

# InsideOUT

PRODUCED BY THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT OF THE DENVER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

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## THE SWEETEST SWING IN BASEBALL



*The Sweetest Swing In Baseball*

by Rebecca Gilman

Directed by Wendy C. Goldberg

**April 5 - May 26**

The Ricketson Theatre

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ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT MCKOWEN

# InsideOUT

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## SYNOPSIS

**RHONDA:** Whether the critics like it or not or whether anything sells is not important. What's important is that the gallery is proud of the work we show.

**DANA:** It's totally bombing, isn't it?  
*The Sweetest Swing in Baseball*

**D**ana Fielding is a successful painter who has somehow lost her vision. An art show of her latest work has been a flop; her agent and art dealer cluck around her with useless advice, and her previously stalwart boyfriend decides he'd rather not stay with her.

After a suicide attempt, Dana is sent to recover at a psychiatric hospital. She finds solace in the hospital's dull routine and inspiration from two fellow inmates: Michael, a gay recovering alcoholic, and Gary, a violent sociopath who stalked a CNN news reporter. Dana wants to stay in the hospital, but her medical insurance won't cover more than ten days in the hospital. She finds inspiration in an unlikely hero and comes up with a scheme to extend her stay. The play explores the struggles and pressures of an artist in contemporary society, the pressures of celebrity, the inadequacy of the mental health system and the fine line between art and madness.

# THE PLAYWRIGHT

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**B**orn in Trussville, Alabama, Rebecca Gilman attended Middlebury College and is a graduate of Birmingham-Southern College in Birmingham, Alabama. Her plays include *The Glory of Living*, *Boy Gets Girl*, and *Spinning into Butter*, among others. She is a three-time Joseph Jefferson Award winner. *The Glory of Living* was also named a *Time Magazine* Top10 play for 2001, and she won Gilman the George Devine Award and Great Britain's *Evening Standard* Award for Most Promising Playwright.

Gilman is a resident playwright at the Chicago Dramatists Workshop. Her plays have also been produced at the Lincoln Center Theatre in New York, Royal Court Theatre in London, the Public Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, Manhattan Class Company, as well as other theaters around the country and abroad. She received her M.F.A. in playwriting from the University of Iowa in 1991. Chicago Tribune Arts Critic Chris Jones has said of Gilman that "she writes plays with such intriguing plots that the audience finds itself hungry for what is going to happen next-and once she has the viewer under that narrative spell, she does not shirk from exposing complex themes with a strongly feminist sensibility, dispensed with just the right quirky touch of nouveau Southern gothic."

# DARRYL STRAWBERRY

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*We don't talk about the things that happened to us...if we didn't have some issues, I mean, what coulda been, coulda been.*

—Darryl Strawberry

**D**arryl Strawberry, born in 1962, is a native of Los Angeles who played high school baseball for the Crenshaw High Cougars. He was drafted from high school in 1980 by the New York Mets; some baseball pundits called him the black Ted Williams. In New York he began to play at the major league level in 1983, posting 26 home runs, seven triples and batting in 74 runs, while hitting for a .257 average that year. As a result he was named the National League Rookie of the year. The next year he made it to the All-Star game because he hit 26 home runs and batted in 97 runs.

**I**n his prime years (1985-1990), Darryl's numbers were impressive. In 1986 he hit 27 homers and knocked in 93 runs as the Mets won the 1986 World Series. In 1987 he hit 39 home runs, 32 doubles, stole 37 bases and drove in 104 runs. Despite all his work, the Mets failed to reach the playoffs. In 1988 Darryl once again hit 39 home runs and drove in 101; the Mets made the playoffs but lost to the Dodgers in the National League championship series. In 1989-90, Strawberry's offensive numbers declined, but he was still extremely popular with fans; action figures, posters and banners of him were hot sellers. But he was also becoming controversial.

He had a physical altercation on team picture day with captain Keith Hernandez and a war of words with infielder Wally Backman. He often overslept and missed team workouts. He publicly complained about manager Davey Johnson after he was replaced by pinch-hitter

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Kevin Mitchell during the 10<sup>th</sup> inning of Game Six in the 1986 World Series. After the 1991 season, he had 280 lifetime homers and was drawing comparisons to home run king Hank Aaron. In that same year, after contract negotiations with the Mets broke down, he signed a very lucrative contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers. It was then that more of his personal problems began to surface.

In 1987 Strawberry's first wife, Lisa, filed for legal separation on the grounds of domestic violence. Two years later, another woman, also named Lisa, charged him with being the father of her child. He was involved in yet another violent confrontation but no charges were filed.

In 1990, after another charge of domestic violence, he checked himself into an alcohol rehabilitation unit. In 1993, he was arrested for hitting his pregnant girlfriend, Charisse Simon, but no charges were filed; they married and had three children. After not appearing for a game in 1994, the Dodgers announced Strawberry had a substance abuse problem and he began a four-week stint in the Betty Ford clinic. That same year, he and his agent were indicted for failing to report more than \$300,000 of income from autograph and memorabilia shows. In 1995 Strawberry was suspended for 60 days by Major League Baseball after testing positive for cocaine; he also was charged with failure to make child support payments.

In 1998 he was diagnosed with colon cancer and underwent surgery to remove the tumor and 16 inches of his colon. Because the cancer had spread to a lymph node, he underwent a course of chemotherapy. Despite this chilling medical news, he continued substance abuse, drove while taking pain killing medications, and was in and out of rehab.

In 2005, his first year of eligibility, Strawberry received only six votes from the Baseball Writers' Association of America for induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame; he now must wait twenty years to be considered again. That same year he worked as an instructor for the New York Mets. On October 12, 2006 Strawberry threw out the ceremonial pitch at Shea Stadium in Game One of the National League Championship series between the Mets and the St. Louis Cardinals. He was given a standing ovation by the crowd.

*I'm not ashamed of who I am. Of course, I'm ashamed of the things that have happened. But with life experiences, you're able to give back and help others.*

—Darryl Strawberry

[http://en.thinkexist.com/quotes/darryl\\_strawberry/2.html](http://en.thinkexist.com/quotes/darryl_strawberry/2.html)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darryl\\_Strawberry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darryl_Strawberry)

## DIAGNOSING DANA

*And Something's odd—within  
That person that I was—  
And this One—do not feel the same—  
Could this be Madness—this?  
—Emily Dickinson,  
The First Day's Night Had Come*

**D**ana is in danger of being diagnosed with anxiety or depression and dismissed from the hospital with a bottle of antidepressants unless she can come up with something that will allow her to be hospitalized longer than ten days. She comes up with a plan to convince doctors that she needs further evaluation. Dana also worries that treatment for mental illness may destroy her

creativity.

Many people believe there is a fine line between genius and madness. And there are studies that strongly suggest a link between creativity and depression. "In one study by psychologist Kay Jamison [she found] that, of 47 painters, writers and sculptors, 18 of them had been treated or hospitalized for depression—a rate of 38%, which is more than six times that of the general population."<sup>1</sup> Another reason this figure may be so high is that depressed individuals may be more inclined to choose careers in art where their behavior and moods are considered more acceptable than in areas such as accounting or banking.

Historically, many visual artists were hospitalized or attempted suicide: Paul Gauguin, Phillip Guston, Edvard Munch, Georgia O'Keefe, Salvador Dali and Jackson Pollock are among those names. Some succeeded in suicide such as Vincent van Gogh, Mark Rothko and Pietro Testa. In other artistic and/or political endeavors eminent depressives include Edgar Allen Poe, John Keats, T.S. Eliot, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.

Often artists suffer emotional and mental problems due to the difficulties of creative pressures combined with our culture's celebrity obsession. For example, contemporary artist Jean-Michel Basquiat quickly achieved international stardom in the early 1980s. The self-taught artist, who first attracted attention by creating illicit works of graffiti in the New York City subway system, suddenly found himself collaborating with legendary artists such as Andy Warhol. Initially, Basquiat was feverishly productive but grew increasingly un dependable under the stress of fame in combination with constant media scrutiny. Depressed and stuck in a creative slump, his drug use increased and he died of a heroin overdose in 1988 at the age of 27.

Is mental illness the pathway to creative genius? Paul Wolf, a clinical pathologist from the University of California specializes in investigating the effects of disease and drugs on the creativity and productivity of sculptors, painters, composers and authors. "The associations between illness and art may be close because of both the actual physical limitations of the artists and their mental adaptation to disease."<sup>2</sup> Their illness in many cases is a path, rather than an obstacle to achievement. Albert Einstein, Andy Warhol, Paul Cézanne, Francisco Goya, Michelangelo, J. M. W. Turner and Hector Berlioz are among the many whose genius was influenced by such conditions as depression, autism, myopia, anxiety, chronic pain, gout and stroke.

The connection between artistic success and depression inspired an exhibition at the *Galleries Nationales du Grand Palais* in Paris in 2005. The show, titled "Genius and Insanity in the West" was an ode to melancholy as a key element in the artistic temperament. The works of Goya, Rodin, Van Gogh, Munch, Picasso, Delacroix and Blake were on display, including masterpieces on rare loan from dozens of museums and collectors. The curator of the show, Gerard Regnier, said "Melancholy is not just negative; on the contrary, it was a positive energy that gave strength and genius to great artists throughout western civilization."<sup>3</sup>

*Madness need not be all breakdown.  
It may also be a breakthrough.  
It is potentially liberation and  
renewal as well as enslavement and  
existential death.*  
—R. D. Laing (1927-1989).  
*The Politics of Experience.*

1. Joffe, p. 1.
2. Dobson, p. 1.
3. canada.com, p. 2.

<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/artslife>

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<http://www.dissociation.com/index/definition>

Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament.* New York: Free Press Paperback, 1993.

Joffe, David. "Overview of Clinical Depression." [david.a/scorpioncity.com](http://david.a/scorpioncity.com)

# MENTAL HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

DANA: I'm self-employed, my insurance is the cheapest one. Golden Rule. I think it only covers if I get hit by a bus.

—*The Sweetest Swing in Baseball*

Dana's problem is shared by many. In the world of ever-increasing health care costs, there are considerable restrictions and limits for mental health care written into both private health insurance and federal plans such as Medicare and Medicaid. The *National Mental Health Association Journal* of 2003 pointed out: "Many health plans discriminate against people (with mental disorders) by limiting mental health and substance abuse healthcare by imposing lower day and visit limits, shorter hospital stays, higher co-payments and deductibles and lower annual and lifetime spending caps." <sup>1</sup> These limits, which have been in place since the early days of health insurance, are based on faulty assumptions that 1) mental health problems are somehow less treatable than other health problems and 2) mental problems are caused by an individual's weakness of character rather than by genetic or biological factors beyond a person's control.

Mental health conditions are far more treatable today because of better understanding of neurochemistry and brain functions along with advances in pharmaceutical research. For example, "the National Institute of Mental

Health (NIMH) estimates the success rate in treating depression at 70% to 80%, compared with a 45% to 50% success rate in the treatment of heart disease." <sup>2</sup>

In 2002 the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, a 22-member group of psychologists, psychiatrists, and state and federal administrators, filed a report calling for a streamlined system of diagnosis and treatment in a patient's own community. The commission strongly urged "that mental health be addressed with the same urgency as physical health, with equivalent insurance coverage." <sup>3</sup>

1. bipolar.about.com. p.1.
2. American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, p. 2.
3. Grady, p. 1.

<http://bipolar.about.com/od/insurance/healthinsurance.htm>

"Testimony." American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, 2004. <http://www.aagpgpa.org/advocacy/testimony>

Grady, Denise. "Major Change in Mental Health Care is Urged." <http://query.NYTimes.com/gst/>

# ANTIDEPRESSANT & PERSONALITY CHANGE

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DANA: I guess I really feel like I didn't want to take something that would change my personality. I feel like your brain determines your identity, and when you mess with the chemistry in your brain, you fundamentally mess with who you are. And if I mess with who I am then I mess with my painting.

—*The Sweetest Swing in Baseball*,

Dana makes it patently clear why she will not take antidepressants. To some extent, this same argument was initiated by Dr. Peter Kramer in his book *Listening to Prozac* (1993). He cited cases of mildly depressed patients who took this drug and not only felt better but underwent remarkable personality transformations. Dr. Kramer found these changes disconcerting, leading him to question “whether the medicated or unmedicated version was the person’s ‘real self.’”<sup>1</sup> He points out the possibility of altering brain chemistry to order, changing a shy sensitive person into a sociable, assertive one.

Dr. Charly Groenendyk of the Netherlands takes the argument even farther. He insists that nobody in the medical field really knows what a “biochemical imbalance” is, and if it is the cause of a mental disorder. He says that these mood-altering drugs are cleverly promoted by the pharmaceutical industry, prevailing over scientific evidence and research (what research he doesn't mention). He accuses primary care physicians of prescribing antidepressants to treat everything from eating disorders to back pain, sometimes with negative reactions.

On the other side of the issue are psychiatrists who claim that psychotropic drugs don't have the power to change the human brain. It is the mental disease that changes one's way of thinking, of perceiving and reacting to everyday life. In addition, Sane Australia, a mental health support group, reiterates that antidepressants do not change the personality; they make a patient feel better, and in doing so, make it easier to face the current stresses in their lives. But these drugs cannot be prescribed without consultation with a doctor, education and continued therapy. This therapy can be one-on-one with a doctor or the aid of a support group, or both.

“Medication will not change who you are as a person, your unique characteristics or your life circumstances. The goal of antidepressants is to allow you to work toward positive changes in your mood, your emotional state and your behavior patterns.”<sup>2</sup>

1. [www.Listening\\_Prozac](http://www.Listening_Prozac).
2. [www.uhs.berkeley.edu/](http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu/)

<http://www.antidepressantsfacts.com/charlygroenendijk>

<http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu/home/healthtopics>

[http://Listening\\_Prozac\\_psychiatrist\\_explore\\_antidepressant](http://Listening_Prozac_psychiatrist_explore_antidepressant)

[http://web4health.info/answers/therapy\\_psycho\\_drugs\\_effect](http://web4health.info/answers/therapy_psycho_drugs_effect)

# CRITICS AND ARTISTS

By Sylvie Drake

*The job of the critic is to reciprocate and extend the conversation, to explore the play and link it to the world.*

—John Lahr,  
critic for *The New Yorker* magazine

When playwright Samuel Beckett wanted to find the worst insults his protagonists in *Waiting for Godot* could hurl at each other, the topper was “C-R-I-T-I-C!” This illustrates the tenuousness of the relationship between artists and their critics—and the depth of resentment an artist can feel about criticism. While the artist’s very life is on the line, the critic is merely venturing an opinion from a safe spot in the audience. The relationship is therefore at best guarded and at worst adversarial. After all, it is fair to ask why artists should be singled out to be subjected to the kind of public scrutiny that a doctor or a bank manager or an engineer is rarely exposed to.

A clever cartoon recently showed a stone age man carving a rock while another man looked over his shoulder; the caption read: “Hi, I’m the first critic.” The notion of arts criticism has been around in various forms on and off throughout recorded history. At its best, criticism should be as artistic and elegant in its expression as the art it evaluates. It should be an inquiry into the nature of that art. But the centuries have produced few critics who have left a memorable impression. Among the few are George Bernard Shaw, William Hazlitt, Harley Granville-Barker, Kenneth Tynan, Stark Young, Brooks Atkinson, Harold Clurman, Eric Bentley and that eminent social critic, Oscar Wilde.

The fact is that everyone’s a critic. People have an opinion about pretty much everything, from a meal they’ve eaten or a show they’ve seen, to a song they’ve heard or an exhibit of paintings, a new building, the latest fashion or the President of the United States.

A critic also is a human being and therefore all criticism is subjective. The difference is that a professional critic is paid to be well-informed, to be discriminating and to write well, expressing an opinion articulately and in context.

At its best, criticism should serve the artist as well as the public (although not all artists would necessarily agree).

Otherwise he or she is relegated to the lower rank of “reviewer,” where the thumbs-up/thumbs-down kind of writing prevails and passes for criticism. A reviewer is more of a consumer guide. A critic is expected to bring a level of intellectual disquisition to the writing. “In criticism, there is no right or wrong,” says John Lahr, critic for *The New Yorker* magazine. “There is just good argument. In reviewing, there is no argument at all.”

What makes a good critic? Ideally, a passion for the art (not the artist), a solid knowledge of the form and the ability to compose a critique with accuracy, wit and grace. To avoid any semblance of favoritism, good critics rarely fraternize extensively with artists and vice-versa. Like Dana Fielding in *The Sweetest Swing in Baseball*, artists often feel understandably vulnerable. They often choose to not read critiques, good or bad. Likewise, critics must keep in mind that 99% of the time the artist is only trying to do honest work, so, as much as possible, a negative reaction should be carefully documented. It should be clear about what does and doesn’t work and why. It should provide context. Kindness and generosity are not words frequently associated with criticism, but they are in fact key components of the best critical writing. The heart must be informed by the writing as well as the mind.

*Sylvie Drake was a theatre critic at the Los Angeles Times from 1969 to 1993. She is currently Director of Publications at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.*

*Criticism makes meaning, reviews make judgment.*  
—John Lahr, critic for *The New Yorker* magazine

# THE STRUGGLE TO BE AN ARTIST

DANA: ...I mean, it's a constant struggle. But the thing to focus on is the present and how I feel now. And not to worry that things will go bad. So you just have to tell yourself, 'Don't worry about it.' ...

—*The Sweetest Swing in Baseball*

Dana is in a safe, protected place when she utters these words, but, unfortunately, the lives of artists are not always placid ones. Carol Becker writes in her essay, “Women, Anxiety, Creativity” that “for creative people of both sexes, the creative act often churns up unconscious confusion and ambivalence. These feelings can cause a great deal of pain in the artist until he or she works them through, gives them a shape and moves beyond them.”<sup>1</sup> This situation provokes anxiety but anxiety embodies a creative component in that one can imagine what has not yet occurred and then manifest itself in the action of painting, writing, composing, etc. “To be creative one needs to feel the confidence to recreate the world from scratch, to defy order, to break the conventional apart, to analyze and be critical of existing forms, to assert the unconscious over the conscious.”<sup>2</sup> “Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction,” said Picasso.<sup>3</sup>

Judy Chicago (*née* Gerewitz), a recognized female artist who created “The Dinner Party”, went through a series of struggles during the feminist revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. By studying women’s art through the centuries and forming and transforming various women’s groups, she came to two conclusions. First, she decided she must paint for herself and not for any particular art community. Secondly, she concluded that ‘female creators’ must be educated in a variety of skills such as research, writing, history, photography, graphics, etc. During the 1980s the art world witnessed a generation of women who availed themselves of the feminist principles embodied by Judy Chicago and other feminist artists and writers. Since that time contemporary female artists have conquered some of the male dominated bastions of art. The Guggenheim Museum in New York mounted solo shows of Jenny Holzer’s works

(1989) and Rebecca Horn (1993). In 1993 the Tate Gallery in London awarded the coveted Turner Prize for young artists to Rachel Whiteread. The question of whether women will continue to stake out important positions in the art world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century still remains open.

In the book *Living the Artist’s Life: a Guide to Growing, Persevering and Succeeding in the Art World*, Paul Dorrell cites the need for drive, for that element is as essential as talent for inspiration and confidence. He warns that young artists will suffer because “we tend to feel things more deeply and this, combined with our inordinate sensitivities, seems to make suffering more intense.”<sup>4</sup> As for depression, Dorrell calls it “the artists’ malaise.”<sup>5</sup> He argues that depression is common among artists because of the years of struggle to emerge from the amateur to the professional level, the indifference of the public, the rejection of the critics and the financial insecurity of it all. He urges young people to get help through therapy or a support system, and “by doing this, you’ll grow stronger. From inner strength comes good work.”<sup>6</sup>

1. Becker, p. 219.
2. Becker, p. 216.
3. Becker, p. 217.
4. Dorrell, p. 20.
5. Dorrell, p. 27.
6. Dorrell, p. 31.

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