



9 CIRCLES

BY **BILL CAIN**



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9 CIRCLES was developed at the Ojai Playwrights Conference,
Robert Egan, Artistic Director and South Coast Repertory's Pacific Playwrights
Festival, Martin Benson and David Emmes, Producing Artistic Directors.

Winner of the 2010 Sky Cooper New American Play Prize at Marin Theatre
Company, where it received its world premiere under the leadership of
Jasson Minadakis, Artistic Director and Ryan Rilette, Producing Director.

For Patrick J. Adams

*Knowing that Patrick is around to act impossible parts
gives me the confidence to write them.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Stories are my way of understanding the world. I think that's true for most of us. We can understand an event if we can fit it into a story — so we must be careful with our stories.

I was five when I was first introduced to one of the stories that shapes our world on a daily basis. Since it was the first movie my parents ever took me to see, it made a tremendous, foundational impact on me. It was an allegory about a coalition of the Good who defeat absolute Evil with the help of God and brutal, murderous violence. It was called Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It is the children's version of a story that shapes a great deal of our understanding of the world.

It is Shakespeare's national philosophy — Harry V decimates the evil French and it is God's victory, not ours — so this primal story shapes a good deal of our political thinking. As it is Milton's theology — God battles Satan in cosmic war in *Paradise Lost* — it shapes a good deal of our religious understanding. This take-no-prisoners good-versus-evil battle consumes an enormous percentage of the Bible. There are no tears for Goliath. What a relief then for me to meet — better late than never — Dante and his alternative view of the universe — *The Divine Comedy*.

If you haven't read it, you have a great treat in store. It is great fun, very moving and, above all, it provides an alternative story framework for understanding our lives — political, religious and personal.

Life is not a battle, but a journey. The hero is not a lonely man on a solitary crusade. He is always accompanied by a guide and mentor — one who is willing to go through any and every fire with the traveler. The ultimate goal is not the obliteration of the enemy. In Dante, when you achieve your crown, it is not because you have conquered the world; it is because you have become “lord of yourself.”

And heaven and hell are not so far apart. In *The Divine Comedy*, they are adjoining territories. To get to one, you have to pass through the other. Although some of the people you meet in hell are undoubtedly evil, many are not. There are many good, beautiful,

unlucky people in hell and a great many mediocrities on their way to heaven. One of the joys of the journey is Dante's surprise in finding that he has good friends in both places. There are sympathetic moments all along the way. And there is compassion for the damned. At the very center of hell there is terrible violence, but the ones perpetrating the worst of it weep as they do it.

Above all, there is the woman. In the Bible, woman is the flaw in creation. Eve, the weaker vessel, ate the apple and we all suffer. In Dante, Eve — with Mary, Ruth and Beatrice — holds the key that unlocks the ultimate mystery.

At the end of the *Comedy*, you reach not a bloody battlefield, but a vista full of blinding light where you can see what you have always hoped for — the love that moves the universe.

Like *The Divine Comedy* after which it is modeled, the soldier's journey in *9 Circles* is a journey through terrible darkness into transforming light. In some of the darker scenes, it is important to remember this.

(Incidentally, it is also important to remember that — even at his darkest — Dante finds humor — as does Reeves — as do we.)

The first production of this play at Marin Theater Company ended with an extraordinary moment.

As the soldier stood perfectly still, the world changed around him.

Craig Marker — our Reeves — stood in a light cue that grew gradually over the course of his final seven-minute monologue. As the intensity of the light grew, the moment became a transfiguration.

I mention this moment — created by Kent Nicholson (director), Michael Palumbo (lighting and set designer), Callie Floor (costumes) and Craig Marker (Reeves) — because it so perfectly illuminates the journey of this play. As the nineteen-year-old Reeves learns and grows in each circle, as he accepts his own — and our own — darkness, he is illuminated from within.

As for many of us, it is not the darkness within that is unbearable, but the light.

9 Circles is ultimately a journey we make together towards that demanding, revealing light.

*Bill Cain
Fall, 2010
Marin*

9 CIRCLES received its world premiere production in 2010 at Marin Theatre Company in Mill Valley, California. It was directed by Kent Nicholson; the set and lighting design were by Michael Palumbo; the costume design was by Callie Floor; the sound design was by Cliff Caruthers; the stage manager was Angela Nostrand; and the dramaturg was Margot Melcon. The cast was as follows:

REEVES Craig Marker
LIEUTENANT, ARMY ATTORNEY, PASTOR,
LAWYER, DEFENSE James Carpenter
YOUNG FEMALE LAWYER, SHRINK,
PROSECUTION Jennifer Erdmann
Understudy Aldo Billingslea

9 CIRCLES was also produced at Bootleg Theater in Los Angeles, California. It was directed by Justin Zsebe; the set was by Jason Adams; the lighting design was by Lap Chi Chu; the costume design was by Kathryn Poppen; the sound design was by Adam Phalen; the stage manager was Amber Koehler; and the assistant stage manager was Johnny Rodgers. The cast was as follows:

REEVES Patrick J. Adams
LIEUTENANT, ARMY ATTORNEY, PASTOR,
LAWYER, DEFENSE Paul Dillon
LIEUTENANT, PASTOR Joe Holt
YOUNG FEMALE LAWYER, SHRINK,
PROSECUTION Arlene Santana

CHARACTERS

DANIEL EDWARD REEVES — 19/20 — an American soldier in Iraq and after.

(The other roles should be played by two men and a woman. It is possible to do the play with only one man, but two are preferable.)

MEN:

LIEUTENANT

ARMY ATTORNEY

PASTOR

CIVILIAN LAWYER

DEFENSE

WOMEN:

YOUNG FEMALE LAWYER

SHRINK

PROSECUTION

Note: The cast members will announce changes of place and time throughout. Circle titles that appear in bold are not read aloud.

9 CIRCLES

CIRCLE 1: HONORABLE DISCHARGE

Daniel Edward Reeves — an army private for less than a year — nineteen — maybe twenty — Texan — enters. Lean. Intense. Standing at rigid military attention. This young man desperately wishes to remain a soldier.

The woman appears — like the men, in military fatigues.

She carries a pair of army boots.

WOMAN. CIRCLE ONE: IRAQ. HONORABLE DISCHARGE.
(Before exiting, the woman will place the boots down as an emblem of the scene. In each scene, an emblem of the scene will be placed on stage. An army lifer lieutenant — 30 — enters — with Reeves' orders in his hand.)

LIEUTENANT. Private REEVES.

REEVES. Sir!

LIEUTENANT. Your orders.

REEVES. Sir.

(Lieutenant opens orders. Reads. Then —)

LIEUTENANT. *(Happy for Reeves.)*

Honorable — discharge.

(As the lieutenant goes to sign the orders —)

REEVES. Honorable discharge? I don't like the sound of that, sir.

LIEUTENANT. You like the sound of “dishonorable discharge” better?

(Lieutenant goes to sign.)

REEVES. *(Don't sign.)*

At least it means something, sir. You know something happened and it wasn't good. “Honorable discharge” sounds — bad.

LIEUTENANT. Bad? In what way?

REEVES. Sexual.

LIEUTENANT. "Honorable discharge."

(Lieutenant gets it.)

REEVES. Sounds like what your biology teacher'd say 'cause he's not supposed to say "cum."

LIEUTENANT. A euphemism.

REEVES. Is that where the words mean the opposite of each other?

LIEUTENANT. *(No.)*

That's oxymoron. Military intelligence. Euphemism. Like somebody who wouldn't say shit if he had a mouth full of it.

REEVES. Yes, sir. That's it exactly, sir. Sir, I want to stay here until we win this war, SIR.

LIEUTENANT. Son, if we could've won this war, we would have won it at the Battle of Lepanto.

REEVES. When was that, sir?

LIEUTENANT. Before your time.

(Preempting objection.)

Private, you've got no say in the matter.

(He goes to sign the orders.)

REEVES. *(To delay the signing out.)*

I'll desert. I'll learn their language. I can already count to ten. I'll join them. I'll become their leader. Like in that movie.

LIEUTENANT. *(Intrigued.)*

Lawrence of Arabia? Peter O'Toole.

REEVES. *Universal Soldier*, sir. Jean-Claude VanDamm.

LIEUTENANT. Son, you know why you're being discharged?

REEVES. I know what the form says, sir. It says I have a personality disorder, sir.

LIEUTENANT. And what do you think of what the form says?

REEVES. I think — I think it's a euphemism, sir.

(Then.)

I'm no expert, but I think a personality disorder can be an advantage in certain circumstances.

LIEUTENANT. Such as?

REEVES. Some things don't bother me the way they bother other people.

LIEUTENANT. Like?

REEVES. The basics, sir. Killing people. It bothers some people, sir.

LIEUTENANT. It doesn't bother you?

REEVES. Sir, we came here to kill people, sir.

LIEUTENANT. (*Gung-ho.*)

Soldier, we came here to help build a nation. That is our mission. Operation Iraqi Freedom. And that's a very unusual expression because it's both a euphemism AND an oxymoron. You don't see a lot of them but when you do, run, because it means there are no words to describe the unspeakable fuck-up you are in.

REEVES. (*Gung-ho-er.*)

Sir, I don't mean we're here to kill *all* the people. Just the ones who hate freedom. Whoever is left when the killing stops — that's the nation.

LIEUTENANT. Son, I don't know why they're sending your home. Seems to me you're everything we want in a soldier.

(*Checking his file.*)

You're nineteen?

REEVES. Yes, sir.

LIEUTENANT. Your home's Texas, right?

REEVES. Wherever these men are is home for me. They're my brothers, sir.

LIEUTENANT. You know the French Foreign Legion? They take an oath, but they don't take it to their country.

REEVES. That's because the French are fucked up, sir.

LIEUTENANT. They take their oath to the Legion — to one another — they kind of avow themselves to one another. This isn't that.

REEVES. No?

LIEUTENANT. No.

REEVES. Army of one, sir?

LIEUTENANT. What do you think of that, private — army of one?

REEVES. Army of *one*? It's an oxymoron, sir.

LIEUTENANT. You know, for a grunt, you're pretty smart.

REEVES. That was not the consensus of opinion of the faculty at my high school, sir. I'm not smart, sir, but I can learn if someone will show me.

LIEUTENANT. It says here you sought help —

REEVES. (*Twitch/wince.*)

That was the mistake, wasn't it, sir?

LIEUTENANT. Maybe not. You've seen some terrible things. You've seen people die.

REEVES. That doesn't bother me, sir.

LIEUTENANT. No?

REEVES. No, sir. People are *supposed* to die, sir.

LIEUTENANT. Bodies like meat don't bother you?

REEVES. No, sir.

LIEUTENANT. No?

REEVES. I mean "No, not like meat, sir." *Meat* gets cut on the joint.

LIEUTENANT. Bodies like hamburger then?

REEVES. No.

LIEUTENANT. Bodies like *what* then?

REEVES. (*A moment, then —*)

Like a couch.

(*Then.*)

A leather couch in a nice house. And they took good care of the couch.

LIEUTENANT. Who?

REEVES. The people who live in the house.

(*Then.*)

It cost more than they could afford. It cost more than anything they ever bought. Maybe it cost more than their car. But one night while one of them was sitting on the couch —

LIEUTENANT. Who?

REEVES. Doesn't matter, sir, we're talking about the couch — one night somebody breaks in and stabs the person on the couch.

LIEUTENANT. Who breaks in?

REEVES. A freedom-hating raghead breaks into the house and stabs her and she's surprised.

LIEUTENANT. She?

REEVES. She/he — doesn't matter, sir. What matters is that he didn't have time to get off the couch. *He* stayed on the couch until *he* bled out. And even though they do everything they can to make the house clean again, the realtor can't sell it because something bad happened in the house.

LIEUTENANT. On that couch.

REEVES. (*No.*)

The couch is gone. The couch gets put in a lot. A vacant lot. Vacant except for the couch. It's a good couch, but not even junkies will sleep on it.

LIEUTENANT. Because of the blood.

REEVES. Because of the blood dogs come and tear it apart.

LIEUTENANT. What kind of dogs?

REEVES. You're right. Coyotes, sir.

LIEUTENANT. You've got quite an imagination, son.

REEVES. They think the couch is meat because it has blood in it, so they tear into it but they can't find the living part. They tear into it every time it rains because, every time it rains, the blood gets wet and it's like the couch is trying to come to life but it can't because it isn't anything anymore. Not even a couch. That's what the bodies look like, sir.

LIEUTENANT. You're right. That's what they look like.

REEVES. And you look at your friend's legs and you're embarrassed because they don't even look like meat anymore. He's torn open but you don't see the inside of his body. You see the inside of the insides. Not muscles, the inside of muscles. Not bone, the inside of bone. And that's very private stuff. Not even God ever saw stuff like that. But your friend he's waving it around like he's got no shame and he's screaming and crying and you're sort of embarrassed because this guy — this guy who'll never be anything anybody will ever want again — not even as much as somebody wants a good couch in a nice house — he doesn't know enough to die? *That* bothers me.

LIEUTENANT. You know Jackson? His legs got torn apart. Just like you say. Torn right off and a hunk of his arm gone like a shark bite. Just like a shark came up and took a piece out of him.

(Then.)

He's back. It took courage, but he's back.

REEVES. Yes, sir, I know. That's what makes me so —

(Reeves can't speak.)

LIEUTENANT. Talk to me.

REEVES. *(Torn between rage and sorrow.)*

So you're telling me a guy who was torn to pieces — *he* can get back here — and stay here — and you're telling me what's *in here* —

(Reeves' head.)

WHAT'S — INSIDE — HERE —

(Fighting tears.)

— is in WORSE SHAPE — than a guy who was TORN TO FUCKING PIECES BY A PACK OF DOGS AND A SHARK? Is that what you're telling me?

LIEUTENANT. No, son. Nobody's saying that. What's wrong with you — it might be something small. But whatever it is — all they're saying is — it can't be fixed.

(Then.)

9 CIRCLES

by Bill Cain

2 or 3M, 1W

A psychological thriller based on actual events, 9 CIRCLES tells the story of an American soldier on trial for his life. A young soldier — honorably discharged but then accused of an unspeakable war crime in Iraq — Daniel Reeves is forced to navigate a Dantesque labyrinth of commanding officers, public defenders, lawyers, preachers and military psychiatrists. By turns shocking, mesmerizing and biting funny, 9 CIRCLES accompanies this astonishing young soldier on a tour de force journey to a shattering conclusion in which the infinite size and tremendous power of a young man's soul is revealed.

"It's a dense, fiercely performed and provocative journey ... a gritty, at times revealing trip."
—The San Francisco Chronicle

"The power and punch of 9 CIRCLES is undeniable. Cain's script zeroes in on one soldier's story and leaves us feeling the inescapable historic and emotional weight of the entire war. This is theater that shakes our foundation and leaves you breathless."
—Bay Area Backstage

"This important work packs a powerful emotional punch, examining timeless social issues with insight and compassion."
—BackStage

"Shocking, mesmerizing and biting funny."
—Berkshire On Stage

"As disturbing and thrilling as it is engaging and heartbreaking."
—Boston Theatre Review

"Cain has been called one of the more remarkable and eloquent writers on the current American theater scene. 9 CIRCLES proves why."
—Bohemian.com

Also by Bill Cain
EQUIVOCATION

ISBN 978-0-8222-2593-5



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