

# *Warnings Before Breakfast*

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

***Warnings Before Breakfast*** is an adaptation of two early O'Neill plays, *Warnings* (1913) and *Before Breakfast* (1916), but on a more personal note it is quest to find empathy for the characters and their circumstances. For years, I had little interest in these two plays. I found the characters either unlikable or inert. There was little to root for or identify with. But over time and revisiting the text, I started to ask new questions and identify new doors to crack open and peek into. With the play *Warnings*, I began to look at the discomfort of the passive central character James Knapp. He finds himself trapped between his responsibilities to others and himself and seems unable to fight the forces against him. My discomfort with Knapp as a character became an interest in exploring his discomfort. Perhaps the character didn't like the way his life was written either. I had more in common with him than I thought.

*Before Breakfast* features the unhappy Mrs. Rowland venting her frustrations at her husband in another room. The audience does not see this man or hear him utter a word during the entire play. The cumulative experience of Mrs. Rowland piling on dissatisfaction after dissatisfaction and the silence of the unseen husband gave me nothing I could relate to. But at some point, I asked myself the question "What's going on in the other room?" I had a desire to balance out the story in a hope of understanding multiple sides of the situation and perhaps finding something redeeming.

What would happen if I looked at the outwardly frustrated Mrs. Rowland and the inwardly frustrated James Knapp as a couple experiencing a breakdown in communication? Mrs. Rowland became Woman and James Knapp became Man to blur the lines separating the two stories and to help me see their worlds as overlapping. The goal became making two separate characters' dilemmas into the story of a relationship in crisis.

Ultimately, in seeking to find empathy for these characters and these stories I had to see them together in a new way. I hope audiences will see these plays with fresh eyes as well. Looking into the mirror with empathy, we see others, as well as ourselves.

*Eric Fraisher Hayes, Adaptor and Director of **Warnings Before Breakfast***