

Andrew

Hello everyone. This is Andrew Pond, Artistic director of Eclectic FULL Contact Theatre. Welcome to Season 3 of The Half Hour Audio Hour. Every month, we'll be featuring a different playwright, allowing you to not only hear their work, but to find out a little more about them and their process. This month's production is "The False Years", written by Amy Crider, directed by Rinska Carrasco Prestinary, and starring Dan Lin

Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to Amy Crider. After the production, stay tuned for an interview with Amy for more insight into the play and this process.

Amy Crider began studying playwriting with Second City, then studied with Chicago Dramatists for a decade. She's an alum of the Jackalope Playwrights Lab, and this year she was in the inaugural cohort of the Refracted Playwrights Lab. She's been semifinalist for the O'Neill and the Princess Grace Award, was third place for the James R. Stevenson Prize, and in 2021, she won the Tennessee Williams One Act Play Contest. Amy produces a podcast of audio versions of her work, called Continuous Dream Theatre. It can be found at continuousdream.com, or your favorite podcast player. Her first novel, Disorder, a murder mystery, is available on Amazon or it can be ordered from any bookstore, and her second novel is coming out in the fall. For more about Amy's work, you can check out her website at AmyCrider.com

And now, The False Years

(Sound of Muzak and a ceiling fan. Footsteps approach, and the doctor enters. The patient is already there. They speak)

PATIENT

I've been thinking about your question. And I was also thinking about my meds. I thought I'd look up a little about lithium.

(Pages through notes)

Lithium is a metallic element used for a wide range of products. Its atomic number is 3 and under standard conditions, it's the lightest metal and the lightest solid element. People know lithium batteries. You know it as a medication. That's

lithium carbonate. I knew someone who was a big fan of The Sopranos. I guess Tony Soprano took it. Which doesn't make sense to me because if I understand the show, Tony Soprano suffered from depression, and lithium wouldn't be much good for that. Lithium carbonate is a mood stabilizer, used to treat bipolar disorder to prevent manic episodes. Yeah, I know you know, I'm just sorting some things out.

I take three hundred milligrams, three times a day. It sounds like a lot when you put it that way, but it's a tiny pink capsule and it's such a relatively mild drug. You're using it for more and more conditions, like alcoholism, I hear. It's not an anti-psychotic. And I don't think it's doing me a lot of good. That's why I was looking it up. I think I'd like to try an anti-psychotic. Maybe, you know, just try it. I mean, I know you're the expert. You wouldn't steer me wrong. I'm just nervous about getting out, facing the world again. It's been a nice break to be here. Funny the notions people have about psychiatric wards. People think all kinds of silly things.

Like we all sleep on bare cots in one big cavernous room, like some kind of turn of the century TB ward. Or that we're in a hospital room with a hospital bed, and wearing hospital gowns, with nurses in uniforms. When we're all mostly in our regular clothes, in bedrooms like dorm rooms around a common area, and the nurses are in their regular clothes. The nurses are well-dressed. Maybe overdressed. I think they're being aspirational. Like, if you work hard to get sane, you too can wear these nice, unwrinkled clothes like us. One of the nurses was wearing kind of a tight sweater dress yesterday. To be honest, I think it's a little sexy for a psych ward. I mean, I don't want to be critical. I think actually that she likes you. I know you wear that wedding ring, but I get this vibe she's attracted to you. I even wonder if she's your wife. We wouldn't know. Husband and wife working side by side at the psych ward? It's possible. Never mind. You just look for connections. That's the thing. It's not my illness. The human mind is always looking, looking for connections. Like seeing faces in the landscape of Mars.

I know you have kids. At least I think so. Those two watercolors on the wall of your office here. Kids' drawings. Your kids. You don't have to tell me, but

that's what it looks like.

I notice. Sure I notice things. I seem crazy sometimes. Okay, I am crazy sometimes. I don't pretend I'm not. But that doesn't mean I don't notice things like how that nurse looks at you, or the kids' drawings on your wall.

Like, we all noticed at dinner the first night, that our wrist bands, the ID bands, are different colors. Mine's white, and some of the others are pink or green. I asked you about it the other night.

Just now I peeked at the form on your desk when I was alone in here for a minute, just before you came in. It said I was obsessed with the wrist bands and that I think they have magical properties. I don't know where the hell you got that idea! We were all only curious, whether the colors meant anything. For example, if it related to our diagnosis. Does my white one mean I'm bipolar, and Mary's green one mean she's OCD? We were only curious, it didn't mean a goddam thing like you thought, reading so much into my simple question! I'm not getting upset! It's just a little frustrating!

(Doctor leans over and opens drawer with medication)

Okay. Sorry. Never mind, let's just forget about all that. We don't have to get into it. I don't need Ativan. I don't want to go to sleep right now. I'm leaving in the morning, after ten days here, and this is our last talk. You asked me a question. I'm trying to get to it.

(Doctor closes drawer. Patient crosses to a closer chair and sits)

I always think it's the last time. The last one. I collect these frogs. Ceramic frogs, wooden, terra cotta, bronze. Some are realistic, some are a mosaic of color. I don't go to the store looking for a frog. They find me. I'll be in a dollar store, or even a drugstore, and there's a beauty on the shelf. The last one I bought was crystal. A beautiful, faceted crystal frog. It was pricier than the others, thirty dollars. And I thought, this is the last one. Just this final beauty. And I get it home and put it on the shelf.

And for some reason my sister explodes. I'd been living with her about six months. And she's had it with the frogs taking over. She says I'm becoming a hoarder. And she says it's my

mania, my frog mania. And I just sit down and put on my headphones and listen to Terry Gross.

But the next day, while I'm out picking up some fried chicken for us—and there I am,

doing her a favor picking up a nice dinner—when I get back, she has gotten rid of all the frogs.

Just swept them away like they were dust bunnies, like they were nothing.

And I ask, where are the frogs? Now she could have put them in a box and stuck them in a closet. That would have been reasonable.

My oldest frog, and the most valuable, is a ceramic tulip vase. It's a a white vase in the

shape of a big bullfrog, painted with little roses, with holes on its back for holding tulip stems. I

got it on Ebay for twenty-three dollars plus shipping, and it turns out it's from 1637. It was

made during this episode known historically as the tulip mania. It happened in Holland. Today

there's the big tulip festival in Holland, Michigan.

In the 1630's in Holland, people went crazy for exotic tulips. When a tulip gets those

stripes, like the flaming red and white stripes, it's called breaking.

They'd spend a thousand

guilders on a bulb, hoping it would break. It was all about the break.

People speculated, people

bought and sold options. A bulb could cost a craftsman's yearly wage.

It was a luxury that the

rich wanted to show off their wealth and outdo each other, and the middling classes coveted. If

you had a tulip with that break, you'd arrived, you were one of the elite. They bid up the prices,

the market soared in a frenzy. Higher and higher it all went. Until 1637. Then it crashed.

People lost hundreds, in some cases a thousand guilders. It didn't completely ruin anyone. But

the bottom fell out. The tulip had been like a golden trophy. Then the depression set in, and

people went back to their black bread and beer and for some time they stopped reaching for the

sky, and a tulip was just a tulip again. And if you asked them, they couldn't explain it, why a

tulip was worth one's sanity and dignity, and then it didn't matter at all anymore. They couldn't

say when it all started, what lit the fuse, and what snuffed it out.

It was just an episode, an

exceptional moment in their otherwise rational, dignified lives. They

didn't want to talk about it.
Just wanted to get on with their lives. I don't know if that was when
it all began. If the tulip
mania was the start of it all.

My parents split up in 2005. They were in their seventies. And my
mother lived with my
sister, and my dad lived with me, until they both passed. My mother
was determined to outlive
my father, but she didn't. And even though my sister and I were not
young by any means, we
still took on this influence, that my sister took on mom's anger and
bitterness, and I took on
dad's guilt and helplessness. They split up over donuts.

The stock market was going up and up. And my dad was convinced it was
a sure thing.
He wanted to get in while the going was good. But they didn't have a
lot of savings. What they
had was a house. A nice house, all paid for. Three bedrooms, two
baths. Half an acre. The yard
had a garden with tomatoes and peppers, and Dutch tulips lined the
walk. Tulips that broke in
red and white strips. It was a brick house, with a big willow tree in
back. I used to love to hide
under that willow, with a book and a box of Cracker Jack.

Dad figured, if he could sink a big wad of cash into the market, he
could really make a
killing. So he mortgaged the house. Took three hundred thousand out of
it.
He said, that's what the rich men actually do, the big shots. People
like George Soros
don't invest their own money. They leverage it. They borrow a million
from some corrupt bank,
buy a bunch of stock, turn a million into a billion overnight, pay
back the loan, and pocket the
rest. They all do that. Even the famous empire builders in the old
days, people like Carnegie.
They didn't make their fortune building railroads and creating jobs.
This is how they actually
made most of their fortune, leveraging the market.

So. Around our town, they were building Krispy Kreme shops right and
left. People
were lining up in their cars around the block to buy those donuts,
fresh and hot, hot from the fryer. I like donuts. Everyone likes
donuts. They were selling like...hot cakes. That's the
actual expression, so you know how real it was, what a sure thing it
was. And Krispy Kreme went public. And donuts, they're so benign. It's

not like oil that pollutes everything for miles around, or coal that strips off the mountain tops. It's not like weapons or any evil. Just good, sweet, innocent donuts. He sunk the money into Krispy Kreme.

I don't know the ins and outs. Later he said they were cooking more than donuts. But the donut bubble burst. And he lost the house. And his wife. And my sister, who took mom's side and barely spoke to him again.

My sister and I were close growing up. She was my big sister, kind of my protector. But after that, it all frayed. She let me move in last year, but she makes sure to remind me it's a temporary arrangement. And the house is her house, the stuff is her stuff, the meals are her recipes.

I think she's a little afraid, that I could do something. That I'd find some way, in my mental disorder, even by accident, to cost her everything. Sometimes she hints that maybe my disorder comes from my father, which is not the case, he was perfectly normal. This fear is like a little bit of shattered glass under our feet.

I think sometimes I forget to breathe. I'll be sitting there, lost in thought, and then I'll realize I haven't taken a breath in a long time. I told my sister that, and she just rolled her eyes and launched into a lecture on the brain and how humans don't need to think about breathing, as if I didn't know that.

My sister is a scientist. A chemist. She believes in reason. She thinks I can conquer my issues with reason. She believes in progress. She's a Libertarian. An originalist. She says, there's a great chain. Links that are passed down and added to from early times to today, and we're in peril to break that chain.

And to my sister, the great mistake of our modern life is the unraveling. She wants me to exercise my reason. Just think harder. She writes me inspirational notes she leaves around the house. She wants to inspire me to consider my situation. Her last note said that

(Pulls note out of pocket)

I'm lucky we don't live in the Dark Ages anymore, with my illness, because maybe they'd call me possessed. I'd be burned at the stake. I should be grateful. But here's the thing.

The height of witch hunting was the Renaissance. These men used all their reason to analyze and rationally examine this problem of witchcraft. They were intellectuals. They were logical. They became authorities and law givers. They used the total force of their reason to make this understanding of the spirit world, and with the full force of their reason, they passed laws and created courts and judges, and in the full force of their reason, they burned the flesh of various people. Many of all sorts, many women and healers, but also people of all sorts, and people who just couldn't keep their mouths shut. And people like me. The wealthy weren't always safe, either. If you accused your neighbor of witchcraft, you could have his property. And if you turned in a witch, you were protected from the same accusations, so a culture of great fear was born. But it was all born of

people trying to be reasonable. If someone tells you that all you have to do to protect yourself from being burned was to burn your neighbor, then burning your neighbor becomes a reasonable thing to do.

I try to tell my sister about this, about these origins. She says it again, how lucky I am to live in the modern world. How superior we are, because every generation builds on the mistakes of the past and becomes more rational and more enlightened.

She says, "We make progress. We know better now." I tell her, we always think this. She doesn't want to talk about it, and she runs out of the room and I chase her but she locks herself in her room, and I hear her turn on the TV, as loud as she can, and I'm telling it to the empty hallway, I don't bother to shout, I hear the voice of the TV soothing her, and my voice sounds only like static while I try to say this.

Every generation thinks, we're better now. At least we're not cannibals anymore. We're not the killers of Socrates. We're not the witch burners. We're not using the guillotine. We're not slave owners. We're not colonizers. We're not cutting off the hands of workers on rubber plantations. We're not sending children into coal mines. We're not mired in the mud of the Somme. We're not goose stepping. We're not lynching. We're not arresting homosexuals. We're not executing communists. We're not electing murderers. We're not doing those things anymore. There's always something we're not

doing, and proud of not doing, but for some reason there's always something new to not do that we're just so proud and happy not to be doing anymore.

And we call it progress. "Because we have reason now. We didn't have it before, but

now thanks to the miracle of progress, we have reason now."

Excuse me, I'm forgetting to breathe.

I'm just trying to answer. It's a question I've been pondering for a long time. I think I figured it out.

So I came home, and my frogs were gone. And I asked my sister, where are the frogs?

And the thing is, she wouldn't tell me. She could've put them in a box in the closet, and maybe I

would have been okay with that. But did she throw them away? Or drop them off at Good Will?

And she wouldn't tell me. I couldn't know. And it ached inside me, this not knowing. It was

like losing a child, or an old friend. Not knowing.

So I got increasingly agitated. She was cooking at the stove. She had a date that night, her first date in like a couple of years. She wanted to bring strawberries dipped in melted white chocolate. So she's melting the white chocolate on the stove, being real careful about the temperature. And I'm yelling and she's stirring the pot. And then I grab a big glass of water and toss the water into her chocolate. This causes it to just seize up and harden so it's no good. Then I throw the glass against the wall.

It doesn't even break. I can't even break a glass.

She starts screaming at me, and I take off, run out of the house to the park. It's a

beautiful night, cool and dry. And I settle onto a bench. I watch the geese with their goslings.

And I'm pondering it. The question. When did it all go wrong? When did it all go so

terribly, awfully wrong?

I'm on the bench two nights, and in the morning, I see the sun rise. Big pink and gold

clouds. Venus sparkling in the deep blue just fading above. And I understand. It was long ago,

maybe five thousand years, maybe more. It was when we stopped scratching a living out of the

earth with our bare hands. It was when we wanted something more. When we tried to use our

reason to control our fate. Controlled the floodwaters and created

systems and made order out of
fear. It was when we couldn't accept the fear anymore. When putting
everything onto God
wasn't enough. By God, I mean the unknown.

It should be enough to plant wheat and pray. Enough to get by with
hope and
community. But that stopped being enough. And then it all went
terribly, awfully wrong. When
it wasn't enough and now nothing is enough, nothing is ever enough.
And all this time since, these five thousand years, we've been living
in a delusion. We
live in falsehood. And every year, every day, it's all more false.
These have been the false
years, these years of civilization. You asked me when it was. That was
when it all went wrong.
Meanwhile, my sister goes straight to a judge to have me committed,
because I've run
off. She says I'm "off my meds." Well, yeah I ran off without taking
my lithium. You and I
both know two days without lithium doesn't mean a damn thing. But of
course she gets her way,
and they pick me up and bring me here.

It's okay here. I guess my sister might talk to you when she picks me
up tomorrow. If
you get a chance, I'd appreciate it if you'd ask her what she did with
the frogs. Just so I could
know.

And I'm thinking, I don't think the lithium is enough. I know it's not
a really powerful
medication. I was wondering about something more potent. What do you
think? Trilafon?
Yeah, Trilafon. I like the sound of that. Sounds like a flower in the
woods with three red petals.

(Sound of elevator and a rolling cart)

I hear them wheeling in the dinner cart, with the trays of mac and and
cheese and the
cold, dry rolls. I won't miss the food.
I guess that's everything. I hope I answered your question. Thanks
Doc.

(Sound of ceiling fan and muzak)

Andrew

Thank you for listening to The False Years, here on The Half Hour
Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Amy Crider

after the recording of this show.

Andrew

All right? So Amy first off I want to say thank you for letting us be part of your show the false years.

Amy Crider

Thank you Thank you for doing it I Really appreciate it.

Andrew

So tell me when did you start writing.

Amy Crider

I Always wrote from early childhood. When I was very young I used to read these novels called the Happy Hollisters and I wanted to write one of the happy Hollisters type of novels. So when I was very young but I was sidetracked for a long time and didn't settle in to seriously embark on a writing career until I was about 40. So twenty one years ago was when I sat down and said this is it I'm going to try to establish a career as a writer.

Andrew

What at that time motivated you to make that decision.

Amy Crider

Oh probably turning forty was part of it feeling like time is going by and I'm not doing it. I had a kind of depressing job at the time and I had ideas I always had a lot of ideas for things and I wasn't getting them written and I felt this pressure. I had a particular idea for a screenplay I wanted to write and I just felt like I've got to do this I'm I'm not doing it. And I had recently gotten married to my current husband and I asked him would you support me if I quit my job and write full time and he was on board with it and so that's how I started.

Andrew

So what inspired the false years.

Amy Crider

I was actually inspired by a conversation with my husband about Philip K Dick the writer whose novels have been made into many movies now like blade runner. Philip K Dick was probably mentally ill possibly bipolar. I don't think he ever got an exact diagnosis and his case was complicated by his drug use but hearing about his life and some of the struggles he had um, made me think he was very similar to me. I'm also bipolar. My actual diagnosis is bipolar disorder with psychotic features. But I've been in remission for the most part for 30 years, but when I was symptomatic thirty years ago having these manic episodes, I was also having these strange insights into civilization

and society in the sense that things we take for granted aren't quite real.

Philip K Dick was interested in gnosticism and he had this idea that the last few thousand years have been false years. Have been not quite real, and I think I can explain this better by talking about the french philosopher Baudreard who talks about the simulacrum and how we live with a certain amount of simulations of things all around us. And a good example of this was a funny Facebook meme I saw that showed a picture of a pumpkin on a vine and then a picture of a piece of pumpkin pie and then a Starbucks pumpkin spice latte and then artificially flavored Pumpkin Spice Coffee creamer. Each step is more of a simulation from the original and we live with the pumpkin spice artificially flavored coffee creamer as our reality and that's not really real. It's a bit of a falsehood and so I just have this sense that we live in a certain amount of falsehood in our lives. How many people have ever seen a pumpkin growing in a field or grown their own pumpkin.

So those were all the sorts of ideas I had that I brought to the script.

Andrew

I have to say that's a lot to to put into a 10 page script.

Amy Crider

Yeah.

Andrew

And congratulations you were--in 3 seasons--you're the first person to bring up french philosophy.

Amy Crider

Ah, thank you.

Andrew

I think that all comes comes across very beautifully in the script. it really stands out as a very affecting and interesting script from both an intellectual and an emotional side of it.

Amy Crider

Ah, thanks.

Andrew

Now, I know you've written novels and and scripts and so I know that youwrite in several different mediums. But what challenges are there for writing for audio as opposed to writing for something to be performed on stage or or some other form of of writing? what are some of the challenges in that.

Amy Crider

I Actually find it a bit easier to write for audio I don't have a great visual sense particularly with three dimensional space when I write a play I often struggle with trying to picture what the set would look like or how actors might be blocked, so actually it's a little easier for me to write for audio. I think one of the things that's ah unfortunate that we miss with the audio though is the actor's face, because when we did the first rehearsal we were actually actually all on video and could see each other. and Dan had these wonderful facial expressions and I said at the time. Oh it's too bad that we're not going to be able to see your face with this? Um, so that I I think missing the actor's face is a challenge overall, but actually in terms of the writing it's It's actually a little easier for me.

Andrew

So as you say you write full time now. Do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like to promote.

Amy Crider

Yes, thank you I I have a novel that's out now called Disorder it can be bought through Amazon or ordered from a local bookstore. It's on bookshop.com and Barnes and noble. And it's funny that it might seem like I'm always writing about bipolar disorder because this is a murder mystery about a bipolar woman but that's not the only thing I write about. I do have a novel coming out in the fall a historical novel about monks creating the book of Kells in eighth century Scotland, and I have a podcast--my own podcast called continuous dream theater that you can get to if you go to continuousdream.com also if you go to my website. Amycrider.com there are links to the novels and the podcast. I have a Youtube channel, so all of those things.

Andrew

Excellent, excellent and I will will will make sure to put that a link to ah your website in the episode description of the podcast.

Amy Crider

Ah, thank you.

Andrew

Yeah, absolutely. And so I'll end with with the same question that I've asked everybody else. What in your opinion is the biggest misconception that people in this country have about mental health.

Amy Crider

I Think there are a few things I think people are starting to understand more and more how common it is to have some sort of disorder or struggles with anxiety or depression. Um I think more and more people are getting this bipolar diagnosis. It seems like I meet a lot of people who've been diagnosed that way. but in terms of misconception I think in America we put a great emphasis on personal

responsibility and a great emphasis on happiness. As if we're obligated to be happy all the time It's in our foundational document. You know the pursuit of happiness and it seems like this American obligation to be happy and I think that along with that this personal responsibility that you isolated as an individual, Have to do something if you're depressed will take this medication, when so often. It's a social issue as well and a societal issue an economic issue that if you're depressed because you have a terrible job. It's not just your responsibility or your fault or anything for being depressed. Maybe part of the solution is changing your job or finding more friends as Rinsko was saying, that support network. and I think that this idea of this personal responsibility to be happy is a bit of a misconception that we have in America, I think.

Andrew

Absolutely I fully agree. There is this this concept that if oh you're not happy It's your own fault. You know?

Amy Crider

And yeah.

Andrew

As you point out there are societal factors. There are all different types of factors that go into whether or not, you're quote unquote happy and it's also just impossible to be happy all the time.

Amy Crider

Right? And another thing I would say too is that we have this idea that you should just see someone see a therapist and everything will be fixed and it's a much longer process than that they're not.. There are some therapists who aren't necessarily as good or not a good fit for you and so it might take several therapists to find someone who clicks with you. It's a long process. It's not just I'll see someone and you'll be better in no time you know. People don't realize what a long process It can be to get well.

Andrew

I would say that for me that's probably one of the big ones is this this concept that there's sort of like a ah one size fits all solution. Or that all therapy works for all people you know.

Amy Crider

Right? Or all medication Sometimes you have to try--I had to try a couple of different medications before something really worked for me and that that in itself that was like a year-long process. So you know.

Andrew

Right?

Amy Crider
There's no quick fixes.

Andrew
And unfortunately especially in in America and at this time in history, we are very much all about easy and fast as opposed to something that actually works. Well Amy Once again I just want to say thank you so much for allowing us to be part of this script. It's an absolutely wonderful script and a very important subject that you know there's not enough real conversation about and so I really do appreciate you allowing us to be part of this show.

Amy Crider
Well thanks, a lot. It's been a great experience I Really appreciate this opportunity and thank you for having me.

Andrew
We hope you enjoyed The False Years. Next month, we will be presenting Fingers Crossed, written by Colette Cullen. If you enjoyed what you heard, please remember to like, follow, and subscribe to our podcast. And feel free to leave a review! You can help us out in continuing this work by heading over to redcircle.com/shows/half-hour-audio-hour, where you can sponsor us through a onetime or recurring donation and become our partner in highlighting the voices and stories of women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ artists. And head over to eclectic-theatre.com to find out about our serialized audio dramas, Deep Shadows, Bloody Bay, Clusterf**k, Monocyte, and Throwing Shade. On behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT, thanks for listening