PLAYING FOR HIGH STAKES: Theatricality, Power, and the Human Condition in George F. Walker's Drama

by

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ABSTRACT

PLAYING FOR HIGH STAKES: Theatricality, Power, and the Human Condition in George F. Walker's Drama.

George Walker's exaggerated style has elicited both condemnation and praise from critics who are divided on the merits of such an approach. A focus on style, while valid, neglects Walker's consistent thematic concern with power, specifically the power within human relationships. This paper will, therefore, examine Walker's use of exaggeration as a manifestation of his thematic concerns with power.

The first chapter argues that two early plays, Bagdad Saloon, Beyond Mozambique and demonstrate Walker experimenting - both in the themes of his drama and in his own dramatic technique - with power as an ability to attract attention. In the dramatic personae of each play, an overabundance of famous individuals not only guarantees viewer attention, it also precipitates a chaotic power struggle between the needs of the individual for recognition, and the needs of the community for order. These early plays demonstrate they way in which Walker's desire as a playwright to make "connections" (interview, 74)

with his audience manifests itself as an exploration of the links between staging and power.

The second chapter examines a shift in focus from the famous to the authoritarian in Zastrozzi, the Master of Discipline. Through his violent theatricality, Zastrozzi dominates all other characters, generating a fear of powerful individuals, while simultaneously stimulating the community's need for order at any cost. The chapter will consider Walker's movement away from borrowed characters toward a personal style described as "high stakes realism" (Interview, 71), a dramatic technique that attempts to be both overblown and realistic. Zastrozzi's abuse of physical power is compellingly visible, seducing the audience, on stage and off, into witnessing his crimes with a degree of fascination, even pleasure. Walker's "realism" springs from a "high stakes" visibility that implicates the community in Zastrozzi's crimes by revealing a powerful need within the community for the leaders they both create and fear.

The final chapter follows Walker's development through Criminals in Love and Better Living. Walker's "high stakes realism" continues to narrow its focus by examining the exaggerated emotions found in the modern family. In these later plays, the absence of the father creates a power vacuum, allowing the emotional needs of the community to dominate the stage. The paradoxical conjunction of fear and

need in the relationship between individual and community continues, becoming central to Walker's assessment of the "human condition" (Criminals 11). As his work matures, it becomes increasingly obvious that it is this realistic, yet paradoxical condition that drives Walker's characters to such exaggerated behavior.

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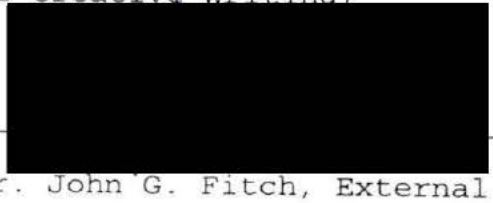

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

In his review of George Walker's Escape from Happiness, David Richards puts forward his own literary maxim to accommodate Walker's exaggerated style. Richards suggests that: "some of the actors can be hysterical all of the time, and all of the characters can be hysterical some of the time. But all of the characters cannot be hysterical all of the time" (6). This criticism is repeated by other critics who feel that Walker's "form of presentation can't support the weight of the ideas and situations his script presents us with" (Harrison 14); that his plays are nothing but "extravagant attitudinizing" (Astington 65).

There is no denying an element of hysteria at work in Walker's plays. Opening stage directions for Bagdad Saloon call for: "cacophony," "discarded things," "a great din" (5). Walker's early plays are particularly susceptible to this criticism. Plays such as Bagdad Saloon and Beyond Mozambique are constructed of readily recognized cultural icons and generic types, components that, in their profusion and exaggerated presentation, disrupt rather than unite. Stein (Gertrude), the literary personality, is mismatched with the gunfighter Doc Halliday; Rocco, the mad scientist, is married to a woman who believes she is in a Chekhov play.

Although Walker has been harshly criticized for the hysteria he places on stage, praise centers just as consistently on this element of extremity. His work is "inspired mania" (Johnson 91). It has an "addictive theatricality" (Kareda 46). Stephen Haff describes Walker's work as "articulate, populist Spoken Opera"(79). These observations are interesting, not only because they point to an important, if contentious, element in Walker's work - his stylistic exaggeration; they also indicate the degree to which Walker's thematic concerns with power have been ignored.

While Walker's stylistic exaggeration has attracted considerable attention, it has not developed in isolation. His technique has, in fact, developed in response to a consistent interest in the ways power functions in human relationships. In Walker's work, the community both needs and fears the individual; with equal force, the individual needs yet disrupts the community. A combination of need and fear binds Walker's characters together. His exaggerated style forces these conflicting elements out into the open where they engage in a violent struggle for supremacy. It is this paradoxical attraction/repulsion that constitutes Walker's vision of the "human condition" (Criminals, 11), a condition that often produces hysteria as a realistic response to a basic human paradox.

To demonstrate the manner in which stylistic exaggeration and thematic concerns develop in concert, this

paper will pursue a chronological assessment of Walker's work. Initially, it will consider the growth of Walker as a playwright, beginning with early plays that experiment with borrowed, well-known characters displaying well-defined needs. Walker exaggerates these writing techniques, and the familiar characters he borrows, to examine power as the ability to command attention. Commenting on his own dramatic powers, Walker states that he doesn't "want to be judged as an artist, it's not about that, it's about getting attention, and making connections" (Interview, 73). Although he claims to be unconcerned about his status as an artist, Walker aggressively pursues his connections with the audience by exploring the power of the famous individual to command the attention of the community, and, by extension, his own position as playwright. The first chapter will take note of the similarities between Walker's use of well-known, borrowed personalities and modern marketing techniques that attempt to exercise economic power over the community. By recognizing the audience's role in the creation of famous personalities, Walker identifies power as originating within the community. It is, paradoxically, a power that must be embodied by an individual to become visible and active.

Harrison was correct in noting that Walker's early plays were not yet equal to the "weight" of his subject matter. The chaotic overabundance of famous personalities struggling

for viewer attention often produces a hysteria that confuses and disturbs the audience. In Zastrozzi, the Master of Discipline, Walker's exaggerated style addresses power in the more unified and visible form of the dictator. By narrowing his focus to one powerful individual actively imposing order on his world, Walker recognizes the realistic needs of the community for order. By making power completely visible, Walker both attracts and implicates the audience, on stage and, by analogy, in the theatre, in Zastrozzi's oppressive acts. Walker describes his dramatic technique as "high stakes realism" (Interview, 71), a condition in which power, made visible by an exaggerated style, proves irresistibly attractive, both to the individuals who desire it, and the communities that fear it.

In his later plays, Walker addresses questions of family unity and love, questions that have, in many ways, haunted much of his earlier work. Walker's examination of the relationships between individual and community narrows further to an examination of the emotional relationships found within the smallest of communities, the family. This focus on the family allows Walker to again violently repel yet attract the spectator. By exposing the family's powerful emotional needs, Walker compels the spectator to recognize those emotions as uniquely human.

Better Living and Criminals in Love highlight the powerful emotional needs generated by the absence of the father. Lacking a powerful leader, the emotional needs of

the family expand and violently struggle to fill this vacuum. This struggle, as seen throughout Walker's work, leads to a conclusion that the destructive nature of the "human condition" springs, in large part, from the paradoxical relationship between individual and community. Although Walker is unable to resolve this paradox, the struggle itself becomes the most compelling argument against what would otherwise be a very pessimistic assessment of his work. His characters are simply "humans unleashed" (Haff 78); placed within an impossible paradox they are violent, confused, and undeniably human.

CHAPTER ONE

WALKER'S USE OF THEATRICALITY

> Be aggressive. Presume that you are famous. Let the world prove you wrong. (Bagdad Saloon 71)

When George Walker began writing plays for Factory Lab in 1971, he became part of an alternative theatre scene that, according to Ken Gass, would move Canadian theatre "away from our colonial upbringing" (7). Gass, then artistic director at Factory Lab, makes this observation not just as an introduction to Walker's work, but to justify his policy of producing only new, Canadian playwrights. This policy did not spring from any "passionate nationalism" (7). Rather, it was a means of "escaping the Canadian theatre rut of following fashion"(7).

Whatever the intention of Factory Lab's policy, it provided Walker with a lengthy apprenticeship period, allowing him the opportunity to experiment and adapt rapidly to audience feedback. Walker admits that his exposure to the theatre was extremely limited at the time of his first plays. It is, therefore, not surprising that his work should draw on television, film, and classical literature. As will

be discussed in this chapter, Walker's borrowing springs not so much from a postmodern desire to subvert the familiar, or a desire to escape fashion; rather, it grows out a personal urge to connect with his audience, and thereby succeed as a playwright.

In many ways, Walker is more the salesman than the subversive artist, providing a great variety of entertainment possibilities in his first plays. Factory Lab allowed him to respond quickly to audience reception of his efforts. Walker identifies this populist urge as mo tivated by a need for "getting attention, and making connections" (Interview, 73). As will be discussed, his early work reveals this concept of "connections" to be intimately linked to his initial understanding of scriptwriting as a process of aggressively attracting attention, between the characters on stage, and between the stage and the members of the audience.

This chapter will focus on two early plays, Bagdad Saloon and Beyond Mozambique. Initially, these plays provide the audience with familiar faces and recognizable settings. An overabundance of the well-known, however, disrupts rather than reassures the audience. This confusion is increased by Walker's violent theatricality, a stylistic technique that entertains by exaggerating the individual status of famous characters to the point of conflict. This violent confrontation of the familiar guarantees audience attention; it also raises questions about the nature of power. Although

power manifests itself in the violent struggle between famous individuals on stage, the nature of fame implies that the source of power must reside within the audience. This chapter will trace the development of a stylistic technique that aggressively attempts to attract attention, and the way that the nature of this attractiveness shifts, from surface recognition to the power that fame implies. The presence of power as a thematic by-product of Walker's stylistic technique is not clearly defined in these early works. The chaos on stage at times threatens to overwhelm the audience. These plays are less than masterpieces; Walker's need to powerfully attract attention, however, provides an intriguing hint at a growing relationship between his stylistic and thematic concern with power.

Bagdad Saloon opens with the stage directions: "Cacophony. Shadows. Trumpet Calls. Arabian pop music. Singing. Banging. A great din. The entire cast taking part" (20). Into this cacophony Walker places a cast of recognizable characters: Ahrun, the king of some ill-defined Eastern kingdom, is engaged in a search for "fame...the only excuse for existence" (30). He has brought together four famous Americans, two from high culture, two from low, to supply his search with "Purpose, Glamor.. Mystique" (55). Gertrude Stein and Henry Miller are both well-recognized literary figures. Miller's character includes, schizophrenically, two other literary greats, one American, one British: "I'm a literary reincarnate. Three lives. The

first John Donne, the second, Herman Melville. The third, I myself, yours truly" (38). Doc Halliday, a gunfighter, is a recognizable part of American Western mythology. Doc is as much a representation of a genre as he is a character, the two being inseparable in the American film western. While Dolly Stilletto, a prostitute who had her picture taken with Doc in Kansas in 1860 is less well known, both are recognizable components of the western genre. Aladdin, without a lamp, is confident nothing bad will happen to him: "I'm too innocent" (22). Ivanhoe Jones is the freak son of Doc and Dolly, a "short, sprawling mass with a deformed face. Ivanhoe has a language. His language consists of 'Snork,' 'Trebble,' 'Rufe,' 'Enuff,' and 'Uh.' Nothing more. Nothing less. He is a "gigantic darling" (79).

As an experimenting playwright, Walker assumes his audience will recognize these literary figures; he also assumes a certain entertainment value will accompany each of the characters. In Bagdad Saloon, characters are already famous, preexistent, and as such, they are already developed. North American audiences would recognize the western gunfighter; they might have some awareness of the literary figures. These famous personalities, therefore, provide a safe, if potentially confusing framework for a developing playwright.

> Sara: What do you want from all your nonsense?
> Aladdin: Mystery. (Pause) The O.K. Corral. The Texas Rangers, Paul Revere, Donald Duck, Jessie Owens, Annie Oakley, Betty Crocker, Buster Keaton, Robert E. Lee, Aunt Jemima, George Washington, George Washington

> Carver, the Wright Brothers, Charles Lindburg, those men on the moon and what's so grand about the Grand Canyon? (67)

Walker, however, is not content with his characters' historical status as literary or film giants. He inflates them further.

> Doc Halliday the infamous killer is now eighty years older. True, he does not appear to have aged at all. But I think I have found the reason for this. It is because he - like so many Americans of his type - is immortal. (33)

This desire for immortality, voiced by characters who struggle for the recognition they already command, highlights Walker's curiosity about the nature of fame. Parody would be a predictable outgrowth of this type of characterization, but Walker is more interested in the phenomenon of fame.

The accepted attitude toward fame glorified in the American dream and American film (i.e. anyone can become president/movie star/giant) implies that an individual's inner worth is reflected in his achieved status, a stature attained by great or honorable acts as in the traditional sense of the heroic. In fact, fame, or Walker's sense of the heroic, has little to do with interior qualities, and everything to do with surface detail. Thomas Schatz, commenting in Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System, deals with fame as it appears in the celebrity. "A particular celebrity may be liked or disliked; what is important is his or her recognition level." He goes on to note that:

> the very existence of royalty and aristocracy, whether of birth or of media, implies that celebrities fulfill human needs; since they did not exist we had to create them. (84)

There is something undeniable about the importance of the audience in the presentation of the celebrity, even the fictive presentation of a character playing a famous personality. The celebrity's presence makes the statement, "you know me," to which all in the audience, all who have been exposed to the celebrity, respond "yes." This affirmation recognizes a preexistent audience, one that has already transferred attention to the character.

The affinity between the preexistent audience and the audience in Walker's theatre establishes a sense of community, a comfortable placement from which to view Walker's work. For the spectator, this is the initial connection, the beginning of a recognizable landscape - and the beginnings of Walker's success as a playwright. Walker's abundance of familiar faces is certain to attract attention. It is also certain to disrupt the sense of community so recently established. As Ahrun observes, one must surround oneself "with familiar things, because the world is conspiring to deprive you of your senses" (68).

Ahrun's search for the meaning and security of fame provides a bare plot line, but the play is experimental; it is less the development of a narrative than a series of exaggerations, of characters posturing for recognition. Walker's style makes an initial connection by forcefully attracting attention, and by touching upon a basic human

need for famous people as discussed by Schatz. Urjo Kareda describes Bagdad Saloon as "a phenomenal leap forward, a powerful, original work of almost addictive theatricality" (46). With such an abundance of famous characters, theatricality is essential for survival in Bagdad Saloon. Walker's increasingly violent theatricality draws not only on audience ability and need to recognize the famous, it also touches upon the power within the community to confer status, and on the community's fear of the violent, famous individuals it creates.

Dolly grabs Doc's hair, puts a knife under his chin, yanks his head back and observes: "I've been having nightmares, John. I slit open your jugular vein. But you don't die" (63). The odd juxtaposition of the known, and the inflated animosity the characters bear toward each other challenges the undeniable, creating a disturbing paradox wherein the audience must respond both "yes" and "no" to his creation: Yes, we, the audience, recognize these characters as drawn from the community. However, these members of the community are not acting appropriately. They are viciously individual and disruptive. This "Yes"/ "no" response presents a possible point of contact with postmodernism. Postmodernism, with its inclination to install and subvert, does not, however, adequately address the needs of a playwright who claims to pursue "high stakes realism" (Interview, 71). Familiar personalities like Stein and Doc might also be labeled as parodic figures. Again,

parody is not the connection that Walker seeks. As will be discussed throughout this paper, Walker does not seek to subvert, or to ridicule; rather, he seeks his own realistic assessment of the human experience, an assessment that can only be found in the exaggerated behavior of his characters.

By forcing these famous people into a confrontation with each other, Walker generates entertainment. As this confrontational style becomes even more violent, it has a secondary effect of being simultaneously reassuring and threatening. This paradox, produced by a stylistic technique, in turn highlights power as an element of entertainment, and the process by which power is conveyed from the anonymous crowd to the famous individual. As Stein says: "Be aggressive. Presume that you are famous. Let the world prove you wrong" (71). Although this secondary effect is much more developed in later plays, the antecedents of a merger between stylistic exaggeration and thematic concerns with fame and power are present.

Stein's technique of aggressively presuming fame, and then challenging the world "prove her wrong," (71) attracts recognition and then converts this recognition to power. She taunts the other characters to disprove her fame. Although entertainment is the intended product of the relationship between Stein and the audience, the struggles for fame between the characters are synonymous with a struggle to wrest power from the audience. As each character tries in

turn to gather attention, each aspires to the power that moves from the community to the individual.

Stein's tools are words. Doc threatens with his gun. Dolly uses a knife. Although they threaten with physical power, the power these characters seek from each other, "immortality," is a power that must come from the community, either because of community need for the celebrities they create, or because of the community fears of the disorder around them. Walker's assumption, that his audience will recognize the famous, also anticipates that the audience will be unable to disprove Stein's claim to fame, that is, they will be unable to withdraw the power they have already given her. Walker's eclectic drama surveys many famous personalities.

> Ahrun: Classical heroes. Lear, Othello, Prospero.
> Servant: Ambitious men.
> Ahrun: Heroes! Classical artists. Rubens, Renoir...
> Servant: Talented men.
> Ahrun: Famous men.
> Servant: Ambitious men.
> Ahrun: Fame is the artist's only excuse for existence. And fame is every man's right. That's logic.
> Servant: Poorly constructed.
> Ahrun: Logic.
> Servant: And the Americans?
> Ahrun: They're only concerned with being legendary. (57)

The importance of this abundance of personae lies not so much in its criticism of American character traits, or in the "poorly constructed" process wherein important fictitious men are equal to important historical figures. The by-product of Walker's exaggerated style is a thematic exploration of the nature of fame - fame as a superficial

ability to command attention as described in Schatz's discussion of celebrity; fame as the product of merit; and raw, self-centered, individual ambition as the source of fame. The Americans, or any culturally dominant group, are simply "legendary." As Stein, the historical celebrity demonstrates, fame can be conferred by cultural mythmakers. If it is, however, a "right" belonging to anyone willing to "presume to be famous," then logically, it can be taken by any powerfully entertaining individual. More specifically, by overtly identifying and claiming the power of fame, by challenging the audience to deny her celebrity status, characters such as Stein expose the power the audience is actively surrendering to her, and by association, to the playwright.

This is a dangerous game for a character, and by association, the playwright. The historical Stein may be "immortal," Walker certainly is not. And yet, it is an inherent risk in this kind of "high stakes realism." By exaggerating what is at stake, for the characters, the playwright, and ultimately the audience, Walker hopes to strike a realistic chord. If Walker's thematic interest in power centres on the relationship between individuals and communities, then Walker, the neophyte playwright, might consider his own, realistic, relationship with the audience. If he entertains, he exerts power over his audience - the power to elicit recognition, the power to keep them in their seats, to bring them back again, the power to draw the money

from their pockets. Without this power, audience inattention could quickly force Walker back into his cab.

Although Ken Gass certainly found in Walker a playwright willing to pull out of the "rut of fashion," Walker's theatrical appeal has much in common with modern marketing techniques. His "high stakes realism" is subject to the same danger present in media-generated advertising: without constant, new sources of stimulation, viewer attention will be lost. Like the advertiser who, behind all the hype, has a product to sell, Walker the playwright must, ultimately, present something more than borrowed characters and situations to sell his script. In Bagdad Saloon, characters compete with each other, demonstrating their ability to expand, attract attention, and thereby attain credibility. Henry: "You are all bit players in an arrogant farce. And I am the eternal navigator" (51). Stein first rejects Ahrun's artificial world as "a stupid cliche", but once she accepts her role in it she demands a whip: "I will not be incomplete. A stage-coach driver needs a whip" (54). In a world built entirely on the phenomenon of fame, the spectator must decide which role, character, or personality is greatest, most worthy of recognition, and therefore, he or she can no longer depend on agreement with the preexistent audience. In this way Walker mirrors a paradoxical element of our modern, multi-media world, a place where differing sources of information, commercial advertising for example, compete in a vicious struggle for

recognition by being simultaneously broad in their application, yet individual and personal in their appeal. In the advertising world, survival of a particular product depends on its ability to attract attention. It must first attract the potential buyer before it can be sold. If it sells, it survives, if it fails to sell, it is terminated. There is something of the aggressive salesman in Walker's early experiments as a playwright. Without theatrical history to bind or guide him, Walker employs the material from his own experience. He instinctively knows that if he fails to capture his audience's attention he will disappear before anyone discovers the substance behind the hype.

> Aladdin: You're going to shoot me.
> Doc: Uh-huh.
> Aladdin: Why?
> Doc: None of your business.
> Aladdin: I see.
> Doc: If you're worrying about the pain. Don't. I'm going for the heart. You'll feel a thud - then nothing. Ready?
> Aladdin: Well, there's just one question.
> Doc: I don't answer questions.
> Aladdin: It's my - Elixir - this...
> Doc: What about it?
> Aladdin: People refuse to buy without tasting and having tasted refuse to buy. I myself can't find anything wrong with the taste. But - well you see I would dread dying in such an ignorant condition. (34)

Doc tastes the elixir and falls to the ground. Aladdin observes: "Poor witless creature. Cowardly man. Ass of a pig. Why should you be so well known" (35)? A interesting question, one that again suggests a consideration of the complex craving for, and fear of the power that flows from such fame. Why should we give immortality to a killer and an

"ass"? Halliday falls, but he does not die. He is, fortunately, immortal and able to endure Walker's harsh treatment. Bagdad Saloon does not elevate Walker into the ranks of the immortal. It does, however, encourage him to push his characters even harder in his next play.

In Bagdad Saloon, Ahrun's constructed desert/western world provides some genre recognition, but recognition is focused primarily on individual characters. Beyond Mozambique depends more heavily on genre recognition, the B-movie style and the Hollywood gangster film, continuing a process wherein Walker forces well-known stereotypes and cliches into a struggle for survival. This struggle becomes even more violent in Beyond Mozambique, thereby increasing the "stakes" for the characters, and the theatrical attractiveness for the audience. The substance behind this theatricality, however, continues to reside in Walker's growing ability to establish a relationship between the violent demonstrations of power on stage and the spectator - a relationship that increasingly implies the audience's role in that violence.

As in Bagdad Saloon, Walker begins with visual and auditory chaos. The opening directions call for " a clutter of discarded things...Whisperings. Commotion. Branches breaking. Muttering. Muffled drums" (90). Into this commotion, Walker sends his new set of characters: Enrico Rocco, the Nazi mad scientist, declares "My baseness is my strength" (113). Rita, a borrowed Hollywood actress,

observes that she is "crass" more than class. She is making porn movies until she can become like her idol, Rita Hayworth. Olga, Rocco's wife, is "classically deluded" (113), thinking she is Olga from Chekhov's Three Sisters. Liduc, the cocaine-addicted Catholic priest desires the bodies of "lean young men" (122). Lance, the easily recognized Mountie, is frightened by all the "commotion." To him "it sounds like anarchy. It sounds like insurrection"(100). While immediately recognizable, these characters are generic rather that specific, unlike Gertrude Stein in Bagdad Saloon. The effect, however, is to again create a paradox. Beyond Mozambique offers the safety of the familiar while simultaneously challenging that safety by filling the stage with incongruous and violent character types competing for audience recognition.

Rita, like the other characters when taken individually, provides an initial point of recognition in this disturbed landscape. Dressed as her namesake, Rita Hayworth, she is going to make a movie,

> not porn. I did porn in New York. This one is going to be a classic. It'll have sex. But It'll be sex with class. No pubics. That's what I'm doing here, you know. Research. I'm immersing myself in the place. Digging in. You know. So that when we make the movie I'll come across super real. I play a stupid slut who always wanted to be an actress. (106)

Critics might consider Walker nothing more than a stupid slut who always wanted to be a playwright. Like Rita, Walker can assume a realistic appearance only if he overcomes the homogenizing effect of the borrowed surface of his work.

Immersing herself in the place may help define Rita's position culturally, but it will not automatically make her a distinct, Walker character.

If Rita is to have any stature within the parameters of the play, she must convince the other characters that she is an actress "playing" the slut. If she is to have any credibility with Walker's audience, she must play Rita Hayworth well enough to convince the spectator that the recognition of the preexisting audience that attends the real Rita Hayworth is transferable, that is to say the current audience must be willing to give Walker's Rita that power, even if the other characters on stage are unwilling. Again, Walker appears to be both hustler and playwright, employing a common marketing technique. Products are aligned with the known in the hope of selling by drawing on the power of the familiar. Initially, fame - in the sense of recognition - opens the way; fame has an inherent power, even when it has little or no substance.

> Rita: Do you like my bathrobe? I painted it myself. Do you like the glitter?
> Liduc: It's very...
> Rita: Crass. Yeah, it's crass. But I have no choice. It was either do it up vulgar or blend in with the scenery. I mean everyone else is so weird you know. Well, I was the last one to get here and all the other styles were taken. So I got left with 'vulgar.'(116)

Rita is aware that "it's just hype. But at least it matches my clothes" (116). Perhaps Rita voices Walker's frustration at the abundance of well-established characters and dramatic situations. Bagdad Saloon uses the hype of a beauty pageant

in much the same marketing way. Dolly is contestant number thirty-three. She is also pregnant.

> Dolly: I'm not ashamed of being pregnant. And that's half the battle, isn't it? Strike. Strike the pose.
> Mitch: Low key. Soft sell. Subtle variations. And the gradual shift in trends. (24)

Rita will play the slut to attain status, and realism in the eyes of her audience. If she succeeds, she sells her product - entertainment. Taken individually, Rita provides familiarity. Placed within her world of mismatched characters, however, she becomes part of the distortion. Walker's sense of entertainment continues to manifest itself as a power struggle between characters, a struggle that reinforces the position of the audience as the true source of that abused power.

Beyond Mozambique is set in the jungle, a place where, typically, only the strong survive. At the 1991 production at William Head prison in Victoria, the set was overflowing with jungle-like plants. The opening "commotion" of "muffled drums(90)" recurred throughout the play. To the Corporal, "it sounds like anarchy. It sounds like insurrection"(100). The insurrection that surrounds the characters is mentioned, but never confronted. It is a backdrop for the anarchic struggle for survival among the characters, a struggle that kills half the cast, but produces no clear winner.

Having established the familiarity of these genre types at play in Beyond Mozambique, Walker's theatricality expands

and distorts each of the characters. Enrico Rocco's obsession is his work: "I must maintain my obsession"(91). Olga is obsessed with Russia, Liduc with drugs, Rita with the movies. All of Walker's characters are simplified in the cartoon and the B-movie sense; they are, however, exaggerated by their individual needs, and their brutal treatment of each other. Although Olga is drawn from high culture, most of the other characters are drawn from popular culture such as science fiction and the gangster genre, particularly the Hollywood gangster movie. Thomas Schatz observes that:

> The gangster setting, like that of the Western, is one of contested space where forces of social order and anarchy are locked in an epic and unending struggle. But whereas the Western depicts the initial struggle to establish social order, the gangster film deals with an organized society's efforts to maintain order. (24)

The struggle in Beyond Mozambique is as bloody as any gangster film. All of the characters are armed: Rocco carries a switchblade; Olga keeps a pistol under her skirt; the Corporal has his revolver; Liduc keeps dangerous drugs in his pocket; Tomas has a machete; Rita is smuggling guns for the insurrection. Even though Rocco is a doctor, he is reminiscent of Johnny Rocco, played by James Cagney in the gangster film Key Largo. When the Corporal inquires about "this Italian doctor who became so good in his job he became top dog in one of those fancy Nazi hospitals" (99), Rocco threatens him with a knife: "You repeat that once. To anyone. And I'll slice you up" (99). When the injured

servant Tomas refuses to cooperate, Rocco tells Olga to "press on the red spot" (97) on his bandaged head. Rocco, although not recognized as a particular personality such as Stein, is identifiable as a composite of genre types, i.e., gangster/mad scientist. Rocco is obsessed with his own importance, and willing to fight for that importance. He is certain that one day "they" will place a

> huge tablet in the foyer of the city hall in Naples. 'To Doctor Enrico Rocco, a native son. A man who had the courage lacking in other scientists of his age. It was not that he thought human life was cheap but that he believed that the advancement of medical science was divine. (91)

This individual is willing to use the advancement of science as his justification for perceiving the rest of the community as "cheap." Rocco demands that Olga tell him he is not just a great scientist, but a "genius. A mind like mine has a great appetite. It even needs flattery" (95). Rocco becomes a hybrid, a "Nazi," gangster scientist who, like Stein or Doc in Bagdad Saloon, hopes to dominate his world by expanding at the expense of the others. Even in his self-centered obsessiveness, however, Rocco demonstrates the need of the famous for their audience. Without a cooperative audience, fame evaporates.

> (The Corporal comes in, dressed in full R.C.M.P. uniform)
> Rocco: What in God's name is that outfit all about?
> Olga: Lance was with the R.C.M.P. before he came to work here.
> Rocco: What's the R.C.M.P.?
> Olga: I'll explain later.
> Rocco: The man is a clown. The only policeman in the area is a full fledged clown. (96)

There is certainly parody here. The R.C.M.P. are viewed critically, as "clowns." The insult, however, undermines the Corporal's very existence. If he fails to demand attention, he is in danger of loosing his ability to hold the viewer's attention, and with it his power. He is, in fact, in danger of disappearing into anonymity. When Stein gains the upper hand over Henry she demands: "Pick up my bags you snivelling non-entity" (25). Ahrun observes that: "The one real trouble for intelligent men is being anonymous" (37). This dread of anonymity is certainly not peculiar to Walker. Michael Wolfe observes that:

> Victorian writers, like other respectable Victorians, were frightened by the city as they were by the machine because it had no respect for them. It took away the identifying space that surrounded them and it threatened to render them anonymous and nondescript. The Victorian novel, with its large cast, tries to provide a way of personalizing anonymity. It tries, in short, to familiarize the urban crowd. (50)

The characters in Beyond Mozambique are familiar to the degree that they exist as stereotypes. Walker simply takes this familiarization process one step further, assigning not only a familiar face to the crowd, but faces that are actively struggling to defeat anonymity by defeating each other. It is the violent law of the jungle, the law of the marketplace. Walker makes it a dramatic law, the beginning of his distinct sense of "high stakes realism."

In his article "Going With the Flow: Performance Art and Mass Culture," Philip Auslander notes that "Mass culture itself has emerged as the site of possible resistance to the

mainstream"(123). Walker certainly deploys mass culture against itself, but the stereotypes that Walker draws on for recognition are not deployed simply as parodic insults to the mainstream. As indicated earlier, a postmodern interpretation of Walker's work would detract from an emphasis on Walker's realism, a realism found not so much in the multi-media confusion around us but rather in mainstream hungers within us. A recognition of the spectator's hunger for theatricality and the power that springs from that hunger draws closer to defining Walker's paradoxical sense of the human condition, a relationship wherein power, as demonstrated by the individual, and need, as demonstrated by the community that supplies the power, are intimately linked. This "condition" is the ultimate development of Walker's merging of stylistic and thematic concerns, a merger that becomes clear in his later plays.

As noted earlier, critics are divided on the merit of Walker's dramaturgy. Douglas Cooper believes that Walker "offers a cartoon, and, by the end of the play, you are left with a cartoon. Walker doesn't know what he's doing" (61). Walker certainly walks a thin line between the tension he hopes to create and the empty clichés he uses to create the tension. His solution is not to carefully walk this line, but to purposely exaggerate the stereotype, thereby forcing his audience to both recognize and question this widely accepted set of features. By maintaining the tension between the sense of community that accompanies the mass-recognition

of the famous, and the violent behavior of his individual depiction of fame, Walker is able to give thematic substance to an experiment that would otherwise succumb to stylistic chaos.

Walker's vicious world forces all of the characters to struggle for dominance. It will not, however, let Rocco or any of the characters in Beyond Mozambique dominate. Although the vicious Rocco asserts that "there is something about committing crimes against humanity that puts you in touch with the purpose of the universe"(126), he does not succeed in dominating the world of Beyond Mozambique.

> I'm sinking with confidence into the mire. It's all out into the open and I'm safer than ever. I have finally destroyed that fucking tower and now there are only three forces in the world. God. Ignorance. And me. (126-27)

The drums continue to grow louder. The play ends like a bizarre musical, with the cast humming Swan Lake while Rocco moves the dead Olga's lips to say, "we shall go away, and we shall be forgotten, our faces will be forgotten, our voices and how many there were of us"(135). Final stage directions call for:

> Sudden violence and activity from the bushes, getting closer and louder. Everyone on their feet now, edging toward the door of the house, looking at us in confusion and growing anxiety-backing up slowly. (135)

The Corporal asks in desperation: "What's going on here?' Rita replies: "It's a power struggle"(131). Although the struggle between characters is intense, power, and with it responsibility for the violence, constitutes a shift toward

"us," the spectators. Stage directions call for the Corporal to come in:

> (Minus one arm. Blood dripping. A note attached to his sleeve. The note is plainly visible. It reads. 'Entertain us.')
> Liduc: Amazing. I don't understand how you make all this violence so gratuitous.
> Rocco: What's it say? I'll do anything it says.
> Rita: (reads) 'Entertain us.' (Pause. They all look around. And from this moment there is a distinct tendency for everyone to play outward) (133)

This metadramatic experimentation is also visible in Bagdad Saloon. Ahrun opens the play with a "Soliloquy." He stands centre stage and demands:

> action. Call it a through line. One man. Me. Wanting to be the hero of a piece. Wanting to act and act well. Hero. Anti-hero. Failed-hero. Action. Acting. Actor. (20)

Walker not only pushes at the boundaries of audience recognition, he pushes himself out from the safety of the workshop framework. He aggressively, and here metadramatically, challenges the audience to participate in his own bid for immortality. This is a "high stakes" manoeuvre for Walker. To directly acknowledge the audience's position of power in the entertainment process is to provide them with options. They might decline to buy another Walker play. By directing the attention toward the audience, Walker metadramatically exposes the power that has been moving between characters, and between stage and audience. With power, however, comes responsibility. The characters perform their bloody dance to "get safe." But obviously, they also dance to entertain the audience.

> Rocco: No. You'll live. Till I'm safe. You'll bleed till I'm safe. All of you. We'll all entertain together. No one gets safe before me.
> Liduc: (Points to Olga) Except her.
> Rocco: No. Not even her.

Rocco grabs lipstick from Rita to paint "two tears and a huge, obscene smile"(134) on Olga's face. Stage directions call for the dead Olga to be placed on Rocco's knee.

> Sticks hand up back of her dress to her throat....Rocco is manipulating Olga's vocal cords....Moves Olga's jaw. And the following speech comes from Olga, in her own voice, but distorted and unbearably erratic. (134)

Both Bagdad Saloon and Beyond Mozambique end with the cast singing, as if a song could unite these brutal, brutalized characters. In typical Westerns and Gangster films, the rugged individual, with good intentions or bad, must disappear if society is to survive. These plays end with a community of individuals trembling at the sight of each other. All of Walker's characters would have to die to fulfill the genre convention because all are obsessively individualistic. Rocco declares that "it's all out in the open." As he sinks "confidently into the mire," he feels "safer than ever."

Commenting on his early use of genre, Walker observes that:

> I thought at first that these genres would be liberating, that they would give a framework to something deeper. I wanted people to see through them to what was going on inside. But that didn't always happen. Rocco wasn't anything like Bogie, but it seemed that lots of people were comfortable with the play on this level. There was a gradual falling away from genre because it eventually just got in the way. (71)

Although imperfect, the plays are more than student experimentation. As the use of genre falls away in later plays, the merit of these earlier works becomes more obvious. Harrison was correct. Walker's early theatricality "can't support the weight of the ideas and situations his script presents us with" (14). As he continues to write, however, the relationship between Walker's exaggerated style and his thematic concern with power becomes more concise, and more unique.

Walker's next work, Zastrozzi, the Master of Discipline, further develops these mirrored relationships by increasing the stature of one evil character. With this greater focus on a single, evil individual, Walker demonstrates his growing ability to consolidate thematic and stylistic concerns. Zastrozzi continues to both appal and attract the spectator. Walker's interest in the power of the famous, however, shifts slightly to an examination of the power of the charismatic leader, a interest hinted at in characters like Rocco. Again, realism springs from the exaggerated; and power, while manifested by the individual, finds its source in the community.

CHAPTER TWO

ZASTROZZI THE DICTATOR

> It is my responsibility to spread out like a disease and purge. And by destroying everything make everything safe....Alive. Untouched by expectation. Free of history. Free of everything. (Zastrozzi 66)

By drawing on the familiar, Bagdad Saloon and Beyond Mozambique create fictive worlds in which fame is a manifestation of the power of the community. While characters such as Rocco and Ahrun attain some degree of stature because of the recognition they elicit from the audience, no one character dominates. In these early plays, a central figure must fight for status to survive the chaos around him. Zastrozzi, however, dominates completely.

By accepting responsibility for making "everything safe," Zastrozzi continues to explore the relationship between individuals and communities, focusing on the symbiotic relationship between the oppressor, empowered by the community, and the oppressed who both fear and desperately need his powerful hand. Zastrozzi's singular evil, paradoxically, both serves and threatens the members of the community by promising them order while implicating

them in his crimes. This paradox can be effectively explored because of the improved relationship between Walker's stylistic and thematic concerns. Zastrozzi's stylistic exaggeration places all crimes in complete view of the audience. Having commanded audience attention in this way, Walker's "high stakes realism" is then able to expose the relationship between one powerful individual and a complicit community.

Zastrozzi, the master of discipline, shares the stage with other characters typical of Walker's exaggerated sense of presentation. Matilda is "the most accomplished seductress in Europe" (15), Verezzi, the justification for Zastrozzi's revenge, is "monumentally ignorant" (43). Life gives him the "giggles" (25). Julia is the "most beautiful and sensitive woman alive" (41). Zastrozzi, however, is

> the master criminal of all Europe. This is not a boast. It is information. I am to be feared for countless reasons. The obvious ones of strength and skill with any weapon. The less obvious ones because of the quality of my mind. It's superb. (12)

Zastrozzi is in control throughout. Stylistically, Walker's growing control is reflected in the homogeneity of this cast. Unlike the plays discussed in chapter one, where characters all clashed, like plaid and polka dot, the characters in Zastrozzi are more indigenous to the play's landscape of nineteenth-century Europe. These characters belong in Zastrozzi: the master criminal, his accomplices, his victims. The only incongruous character in the cast is Victor, Walker's first 'everyman' character. Although

Zastrozzi moves away from a dependence on borrowed fame visible his earlier work, it continues to demonstrate power as moving from the community to the individual.

Based loosely on Shelley's Zastrozzi, Walker's Zastrozzi contains some obvious borrowings from well-recognized genres and conventions: heroic drama, the Gothic novel, swashbuckling movie, the gangster genre, and television melodrama. Interestingly, Shelley's own Zastrozzi blatantly borrows from a popular genre of the time - the Gothic Romance. According to Shelley's cousin, Thomas Medwin, Shelley was "enraptured" (Chesser 15) by Zofloya by Mrs Byrne. All of Shelley's main characters, the plot line, and the setting are borrowed from Zofloya: Zastrozzi, bent on the cruelest kind of revenge for the murder of his mother, seeks to torment his mother's murderer, Verezzi, until Verezzi commits suicide thereby damning himself to hell. The source of torment will be love. Shelley, embarrassed by Zastrozzi, referred to his early work as the product of a "state of intellectual sickliness and lethargy" (Chesser 11). Typical of the genre, "The colours are laid on so thick that to the modern taste the effect is ludicrous" (Chesser 3). Obviously, Walker was not the first to use exaggeration. These characters and conventions become unique to Walker because, paradoxically, Walker approaches the Gothic with open admiration, finding in it a realistic vehicle for the powerful emotion that he, Byrne, and Shelley all hope to explore - revenge. It is not important that most

in the audience have never heard of Shelley's Zastrozzi. What is important is that they recognize the emotions that motivate revenge. This emotional justification for violence reinforces the movement of power from community to individual.

> It is not passion....It is not greed or hate or lust or fear....It is not the end of the world. It is easily worse. It is revenge. (11)

Revenge is an interesting phenomenon in that it is not so much an emotion itself as an indicator of emotions such as fear, anger, and the pain of lost love.

As in Beyond Mozambique with its B-movie style, Zastrozzi plays with a recognizable atmosphere. Opening stage directions indicate the play takes place, "Just before the storm" (11). Catherine Smith observes:

> Clearly, in his concept for both set and costume, Walker wanted to throw attention to surface details and, in so doing, to overtly signal to his audience both the source and the time period he borrowed from, a combination of Piranesi's etchings and nineteenth century Europe....A red cloth of velvet-like richness was draped on a diagonal from the ceiling to the floor on the downstage-left entrance/exit. The set was finished to simulate the dull grey stone one associates with a Gothic prison. (5)

This focus on readily recognized surface features functions much as it does in Walker's earlier work to create a sense of familiarity for the audience. Within Gothic convention, setting and story predominate; it is a place where we will be frightened by the supernatural, the unknown. The exaggerated Zastrozzi, however, will subdue

these fears by being completely evil and completely obvious. He will draw all fear to himself by defeating the other fears, even the fear of the "vague" (15), and the "ordinary" (47). Zastrozzi's cruel dominance will defeat the anonymity that Auslander claims haunts modern society by defeating all competing claims to the viewer's attention. "High stakes realism" promises an intimate union between the anonymous community and the individual manifestation of power on stage. This vicarious experience, however, can only be successful if power is exaggerated and visible, and audience attention/complicity complete.

Although the potential for disorder is indicated by the opening stage directions "Just before the storm", the chaos of earlier plays is precluded by the presence of the dictator. Zastrozzi's plan for making the world safe by destroying it is the logic of the oxymoron: it can only appeal to those with extreme fear of the disorder around them. This fear pushes the fearful outside of normal logic to consider drastic acts, not acts that the timid would perform themselves, but acts they would condone. But before they give approval, the timid within the audience must be made aware of their need, then seduced into the means. Walker continues to depend on violent theatricality to attract attention, but in Zastrozzi, power demonstrates its absolute control by aligning itself more directly with the ability to entertain as demonstrated in Zastrozzi's metadramatic appeal to the audience.

The play opens with a brief introduction by Bernardo, informing the audience that the "air will explode," with a single impulse, "revenge" (11). Walker then gives Zastrozzi sixty lines, punctuated by lightning, to familiarize the audience with the individual who will embody and enforce this urge:

> You are looking at Zastrozzi. But that means very little. What means much more is that Zastrozzi is looking at you. Don't make a sound. Breathe quietly. He is easily annoyed. And when he is annoyed, he strikes. I am at the height of my power...I am what I am.... (11-12)

Zastrozzi steps out of the Gothic setting to present himself as greater than character or genre. "I am what I am." Again, Walker exposes himself, through his character's metadramatic behavior, to danger. This high stakes approach succeeds because of Zastrozzi's entertainment powers. Zastrozzi takes control of a very narrow walkway between stylistic cliché and the thematic issue that Walker hopes to expose. If theatricality is addictive, the monstrous Zastrozzi, more than earlier characters, will bind the spectator's attention. Walker anticipates audience attention and complicity in this metadramatic opening by intimately including the spectator in the script. The audience will, typically, be sitting still and quiet. Having demanded attention, Zastrozzi is positioned to begin drawing power from the audience, a power that is enhanced by the visibility of its transfer.

As in earlier works, Zastrozzi's power is not so much taken as bestowed by the many, a power surrendered in return for entertainment, and on a deeper level, order. Initially, Zastrozzi is able to attract the audience because of his talent for self-recognition that overcomes any lack of fame. While earlier characters struggled for fame, Zastrozzi attracts uncontested recognition and power by visibly embodying both entertainment and power. By aligning himself with the desire for revenge, he calls upon an emotional justification for his violence. It is Zastrozzi's willingness to take responsibility for the community, however, that finalizes his position of power by recognizing the community's need for order. Zastrozzi will entertain, but he will also take responsibility for the world condition. All we must do is let this man at the "height of his power" act.

Although Zastrozzi claims ultimate physical power, he, like all good killers, understands the usefulness of seducing his victims. Zastrozzi follows melodramatic convention by providing valid justification for his desire for revenge. Zastrozzi reveals that his mother was killed by Verezzi and Verezzi's father. As Zastrozzi observes: "I, her son, have a legitimate claim to revenge" (39). Social and legal convention would disallow the actual act of revenge for the timid spectator, but Zastrozzi is under no such constraints. The active agent is in place, ready to attack

the enemy with complete viciousness. All that is required in a complacent community.

Zastrozzi's enemy, Verezzi, is, however, almost inconsequential. He is "a vegetable" (48). Revenge, as depicted in melodrama, is often a convenient justification for violence, but convention would increase the stakes by pitting Zastrozzi against a worthy opponent. Lacking a meaningful relationship with Verezzi, Zastrozzi's violent urges find an outlet in the enemies of the community.

> Zastrozzi: At first I wanted him just for myself. For what he did to my mother. But what I have learned of this man, this Verezzi, makes me want him for another reason. That smile, Bernardo, I will remove it from the earth. It is a dangerous thing. It raises a bigger issue than revenge.
> Bernardo: Is this a new development?
> Zastrozzi: Actually, it is still revenge. But in a larger sense. In fact it is revenge in its true and original meaning. And therefore some other word is probably necessary. It is 1893 and language, like everything else, has become pleasantly vague.
> Bernardo: I'm not sure I understand.
> Zastrozzi: Naturally. Because if you did there would be two of us and there is only need for one. No. Call it revenge, Bernardo. Tell everyone else to call it revenge. If it will make you happy I'll even call it revenge. (15)

The justification for violence moves away from the individual Verezzi to the dangers faced by the community, in an unnamed "original" definition of the word that Bernardo and the rest of us are not privy to.

Standing between Zastrozzi and his apparent enemy, Verezzi, is Victor. Victor is Walker's first ordinary man, an interesting character to place between the community and the true enemy of the community. Victor, more than any

Walker character to this point, is a member of the community. Although he embodies community values, he ultimately stands in the way of the community's will, a will driven by fear. Victor is dedicated to Verezzi simply because "I promised your father I would take care of you so I will" (38). This simple promise forces Victor to flee with Verezzi, protecting him from Zastrozzi's wrath. But eventually they can run no more and Victor meets Zastrozzi. As an ordinary character, Victor offers the possibility of spectator identification. Walker uses the relationship between Zastrozzi and Victor not to provide a worthy opponent for Zastrozzi, but to continue his seduction of the audience. Discussing the death of his mother, Zastrozzi asks:

> Zastrozzi: And the letter described what they had done?
> Victor: Yes.
> Zastrozzi: What did you think?
> Victor: It was horrible, of course.
> Zastrozzi: Describe exactly what you mean by horrible.
> Victor: Bloody, vicious. Unforgivable.
> Zastrozzi: Wrong. Not even close. Horrible is when things proceed unnaturally. When people remain unanswerable for their actions. (39)

Walker anticipates that his audience will contain not only people hoping to be entertained by vicarious identification with the exaggerated Zastrozzi, but those who recognize a world where "people remain unanswerable for their actions." We are brought closer to a recognition of our attraction to the violent Zastrozzi. In a chaotic world where so many crimes go unpunished, so many unfairnesses

unanswered, so many attempts at communication misunderstood, a powerful, central figure can seduce those weary of disorder with his promise of order; but this central individual must be allowed to act decisively, that is violently.

In his earlier plays, Walker demonstrates power flowing irresistibly between audience and celebrity. Having explored this relationship, he now attempts to not only recreate this flow of power, but to exaggerate the power by bringing this symbiosis into the full sight of his community.

> It is my responsibility to spread out like a disease and purge. And by destroying everything make everything safe....Alive. Untouched by expectation. Free of history. Free of everything. (66)

By placing Zastrozzi's power in terms of his willingness to take responsibility for the world's problems, Walker demonstrates the paradoxical nature of power in the relationship between individuals and communities. Power, in Zastrozzi, is both the salvation and the destruction of the community. This thematic exploration, however, must take place in stylistic condition of complete openness. Power cannot be hidden stylistically if responsibility is to be shared.

Zastrozzi's abuse of power is there for all to see. Even Zastrozzi's internal struggles are played out in the open. Zastrozzi announces: "I am having a nightmare." It is the "most terrifying" nightmare he has ever had because in

it he is "in charge of the forces of good." In the nightmare the 'good' Zastrozzi wins against the evil Zastrozzi and they make him a "Christian saint. The patron saint of smiles" (51). This is the worst of nightmares because Zastrozzi, in his egocentrism, knows it could be true - only Zastrozzi could defeat Zastrozzi.

The brief appearance of the "forces of good" in no way indicates a psychological depth being explored in Zastrozzi. Walker is not interested in the "mysterioso" (Interview, 72). Zastrozzi calls upon good as necessary to the exposing of ultimate evil. The nightmare about goodness, rather than adding a new dimension to Zastrozzi, serves as a foil for his well-stated evil. This "high stakes" evil, as demonstrated in such an open stylistic setting, is meant to inspire confidence as much as fear. If a leader must kill everything to make it safe, the leader you choose must be very good at his job. In Zastrozzi, goodness has nothing to do with a vegetable like Verezzi, who thinks of himself as a "messenger of God," a "prophet," a "God" (35). Goodness springs from the power to make things "safe." It is indicative of the human experience, as Milton's Satan/God characterization demonstrates, how difficult it is to make good interesting, and how easily evil takes the stage. If Zastrozzi wins audience approval, in spite of his violent and obvious methods, then there is complicity, guilt, "realism." The greater the level of audience entertainment, the greater the level of community culpability.

If the evil Zastrozzi wins approval, he demonstrates an obvious flow of power from the community to the individual. But why would a community give power to such a killer? Walker creates an ultimate killer to heighten and highlight the community's need for order. Rocco in Beyond Mozambique may attempt to control his world, but "under all that bravado, he's really just a frightened boy" (34). Zastrozzi is not just empty bravado. Zastrozzi's status as dominant individual produces a gradual deflation of the secondary characters. Bernardo is revealed to be "a seedy little butcher," a "thug" (42). Matilda is a "tart" who wishes "that men in general could perform with the same intensity they lust with" (38).

According to their plan for revenge, Matilda, Zastrozzi's vicious lover, will capture Verezzi's love. She sleeps with the vegetable because she loves Zastrozzi.

> Matilda: He beats me like he could kill me. And I love him for that.
> Verezzi: You should love me instead. I'm gentle. I'm an artist. I am a saint. And I love you.
> Matilda: Could you kill me? If you could kill me I might love you. (44)

Walker certainly takes his chances here with the women in his audience. And yet, his interest rests more with maintaining the relationship between entertainment and power than with maintaining political correctness. Rita strives to become "super real" by finding realism in the accurate depiction of a real person. Matilda is unknown. She is, however, a "most accomplished seductress." There is

something recognizable about her obvious presentation of power as it manifests itself in relationships. In personal relationships, a struggle for power often casts one as the oppressor and one as the oppressed. The emotional interaction between individuals in the smallest community of personal relationships will find its way into Walker's later work. In Zastrozzi, however, the relationship between Zastrozzi and Matilda reinforces visible violence as the means of implicating the community with the leader who must be brutal to fulfill their expectation. Zastrozzi is violent with Matilda's participation, and audience awareness.

In Bagdad Saloon, characters claim heroic stature simply because of their fame. They are large not because of inner strength or heroic acts, but because they are recognized. In Zastrozzi, Victor, the common man, is forced to attempt a heroic deed and defeat Zastrozzi. Lacking fame, he has no choice but to act. In Zastrozzi, however, "the most decisive action is always violent" (47). The necessity for Victor to use violence appears before his confrontation with Zastrozzi:

> Victor: You are insane.
> Verezzi: Who says so?
> Victor: I do.
> Verezzi: You are my servant. You are not to say I am insane. You are insane. Yes, Victor, you are insane. So there.
> Victor: Shut up.
> Verezzi: You shut up.
> (Grabs Verezzi violently by the throat and shakes him) Shut up, shut up, shut up. (39)

Victor accepts the need for violent action. As a common man, he contains the conventional values and fears of the community. "Something is wrong. Something is unbalanced. I abhor violence, but I also abhor a lack of balance" (59). After fleeing with Verezzi for three years, he can run no more and decides to confront Zastrozzi.

> Zastrozzi: You look silly.
> Victor: But I am alive.
> Zastrozzi: Perhaps more alive than you have ever been. That is sometimes the way a person faces death.
> Victor: I intend to live.
> Zastrozzi: You should have taken my advice and become an ordinary man.
> Victor: I am an ordinary man.
> Zastrozzi: An ordinary man does not challenge Zastrozzi.
> (Zastrozzi attacks him viciously. Victor defends himself well.)
> Victor: I am still alive. I am still waiting to be judged.
> Zastrozzi: And growing arrogant.
> Victor: You talk about arrogance. The man who kills on whim. Who kills an artist simply because he is mediocre. Who commits crimes against people because he believes he is the thing that they must be answerable to.
> Zastrozzi: They must be answerable to something. (66)

Zastrozzi soon kills Victor. "Ah Victor. You knew what was in your heart. But you did not know your limitations" (67). Zastrozzi places Victor back within the realm of the ordinary, that is, back within the community. His limitations were not only that he could not attain enough stature to draw attention away from Zastrozzi, but that he limited the timid's ability to act through their champion, Zastrozzi. Had Victor defeated Zastrozzi, Verezzi's vague, vegetable-like goodness would have triumphed, leaving the

spectator with a world condition relatively unchanged from the one they entered the theatre with.

The play ends with all but Verezzi and Zastrozzi dead. Verezzi, the "vegetable," the "God," although alive, is neutralized because he has none of the appeal of the evil Zastrozzi. The audience is given little choice as to who they identify with. In such chaotic times, Verezzi is easily viewed as a part of the problem. Victor is interesting, but he is also dead. By drawing on our hunger for theatricality, and our aversion to identifying with a loser, Walker is able to insist that we be attracted to the evil Zastrozzi, and with attraction comes an implied approval. Zastrozzi's obsessive desire for order seduces us into accepting Victor's death, along with the other crimes: Julia kills Matilda, Bernardo kills Julia, Zastrozzi kills Victor and Bernardo. For Zastrozzi, this Elizabethan ending is a "process of simplification. I am simplifying my life. These people came here to be judged" (64). This judgement day closing leaves Zastrozzi the undisputed focal point of his world.

In the preceding chapter it was suggested that contested fame could reveal a relationship between entertainment and power. Zastrozzi demonstrates a further step in this relationship. By exposing our need, not only for entertainment but for a powerful individual, free of the very social constraints that make a community workable, Walker reveals our fears of our surroundings and our

willingness to support an evil, destructive individual. Again, a paradox: The evil, as embodied by a violent individual such as Zastrozzi, can only be controlled by a powerful individual like Zastrozzi. By implicating the audience in this individual's crimes, Walker demonstrates that it is not only Zastrozzi who must take responsibility, but the community, and with that revelation of responsibility comes a recognition of the source of power within the community.

On the surface, Zastrozzi's excessive theatricality might be viewed as escapist drama, or parody. But Zastrozzi's theatricality is intimately connected to a collective desire for order and identity. The violent authoritarianism of Zastrozzi does not need to subvert Gothic conventions to explore fear, guilt and the very human need for recognition. Zastrozzi is the culmination of the exotically theatrical in Walker's work. Although Walker continues to use exaggeration, there is a shrinking of focus: the relationship between competing individuals and their implied mass audience in Bagdad Saloon is reduced in Zastrozzi to an examination of one individual able to control his immediate world. This reduction of focus continues in Walker's later work, allowing him to explore the individual and his placement within the smallest community, the family. Although the stylistic focus shrinks, the exaggeration remains, highlighting the powerful emotions that precipitate action on stage. Power, both stylistic and

thematic, continues to be mirrored in the relationship between individuals and communities.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FAMILY

> What are you talking about you dumb fuck. We're father and son. That's not a relationship. It's destiny. (Criminals In Love 22)

At the beginning of this paper it was noted that disagreement over the merit of Walker's use of exaggeration failed to recognize the importance of the relationship between an exaggerated presentation and Walker's thematic concern with power, a relationship that manifests itself as a violent struggle for power between individuals and communities. Bagdad Saloon offers fame as the individual's avenue to recognition by the community. The struggle for recognition in Bagdad Saloon gives way to the uncontested power of the dictatorial Zastrozzi. This consolidation of stylistic and thematic concerns continues in the East End plays, focusing on the role of the father within the smallest of communities, the family. Chapter three will examine Criminals in Love and Better Living, two of Walker's three East End plays. The powerful individual, however, is absent in these plays, highlighting the community's exaggerated needs, rather than the individual's response to those needs. By removing the physical manifestation of

power, Walker also continues to shift the focus from physical power to emotional power, allowing emotions such as love and fear to dominate the stage.

In many ways the family as a dramatic locale is a logical progression for Walker. It is one of the most basic human structures, offering order and protection from anonymity by placing the individual within the community of a single household. Although this chapter deals with recent plays that are visibly concerned with the contemporary family, there are, in fact, families of some description in every play discussed. In Bagdad Saloon, Doc fathers the freak Ivanhoe with Dolly. In Beyond Mozambique Rocco and Olga are husband and wife; along with their guests they form a kind of extended family. Both worlds, composed as they are of familiar faces, attempt to create a familial affinity with the audience, predominantly through the depiction of well-known personalities and genres, but the roles of husband and wife are present. Zastrozzi has a mate of sorts, Matilda. Victor plays a father role to Verezzi. Although these plays could hardly be said to specifically examine family relationships, they do provide a recognizable antecedent to the family relationships in the East End plays. The East End plays, however, are much more confined than the earlier works, that is to say much more located in the present and bound by the ordinary emotions of love and fear found in abundance in the modern family.

This limiting of exotic elements in favor of the contemporary is not a direct bid for realism, but a by-product of Walker's willingness to persue his "high stakes realism" into the here and now. Although these recent plays are much less exotic, they are, nonetheless, exaggerated. Richards' criticism that "all of the characters can't be hysterical all of the time," was leveled at Escape From Happiness, one of the three plays set in the east end of Toronto. Walker is able to keep the stakes high by denying his characters the comfort of subtext.

> Actors often compare my stuff to Shakeskeare and the classics because there's no subtext. People just say what they're thinking. They think out loud. That's why I'm kind of uncomfortable with the hiddenness of the subtextual, the mysterioso, that kind of oblique poetry. I say it's better to let it hang out even if you're going to feel sort of stupid. That way I think you connect more with the audience. (Interview, 71)

Fame is no longer an issue, but size continues to enliven the work. In the East End plays, Walker attempts to connect by way of the overblown emotionalism of ordinary people. Patrick Macdonald, director at Green Thumb theatre in Vancouver, believes that "Walker's sense of realism has to do with a bold honesty about character emotions" (Interview). Stephen Haff describes Walker's work as "spoken opera" (79). Although the East End plays are far removed from earlier works in setting and time, they demonstrate a stylistic and thematic consistency. If, as some critics claim, Walker's work is flawed, it is a familial disorder, one with little hope of cure.

The family in Criminals in Love includes Junior and Gail, two young lovers trying to escape what appears to be a family destiny in crime. Henry, Junior's dad, is a cheap crook; William, a bum, adopts the young lovers; Sandy is a nineteen-year-old experimenting with prostitution; and Wineava, the domineering aunt who attempts to fill the vacuum left by the missing father. Not a completely ordinary family, but still a long way from Rocco and Olga.

Criminals opens with Junior's head under Gail's sweater. This provides a visual metaphor for the "bond" (60), a recurring term representative of the power that holds the family together. Junior and Gail are ordinary young lovers, ordinary in the sense that they demonstrate a recognizable relationship. Junior believes that Gail is his "salvation." She will save him from his "true destiny" which is a "fuck up"(4). The fuck up that threatens this otherwise workable relationship is found in another bond, that between father and son. For Junior, personal survival depends on avoiding a terrible implication of the bond - "destiny."

> Junior: If you lay all the things of life along a ruler...legacy is at one end and destiny is at the other. (8)

Junior appears destined, through no fault of his own, to follow his father into a life of crime. Gail, his salvation, is bound by love to this same destiny. When Junior tries to end his relationship with his father, Henry replies: "What are you talking about you dumb fuck. We're father and son.

That's not a relationship. It's destiny" (22). "Destiny," and the "bond," are at play throughout Criminals in Love. They are, in many ways, differing faces of the same power: the bond of love provides community and protection to the individual; the destiny of the individual, however, continues to be destructive. As a couple, Junior and Gail are caught in a paradox, with the "bond" being the hope for order as implied by the family structure, and destiny the individual's urge toward disruption, as demonstrated by Henry, and later Wineava. As the title indicates, Criminals in Love increasingly shifts attention to the powerful emotions responsible for the hysterical behavior on stage.

Gail is cast in the unenviable role of protecting Junior from his destiny in crime. Unfortunately, she's "not thinking clearly. It's the down side of love" (21). Her love for Junior both nurtures and limits her. They meet William beside a dumpster. William is an outsider, a bum who, for no apparent reason other than a desire to help, adopts Junior and Gail. He claims to be "the inventor of the modern connotation of destiny."

> I speak now from the heart of experience. I use words like destiny and fate and despair....I describe the fine line which separates the land of function and dysfunction. I put it in the terms which cover the spectrum. The political.. The philosophical. The poetic. Occasionally I use the vernacular. I talk of the great fuck-up. Of getting shafted, getting screwed up the ass. Without even a kiss. I describe the human condition. (35)

Walker rightly anticipates that many in his audience will recognize this "fine line" between "function and

dysfunction." It is no longer necessary for Walker to borrow characters in order to connect with an audience. He is able to display, instead of famous personalities, well-known emotions. In Criminals in Love, powerful emotions of fear and love draw the line between a functional bond and dysfunctional destiny. There are powerful emotional needs drawing these characters together. There are equally powerful individual urges driving them apart. This is the paradoxical "human condition."

Wineava, Junior's aunt, is the active agent in Criminals in Love's slide toward destiny. She claims to be the main proponent of order as promised in the family "bond." She is, however, also the psychotic individual whose quest for personal power will make it impossible. Wineava demands all give her an introductory kiss as an indication of their participation in the family bond: "Give me a kiss. Come on over here and give me a kiss. I'm your aunt" (43). When coercing the young couple into helping unload boxes of stolen goods, she will only tell them that the boxes are part of the "family business" (44).

As often as Wineava invokes the bond, she refuses to define it:

> I'm married to the main man. It's just a marriage of convenience. There's no sex but there's a bond. By the way, do you all understand what I mean by "family" (32)?

They all nod, unknowingly. Wineava claims to speak for the community, but the driving power behind her is her own individual destiny.

The characters in Criminals in Love go through a process of inflation similar to that found in earlier plays. Gail observes that Junior "has a picture of me in his head twenty times the size of life" (49). William begins as a bum, then becomes a man with "a purpose" and that purpose is to protect Junior and Gail. To better play the role he buys a suit, "with all the attendant status. An impressive sight. I wish I could be you looking at me" (79). Unfortunately, William, for all his good intentions, is no match for Wineava. Although William puts on a pretty good imitation of a self-possessed man of power, Wineava is not impressed. Just as Stein could marginalize Henry by simply seeing him as a "non-entity" (25), Wineava is able to deflate William by seeing him as "an old man" (47).

By taking a leadership role, Wineava tries to fill the vacuum left by the father, Henry. She maintains the bond to the bitter end by demanding recognition as the female version of the ordering principle. Gail and Junior desperately try to function, to maintain and define their own bond. They are the community of two, inescapably bound to a destiny that steadily pulls them apart. Wineava becomes progressively more outrageous over the course of the play; Nicola Cavendish, playing Wineava at a Green Thumb production in Vancouver, accentuated her sexuality visually

through enlarged breasts and padded hips. Once recognized as the head of the family, a recognition she regularly demonstrates through enforced kissing, Wineava initiates a transformation of the family, from family to criminal gang to revolutionaries to convicts. She is the power of the bond, driving the family's destiny of destruction.

Zastrozzi ends with Zastrozzi in complete control; Wineava, however, fails. "I didn't mean to make a bad impression. I was just trying to provide leadership" (100). Stein suggests one can simply take power/fame/leadership by challenging any to disprove her ability to be recognized. Zastrozzi uses a sword to take his position as leader; he maintains it, however, by implicating the community in his behavior. Wineava, like Zastrozzi, seduces the community into following her. Although she is unable to attain the unchallenged status that Zastrozzi possesses, she, nonetheless, implicates her followers in her crimes.

At the end of the play, Junior and Gail are left on stage, waiting for the police to take them away to their destiny in jail. As characters they are unassuming. Junior's very name announces his lesser status. But in the moments before the police arrive with all the "scary" (119) implications, Junior and Gail kiss. Gail pulls out her sweater so Junior can assume his original position - nursing under Gail's sweater. This is perhaps the closest Walker comes to a happy ending. Although their destiny is close at hand, the bond of love is still strong. Wineava has not

seduced this community of two into surrendering power to her because power in Criminals is emotional power, and that power is still possessed by the community. Unfortunately, as the East End plays demonstrate, emotional power cannot endure without leadership. The family disintegrates as sirens bring down the curtain. Walker is not finished with these characters. In Better Living they return to again examine the way powerful needs unite and dissolve structures.

The East End plays share not only locale and characters, but a thematic focus on emotion as an ordering principle. Although the focus shifts from visible to physical to emotional power, the problematic nature of power remains. Walker's "unleashed humans," although willing to recognize their powerful emotions, are anything but orderly. Their hysterical struggles to define themselves emotionally provide ample opportunity for parody, but Walker's "high stakes realism" is more interested in a realistic examination of the potent emotions that inform human behavior. In Better Living, Walker allows the vacuum developed in Criminals in Love to remain unfilled much longer, thereby aligning an absence of leadership with an absence of emotional outlets. Power is visibly frustrated in its inability to find an individual able to act powerfully, allowing Walker to continue his examination of the responsibility of those who need for the leaders they create.

Gail and Junior reappear in Better Living with a fleshed out family of a mother, Nora, a background figure in Criminals, two sisters, Mary Ann and Elizabeth, an uncle Jack and a prodigal father, Tom. Again, Walker presents a recognizable family in a contemporary setting. The "bond," appears in Better Living simply as the "family." Destiny, also unmentioned, is also at work as the destructive inclinations of characters who are frustrated in their quest for love. Perhaps what is so recognizably contemporary about this family is the fact that it is "dysfunctional." The three daughters all suffer, in spite of their membership in a family. Mary Ann cannot name her baby for fear of giving "her the wrong name and she'll be stuck with it all her life"(141). She worries about everything from "food" to "nuclear power"(142). Elizabeth, a lawyer, is certain "The future is shit. Just like the present. The future is tyranny and chaos and bitterness and suffering with just a little bit of joy thrown in to make it endurable" (201). She is having trouble at work because her "mind is on my family, and my family is really fucked up"(200). Gail is on the verge of violence: "Someone tell me what's going on or I'll go berserk. I'll break things" (146). As in Criminals, it is not personality, but emotion that is inflated. This family is haunted, not so much by the missing father's ghost, but by the tremendous emotional needs his absence exposes.

There is a closer scrutiny of the role of mother in Better Living. Nora, a background pr_esence in Criminals assumes a much more visible, if ineffectual, presence in Better Living. She believes that Gail is possessed by her father's ghost, recognizing his "dirty language", his "masculine force." Nora grabs Gail by the head and shakes: "Out you vicious bastard. Putrid love killing madman. Leave this child alone" (162). Lost in her excavation project in the basement, Nora is, nonetheless, happy to have her girls home. "There's safety in numbers. Now there's a theory I actually understand" (216). Nora sums up the position of the community, the herd, seeking safety in numbers. Nora's isolation in the basement, however, places all the more attention on the male absence, and the need for leadership.

The absence of a father figure in Criminals in Love precipitates the rapid rise of the aunt, Wineava. In Better Living this vacuum lingers for the first three acts, allowing emotional elements such as confusion, anger, and frustration to gain even greater status. The only thing keeping this family from going "berserk" is their craving for "safety in numbers," that is community. This community, however, appears unable to function without individual leadership. The need for the missing love that Tom represents unites them as followers. As much as they may resent his position as leader, the family cannot separate their emotional need from the ordering possibilities of the father and the missing love he represents.

After a ten-year absence, Tom's mysterious reappearance into this emotionally charged scene, rather than stabilizing the family, precipitates even more chaos. Nora denies that he is alive, preferring to believe: "He's dead. I saw him die. In my dreams. Hundreds of dreams. Hundreds of deaths. Cruel. slow, painful" (130). To Elizabeth, he is "a bad smell from the past" (155). Nora, in a state of denial, is more comfortable seeing him as a "burglar" (156). Walker extends this doubt about Tom's true identity to the audience: he does not confirm Tom's status as father until the end of the play, allowing Tom to play the role of Tim, a jail house friend of Tom's who has come to redress Tom's mistakes. This role-playing has enough credibility to cause some doubt in the minds of the characters, and with the audience, diverging from earlier techniques that demanded recognition of the obvious. Again, the stylistic shift moves viewer attention away from the hysterical manifestation, and toward the motivating force behind the behavior. This bit of deception about Tom's identity is the closest Walker comes to the "mysterioso" (Interview, 72). This slight uncertainty, however, only serves to enhance the emotional vacuum that Tom, or his proxy Tim, represent.

In typical Walker fashion, character actions are violent. Elizabeth is armed : "Father dear father is coming home and I'm going to blow his head off" (140). Mary Ann worries. Gail fights off the urge to "break things," and tries to be hopeful. She still contemplates the possibility

of a desirable father figure. "Where is my father," she asks. "Gone. Dead? Insane? Some new life somewhere? Taken away by aliens? He's not here though, is he" (124). Gail prefers to blame Nora for their present condition: "The thing is I'm deprived. Emotionally deprived. Deprived of love. Mom's weird" (158). These actions are more appropriately labeled reactions, recognizing their cause in the frustrated emotions that fill the stage, emotions looking for an ordering principle that will allow them to pursue a relationship. Zastrozzi's violent urge for revenge indicates a shift in focus to the emotional. Gail's violence draws on an emotional force that is constantly in sight because Gail, like the other characters, cannot bestow that emotional power on a dominant individual.

Walker has consistently pursued this openness as his avenue to "high stakes realism." As Walker observes: "People just say what they're thinking" (75).

> My take on it is you keep saying it until you say something of value, it's not the economy of it, it's the desperate aggressiveness of it. Why have a public activity that basks in the private? (75)

Gail alone is prepared to welcome Tom back, both as a player in her life and a character on stage with status. She instructs Tom as to his role: "I need love, attention. So if you're going to stay you've got to do your job right. You've got to be a real father" (161). The East End Plays allow the individual "I' to voice his/her need for the collective experience of love. It is power still, but a power that

cannot be broken into individual manifestations. The power of love is realized only through community. This paradoxical relationship between individual and community continues to reside at the heart of Walker's sense of the "human condition." Although Zastrozzi claims that "I am at the height of my power...I am what I am" (11-12), he still craves to share culpability with the community. Although there is little that might be called love in Zastrozzi, Zastrozzi's desire for revenge moves Walker closer to love as the most paradoxical manifestation of this relationship between leader and follower, between individual and community.

A discussion of the human emotion of love is beyond the scope of this paper. The interest here is with the way Walker progresses from violent theatrics to violent emotions as a means of connecting his spectators with the complex emotional make-up of the human experience. Without entering into a psychological study of human needs for love, it is fair to assume that love manifests itself as a desire for recognition. Even the many examples of people attracting negative attention, as seen in troubled children (and many of Walker's characters), can reasonably be attached to the need of the individual to participate in some form of community. It is the individual's powerful need for a community to reinforce his/her individuality, and the community's fear and need of the individual leaders they create, that constitutes a basic paradox from which Walker's

work draws its power. For Walker, it is a realistic assessment of the "human condition."

Initially, the struggle to identify and express the emotions present in Better Living center around Tom. Tom, however, does not come offering love. Instead, he offers a system:

> It's a kind of socialism based on the reality of the place. In this place it's a kind of consumer socialism. The theory is that if you can't stop buying things you should at least buy the right things for the most people. It's like a government, like a society. (177)

If, as suggested earlier, Walker in some respects mirrors the marketing reality of modern life, where competing sources of information, commercials for example, battle for supremacy, then this "consumer socialism" can be viewed as a continuation of Walker's attempt to mirror the seduction of communities for individual gain. Rather than demand our attention through personality, Tom offers up theory as a solution to the chaos he finds around him. Although his family craves the loving leadership of the father, Tom attempts to fill their need with "consumer socialism." It will lead them out of their distress by providing productive outlets for each member of the family. Mary Ann is:

> stuffing envelopes. That's only the first part of my job. The second part is to devise a more efficient way of doing the first part. This requires thinking. Thinking prevents me from worrying. (176)

Walker's exploration of the individual's desire for fame and recognition finds its reverse in Mary Ann, a character who

craves invisibility rather than ultimate visibility. Mary Ann is prepared to do anything to keep from worrying.

> Elizabeth: Shut up.
> Mary Ann: With pleasure. Soon I'll stop talking altogether. Then I plan to stop moving. My ultimate goal is to become invisible. That way I'll be able to get my work done without taking up any valuable space. Also I'll feel a lot safer. (180)

The need for safety is again used as an indicator of the emotions that motivate behavior. A need for safety must be motivated by some fear. Mary Ann feels a lot safer now that she is being directed by a leader. Her reduced fears have a direct relationship to Tom's role as leader. Tom's system, however, is one of avoidance. He plays at filling the role of leader.

In Zastrozzi, Walker focuses on the dominant leader and his ability to both coerce and seduce his followers. Better Living focuses on a power frustrated in its attempts to materialize in the individual, thereby forcing this community of followers and their emotional needs to centre stage. Tom is the male leader, but he is neither the protagonist nor antagonist of the play. When Jack asks Tom if he thinks the reason the family is so "weird" is because they've "been living without a man" Tom replies:

> Naw. I'm not simple minded. I've seen both sexes in the world. One does as well as the other. These people here are just not organized, that's all. (174)

Better Living surveys many of the male authority roles, right up to the male god.

> Mary Ann: The tyrant will come. The commissar. The dictator. The chairman. In our sleep. Slit our throats.

> Elizabeth: Knock it off.
> Mary Ann: The policeman, the principal, the crossing-guard, the premier, the president, the executive director, the person with the keys, the one who signs the cheques, gives you an allowance, gives you advice, helps you grow up, makes you understand, makes you better, makes you over, makes you from scratch, the maker- Elizabeth: The giver of life, the creator. (214)

These powerful male figures are pushed aside, marginalized not only by Tom's observation about "both sexes," but by the vacuum that they, as powerful personalities, can never fill. When asked about the way authority functions in his plays Walker responds:

> Authority, sure, in high stakes realism your reaction is big, it could be desperate or heroic. A father is just a father but if it's a troubled family in a troubled world the father has a bigger role and the children have bigger responsibilities. The patriarch is a bigger deal in that situation. (35)

Wineava resembles Zastrozzi in her ability to physically dominate those around her. When asked about a hypothetical meeting between Wineava and Zastrozzi, Walker replied:

> I don't know, the mind boggles, they're both control freaks, anything could happen. How do you order around someone who wants to order you around? Is there a room big enough to contain them? Would they be speaking the same language? (66)

Obviously, Walker does not see power as defined by gender. Although there are a preponderance of male power figures in Walker's work, this need not be viewed as perpetuating male hierarchy. Power has no sex, and Walker, being a man, could rightfully be expected to experiment with male characters. Although Better Living is extremely critical of male leadership, there isn't an anti-male attitude in Walker's

work. As Elizabeth says: "I like men. I just don't like the men who seem to show up here" (190). Every male authority figure comes under attack in Better Living. Jack, the priest/uncle recognizes that priests are no longer able to fill an authority role because:

> They're perceived as being outside of society in the first place and all of their actions even the sacrificial ones are perceived as actions, once removed, of personally motivated non-political symbols. (171)

This description of the personally motivated individual, "perceived" as being "outside" and "once removed" is at odds with the sense of community usually associated with religion. Jack's description gives him more in common with the self-centered individuals in earlier plays than the role traditionally assigned to the priest. Rather than blame the missing leader, this family is held responsible for its condition.

The chaotic landscape of Bagdad Saloon produces confusion and fear, and a struggle for order through recognition of the famous. In Zastrozzi, fear of disorder leads to the rise of a dominant manifestation of fame - the dictator. Walker's coup d'etat in the East End plays leaves the community and its need for leadership predominantly responsible for the chaos in their lives. The responsibility for violence continues to shift, through a recognition of fear, to the community.

Tom offers a much reduced form of leadership as a solution to the chaos, thereby allowing the community's

needs to gain stature. Again, as in Zastrozzi, this promise of safety contains, paradoxically, the threat of violence. Tom must convince the community that they need the safety he offers.

> This idyllic existence won't last much longer. In the third world. I've seen the people. They're in bad shape. They can't take it much longer. They'll be coming here looking for relief. Secret armies of confiscation are being formed in the Lybian desert, in Bangladesh, in the jungles of El Salvador, the Philippines. I'm here to protect the family. (204)

In Better Living, fear again leads to the necessity of violent action. The relationship between fear and violent behavior is explored throughout Walker's work. Anarchy reappears. Even in the modern, Canadian setting of the East End plays, decisive, violent action may be necessary.

> Tom: Do you want to do the killing
> Elizabeth: If I had to I'd do it.
> Tom: But do you want to, baby doll. When the starving millions come to take our food away. Do you want to kill them.
> Elizabeth: No.
> Tom: Well I do. I want to kill them. Because I hate them. I hate them already and they're not even here. I hate their weakness. I've seen glimpses of it and it made me sick. That kind of weakness makes me sick. (204)

There is a certain hopelessness, an absurdity to this condition, a world where the oppressed create an oppressor by their weakness, where the oppressor is compelled to dominate the weak who disgust him. Like Zastrozzi, Tom promises to take responsibility for the safety of those around him. Zastrozzi seduces the audience into accepting the violence of a dictatorship. Tom tries to seduce his audience into accepting his "consumer socialism." It is,

however, only a replacement for the family structure, one that attempts to organize without the ordering power of love.

Just as it is possible to look back at Bagdad Saloon or Beyond Mozambique and identify crude versions of the family, it is possible to look at these early plays and identify a craving for love as participating in the chaos of non-meaning evident in Walker's over-abundance of meaning. What is absent in the relationship between Rocco and Olga? They see and recognize each other as husband and wife, and yet when Olga dies Rocco plays with her like a doll. Doc and Dolly produce a freak son whom Doc refuses to recognize. The ultimate frustration with so many incongruous characters inhabiting one stage is not the fact that they overwhelm our ability to make sense of the known, but that they toy with a deeper need for emotional security. For Walker, the need for safety is expressed in the relationship between fear and love, emotional needs that both enliven and debilitate.

Tom's system demonstrates a modest potential to pull the family together. Marry Ann is happier stuffing envelops. Even Elizabeth joins, stuffing envelopes "better and faster than you ever imagined" (202). Bonsumer socialism, however, is at best a temporary structure, designed to imitate the unifying, emotional force of the family without actually providing the love. Although Tom claims to be "the basic ingredient of survival" (203), he is, in fact, a hindrance to survival.

Elizabeth eventually joins Mary Ann and the rest of the family in Tom's plan for survival, only to have him abandon them a second time:

> He was a goddam coward. I gave in to him. I never give in to anyone. I gave in to his system and his lunatic vision of the world and his lunatic vision of the family. And he left. I came a long way towards him and he just left. (218)

Even Gail, who initially accepted Tom and the possibility of his love, develops a "healthy unhealthy need to kill him" (212). Walker continues to presents a bleak picture of the human condition. Although his exaggerated questioning of our social structures generates parody and a substantial amount of humour, it is a by-product of Walker's desire for the realism found in our undiminished needs.

Better Living ends with Tom again missing, and the family openly dysfunctional. As bleak as this form of realism might be, there is a sense that Walker is not striving for unrelenting pessimism. The struggle has had an effect. Mary Ann reveals she has finally named her baby, "a very courageous decision" (221). Gail announces she is pregnant. Nora insists they track down the father to make sure he "waives his rights" (223). She then suggests they find some "books about how to be happy" (224). As Jack observes: "Tom's craziness is the craziness of the world" (220). Walker's high stakes realism appears hysterical because it strives for a realistic depiction of the "craziness of the world."

This paper examined five of Walker's thirty plays. In an attempt to view these plays as representative, it has allowed Walker to define the parameters of the discussion. The personal "connections" Walker seeks between playwright and audience begin an extended, aggressive examination of the conflicting needs of the individual and the community. Walker's "high stakes realism" exaggerates to draw attention to these conflicting needs. The violent hysteria that results is a realistic recognition of a paradox that constitutes one playwright's view of the "human condition." Although all the ordering structures in Walker's work fail to resolve this paradox, the potency of the need driving individuals and communities together remains undiminished and, in its own way, life-affirming.

With, presumably, many years yet to write, Walker seems certain to continue attracting diverse reactions. A production of his Governor General's Award-winning play, Nothing Sacred, recently opened in Toronto, with over thirty thousand attending. Even with such a response, the play lost money for Walker and star Eric Peterson who personally contributed to production costs. The play closed after eleven weeks. Kate Taylor believes it was his move from the small, subsidized theatres like Factory Lab that defeated Walker.

> Nothing Sacred, which had been plodding along with 50-per-cent houses in the Winter Garden, was finished by the move downstairs to the Elgin. English says people couldn't find the show after the move, while other

> observers suggested that Nothing Sacred wasn't glitzy enough to fill the Elgin. (C1)

It is interesting to consider that the exaggerated Walker should find himself upstaged by a large building. Interesting, also, that all of the borrowing from popular culture should produce no guarantee of recognition from the mass audience. Perhaps this is another affirmation that power resides in the community. Hopefully, George Walker won't be discouraged by this lack of mass recognition; he has certainly earned the right to presume to be famous.

APPENDIX

Interview with George Walker, April 5, 1994.

Schoenhoff: I thought I'd first make a general statement about what I'm trying to get at in your work, and then I have some questions. How does that sound?

Walker: Okay.

Schoenhoff: I'd like to say I really like your work, but now I have to define what it is that I like, which isn't so easy. There's some element of size, something big about it that appeals to me. I've been trying to narrow that down. Here's the statement: I'm working with the paradoxical nature of structures in your work, structures that are both the salvation from, and the source of the chaos in life. I track this paradox through three portions of your career, the first one dealing with Beyond Mozambique and Bagdad Saloon, the second chapter with Zastrozzi, and the final chapter with Better Living and Criminals in Love.

Walker: What was that...structures...?

Schoenhoff: As an example, the family is a social structure that offers shelter, warmth, understanding, escape from the harshness of life; but it can also be a very troubled place, full of disappointment, pain, and insecurity.

Walker: Okay...Let's move on.

Schoenhoff: I've got chaos written at the top of a page, with thematic on one side and stylistic on the other. There's a lot dangling off these two subheadings. Chaos is a word that appears often, in your work and your interviews. There seems to be an overriding concern with structures, or order as an antidote to chaos. One thing I'm trying to do is show some connection between your stylistic techniques and the thematic content of your work. Your early work has stuff from all over the place - b-movies, novels, television, you seem to be playing with genres to create disorder. The later works settle down, stylistically, so to speak, but the chaos remains as a thematic concern.

Walker: Well, yeah, the movement through genre. I just kind of let genre fall away. I thought it was liberating at first. I thought people would look right through it, look through the framework. But the framework got in the way. No matter how liberating I thought it was, people wound up staying in the genre. I mean the Power Plays have nothing to do with Bogart. It's hard to comment. I don't think thematically. I just try to put myself in life, not so much in the theatre. I write from the subconscious up. The work resonates if people live in the same world as me. Chaos, sure chaos. This is my struggle. When I dropped genre I called it high stakes realism. They're all real people. Drop the genre and it becomes more apparent.

Schoenhoff: There seems to be a movement from an abstract sense of the hero, or the anti-hero to a more realistic father figure. Any sense of playing with the role of the father?

Walker: Well, it keeps coming up, must mean something. I don't decide what to write about and then go write it. It's not how I work. I can think about someone else's work that way, but not mine. I'm not that much into self-analysis. I do appalling things so I don't want to examine them too much. Authority, sure, in high stakes realism your reaction is big, it could be desperate or heroic. A father is just a father but if it's a troubled family in a troubled world the father has a bigger role and the children have bigger responsibilities. The patriarch is a bigger deal in that situation. I tend not to put small talk on stage.

Schoenhoff: So what do you think of an academic assessment of your work?

Walker: I have no problem with it. I just don't think that way so I have to make it up as I talk to you.

Schoenhoff: Fictionalize all you want. You mentioned size. When I started floating ideas around for this paper I said things like "I like him because he reminds me of Shakespeare. It's..." I flapped my arms and made measurements like I was describing a large fish "it's very dramatic." This didn't get me too far. Any help you can offer there.

Walker: Actors often compare my stuff to Shakespeare and the classics because there's no subtext. People just say what they're thinking. They think out loud. The text is everything. It's like the urgency. They come out exact. It's not hidden, we're not wondering, we're told constantly, someone says something they really need to say, someone responds and they have conflict, even if they're mutually confused you have to have a conference to figure out how to fix. Again, when the stakes are high it gets dangerous for

an actor in the sense that they could just comment rather than tell the truth. If you say to an actor "mean it more" it can get heroic, large, but it stays full of the truth of character, not just big for bigness sake you know. Why does the character have four of five sentences to say the same thing? It's because once wasn't enough. I mean I'm going to go to the store, I'm going to go to the store right now, I'm really going to go to the store I'm going to go to the store and no one is going to stop me.

Schoenhoff: The words "hyperbole" and "theatricality" came up a lot in my attempts to describe what I liked. It seems some of the early characters like Stein or Doc were already big and then you pumped them up more.

Walker: Pumped them up more, right.

Schoenhoff: Patrick Macdonald didn't like "hyperbole," he felt it implied something artificial or untrue. He also talked about "meaning it more."

Walker: Well, you know, I just watch life unfold. I read the newspapers every day and I say wow, and they think my stuff is exaggerated, I mean from where I'm sitting it's just docudrama, it depends on what part of the paper you're reading. I mean, if I put that stuff in a play, people call it exaggerated. I say godamit look around. But I guess it's selective also. See, I think one of the great functions of theatre is that people on stage can speak out loud what the audience feels inhibited about in their real lives, it's cathartic. It's healthy. That's why I'm kind of uncomfortable with the hiddenness the subtextual, the mysterioso for the sake of the mysterioso, that kind of oblique poetry. I say it's better to let it hang out even if you're going to feel sort of stupid. That way I think you connect more with an audience...If you think you're fucked up look at me.

Schoenhoff: Here it is.

Walker: Here it is. When you put stuff like this on stage and it's cooking along you can even get boisterous school matinees and they shut up pretty soon because there are people up on stage who are even more upset about things than they are. I mean look at those adults up there.

Schoenhoff: I've got a 15-year-old daughter and we saw Criminals together and it was such a kick for us. With a teenager it's so hard to find those bonding points, the things we can do together. It's really fun to laugh with someone who you are often at odds with.

Walker: Yeah, I know exactly the feeling. My oldest is 26. It's nice when you can get the generations together. And

that's why Patrick had a problem with hyperbole, and I do too because it can make it sound untrue. I don't want to be judged as an artist, it's not about that, it's about getting attention, and making connections, that's where the comedy comes from, from the truth. It's not from irony. None of these things work out of context. I don't write jokes, good lines. People come up and say there were so many good lines and I say well name them and they can't. They retell it and it doesn't make any sense, so it's not how I work. I'm not particularly witty or funny but in context truthful responses escape from people.

Schoenhoff: You first caught my attention playing with the phenomenon of fame in Bagdad Saloon. Zastrozzi demanded attention.

Walker: Well, you know, you give me your attention and I'll give it my best shot, I'll try to keep you awake. Again, it's the desire to connect. Zastrozzi wants to connect so he can share culpability with the audience. If I get you laughing and thinking what a neat guy I am, and then commit all of these crimes... who are you to judge me? You gave me permission to do it.

Schoenhoff: Right. I see some similarities between Zastrozzi and Ionesco's Rhinoceros. Do you know it?

Walker: A vague recollection when I was a teenager.

Schoenhoff: Rhinoceros is working with the same shared culpability. Gene wilder did the movie. It was pretty good.

Walker: Was Zero Mostel in that?

Schoenhoff: I think so, they all grow horns. I'll move on to the next page. Language. Language seems to be a structure that offers hope of communication, but it fails so often.

Walker: Well those are big things, hope and despair, cynicism. Language is the route to and escape from everything in my work, that's how you get there. It's not sub-textual, you get there by expressing hope and someone dashes hope with words. It's so out front. An American wrote an essay about my work. He said language was energy. That's true. Energy. Language is everything.

Schoenhoff: I've got a review here by Stephen Haff. He's a New York critic.

Walker: Right.

Schoenhoff: He calls your work "spoken opera." What do you think about that?

Walker: I think that's right. You know good opera that's grounded is blown up with emotion. That's another thing I talk to actors about, that words are tools of the emotions, you can't just have an intellectual understanding, I'm really much more interested in what you're feeling than what you're thinking, or at least a good balance. People often think that if there's a lot of words it's an intellectual play, actually there's a lot of emotion. When directing I start with the actors and say "make sure it's real. Everything you're going to be doing here is based on real human behavior. It's full, not sensational, if you feel like you're being conversational in my play then you're in the wrong play."

Schoenhoff: Yes, Patrick Macdonald said something to the effect that you don't write conversation.

Walker: Again, it's not casual conversation. It's like we must have this conversation! I must say this and then you have to say this. High stakes. It has to happen. People on stage want it to happen. That's my idea of drama, again I don't have any polished ideas about drama. I have 'in your face' ideas. But I stopped apologizing for that. Here we are.

Schoenhoff: How about humor? Keeping with my focus on chaos and order, humour seems to be one structure that's always successful. Most structures are fraught with problems, the whole human experience is pretty iffy. But laughter is always successful. Following my line of reasoning that the structures in your play are problematic to the point of being destined to fail, it would be possible to put forward a rather pessimistic assessment of your work, but that isn't how I come away, and that thanks to the humour.

Walker: Laughter is very healing. It's also very democratic. People get to vote right away. I find it healthy because comedy comes out of a shared anxiety, characters bumping along a wave back and forth to the audience. It's the nature of the work that it wants something exposed, that's comedy. I want the audience to share in that. I don't want to be judged as a writer. I don't want to be given a mark. I don't want to be appreciated. I want to make connections. Sometimes that makes you laugh, it makes you feel, all of that feeds into the work.

Schoenhoff: I also work with the idea of recognition. In Bagdad Saloon fame is a part of the process of recognition; in Zastrozzi recognition, culpability, is forced on us. It seems that recognition somehow connects our needs and fears.

Walker: Yeah. I think it's really really important you don't move away from people. See this person, you know him, and now we're going to look at him for a while together and

I'm not going to make him pretend he's got all these nooks and crannies. It's not the same as saying "look how clever I am. I've made up a really unique person, never seen on stage before." I prefer trusting that he's like you and me, and we explore together. I'm not going to throw cloaks. I'm trying to expose, so recognition comes, it's not exclusive, it comes from getting everyone involved...like I get this image, I'm more comfortable when they're leaning in and the actors are leaning out toward the audience. They're trying to get to each other. They're not sitting back saying, "I can't figure this out. I'm baffled." Its more like "I..I...yeah, I sort of know who you are." Again, that clever poetry means nothing to me. Yeah, I could give you a mark on the art scale.

Schoenhoff: As I mentioned, I enjoy Shakespeare so much for his size and I guess that sense of honesty you mentioned, so when I come to playwrights like Pinter and Beckett, there's a certain frustration with all that isn't said.

Walker: Well, I'm just trying to get through it. My take on it is you just keep saying it until you say something of value, it's not the economy of it, it's the desperate aggressiveness of it. I have one thing to say but I might have to say it in ten different ways so that you and I might understand it in the same way, have something to build on, the public forum of theatre. Why have a public activity that basks in the private? Then I have to go searching for them.

Schoenhoff: How are you doing?

Walker: Ohh...five more minutes.

Schoenhoff: Okay. Often incongruous people/places appear in your work. Instead of asking a few last questions I'd like you to get your reaction to my placing two of your characters, say Zastrozzi and Wineava in a room together.

Walker: Well...what....I don't know, the mind boggles, they're both control freaks, anything could happen, how do you order around someone who wants to order you around...is there a room big enough to contain them...would they be speaking the same language?

Schoenhoff: How about this: a double date, Verezzi and Julia from Zastrozzi and Junior and Gail.

Walker: That's good. I like that, a double date. I can't imagine

Schoenhoff: No? How about this: Zastrozzi and Matilda...and Rocco and Olga.

Walker: Great. Well, you'd get all kinds of physical and psychic violence, food thrown around the table, the women trying to suppress rage, the men trying to make order. That's a good thought, double date. I don't know if I'd want to be anywhere around, these are the characters of power, authority, except for Junior. Putting Junior in anything is...? Junior and Verezzi. Interesting. Oh, I can't think about that.

Schoenhoff: How about William and Tom?

Walker: Another control freak and William, one of the most generous people I've ever written about. Tom might just wring William's neck like a chicken. William might trick him into changing his life if they got through the first five minutes. In Better Living Tom in a dark mode might kick William to death, but in the right situation where they both share a need for a drink, they might meet. They're both still alive, so to speak, so who knows.

Schoenhoff: The last question, with a bit of a philosophical bent, is there any connection between the terms "consumer socialism," and "the bond"?

Walker: Well, people build philosophies around their emotional needs. You look at those people and these philosophies make perfect sense for who they are. Individual survival. That's how I see the world, it's my philosophy, maybe a big rationalization, people are looking for their own little corner of the truth, it's the philosophy of necessity. People make them up as they need them and they're as valid as anything else. Whatever gets you through the night.

Schoenhoff: Well great. Any unsolicited observations you'd like to make here.

Walker: The work becomes increasingly about connections. The last play is three kids in a park talking, no pyrotechnics. It's more about the struggle to survive and connect with each other, and the audience.

Schoenhoff: Thanks so much.

Walker: Sure. Send me a copy when it's done.

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