

Memory is something most of us take for granted. If you don't believe that, ask yourself when the last time was you woke up in the morning not knowing who you are? And what about that person next to you. Who is that? When and where did you meet?

And, furthermore, where are you? How did you get here? Sound familiar? Of course not. Memory is such an integral part of our being that, as I say, we take it for granted. We know who and where we are each morning and we don't even think about it, let alone consider how we know.

That seems to be the theme of the current production by the Old Castle Theatre Company. Lee Blessing's remarkable "A Body of Water" shows us two people in exactly that situation. They wake up and have no clue as to whom or where they are.

Alzheimer's disease? Possibly, but, if so, there is far more than that to the plot of this 90-minute play in five scenes. Ross, a retired judge, played expertly by Bill Tatum, and Avis, his wife, equally well performed by Paula Mann, are a couple who find themselves totally without memory. Their confusion turns to anger and then to fright.

They are in a rather plush summer home surrounded by a body of water that possibly symbolizes how they are exiled from their lives, cut off from all connections with their past. As they struggle, often humorously, with their dilemma, a young lady enters. Who is she? How did she get here? And, by what right has she let herself into the house?

Carey Van Driest does a masterful job as this intruder who claims at one time to be their loyal and loving daughter, Wren. At other times, she informs the couple she is their lawyer striving to defend them from charges of having murdered their daughter. As such, she displays exasperation and even cruelty in the way she interacts with the couple. Which explanation is true is a matter never totally resolved.

In fact, one wonders if Wren is really there or a figment of the couple's imagination, or a dramatic device, possible.

The play soon arises above the comical level into a sphere of terror for the couple and, to some extent, for the audience. It is a very strange mystery that leaves one totally puzzled but most assuredly thinking about how much of our existence depends upon our memory.

Eric Peterson's direction keeps this drama, not only interesting, but deeply thought-provoking. Don't expect answers because they aren't there. This is not your typical mystery with all issues resolved at the end. Rather, it is designed to awaken us to the role our memory plays in our lives.

But it will keep you focused on the theme and on the marvelous portrayals by Tatum, Mann and Driest.

They will have you believing, wondering, and questioning long after you have left the theater.