

InsideOUT

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Theatre Company
KENT THOMPSON
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

THE WHALE

THE WHALE
by Samuel D. Hunter



2011/12
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InsideOUT

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Producing Partner:

**Carol E.
WOLF**

Synopsis

CHARLIE: *Go ahead, what's it gonna do?
My internal organs are five feet in at least.*
—The Whale

Charlie is morbidly obese and is taking no steps to improve his health. He is worried about reconnecting with his daughter, Ellie, whom he hasn't seen in 17 years. His friend Liz urges him to go to the hospital for his breathing problems, but he refuses. Elder Thomas, a Mormon missionary who comes to Charlie's door, also pleads with him to seek medical help. But Charlie has no medical insurance and insists his money must go to Ellie. In this touching but humorous play, we see the devastation of loss on one man's life. ■

THE PLAYWRIGHT

SAMUEL D. HUNTER

Samuel is a graduate of NYU, the Iowa Playwrights Workshop and the Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at Julliard. His plays include *I Am Montana* (produced at London's Arcola Theatre, Montana Repertory, developed at the Flea, Seven Devils Playwrights Conference, Ojai Playwrights Conference, Missoula Colony, Julliard New Play Festival, Bay Area Playwrights Festival); *Five Genocides* (upcoming production at Clubbed Thumb; developed at Page 73, Ars Nova, Lark Theatre, translated into Spanish and presented in Mexico City); *Atlasing Sodom* (developed at the Kennedy Center's MFA Playwrights Workshop, Primary Stages, Playwrights Horizons, NNPN National Showcase); *Idaho/Dead Idaho* (developed at the Seven Devils Playwrights Conference, Ars Nova, Julliard, Lark Theatre, Rattlestick, 2009 Princess Grace Award runner-up); *Norman Rockwell Killed My Father* (developed at the 2005 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference); *Abraham (A Shot in the Head)* (produced in the Blueprint Series at Ontological-Hysteric); *Hell's Canyon* (developed at Julliard, LAByrinth Summer Intensive) and *The Whale* (developed at 24Seven Lab, reading at LAByrinth). ■

<http://www.clydefitchreport.com/2010/05/special-5-questions-director-kip-fagan-interviews-playwright-sam-hunter/>

MORBID OBESITY

CHARLIE: *I haven't been able to weigh myself in years; it's hard to know.
Five-fifty? Six hundred? —The Whale*

In their book *Eating Disorders and Obesity*, Brownell and Fairburn write, “Morbid obesity can be defined as an excess of body fat.”¹ A more updated definition is given by the *New York Times* as “patients who are 50 or 100 pounds over their ideal body weight. Alternatively, a BMI (body mass index) value greater than 39 may be used to diagnose morbid obesity.”²

Medical complications caused by obesity are: hypertension (high blood pressure), stroke, heart disease, gallbladder trouble (bile becomes saturated with cholesterol), respiratory conditions, cancer (especially breast and colon), arthritis, gout, diabetes, sleep apnea (cessation of breathing while sleeping) and somnolence (feeling drowsy during the day because of sleep deprivation).

The causes of morbid obesity are, of course, consuming large amounts of food in a day and genetics. Although genetic causes are not the main reason for super-morbid obesity, most obese people show some hereditary factors such as overweight parents. Some environmental reasons include the type of foods available, lack of physical activity and the quantity of foods available.

Psychological causes figure in becoming morbidly obese. These are boredom, anxiety, stress, trauma and low self-esteem. Certain illnesses can cause obesity such as hypothyroidism (an underactive thyroid), depression, Cushing’s syndrome (the body exposed to high levels of the hormone cortisol), and the use of certain antidepressants or steroids.

The latest obesity statistics in the United States in 2009 show that “two-thirds of American adults are either obese or overweight; 49 states are affected with the problem out of 50 states in this country...and Colorado has the lowest adult obese rate with 18.9 % of obese people.”³

Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician and the father of Western medicine, had suggestions for the remedy of obesity. He recommended that people “perform hard labor, sleep on a hard bed, eat only once each day, eat fatty food for greater satiation and walk naked as long as possible.” ■

1. Brownell and Fairburn, eds. p. 386.

2. [health/nytimes](http://health.nytimes.com)

3. obesity.ygoy.com

Brownell, Kelly D. and Fairburn, Christopher G., eds. *Eating Disorders and Obesity*. New York: *The Guilford Press*, 1995.

<http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/symptoms/morbid-obesity/overview.html>

<http://obesity.ygoy.com/2010/02/24/five-major-causes-for-super-morbid-obesity>

MOBY DICK

ELDER THOMAS: (reading) *In the amazing book Moby Dick by the author Henry [Herman] Melville, the author recounts his story of being at sea.*

—The Whale

Elder Thomas reads this passage from a student's essay. The on-line students, whom Charlie is tutoring in essay writing, are one of his few connections to the outside world. Charlie knows he is dying, but like Ahab, the protagonist of *Moby Dick*, he will fight against fate rather than consign himself to the hospital. Ahab chooses to pursue the great white whale and forsake the comforts of home, while Charlie makes the choice to refuse medical help and reconnect with his daughter Ellie.

Like the sailors aboard the Pequod (Ahab's sailing vessel), Charlie is isolated. He communicates via the computer with his students and the few friends who come by, but because he is so immense that he cannot move far. Like Ahab with his wooden leg, Charlie is physically and psychologically damaged. Ahab is hampered by this leg and his monomania to capture the whale; Charlie is impaired by his size, the death of his lover and the overwhelming desire to connect with his daughter.

Clark Davis sees *Moby Dick* as a "struggle to find meaning in a complex and hostile world."² Ishmael, the narrator of the book, finds multiple perspectives in his friend Queequeg and gathers as much information and as many opinions as he can so as to judge a situation as neither good nor bad. Charlie, too, tries to find meaning in his limited world. He reads all the books he can, watches TV and scans the internet, but is restricted by his size.

Melville saw man living utterly alone in a world where overwhelming questions have no answers. Perhaps D. H. Lawrence summed up the situation best when he wrote that Melville "pined for a perfect relationship. But he knew in his heart that such communion cannot be because each soul is alone, and the aloneness of each soul is a double barrier to a perfect relationship between two beings."³ ■

1. Roberts, p. 39.

2. Stanley, p. 203.

3. Ibid, p. 206.

Chase, Richard, ed. *Melville: a Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood, Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

Roberts, James L. *Melville's Moby Dick*. Lincoln, NE: Cliff Notes, 1993.

Stanley, Deborah A., ed. *Novels for Students Vol. 7*. Detroit, MI: Gale Group, 1999.

MORMONISM

ELDER THOMAS: *I represent the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints?
We're sharing a message for all faiths?*
—The Whale

The *Book of Mormon*, written by Joseph Smith after he reportedly transcribed and translated text on golden plates he discovered in 1830, has several characteristics. It has a complicated narrative as told by Nephi, Mormon and Moroni and has a unifying theme of “God’s mercies are ever extended to those who exercise faith.”¹

The *Book of Mormon* tells the story of an ancient band of Israelites who fled the Holy Land and went to Central America 600 years before the birth of Christ. Descended from Lehi, a Hebrew who was divinely directed to lead his family from Jerusalem to the Americas, they lived in the Americas from about 600 BC to 421 AD. Lehi’s descendants then split into two groups, the Nephites and the Lamanites. Nephites were thought to be God’s chosen people; they worked hard and were virtuous, but in becoming prosperous, they lost their beliefs. The Lamanites, who had become nomads, rose up in violence and conquered the Nephites.

As is referenced in the play, Mormon Church policy condemns homosexuality as sinful behavior. “One of the tenets of the Mormon doctrine is the Law of Chastity; it permits sexual relations only between a husband and wife who are legally married.”² A fundamental doctrine of Mormonism is the taming of appetites and passions; self-mastery is a goal of the faithful and all sinful acts must be repented. ■

1. Hardy, p. 8.

2. [whatmormonsbelieve](http://www.whatmormonsbelieve.org)

Hardy, Grant. *Understanding the Book of Mormon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Williams, Jean Kinney. *The Mormons*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1996.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Mormon

<http://www.whatmormonsbelieve.org/homosexuality.html>

MORMON MISSIONARIES

LIZ: *You grew up in Iowa and they sent you to Idaho on your mission?*
—The Whale

Elder Thomas (when a Mormon goes on a mission he is called “Elder”) prefers to carry out his mission alone because of difficulties with his partner, but most Mormon missionaries travel in pairs. Missionary work is a fundamental principle of the church; there are 56,000 missionaries in 330 organized missions around the world. Every young man between the ages of 19 to 25 (and some women, too) are expected to fulfill a mission and pay his/her own way with a family’s help. The uniform for each is dark suits (or skirts) and white shirts. The first Mormon missionary was Samuel Smith, brother of Joseph, who did his proselytizing in upstate New York.

At the Missionary Training Center the young Elder receives intensive language training, studies the Gospel and learns how to teach the Gospel. While at the center he provides community service ten hours a week.

The training centers are like small universities and are located in “Provo, Utah; Preston, England; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Mexico City, Mexico; Santiago, Chile; Bogota, Columbia; Lima, Peru; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Hamilton, New Zealand; Manila, Philippines; Tokyo, Japan; Seoul, South Korea; Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Madrid, Spain; Accra, Ghana and Johannesburg, South Africa.”¹ It is generally understood that every member of the Mormon Church is a missionary and should set a good example for his neighbors.

To help the young Elders focus on their work, missionaries have limited contact with family and friends during their two-year stint. They are only allowed to call their families twice each year – on Mother’s Day and Christmas. Once a week they can exchange e-mail or a letter with their families or friends. They are prohibited from watching TV, going to the movies or using the Internet except for e-mail.

The missionary’s schedule is fairly grueling. They are up at 6:30 AM for breakfast, 30 minutes of exercise, then two hours of scripture study. They then leave their place of residence to proselytize. Elder Joshua Wood, 21, of Idaho Falls, Idaho says, “Life can be very lonely. There is plenty of daily rejection and frustration.”² He and his partner, Elder Andrew Swindle, cover West Miami, Coral Gables and portions of Little Havana, Florida;

they and the 178 other missionaries who work in Broward, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Monroe and the Bahamas are expected to baptize 100 new members each month.

Missionaries live in apartments provided and paid for by the Church, but their places are very spartan. Their only day off is Monday and that is usually spent doing laundry or food shopping.

Bloomberg Businessweek published an article in June 2011 titled “God’s MBAs: Why Mormon Missions Produce Leaders.” According to the article, those who studied at the Provo, Utah site “have gone on to become among the most distinguished and recognizable forces in American business and civic life.”³ These include Mitt Romney (mission France) who amassed \$190 to 250 million as head of Bain capital, was governor of Massachusetts and currently running for US President and his Republican rival Jon Huntsman, Jr. (mission Taiwan), former governor of Utah and ambassador to China. The list also includes JetBlue founder David Neeleman; Chief Executive Officer of the Bank of Credit Suisse Eric Varvel; self-help mogul Stephen Covey who wrote the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*; Kim Clark, former dean of Harvard Business School and Gary Crittenden, who has served as CFO for Citigroup, American Express and Sears-Roebuck. ■

1. www.dearelder.com

2. www.rickross.com

3. www.businessweek.com

http://www.dearelder.com/index/inc_name/Mormon_Missionaries

<http://www.rickross.com/reference/mormon/mormon160>. Html

http://www.business.com/magazine/content/11_25/b4233058977933.htm

JONAH AND THE WHALE – BIBLE STORY SUMMARY

The story of Jonah and the Whale is one of the oddest accounts in the Bible. It opens with God speaking to Jonah, son of Amittai, commanding him to preach repentance to the people of Ninevah. Jonah found this order unbearable; Ninevah was known for its wickedness; it was also the capital of the Assyrian empire, one of Israel's fiercest enemies. Jonah was a stubborn fellow and did just the opposite of what he was told. He went to the seaport of Joppa and booked passage on a ship to Tarshish, heading directly away from Ninevah. The Bible tells us Jonah "ran away from the Lord."

In response, God sent a violent storm which threatened to break the ship to pieces. The terrified crew cast lots, determining that Jonah was responsible for the storm. Jonah told them to throw him overboard. First they tried rowing to shore, but the waves grew even higher. Afraid of God, the sailors finally tossed Jonah into the sea and the waters suddenly grew calm. The crew made a sacrifice to God swearing their vows to him.

Instead of drowning, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish which God, of course, provided. In the belly of the whale Jonah repented and cried out to God in prayer. He praised God, ending with the eerily prophetic statement, "Salvation comes from the Lord." (Jonah 2:9)

Jonah was in the giant fish three days. God commanded the whale and it expired the reluctant prophet onto dry land. This time Jonah obeyed God. He walked to Ninevah proclaiming that in 40 days the city would be destroyed. Surprisingly, the Ninevites believed Jonah's message and repented, wearing sackcloth and covering themselves in ashes. God had compassion on them and did not destroy them.

Again Jonah questioned God because Israel's enemies had been spared. When Jonah stopped outside the city to rest, God provided a vine to shelter him from the hot sun. Jonah was happy with the vine, but the next day God provided a worm that ate the vine, making it wither. Growing faint in the sun, Jonah complained again. God scolded Jonah for being concerned about a vine, but not about Ninevah. Moral of the story: God expresses concern even for the wicked. ■

<http://christianity.about.com/od/biblestorysummaries/a/Jonah-And-The-Whale.htm>

ONLINE EDUCATION

CHARLIE: *It was an essay. It's my job. I do online tutoring; online classes on expository writing.* —The Whale

The beginning of the World Wide Web in 1991 altered the way we exchange information, ideas and communicate with one another. It has permitted people all over the world to connect with each other in ways that were never before imagined. This new form of communication has had a huge impact on the world of education.

Online education was launched in the corporate world.

In the 1980s companies began using computer-based programs to train new employees, but this practice was severely limited because of the technology of the time. It wasn't until the invention of the Internet that this practice began to grow in efficiency. Using the Internet, companies could train new employees who lived in remote areas and also chat with them online in order to answer any questions.

From the mid 1990s through the early 2000s, computer technology and the Internet grew enormously. New forms of multimedia changed the way we use the Internet in order to communicate. As a result, online education has become more efficient and even more accessible.

The invention of webcams allowed instructors to interact with their students in real time. In this day and age online education allows students to access information and their instructors in a variety of ways. Not only do they have access to text-based lessons, but also to images and videos provided by the instructor. Also, assignments can be done and submitted online, bypassing the need to print or mail anything.

Today there are many kinds of online courses available for different learning styles and levels. Some courses are entirely online while others combine both online and in-class coursework. There are online courses available for adult learners, college students and even K-12 students.

But there can be problems with online education. Establishing a solid online education program takes time; years may pass before a model is perfected or before the program matures. During the program's development the creators may be forced to adjust policies and practices, which can interfere with the coursework of the enrolled students. Because online courses are extremely expensive to create, funding can be a problem; because online programs physically separate students from the real classroom, online courses do not meet the traditional criteria for outside funding.

Compared with traditional face-to-face courses, online students interact less with their educators and peers. In addition, their limited social contact is generally lower in quality. Experienced teachers realize that some interaction which happens in the traditional classroom cannot be duplicated online.

While there are limitations, there certainly are benefits to online education. One of these is that tuition rates are much less expensive than at traditional academic institutions. According to a report presented at the No Child Left Behind summit, many states are funding online learning through state-funded virtual school programs, which either reduce tuition or waive it completely. Students of an online school can apply for federal financial aid if the school is accredited by the US Department of Education.

Online courses can motivate certain types of students to attain higher levels of academic excellence. Students who profit from virtual learning include those who feel more confident communicating with teachers and peers online rather than in class; students with learning difficulties or those who simply have trouble excelling in traditional classrooms.

One highly praised benefit of online education institutions is flexibility. Students can access their educators and course material from anywhere at any time. More and more people who have full-time jobs or other responsibilities that prevent them from attending traditional institutions are turning to online courses.

The use of the Internet for educational purposes has greatly increased the potential for reaching new learners. Online courses are available to students who either choose not to or cannot attend school in traditional settings. In addition, educators can instruct a large number of pupils; therefore, online courses are able to easily accommodate a greater number of students.

Additionally, the advent of online learning is increasing educational opportunities for atypical students, such as incarcerated youths, dropouts, hospitalized or homebound individuals, persons with physical disabilities, home-schooled students and those who have been suspended. Online learning can also benefit K-12 schools. Additionally, online classes can serve as an alternative to substitute teachers but only in small schools with small classes.

Online courses offer educational resources in multiple media formats. They support the use of email and newsgroups and real time communication such as chat rooms, webcasting and audio/video technology among teachers and students. Such discourse may inspire self-reflection among learners, which online educators hope will help their students engage in deeper learning. ■

1. www.onlineeducation.org

<http://www.onlineeducation.org/history-online-education>

<http://www.onlineeducation.org/negative-aspects-online-education>

<http://www.onlineeducation.org/positive-aspects-online-education>

GLOSSARY

“Song of Myself” is a poem by Walt Whitman. It is a combination of biography, sermon, meditation and explores the possibilities for communion between individuals.

Biofeedback is a form of alternative medicine in which one learns to control bodily functions such as blood pressure using your mind. One is connected to electrical sensors that help measure and receive information about the body.

Ambien is a prescription medicine used for the short term treatment of insomnia, as well as some brain disorders. It can have a hallucinatory effect or cause uncommon and even dangerous behavior in certain individuals.

The Great Gatsby is a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald set among the very wealthy on Long Island, NY, in the 1920s. ■

CONNECT

A series of free discussions providing a catalyst for discussion, learning and appreciation of the productions

Perspectives - Denver Center Theatre Company's own "Creative Team" and community experts host interactive, topical discussions with attendees that provide a unique perspective on the production. This provides an in-depth connection that makes the stage experience even more rewarding.

1/13, 6pm, Jones Theatre

Talkbacks - Perhaps the best way to fully appreciate a production is by engaging in a stimulating dialogue with your fellow audience members and the actors who bring it to life.

1/22, Post-show

Theatre & Theology - In our continued partnership with Pastor Dan Bollman with the Rocky Mountain Evangelical Lutheran Synod and cast members, this discussion examines the relevant connections to the productions through a theological lens.

1/24, Post-show

Higher Education Advisory Discussions - Audience members gain scholarly insight into the productions through discussions, facilitated by faculty members from regional colleges and universities.

1/29, Post-show

IN CONVERSATION

Sunday, Jan 22, 11am
Conservatory Theatre
(Newman Building, 1101 13th St., 3rd floor)

Engage, Experience, Reflect

- Engage in a pre-show dialogue with local and regional authorities about the themes and issues of the current production
- Share in the experience of watching the matinee performance
- Reflect upon the performance, sharing your perspective, in a post-show setting

Modern religious doctrines differ significantly on the issue of homosexuality. While some are accepting and inclusive of people with differing sexual orientations, many other religions take a negative, and at times perhaps a hostile view of people who are gay. This negative perception makes it difficult for homosexuals wishing to have a spiritual connection find a place of belonging in order to express their faith. Why do gay people being shunned by organized religion still struggle for religious inclusion? What role do religions that adamantly condemn homosexuality play in the negative self-image and suicide rate of young people in the United States? Has there been a recent shift in religious attitudes towards homosexuality? If so, how has this shift towards more liberal and inclusive congregations influenced the openness of homosexuals within a denomination?

Use promo code CONVERSATION to purchase tickets to this matinee. Participation in the pre and post show dialogues is free.

QUESTIONS

PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of being “morbidly obese?” What are some of the causes and effects of being morbidly obese in today’s society?

POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

1. What does the title of the play, *The Whale*, mean to you? What are the literary allusions to whales in the play and why are they used? How do the literary references inform the story?
2. How would you characterize the relationships that Charlie has in the play? Why is Charlie trying to reconnect with his estranged daughter? Why does he listen to Elder Thomas’s testament?
3. Why is Liz helping Charlie? Why are they friends? What tests their friendship?
4. Charlie asks his on-line students to write “something truthful.” How does this play comment on truth? What truth is Charlie trying to discover?
5. How would you describe Ellie’s actions toward Elder Thomas? Are her motives selfish or is she trying to help him?
6. Before you die, is there a piece of literature that you would like to read one last time? Explain why you would pick this piece of literature?