

The Individual Experience of Grief in Ralph Lemon's *How Can You Stay in the House All Day
and Not Go Anywhere?*

Maggie Kinton

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Professor Tamura

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Ralph Lemon's *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* is a performance that explores themes of loss, audience, and identity. Katherine Profeta, Ryan Platt, and Alison Bory all examine the depiction of loss in *How Can You Stay*, but they interpret the scene with Okwui Okpokwasili's prolonged crying differently. I will discuss whether *How Can You Stay* is a performance about grief as an individual experience, and if that means it is impossible, or even unjust, to ever fully interpret.

Profeta, Platt, and Bory all clearly discuss Lemon's loss and grief. Profeta explains how the section of *How Can You Stay*, 'Sunshine Room', introduces the "state of grief."¹ She claims the dancers represent Lemon's pain, and that "the subjective experience of grief... is absolutely anti-spectacular," because when one is in mourning, the "outside audience" cannot be imagined.² Profeta also explores how Lemon's attempt to create a "dance that disappears" contributed to his depiction of loss.³ Similarly, Platt argues that Lemon "invoked a powerfully human theme: the inability to accept or explain the loss of a loved one."⁴ Lemon's unique and at times confusing performance represents how it is impossible to understand another's grief. *How Can You Stay* demonstrates the difficulties in portraying pain, and "is about mourning, but not necessarily moving on."⁵ Lastly, Bory agrees that *How Can You Stay* is about loss, and that it displays Lemon's "private lament," and observes *How Can You Stay* while thinking of Kevin Quashie's idea of "quiet."^{6, 7} She uses this perspective of "quiet" to explore how Lemon used his

¹ Katherine Profeta, "Training the anti-spectacular for Ralph Lemon's dance that disappears," *Performing Arts Journal* 34, no. 3 (September 2012): 226.

² Profeta, "Training," 226.

³ Profeta, "Training," 215.

⁴ Ryan Platt, "Ralph Lemon and the Language of Loss," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 2, no. 2 (2011): 71.

⁵ Platt, "Ralph Lemon," 80.

⁶ Alison Bory, "A Dance After All Hell Broke Loose: Mourning as "Quiet" in Ralph Lemon's *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?*" in *Art and Dance in Dialogue: Body, Space, Object. Art and Dance in Dialogue*, ed. Sarah Whatley, Imogen Racz, Katerina Paramana, and Marie-Louise Crawley (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), 184.

⁷ Bory, "A Dance," 181.

performance to portray his grief after the loss of his partner, Asako Takami, and claims *How Can You Stay* “offers a resulting revelation of interiority that creates a space of personal mourning.”⁸

In contrast, Profeta, Platt, and Bory all hold different views about the scene where Okwui Okpokwasili cries. Profeta argues the wails were “disturbingly familiar,” and that “they were trying to share with [the audience] the experience of witnessing something disappear – a dance, a person, a moment.”⁹,¹⁰ This section was about the universal experience of loss. On the other hand, Platt argues Okpokwasili’s cries were “aggravating,” and that the scene “failed to reach its audience.”¹¹ Finally, Bory cites both Profeta and Platt, claiming that whether the scene draws empathy or aggravation, it “demands time” and energy of the audience, and does not give an answer.¹² Instead, “there is only sitting; there is only contemplation; there are only bodies in relation.”¹³ *How Can You Stay* allows the audience to sit with the grief of others.

How Can You Stay is certainly an exploration of Lemon’s grief, but due to the incomprehensible nature of the performance, I find it hard to justify seeking greater meaning or drawing general conclusions about grief from Lemon’s work. Claims such as Profeta’s, that “Okpokwasili’s choking grief... also belonged to the universe – to everyone and anyone who was willing to recognise it as their own,” take Lemon’s individual experience and make it universal.¹⁴ While these different interpretations are interesting to consider, I am led to wonder if they are only defeating the purpose of Lemon’s goal to create a “dance that disappears,” and if Profeta, Platt, and Bory are instead creating a dialogue that could be perceived as problematic.¹⁵

⁸ Bory, “A Dance,” 182.

⁹ Profeta, “Training,” 227.

¹⁰ Profeta, “Training,” 229.

¹¹ Platt, “Ralph Lemon,” 75.

¹² Bory, “A Dance,” 190.

¹³ Bory, “A Dance,” 191.

¹⁴ Profeta, “Training,” 227.

¹⁵ Profeta, “Training,” 215.

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