

F. R. {E}. WILL... L. L. ... L

By Timothy M. Gadomski

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRlich COLSON writes...Funny how in the current zeitgeist, at least from my insular yet global position at Fleas on the Dog auxiliary headquarters (and if that sounds like the coordinates for a refurbished satellite in orbit it wouldn't be entirely inaccurate), the seats at the gates of heaven (and/or hell) seem to be ubiquitously occupied by customer service representatives. Maybe it's that AT&T rep, you know, the one who promised you an upgrade but then your phone was cracked, and you didn't have the insurance plan because you never needed it before, blah blah blah #suckonmybrokenphone. NM. The problem with leaving such a monumental task up to the customer service department (or the representative representing the representatives) is that they're bound to get it wrong every once in a while, even with directives in place from the higher ups including God him(her/them)self, due to staffing shortages and supply chain issues, no doubt. Well, that's almost exactly what happens in *Free Will*, by the hilarious Timothy M. Gadomski. In the play, the titular Will Thompson is subject to just that kind of error when he finds himself at heaven's door without having his name on the list. However, why the mistake was made isn't nearly as important as what to do about it – and whether Will has any choice in the matter. Do any of us? *Free Will* is a lightning-paced rollicking play that in all its ebullience hones in on some pretty heady territory about determinism, fate, and fatalism. Read it, laugh, cry, and say the serenity prayer for good measure. An excerpt, as fate would have it:*

GOD

Oh, yeah because when the Italians started liking art the Black Plague just disappeared.

(GOD takes a breath to relax.)

Look, I didn't give anyone free will.

DEATH

There is no way you have laid out every single decision ever.

GOD

Oh, well of course not. I let them decide what shirt to wear, the flavor toothpaste they buy, and if they choose dessert after a meal but, never do I let them decide, "Hey, let me look for some cotton candy by the Elephant grounds."

WILL

I can still hear you! This jail cell is just made of clouds you know!

The title 'Free Will' is written in a large, blue, outlined, cursive font. The word 'Free' is on the left, and 'Will' is on the right. There are three stylized white clouds with blue outlines: one above the 'e' in 'Free', one above the 'i' in 'Will', and one below the 'l' in 'Will'.

FREE WILL

by

Timothy M. Gadomski

CHARACTERS

WILL: Will Thompson, 30-year-old male.

SAINT PETER: One of Jesus’ twelve apostles. Guardian of Heaven’s Gate and customer service representative.

GOD: Eternal creator.

DEATH: Eternal guide to the recently deceased.

LOCATION

Heaven’s Gate

TIME

Now

Note: All stage hands should be dressed in white; they’re angels after all.

FREE WILL was first performed at Nelson Hall Theatre, Cheshire Connecticut, on January 24, 2020 with the following cast and crew:

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| WILL..... | Francis McLaughlin |
| SAINT PETER..... | Zach Fontanez |
| GOD..... | Julia Gritzbach |
| DEATH..... | Drew Myers |

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Director..... | Timothy M. Gadomski |
| Set..... | Timothy M. Gadomski, Grant Shoenfeldt, Zach Fontanez |
| Light & Sound Board..... | Colin Palma |

SCENE 1

AT RISE:

(Bright light and clouds abound. There is a large heavenly gate center stage. SAINT PETER stands at a heavenly pedestal immediately down stage right of the gate. WILL wanders in; he has an elephant footprint across his shirt.)

SAINT PETER

(Noticing him. Confused by his presence.)

Can I... Uh, sir, sir can I help you?

(WILL is still wandering in confusion. Calling to him.)

Sir! Excuse me,

(WILL looks at him and points at himself as if to ask, "Me?" SAINT PETER nods, "Yes, you.")

Can I help you with something?

(Looking at his book.)

Who are you?

WILL

Uh, Will; Will Thompson. I was... Well, this is sort of embarrassing. I was looking for the cotton candy vendor and then I stepped in a large pile of... Well you know, then I heard a loud like I guess a trumpet maybe, and poof I was here.

SAINT PETER

Oh, boy.

WILL

Oh, boy what? That can't be good. Where the hell am I?

SAINT PETER

This is Heaven, Will.

WILL

This doesn't look like Heaven.

SAINT PETER

Well, sorrrrrry! We weren't really expecting anyone. What does your place look like when people show up unannounced?

WILL

Well, jeez, I didn't mean-

SAINT PETER

Anyway! Cotton candy, large pile, trumpet: it sounds like you were crushed by an Elephant.

WILL

Oh, come on! If that happened, I'd be dead for sure! How on Earth could a
(He slows, realizing his predicament.)
 person survive...

(Fully realizing.)

Oh, God dammit!

SAINT PETER

(Searching his book.)

Yeaah. Problem is: I don't see you in my book.

WILL

(Pause. Frightened.)

I don't wanna go to Hell! What in the world did I do wrong? I pay my taxes, I vote, I donate to the Boys & Girls Club of America...

SAINT PETER

No, no, no, I mean that you're not in my book at all. There's no Will Thompson. No name, no destination. You sure you belong here? You're Catholic, right?

WILL

Yeah, I have been my whole life: baptism, communion, confirmation...

SAINT PETER

(Continuing.)

'Cause if you're Baptist, Lutheran, Protestant, etcetera, you're at the right place. We just do each at a separate time so not to confuse anybody.

WILL

No, I'm Catholic.

SAINT PETER

(Continuing.)

Now, if you're Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Jewish, or something like that, you just go over a few more blocks, take a left at the Wal-Mart and there's a Guide Station. Just talk to Anubis, Charon, Abraham, Abu Bakr, or Kevin.

WILL

(Confused by the concluding name.)

Kevin?

SAINT PETER

Oh, he's new. He's here for the Mormons.

(A corded house phone at the pedestal rings. To WILL.)

Just a moment.

(On the phone.)

Yes. He's here now. You're what? No, of course. Here? Okay. Yes, peace be with you.

WILL

Was that a landline?

SAINT PETER

Let's focus on what's important: They're coming down.

WILL

Who's they?

SAINT PETER

God and Death.

WILL

God and... Who?! Death and... What?!

SAINT PETER

Relax, they're just two normal-

(Heavenly music begins to play.)

Oh, God.

(He straightens up and brushes himself off. Blinding lights are on GOD's entrance through the gate.)

DEATH

(GOD enters dramatically. After a time, the heavenly music starts to skip and repeat like a record. GOD looks back and hears a loud smash. Audible grumbling offstage from DEATH until entrance. Arguing with GOD.)

Why do I have to play the stupid music? It's not like Will doesn't know you're God, and I'm just as important as you are.

GOD

Will you stop the complaining? You have one job!

DEATH

One job?! Do you know how many people I deal with every single-

SAINT PETER

(A notifying cough.)

Your Holinesses.

WILL
You're God?

GOD
Yes.

WILL
You're not... But you're a...

GOD
(Intimidating him.)
I'm a what?

WILL
(The joke here will likely be the non-white race or non-male gender of GOD. If not then it can be some other visual aspect that GOD is not generally expected to have by white-male Catholic standards. In the end, GOD should be the opposite in race or gender of WILL.)
A totally normal, and reasonable representation of my personal expectations of God.

SAINT PETER
(DEATH and SAINT PETER are looking at the book. GOD joins.)
See? No, Will Thompson. He's not here.

GOD
And yet, he is.
(Motioning toward WILL.)

DEATH
(None of them are looking at the book anymore. GOD stares at DEATH.)
Oh, no, no, no. Don't put this on me. The guy died and I brought'em up. That's what I do. That's my one job.

GOD
(GOD and DEATH are slightly separated from SAINT PETER and WILL.)
Well he obviously wasn't supposed to die! He's not in the darned thing!

WILL
(Meekly piping in.)
If I could just-

GOD & DEATH
(To WILL.)
Not now!

GOD

Pete, could you bring him somewhere? We can't just have him sitting here outside Heaven's Gate.

SAINT PETER

Uh, yeah. I'll bring him to the holding room.

WILL

The holding room? That doesn't sound very heavenly!

(SAINT PETER sits him down on a small white bench that has just been placed stage right. Stagehands bring on walls made of cloud and build on each side and behind him.)

Well, I guess this isn't too bad. Pretty comfy.

(A stagehand brings on a white jail cell door and closes WILL in the room.)

Hold on. What's the big idea?!

SAINT PETER

Don't worry you're fine. This is only to ensure you don't wander off somewhere.

WILL

This feels a lot like holy jail.

SAINT PETER

(Nervously explaining because he knows WILL is completely right.)

Oh, there's no jail in Heaven. It's just a secure holding room.

(He begins to exit.)

For when things go... Wrong.

(He rushes offstage. WILL calls to him but gives up. While in the cell, he moves about, relaxes, plays with a ball of cloud, and stares longingly through the bars.)

DEATH

How could this possibly be my fault? I don't kill them I just pick them up!

GOD

Everybody lives and dies according to my plan. Will Thompson getting curb stomped by a 10,000-pound Barnum elephant was not part of my "Bigger Picture."

DEATH

(WILL is staring longingly out the prison bars. He perks up when he hears "free will".)

What about free will?

GOD

(WILL gets more excited.)

Free will?!

WILL

(An outburst.)
Yeah! Free Will!

DEATH

(Rolling his eyes.)
Not you. The concept of free will.

WILL

I like the concept of free Will.

GOD

That's not what we mean.
(They go back to forgetting he's there.)
Free will was never fully introduced. Every time we tried it, they succumbed to utter mayhem.

DEATH

(Hitting a nerve.)
The Medieval Period wasn't that badd!

GOD

Not that- Not that bad?! 200 million people died because they got sick? 200 million because of a cough, Death.

DEATH

Oh, God.

GOD

Don't, "Oh, God" me. You wanna know the top 9 things to fear during the Middle Ages? I'll tell you:

(GOD exaggerates each one.)
plague, famine, travel, birth, childhood, bad weather, adulthood, violence, and sudden death.
Sudden death! People were just keeling over for no good reason!

DEATH

Hey, it all worked out! The Renaissance came next.

GOD

Oh, yeah because when the Italians started liking art the Black Plague just disappeared.

(GOD takes a breath to relax.)
Look, I didn't give anyone free will.

DEATH

There is no way you have laid out every single decision ever.

GOD

Oh, well of course not. I let them decide what shirt to wear, the flavor toothpaste they buy, and if they choose dessert after a meal but, never do I let them decide, “Hey, let me look for some cotton candy by the Elephant grounds.”

WILL

I can still hear you! This jail cell is just made of clouds you know!

(GOD points a finger toward the cell, a stagehand enters with another layer of cloud wall which they place on the stage left side of the cell.)

GOD

And I certainly did not give Will Thompson free will.

DEATH

So, what they won't ever see free will?

WILL

(Piping in.)

Oh, come onnn!

DEATH

Every person's self-determined actions-

GOD

Oh, here we go. You talk to a few hundred college professors on their walk to the afterlife and now, you're a scholar of Plato, Kant, and D'Holbach.

DEATH

I just want to know. I've waited quietly-

GOD

(Oh, yeah?)

Quietly?

DEATH

(Correcting themselves.)

Mostly quiet, for millennia. This is the first time I walked some poor schlub up here that didn't belong.

GOD

Look, it doesn't matter!

DEATH

(Interjecting.)

How doesn't it-

GOD

(WILL is listening intently.)

“You’re free to follow your desires,” “every action is pre-planned,” or “each deed determines the future.” Believe whatchya want. What really matters is how free you feel. The question shouldn’t be: “Do I have free will?” It should be, “How free am I?” Once you figure that out, then you can learn to control the things you actually have power over.

(A long pause.)

DEATH

(Still annoyed.)

You know what, fine! Don’t tell me!

GOD

Don’t? I just laid out the whole thing for ya!

DEATH

No, you’re just messing with me again. You know what? I’ll just bring him back.

(WILL is excited again. DEATH starts walking to WILL’s cell.)

GOD

(Grabbing DEATH.)

You can’t bring ’em back now. He’s been dead for 20 minutes already!

WILL

20 minutes?! I’ve been here for 5; max!

DEATH

(Closer to WILL now.)

Time moves differently here buddy.

(To GOD.)

But still they won’t even notice; he’s probably just getting to the hospital now.

GOD

Hospital?! Due to dumbo’s misstep he’s probably a free will pancake! Might as well bring him directly to the morgue.

DEATH

Well, what about the Hindus’? We could bring him over there.

GOD

He doesn’t believe in more than one God. He’s a Catholic remember.

DEATH

You said it yourself:

(DEATH makes a flattening hand gesture.)

pancake.

GOD

Oh, what the heck everyone outsources why not us?!

(They walk over to WILL's cell together. GOD opens the door.)

WILL

(Overjoyed.)

Free Will!

DEATH

(DEATH guides WILL offstage.)

Let me bring you to my friend Shiva; he'll get you reincarnated in a jiff. You've been a good guy, right?

(They exit together.)

GOD

(The phone at the pedestal rings.)

I am not answering that.

(GOD exits through the gates.)

SAINT PETER

(Rushes in and answers the phone.)

Yes, this is Heaven's Gate. Peter speaking.

(He listens a moment. Calling to GOD.)

God, it's for you! There's a really important prayer coming in from the United States.

Apparently, it's an election year?

(Fade to BLACKOUT.)

(END OF PLAY)

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *As un-scholarly as it may seem, "Free Will" was inspired by an image I saw online: a poorly drawn man in a jail cell. I decided to call him Will and thought it was the funniest thing in the world for 15-minutes. All that came to mind was his freedom; "free Will!" With this, my play was born. Although, this dead man was absurdly stuck at Heaven's Gate, I wanted to cover a deeper topic that tied into the dumb joke that inspired me: free will. Do we have or not? My script does not try to answer that question and... Neither will I. What I did instead was present levity among the real opinions of theorists. The play states: it doesn't matter whether we have it or not. It matters how free we feel... And that's that.*

If I were to talk about the dramatists that inspire me, I would normally talk about Mister Samuel Beckett. His stories were a bit darker though so, at this time, I will say that my best friend, musician, and fellow artist, Zach Fontanez is the one who inspired me. When I write a comedy, he's the man I go to. One of the best feelings in life is laughter with a friend and Zach is my go-to guy.

AUTHOR BIO: A rising playwright displaced from Long Island to Connecticut, Timothy M. Gadomski currently works at Nelson Hall Theatre in Cheshire. Gadomski writes with their heart & soul often with storylines dealing with Mental Stability, Love, and Gender. Timothy has been

involved in theater for over a decade and had the shows, "Indulgence," "Free Will," "The Misery Theatre Guild," and "The Harsh Reality of Dating a Poet," produced throughout Connecticut, the Midwest and the East Coast. This January, the show "Harmony Lake" will be produced at Harriton High in Pennsylvania