Conversation between Pops, Lulu and the Church Lady reveals that the Church Lady is Latina and speaks slightly broken English; that Junior has not come back since he left; and that Lulu is going to visit him. Pops refuses to give her money for him. Conversation also reveals that Pops is in the process of being evicted. As Lulu goes, Pops brags to the Church Lady that he’s going to be a grandfather, and then tells Lulu to take the dog with her. Lulu goes, telling Pops she loves him.

The Church Lady comments that she has intuitions and psychic impulses, adding that she thinks Lulu is not pregnant. Pops says he hopes she’s wrong. Conversation refers to Pops’ bandage, and to how he got the injury: in an attack from a drug-high “bandito” that Pops says he knew – but then, he adds, “who really knows anybody anyway?” Further conversation reveals that the Church Lady is there instead of Glenda, another church lady who had befriended Pops’ wife (Delores) and who continued to visit Pops after Delores’ death. Conversation also reveals that Pops never knew his father, who was a traveling salesman.

This Church Lady, who is never identified by name, tells Pops she is there to give him Communion. She also tells him that she “knows” things about him – for example, that he cared for “the bandito” who hurt him; that he’s both angry and relieved that Delores died; and that he paid to have sex with prostitutes. When he protests, the Church Lady says that she too, in a bad time, was a prostitute back in her home in Brazil, but that everything can be forgiven. Pops tries to get her to just make conversation, and for a while the Church Lady does: but she continues to return to her efforts to try to get Pops to take Communion, saying that she knows he wants to but that he’s refusing because he’s so angry. She also asks him to consider helping out abandoned orphans in her home country.

Eventually, the Church Lady literally seduces Pops into taking Communion: she removes most of her clothes, arouses him (stage directions indicating that, for Pops, this is something that has not happened for a long time), and mounts him. As they have intercourse, she puts a communion wafer between her lips and feeds it to Pops, who is becoming increasingly short of breath, and at the end of the scene, seems to be having a heart attack. When he asks the Church Lady to call for an ambulance, she refuses. He calls for Delores, and then quotes something the Church Lady said to him earlier: “Always we are free!” As the Church Lady asks him again for money to help the orphans, he shouts that this is the greatest moment of his life … and then collapses.

Analysis

As the second half of the play begins, it moves in a very different direction. First, there is the introduction of a new character who, as the scene reveals, turns the story around both in terms of what happens, particularly to Pops, but also in terms of style. The Church Lady's apparent psychic sensibilities in this scene take the narrative briefly and lightly into the realm of what's often called "magic realism", a style in which elements that might seem far-fetched, or existing because of some kind of magic power or influence, are integrated into a realistic narrative / setting and are fully accepted by the characters. In this particular case, the Church Lady's "psychic" abilities add a new, intriguing, and sometimes puzzling layer of meaning to the story: the idea that there are forces at work in people's lives, and particularly in Pops' life, that are unknown.

What's particularly interesting to note is that later in the narrative, the revelation of the Church Lady's true identity and purpose calls into question the truth of EVERYTHING that she does and says in this scene: an eventual evocation of the play's thematic explorations of facades vs. reality, also evoked here as the Church Lady raises the question of whether Lulu's pregnancy is real. For now, though, the Church Lady pushes both Pops and his story into new directions, all of which are completely unexpected by both character and audience.

Those actions include triggering the revelation from Pops that he never knew his father (a revelation that develops the parent-child relationships theme and, simultaneously, foreshadows revelations in following scenes about how his father's desertion defined Pops' identity); the reference to orphans (a comment that foreshadows a key moment at the play's conclusion; and, at the scene's dramatic and literal climax (that is, Pops' concurrent moments of physical orgasm and spiritual ecstasy), a manifestation of the play's thematic interest in grace and compassion, both key implications and goals of the religious ritual (communion) enacted by the Church Lady.

Other important references include the reference to Junior, and to Pops' determination to not give him any money (another parent-child moment); another reference to the dog (again foreshadowing moments later in the narrative where Pops' perspective on the animal changes, indicating his deeper change as a person and as a father); and Pops' question about who really knows anybody. This can be seen as introducing the thematic question of facades vs. reality in a fairly direct way, an element developed further later in the play, when the Church Lady's true identity and purpose are revealed.

Discussion Question 1

Given what has gone before in the play, who do you think "the bandito" actually is?

Discussion Question 2

How does the play's theme relating to issues of faith and hope manifest in this scene, either directly or ironically?

Discussion Question 3

What is your reaction to the revelation that the Church Lady was also, at one time, a prostitute? Do you agree with her that everything can be forgiven?

Vocabulary

bandito, paraphernalia, ritualistic, inexplicable

Act 2, Scene 2

Summary

This scene is set in Pops' bedroom. Stage directions suggest that "Pops is very ill. [There is an] EKG monitor and IV. A nice bouquet of flowers is by his bedside. Pops is in bed: Junior is by his side.

Conversation reveals that Junior has been at Pops' bedside ever since he (Pops) fell unconscious; that Pops has the dog in the bed with him; and that Pops told Lulu his "last wishes", wishes he repeats to Junior. "No funeral, no wake, no burial, no refreshments, no nothing!" Junior tells him the police association is paying all the bills. Pops comments that he was told the same thing about Dolores' medical bills, and that proved to be a lie.

Junior tries to say something to Pops, but Pops refuses to hear it. Finally Junior explodes in anger at how Pops, all his life, refused to hear not only what Junior had to say, but what Dolores had to say as well. Conversation reveals that Junior was Dolores' confidant, and that she told him a great deal about her marriage to his father. After giving him some seemingly last minute advice (to eat a lot of fiber and vegetables, as well as get potassium, because "a black man needs that"), conversation turns to Pops' father, who – as Pops said to the Church Lady in the previous scene – was "a traveling man", and never home. Pops says he hated his father, and then confesses that he made every choice in his life – marriage, settling down, finding a steady job, being a father – in reaction to the kind of father he was. His confession also refers to the night he got shot: specifically, to a conversation he had with his lawyer (Mo Lubenthal) in which Lubenthal said he wasn't likely to get any money from suing the police because Pops was both drunk and someplace he wasn't supposed to be … but then suggested that if Pops said the rookie used the word "nigger" there might be something there. Pops then further confesses that trying to live his life in reaction to his father proved to be a failure; that he's realized he's more like his father than he believed; and that if he survives, he might just do some traveling of his own.

Conversation then reveals that Lulu is not pregnant, and Junior is relieved. Pops thinks Junior still owes it to Lulu to take care of her.

The conversation further reveals that the move out of the apartment has been called off; that Detective O'Connor and Lieutenant Caro came by, but Lulu said that Pops wasn't to be disturbed; and, when Pops tells Junior to call Lubenthal, Junior says there's not much chance of a deal on the lawsuit any more. Pops tells him to make the call anyway then take the flowers and the dog out of the room. Pops concludes by telling Junior he loves him immediately followed by "get the fuck out".

Analysis

The first element of note in this section is its multi-faceted development of the parent-child relationships theme. The primary movement here is in the relationship between Pops and Junior, but there are also references to Junior's relationship to Delores (his mother, Pops' wife) and, in the references to Pops' relationship with his own father, the sense of such complex, difficult relationships – and the feelings that both give rise to them and result from them – being passed on from generation to generation. The next element of note in this scene is also thematically related: Pops' reference to the truth of what happened on the night he was shot, a manifestation of the play's thematic interest in race relations. The revelation that Pops lied about what happened that night puts him in a very different light from what the play has said about him up to this point. An audience might very well be shocked, but perhaps not terribly surprised, given what has been said about race relations in the play up to this point.

Other noteworthy elements here include Pops' reference to thinking about doing some traveling of his own, which foreshadows key moments in the play's conclusion; the reference to Lulu not being pregnant (which, at this point in the narrative, suggests that there might have been something to the Church Lady's claim that she has psychic abilities of a kind); and the reference to a visit from O'Connor and Caro (which foreshadows their plot-essential visit in the following scene).

Finally, there is considerable, and considerably touching, irony in the final moments of the scene. Junior, earlier in the scene, clearly wanted to tell Pops that he loved him, only to be rejected by his father, by the end of the scene Pops has turned the tables and said it first. This, like the fact that Pops is now willing to share is bed with the dog, indicates that for whatever reason, Pops' attitudes are starting to change.

Discussion Question 1

In what way does the play's thematic interest in facades vs. reality manifest in this scene?

Discussion Question 2

What does the fact that the dog is in Pops' bed suggest about how his relationship with the animal has changed? How he himself has changed?

Discussion Question 3

Do you agree with Pops that Junior has a responsibility to Lulu even if she's not pregnant? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

codependent, partake, potassium, interject, negligee, confidant

Act 2, Scene 3

Summary

Pops is in his bedroom, still hooked up to electronic monitoring equipment. He is attended to by a male nurse, (played by the actor who played Oswaldo). O'Connor sits by Pops' bedside, while Lulu sits outside the bedroom, at the front door. Junior insists to the Church Lady that she's not welcome. During their confrontation, Caro arrives. After he goes in, Junior closes and locks the door in the Church Lady's face.

After a brief conversation with Lulu, Caro goes into Pops' bedroom, where he reveals that the City and Pops' lawyer (Lubenthal) have come to an agreement on a settlement of Pops' lawsuit. In exchange for Pops signing a non-disclosure agreement, he will be allowed to remain in his apartment rent free for another 18 months; Junior's criminal record will be wiped clean; other "activities" that have been going on in the apartment will be forgotten; and that Pops will receive honorary memberships to a couple of police organizations. Pops demands money as well, and after Caro initially resists, he reveals that there is a fund of $15,000 that Pops can have. Pops insists on more: Caro tells him there is no "more", and that if Pops keeps on pushing, he (Pops) will get nothing. Pops then agrees to the terms, as long as he gets the ring that Caro gave O'Connor.

Both O'Connor and Caro react with disbelief: Caro's is angry, bordering on the furious, while O'Connor's is sad and hurt. Caro demands that Pops be reasonable; O'Connor says that all she wants is for Pops to walk her down the aisle, and that she's desperate for all this conflict to be over. Pops insists, saying that O'Connor and Caro can talk about it while he's in the bathroom. Junior comes to see what the argument is about, but Pops tells him to go away. After Junior goes, conversation reveals that Pops knows that Caro's father is not a police officer, as Caro says he was; that for O'Connor, Pops is a reminder of HER father; and that Caro believes that in spite of what Pops says, the white rookie cop that shot him did NOT call him "nigger". Pops says he may be right, demanding that Caro hand over his colorful necktie as well and saying that if he (Pops) refuses the agreement, the ambitious Caro will have to explain to his "bosses … how [he] fucked this shit all up. You can have a victory," Pops adds, "or you can have a ring." He then shouts for Lulu's help getting to the bathroom. As O'Connor protests that what he's doing isn't right, Pops goes out with Lulu, and tells O'Connor to "be well".

Analysis

This scene contains the play's climax: specifically, the confrontation between Pops, Caro, and O'Connor over whether Pops will, or should, accept the settlement offer from the police. There are several things to note here: the references to other "activities" going on in the apartment (echoes of earlier references to Junior's being a thief, Oswaldo's undefined history on the street, and Lulu's prostitution); Pops' demand for money); the suggestion that the powers that be know that Pops lied about being called

“nigger”; and the conflict that erupts first over Pops’ demand for the ring, and second for Caro’s necktie. The first seems to be defined by, again, Pops’ need for money; the second, by Pops’ determination to humiliate Caro, who is, it must be remembered, white.

What’s potentially puzzling about this scene is the reason why Pops wants the ring so badly: why, after all, would he want to do something so hurtful to O’Connor, who has been so supportive of him in the past? One possible answer is that he wants to humiliate her in the same way and for the same reasons as he wants to humiliate Caro; as Pops stated earlier in the play, he believes them to be more ambitious than compassionate, wanting to resolve the conflict over the lawsuit so they can advance in their careers. Another answer, however, is revealed in the following (and final) scene, in which Pops’ eventual intentions for the ring are revealed; at that point, the audience will be able to determine whether he had that intention in mind in THIS scene. Meanwhile, it’s important to note that this scene, and this particular argument, end on a note of suspense; it’s not revealed whether Caro or O’Connor actually do hand over the ring.

Other noteworthy elements in this scene include developments in the theme of facades vs. reality (in Caro’s apparent lie about his father’s job, as well as in Caro’s apparent knowledge of the truth about Pops’ claim of being called “nigger”), as well as in the theme of parent-child relationships (again manifesting here in the explicit comment by O’Connor that Pops reminds her of her father).

Discussion Question 1

What element of this scene seems to be the ironic or contrasting counterpoint to the play’s thematic interest in grace and compassion?

Discussion Question 2

What is ironic about the stage direction that the actor who played Oswaldo is also playing the nurse who cares for Pops?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Junior locks the Church Lady out of the apartment?

Vocabulary

prognosis, pneumonia, courtesy, confiscate, barrage, overestimate, liability, expunge, conciliatory, advisory, discomfort, demarcation, perilous, shiftless

Act 2, Scene 4

Summary

Six months later, Junior sits in his mother's wheelchair, drinking. Oswaldo arrives, conversation revealing that he is staying in the flat again. Lulu comes in, asking whether "Dad" has called. Conversation reveals that Lulu asks every day whether he has called, and that he's been gone for four months, along with the dog.

As the three characters remain in the apartment, Pops (now referred to in stage directions as Walter) appears on the roof. Stage directions indicate that this takes place "two weeks after Pops' last scene. On the roof. Summer. Walter is dressed in a suit and is wearing [Caro's] distinctive tie." Also present are Walter's cane, a traveling bag, a small pet carrier – and the Church Lady.

The Church Lady expresses her relief that she didn't kill Walter, adding that she hopes the invitation to see him and his evidently being set to travel don't mean that he wants her to travel with him. Walter says no, commenting that even though their last meeting wasn't necessarily good, it got him to where he is now in his life, and that the Church Lady gave him "grace. 'Always be free', right?" When the Church Lady agrees, Walter gives her O'Connor's diamond ring, telling her it's for the orphans she talked about. The Church Lady protests, eventually confessing that she's not from the church at all: she's just a cleaner, and that when Glenda told her about Pops, she (the Church Lady) decided to come and rob him. Walter says that doesn't matter: she changed him. The Church Lady says "You changed yourself", and Walter tells her to keep the ring and change HER-self as well, adding that Junior will be fine … or he won't.

The Church Lady says again there are no orphans.

Walter gives her the ring and kisses her, saying "there are orphans somewhere."

And then he goes, taking with him his travel bag and the pet carrier.

"The Church Lady remains alone. She stares out at the horizon. The lights fade.

The play ends.

Analysis

In the aftermath of the play's climax in the previous scene, this brief scene does several things. It answers the question posed at the end of the previous scene about whether Pops took the settlement and whether O'Connor and Caro gave him the ring. This scene also potentially answers the question of why Pops wanted the ring at all (to give to the Church Lady so she could pass on the proceeds of its sale to the orphans she said she took care of – although there is some question about when he made the

decision to do so when he first demanded the ring. The moment also manifests, in the most significant way in the play, the theme of facades vs. reality (in the façade originally presented by the Church Lady and the reality she confesses to Pops. Perhaps most importantly, the scene offers the main example of the play's thematic interest in grace and compassion. This is Pops' forgiveness and understanding of the Church Lady's lie, and his wish for the orphans, an act of compassion that is perhaps foreshadowed by Pops' earlier compassion towards the other young people in his care (Oswaldo and Lulu) and which, because of its placement at the play's conclusion, seems to be the play's primary theme: that compassion, even in the most difficult souls, is possible. This is the key implication of the play's final line, and is perhaps this is why stage directions indicate that, as he leaves, Pops is taking the dog with him.

Other points to note include the stage direction that Junior, like his father at the beginning of the play, is sitting in his mother's wheelchair drinking. This brings the play full circle and leaves the audience wondering if Junior will turn out like his father.

How this scene handles time is of interest to note. The first part of the scene takes place in the present, while the second part of the scene takes place in the past. How stage directions handles this is tough task and worthy of discussion.

The fact that the final scene is set on the roof continues to support the idea that the roof is intended to be seen as a place evoking freedom and possibility for the play's character.

Finally, the play's ending suggests that there is also a beginning – in this case, a beginning for Pops and perhaps a new beginning for the Church Lady, but arguably no new beginning for the three people left in the flat – Junior, Lulu, and Oswaldo. This suggests that the flat has, throughout the play, represented being stuck or held in the present, or in a place of suffering, an aspect of the play that seems to relate, relatively tightly, to the fact that as long as he stayed in the flat, Pops was not free. However, with the settlement now in hand and no longer tied to the flat, Pops is finally free.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think is the significance in the stage directions for this scene of Pops being referred to as "Walter"?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the symbolic significance of Junior sitting in his mother's wheelchair?

Discussion Question 3

When do you think Pops made his decision to use the proceeds of the ring's sale to help the orphans mentioned by the Church Lady – before he asked for the ring? between getting the ring and seeing the Church Lady in this scene? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

fedora, leper

Characters

Walter “Pops” Washington

Pops is the play’s central character and protagonist. He describes himself as a senior citizen, an ex-cop, and a good tenant, all of which play important roles in the plot, in the play’s various relationships, and in the development of its themes. Pops is also a widower, his wife Delores having died a few months before the beginning of the play.

One of the largest roles Pops plays is that of 'father'; he is a genuine father figure to his son Junior, and a surrogate father figure to several other characters (including Oswaldo, Lulu, and his former partner, Detective O’Connor).

Finally, Pops is black / African-American, a fact that is not mentioned in any of the character descriptions or other introductory material, but which emerges only in dialogue. Granted, an audience will know Pops’ ethnic background as soon as he appears onstage for the first time, but it’s still an interesting point to note – that the author does not identify him as such to potential readers early in the published version of the script.

Pops’ movement/actions through the play are primarily defined by what can be seen as a demand for respect – from the City of New York (against which he has mounted a long-standing, long unresolved lawsuit); from his colleagues in the Police Association; and from his landlord, who is demanding that Pops move out of the rent controlled apartment he’s living in. Pops spends the play, in the way he seems to have spent much of his life, fighting for what he believes is his due – as a man, as a black man, as a police officer, and as a husband, father, and friend. There is a very clear sense that he has been frustrated so long that he has become angry and bitter, superficially generous but ultimately lacking in genuine compassion. It takes the intervention of the Church Lady and an apparent heart attack to wake him up to both his true nature and the possibilities for what that nature might become.

Junior

Junior is Pops’ son, and a complex character in his own right (interesting to note that the narrative never indicates whether Junior is his given name, or whether it's a nickname). At times angry and bitter with his father, at other times desperate to both give and receive affection; at times struggling to discover the right thing to do, and at other times clearly portrayed as operating on what might be described as the wrong side of the law; at times a good and affectionate boyfriend, at other times selfish and insensitive – Junior is a mix of powerful drives and contradictions that leave both the audience and the character himself confused, frustrated, and edgy.

Like his father, Junior grieves the death of his mother. Like his father, Junior’s edginess and temper can be attributed, at least in part, to that grief. Also like his father, Junior

seems to deal in moral shades of gray, arguably out of what they both perceive as the necessity imposed on them by society to do just to survive. Ultimately, there is the overall sense about Junior that he wants to, and at times tries, to be a decent person. There is also the sense that Junior, and the play, believe the world to be stacked against him.

Oswaldo

Oswaldo is Junior's friend. There are no clear indications as to his race, but there is the sense that he is of non-Caucasian ancestry. He has many similarities to Junior, such as age, an ongoing struggle with substance abuse and crime issues, a struggle to have a good relationship with his father.

Unlike Pops, however, Oswaldo's father is not nearly as tolerant: when Oswaldo returns home to attempt a reconciliation, Oswaldo's father becomes violent and throws him out of the house. Pops, who has become something of a surrogate father to Oswaldo, at first treats him with a kind of compassion, if with a degree of simultaneous gruffness: later, however, when Oswaldo returns from his meeting with his father, having fallen off the wagon and relapsed into substance abuse, he (Oswaldo) attacks Pops, desperate for money. Pops emerges from the encounter physically wounded, and probably psychologically wounded as well, at least to some degree. The narrative isn't clear on what happens to Oswald, although when he returns near the end of the play, there is the sense that for him, not much has ultimately changed. He is still struggling to get his life together, and in many ways, still likely to fail.

Lulu

Lulu is Junior's girlfriend. As is the case with Oswaldo, the narrative isn't clear on her ethno-cultural origin. What is clear is that she is young, sexy, rough around the edges, and not afraid of expressing her feelings, whether they be feelings of anger and frustration with Junior, or hope, playfulness, and affection with Pops. Her mind changes quickly and frequently, and she is also emotionally volatile. At one point, she claims to be pregnant, but there doesn't seem to be any physical evidence and at one point, the visiting Church Lady suggests that Lulu) is, in fact, not pregnant.

Lulu and other characters also claim that she is studying to be an accountant, but Lieutenant Caro, in his angry, agenda-driven argument to Pops that it's time to give up his lawsuit, suggests that Lulu is a prostitute, has been for some time, and is unlikely to change. The implication of both these elements (the pregnancy, the being an accountant) is that Lulu, like so many of the other characters, is a liar, a manipulator, self-deluded, or some mixture of all three.

Like Oswaldo and Junior, at the play's conclusion Lulu seems to be exactly where she was at its beginning: lost, reliant on others, and not entirely sure what the truth of her life is, or is meant to be.

Detective O’Connor

Detective Audrey O’Connor was Pops’ (white) partner and protégé during her early days on the police force. While there is relatively little portrayal of the kind of officer she was at the time, the fact that she is a detective at a relatively young age suggests that she is ambitious. O'Connor's actions and comments towards Pops suggest that she is, to some degree, compassionate in general and affectionate towards him. Perhaps most importantly, there is a feeling of sensitivity and respect about her that many of the other characters, including her fiancé (Lieutenant Caro) lack. O'Connor is also more of a consistent truth teller than the other characters in the play. She is somewhat manipulative, but not nearly as much as Caro is, and she seems to be coming from a place of genuine sensitive to, and awareness of, Pops’ troubles, values, and goals. She is, in many ways, the unfortunate victim of Pops’ anger and resentment towards the police association, the city, and Lieutenant Caro.

Lieutenant Caro

Caro is O’Connor’s fiancé, not risen quite as far in the ranks of the police force as she is, but evidently determined to get there sooner rather than later. Brash, outspoken, uncensored, frequently insensitive and often self-righteous, there is the sense that there is also a ruthless streak in him: that he will do whatever it takes to get what he wants. He is eventually matched in this,by Pops, who plays his own version of the same game and eventually wins, bullying Caro (and O’Connor) out of some valuable possessions, ostensibly to teach them both a lesson about respect, manipulation, and lies.

Caro is one of the bigger liars in the play, revealing himself as being willing to say virtually anything in order to get Pops to do what he (Caro) wants. Ultimately, Caro is portrayed as a bully, which on one level does not bode well for the relationship between him and O’Connor, and which, on another level, might very likely lead an audience to a kind of cheering when Pops finally gets the better of him.

Church Lady

The Church Lady appears only in the second act, but is referred to in the first, her appearance foreshadowed by requests that Junior go shopping for some particular things in preparation for her visit. When she actually appears, however, she is not the Church Lady (Glenda) that Pops was expecting: later in the play, the narrative reveals that she is, in fact, a cleaning lady from which Glenda comes, and posed as a “Church Lady” in order to eventually rob Pops. What is later revealed to be her plan is interrupted by Pops’ heart attack in the middle of the Church Lady’s seduction of him, a heart attack triggered by the intensity of her passion (which may or may not be real, given that her agenda at the time the “attack” takes place is ultimately revealed to be not what she claims).

Nevertheless, in spite of being a liar and a manipulator like so many of the other characters, the Church Lady inadvertently speaks a key truth to Pops and the audience, and thereby sets in motion the play's examination of one of its key themes. When the Church Lady, in her first appearance, speaks of always being free, it begins a chain reaction of self-examination in Pops (most of which takes place offstage and/or between scenes) that results in the final scene of the play, also involving the Church Lady (forced into telling the truth about who she is), in Pops' change of heart, his transformation into someone capable of genuine, open-hearted compassion. Thus the Church Lady, in spite of ultimately being a construction of lies, inadvertently speaks a truth that triggers the awakening of that truth (i.e. the value of compassion) in the heart and mind of someone who, until her intervention, had not known it.

Delores

Delores is the recently deceased wife of Pops and mother of Junior. She never appears in the play, but aspects of her character and life play important roles in the plot and story. She was a long-time invalid who never got appropriate treatment (a situation that Junior angrily blames on Pops). She confided in her son, and was a long-suffering spectator to her husband's excesses of temper and resentment. As the narrative eventually reveals, she was wiser and more aware of Pops and his shortcomings than he ever gave her credit for.

Mo Lubenthal

Lubenthal is Pops' lawyer, the attorney handling the years-long lawsuit that Pops raised against the city in the aftermath of being shot by a white, rookie police officer. It was Lubenthal who suggested to Pops that, in order to secure a settlement from the city, Pops should say that the shooter called him "nigger" just before the gun was fired. In other words, the unseen Lubenthal was an advocate for falsehood and lies.

Oswaldo's Father

This character, also unseen by the audience, is an important component of the play's thematic exploration of relationships between father and sons. The troubled, struggling Oswaldo has high hopes for reconciliation between himself and his father when he (Oswaldo) goes home for a visit, but is surprised, disappointed, and hurt when an argument ensues, and his father throws him out of the house. On some level, given what the play reveals about Oswaldo's character and life (i.e. that he is in fact a liar, an addict, and a criminal) that Oswaldo's father is justified, at least to some degree, in his actions; nevertheless, the actions of Oswaldo's father are a clear contrast to the more tolerant, seemingly more compassionate actions of Pops towards Oswaldo.

Glenda

Glenda is the real Church Lady. Her friendship with Delores led to a friendship with Pops, one that continued past Delores' death. Glenda's inability to visit Pops due to illness is the catalyst for the appearance of the false "Church Lady" which, in turn, is the catalyst for Pops' eventual transformation.

The Arrested Man

Early in the first half of the play, Pops and O'Connor tell a story of a unique arrest they performed while on the beat - and, more specifically, while O'Connor was relatively new at the job. They arrested a man, the story goes, who had a knife in his head. Pops describes how he treated the man relatively well, and didn't remove the knife because to do so would end the man's life sooner rather than later. The arrested man can therefore be seen as metaphorically representing Pops, who has a kind of "knife" in his head (i.e. an obsession) about the lawsuit. The difference is that unlike the arrested man, Pops doesn't "die" when the knife of his obsession is removed. Pops, by contrast, discovers an entirely new way of living and being.

Symbols and Symbolism

The Apartment

Pops and his extended "family" live in a large, rent-controlled apartment in a mostly wealthy area of New York City (Riverside Drive). The apartment, in its shabby opulence, represents the dreams of status and self-respect to which Pops clings throughout the play in the same way as he clings to his tenancy.

The Wheelchair

At the beginning of the play, Pops sits in the wheelchair his now-deceased wife used to sit in. At the end of the play, Junior sits in that same chair. For both men, the wheelchair represents both the past and their crippling ties to that past. At the end of the play, though, the fact that Junior is sitting in the wheelchair while Pops is up on the roof (a symbol of freedom and opportunity) suggests that while the son (Junior) has remained trapped in the past, the father (Pops) is preparing to move on.

The Roof

On top of the Riverside Drive apartment building, there is an open space in which several of the characters take refuge at one point or another in the play. The roof represents freedom, opportunity, and possibility.

The Good China and Silver

Early in the play, Junior takes Pops to task for using the good china and silver. This, like Pops' use of the wheelchair, suggests that Pops is tied to his beliefs and values and feelings about the past.

Pops' Dog

Throughout the narrative, the never-seen dog is viewed by most of the characters, to one degree or another, as a nuisance. The dog, however, is clearly portrayed in stage directions (particularly in Act 2) as never leaving Pops' side. At the end of the play, in spite of having spoken so negatively about the dog earlier in the story, Pops leaves with it to start his new life. There is the sense, then, that the dog ultimately comes to represent possibility - more specifically, and for Pops, a new life free from anger and more associated with compassion and caring.

Pops' Lawsuit

Early in the story, conversation reveals that several years before the play began, Pops launched a lawsuit against the City of New York for their mishandling of the shooting that ended his career. Pops has, for several years and against the recommendations of friends and family, pursued that lawsuit in the name of finally achieving what he believes to be justice. The lawsuit, like other aspects of the script (including the good china and silver), represents Pops' angry determination to not let go of what he sees as the injustices of his past.

Lulu's Baby

Early in the story, Lulu tells Pops that she's having a baby, and he reacts with excited anticipation. Junior, however, is not nearly as pleased, but tells Lulu that the question of whether she's going to keep it is hers to make. For her, for Pops, and for the play in general, the baby is another symbol of hope and possibility. Later in the play, when the narrative clearly reveals that Lulu is not pregnant, it can be seen as representing a disappearance of hope for both her and Junior, a metaphor reinforced by the fact that Junior sits in his mother's old wheelchair which represents the past.

The Knife in the Arrested Man's Head

At one point in the story, Pops and Detective O'Connor tell a story of a man they arrested who had a knife in his head. That, plus Pops' comment about what might happen to the man if the knife was pulled out (i.e. the man would die) can be seen as metaphorically representing Pop's situation with the lawsuit: he has an idea in his head, and he seems to also believe that if it were "pulled out" (i.e. abandoned), he too would die - or at least his integrity would.

O'Connor's Engagement Ring

When O'Connor reveals that she and Lieutenant Caro have become engaged, Caro tells the story of how their engagement ring came into his possession: he gambled, won a lot of money, and spent it all on the ring. The sense here is that the ring, for them and for the play, represents good fortune. As the play reaches its climax, Pops demands the ring as part of his settlement of the lawsuit: the sense here is that Pops is grasping for some good fortune of his own, of a sort that's not going to be coming from the lawsuit in any other way. At the end of the play, Pops passes on that good fortune to the erstwhile Church Lady, implying that selling the ring and distributing the money would benefit a lot of people - that is, spread the good fortune around.

Caro's Tie

At the same time as Pops is demanding the engagement ring as part of his agreement to settle the lawsuit, he also demands that Lieutenant Caro hand over his colorful, flashy necktie. There is the sense here that for Pops, the tie is tied to Caro's ambitious, somewhat flashy, personality, and that for him (Pops), taking possession of the necktie represents a kind of domination, or win, over Caro's ambition and/or determination to dominate HIM.

Settings

America

America is the country in which the play takes place, a setting notable because of America's centuries-old history of tension between races (specifically: between whites and non-whites, particularly African-Americans). Such racial tension is an important thematic component of the play.

New York City

New York is the city in which the play is set. Its history of having a significant population of non-whites, plus the history of tension between whites and non-whites on its police force, are key components of both the action and the themes of the play.

The Present

The play is set in present-day New York, an important element of the narrative because of relatively recent crimes against black people perpetrated by police in America. Here again, the play's thematic interest in tensions between whites and non-whites, specifically African-Americans, has another level of manifestation.

Pops' Apartment

The apartment on Riverside Drive, in which most of the play's action actually takes place, is also a key symbolic element. Its situation, on one of the more affluent streets in New York City, is an ironic one, given the relative lack of income that the play's characters have.

The Roof

Several key scenes take place on the roof of the apartment building in which Pops and his extended "family" live. There is the sense that for the play and for the characters, the roof represents a kind of freedom, openness, and possibility.

Themes and Motifs

Parent-Child Relationships

This is the first of the play's two key themes – that is, thematic elements and explorations that play out in the narrative consistently, vividly, and quite apparently. These sorts of relationships are explored in two main ways: through the relationships of people who are actually connected by blood and birth; and the relationships of people who are tied together by affection, physical proximity, or some other form of connection that seems like what a parent-child relationship could or should be – at least in the minds of the characters.

In terms of the first type of relationship, between biological parents and children, the most obvious example is the relationship between Pops and Junior, full of tension and conflict, but also (as in Act 2, Scene 2) full of unspoken affection. This particular relationship has a powerful, vividly contrasting echo in the relationship between Oswaldo and his estranged father, within which Oswaldo still has hope that something positive can emerge from their conflict, a hope that, much to Oswaldo's drunken disappointment, is completely dashed. Then there is the relationship between Pops and his long-vanished father (the disappointments of which Pops based his entire philosophy of life), and finally, the relationship between Caro and his father. This last is referred to only in passing, and initially as part of a series of lies and manipulations entered into by Caro in order to get Pops to agree to end his lawsuit. There is little or no sense of what the real relationship between the two actually is.

In terms of the second type of relationship, between non-biological friends who have aspects of a parent-child relationship as part of their friendship, it's interesting to note how all the play's examples involve Pops: Pops and Oswaldo, Pops and Lulu, Pops and O'Connor, and in some ways, even Pops and Caro. In all these relationships, Pops is a paternal, or fatherly, figure that the other characters look up to, admire, and are grateful to for providing things that they believe fathers should provide: safety, shelter, food, respect and affection (both given somewhat grumpily), and a sense of something to live up to. The irony is that Pops does all these things in response to his above-mentioned, poor relationship with his own father. Pops has, in some ways, lived up to his goal of being a better father-FIGURE, if not a father to his own discontented son, than his own, runaway father was to him.

Facades and Reality

The second of the play's two major, anchoring themes is the tension between facades and reality, between lies and truth. Many of the play's characters in the play tells lies, or presents a false front to the world. Pops lies about the events of his lawsuit; Caro lies about his own father in order to manipulate Pops into giving up the lawsuit; and,

perhaps most significantly, the Church Lady lies about her identity in order to, as she eventually confesses, rob Pops.

Here it's interesting to note that the younger characters in the play – Junior, Lulu, Oswaldo – seem to be somewhat better at telling the truth than the adults … or, if they're lying, they conceal it better. Junior, for example, never outright says that he's not dealing in stolen goods: but he never actually says he's not. Lulu never reveals whether she's truly pregnant or not; and Oswaldo, in his own way, tells the truth all the time – the truth, that is, as defined by and relating to his impulse and desires of the moment.

The only character who seems to tell the truth the whole time is O'Connor. She, in many ways, is the touchstone, or the measuring stick, by which the facades and lying of the other characters can be evaluated, measured, or contrasted. She tells what she believes to be the truth about Pops' situation with the lawsuit and the police department; and she tells what she believes to be the truth about her and Pops' relationship (a truth that, much to her disappointment, turns out to be an illusion when Pops lumps her in with the manipulative Caro and takes their engagement ring). There is the sense, in fact, that because of this capacity to tell what she sees as her truth, O'Connor is the most vulnerable character in the play: for the others, lies, half-truths, and delusions become a kind of armor, a way of defending themselves against the corrupt, harmful advances of the world.

Race Relations

A third theme plays out in the play with a similar degree of clarity and intensity as the previously discussed two main themes, but with less presence: that is, it comes up less often and is less of a focus of conflict or narrative tension. This is the theme of race relations – specifically, relations between whites and blacks in America, particularly in New York City, and most particularly within the police force.

America has a centuries-old history of tension and conflict between the races that dates back to before that country's Civil War, which was fought for several reasons but was primarily defined and motivated by differing attitudes towards black slavery. Even after the War's conclusion, and for decades since, including the present day, tensions between whites and blacks have been violent, multi-faceted (i.e. playing out in court, in peaceful demonstrations, in violence, and in many aspects of day-to-day life), and seemingly insurmountable.

The narrative suggests that as a black man in contemporary America, Pops has experienced a number of these forms of violence; and that, as a black police officer, Pops has experienced more forms of violence, even from within his own community of fellow cops, than most. This means that the intensity of his bitterness, his resentment, and his anger seems, to him, more than that experienced by most: that intensity fuels the determination - almost obsession - with which he pursues his lawsuit against the City; and, arguably, fuels the tenacity with which he sticks to the lie about being called "nigger" by the rookie police officer that shot him. Pops, it seems throughout the

narrative, is grinding an axe with his lawsuit that has as much to do with the bigger picture of being black in America in general as it does with his own individual experience.

Here it's interesting to note that Junior seems to be less concerned about being black in America than his father, even though, it could be argued, as a young black man he has more reason to be afraid or resentful than his father, young black men being, again arguably, at the most risk of dying young and/or violently. It's also important to note how the white Caro argues against Pops' beliefs and opinions that what happened to him was race-motivated. It's not just about being black, Caro says – which, Pops might say (but doesn't), is exactly what a white man WOULD say.

Hope, Faith, and Possibility

There are two secondary themes developed in subtler, less overt ways throughout the narrative. Unlike the play's other themes, the first is directly spoken of rarely, if ever, but is nonetheless apparent in action, in conversation, and in setting. This is the theme of hope, faith, and possibility.

The play begins with an expression of hope: Oswaldo's belief that he is on the right path towards putting his life on track (i.e. working in counseling, planning to reconcile with his father). Hope and possibility are also explored through the Act 1, Scene 2 conversation between Pops and Lulu, in which the latter says she's pregnant and the former expresses joy and anticipation, the implication being that, for him at least, a baby will change things for the better. Here it's important to note that this is the first time in the play that the action takes place on the roof of the Riverside Drive apartment building where Pops lives, a narrative choice that is echoed in two other scenes in the play both of which suggest, albeit to varying degrees, that this particular setting is tied to this particular theme.

Other explorations of hope and possibility manifest in Pops' determination to win his lawsuit (a hope that has become dark and somewhat obsessive); the belief in Junior that getting away from Riverside Drive, and New York, will, at the very least, bring him new possibilities (this is revealed in the second scene on the roof, late in Act One); and, at the play's conclusion, Pops' hope for a new future in the aftermath of surviving what appears to have been a heart attack. This scene is the third scene to take place on the roof, and the third scene in the play which, once again, ties this particular physical location to this particular thematic element.

Finally, there is O'Connor's increasingly desperate and sad hope that Pops will be the person to walk her down the aisle on her wedding day. In spite of the fact that she uses this hope as a tool to try and manipulate Pops into settling the lawsuit, there is the sense that, in the same way as she seems to be the only character who tells the truth, her hope here is genuine. This is vividly contrasted with Caro's hopes for Pops to end the lawsuit which seems, as the narrative unfolds and in contrast to O'Connor's similar hopes, to be entirely related to selfish motivations and ambition.

Grace and Compassion

The play concludes, in the scene on the roof between Pops and the Church Lady where Pops reveals a transformation in his character, perhaps in his relationship with truths about himself, and almost certainly in his relationship with the world. This is his new belief, revelatory to him, to the Church Lady, to the audience, and the play, that there is something beyond selfish need and the desire to fulfill it at all costs, even at the cost of the truth: compassion and generosity, genuinely felt and genuinely expressed.

It could be argued that this particular thematic contention, expressed through Pops' personal evolution from someone self-motivated and bitter to someone who is ready and able to give freely to others, is in fact a mirror image of the theme relating to facades and reality. In other words, the gestures made or commented on by Pops, in their selflessness, can be seen as simply providing contrast to what has gone before, highlighting the play's emphasis on selfishness and manipulation by providing a vivid, joyful example of the opposite. Here, though, it must be remembered that in structural terms, what happens at a story's conclusion generally suggests that it is, in one way or another, a defining element of that story, and its purpose. In the case of this particular play, Pops' acts of apparent compassion, freedom, and release suggest that the moment, his actions, are what the action of the play has been moving towards all along: this is, the moment suggests, what the story is about … a bitter, angry man finding "grace", as he himself says. There is deep irony in the fact that he arrives at this grace not only as a result of physical illness (i.e. surviving a heart attack), but as the result of the lies and manipulation practiced on him by the Church Lady, and arguably from similar lies and manipulation practiced on him by the other characters.

While Pops seems, at the play's conclusion, to be less aware of the impact on him of the latter, he is fully aware of the impact of the former. It is up to the reader and/or the audience to see the impact of the other characters as acting on Pops in tandem with the actions of the Church Lady. In other words, responding to the practice of ALL the lies in the play leads Pops to a place of choosing not more lies, but a new and different kind of truth – a compassion and generosity that he has, arguably, displayed earlier in the play (i.e. towards lost souls Oswaldo and Lulu) but which, by the story's conclusion, extends to himself, perhaps for the first time in his life.

Styles

Point of View

For the most part, the action of the play unfolds with a focus (point of view) on central character and protagonist Pops Washington. His actions, reactions, and intentions are the primary motivating factor in the action, even when secondary characters (i.e. Junior, Lulu) take focus, however briefly. The story is built around, and defined by, Pops' journey of transformation, which has a number of aspects. First, there is his movement from denial about several aspects of his living situation (i.e. the death of his wife, his relationship with his family, his lawsuit against the city) into an acceptance of various realities and truths. Then there is his movement from a compassion based on a kind of resigned tolerance (i.e. towards Oswaldo, Lulu, and Junior) to a broader, more genuine sense of wanting the well-being of others (i.e. the "orphans" that he tells the "Church Lady" to help through the sale of the ring). Finally, there is a physical movement that metaphorically evokes both the above: his movement out of the apartment that has, in large part, defined his identity for several years and towards a new kind of freedom and possibility. The story is his; the primary point of view is his.

The play's thematic point of view is closely tied to its narrative point of view. In the same way that Pops' journey through the story manifests and relates to the power of transformation, the play's central theme manifests the same thing. If transformation is possible in an opinionated, bitter, wounded elderly man like Pops; if transformation is possible in a life lived in a run-down, battered apartment; if transformation is possible in a socio-political-economic system, such as the one Pops lives in, that is corrupt and poisonous with racism and lies … then, the play seems to be saying, it's possible just about anywhere, leaving hope in the minds (and points of view) of audience members that transformation is possible for the hardened, troubled characters that Pops leaves behind.

Language and Meaning

The first point to note about the work's use of language is that because it is a play, all its various narrative elements (story, plot, character development, themes) are communicated through dialogue – through what people say, how they say it, to whom, when, and where. Why they say it is often more inferred than directly spoken: in the "subtext", or aspects of character identity and meaning that emerge from beneath the words to reveal truths at the heart of the various characters. A second, and related, point, is the way the characters are generally well-individualized in terms of their dialogue. Characters whose lives seem to be lived primarily on the streets (Junior, Oswaldo, Lulu) speak very differently from the characters whose lives are more blue collar, or working class (O'Connor, Caro) – all those characters, in turn, speaking very differently from the Church Lady (with her broken English, which may or may not be part of her assumed, artificial persona) and, most notably, from Pops himself, who speaks

with an intriguing, unique blend of edgy, bitter, street-defined language and the larger vocabulary of the more educated cop he once was.

This leads to a particularly intriguing note about the play's use of language. There are a lot of curse words in the piece. At the same time, sometimes even in the same sentence, characters use words with an intellectual weight, clarity, and depth of meaning that contrasts vividly with the sharper, edgier language around it. It's a bit like seeing a precious stone in a pile of gravel – it stands out for its uniqueness, its clarity, and its polished shape. What's particularly interesting is that this is true of the so-called "street" characters as much as it's true of the so-called "blue collar" characters: Oswaldo and Junior have this kind of word usage as much, if not more noticeably so, than O'Connor and Caro. Pops also has this kind of combination vocabulary, creating a kind of unlikely poetry at times.

Structure

For the most part, the action of the play unfolds in relatively linear fashion: Event A leads to Event B leads to Event C; action leads to reaction; cause leads to effect, all defined by the intentions, needs, and drives of the various characters. The central motivating force, both in terms of the action and the structure that gives shape to that action, is protagonist Pops Washington. Here it's also important to note that, again for the most part, the primary action and structure of the play is set within the boundaries of Pops' Riverside Avenue apartment, anchoring the play's primary narrative line within its walls.

There are three exceptions to this essential structural pattern, exceptions that follow and/or develop a pattern of their own. Three times in the play – twice in Act One, once in Act Two – action moves to the roof of the building in which Pops has his apartment. As noted elsewhere in this analysis, that rooftop setting is evocative of freedom and possibility, one of the play's central themes. What's particularly interesting about this shift of physical setting is that it also tends to evoke a shift in time. The first scene that takes place on the roof (in which Lulu reveals her pregnancy to Pops) is set within the linear timeline of the rest of the play (it could be argued, though, that because Pops and Lulu are smoking marijuana, that their experience is, perhaps, not entirely of time and linear reality). Meanwhile, the other two scenes (between Lulu and Junior in Act 1; between Pops and the Church Lady at the end of the play) take place outside of the linear timeline of the action that takes place in the apartment – more specifically, they are flashbacks, movements backward in time from the action of the play unfolding around them. In the case of the Lulu/Junior scene, the movement backwards is only a few minutes; with the Pops/Church Lady scene, the movement backwards is a few months. The sense here, again, is that hope and possibility exist outside not just the physical (moral?) squalor of the apartment, but also the linear structure of the play that defines the action and events that take place within that squalor.

Quotes

Junior: "Now whatchu want me to do with this envelope from the landlord?" Pops: Let the dog clean his ass with it! I'm a ex-cop, war veteran, senior citizen with a legal rent-control lease from 1978 and I never pay late - I wish they would try to fuck with me.
-- Junior / Pops (Act 1, Scene 1, Part 2)

Importance: This quote functions on a couple of important levels: one, it gives key information about Pops (i.e. who he is, what his situation is); and two, reveals important elements of the plot (i.e. the lease, the ex-cop).

... if you had any integrity, you'd know that an honorable man can't be bought off - an honorable man doesn't just settle a lawsuit 'no fault" and lend his silence to hypocrisy and racism and the grievous violation of all our civil rights.
-- Pops (Act 1, Scene 1, Part 2)

Importance: Again, this quote functions on two key levels. One, it defines Pops' self-image; and two, functions as an ironic contrast to the way most characters in the play, including Pops, behave without real integrity. In that sense, it can be seen, in hindsight, as showing just how self-deluded Pops actually is.

I may look how I look - but that don't mean I AM how I look!
-- Lulu (Act 1, Scene 2)

Importance: In this quote, Lulu manifests the theme of facade in reality, suggesting that what she seems to be is not exactly who she is. What's interesting about this quote is that she never really acts in a way that indicates she actually IS anything other than what she says she is. This, in turn, suggests, that Lulu, like Pops, is in some ways deluded about herself.

You oughta keep in mind that when your father came up in the force in the late '70's - being a black guy didn't exactly put him on the fast track for career advancement, yet he served with distinction and valor. And to that I say once more: 'Salud, Mr. Washington.
-- Caro (to Junior) (Act 1, Scene 3, Part 1)

Importance: A truth and a lie exist simultaneously in this quote: a truth about race relations (evoking one of the play's key themes), and a lie about Caro's respect for Pops (as the play later reveals, Caro has actually very little respect for Pops and what he (Pops) says he stands for.

You're a proud man, I get it. And eight years ago, when you were in the newspapers every day, public opinion running high, the outrage, the call for justice - then absolutely, hold out for all you can get off those bastards - but now? The truth is nobody cares about your case any more except you ... look, do yourself a favor. Sign the nondisclosure. Cash a check with a little weight to it. Live your life a happy man ...
-- Caro (to Pops) (Act 1, Scene 3, Part 2)

Importance: Caro cuts to the chase in this quote, one of the few occasions in which what he says can be perceived as a genuine truth, and not a lie disguised as a truth.

... personally, I would love to be able to agree with you completely, Because if not for the fact that you happen to be totally wrong, you'd probably be right. And I mean that. And that being said, I'm certain that you'll also have to agree with me that - whether we like it or not - the simple fact is that not everything in this world, Walter, is about being fuckin' black!
-- Caro (to Pops) (Act 1, Scene 3, Part 2)

Importance: The white Lieutenant Caro, in this quote, encapsulates a great deal of what the play has to say about race relations, and also what certain elements of white culture, in contemporary American society, says / thinks / feels about black people who argue, among other things, that being black, and being on the receiving end of white prejudice or privilege, pervades every aspect of their lives.

Everybody hates fuckin' cops - even cops hate cops. And everybody especially don't like black cops! White cops were never comfortable with us, black civilians think we Uncle Tom, white civilians think we uppity, and everybody damn else sees we're black and thinks we're somehow not entirely qualified to carry a badge and a gun -
-- Pops (Act 1, Scene 3, Part 2)

Importance: In his general comments on being a police officer, Pops also adds a layer of meaning to the play's thematically central arguments about racism.

God still loves you, Mr. Washington. Don't be too proud to be free. 'Always we are free.' God loves you. And your life can be, believe me, a beautiful life indeed if you can only learn to love God back."
-- The Church Lady (Act 2, Scene 1)

Importance: This is the quote from the Church Lady, in her first appearance, that provides Pops with the inspiration that propels him to the end of his emotional and spiritual journey of transformation: specifically, the comment that "Always we are free", a saying that, as a result of the play's action and his own resultant journey of transformation, he comes to adopt as a guiding principle as he starts a new life at the end of the play.

Well maybe I need to say it! Maybe your son needs to say it! Maybe your wife needed to say it - or to fuckin' hear it - even once! Just once! You ever fuckin' think of that? ... I could be the one in the bed and it'd be the exact same cold fuckin' shit with you. Ask Mom. Yeah. She made excuses for you all her life. But she lived it.
-- Junior (to Pops) (Act 2, Scene 2)

Importance: In this quote, one aspect of the play's key thematic interest in parent-child relationships, Junior vents his deep, long-standing frustration with his mostly silent father. It's important to note that Junior never actually says what he seems to intend to

say, but by the end of the scene from which this quote is taken, it seems pretty clear that he is intending to say, and wanting to hear, the words "I love you".

Trying to live in reaction to my father turned me angry, drunk, and half outta my mind. Don't do the same like me, Son. It ain't necessary. Because in reality, I'm more like my daddy than I thought. And I only learned it the night of my little heart attack last Sunday. And if I survive this, I might just take to the road and travel a little myself - do a little wandering."
-- Pops (to Junior) (Act 2, Scene 2)

Importance: This quote is significant for several reasons: it is one of the play's key references to its theme of parent-child relationships; it reveals a great deal of Pops' perceptions of himself; and it foreshadows the play's conclusion, when the narrative reveals that Pops has done exactly what he says, in this quote, that he might do.

I just want you to walk me down that aisle, Walter. I just want to put all of this behind us ... Junior deserves a second chance. And you deserve to keep your apartment and everything you've worked so hard for. You're like my father. And Dave has grown so fond of you - he so respects your guts and your principles and he really just wants to take you fishing ...
-- O'Connor (to Pops) (Act 2, Scene 3)

Importance: In this quote, coming late in the play and forming part of its climax, O'Connor (one of the few characters in the play who seems to speak the truth regularly and consistently), speaks what she believes to be a truth: that Pops will be better off if he settles the lawsuit; that she has a great deal of respect and affection for him no matter what; and that Caro does too. Later in the scene from which this quote is taken, Caro reveals his own truth, which is somewhat different from how O'Connor perceives him.

I'm just a cog in the wheel, Walter - and so are you! And the wheel's gonna keep turning whether it's gotta grind out your guts or not - either way, the wheel don't feel a fuckin' thing! The wheel don't give a fuck, Walter. And you know that!
-- Caro (to Pops) (Act 2, Scene 3)

Importance: In the midst of his lies and manipulations, Caro - perhaps surprisingly - speaks a truth to Pops. This is the idea that ultimately, all he or any of them is, is a cog in a much larger, ultimately destructive and ruthless and insensitive, machine.

There are orphans somewhere.
-- Pops (Walter) (Act 2, Scene 4)

Importance: This is the final line of the play, a thematic evocation of the kind of sympathetic, compassionate person that Pops (now known as Walter) has become as the result of passing through, and being changed by, the events of the story.