

6-2011

Labeling Abigail

Annora E. Brennan

Union College - Schenectady, NY

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Labeling Abigail

By

Annora E. Brennan

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Theater and Dance

UNION COLLEGE

March, 2011

Table of Contents

Three Plays I Like and Why- first research paper that explored my own personal interests in plays and what made them entertaining to me

The Demands of Playwriting- second research paper that outlined the requirements of a play and how I would incorporate these demands in my own writing process

Final Performance Script- *Labeling Abigail*: my final script with performance stage notes included

Director's Concept- third paper that detailed my intentions for the performance and my rehearsal process

Director's Calendar- created to present my intent for each rehearsal and when my tech and dress would be for the show; this calendar was discussed at my weekly production meetings

Feedback Questionnaires- these were created for my two scheduled feedback sessions during the rehearsal process. Invited guests were to fill these questionnaires out, and then I would hold a discussion after they viewed a section of the performance to listen to their opinions and gain feedback on what I needed help with

Labeling Abigail poster- the poster for the performance, designed by myself and Jennifer Taubes

Labeling Abigail Program- the program for the show

Pictures- there are some from our first read through as a cast, then from one of our rehearsals and lastly from our dress rehearsal all taken by my advisor Patricia Culbert

Experience final paper- this was my last paper due for the project, I discussed the final outcome of the project as a whole and how I grew as a theater student through this project

Annora Brennan

Senior Project

Patsy Culbert

September 21, 2010

Three Plays I like & Why: An Analysis of the work of three playwrights

Plays; what makes them different from novels? What makes them entertaining? Why would one read a play when they could just see it on stage? I have always been a fan of playwriting. My face would light up with excitement in English class when I discovered we were reading a play next instead of a novel. I was always interested in Theater, but was that my sole reason for enjoying reading plays so much? In my exploration of why I like plays, I have found that I truly enjoy them for the way they are written and how plays focus mainly on the character's emotional journey rather than just the events that happen to him or her throughout the character's life. Three plays that capture these ideas are Alan Ball's *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*, Wendy Mac Laughlin's *Watermelon Boats*, and *Three Tall Women* by Edward Albee. Each of these plays unravels the emotional discovery of their characters through a simple, casual conversation between five bridesmaids, two best friends, or a single character conversing with herself.

Alan Ball's *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* recounts the story of a wedding reception in Knoxville, Tennessee through the secret conversations of the five bridesmaids forced to wear the same hideous dress. The play begins on a lovely summer afternoon in Knoxville, a perfect day for a wedding; a perfect day for those of the upper/middle class to mingle and flaunt their country club memberships. However, instead of focusing on the boring happenings of the reception, Ball places the audience behind the scenes in the bedroom of the

bride's sister, one of the bridesmaids, home to the backstabbing comments of all five bridesmaids. The bedroom serves as a refuge for all five women, a place where they can smoke, gossip, unzip their dresses and let loose. The five women are a diverse group. Meredith, the youngest of the five, is the sister of the bride, and the most vocal about how much she dislikes the bride. Trisha is an ex-best friend of the bride who has been with many men, but is always left unsatisfied. Georgeanne is another ex-friend whose troubles with the bride began when the bride's ex-fiancé knocked her up in college and left her to do the dirty work. Frances is the religious cousin who is curious about men but still very nervous around them. Finally Mindy is the bride's new sister-in-law, an open lesbian who tells it like it is. The casual gossip of these women hiding out in Meredith's room uncovers their history as friends, women, and how they survive in their worlds.

Ball sets the play to begin right after the wedding, as the reception commences. Frances enters Meredith's room, remembering her childhood days and discovers what she believes is a "real" diamond bracelet. Right from the get-go, we know what Frances is all about as she tries frantically to take the bracelet off because she hears Meredith coming and childishly decides to hide under the bed. Ball immediately brings the audience back to those childhood memories, the fear of being caught, and how girls just love to dress up. Then Meredith takes the audience to those rebel days of doing "bad things" in one's room, as she tries desperately to find a joint. Trisha, the cool girl, enters with her confidence clearly in place, followed by the emotional wreck that is Georgeanne. A little later the fifth and final girl, Mindy, introduces herself as the more dedicated bridesmaid reminding the women they are needed downstairs. The roles of the women are clear from each of their introductions. Frances will play the role of the naïve one, Meredith will play the young rebel, who complains the most about the wedding, while Trisha

keeps her cool, and Mindy serves as the words of wisdom, as they all try to comfort Georgeanne. These roles do not change dramatically from the beginning to the end of the play since these roles reflect the women's personality traits. However, each of the characters has a moment in the play where she loses control and a hidden desire or emotion comes exploding out.

Meredith's wall breaks down when she admits of her relationship with the boy everyone had a piece of, Tommy Valentine. He took a piece of Meredith without her realizing it. Georgeanne regains her strength from the pain she experiences in hearing Meredith's story, and Mindy reacts by showing her angry as she rants about the male sex. Frances begins to finally let loose when she gains the attention of a bartender and the girls give her a special makeover. The sensitive side of Trisha surfaces in her struggle to give the cute guy, Tripp Davenport, a chance to win her heart. The women's bedroom conversation allows the characters to feel comfortable expressing themselves and their pain to one another. Their inner moments seem more real because they are in place of trust. Their conversation and troubles provides information about the world in which they live. The men obviously hold the power, as do the elders, as Meredith's parents still have a hold on her. The women discuss the "hoity- toity" expressions of the guests at the party as the guests fill their conversations with back-handed compliments and constant comments hinting at their income level. The women do not have these limits on their conversation, clearly seen in the scene where Frances and Trisha have a battle about religion. The women are living in a more realist world than the other guests at the party. Georgeanne has gone through an abortion, Mindy is a lesbian, and Trisha sleeps with everyone. They do not try to fit into the world they were born into, they are creating a world for their own generation. As Trisha rants to Georgeanne "I think any woman who chooses marriage in this day is out of her

fucking mind,” one can sense the great difference between the world the women choose to live in and the world their parents lived in (Ball 22).

Five Women Wearing the Same Dress was written in 1993, depicting the popularity of country clubs and the disdain the establishment has for the kids of new age punk rock and grunge. However, this play could take place in the present. The conflicts between the older and younger generations would still be accepted as an issue today. Besides describing the time period and expressing the problems of each character, the dialogue serves as a form of identification for the characters. First of all the form of the dialogue, identifies the characters as women in their attention to detail, noticing shoes, body language and always reading too much into things, all of which are common characteristics of women. Then in their informal chats in Meredith’s bedroom, the characters’ choice of words helps to identify their character traits. For instance, Meredith constantly swears and does not have as an extensive vocabulary as the other women, showing her young age, while Frances does not even think of swearing and maintains a very formal and polite conversation even with a group of friends. Good playwrights have a talent for expressing many finite details of a character’s traits just in the way they speak and Ball excels at this skill.

Much can be learned from the constant gossip and bickering in Meredith’s bedroom. The women discuss their society and the roles of men and women within that society. They not only rant about the ridiculousness of a man-powered world and how men have, “fucked up the economy, they’ve fucked up the environment, and what the hell do they do about it? They fuck little girls,” as Mindy kindly puts it, but the women also criticize their own sex (Ball 53). Mindy mocks the typical beauty queen contestant’s speech with the pageant queen stating, “Here’s my tits, here’s my butt and here’s my tits again, thank you” (Ball 40). While Trisha examines her

own morals as a woman in her approach to men, “But love, what is it? I have had so many guys tell me they loved me, and not a single one of them has made any difference in my life” (Ball 22). In the bedroom, no one is safe from criticism, not even the women themselves. They comment on their lives and the lives of others expressing a broad spectrum of beliefs and life issues. The title hints at the story of the play, five completely different women all wearing the same dress, all of whom have issues, all of whom want change and all of whom end up finding the help they need in that bedroom, on that given day, to embrace who they truly are.

Dialogue plays an important role in Wendy Mac Laughlin’s *Watermelon Boats* as well, but it is the change in dialogue that makes her play stand out. Though *Watermelon Boats* was first produced in 1979 the themes of the play are timeless. *Watermelon Boats* could be set anytime in the present and work perfectly. The play follows two best friends, both named Katherine, through ten years of their lives and how their opinion, morals, and goals change. The dialogue between the two girls serves the same purposes it did in Ball’s play in fleshing out the world the girls live in and their characteristics, but Mac Laughlin also demonstrates the change that occurs as the girls mature through the changes in their dialogue. The play begins with the girls, age eleven, setting their just made watermelon boats into a lake and watching the boats float away. Their first conversation is full of words like “fabulous” and “fantastic” as they speak about who their sixth grade teacher is going to be and how they “can’t believe boys put that...” (Mac Laughlin 150). They are just two young girls anxious to grow up. Kate wants to become a famous writer, while Kitty hopes to prove that their IQ means she will do great things. The next conversation becomes a little more caddy as the girls enter the high school. Their stabs at each other become more elaborate than your IQ is “lower than mine” (Mac Laughlin 151). Instead their insults become more personal with “Perfect stays on one side looking her nose down at the

rest of us screwing it up on the other,” which is much more sophisticated than what they would have said to each other when they were eleven (Mac Laughlin 153). Then with their final transition, the sentence structure does not change much but their realizations of how important their relationship is to each other shows another stage of growing up, “All I want is to get married, be a good mother and have you as my friend,” Kitty selflessly admits (Mac Laughlin 154). The dialogue helps to establish the changes in the two girls as they grow up right in front of the reader.

Mac Laughlin creates a world full of choices and criticism with the conversation of two girls. *Watermelon Boats* tackles the issues of abortion, birth control, religion and boys. It is fascinating how much is explored within these two girls’ lives in only a few pages. Most of the issues revolve around the character of Kitty who of the two girls was always the more curious when it came to boys. Kitty starts as the one who wears the first bra eventually becoming the “slutty” one, sleeping with too many boys and not using any precautions. She even admits she may not know who the father is when she discusses her late period with Kate. Kitty seems very confident with her life choices. She constantly defends her actions to Kate who finds her behavior disgusting and very unlady-like. However, when Kitty confesses that her behavior towards men makes her feel important but states, “Afterwards, though, at home in bed...I feel more alone,” her confidence seems to waver and her sensitive side shines through (Mac Laughlin 152). This brief moment of realization connects to Kitty’s final transformation as she accepts her sensitive side and embraces her appreciation for Kate as always being there for her. Kate’s character, on the other hand, varies little from her good girl persona as an eleven year old dreaming of becoming a great writer to a career driven high-schooler writing and producing her own plays. She takes on a motherly type role when it comes to dealing with all of Kitty’s issues,

scolding Kitty for sleeping around, drinking, and even thinking about getting an abortion. Kate's beliefs help to bring the morals of the outside world to life as she expresses her belief that "abortion is wrong" and does not think a woman should have sex before marriage. Kate's big transformation occurs during the girls' last transformation into college students. The two girls revisit their high school arguments and Kate admits that Kitty was right about her not living life. The pressure Kate puts on herself to become a famous writer and always do the right thing finally becomes too much for her and she wishes she had more of Kitty's spirit to just experience life. The two girls end up complimenting each other for what they use to criticize each other about when they were younger. Mac Laughlin's ability to capture the important issues of each transition allows for more of the girls' story to be told without necessarily stating it.

Unlike *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*, *Watermelon Boats* does not have a lot of action to support the dialogue. The girls are simply on stage with two ladders, miming the action of letting their boats out on the water and when the fog horn sounds the actors change their hair style to signify the time change. To have such little action with only a ten-minute play, the success of the play really comes down to power of the dialogue and the theme of the play. *Watermelon Boats* expresses the importance of friendship. No matter what the two girls went through they still made it back to that lake and continued their personal ritual of watching their boats float away. The two girls did not always agree but they never left each other. By simplifying the action, the set, and the dialogue Mac Laughlin developed a story based solely on what moved the story forward. There was nothing extra to distract from the importance of the two girls' relationship. The ability to make such a powerful statement with so few words sets Mac Laughlin apart from other playwrights.

Similar to the first two plays Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* works as a casual conversation between women, however the three characters in Albee's play have a little more in common than the characters in the first two plays discussed. Albee creates a new approach to a biographical story with *Three Tall Women*, as the characters are playing the same person just at different times of the woman's lifetime. *Three Tall Women* explores the changes one goes through during a lifetime. Albee does not name the three characters, only labels them as A, the oldest; B, the middle aged one; and C, the youngest. The beginning scene sets the story so one believes that the youngest woman, C, is learning the trade of B, as the main caretaker for A. Then the issue of A's belongings and payments come into the conversation so C can be mistaken for someone working for the government. It is not until the end of the first Act that it is clear that the world created on stage is not necessarily "real" and that the women are all the same person. The slight confusion of who the characters are does not take away from the story being told as A runs the dialogue as a senile old woman reminiscing about her younger years. A tells stories of prized horses and her luxurious life style as a well known woman of the wealthy class. Right away the importance of appearance and social acceptance are clear. Later A admits that all her diamonds and jewels are fake since her money began to dwindle after the death of her husband, but she clarifies the jewels are more than "glitter," that the jewels serve as "tangible proof...that we're valuable...that we're valued" (Albee 65).

Albee makes a firm statement about the affects of society on a person's values with the drastic changes from C to A. C embodies the innocent desires of youth and the never ending hopefulness that one will be able to find love. B has a much more realistic look on life, as she has already been through their marriage and some of the rough moments, but still has an emotional wound that can be triggered by the simple mention of her son. A looks at life as a film she

watches over and over again. A has lost the emotional attachment to life and refers to herself as an “observer” awaiting death. C fears what is to come and denies her transformation into B and A because she has not yet experienced the world that B and A have. Marriage remains a fairytale instead of the business deal it becomes. Family still serves as a place of happiness and comfort where for B and A it has become a nuisance and disappointment. Albee demonstrates how much a person can be changed by the world they live in through the conversation A has with her former selves. A holds the power in the play as she is the oldest and “wisest” since she is what the other two eventually become.

Albee’s unique style of telling A’s story allows for the intentions and desires of each stage of her life to be told by her. *Three Tall Women* covers the loss of virginity, the loss of a loved one, struggles with family, cheating, and even accepting the end of one’s own life. C innocently and excitedly describes the time when she was “that kind of girl” and how she wanted to do “it” (Albee 48). The same giddy feeling comes over A when she recalls the time her husband presented her with an unexpected gift in a much unexpected way. A and B team up to lecture C on the real life of marriage and B painfully recalls the time she cheated and their son angrily reminded her of her mistake as he walked out the door never to return. As A wraps up the conversation with her rant on the happiness of knowing “it’s all done” Albee leaves the other two still where they were in the beginning. C still hopes to find the love of her life as B stubbornly stands her ground that she will never forgive her son. In displaying the change this one woman goes through in her lifetime, Albee also establishes that though the three play the same woman they are each their own woman. A, B and C know who they are and embrace their beliefs. Albee perfectly titled this piece *Three Tall Women* because A, B and C are three very

different characters. Albee introduces a new way of looking at life, in enjoying the different people one becomes instead of looking at life only through one's final set of eyes.

All three plays reveal the transformations of their female characters, each in their own distinct style. Ball's bedside chat with the bridesmaids, Mac Laughlin's yearly tradition between two best friends, and Albee's abstract exchange between a single person all embody what I love about plays. Plays tell a story through dialogue whether it be between five people or a single character. A playwright must decide how to place the important parts of the story into the dialogue to assure the character's whole story can be told. The dialogue in these three plays makes the story more personal since the characters are telling the story not a narrator. The simplicity of the dialogue in these three playwrights' works allows for the readers to involve themselves in the conversation, whether it is to comment on their feelings towards abortion as Kate and Kitty, or tell their own story about why men are stupid as the bridesmaids. A good play to me makes the readers or audience feel as though they are eavesdropping on a conversation, eager to know what the characters are talking about. Besides their exceptional work with dialogue, each of these playwrights constructs a different way to tell a similar story. With these playwrights the stresses and experiences of being female were remembered and recounted by the characters through gossip, by snippets of time, or the bickering of an old woman with her former selves. All three plays are uniquely structured demonstrating the playwright's artistic ability to invent the way their character's story is told. With this creative power and the use of common dialogue these three plays exhibit what I find so fascinating about plays.

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Annora Brennan

Senior Project

Patsy Culbert

Oct. 5, 2010

The Demands of Playwriting

What does a play need? What fuels the action of a play? How does one create characters? These are all questions first time playwrights might ask themselves and I find myself asking these questions as I begin my journey into playwriting. A play defined by Robert Cohen is an “event”, it is “action, not just words in a book” (Cohen 25). A play composes the elements of plot, character, theme, dialogue and once on stage even music, lights and of course the spectacle of it all (Cohen 33). These may all seem like simple components, however, each has its importance in making a play great. Cohen breaks down the qualifications of a good play in his book, *Theatre*. Cohen declares that a good play must have credibility and intrigue, speakability, richness, depth of characterization, gravity and pertinence, compression and economy, and celebration.

The credibility and intrigue of a play focuses on the believability of the action. The action of a good play does not route itself in the theatrical plot created by a given playwright, but on the human instincts and goals of each character combined with the situations the characters are placed in. Will Dunne describes this same concept of the importance character as he states that the “character is the story” (Dunne xvii). A play should be fueled by “human needs” (Cohen 325). A play is a “living thing” so it must take in consideration all of the elements that influence the human mind (Egri 112). The intrigue of a play constitutes the audiences’ eagerness in wanting to know what happens next. Even more importantly, a good play makes the audience

question the meaning of the action, shedding light on the many mysteries of human behavior. The intrigue of a play “draws us into the world of a play” while the “credibility keeps us there” (Cohen 326). The speakability of a play refers to the power of the dialogue. The dialogue must have a great impact when it is spoken to ensure that the meaning of the play is heard and the theme is focused. There are many tools that playwrights use to make effective dialogue such as “fast punch lines, significant pauses and electrifying whispers” (Cohen 327). However, the most important aspect of the dialogue is that it fits the character. The dialogue must have the same credibility the action of the play had.

In continuation of the theme of credibility, the richness of a play provides the specific details of the world of the play (Cohen 329). The quality of the details expressed allow the audience to feel as though they have traveled to another world submerging themselves into the characters’ lives rather than just being an outside observer. The depth of characterization holds the key to the play. Cohen describes this facet of a play as one of the most difficult for beginning and veteran playwrights. Each character must have his/her own intentions, desires, goals, expressions and motivation (Cohen 329). Lagos Egri goes even further into detail about the importance of character in his book *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. Egri explains that every character has three dimensions; physiology, sociology and psychology (Egri 53). Without these three dimensions the character will not seem human. If the character does not behave like a human being then the audience will be unable to believe the action of the play and thus the play loses its credibility.

The gravity and the pertinence of the play pertain to the central theme of the play. An affective theme usually gives significance to “humanity’s spiritual, moral or intellectual life” (Cohen 331). The theme must touch on current concerns either of the present time or issues that

are classified as timeless. A truly great theme can serve a play for any time (Cohen 331). Egri develops the importance of theme in his book. He also stresses the importance of the premise of the play. Egri defines a good premise as containing “character, conflict and conclusion” (Egri 27). Like a theme, the premise becomes a brief synopsis of the play and is the reasoning behind the actions of the characters.

The last two qualifications for a good play on Cohen’s list are compression and economy, and celebration. The compression and economy of a play models the skill of the playwright in condensing a story into a theatrical time frame. The term economy refers to the playwright’s ability to eliminate or consolidate “characters, events, locales, words” etc, in order to help with the compression process (Cohen 333). In compressing the story the intensity of the situation increases and there becomes a clearer “climatic confrontation” for the characters (Cohen 333). Cohen last demand is the element of celebration. Cohen stresses that a play should celebrate life not just “depict or analyze or criticize it” (Cohen 334). Though the theme may be depressing the struggle the characters go through should remind the audience of the essence of life. Cohen even refers to a play as a “piece of life” (Cohen 26). Creating real characters and real life situations allows for the audience to relate to the play and reflect on their own lives. Each of the qualifications of a good play developed by Cohen reverts back to one main demand: real characters.

In the development of my own play I will do my best to fulfill all of the criteria presented by Cohen. However, the creation of my characters will be my first and main concern. As seen through the exploration of Cohen’s criteria for a good play, most of the demands center on the fact that the characters within the play are unique and their actions are based upon each individual’s desires, motivations, and emotions. Egri classifies the needs for a real character in

three different dimensions as mentioned before: physiology, sociology and psychology.

Physiology is the physical make-up of the character. Egri argues that a person who is sick acts differently than a healthy person and even has a very different opinion on health itself (Egri 54).

Any kind of deformity can affect a person's outlook on the world. By establishing the physicality of the characters a playwright has already begun shaping the conflicts and action of the play. The second dimension is the sociology of the character. What are the surroundings of the character?

Where did the character grow up? What were his/her parents like? Did he/she go to church?

These are a few of the kinds of questions to answer in exploring the world around the character and how these elements affect the make-up the character (Egri 54). A character that went to church every Sunday since birth would have a different outlook on the world than a character that never set foot in a church. The last dimension explored by Egri is the psychology of the character. The psychology of the character is based on the combination of the first two. How a character reacts to others or different situations has a physical and sociological foundation (Egri 64). These three elements of a character are referred to as the "bone structure" of the character in Egri's book. A similar set of questions can be found in William Dunne's *The Dramatic Writer's Companion*, as Dunne explores the physical life, the inner life and the character's life with others (Dunne 4-6).

The "bone structure" and the lists of questions in Dunne's book provide the playwright with the basic beginnings of characters. Dunne's book provides many more exercises to develop one's characters while Egri focuses more on what a playwright must gain from the character he/she created. Egri points out that human beings are constantly changing. A playwright must know his/her characters "as they are today, but as they will be tomorrow or years from now" (Egri 83). He refers to this as character growth. The conflicts presented to the characters in a

play have to affect the characters' ways of living and in result make them alter themselves (Egri 84). If the character does not change throughout the play then the play did not have a true conflict and the characters become unrealistic, thus producing a bad play. Another criterion that Egri explores is the strength of the character. He emphasizes that a playwright should construct a character with a strong will. A character should be willing to fight for his/her convictions (Egri 105). This allows the play to develop a more intense conflict creating a much more intriguing play. The character must face his/her internal contradictions in order to win his/her goal (Egri 105). This relates to Cohen's emphasis on the gravity of the play. Cohen stated that the theme of the play should incorporate some type of human predicament and a character fighting against his/her internal contradictions fits Cohen's criteria.

All three authors, Cohen, Dunne and Egri, emphasize that the characters create the plot. However, Egri gives the new playwright a hint on constructing a character known as the pivotal character, the one who helps to make the play move. A pivotal character generates the conflict because he/she is so determined to obtain his/her goal that he/she will go to any length to get it (Egri 130-131). Next on the check list for Egri is for the playwright to make sure that each of the characters be their own unique person. If a play is composed of all the same type of character then there can be no conflict. The characters can have similar attributes, but they also must have opposing beliefs or outlooks, something to establish an opposing element in which a conflict can arise. Egri gives the example that two thieves can exist in the same play however one must have a different temper or philosophy. For example one could be a coward and the other fearless, or one could respect women while the other despises them (Egri 137). All of the requirements Egri discusses in his book provides the new playwright with a check list to make sure that the play being written will have credibility. Egri constantly stresses that the plot, the action, the conflict

and the conclusion should make sense for the characters in the story. Egri wants the playwright not just to write a story but to truly create a living world inhabited by real people.

The second necessary element I plan to focus on as I begin to write my play will be the premise. As stated earlier the premise of the play contains character, conflict, and conclusion. The premise provides a “thumbnail synopsis” of the play (Egri 27). The premise should be the reasoning behind the characters’ actions. A playwright can start with an idea for a play, but a play cannot be successful with just an idea behind it. The premise establishes the journey of the play, the guiding force that drives the characters’ actions. An example premise would be “great love defies even death” which obviously describes the premise behind Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (Egri 34). Egri advises the playwright to write what he/she believes in, he states “a good premise represents the author” (Egri 36). The premise should not be spelled out in the play but serve as the thematic background to the action of the play. Egri suggests sticking to one premise rather than creating multiple ones. Similar to the other elements of the play, the premise depends on the characters. If a playwright does not have a good premise then the playwright does not know his/her characters well enough (Egri 49). However, the premise does help to guide the action of the characters allowing the playwright to establish some structure when composing their journeys.

By starting with the development of my characters I can begin to find the premise of my play and eventually tackle the other criteria on Cohen’s list. In using the many exercises suggested by Dunne, and establishing the “bone structure” Egri discusses, the world and intentions of my characters will become clearer and I will be able to find the opposing forces that will provide the needed conflict. Through the exploration of my characters and my own beliefs I hope to discover a premise that will fuel the movement of my play. The other criteria on Cohen’s

list will hopefully fall into place after the careful construction of my characters and premise. In order to write a good play many elements need to be considered. However, the most important part for me is creating believable characters that an audience can relate to and will force the audience to look a little deeper into themselves.

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Labeling Abigail

Play Script

By: Annora Brennan

Senior Honors Thesis Project

Department of Theater and Dance

Union College

Winter 2011

Characters

Abigail Attwater- an energetic elementary school student whose innocence embodies the simple joy of life

Babe- (Abigail McCoy) a stereotypical popular high school student whose looks and actions hide a much darker past

AJ- (Abigail Johnson) a highly opinionated college junior who prides herself on her male outlook on life, though secretly wishes to be swept off her feet

Dr. Abigail Whittfield- a happily married professional in her late twenties whose feministic goals may be hindered by her maternal instincts

Mimi G- (Gail Peterson) a sassy grandmother who busies herself with doting upon her sons and grandchildren in hopes to dull the pain of her loneliness

The set is simple. Each character has their own designated area set up in a slight semi-circle arranging the characters by age beginning with Abigail Attwater (stage right) and ending with Mimi G (stage left). Abigail's area is filled with stuffed animals, a coloring book, crayons, chalk-drawn hopscotch and other childhood activities. Babe's area has a school desk with a range of beauty products to pamper herself with. AJ's area resembles a typical dorm common room with a couch and evidence of a big night of drinking all around it. Dr. Whittfield has her work set up on a table/desk, with her lab coat hanging off the back of her chair. Mimi G has a medium sized wing-back chair with a side table to hold her tea and cookies.

(Lights up)

Each character stands behind their designated areas

"Girls Suck" *(Announced by all five characters)*

(Music)

Each character begins to live within their worlds; Abigail Attwater starts to play hopscotch

Abigail Attwater

My name is Abigail Attwater. I am in second grade, and I am 7 and a quarter and six days years old. I can count up to the thousands and I can already read four books. My teacher Mrs. Perkins says I am very smart. I love school. You get to do so many fun things, like color, and story time, and math, and gym class, and music class and lunch!!! Chicken patty day is my favorite day; that's when I get to bring money for lunch and I can get chocolate milk with it. I sit with my best friends Jillian, Quanita, Samirah, and Lindsay every day at lunch. Michael, Avery, Rich, John, and Joseph sit at our table, too. I like to sit sideways on the bench so I can talk to the other tables, too. Mrs. T is the best lunch lady; she always gives you a lot of tater tots.

Mimi G

Darlings, you may call me Mimi G, it's the name my first grandson gave me and it has been my name ever since that sweet boy entered this world. Today my lovely son brought me a Boston Crème donut. It was delectable! I can have one more this year. I try and limit myself due to the doctor's concerns with my sugar levels. But a little sugar cookie with my tea shouldn't hurt.

Abigail Attwater

Recess is the best. I always eat fast so my table can get to be first in line for recess. The swings are the best. The WORST day was when I was the first person in line for recess and I wanted to get to the swings, so I ran as fast as I could, but I was wearing my Speedo flip flops and I tripped on the black top, but I got up quick and kept running. I got a swing. But my knees were bleeding so I pulled my dress down to try and hide my knees. But when I was swinging Mrs. T noticed my knees and made me get off the swing. It wasn't fair. I got there first. I had to spend the rest of recess in the nurse's office. The nurse thought I was crying because my knees were gushing blood, but I just wanted to SWING.

AJ

The name's AJ and let me just tell you, I HATE GIRLS! Crying, bitching, pouting, complaining, some more crying, they're a constant headache. The one thing that hasn't changed from high school to college is the ridiculousness of girls. They still judge you if you talk to too many guys, or if you have the wrong kind of outfit on. "She's a slut," "She's ugly," "She's fat," "She sleeps with everyone." Their lack of ability to entertain themselves with their own lame lives makes your life their new gossip page.

Babe

Everyone calls me Babe, even my teachers, that's how high school is if you're me. These poor girls, I feel as though I need to bring them home and dress them myself. I try my hardest to compliment the one thing I don't want to barf on in their outfit, but some days it is too hard to find anything pleasant. It's like they want boys to find them unattractive. I don't even think these girls have a shot at being lesbians. Don't even get me started on the "Goths!" I mean, really, why are you wearing safety pins on the outside of your skirts? Those are typically used to mend your clothing or make it fit better on your body, not as an accessory. Oh, and you have to stop with these dog collars. Seriously, they look better on my cocker spaniel. It's as if they are asking to be compared to dogs. I can't stop people from barking at you, you did it to yourself by wearing *that* to school. I mean I figured it out by myself, why can't they? They are wearing sweat pants, and sneakers to school, hiding their womanly shape. I mean, I get that it is the 21st century and women and men are equal and whatever, but I mean we don't have to go as far as to try and look like men, do we now? I really hope that these female athletes make some money with their sport, because they will have to pay a ton to get a man looking like that. Disgusting!

AJ

I think my favorite thing is if you talk to another girl's boyfriend, you are automatically trying to steal him away. First of all, I don't find your boyfriend attractive and secondly, anyone who would date YOU...they must have some kind of inferiority complex to want to deal with your GREAT personality.

Babe

Guys want a girl who actually looks like a girl.

AJ

That's another thing, why do guys want to date these girls? If I were a guy I would definitely be gay than deal with that shit. I would rather drop kick a girl in the face than have to give her a hug and tell her she's beautiful 1800 times a day.

Dr. Whittfield

"Mrs. Whittfield"- That's what he called me! MRS.! I have been working with him for two years; he knows I have my doctorate. DR. ABIGAIL WHITTFIELD! Not "little miss," not "sweetheart," DOCTOR. He does it on purpose, that arrogant asshole.

Abigail Attwater

Boys are stupid. They always get into trouble. They always talk when the teacher is talking and they always get in trouble in gym class for being too rough. This one boy won't leave me alone. He chases me around the playground and is so annoying! I don't like him. He is stupid.

AJ

This whole double standard thing kills me...No one thinks less of a guy who bangs a different girl every weekend, but if a girl does it, "Whore," "Slut." We do it to ourselves. Instead of girls supporting each other, we just talk shit about one another and try and put the other down so we can be the top girl.

Babe

I know I'm pretty. People may think that I am a cocky bitch, but that's because they don't look like a model.

Dr. Whittfield

It's the 21st Century; one would think that men might have accepted that women have careers now.

Mimi G

My sons are so good to me. They take care of me so well. Their wives, on the other hand, awful; so needy and too concerned with their own lives. They do not treat my boys the way they should.

Dr. Whittfield

I want to have a successful career. I want my research to make a difference in the world of science. I know that my husband's job could support us while I was out of work, but I want to be able to support our family as well. I would be throwing all my hard work away. I CAN'T have a baby now.

Abigail Attwater

Today I have to go to my friend Stephanie's house 'cause my mom has to work. I don't really like Stephanie's house. She never lets me be the baby when we play house, I always have to be the older sister who has to do homework the whole time. And she always gets to be the pink power ranger and I have to be the yellow one. The pink one is better. I told my mom one time that I didn't want to go to dance 'cause Stephanie told me that I looked like a boy with my new hair cut and I didn't want to see her at dance. I wish my mom would stay home or take me with her. I don't want to go to Stephanie's!

AJ

Girls SUCK!!!!

(Transition music)- Dr. Whittfield acknowledges AJ's hangover and offers AJ some Tylenol to aid in her recovery while Babe has a conversation on her cell phone

"Him" (Announced by all five characters starting with Abigail who points to one of her stuffed animals, then Dr. Whittfield says "Him" looking at a picture of her husband, then AJ laying on the couch, next Mimi holding her necklace which holds her husband's wedding ring, and finally Babe says "Him" as she kisses a picture of a guy in her magazine)

(Music)

Mimi G

My grandchildren are quite impressive, very beautiful and intelligent. My granddaughter Alexandra Victoria is currently dating a very striking young man who reminds me of my darling; a nice Irish boy.

Dr. Whittfield

My husband and I met in college. We were both dating someone else when we were first introduced. It was our sophomore year and we went to the big basketball game against our schools rivals. We ended up sitting in the same section and a mutual friend, Josh, made the introductions during halftime. Josh still to this day takes full credit for our marriage. Nothing happened right away, since we were both involved

with someone else, but we realized that we had a similar schedule. He was pre-med so we both took many of the same science classes. We began getting to know each other more and spending time together. We would have study dates in the library, dorky I know. But we were also pretty big partiers. We attended many themed parties that our group of friends held. The best was the fake wedding we had. I was the bride and he was selected to be one of the groom's men. However, at the reception our relationship became a little more than a friendship. Everyone in the wedding party decided to switch partners. The bride and one of the groom's men got together. We did not officially start dating until our junior year, but we have been together ever since. We moved in together when we were both accepted into the Grad program at Georgetown. We helped each other through the rough times there and once we made it out we celebrated with our marriage. He is the perfect man for me. I love him.

(Music)- Abigail runs over with veil to Dr. Whittfield and puts it on her, then goes and grabs one of her stuff animals. Abigail and Dr. Whittfield adlib a scene where Abigail marries Dr. Whittfield to her stuffed animal, they then both return to their worlds

(Music fades)

AJ

"Do you have a boyfriend?" (Ugh) I belong to a family of daters. My brother had a natural progression of girlfriends, my sister dates so many it's hard to keep track of who is the current leader of the pack. Even my parents dated a lot when they were young. The answer to the question is no.

Babe

I would never date anyone in my school; they are not at my level, but at least I give them something to dream about.

Mimi G

There he was, a college boy, looking at me, noticing me. I was fabulously wearing a floral dress, swoop neck, brand new Mary Jane's, freshly curled hair, (mmm) to die for. And there before me was the most handsome clean-cut MAN walking over to me. Fresh clean shirt and tie, navy blue sweater, khakis, and those two-toned Docksidors. Your grandfather knew how to dress. The first words out of his mouth were, "Excuse me, pretty lady, may I ask your name?" "Gail." "What a lovely name for a woman."

AJ

I almost dated this kid in high school. We would talk for hours on AIM (*laughs*). He had that kind of smart, sarcastic humor that I loved. He wanted to date me, but I had fully committed to the role of fun, single girl who despised high school relationships. I broke his heart. The truth is he didn't look like my friends' boyfriends. He wasn't your typical "hot guy." I was afraid of what my friends would say.

Abigail Attwater

Michael is really funny and when we play a big game of tag we always try and tag each other. He gets in trouble sometimes but he's smart like me.

AJ

Begins cleaning up the cups and bottles from the night before

I'm no longer the naïve brat I was in high school. I go after the guys that I am attracted to. However, that doesn't mean I have settled down yet. I embodied the party girl mentality pretty hard entering college. You could say I was the definition of "Woo College." I still enjoy a good time but freshmen and sophomore year are over. I'm a junior in college now I should be settling down with someone. But I just can't seem to rid myself of the party girl persona. I've tried to start relationships with guys at school; however, making it more than a weekend ritual hasn't been my forte. It's either I find a guy who is exactly like I was and is just looking for fun, or I find someone who thinks I wouldn't want to settle down so he moves on to one of those "girlfriend" girls, whatever the fuck that means. Wasn't I fun? Didn't we like each other? Do I have to nag you, piss you off, and tell you can no longer hang out with any of your friends in order to become more girlfriend material? I just don't get it.

Babe

In order to date me, you must be attractive, well mannered, well dressed, be able to buy me gifts and most importantly get my father's approval.

(Music)

Mimi G

It is so lonely without him, my darling. I miss him every day. The world seems empty. I have my children and my grandchildren, but they all are living their lives. The life I loved to live left with him, all I can do now is remember.

AJ

I guess I shouldn't have slept with them.

(Music fades)

Abigail Attwater

There is also a kid in my class that looks like Aladdin, but he's really quiet, so I don't talk to him all the time.

(Transition music)- Abigail mimics Babe as Babe fixes up her make-up. Abigail uses her crayons as her "make-up," but when Babe looks down her shirt to fix her cleavage Abigail covers her eyes, while Dr. Whittfield pulls a Slimfast and other healthy options from her bag

"Old Enough" *(Announced by all five characters)*

(Music)

Mimi G

Now listen, deary, when I was your age, I made the most important decision of my life. I was 16 and the name that I was given at birth was absolutely wretched. I do not even like to say it out loud; that is how horrible it was...the name was unladylike; it did not suit me at all; I cannot believe my mother named me that. Abigail, such an awful name. Gail was much more mature, womanly, sophisticated. Your grandfather would have never fallen for an Abigail. I became a woman that day I legally changed my name.

Babe

I am already a woman. I know how to please men. I'm a natural. It all started when I was 14. My sister Emily had a huge rager at our house. My dad was, of course, away on business and Emily had a bunch of kids from our high school over, well the ones who were cool enough to be there. A bunch of college guys came too. Emily was very good at getting guys, so the fact that there were older guys at the party was no surprise. But this was the first party that she allowed me to attend. She said that I was finally old enough to really party. She even let me borrow some of her clothes. I knew that it was going to be a night that I would never forget. (...) Though I was new to the partying scene, I knew how to play it off like I was a pro. I curled my hair only slightly to give it that natural, tussled look. I accented my eyes with a

little eye liner and mascara, and put on the outfit my sister found acceptable for her party. What she didn't know was that I also stole her lace bra for the occasion to give myself a little extra confidence. It made me look like the C-cup I would soon be, instead of the almost B's I had at the present time. I looked at least 17, though my plan was to go for a young looking 18 year old.

Babe goes behind her desk and begins brushing her hair and getting ready for the party

Abigail Attwater

My mom lets me pick out my clothes now. She says I'm old enough to dress myself. I get to pick out my favorite shirt and shorts, and shoes, and socks, and hair ties! The other day I picked out my favorite T-shirt that I got at the San Diego Zoo. It has a baby monkey, a baby elephant, a baby lion and a baby giraffe on it. Then I put on my black stretchy shorts and I have my new green Speedo sandals on, but my feet get cold so I put on my purple socks too. They are the fuzziest. I put my hair in pigtail buns, all by myself. My mom asked me if I was sure that's what I wanted to wear to school that day. "YES!" So she let me keep the outfit I picked out on!

Dr. Whittfield

Opens the Slimfast on her desk

It all goes downhill from college. I know there are some who fluctuate during college due to the increase of alcohol intake, but most females are able to keep in pretty good shape. I never thought the days I had to wear spandex to feel good in my clothes would come so soon. I used to be able to eat whatever I wanted and not gain a pound. Now I feel as though I can see the food settle into my stomach and ass instantly. It doesn't help that I have a mother-in-law who loves to point out all of my flaws every time I see her.

Mimi G

Wears an unattractive multicolored blouse whose colors do not match the red and gold scarf

Do you like my new blouse? Seventy-five percent off at Marshalls, the sale ended today. I adore the colors. I feel like a beautiful flower garden in this blouse. I cannot understand why it would be seventy-five percent off. They should sell this full price they would make a fortune. All the girls would look so lovely in a blouse like this. The lady who checked me out asked if I was attending a costume party, (...) She must have thought I was from some sort of wealth; buying such an elegant blouse for a costume.

Sweet girl; very overweight, though, poor dear. Some girls do not have any self control these days. (...) This will go nicely with my red and gold scarf, don't you think?

Babe

I knew Emily wouldn't be paying any real attention to what I was doing or telling people at the party, partly due to the drugs she'd be doing and the fact that she would be busy picking out her boy toy for the evening. She had been bringing boys home since I was about ten, right after our mom died. My dad was too in shock to notice in the beginning and later realized she was too out of control to stop her. Anyway, *(Babe moves by AJ and AJ passes her a solo cup)* I started to casually make my rounds through the house, checking out the scene. As I was talking to one of the senior boys from my high school, an extremely hot guy walked by and winked at me. I tried my best to keep my cool but I instantly blushed and he definitely knew he had a strong effect on me with just that one look. He disappeared for a while, but as it got later in the night he came back to me. He asked me if I went to the university. I told him I was still in high school, and that I was Emily's sister. He said he didn't know that Emily had a twin sister. I did not feel the need to correct him again so I just smiled and gave a little giggle. I knew could look older. After a little bit of small talk he asked for a tour of the house. I brought him upstairs, and showed him a couple of the guest rooms, and Emily's room, but when we got to mine I heard him shut the door behind him.

AJ

Girls do just want to have fun, but we can't have fun without the aftermath of being called a dirty whore.

Abigail Attwater

I do have trouble dressing sometimes 'cause I can't open my eyes when I get dressed. I have to keep them closed, 'cause my daddy always says to close my eyes when "naughty bits" are on the T.V., and my friend Stephanie said that it was bad girls taking their clothes off. But I'm a girl too, so I can't look when I don't have clothes on. So I lay my clothes on the floor and then feel for them with my eyes closed. Sometimes I go to school with my shirt on backwards but at least I'm a good girl!

Mimi G

I have to wear scarves to cover up the old turkey. Everything starts flabbing around when you get to my age. That is why I got my shape-ups. I saw the commercial on the television. I'm going to be fit as a fiddle with these better bum shoes and my daily weights: 2.5 pounds each arm.

Pulls out weights from behind the pillows on her chair and demonstrates a couple exercises

Babe

Steps forward out of her world

He thought I was older, so I guess it was my fault for tricking him. I mean 18 year old girls do that kind of stuff. I didn't want to be embarrassed and tell him I was only 14. So, I just went along with it. It was what a woman would do, and I was a woman; I was mature. My sister said I was old enough. Some girls are just ready earlier than others.

AJ

Steps forward to join Babe down center

Why can't I be a slut? I am human, aren't I? I have the same sex drive as any guy. That stuff about guys always thinking about sex, well, have you ever been in a girl's mind? Well, I guess I can't speak for all girls, but jump into my mind for a moment, straight up porno! Maybe a little more of a Cinemax porno where there is a little more plot, but porno nonetheless. I try hard to contain myself on the weekends, but I like to party. A few drinks in, those internal desires tend to take control. It also doesn't help that I frequently take the initiative and text, leave a voice mail, or even whisper right into his ear the exact vulgar language I wish he would say to me. Sex is fun, it feels good. Why wouldn't someone want to do it as much as possible?

(Transition music)- AJ walks Babe back to her area and throws out the cup she had given Babe previously

"Model Mothers" *(Announced by all five characters)*

(Music)- Dr. Whittfield leaves her area and walks down center

Dr. Whittfield

My mother was the one who pushed me into science. She wanted all the success in the world for me...except marriage. She wanted me to stay her little girl forever. It was a constant guilt trip with her.

Though, you would have never guessed her disapproval of my marriage by the way she doted on my husband. She treated him like a prince. She never made things easy, drove me up a wall, but life's not easy so I guess I should thank her for that.

Babe

Leaves her area and moves down right

My dad did everything with us when we were little. He would play "Scar" with me and my sister. It was a game where we would go across the street from our Cape house to one of the old grave yards, and my dad would pretend to be Scar from the Lion King and try and catch me and my sister before we got to "pride rock," which was actually an above ground grave. He would sing songs to us every morning as he made breakfast. He even had a special song for me, "I Got You Babe," by Sonny and Cher. He had always called me "Babe" since I can remember. I would feel so special when he sang that song to me. The name has now come to refer to my looks, which is nice, but the name belongs to my dad. I was his baby girl, his "Babe."

Abigail Attwater

Grabs a stuffed animal, her coloring book, leaves her area walking past Babe and Dr. Whittfield and end up to the left of Dr. Whittfield

After school I walk one and a half blocks past my house to the school my mommy teaches at. She lets me go to the bookstore and pick out a snack and then I get to teach at the front of the class with her. I've even dissected a pig! The big kids in her class call me "little Attwater."

AJ

Leaves her area and comes down in between Dr. Whittfield and Babe

Not too many people know. I don't like to talk about it. For some reason I just don't think people would get it unless they knew her. I don't know why I feel this way...people still get upset when grandparents die. But it was different; it was just too out of the blue. My grandmother was at my house five days earlier questioning my attire; "Abigail Johnson," she always called me by my full name, though the rest of my family called me AJ, "is that all you're wearing?" She was referring to the bikini I wore to my beach job. She, of course, was taking out the trash at the time, always cleaning something. She had been up for my high school graduation.

Abigail Attwater

I call my grandmother Mimi G 'cause that's what my brother and sister call her. My mommy says I'm named after her.

Abigail moves over to Mimi G's chair. They embrace and Mimi G welcomes Abigail into her world, Abigail sits down right of Mimi's chair

Mimi G

All children need a grandmother; a wonderful woman, who will tell them the proper way to present themselves to the world when their parents have misled them. A woman who will acknowledge every accomplishment they achieve with their favorite candy and a card (*hands Abigail a card*). If there is not a card for the occasion, it's no matter; a Birthday card can be used for many different occasions. All one needs is a good ball point pen.

Abigail presents Mimi G with a picture from her coloring book

Abigail Attwater

My Mimi scratches my back with her fake nails 'till I fall asleep.

Mimi G gives Abigail options of books to choose from that she will read. Abigail chooses one and Mimi begins to mime reading Abigail a story

AJ

My dad and I were out to dinner. We didn't think it was a big deal when Mom first called. It sounded like my grandmother had just been in some sort of fender bender. We thought everything would be fine. I will never forget the look on my mom's face when we entered the house. It was not alright. My parents rushed out of the house in hopes to make it to the hospital in time. My sister and I couldn't move, we just stood in the kitchen staring. Anytime the phone rang, my stomach would turn.

I answered the phone, my parents had only been gone thirty minutes or so; they were hours away from the hospital. She died. I could hear the pain in my mom's voice as she asked how my sister was holding up and if I could call my brother. She wanted to be with her mom. I just wanted to be there for mine.

Babe

My mom was the only one to call me Abigail. Her voice still haunts the name.

Mimi G

Looking up from the story book

My grandson Ryan Garrett plays baseball quite well, a very good athlete. I go to all of his baseball games. The sweet boy got me a team cap, which I purposely forget each game. Women shouldn't wear those awful things. His mother looks foolish.

Babe

My mom just couldn't handle it. We were just too much for her. My dad loved us too much in her eyes. She resented us. I was too young to know any of this at the time. But looking back, my memories of her are only of her crying, or going out late at night with my dad chasing her, telling her not to go. I thought it was a weird game they played. He loved her so much. But she didn't love being a mom. I still think she

loved us, but she couldn't let go of the life she had before. She was a famous model and transitioning to family life required a lot of pills. I guess she went out like a star.

AJ

AJ moves left passing Dr. Whittfield and observes the scene between Mimi G and Abigail.

I wish my grandmother was around to see what I have accomplished. She would be so proud. She always liked that I didn't have boyfriends, more time to spend with her.

Mimi G

Mimi hands the story book off to Abigail as she tells the audience about Abigail

My youngest granddaughter is quite the character. She is full of energy which will hopefully help her shed some of the baby fat. But she is beautiful nonetheless, the most adorable chubby cheeks. Her mother thought she was being sweet when she named her after me. Though I despised the name as a child, the little girl is the perfect Abigail.

Abigail Attwater

Abigail pulls on Mimi G's pant and says to Mimi G

Oh on our Fun Day for school I won first place in the potato sack race for my grade, just like my brother and sister did.

AJ

Moves back towards Dr. Whittfield

It was hard to see my mom go through the loss. She seemed to not be able to be happy simply because my grandmother wasn't there to be happy too. It's hard losing the one person who loves you no matter what. I don't know what I would do if I ever lost my mom. I hope to be a mother like her. I guess I should work on finding a boyfriend before I start considering having kids.

Dr. Whittfield

I've always wanted to be a mom. To experience the joy in watching my children grow, make mistakes, laugh. I want to lie outside on a blanket with my baby asleep on my chest and just be there while he or she sleeps soundly. I want to watch my husband's face light up as his son scores his first goal in soccer or as his daughter puts on her sparkly tutu for her dance recital or vice versa (she laughs). He will make such a great dad. He wants to have a baby so badly...I want to too but...why can't...

Babe

Emily got angry, she felt abandoned. So naturally she resorted to the same things our mother did to be happy. My sister was the only role model I had. I know people think that my sister and I will end up like our mother from the way we act. But they don't know anything. I will make my father smile again, a real smile.

(Music)- Dr. Whittfield and AJ move right to comfort Babe

Dr. Whittfield

I'm ready to be a mom. I want to have a baby!

Babe

I am stronger than my mother.

AJ

I better only have boys!

Abigail Attwater

Gets up from Mimi G's area and joins the others standing to the left of AJ

When I grow up I want to be just like my mom!

Annora Brennan

Senior Project

Patsy Culbert

Director's Production Concept

The concept for *Labeling Abigail*:

The premise of my play came from a variety of ideas. I initially wanted to write a comedic piece about my family which then transformed into the idea of a one-woman show about my life. These two initial ideas gave birth to monologues such as AJ's "I hate girls" and to impersonations of my relatives like my Mimi. I knew I wanted to be able to share my thoughts of how idiotic girls can be but still incorporate the love I have for my family as well. I began to further examine my personal opinions of society and myself. I tend to consider myself a feminist in that fact that I believe women can do everything men do and should not be tied down to stereotypical roles. When I was growing up I always pictured myself as a professional succeeding in a chosen field and having the ability to support myself. But as I got older I realized that my ultimate dream was to eventually become a mother. I would have no problem being a stay at home mom. I've also always dreamed of becoming famous since I was little, but there are negatives to that type of lifestyle in regards to wanting a family. Nowadays women have a lot of choices to make all of which have pros and cons. I wanted to be able to express the dilemmas that women go through in order to refute common female stereotypes while acting upon their own desires.

In *Labeling Abigail* I was able to incorporate all of my ideas into one piece. The play has comedic elements stemming from the actions of stereotypical characters while exploring the trials and tribulations that females go through in order to become the women they want to be.

The characters I have created are based upon combinations of my own ideals, family members and personal experiences. With the characters I also wanted to include the change in thought and emotion that females go through as they grow up, as well as, demonstrate that all ages of women deal with similar troubles. The characters cover the many issues of sex, love, gossip, image, family, loss and finding oneself. I want the audience to experience a range of emotions as the characters reveal their inner most desires and secrets, but find that each character has accepted who they find themselves to be at the end of the play, even the younger characters that have much more to experience.

The characters:

Abigail Attwater is an energetic elementary school student whose only problem in life is a girl who her mother has arranged for her to be friends with. Abigail is the character mostly based on my life. Her eagerness to learn demonstrates all little kids' desire to grow up and become a big kid. Abigail is ready to conquer the world in her spandex shorts and Speedo flip flops. She seems to have life all figured out though she may know the least about it.

Babe (Abigail McCoy) is a typical bitchy popular girl who every guy in high school wants to date and every girl wants to be. She is beautiful, smart, though there are times she just gets others to do her homework for her, and she knows that she can get pretty much get anyone to do what she wants. I know that everyone can look back to high school and pick out the girl or guy who seems to be just like Babe. They may have even been Babe. I wanted to go deeper and find the reasons behind the popular girl. Kids in my high school always thought that the popular kids were the ones that had everything, but in growing up one realizes that having everything is a rare occurrence. I'm sure there was much more to the popular kids in my high school as well.

AJ (Abigail Johnson) is the opinionated college girl. She is the character that I got to express many of my own personal dislikes of the cattiness of girls. She embodies a male outlook on life in hopes to never be compared to the girls she detests. However, she finds herself desperately wanting everything that those girls have. AJ touches on the concept of the “double standard” where guys can get away with a lot more in relationships than girls can. Her inner desires are to find love, but she can’t stem away from her party girl persona and she does not want to seem like an emotional girl talking about her feelings all the time.

Dr. Abigail Whittfield is a happily married career woman struggling with the idea of starting a family. She knows that she wants to become a mother, however, she feels as though this may be detrimental to her career in science. As a current college senior, Dr. Whittfield is the character of my possible future and for many college females. Many girls get married right after college; others only focus on their careers. For some it may be the case that they can have both others may have to make the choice.

Mimi G (Gail Peterson) is a sassy grandmother modeled from all of my grandparents. Grandparents can be that extra source of love for a child or can be the dreaded in-law. Mimi G is a little bit of both but I also wanted to uncover the sense of life ending. Mimi G expresses her joy of watching her grandchildren succeed, but confesses that she at times does not feel alive.

The idea for each character to be named Abigail came in my early writing process. It started simply as a way for me to connect each character and at one point almost became just a helpful writing tool. However, in the finished product the fact that each character has the same name means much more. Though Mimi G and Abigail Attwater are the only related characters, each of the Abigails represents a piece of another. Dr. Whittfield’s insulting mother-in-law seems to

have similar opinions to Mimi G. AJ could be describing girls like Babe that she knew in high school or Dr. Whittfield could end up being just like Abigail's mom and teach science instead of doing research in order to be a mom. For the play I wanted the characters for the most part to be strangers, but intertwine in ways that made them seem as though they all know each other.

The performance:

For my workshop performance this term I want the acting to be the most important part. I want the audience to see the characters come alive from this short script of mainly monologues and for the audience to leave feeling as though they just met five new people that made them look at life in a different view point. In order to accomplish this goal I intend to use lighting, set, and sound as a mere source of highlighting the characters. The only kind of set I intend to use would be different chairs that help suggest the age of the character or blocks of different color that would express the essence of each character. With lighting I have ideas to help suggest the transition between the four sections either in different colors or a slow progression of five defined spotlights fading into one single lighted area. My ideas for sound simply serve as another form of transition between sections that expresses the emotions the characters went through in the previous section. For example after the section "Him" I may play songs about finding love or being hurt. I believe using songs sung by women will help to enforce some of the characters thoughts, since the play is about five females. I do not want anything too extravagant because this play is mainly about listening to these five character's stories. The simplicity of the set and technical elements will also make it a more intimate setting which is fitting for the play because the characters express many vulnerable moments in their lives.

I would like for all five characters to be present on stage at all time, which will allow for the possibility of characters to interact with one another and for the characters to show the audience non verbal evidence of who they are as they all transition into the next section. My staging will come mainly through rehearsing and letting the actors cast explore who their characters are. I have marked areas in the script where I find that there are possibilities of interactions or certain actions, but I want the actors to come up with their own as well so that is it a very organic experience becoming each of these females. Since many of the pieces come from my actual life I will be able to help my actors capture the emotions necessary if they are struggling. However, I do not want to completely direct their every movement because it will be nice to see how others interpret the characters and how they personally connect with them. In rehearsals I hope to explore different ways of having the characters move. As a cast we can find what seems to be the best way to present the script. I will also have open discussions with the actors to see if they experienced similar tragedies or occurrences in their lives. I think that it will make the piece more personal and therefore have a greater affect on the audience. I also intend to ask the actors what their favorite songs were growing up to create a sound track that fits this particular cast as well as the script.

My ideal:

As of now I do not have a complete vision of how I see my script being performed. I know that I would still like having the characters on stage at all times and would like to keep it placed in a more intimate space. However, in terms of the set and technical elements I do not have an ideal yet. I think I will have a better idea of what I want the play to look like after my workshop performance.

Labeling Abigail Calender

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9	10	11 First read through 6:15-8	12	13 Rehearsal 7-9:30 Character Discussion Song options	14	15
16	17 Rehearsal 7-9:30 7-7:50: 1 on 1 7:50- 8:40: 1 on 1 8:45- 9:30:Read through	18 Rehearsal 7-9:30 7-7:50: 1 on 1 7:50- 8:40: 1 on 1 8:45- 9:30:Read through	19	20 Rehearsal 7-9:30 Blocking Finding interactions	21	22
23	24 Rehearsal 7-9:30 Blocking transitions	25 Rehearsal 7-9:30 Continue experimentation with blocking	26	27 Rehearsal 7-9:30 Soft Off Book Feedback #1 Set Blocking	28	29
30	31 Hard OFF BOOK Run @ 7 Possible work day!	1 Run @ 7 Feedback #2	2	3 Run @7	4	5
6 Dry Tech 3:00pm	7 Wet Tech @ 7:00	8 Dress Rehearsal @7:30 Call:6:30	9 Extra Dress? @ 7:30 Call: 6:30	10 Performance @ 7:30pm Call: 6:30	11	12 Performance @ 7:30pm Call: 6:30

13 Strike before 1:00

Annora Brennan
Feedback Session #1

Senior Honors Project
Script Composition

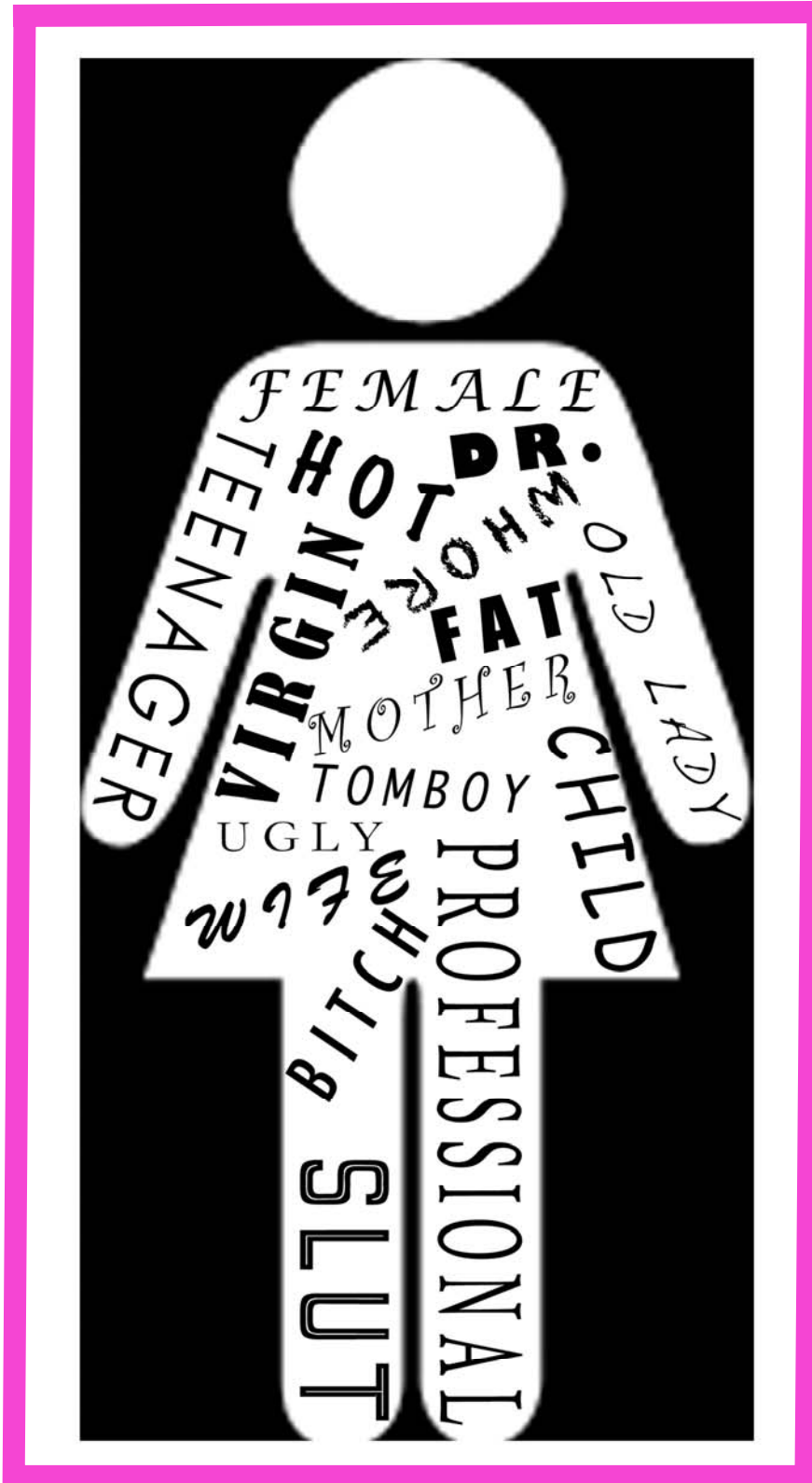
1. If you had to title this work, what would your title be?
2. If you were to arrange the monologues in a performance order, how would you arrange them? (number the order on your copy of the script for discussion)
3. It has been my intention to give equal weight to all the characters.
 - a. Does this work for you? Why or why not?
 - b. Is there one character that stands out above the others? If so, who? Should this be developed further or do you agree with the concept of equality among characters?
4. What would you say my themes are? Are they clearly related through the monologues? Do the themes adequately tie the characters together?
5. Do the stories engage you? Why or why not?
6. The “audience” for each monologue varies. Is this a problem for you?
7. What questions or issues come up for you in reading this draft?
8. What do you think I need to work on?

Annora Brennan
Feedback Session #2

Senior Honors Project
Script Composition

1. If you had to title this work now, what would your title be?
2. Structure: now that characters have been introduced, I have structured the script to reflect transitional points in the play.
 - a. How does this structure work for you?
 - b. How might you rearrange/restructure now?
 - c. Is there anything missing? Is there more you need to know about characters &/or storyline?
 - d. I'm struggling with ending the play. What are your thoughts on this draft?
3. I have added more character material.
 - a. Does this work for you? Why or why not?
 - b. Is there enough character material?
 - c. Does each character feel complete in her 'arc?'
4. What questions or issues come up for you in reading this draft?
5. What do you think I need to work on?

LABELING



ABIGAIL

Department of Theatre and Dance
Senior Thesis Project

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY: **Annora Brennan**

Performance **Feb. 10** and **Feb. 12**

@ **7:30** in the **Actor's Studio, Yulman Theater**
Free Show

The Union College Department of Theatre and Dance Presents

Labeling Abigail

Written and Directed by: Annora Brennan

Cast

Abigail AttwaterAnnora Brennan
BabeLizzie Cohen
AJMaisy Bragg
Dr. Whittfield.....Catherine O’Brien
Mimi G.....Sophie Hewitt

In Partial Completion of Senior Thesis Project in Theatre

Director’s Note

Each of the characters embodies a completely different Abigail. However, the telling of their stories intertwines them in such a way that they are not five females, they are one.

I would like to dedicate this show to all the members of my family. Thanks for all the laughs, love and support. I love you.

Production Staff

Director.....Annora Brennan
Stage Manager.....Ryan Semerad
Set Designer.....Annora Brennan
Costume Designer.....Annora Brennan
Lighting Design.....Anna Gronauer
Sound Design.....Andrew Persson
Annora Brennan
Senior Project Advisor.....Patricia Culbert
Poster and Program Design.....Jennifer Taubes
Annora Brennan

Special Thanks

Patricia Culbert, William Finlay, Alecia Pickett, Maisy Bragg, Sophie Hewitt, Catherine O’Brien, Lizzie Cohen, Ryan Semerad, Steve Michalek, Brittney Belz, Hugh Jenkins, Charles Steckler, Andrew McLain, Jake Larocca, Mat Hayner, Kyle Lanzit, Taylor Connolly

THE THEATRE REQUESTS THAT AUDIENCE MEMBERS PLEASE TURN OFF ALL
CELL PHONES, BEEPERS, AND PAGERS BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE BEGINS.

THE USE OF ANY TYPE OF RECORDING DEVICE, CAMERA OR VIDEO IS
STRICTLY FORBIDDEN.











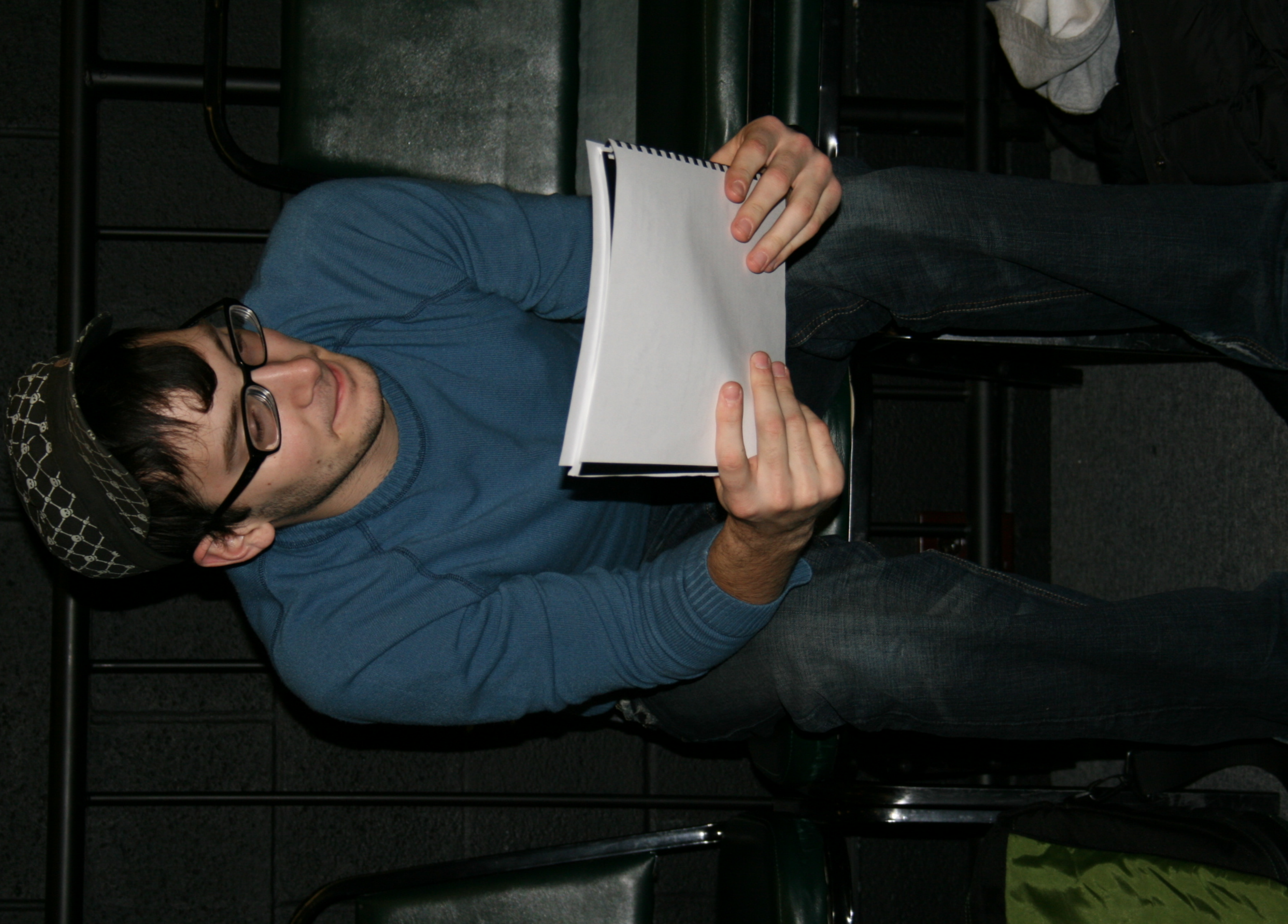


































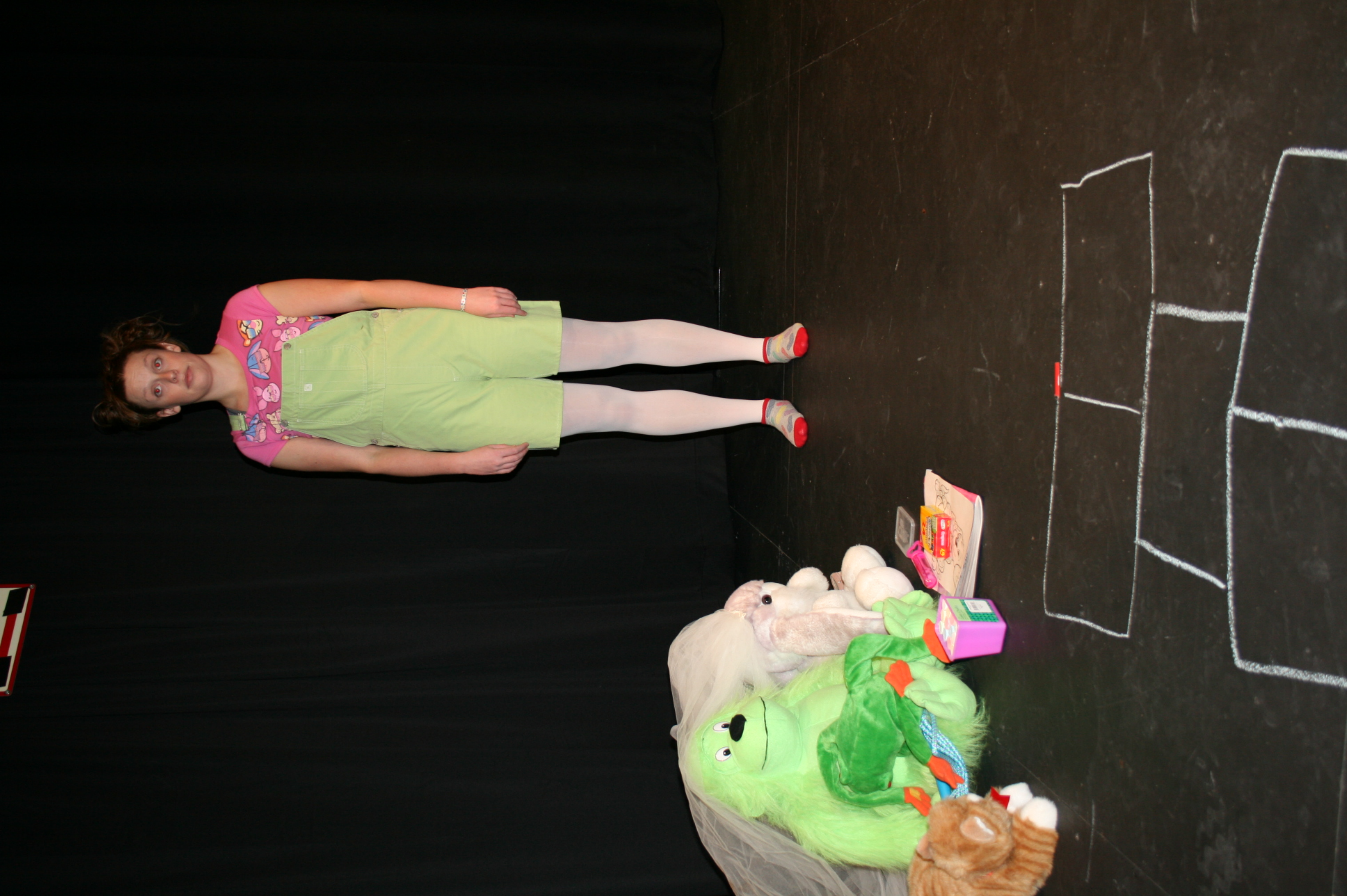








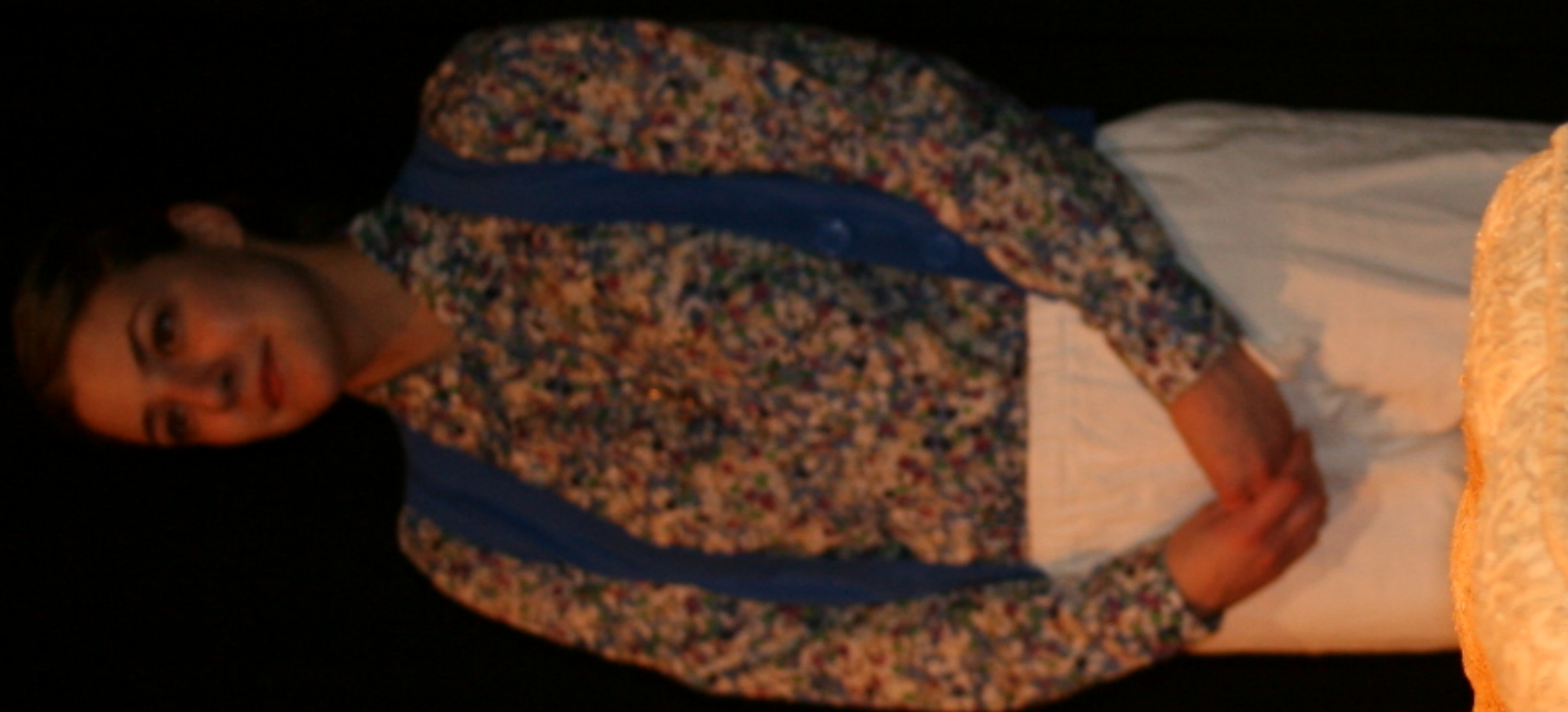






















































































































































































































































































EXIT

















Annora Brennan

Honors Senior Thesis Project

Patricia Culbert

Analysis and Evaluation of Final Project: Labeling Abigail

Nerve-wracking, exciting, frustrating, frightening, thrilling, tiring; this play was an absolute emotional roller coaster that I could not wait to present to an audience and at the same time get off my shoulders. From this the play sounds more like a nuisance than a joy; however, I have never been more proud of anything else I have ever done.

This experience forced me out of my comfort zone from start to finish. I have never considered myself a writer and frankly still do not. The thought of writing my own play was quite frightening, so I allowed for the use of other writers' material in the parameters of designing my senior project. I never used other material. The play was all of my own writing. Surprisingly what I thought would be the hardest task in this project, the writing, turned out to come naturally to me. This could be due to the fact that much of the material came from my own experiences and many of the characters were based on family members, but other parts were out of my own imagination. By the end of fall term I began to fall in love with the script. I found joy in developing the characters, making sure each of their stories was being told. I became more aware of the people and personalities around me as I developed my play's characters. I even came up with a couple more ideas for other plays. I felt like playwright.

As winter term drew near I contacted a good number of girls who I thought could embody my characters well. Lucky for me most of the girls I contacted were able to do it. Casting was not difficult for me because I had either acted or been in an acting class with each of the girls I asked. I knew how they worked, what strengths they had and weaknesses. I was

nervous that some of the less experienced girls would have difficulty with memorizing, but it was not a problem. I had my cast, I set up rehearsals, and it was now time to direct. This was right around the time when the fear returned and I felt as though I did not know what I was getting myself in to. I even said to myself many times “why didn’t you pick something easier?” Trying to organize meetings with the cast, with the department, to find furniture, to meet with my light and sound person, I felt very overwhelmed. I had just finished my final script the week before and now I had to design my entire show that was going up in less than five weeks.

This was one of the many large drops in the roller coaster. I was at the top, feeling confident about my script and cast and figuring out a schedule. Even the first reading was exciting to finally hear the words, but I had no idea how to stage the show. My only idea was to have the five females lined up by age in costume and doing some kind of small activity while others spoke. I wanted music in the transitions and simple lights. It was not starting off as a very active play and I became nervous about presenting it to an audience. I just hoped that something would come up in rehearsals that would spark my imagination. Since I did not know what I wanted to do for staging I thought that working character analysis with the individuals would be a good starting point. The individual meetings were really helpful for the actors and for me. I was able to hear their opinions of the characters, many of which were what I intended them to be. In working the acting first and the quality of their story telling I was able to take my time in thinking about how I wanted to present this play as well as give the actors time to learn their lines in the emotions and pace that was true to their character’s journey.

We would discuss each of their character’s journey and what was going on beneath the surface of their stories. We also discussed their relationships with the other characters. We found options for actions that each character could do in their worlds and possibilities for characters to

interact. In the next rehearsals I got the actors on their feet. As director I would sit out and observe the cast, just reading my own part. From my experience as an actor at Union and over the years I found that when I was forced to make discoveries for my character on my own I developed a better connection to who my character was and it showed in my acting. I wanted this for my actors. I had my own ideas for how I would play the characters and how I initially created them, but it was more interesting for me to see how these four girls saw their characters. I would take notes on things I liked and things I definitely did not like and this was how we came up with most of our staging. I used their movements and other character choices as my inspiration to stage the show.

There were many steps in the staging before we got to the final production. The feedback sessions were essential. I thought that I had a lot of staging and that it was clear what I was trying to portray, but that was not always the case. The first feedback was another scary moment because I thought I had come up with some interesting staging moments, but they were not as entertaining as I thought and I was lucky to have fellow students and professors help me see the light when it came to how theatrical I could make the show. I was stuck in my own idea of keeping everything very simple mainly because I was afraid of running out of time and having an unfinished piece. With the reactions to the first feedback I knew I had to get this out of my head and create some theatrical moments. Once I allowed myself to do this I was able to come up with many more character interactions and special moments that punctuated the themes I was trying to portray. The second feedback session went much better and I felt as though I had a play. The soundtrack was made and now I only had to work with my sound and lighting person and dress rehearsals would begin.

Tech rehearsals always seem to have something extra stressful about them. With the program here at Union I was required to experience both sides of a tech rehearsal; from an actor's point of view to the stage manager's point of view. Many actors get frustrated because the day is so long and they don't understand why the same light cue was repeated five times, meanwhile the stage manager is freaking out that the timing of the cues is not working out the way it is supposed to. The show is coming near and the sound and lighting are the elements that really bring the show to life, if the tech rehearsal does not go well opening night could be a much scarier thought. For my tech it was not so much the actual rehearsal that was stressful it was the thought that the rehearsal was going to be pushed to the next day which really was not an option since my stage manager was not available. Thankfully the schedule was able to stay the same. I knew that these types of unexpected problems arise in the real world of theater and I am glad that not everything ran smoothly for my play because I think the added stress of actually not having a show finished was a good lesson to learn. My tech rehearsal did run smoothly and I was able to highlight the transitions and special moments with the lights. The sound was a little finicky because of a problem with the CDs but it was all fixed by the end of rehearsal. I am happy with my decision to have a dry tech without the actors present so the tech crew and I could learn the show together and get all the basics down before adding the actors. It was also a very cool feeling being able to call out what I wanted for the lights and the different levels for the sound, I felt like a real director.

The same feeling came again in our wet tech. I commented in my rehearsal log how my experience as a stage manager was the saving grace in allowing my tech rehearsals to run so easily. I stage managed my sophomore year at Union and I was the only one working on the show. I did not have an assistant SM, it was just me and I am very thankful for that. I had to

learn everything for myself and I had never worked back stage in my life. I had a lot to learn. Having this type of experience under my belt allowed me to feel very comfortable running a wet tech. I knew that if one cue did not work out that we would need to go back a couple cues in order for the tech crew to get the sequence down and that the actors would need to go back a couple of lines for the timing to be correct. It was interesting calling out orders from the stage. Being in the light and having the nervous butterflies of a performer for the show while making executive decisions on the technical aspects. My technical crew was amazing, they knew what they were doing and they stayed on task very well. Even Ryan who was my stage manager, who had never stage managed before, learned quickly and became very good at calling the show. It was nice to be the one helping someone else learn how to stage manage since I required a lot of help learning the ropes when I did it my sophomore year.

Dress rehearsal went well for me, even though the energy was not necessarily what it should be for a show. The cast went through a long tech the day before so it was expected that they may be a little tired. It was after the dress that I was finally excited to present my play. Before the tech I was confident in the staging and my actors, but it still was not a show because the lights and sound had yet to be incorporated. The addition of the lights and sound is always my favorite part of the show even as an actor. I needed this addition for my play to feel complete. I could not wait for opening night. The only nerves I had now were in regards to my audience. I wanted a lot of people to come, and though a lot of people said they were coming it was not a guarantee. I had put a lot into the advertisements, to make people actually stop and read my poster; I made announcements in my classes and made a Facebook group as well. It paid off and we almost had a full house for our opening night. The performance itself was very rushed due mainly to my two actors who had less experience rushing their lines, and not allowing for

laugh lines, but I knew these were just first day jitters. I was still very happy with the performance and the audience loved it. People would come up to me the next day saying congratulations and others would tell me that they heard about it and were coming on Saturday. I even had a couple of people who came both nights.

It was such a relief. Opening night went well and now I only had one more show to perform. This last performance was going to be very different because my family was coming and the play has a lot more inside jokes for my family and some of my closer friends who were coming Saturday as well. I did email notes to my cast on Friday, giving them a day before telling them a couple of things that would make the play even better for the final performance. It was a bitter sweet feeling going into the final performance. I was so excited to show my family all the work I put into the show but it was the last time I was going to perform with these four girls who I became very close with. After the performance my project was over. A week before that last performance I was so frustrated and anxious about the show that I could not wait for it to be over. But it was the fun part of the show now and I was sad that it was going to be over. The last performance went very well, only very minor mishaps that an audience member would not have noticed. After greeting the audience that night and thanking my cast and crew for another great show, I was finally done.

With all the good reviews that I got from the performance I was very happy that the audience enjoyed it, but the best compliments I got were in reference to the writing. As I said before I do not consider myself a writer, mainly because it has never been a talent of mine. Performing in front of an audience and even directing and stage managing were all things I had done before. I had never written a play. I had not written a piece of fiction since middle school. Writing a play was my true accomplishment in this project. I can honestly say that I love my

script and I even consider expanding on the piece in the future. In receiving such great reviews I have begun to consider playwriting as an option for myself something that I would have never considered before the completion of this project. I want to expand on my play. I enjoyed creating these characters so much that coming back to the play and making it a longer piece would be a joy. I am happy that I kept it short for my project because it forced me to really get into the nitty-gritty depths of my characters, but I think because my characters were so strong that many more stories could be revealed.

Even with all the ups and downs of this project I would not do anything differently. The rough times that I experienced were the ones I learned from the most and the highlights of the experience are some of the major highlights of my career here at Union. I could not be more proud of what I accomplished with the project. I really do feel that it compiled my whole experience in the theater program and I would encourage all theater students to take on something as scary as this was for me. This project incorporated things that I learned from every class I took in the theater. I felt I had sufficient knowledge to go about directing, costuming, designing, and performing my show. Without the skills that I possessed through my multiple theater experiences this project would have been impossible, but I was well prepared. I would have never guessed that by my senior year I would have written, directed and performed in my own play. There are still times I look back at it and cannot believe I finished it. It was an experience that unveiled to me a creativeness that I did not know I possessed and allowed me to experience the stress and accomplishment that goes into writing a play and directing one. I can finally say to myself that I am glad I did not do something easier.