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# MAIREAD

## Educational Material

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Why Not Theatre Company/ February 15th - March 9th 2019



Photo: Alexander S Mastilo

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## Note from the theatre

Dear teacher

We hope you will find this teaching material helpful - both for preparing your students before coming to see our production of MAIREAD by Tanja Mastilo, and for post-show discussion and analysis.

Extracts from the manuscript are included in this material but should you wish to receive the full text, please drop us a line at: [info@whynottheatre.dk](mailto:info@whynottheatre.dk).

Similarly we would be more than happy to conduct Artist Talks after selected performances, so please let us know if you would like us to organise one of these sessions for your group. Our experience shows that it can be hugely beneficial for students to have the opportunity to ask questions after seeing the show and to chat informally with the actors, director and writer.

We look forward to welcoming you to the theatre and hope you will have an enjoyable evening in our company.

With best wishes

Sue Hansen-Styles  
Artistic Leader of Why Not Theatre Company

*Education material by Sue Hansen-Styles and Nina Larissa Bassett*

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## Summary of MAIREAD

MAIREAD is a drama in two acts dealing with love and disappointment, dreams and reality within the framework of a mystery. Four people wake up in individual cells. There is no way out. Why are they there? Who put them in this uncompromising prison? They begin to explore their cells in search of an exit, trying to find reasons for why they are being held captive. Soon, one common denominator becomes clear: they all have a connection with their fellow prisoner; Mairead.

### **A modern love story**

During the various attempts to escape, the connections between the four are exposed: Mairead and Peter were a couple for some years, they have a child. Peter left Mairead for another woman a while ago. The experience wounded her deeply. She tried to move on and fell in love with Noah, who she found on Tinder. Noah is happily in love with Mairead, but also has relationships with other women. His longest standing relationship is with Kate. A mature, analytical woman, who has been married for more than 25 years and seems very keen to befriend Mairead.

The four characters have very different attitudes to love, relationships and the truth. And their beliefs start to clash, as the story unfolds. Questions of self-realisation, emotional abuse, unrealistic expectations, fidelity and promises surface and the four reveal their true colours. Dreams and reality are not always compatible, particularly when it comes to being in a relationship. But where are the limits when it comes to love and being loved? Will confronting past heartbreaks help set them free?

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## The characters in MAIREAD

**Mairead** is the protagonist of the play, i.e. the main character, to whom the other three have some kind of relation. Mairead is looking for love. She is also seeking truths. But it is hard for her to navigate in the modern dating world: what she dreams about doesn't always match what she experiences in real life.

**Peter** is Mairead's ex-partner with whom she has a son. He is an artist. He does exactly as he wants, with little or no understanding of others' needs and desires. In many ways he is a classic narcissist.

**Noah** is Mairead's lover. They met on Tinder. Noah is charming and honest, lives "in the now" and is a serial dater (has many girlfriends at the same time). He genuinely believes he is not emotionally responsible for anyone – because he is so open about his many relationships.

**Kate** is Noah's long-term lover. She is a mature woman, old enough to be Noah's mother in fact. She has been married for decades but her affair with Noah has also been going on for years. She has no difficulty rationalising her relationships.....until she is confronted with the truth.

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## Background to MAIREAD

MAIREAD is a claustrophobic thriller about love. Love in a world where narcissism thrives.

We live in a world where individualism and social media play a very big part and inevitably affect our relationships with each other – especially when it comes to love. Thanks to online communication, new potential partners can be accepted or rejected with a single swipe.

Interactions become quick and superficial. Net-dating can lead to hasty connections, disappointments, serial dating and an increasing emphasis on appearance, material values and posturing. How does this form of “love shopping” affect the concept of finding the one true love? Does the longing for “happily ever after” clash with Tinder and Snapchat dating?

Finding love can easily end up as a complex nightmare when the reality of love is far from the dream. The play is aimed at anyone who has ever looked for love, been in love, been disappointed or destroyed by love, or is simply happy in love. It has a very broad appeal.

MAIREAD is written by the Serbian-born Danish writer, Tanja Mastilo. The writer says: “The play looks at the small but constant changes in dating norms and how they manifest themselves today. Every character in MAIREAD reflects the various aspects of modern dating: narcissism, egocentricity, volatility. It is interesting for me to look at these different aspects and see how they change, and potentially complicate, today’s dating scene.”

In 1954 Jean-Paul Sartre wrote the play “Huis Clos” (No Exit) that famously portrayed the objectives of existentialism, and depicted his view of contemporary humans in a post-world-war reality. The essence of the play is summed up in the quote: “Hell is the others”. For the characters in MAIREAD, who are living in a plugged-in online reality, the question becomes: “Hell is being without the others”.

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## Narcissism, definition

### **narcissism**

/ˈnɑːsɪsɪz(ə)m, nɑːˈsɪsɪz(ə)m / Submit

noun

excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one's physical appearance.

PSYCHOLOGY

extreme selfishness, with a grandiose view of one's own talents and a craving for admiration, as characterising a personality type.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

self-centredness arising from failure to distinguish the self from external objects, either in very young babies or as a feature of mental disorder.

## The myth of Narcissus

In Greek mythology the young Narcissus was the son of the river god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope. He was famed for his beauty. The blind seer Tiresias once told Narcissus's mother that the youth would have a long life, provided he never recognised himself. A mountain nymph called Echo fell deeply in love with Narcissus, yet he rejected her heartlessly. For this he drew upon himself the vengeance of the gods. One day when Narcissus was out hunting he became thirsty and went to drink from a pool. As he saw his reflection, he fell in love with it, not knowing that it was him. As he bent down to kiss it, it seemed to "run away" and he was heartbroken. He grew thirstier but he wouldn't touch the water for fear of damaging his reflection, so he eventually died of thirst and staring at his own reflection. The flower that bears his name sprang up where he died.

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## Narcissism according to Sigmund Freud

“On Narcissism” from 1914 was a significant expansion on Sigmund Freud's theories. The work was produced after work on his earlier theories on dreams and the unconscious mind. It also comes immediately after he began to explore the various aspects of the unconscious mind such as the 'id'. In this work Freud begins to talk about the mind's self-control mechanisms, which he refers to as the 'ego-ideal'.

In the work, Freud introduces the concept of 'narcissism'. He defines it as adoration one accords themselves in light of them being an object of sexual desire. He views narcissism as some sort of neurosis. However, he also claims that all humans have some level of narcissism throughout their development - a stage where the child develops (or fails to develop) connections to reality.

According to Freud, we are not born with an ego; our sense of "having a self" evolves during infancy and early childhood. That evolution entails the

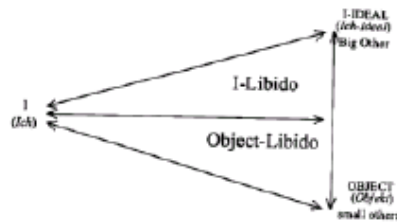


Fig. 1

disruption of primary narcissism brought about by the creation of the ideal ego, which in turn is brought about by intrusions from the outside - in most cases, from parental expectations. Fulfilling the expectations of the ideal ego is one source of libidinal satisfaction for the ego.

In his work, Freud differentiates between two types of narcissism, primary and secondary narcissism. Primary narcissism preexists in all human beings; this type of energy is present from birth. He claims this is the type of narcissism which causes individuals to show their affection towards an object. For instance, when a mother expresses unadulterated love for her child it is a result of this primary narcissism. According to Freud, secondary narcissism occurs when the libido withdraws from objects outside the self, above all the mother, producing a relationship to social reality that includes the potential for megalomania.



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## Narcissistic Personality Disorder - symptoms

Signs and symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder and the severity of symptoms vary. People with the disorder can:

- \* Have an exaggerated sense of self-importance
- \* Have a sense of entitlement and require constant, excessive admiration
- \* Expect to be recognised as superior
- \* Exaggerate achievements and talents
- \* Be preoccupied with fantasies about success, power, brilliance, beauty or the perfect mate
- \* Believe they can only associate with equally special people
- \* Monopolise conversations and belittle or look down on people they perceive as inferior
- \* Take advantage of others to get what they want
- \* Have an inability or unwillingness to recognise the needs and feelings of others
- \* Be envious of others and believe others envy them
- \* Behave in an arrogant or haughty manner.

At the same time, people with narcissistic personality disorder have trouble handling anything they perceive as criticism, and they can:

- \* Become impatient or angry when they don't receive special treatment
- \* Have significant interpersonal problems and easily feel slighted
- \* React with rage or contempt and try to belittle the other person to make themselves appear superior
- \* Have difficulty regulating emotions and behaviour
- \* Experience major problems dealing with stress and adapting to change
- \* Feel depressed and moody because they fall short of perfection
- \* Have secret feelings of insecurity, shame, vulnerability and humiliation.

People with narcissistic personality disorder may not want to think that anything could be wrong, so they may be unlikely to seek treatment. If they do seek treatment, it's more likely to be for symptoms of depression, drug or alcohol use, or another mental health problems.

Source: The Mayo Clinic, US

## Contemporary Narcissism

As we can see, Narcissism isn't a new phenomenon; it reaches back thousands of years, but studies show that narcissistic behaviour is on the rise. In clinical settings, about 2% to 16% of the participants are recorded as suffering from narcissistic traits. Western society progressively strengthens the focus on the individual. Individualism encourages paying ever more attention to inner feelings

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and developing the 'self', yet it also sees a breakdown in more robust social structures, such as local communities and families, that previously set frameworks and values that formed the personality.

As the social fabric loses ground it has become harder to form deeper, meaningful connections with others. Connections based on interactions with others who know your good and bad sides and still accept you as part of a group. This could be said to be a fundamental requirement in order to develop as a rounded human being. The question has moved from what is best for other people/ the community/ my family to: what is best for me. The modernisation of society seemed to prize fame, wealth, celebrity above all else. You are the creator of your own success, and within this form of reasoning also the maker of your own failure. All this, combined with the breakdown in social ties, has paved the way for an empty sense of self with a fragile, or no, proper social context.

The surge in online communication and social media plays a role in the increase of narcissistic traits in our surroundings. The way we spend our free time and communicate has fundamentally changed. We have become more dependant on instant, visual communication forms and a growing number of people are confessing to becoming addicted to 'likes'. Today there are nearly 936m active Facebook users each day worldwide. Internet addiction is a new area of study in mental health and recent cross-sectional research shows that addiction to Facebook is strongly linked to narcissistic behaviour and low self-esteem.

There is a fine line between having a healthy self-esteem and good relationship to one's body and achievements and the troubling self-obsession and inability to relate to the needs and feelings of others that defines a narcissistic disorder. But meeting up with a good friend or two and putting away the smartphones will most certainly improve your mental health.

## Exercises

### a) General discussion

- Imagine a time without social media and mobile phones. How would you contact your friends? Find new friends?
- Today it is the norm to find love via a dating site. Do you know people who have met on a dating site?
- Think about your parents. Do you know how they met?
- Has dating changed over the years?
- What are your expectations when you go on a first date?
- Are there dating rules and norms? What are they?
- How do you get to know a potential date?
- Do you use texting, Instagram, Snapchat, email, telephone calls, hand-written letters, ordinary conversation, Facebook?
- What happens if the date is different in real life from the online profile?

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- What triggers conflict in a relationship?
  - What can you do to handle conflict in a relationship?
  - Can you identify a narcissist?
  - Can you think of any narcissists?
  - What is a serial dater?
  - What is love?
  - Do you think people who have been married for 10 years can still love each other?
  - Does love change over time? How?

### **b) Consider the 4 characters in MAIREAD**

- Do you think Mairead is old fashioned in her ideas about how to find love and truth?
- How would you expect her to feel and react when she discovers that her boyfriend, Noah, has lots of girlfriends, including a much older lover?
- Noah is very open about his serial dating. Does that make it ok for him to date several women at once?
- Peter shows narcissistic traits. What signs in his behaviour could define him as a narcissist?
- What kind of a relationship – if any - do you imagine Mairead could have with Kate?
- There is a 25- year age gap between Kate and Noah. Is it a problem if a much older woman dates / marries a much younger man? Why?
- And if it were the other way round: if a man of 60 were to date / marry a woman of 35? Would that be a problem? Why?
- Can you think of any famous couples where one is significantly older than the other?

### **c) Read the following excerpt from MAIREAD:**

*MAIREAD:*

*Why shouldn't people go to prison for this sort of thing, hm? For lying, cheating, manipulating and deceiving. For making someone feel small, stupid and inadequate that they start questioning their own sanity. How is that not illegal? It can destroy one's life. One's health. Do you know, in something like marketing there are laws that prevent producers from making false promises about their product, someone thought about that and protected the consumers, so that they wouldn't spend their money on something that doesn't work, but when it comes to relationships, when your heart and sanity are at stake - you're on your own. No one cares. Promise away. Lure who ever you want in with your false promises, lie, manipulate, cheat, ghost,*

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*gaslight, deceive.. disappear, come back, change your mind for no real reason whatsoever. You don't need to explain anything to anyone - And hey - it's okay! Never mind the damage you leave behind.*

*Why should they go unpunished, why isn't that a crime?*

*Instead, we'll just let all the predators walk freely among us, because how can we really prove anything, when it's all in my head anyway, right?*

*PETER: smiling*

*I am a predator now, am I? Do you realise how ridiculous you sound?*

*MAIREAD:*

*You can try to shame me all you want, I don't care anymore. A predator always forgets, Peter, always. Although you, you have nothing to forget, because you never knew or understood that you did anything wrong in the first place. So, yes, the only way for you to learn a lesson is if you rot in jail.*

*KATE:*

*Mairead, you're making yourself a victim here, love. Why do you keep doing that to yourself?*

*MAIREAD:*

*Oh shut up, Kate, I've had it with your empowering talks. When did it become shameful to admit someone's hurt you? We can't all be stoic and cold and cool and unaffected by everything that happens around us, you know.*

- What is a predator?
- What is Mairead saying here?
- Do you agree with Kate, that by calling Peter a predator, Mairead automatically makes herself a victim?
- Do you think Mairead envies or despises Kate?
- Do you feel that social and emotional responsibility is important? Why?
- It is an interesting idea that law-breakers are sentenced to prison but heart-breakers are not. Breaking a heart can destroy a soul. Should that not be punished somehow? Discuss.
- For a loving relationship to work, what would you say are the key ingredients?

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- If you could design a new way for people to meet each other and find love, what would it be?

**d) Here is another excerpt from the play. Read it aloud.**

MAIREAD:

*Why should people like you get away with the things you do, hm? Tell me. Kate - You cheat on your husband. Who as far as I understand is a nice and hard working man who loves you, am I wrong? Peter, a narcissistic prick, who has no empathy whatsoever for anyone, not even his own child, charms his way through so many lives and takes whatever he needs from anyone who's unfortunate enough to find themselves in his way. And Noah, a caring and a giving guy. The only problem being that he cares and gives for and too many people, but hey, he's open and honest about it, so it must be ok. I get it Noah, I do... A good looking guy like you, all those women just a swipe away, I get it... sure. The temptation, yeah... We all get it, we all HAVE to get it and accept it. If you don't you're old fashioned and weak, right?*

NOAH:

*Again, not fair, I never said you were any of those things. I gave you nothing but respect and I never treated you badly, Mairead. I liked you, I genuinely liked you.*

MAIREAD:

*You never treated me badly, how many other women were you in contact with while at the same time spending time with me and telling me how special I was to you? How many? Can anyone ever be special enough so that you don't feel the need to be in contact with 7 others at the same time?*

NOAH:

*What you meant to me is not the same what Kate means to me. Every person in ones life has a different role and is in your life for a different reason.*

MAIREAD:

*I'm not talking about all the people in your life, I'm talking about women you've been romantically involved with.*

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NOAH:

*What we had was unique and special, and unlike anything else I ever had with anyone else. But I'm interested in human beings, in the experience of learning and getting to know another person. That sort of thing makes me grow, Mairead. It changes you, every time you get to know someone new, you are a changed person. And I don't ever want to stop changing.*

- What is happening here? Why is Mairead upset?
- What is Noah's reaction? Is he reasonable?
- Is it possible to love more than one person at a time?
- Is it possible to only love one person at a time?
- Do you think Mairead is "old fashioned and weak"?

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## The team and practical information

**Writer:** Tanja Mastilo  
**Director:** Nina Larissa Bassett

**Set/ lighting design:** Peter Rasmussen

**Cast:**

**MAIREAD:** Kerry Norton-Griffith

**PETER:** Nathan Meister

**NOAH:** Kevin Kiernan-Molloy

**KATE:** Sue Hansen-Styles

For biographies, see: <http://www.whynottheatre.dk/team.php>

**VENUE:**

Teatret ved Sorte Hest,  
Vesterbrogade 150,  
1620 Copenhagen K  
Tel.: 33 31 06 06

[www.sortehest.com](http://www.sortehest.com)

**DATES:**

15 February – 9 March 2019  
Mon – Fri 8pm, Sat 5 pm

**TICKET BOOKING**

Tel: 33 31 06 06, (Mon – Fri 12 – 4pm  
Young people under 25: 45 kr,-pp

[www.teaterbilletter.dk](http://www.teaterbilletter.dk)

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