

A DANGEROUS TRIP: A STAGE MONOLOGUE

by

Despina Papadopoulou

(Curtains go up. A boy or a girl in his/her twenties is standing barefoot in the middle of the stage. In bright, colorful and wavy clothes. (S)he walks up and down the stage as if looking for a way out. Suddenly stands in the front and addresses the audience.)

My passion is to travel.

Experience new places with all of my senses like a child;

Taste bizarre food, see unique places, smell funny odors, touch new people, listen to different sounds and tunes!

So I decided to experience something new and take a trip far away from here.

And I have to say it was orgasmic!

I could feel the beat stronger in my ears, my whole body vibrating in an eerie frequency.

Oh I was flying so high!

(An extended hand appears from the right offering something. The character approaches it, takes a pill from it and swallows it. Pause. Starts walking up and down again.)

But then and out of nowhere I started feeling strange, like something was wrong;

Because everything became so yellow; you know this surreal one that makes it impossible to tell the difference between what's real and what's not, like I was starring at a Jeunet movie;

Because Ginsberg got so deep in my head that I wanted to live the margins, experience the feeling of standing on the edge completely unaware of the danger from falling;

Because I became so obsessed with the idea that I am like the moon, circling around reality so far from reaching it, observing from above, unable to be part of it;

Because I couldn't stop thinking that my brain is like clay that others can shape however they want, planting ideas in it and forcing me unconsciously to act in ways I do not want.

Because no idea is truly mine anymore;

Because I don't know if the life that I am living is my own choice; I am not even sure if these words are genuinely mine.

Because anxiety has taken over me and I can't stop thinking about the past, the present, the future;

Because this future seems so ominous, uncertain, threatening, scary and my mind just cannot SHUT UP and let me sleep in quiet.

(Pause. The character takes a few steps backwards and shrinks as if being scared.)

I can't help crying when I'm sinking in this quietness;

It's unbearable to walk on the streets without feeling so guilty; as if I've killed someone and everybody knows

And I know, I know they're whispering about me;

I cannot stand being in front of you (pointing at the audience) knowing that so many eyes are fixed upon me;

I know there are cameras in this fucking room (pointing the corners) watching my every move!

Because my mind is my worst nemesis.

The Construction of “A Dangerous Trip”

“I saw the best mind of my generation destroyed by madness.”

—Allen Ginsberg, “Howl”

The whole monologue rotates around the theme of drug use among young people, and in the following paragraphs I will attempt to explain step by step and as thoroughly as possible the thinking behind its construction. In such an attempt, I have decided to resort to Arthur Kleinman’s, a psychiatrist, and Oliver Sacks’s, a neurologist and psychiatrist, writings. Their work has enabled me to gain an insight into the emotional condition of addiction as is the case of the persona in the dramatic monologue.

Apart from my two medical allies, the use of the dramatic monologue along with the first person narration have significantly contributed to the effectiveness and immediacy of my work. In specific, my piece is a literary composition of a character’s confession in relation to a critical situation, that of drug use. At some points “Dangerous Trip” seems to resemble a poem despite the fact that it lacks a verse pattern and rhyme. It does contain though similes, such as “I am like the moon” and “my brain is like clay,” which apparently highlight the state of the narrating voice who is on the verge of losing her/his mind. These similes have been the most invaluable medium in my attempt to castigate drugs and convey the peril that stems from their side effects. Combined with the dramatic element of the monologue, these similes shed light on the psychological implications of the condition recreated here making the whole piece much stronger and persuasive.

The first person narration adds more dynamism to the whole piece by putting to practice and giving voice to the suffering persona. At the same time it makes it more credible by leaving still some place for criticism as a first person narration is always subjective. In other words, the use of the pronoun “I” triggers further thinking on the matter rather than impose an absolute belief. The audience is not summoned to form a stereotypical opinion but to get emotionally involved as well as question certain notions that were once ignored. It is neither mentioned nor implied in the monologue whether this “I” is a he or she; it does not matter whether you are male or female, whether you sleep with girls or with boys, psychotropic substances can affect both sexes to the same extent. For this reason also, apart from the phrase “take a trip,” there is no other clear reference to a particular drug because after all most drugs in different doses, from cocaine to meth, are likely to gradually reduce the cognitive ability of users either to the point of losing their initial identity or even worse to the point that they detach completely from reality gradually sliding into a paranoid condition.

Moving to the monologue itself, one gets the feeling that it is divided into three different, distinguishable parts, where both style and context change. What binds the three parts together is the theme of drugs that stays in the background; however, the way each part flows into the other creates a kind of domino effect. For example, the first six sentences of the dramatic monologue are characterized by a vigorous excitement that is abruptly disrupted by a sudden “but.” From that point on, the style changes and the excitement is followed by a series of “because” sentences that further enhance the narrator’s confusion, agitation and despair. Finally, the last part separates itself from the second with the evident disruption of “because” sentences as well as with its large dose of paranoia. In other words, the division of the monologue into three discernible parts attempts to reflect the different phases of being affected by drugs, with excitement followed by confusion and ending in paranoia.

The first part of the “Dangerous Trip” is filled with energy and excitement intensified by the use of exclamation marks. This is further intensified by the initial use of the word “passion.” As Arthur Kleinman writes “passion is absolutely required in the unequal struggle to master human experience” (232). Thus it becomes apparent that the word “passion” by itself holds a very strong meaning and constitutes the steppingstone for almost everything, delightful or not, we intentionally experience. The result of such a feeling is explosive. This explosion though appears to be far more destructive than creative.

Of course, apart from passion, curiosity is another factor that urges one to acquire new experiences, new feelings like those that occur while being under the influence of a psychotropic substance. Either a medicinal drug or speed or a hallucinogenic, all have the ability to provide to the user a quick getaway from reality that becomes more and more perplexing day by day (Sacks, “Altered States” 1). Accordingly, Oliver Sacks discloses in his article “Altered States” that after an intravenous injection he had spent once twelve hours of gazing at the sleeve of his dressing gown where a whole battle was taking place. Or at least that is what he believed was going during the time he was high. According to his confessions, it seems that he was incapable of maintaining a connection with the real world around him and was instead ultimately concentrated on the illusion that his mind had created after a dose of a psychotropic substance. A story like the latter reveals that the drug presents the drug user with the option to experience a journey into imaginary realities, “a trip far away from here” (“Dangerous Trip”).

What is more, as Sacks asserts in “Altered States” published in *The New Yorker*, “to live on a day-to-day basis is insufficient for human beings,” and drugs offer “a holiday from our inner and outer restrictions.” The younger someone is, the more susceptible (s)he is to intense feelings and experiences t I do not only refer to people in their twenties, but also to people who are unemployed, with debts to pay and nothing in the future to hope for. Maybe LSD is a bit too much, but a harmless little joint would do the job. Unfortunately it seems that it does it well, all around the world, as marijuana use has increased dramatically over the past few years.

Being a young student myself, one who likes to experiment and feel the vibe of the era, the energy that I am getting from what is happening around me is quite disturbing. Although there is a lot of inspiration and excitement on the part of the new generation, the creative spirit of my generation is crushed by the lack of resources, and drugs may seem as the perfect distraction; they provide an ideal gate to a parallel universe free of stress and uncertainty, a world of “pleasure and euphoria” (“Altered States” 1) that reality fails to provide, as Sacks would claim. One can “take a trip” and transcend to this magical universe within only half an hour and it will cost one only five to ten euros, according to how high one wants to transcend. Of course, the higher one wants to travel, the more money one will have to spend and the more difficult it will be for this person to come down to reality. But young people, “bold and beautiful” hardly care about these things; they only want to fly and “feel the beat stronger in [their] ears” (“A Dangerous Trip”).

Another word that I value as one with a substantial meaning in “Dangerous Trip” is that of “beat.” This becomes quite evident from the reference in the monologue to Allen Ginsberg whose poem “Howl” has inspired the second part of my creative piece. In particular, the style in which Ginsberg’s poem is written, with the “who” sentences coming one after the other, have served as an incentive for the series of the “because” sentences in the second part of the monologue. Beat is also greatly associated with music and being “beaten down” exactly like

our generation who is constantly being smashed by a system that sinks us slowly but steadily into a dark sea of depression and desperation. However, the comfort that drugs provide is only superficial and ephemeral.

Unlike Oliver Sacks who was inspired to write a book by the use of amphetamines (“Altered States” 8), the majority of the people smoking or dropping something are not that likely to be creatively inspired but rather endangered to go through a severe self-crisis and major psychological damage, not to mention mental illness. It takes time to move from the one bank of the river to the other, and such a bad trip is described in the “Because” section of the “Dangerous Trip.” In this second part, I have tried to create tangible pictures through similes that demonstrate perilous aspects of a drug trip. The reason I resort to this particular medium of expression is “because” I like using words that have a concrete meaning in order to express abstract ideas. Therefore, words such as “yellow,” “moon” and “clay” stand out from the monologue, constituting the barriers between illusion and reality, insanity and sanity.

Similar to a cancer that gradually affects more organs, the second part of the “Dangerous Trip” entails all the different parts of life on which the process of the downfall can advance, causing every time the same confusion and frustration. As the downfall takes place, the character goes through a series of various emotions and comes at odds with her or his own self; (s)he cannot distinguish reality from being high, (s)he questions her choices and decisions, (s)he is completely muddled and suffering from guilt and anxiety. Towards the end of the second part of the monologue, the character who was once vibrant and excited in the first part is now left shrunken and miserable, led to the point of depression as (s)he “can’t help crying when sinking in this quietness” (“Dangerous Trip”). This phrase constitutes the outburst of all the emotional suffering that has been built up so far. The path of drugs that (s)he once followed driven by an inner pursuit of happiness has now led him/her to the totally opposite direction.

Finally, this opposite direction is illustrated in the third piece of the “Dangerous Trip.” If one accepts that the second part focuses on the trip, it could be argued that this third part is the eventual destination, the Ithaca, which here though is the least comfortable place for one to aspire. According to Arthur Kleinman, “[e]xhausted and diminished, patients often succumb to fear, loneliness, and desperation” (224), and this is exactly the case with the character of this dramatic monologue. Particularly, after taking the path of drugs, a way with no turning back, the character's psychological state has been completely altered as a result of the mixture of psychotropic substances consumed. (S)he has become completely paranoid suffering from persecution complex and delirium. Her/his cognitive ability has suffered a severe trauma to the point that functioning within society and reality is impossible, even in the least conformist way for the sake of mere survival, as it is even “unbearable to walk on the streets” (“Dangerous Trip”).

This pessimistic way of ending the monologue is not the only ending, of course, that a story of drugs may have. One can argue that after a perturbing experience with psychotropic substances or after suffering from such mental illnesses closely connected to drug use, one can be creatively inspired and remake one’s self and one’s network (Kleinman 224). Kleinman tells the story of a woman who manages to cut off drugs and actively fight against them (224). However, my monologue aims to highlight the negative side effects and alert anyone who feels that (s)he should give such a trip a try. The monologue is not meant to prevent someone from taking drugs, but simply to alert “because” after all we are rulers of

ourselves and our own actions, and when we let ourselves be affected by the flow around us, we may end up losing the only thing we solely and proudly possess, our mind.

Works Cited

- Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl and Other Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956. Print.
- Kleinman, Arthur. "Winthrop Cohen." *What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life Amidst Uncertainty and Danger*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. 27-45. Print.
- Kleinman, Arthur. "Epilogue." *What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life Amidst Uncertainty and Danger*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. 217- 235. Print.
- Sacks, Oliver. "Altered States." *The New Yorker* 27 Aug. 2012. Print.