

# BRIEF CHRONICLE BOOKS 6-8

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**A Play by  
Alexander Borinsky**

# Introduction

How do you begin an introduction for a play that has no beginning? And if the world feels a little unknowable after reading that play, if you feel unknowable to yourself, how do you talk about that, how do you narrate what it was like? Still, I will tell you what I thought about when I finished Alexander Borinsky's *Brief Chronicle*, Books 6-8, though it changed when I read it again, and it may be different for you too. Intimacy. The many ways (sometimes strange or uncomfortable) in which it's possible to know another person. What it means to appear. What it means to live.

When the play opens at the very end of Book 5 with *Baroque opera* and *Mom*, it seems we are encountering something that has already been happening, without us, and this is surprisingly relaxing (we are allowed to be "late"). The ghost will arrive, but in a sense we are making an entrance too. This is not just about the one who watches and the one who is watched; in Borinsky's play, those formalities have been emptied of their meaning. We are all here in this room for whatever will unfold.

Hannah Arendt wrote in *The Life of the Mind* that living creatures are "appearances" as much as they are anything else. To be alive is a grand performance. "And just as the actor depends upon stage, fellow actors, and spectators, to make his [or her] entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the location for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence." And when a play takes you further into life? Into an exterior that isn't in opposition to the interior, that allows for different kinds of vision?

In *Brief Chronicle*, I feel this openness of space, situation, experience. Or, as writer Orhan Pamuk has said of fiction, "when I read novels in my youth, sometimes a broad, deep, peaceful landscape would appear within me." Is it possible for another thing to open up in the middle of one's own self? A kind of connection? In Book 7 of the play DT says, "Julian? I think I've been missing something my whole life. There's another dimension and I've missed it."

What is it like to spend intense time with someone still unfamiliar? How can we come to know someone differently through an encounter that is not typical or expected? (Julian: "I don't really believe in information as a way of getting to know people, but."). I once heard a story about two people who fell in love after getting into a car accident together. I'm not suggesting a car accident as a good way to meet someone; I'm saying that so much of the time we meet in the most mundane of ways—at work or a party—and we say the most expected things. We follow a script, but no one is forcing us to do it. In the play Julian suggests one way he and DT might get to know each other and DT refuses it, but later he changes his mind and suggests it too. A potential violence that might at the same time be an intimate act, one more way of being close. And so, the second time I read *Brief Chronicle* I thought about different kinds of pain, what it's like to give and receive it. What pain teaches us about another person.

And I wondered: can you also come to know someone through a performance, through the space it opens?

I felt grateful, for the theater itself, and for this play by Alexander Borinsky.

—Amina Cain  
Los Angeles, California

## Punctuation Things

(And so ...)	Audience address.
///	Shift of time or place.
{        }	Silence, suspension.
<i>Violins.</i>	⋮ Sound.

## Setting Things

**BOOK SIX** happens almost entirely at a table covered in a bright plastic table-cloth, with an array of hot sauces, a miniature potted cactus, and a string of festive flags.

**BOOK SEVEN** happens over and around a kiddie pool of water.

**BOOK EIGHT** is a fragment. So it happens nowhere.

## General Things

I tend to like it when it's pretty simple.

I tend to like it when, however the text sways—simple speech or broad melodrama—we feel that it has been spoken a hundred times before.

There might be more music than I've indicated. Take a listen to WTMD, a Baltimore radio station, for a sense of the kind of thing you might hear coming out of certain white boys' cars in Little Connecticut.

When we first staged this play in an office building in Manhattan, Rebeca Medina tackled the folkloric dance. She picked a Mexican feminist punk band as the soundtrack and choreographed something silly and thrashing and somewhat chaotic. "That's the place folk dances come from, right?" she said.

## Actor Things

**Julian.**

**DT.** Also called Dan.

**Mom.** Actually named Joan. Also plays **Mia**.

**Band.** A high-school marching band.

[*Stage directions*] which are spoken aloud by an additional performer.

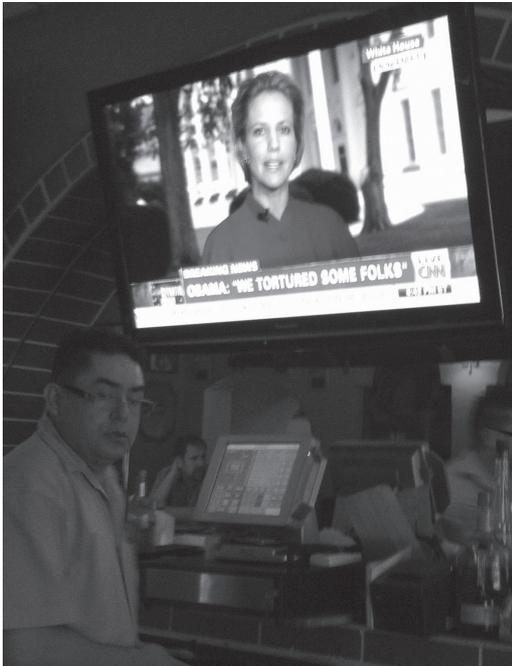
It's best when each performer is older or younger or of a different gender-expression, ethnicity, or ability than you might expect. This keeps the play vibrating in your imagination.

## Context Things

[Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.] has said he personally opposes capital punishment. But he has authorized its use many times.

'The nature of the conduct at issue and the resultant harm compel this decision,' Mr. Holder said.

—“U.S. is Seeking Death Penalty in Boston Case,” *New York Times*, 1.30.2014



Acapulcos Mexican Family Restaurant & Cantina, Stratford, CT, 8.1.2014. Photo by the author.

The basic structure of Noh drama is: a person meets a ghost, dances with a ghost, recognizes the ghost. The ghost leaves. The End.

—Sarah Ruhl, “Theater as a preparation for death”

I will love you till the end of time.

—Lana del Rey

You don't need to be happy you just need to do something.

—The Dolly Wagglers

*N.B.* I was thinking about Dzhokhar Tsarnaev a lot in 2013 and 2014.

I still think about him a lot.

But DT is not Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

*For DRD,  
who seems fearless to me.*

*Transitional  
moment in a  
baroque opera.*

**Mom.** Look. Julian. You're my kid. I'm your mom. Look. Look out. Look out at all this. Look at the crumbled highways, look at the overpasses, pulled up like weeds and lain on their sides. Look at all the big box stores. Their roofs have been peeled back and big fistfuls of their merchandise strewn across the parking lots. Look at all the buildings with their windows punched in like popped eyeballs. This is it. Look at it just look. What a shame, what a waste. We've come to the end. We'll have to clean it all up. Look at the bodies of the drowned. Look at the waterlogged trailers. Look at the mud. Everything, covered in mud. Look at the last gasping fishies. There will have to be some cleaning up of this for sure. Or maybe it's the end, nothing to do. Or maybe we can clean it up. Look, Julian!—