

James Keller, the one who could never be



Vander Ritchie
Co-Editor

I recently reread *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson. It's a play that means a lot to me. Personally and professionally. It marked the first time I became a core actor on the drama team. Those guys who seem to have the big parts every time. But it also means a lot to me personally. And it's weird. And bad. Well... it's got good and bad. And the ways it's good and bad are endlessly weird. Weird in how it manages to achieve all its good qualities by accident. Weird in that it fumbles everything it tries to do, yet somehow absolutely slam dunks what it's doing in the background. Weird in that the characters the show focuses 70 percent of its attention on are cliché cardboard cut-outs, yet the guy who gets as much screen time as Neville Longbottom turns out to be one of the most emotionally and thematically complex characters in the entirety of the English canon. The character that I got the absolute privilege of playing. And in rereading it, I am endlessly fascinated by him. James.

James, for most of the show, plays a Rodrick. An older brother that is snide, mean, sarcastic. What Gibson clearly intended James to be was a symbol. A symbol for a cruel and unforgiving world. And for the world's treatment of the disabled. Multiple times throughout the show, James is the one who constantly suggests institutionalization, and who is least convinced of Annie's ability to teach Hellen. He meant for James to be the villain. That's not who James was. At least to me. To me, James was someone who had been hazed. Who knew the world, perhaps better than any other character, and because of it became cynical and nihilistic. A scene that always rattles around in my head is the breakfast scene. A scene

where, just to set up a showdown between Annie and Hellen, the Kellers are having breakfast and James and Keller fight about military strategy. They're talking about why they lost the Civil War. James seems interested in actually talking about what the South did wrong, while Keller seems not to have yet accepted that they did. What was clearly an attempt at playful banter, or maybe even light characterization turned, at least for me, into James' thesis. One about accepting loss and giving up to save yourself the hurt.

He has a few scenes that, for me, define the show. The scenes where he pleads for Hellen. He talks to Annie, pleading with her to just leave Hellen alone, saying her life is hard enough as it is. He has a deep-rooted love for his sister, and he wants to protect her from a cold and unloving world. He truly believes that there can be nothing done to help her and that she would be better left alone. That she may even be somehow protected by her senselessness. That her inability to see the world around her shields her from how terrible it is.

The Miracle Worker has the easy task of working with real people. Well ... except for James. Helen never had a brother who fits James' character. She did have siblings, a whole handful of them. But no James. Instead, James works as two distinct things. He's an amalgamation of all of Helen's siblings, much more compact and better for dramatic structure. The second is that he works as a mirror for Helen. He is what Helen would be like were she 16 and fully-abled. And his relationship with his father is meant to mirror Helen's with Annie's. At one point in the show, James says, "That there's such a thing as dullness of heart. Acceptance. And letting go. Sooner or later we all give up, don't we?" They show us what could have been. Because they fail, and Hellen and Annie succeed. Because Keller is mean, vindictive, and bad-tempered. Because James is sensitive and emotional. Because, most of the way through the show, he goes pleading to his mother for

help. Help to stop his suffering and mend the relationship with his father that is clearly on the brink of disaster. And he gets nothing, where Hellen got something. And he fails, where Hellen succeeded. And he's left alone to history. His clearly sharp mind never to be used for anything. The ending of the show is when this all finally comes into focus. Not only for the audience but for James. He's just had a confrontation with his dad, where he demands that he let Annie work. He accepts that Annie is helping Hellen. For the first time in the whole show. What happens? James is obliterated. Made to look like a petulant child. And when Annie, only minutes later, finally succeeds with Hellen, James remains seated. He failed. Stupendously.

I think one of the reasons I like James is because I relate to him. He reminds me a lot of who I was just five years ago: so engulfed in a dark world and lacking the maturity to fully confront it. James, a kid so engulfed in love for the world and the people around him that the onset darkness of circumstance nearly destroys him. It created a rancid shell cloaking a fundamentally loving inside. A shell that was confrontational, angry, depressed, and snarky. We were alone. I know how that feels. But what's changed? Well, I went through the same trajectory as James. After months of relentless physical and emotional abuse, I spiraled, ending in a mental health crisis so strong I changed schools. I'd call that a failure. And what brought me out of it? I know it sounds cheesy, but the thing that brought me out of it was feeling like I had a purpose in life. Something that I felt I was good at and that I could spend the rest of my life doing. A way that I could help other people. And for me, that's acting. That's what I want to do with my life. After I knew that, I no longer felt hopeless, I no longer felt like there was no place in this world for me. And when I was up there on that stage two years ago, performing those short little paragraphs, I remembered what it felt like to be James. Thank god I'm not anymore.

Quitting competitive cheerleading



Makiah Parris
Staff Reporter

At age 10 I decided I wanted to do Competitive cheerleading. I joined Stuntz Academy located in Pueblo, Colorado. Competitive cheerleading is one, out of many sports, I favor the most. It always encouraged me to try my best, and work hard for my teammates, my coaches, and myself. The extreme physical activity kept me in shape and not only helped me improve in cheer but also other sports as well. I received many learning opportunities and the experience to connect with my team and compete in different states. After five years of doing competitive cheerleading, my family relocated to Salida. I later had to make the decision to quit due to distance. Although, I knew I couldn't quit being involved in physical sports. I loved the physical activity so I decided to join and get involved in basketball, soccer, and volleyball. Quitting cheerleading was absolutely devastating to me, but I soon realized that it opened up more opportunities and allowed me to test different skills and meet new people.

Traveling was one of my favorite parts of doing competitive cheer. I created life-

long memories and was proud of what I was able to accomplish. When I found out we were moving I was heartbroken, I didn't want to let go of being able to see my friends everyday at the gym and competing for a D2 summit bid, the opportunity to win one of the most coveted National Champion titles in the sport of cheerleading. Moving to Salida from Pueblo didn't really give me an option to continue cheer because there wasn't a gym. I was really devastated that I couldn't be with my team, winning competitions and being there with them to celebrate. I wanted to be there with them to share memories and push ourselves to try new skills.

I decided to take this as a huge opportunity to venture out and find new hobbies, which I did. I absolutely love basketball and I love being able to continue doing volleyball and soccer. I'm excited to get more comfortable with these sports and really learn the game.

I will always miss the extreme physical activity and the constant driving of my coaches. I fell in love with the sports I play now and strive to improve in each one as much as possible. Cheerleading always brought out the competitive side of me and now I get to use it with different activities. If I didn't quit cheerleading I wouldn't have been able to find new hobbies or discover new skills. Although I do miss being able to receive medals and jackets, I'm glad I was able to try something new.

The smell of books

Scarlett Campbell
Staff Reporter

One cannot accurately describe the smell of a book
To me, some smell like lavender and rain
They all smell different, you see
Paper is what most think it to be
But go back and think

Books smell like memories
My memories are laced with sweet perfume and a touch of
love
The greatest of adventures, a book in my hand

Simply put, the smell of books are what you want them to be
Relive the adventures, read through the eyes of you or another
As if they are your own
I love the smell of books
The memories they've brought me
Lavender and rain