

A PERFORMANCE STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF SOOT  
IN *THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO*

by

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## ABSTRACT

In 1985, Christopher Durang created a master work titled *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* which was described by *The New Yorker* as a “brimming cornucopia of brilliant lines.”<sup>1</sup> Frank Rich of the *New York Times* called it “so speedy and chipper that it could almost be mistaken for a Bob Fosse musical.”<sup>2</sup> Douglas Watt of the *New York Daily News* referred to it as a “farical study of a disastrous marriage, marked by still births, insanity in the family and divorce.”<sup>3</sup> These critical responses indicate the necessity to maintain the complexity of the character of Soot without allowing her to fall into the easy stereotypes that trap many artists. The play’s focus on alcoholism, spousal abuse, and cancer make it difficult to reconcile the very serious circumstances with the overtly comical reactions created in the play. My challenge in portraying the character of Soot is to resolve these issues.

I focused on the teaching of Konstantin Stanislavski as interpreted by Sonia Moore of the American Center for Stanislavski Theatre Art to navigate this challenge. Ms. Moore asserts: “Only after the actor has studied the play, the events, and the given circumstances will he be able to select the actions which will involve his emotions and other inner experiences.”<sup>4</sup> With this in

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Oliver. *THE THEATRE: Off Broadway*. New Yorker 27 May 1985: 74.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Rich. *Stage: 'Bette and Boo' By Durang at the Public*. New York Times 17 May 1985, C3.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Watt. *Durang darts slightly off-target*. New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. Ed. Joan Marlowe, Betty Blake. New York: Critics' Theatre Reviews, inc., 1994, 268.

<sup>4</sup> Sonia Moore. *The Stanislavski System*. 2nd. New York: Penguin Books, 1984, 26-27.

mind, I began by studying the script and the playwright for clues about the given circumstances within the world of the play.

“You’re the dumbest white woman alive”<sup>5</sup> is a line from the play used to describe Soot. This line of dialogue has been used in the past to justify stereotypical performances of this character which mask the complexity of a woman who has been seriously hurt by the man she loves. These types of simplified characterizations are flat and do not take into account the inner and outer forces that make Soot who she is. Olympia Dukakis played Soot at the Public/Newman Theatre in New York City in an Obie award-winning performance.<sup>6</sup> She is quoted as saying, “This is a very forgiving play.”<sup>7</sup> Durang later agreed with this assessment saying, “I remember thinking that that sounded right.”<sup>8</sup> He further added that *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* is “based on my parents, it’s more emotionally close to me than some of my more surreal plays...I like the balance of the comic and the sad. It should play as funny, but you should care about the characters and feel sad for them.”<sup>9</sup> Durang also confides that his own father was an alcoholic and that “in life, my mother lost three [children in childbirth].”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Durang. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*. New York: DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE INC., 1985, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - The Marriage of Bette & Boo by Christopher Durang*. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullMarriage.htm>>.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Holmberg. *Family Survival: An Interview with Christopher Durang*. American Repertory Theatre 31 Aug. 1998 29 Sept. 2003 <<http://amrep.org/past/bette/bette2.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Since the play, however humorous, is based on real events in the life of the playwright and his family, it is reasonable to search for playable and understandable motives for the character's action through research of real life given circumstances. To this end, I have been researching the behavior rationalizations inherent in the social interactions of alcoholic families. This has led me to discover a possible explanation for Soot's unusual responses to unpleasant comments and situations. *The eGetgoing Online Addiction Treatment Alcohol and Drug Rehab Counseling* web page explains that family members often choose enabling behavior to cope with the destructive choices of the alcoholic. Enablers "may have their own system of denial that is fed by the lies and deceptions."<sup>11</sup> Further, it states, "We can think of denial as a way of telling the truth about a small part of reality as if it were all of reality."<sup>12</sup> In this way, Soot is employing a rational tactic to cope with an irrational existence. I believe further research will also identify denial associated with personal tragedy. These understandable and human connections will provide me with the basis of my beginning explorations of this achingly beautiful and sympathetic woman because, as Sonia Moore states, "A person's psychological and physical behavior is subject to the external influence of his environment."<sup>13</sup>

Soot's environment includes the time period of the piece and is complicated by the memory play nature of the script, but it adds context for Soot's behavior as a subservient 1950's housewife who feels as if she has very little control over her own world. According to Elaine

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<sup>11</sup> *Enabling Behaviors and the Effects of Enabling*. [eGetgoing](http://www.egetgoing.com/drug_addiction/enabling.asp). 04 Apr. 2003. 23 Oct. 2003 <[http://www.egetgoing.com/drug\\_addiction/enabling.asp](http://www.egetgoing.com/drug_addiction/enabling.asp)>.

<sup>12</sup> *Denial Defense Mechanism*. [eGetgoing](http://www.egetgoing.com/drug_addiction/denial.asp). 04 Apr. 2003. 23 Oct. 2003 <[http://www.egetgoing.com/drug\\_addiction/denial.asp](http://www.egetgoing.com/drug_addiction/denial.asp)>.

<sup>13</sup> Moore, 26.

Tyler May in her book *Homeward Bound*, “If a woman was not satisfied being a homemaker she was supposed to keep that information hush-hush and go about her daily activities as though nothing was wrong.”<sup>14</sup> This information provides further justification and adds strength to the logic of Soot’s actions as she deals with the dysfunctional world of her family. The work I have done researching Soot’s motivations appears to be relevant to the execution of the play. I may now begin to apply that research to the creation of Soot.

The role of Soot provides a wonderful opportunity to develop and grow as a performer. A thesis role needs to supply the MFA candidate with significant challenges. This role has already provided huge opportunities to connect my research skills with my stage work. I believe the role of Soot will force me to push myself and apply all the skills and training I have received during my studies in order to do justice to the richness of the character.

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<sup>14</sup> *Suburbia and the 1950's Family*. Suburbia and Family. 05 May 2001. 2 Jun 2003  
<<http://www.wm.edu/amst/370/2001/sp2/SuburbiaandFamily.htm>>.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Purpose .....	1
General Information.....	1
CHAPTER 2: CHRISTOPHER DURANG -- THE PLAYWRIGHT .....	3
CHAPTER 3: FAMILY DYSFUNCTION.....	17
CHAPTER 4: DRAMATIC STRUCTURE .....	25
Exposition.....	25
Point of Attack.....	25
Complications or Obstacles .....	26
Climax.....	27
Resolution.....	27
CHAPTER 5: DIRECTOR’S CONCEPT .....	29
CHAPTER 6: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNAL .....	35
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION .....	67
APPENDIX A: SCRIPT NOTES .....	69
APPENDIX B: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION .....	123
APPENDIX C: CHARACTER ANALYSIS .....	125
Introduction.....	126
Approach and Style of the Play .....	126
Where.....	128

Business and Movement .....	139
Motivating Force/Desire, Objective, Intentions- What and Why .....	144
APPENDIX D: ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION INFORMATION .....	145
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	164



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Statement of Purpose

This monograph documents my MFA Acting Thesis Role Project, Soot Hudlocke, from casting to performance. These pages contain the research, process, and discoveries made in my development of Soot and her world. It is through the application of my UCF training that I am able to identify and realize my portrayal of Soot as a beautiful complex women and not the “dumb woman” that another character proclaims her to be. This document will expose Soot’s truth, and enable the reader to reconsider her otherwise superficial characteristics.

### General Information

Durang made it clear that Soot’s laugh would be the key to her character. He included a note in the acting edition of the script for directors clearly explaining the importance of her laugh:

Soot’s laugh is terribly important, and an integral part of her character. Don’t cast an actress who can’t or won’t do the laugh. Also, please have Soot do the ‘Oh, Karl’ (laughs) lines as written- that is, she says ‘Oh, Karl,’ and *then* laughs; the laugh and the line should be separated.<sup>15</sup>

I began my preparation for the audition by focusing on Soot’s laugh, not only because Durang indicated that it was important, but also because I knew immediately and instinctively why Soot laughed. I felt the pain behind her laugh. Soot’s laugh was unveiled and rang true to me because I also use a defense mechanism to cope with the unpleasant: my smile.

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<sup>15</sup> Durang. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 80.

The instant connection I had to Soot's inner truth was my starting point, but I knew that I had only scratched the surface of Soot's complex character. I threw myself into gathering research to assist me in the further development of Soot. Performance reviews, critical analysis, information on the playwright, music and television would provide inspiration. I began to gather information that would map Soot's psychological journey and define the fabric of her psyche that would enable me to hone the facets of her character fully in my acting choices. A study of the playwright provided the point of departure, because a preliminary review of the piece clearly indicated an artistic connection to his writing.

## CHAPTER 2: CHRISTOPHER DURANG -- THE PLAYWRIGHT

The American playwright and actor, Christopher Ferdinand Durang, was born January 2, 1949, in Montclair, New Jersey.<sup>16</sup> He was the only child of Frances, an architect, and Patricia, a housewife. Durang and his mother were very close. Both sides of his family encouraged his interest in the arts, but it was his mother who took him to musicals on Broadway and read plays to him at home.<sup>17</sup> Patricia also had a “bubbling sense of humor and liked to laugh and make people laugh.”<sup>18</sup> During the 1950s television was in its infancy, and its influence on Durang was limited. Unlike most children, he found cartoons uninteresting, so he did not watch them. Instead, he watched a station that ran classic comedic Hollywood movies from the 1930s seven days a week. The popular sitcom *I love Lucy* was an influence as well.<sup>19</sup>

Durang was drawn to playwriting at an early age. He wrote his first play in second grade when he was eight years old. It was two pages based on an *I Love Lucy* episode. His first formal production occurred when he was in eighth grade. Durang and his best friend Kevin Farrell wrote a musical titled *Banned in Boston*. Durang’s mother told the priests at the Catholic school the boys attended about it. The priest in charge of the drama department read the play and

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<sup>16</sup> *Biography - Durang, Christopher (Ferdinand) (1949-)*. Contemporary Authors (Biography). Gale Reference Team. Thomson Gale, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 3. Christopher Durang*. 27 Nov. 2006. 28 May 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/QandA3.htm>>.

<sup>18</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students – Q&A 2. Christopher Durang*. 27 Nov. 2006. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/QandA2.htm>>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

wanted the junior and senior classes to put it on. The play was so well received that two years later his and Kevin's second musical, *Businessman's Holiday*, was performed as well.<sup>20</sup> Through his mother's encouragement and assistance, these early musicals were performed for two summers at the Summit Playhouse in Summit, New Jersey. Durang practiced his acting during these summers as a leading character in one play. Durang increased his play reading in high school and was influenced by Joe Orton, Arthur Kopit, and Edward Albee.<sup>21</sup> Durang wrote what he considered to be his first mature play, *Suicide and Other Diversions*, at the end of his high school career. The play is in an Absurdist style. He shortened the play's title to *Diversions* after deciding the title was too dark.<sup>22</sup>

Durang's frequent theatrical involvement coupled with good academics earned him a scholarship to Harvard University, which he accepted. Although he knew Harvard did not offer a major in theatre, he "decided a well rounded education was better for someone who wanted to be a writer than an education that specialized right away in theatre."<sup>23</sup> Durang chose English as his major.

Durang's early college years were a time of personal darkness.<sup>24</sup> He began to question his Catholic faith and eventually stopped believing in its tenets. He stopped dating. He began to have doubts as a writer and stopped playwriting. Durang's family influence and upbringing was

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<sup>20</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 3*.

<sup>21</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 2*.

<sup>22</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 3*.

<sup>23</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 1*. Christopher Durang. 27 Nov. 2006. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/QandA1.htm>>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

the source of this deep depression; it appears these significant life experience connections are represented in most of his plays.<sup>25</sup>

Durang grew up in an Irish Catholic family. He was taught that masturbation, unmarried sex, gay sex, adultery, and even “impure” movies would send a person to Hell just the same as if he or she had murdered someone. As a child, he was a loyal, unquestioning member of the Catholic faith. Durang’s beliefs became more liberal towards the end of high school. He began to question the church’s views on dogmatic absolutes as he learned more about other points of view and current scientific studies, and this created conflict that contributed to his growing depression. Because of this depression, he rejected the Church and had strong disagreements with the Catholic Doctrine regarding many topics.<sup>26</sup>

Durang was an only child, which was unusual in a devout Catholic family. He later discovered this was due to a blood incompatibility between his parents. Doctors told his parents that antibodies had developed during the first pregnancy, and it would be highly unlikely they could successfully have more children. His parents were inconsolable, but because the Catholic Church claimed miracles happen, his mother made three unsuccessful attempts to have more children in hopes God would grant a miracle. Durang’s father, the more logical of the two, believed the doctors and was not as optimistic or even eager to try. The resulting failed attempts

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Durang - *Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students – Q&A 2*.

<sup>26</sup> Durang. *More than the “right to be wrong”*. (Roundtable). *Conscience* 22 March 2003: 32(2).

caused the family to experience the trauma of multiple stillborn births. The loss of a child can be devastating in any marriage. This tragedy only served to worsen the Durangs' marriage.<sup>27</sup>

Durang's father had an alcohol problem as did his grandfathers, so holidays were alcohol-soaked battlegrounds instead of the festive, happy times they might have been. His parents would fight because his mother would want his father to stay sober for the holiday. Often his mother would become so angry she left home with Durang and stayed with her relatives for periods of time.<sup>28</sup>

Due to the closeness of the maternal relationship, Durang became more than just his mother's son; he was her friend and "confidant."<sup>29</sup> He was burdened with very adult issues as a child. This is not an uncommon response in an alcoholic home. This is an extremely difficult position for any young child.<sup>30</sup> Durang would ask his mother not to approach his father if he had been drinking, but she could not hold her temper. If Durang's father came home even slightly tipsy, she would soon be railing at him. This would go on sometimes for hours before his father would lose his temper and begin yelling back, and the conflict would escalate into a full-blown fight. This scenario occurred regularly and frequently. It was waiting for his father to yell back that created the unbearable tension for Durang. This left him in a constant state of dread.

Durang's parents eventually separated when he was thirteen, which was a relief to him. Durang

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<sup>27</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 3*.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 2*.

<sup>30</sup> Robert J. Ackman. *Children of Alcoholics: A Guide for Parents, Educators, and Therapists*. 2nd. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983, 50.

realized his parents would never change so he told his mother never to take his father back.

Durang believed it would be best for all if they lived separately.<sup>31</sup>

Durang's parents were not the only people Durang saw fighting. His mother's temper ran in her family. She and her siblings often fought, and these fights were quite mean-spirited. The dysfunctional issues that prompted the fights between his parents and his mother's family were never resolved, and they resurfaced time and time again. There was no place for a child to escape the screaming and he lived, "in tension and hyper vigilance, wondering when the next fight would be."<sup>32</sup>

All these experiences compounded over many years led to Durang's two-year bout with deep depression. Fortunately for Durang, Harvard offered free psychological counseling and he entered therapy to work through his conflicts and issues. This gave him the skills to cope with his depression by his senior year in college (1971). Even though he regained his drive to succeed, he retained a bit of his "dark view of the world"<sup>33</sup> This darkness significantly influences his style and permeates the worlds he creates in his plays.

His dark world view is evident in *The Nature and Purpose of the Universe*, a play he wrote during his senior year at Harvard. This play produced very positive events for Durang's career. It enabled him to attend an exclusive playwriting seminar at Harvard and won him a

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<sup>31</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students – Q&A 2*.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

playwriting prize that included a production at Smith College. This led to his acceptance into the Yale School of Drama's playwriting program.<sup>34</sup>

Durang was extremely happy to be accepted into Yale to study playwriting because he "didn't want to go to graduate school in English literature."<sup>35</sup> He met some well-known writers, directors, and actors at Yale. Durang was active in Yale Cabaret productions, and wrote the book and lyrics for *Better Dead Than Sorry*, co-authored *I Don't Generally Like Poetry But Have You Read Trees?*, *GYP: The Life Story of Mitzi Gaynor* with Albert Innaurato, and *When Dinah Shore Ruled the Earth* with Wendy Wasserstein.<sup>36</sup>

It was in Durang's senior year at Yale in 1974 that a one-act, forty-five minute version of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* was produced. This student production was "directed by Bill Ludel and featured Kate McGregor-Stewart as Bette, John Rothman as Boo, Franchelle Stewart Dorn as Emily, Walton Jones as Father Donnally, and Sigourney Weaver as Soot."<sup>37</sup> Durang believed at the time that the play could be expanded from a one-act into a full-length play despite the fact that his original one-act version of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* received four additional productions: Williamston Theatre's Second Company, Yale Cabaret (directed by Walton Jones and with Meryl Streep as Joan), Chicago's St. Nicholas Theatre Company, and

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<sup>34</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 3*.

<sup>35</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 2*.

<sup>36</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Acting Theatre*. [Christopher Durang](http://www.christopherdurang.com/ActingTheatre1.htm). 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/ActingTheatre1.htm>>.

<sup>37</sup> Durang. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 62.



Princeton College. Durang disallowed further productions after this to give him time to expand the work while he also turned his immediate attention to new work.<sup>38</sup>

Christopher Durang's first professional production was *The Idiots Karamazov*, which premiered at the Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut on October 31, 1974. The play was co-authored with Albert Innaurato and starred Meryl Streep. It is a satire based on Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and poked fun at several western literary classics.<sup>39</sup> The Direct Theatre presented Durang's *The Nature and Purpose of the Universe* off-off Broadway soon afterward. This same company produced Durang's play *Titanic*, which was moved to off-Broadway. Since *Titanic* was only an hour long, it needed a "curtain riser,"<sup>40</sup> which Durang and his good friend Sigourney Weaver co-wrote. It is called *Das Lusitania Songspiel*, was and is a compilation of parodies of current plays and movies that provided Durang and Weaver the opportunity to co-star.

Durang was prolific during these years. He premiered *A History of the American Film* at the prestigious Eugene O'Neill National Playwriting Conference in 1976. The O'Neil production sparked back-to-back productions by three major regional theatres: the Hartford Stage Company, the Mark Taper Forum, and the Arena Stage. These productions led to a Broadway premier of *Das Lusitania Songspiel* in 1978 and Durang was nominated for a Tony

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<sup>38</sup> Durang. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 62-63.

<sup>39</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays -The Idiots Karamazov by Christopher Durang*. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/fullidiot.htm>>.

<sup>40</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Longer One Act Plays - Titanic*. Christopher Durang. 19 May 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/OneActsLong-titanic.htm>>.

Award for Best Book of a Musical.<sup>41</sup> The accolades poured in following this award. Despite this success, Durang and Weaver decided to rewrite *Das Lusitania Songspiel* in 1979, and they were both nominated for Drama Desk awards for Best Performer in a Musical.<sup>42</sup>

Durang won an Obie award in 1980 for writing his next off-off Broadway production, *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*. Durang called upon his Catholic upbringing and Catholic school experience to write this play. The satiric play consists of Sister Mary Ignatius giving a lecture in Catholic school explaining the beliefs of the Catholic Church during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>43</sup> Durang's straightforward confrontation of Catholic dogma, "came across to audiences funnier than I imagined...the concept of limbo, or how eating meat on Friday used to send you to hell but didn't anymore--simply sounded crazy."<sup>44</sup> *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* ran for three weeks. After some difficulty raising money for a commercial production, *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* was presented off-Broadway by Playwrights Horizons in New York City, double billed with Durang's *The Actor's Nightmare*.<sup>45</sup> *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* was again well received, and stayed on off-

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<sup>41</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - A History of the American Film by Christopher Durang*. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007. <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullAmerFilm.htm>>.

<sup>42</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Acting Theatre*. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/ActingTheatre2.htm>>.

<sup>43</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You by Christopher Durang*. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullSisterMary.htm>>.

<sup>44</sup> Durang. *More than the "right to be wrong"*. (Roundtable).

<sup>45</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Longer One Act Plays - Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*. Christopher Durang. 05 April 2005. 28 May 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/OneActsLong-Sister-Nightmare.htm>>.

Broadway where it ran for over two and a half years.<sup>46</sup> The notoriety was both a blessing and a curse. He now had the full attention of the public and the Catholic Church.

The Catholic League protested Durang's play claiming it was anti-Catholic, which caused state-tax funding problems for some theatres that wanted to produce this show.<sup>47</sup> The negative publicity appears to have reawakened and focused Durang's negative feelings regarding church dogma and his upbringing, because his next series of plays began to delve into his personal familial relationships and Catholicism in a way that seems to lead directly to the resurrection of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*.

In spite of the Catholic Church's protests, or perhaps because of them, Durang was approached in 1983 by an independent producer who wanted to make a movie of *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*. Durang wrote several screenplay drafts that attempted to retain the intimacy of the stage version for the screen.<sup>48</sup>

Under commission for the Phoenix Theatre, Durang wrote *Beyond Therapy* in 1981. After rewrites, it appeared on Broadway in 1982 and starred Dianne Wiest, John Lithgow, and David Hyde Pierce in his first Equity production.<sup>49</sup> Durang attacks traditional Catholic values in *Beyond Therapy*.

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<sup>46</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* by Christopher Durang.

<sup>47</sup> Durang. *More than the "right to be wrong"*. (Roundtable). Conscience 22 March 2003: 32(2).

<sup>48</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Film and TV Writing - Additional Information*. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/filmtv3.htm>>.

<sup>49</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - Beyond Therapy* by Christopher Durang. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullBeyond.htm>>.

Durang's next play continues his attack on Catholic dogma by focusing on the ludicrous of the Catholic education, *Baby with the Bathwater*, which premiered at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts in March, 1983, followed by its Broadway production in November of the same year. This play features very confused parents who view their baby with disinterest, as if it were a disposable inconvenience. Although this play "is a dark comedy about the difficulties of parenthood and how scary it is to be a child", it does have a hopeful ending.<sup>50</sup>

Durang co-authored his first screenplay with Wendy Wasserstein about another volatile church subject that Durang had experienced personally. *House of Husbands* was adapted from a short story about a town with a high divorce rate where the separated men all share a house, fraternity-style. This led to a Warner Bros. offer for Durang to write his next screenplay in 1982, *The Nun Who Shot Liberty Valance*. This film is a comedy based on Durang's feelings about Catholicism; "the story of three friends graduating from a Catholic high school and what happens to them in the real world."<sup>51</sup> The high jinks occur when church teachings and real life collide.

Durang's personal issues regarding themes of religion, childhood, and family dominate his plays during this time period. It is no surprise that Durang chose to expand his most autobiographical play and, in 1985, the full length version of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* was presented by the New York Shakespeare Festival. Although the Catholic League did not go to great lengths protesting this play like they did *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*, they

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<sup>50</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - Baby with the Bathwater by Christopher Durang*. [Christopher Durang](http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullBathwater.htm). 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullBathwater.htm>>.

<sup>51</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Film and TV Writing - Additional Information*.

still branded it an anti-Catholic play.<sup>52</sup> Despite the Catholic League's disapproval, the show earned Durang an Obie award for playwriting, Jerry Zaks an Obie for directing, Loren Sherman for set design, and an Ensemble Acting Obie for the entire cast.<sup>53</sup> This largely autobiographical play is Durang's favorite due to the close emotional ties of the subject matter and, as a personal bonus, he continued thumbing his nose at the heart of conservative Catholic beliefs in such a popular fashion that his opportunities continued to expand.<sup>54</sup>

Durang was hired as a staff writer for the ABC Carol Burnett special, *Carol and Robin and Whoopi and Carl* as a result of his recent successes. Robin Williams was featured in the funeral sketch Durang wrote and Williams won an Emmy.<sup>55</sup> However, Durang's next experience was not to be as pleasant. Director Robert Altman was hired to direct Durang's *Beyond Therapy* for the screen. Altman did not use Durang's screenplay, and Durang did not like Altman's adaptation, but since Altman's version contained parts of Durang's original play, they shared the screenplay writing credit.<sup>56</sup> It was not a happy collaboration.

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<sup>52</sup> *Three More Dumb Plays*. Catholic League: For Religious and Civil Rights. Dec 1998. Catholic League. 15 Mar 2007 <<http://www.catholicleague.org/catalyst.php?year=1998&month=December&read=701>>.

<sup>53</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - The Marriage of Bette & Boo by Christopher Durang*. Christopher Durang. 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullMarriage.htm>>.

<sup>54</sup> Holmberg.

<sup>55</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Film and TV Writing - Additional Information*.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Durang's next spate of writing was unexpected. Durang was hired for a role in Herbert Ross' movie, *The Secret of My Success*. After being cast, he was also hired by the director to enhance some of the movie's dialogue, and rewrote some scenes while creating others.<sup>57</sup>

Durang wrote a half-hour teleplay for a PBS series called *Trying Times*. Durang's piece was titled *The Visit*, in which an insane girl from high school visits her ex-boyfriend, who is now married. "The short film won a Gold Plaque in the 24<sup>th</sup> Chicago International Film Festival."<sup>58</sup>

Durang returned to playwriting with *Laughing Wild*, presented by Playwrights Horizons in 1987. This play's structure is unique, and consists of two monologues by different characters and then scenes with both characters where it appears they are having overlapping dreams. This play exhibits two of Durang's themes: sexuality and religion. The male character is bisexual, and during his monologue, he discusses Christians who believe God created AIDS to punish gay people and *Hardwicke v. Bower*, a well known anti-gay Supreme Court decision. During another scene, the female character interviews the Infant of Prague and finally tries to kill him. The Infant of Prague is a Catholic icon that represents the Christ child.<sup>59</sup> Durang wrote this character into his play because he "thought it would be funny to interview this 'entity' on a talk show," and he "wanted an 'out of date' religious icon to spout the church's out-of-date... beliefs about why birth control is supposedly wrong."<sup>60</sup> The protestations of the Catholic Church

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Durang. *Full Length Plays - Laughing Wild by Christopher Durang*. [Christopher Durang](http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullLaughing.htm). 15 Jan. 2007. 28 May 2007 <<http://www.christopherdurang.com/FullLaughing.htm>>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

pushed Durang into a writing works that reverberate with both his childhood and adult perceptions of the hypocrisy of the Church and their approved family life.

Two short projects followed-- *The Adventures of Lola* and *Naomi in the Living Room*. The first is a screenplay written for Herbert Ross to direct. Unfortunately for Durang, he was unable to rewrite a part of it to Ross' liking, and so the film never came to fruition.<sup>61</sup> The second was a short play written for the 'Home Series' in the theatre called Home for Contemporary Theatre.<sup>62</sup> This play is about "a son and his wife visiting his mother who is very eccentric, rude, and a little psychotic. As the play progresses, the mother becomes more and more offensive, it is apparent that ... It's all about Naomi"<sup>63</sup>

Warner Bros. hired Durang to write a sitcom. As the word "dysfunctional" had become a buzz word at the time, Durang decided to use what he knew of dysfunctional families and write them into a sitcom titled, *Dysfunction! – The TV Show*. The plot revolves around the weekly cable TV show of Drs. Sloane and Driver, two family therapists. Their show has three parts. The first is a general discussion of dysfunction. The second shows the Sullivan family at home, where the doctors are counseling them and secretly filming them. The third consists of a family therapy session in which everyone talks about what happened at home and how they can improve. Again, Durang visits familiar thematic territory: a comedic view of the state of the

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<sup>61</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Film and TV Writing - Additional Information*.

<sup>62</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Long Biography*. [Christopher Durang](http://www.christopherdurang.com/Biography-Long.htm). 15 Jan. 2007. 04 April 2007  
<<http://www.christopherdurang.com/Biography-Long.htm>>.

<sup>63</sup> Tracey Walker. *Edgewood College Theatre: Naomi in the Living Room*. [Edgewood College Theatre](http://edgenet.edgewood.edu/theatre/pastproductions/season04_05/One%20Act%20Play%20Festival%202005/1Act%20-Naomi%20in%20the%20LR.htm). 06 Feb. 2007. 3 May 2007  
<[http://edgenet.edgewood.edu/theatre/pastproductions/season04\\_05/One%20Act%20Play%20Festival%202005/1Act%20-Naomi%20in%20the%20LR.htm](http://edgenet.edgewood.edu/theatre/pastproductions/season04_05/One%20Act%20Play%20Festival%202005/1Act%20-Naomi%20in%20the%20LR.htm)>.

family. Durang also drew inspiration from his life, making the Sullivans a dysfunctional family with an alcoholic father and stressed-out, controlling wife. Durang even made sure the “children fit the pattern of children in alcoholic homes.”<sup>64</sup> Warner Bros. liked the project, and it was sold to Fox TV. By this time, however, the types of shows on television had changed, and Fox chose not to make *Dysfunction! – The TV Show*.<sup>65</sup> Durang’s comment about children makes it clear that children in alcoholic homes are very much in his writer’s mind. It is clear that research into these types of families is required in any knowledgeable treatment of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*.

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<sup>64</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Film and TV Writing - Additional Information*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



### CHAPTER 3: FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

Dysfunction was a word that became ever present in my study, discoveries, and development of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* is a piece made notable by the startling originality in the presentation of these dysfunctions. Its patchwork collection of snapshots of the lives of its characters merges with an absurdist tone and action. The panorama of human dysfunctions presented in the two central families is a damning indictment of American social values importantly; it is a product of the playwright's alcoholic environment and Catholic upbringing. According to an article published in 2001, Durang offered the admission that he draws his darkly funny moments from the pages of his own memories, noting that "for me, comedy played of real [sic] is often the funniest. . . You have to have a journey to take, even if it's just a psychological one."<sup>66</sup>

If the playwright is to be believed, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* reveals a fictional family that closely parallels Durang's own real life dysfunctional family. The alcoholism of his fictional world is not separate from his real life experiences with his family's alcoholism. This makes understanding the specifics of his family's dysfunction important to crafting an approach to the play's performance. The snapshots of memory that Durang chooses to show us are full of family rituals: the wedding, Thanksgiving, Christmas, a birthday, a funeral, the birth of children, family dinners, etc. It is important that Durang's family went ahead with these social rituals because this may be one of the reasons Durang himself never became an alcoholic. This may

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<sup>66</sup> Terry Byrne. *Keeping his wits; Christopher Durang masters satire just by being funny*. Boston Herald. 19 Oct. 2001: SCE, S05.

have preserved Durang's prolific writing career from the trap of personal alcoholism because "in families where rituals were maintained despite alcoholism, recurrence of alcoholism in children was low compared with high alcoholism rates in children from families that did not maintain rituals."<sup>67</sup>

The duties in an alcoholic family typically fall into absurdly specific and identifiable roles whose functions are designed to keep the family unit functioning in the face of massive social imbalance caused by the dysfunctional addiction of alcoholism.<sup>68</sup> These roles are clearly defined by the bulk of research into alcoholic families. So, it is worthwhile to define dysfunctional family roles, but note that "periods of 'dysfunction' do not necessarily make the family a 'dysfunctional family.'"<sup>69</sup> All families experience temporary periods of dysfunction. This explains the universal appeal of Durang's work. "A family becomes a 'dysfunctional family' when the negative family interactions extend over a long period of time and become the usual or normal way."<sup>70</sup> People within this environment can take on multiple and reoccurring patterns of behavior.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ann Lawson and Gary Lawson. Alcoholism and the Family: A Guide to Treatment and Preventions. 2nd ed. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, 1998, 106.

<sup>68</sup> Jeanie Griffin. ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS (ACOA's). Addiction and the Family. FRESH OUTTA PLANS. 12 April 2008  
<[http://freshouttaplans.com/db3/00278/freshouttaplans.com/\\_download/ADULTCHILDRENOFALCOHOLICS.doc](http://freshouttaplans.com/db3/00278/freshouttaplans.com/_download/ADULTCHILDRENOFALCOHOLICS.doc)>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

These absurd behaviors make sense only to those people within the patterns of the dysfunctional familial roles and may be seen as ridiculous, inexplicable, or even funny to those outside the patterns. It is this dark humor that Durang harnesses for the benefit of his audiences. These recurring real life roles form remarkably similar patterns of behavior within the family and force members within the dysfunctional unit to adopt recognizable and abnormal social roles.

These real life social patterns include the role of the Hero. People who take on the Hero role are typically recognized as “overachievers ... motivated by feelings of inadequacy and guilt.”<sup>72</sup> They often look outside themselves for validation of their value.<sup>73</sup> Looking at Durang’s life it is easy to surmise that the role of Matt in *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* is most likely the primary role Durang himself played in his family unit because of his successful and intense desire to achieve accolades, his personal history of depression, and his use of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* to face and overcome his past and forgive his family and himself. This is the mark of the dysfunctional Hero role. He relives his feelings of guilt and inadequacy while hoping to achieve a better future. The Hero typically adopts the role of functional adult who steps in to save family functions.<sup>74</sup> The character Matt in *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* exhibits this role during the Thanksgiving scene when he continues to set up for the feast while the adults indulge in turmoil. This forces a premature maturity on children when they assume this role and shortens the period of childhood. This often leaves the child playing the adult in the

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<sup>72</sup> Sharon Wegscheider. *Another Chance: Hope and Health for the Alcoholic Family*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1981, 86.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ackman, 49.

family who is responsible for fixing the problems of the family. But, because the problem is centered on adult issues surrounding the alcoholism the child is doomed to fail and this causes intense feelings of guilt for that failed responsibly.<sup>75</sup> In Durang's case, however, as an only child the role of the Hero was insufficient to fill his dysfunctional family needs. He had to do more; "Children in dysfunctional families assume traits of more than one role."<sup>76</sup>

The Lost Child is another of these roles. Children who are lonely and withdrawn have taken on the behavior role of the Lost Child.<sup>77</sup> Their psychological growth has been impaired greatly by the alcoholic dysfunction of their family. Unable to deal with the stress around them they can withdraw into themselves for protection.<sup>78</sup> We see this social behavior role in the character of Matt during the Christmas scene when he chooses not to speak. Matt is able to play this role during Christmas because another family member (Soot) assumes the role of Hero during the family gathering. Overwhelmed by his family's dysfunctional behavior, Durang sits quietly withdrawn and observing. Matt's Grandmother Soot assumes the role of Hero and allows Durang the luxury of the Loss Child role. Even to this day, Durang says his demeanor is "quiet and usually polite, and I don't dominate a room in any way. I'm a bit withdrawn, and I listen a lot."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 49-50.

<sup>76</sup> Griffin.

<sup>77</sup> Wegscheider, 86.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 129-130.

<sup>79</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students – Q&A 2.*

The Mascot behavioral role matches the person who provides comic relief out of fear.<sup>80</sup> The power of laughter is a tool that helps the person survive the painful family system and can be used to deflect dangerous circumstances. Matt's Grandmother Soot often accepts this role in trying to maintain balance for her dysfunctional family. Durang says that even though there was great sadness in his family and he could have written tragedies, he "just wasn't drawn to it.... I didn't choose comedy, comedy chose me."<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the majority of his life's work has involved comedy, the key to dealing with painful feelings associated with his upbringing.

The Scapegoat role is another behavioral type commonly assumed by members of an alcoholic's family. The Scapegoat is used by their family to divert attention and blame away from the root cause of the troubled family. The person who serves as a Scapegoat diverts attention away from the alcoholic.<sup>82</sup> This role is seen clearly in Grandmother Soot's behavior when she is constantly insulted and/or blamed for faults by her husband. The family member assuming the Scapegoat role can also try to bring public focus to the family's dysfunction, even at a price to themselves.<sup>83</sup> They are attacked rather than thanked for this action and the person who tells the truth receives the blame. Durang fills this role to a point. During his senior year at Yale he wrote a short version of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*. Producing this autobiographical play in a large, public university calls attention to his home life. This action is usually quite unwelcome because the family desperately tries to hide its dysfunction from the

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<sup>80</sup> Wegscheider, 86.

<sup>81</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students – Q&A 2*.

<sup>82</sup> Wegscheider, 86.

<sup>83</sup> Griffin.

rest of the world. The appearance of normality is of utmost importance for those who feel they are abnormal.

The alcoholic family unit goes through a vicious cycle of stress. First, the spouse and children feel fear due to the unpredictability of the drinker.<sup>84</sup> This seems to reflect Durang's 'fear' of the impending drunken fight even when actual drink is not taking place. The anxiety builds fear in the anticipation of another volatile drinking episode. This anxiety leads to continual threats or entreaties to prevent drinking before it starts which the alcoholic often uses as an excuse to drink again and the cycle begins anew.<sup>85</sup>

The spouse of the alcoholic generally adopts the Primary Enabler role and keeps the alcoholic from suffering the consequences of the behavior.<sup>86</sup> This is done by covering for the behavior or permitting it. They always have the choice to leave, but this is difficult in the best of times, and is strictly forbidden during the time period of the play with the strict Catholic background that frowns on divorce. A wife of an alcoholic may threaten to leave her husband in an attempt to get him to stop drinking.<sup>87</sup> As discovered in researching Durang, he and his mother would leave the home after years and live with relatives for a time for this very reason.

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<sup>84</sup> Lawrence Metzger. From Denial to Recovery: Counseling Problem Drinkers, Alcoholics, and Their Families. 1st. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1988, 234.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>86</sup> Wegscheider, 87.

<sup>87</sup> Jacqueline Wiseman. The Other Half: Wives of Alcoholics and Their Social-Psychological Situation. 1st. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991, 201.

The cultural and economic barriers to divorce are often too great to overcome without aid.<sup>88</sup> Women who are supported by their husbands do not believe they can financially support themselves (and their children) on their own. This fear is not completely without merit since “despite the women’s movement, the status of American women in both occupation and income has stagnated or lost ground since 1950; the average woman’s salary in the United States is 68-75% that of a man’s.”<sup>89</sup>

Another reason women are unlikely to seek divorce is because they are concerned the process is too difficult, confusing, or expensive.<sup>90</sup> In addition, it is seen by some as the ultimate humiliating failure that invites public scrutiny and shatters the protected image of normalcy. Many women say they still love their husband despite the drinking and this can be true.<sup>91</sup> This love, coupled with feelings of guilt, keep these women (and men) from divorcing. They cannot bear the thought that their leaving may cause their loved one’s drinking to become worse, and thus it is the spouse’s fault for the self-destruction.<sup>92</sup> While irrational, these feelings are typical and bleed over into the children.

The presence of children often compounds the guilt. Women dislike breaking up their family and having their children without a father. Children will often beg or convince their

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 206.

mothers to stay with their father.<sup>93</sup> This is also true in reverse. Interestingly, in contrast, it was an adolescent Durang who convinced his mother that she and his father were best permanently separated.<sup>94</sup> While at first glance it may be difficult to understand why one may choose to remain in an alcoholic household but, examining the thoughts, feelings, and reasons behind not leaving gives a greater understanding and insight into my character.

Durang clearly uses his playwriting and particularly *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* as a way to come to terms with his childhood and work through his familial issues and exorcised his demons in the process. All of this is vital to understanding the relationships and actions created in *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*. You must understand before you can laugh.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>94</sup> Durang. *Christopher Durang - Frequently Asked Questions for High School and College Students - Q&A 2*.



## CHAPTER 4: DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

### Exposition

The exposition of this play is revealed in an interesting and unique way. The first example of this may be seen during the photography session before the wedding ceremony at the beginning of the play. Characters and their key relationships are revealed without words in a montage of living photographic like tableaux. The audience is left with knowledge of geographic location (US) and of a non-contemporary time period hinted at by the costuming. Social and family roles are further defined by the characters' actions and dialogue that follows the tableaux, but we already feel we know something about these people. Gaps invite the audience to fill in the blanks with personal experiences from their own lives. This pulls the audience in as more character information is revealed. The relationships of the characters in *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* have repeated throughout history; father, mother, son, etc. Thus the play becomes “timeless” and relevant even today, because the play is character driven by relationships.

### Point of Attack

James Thomas defines *point of attack* as “the moment when the play begins in relation to the background story.”<sup>95</sup> According to this definition the point of attack in *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* appears in the opening scene after the tableau. Matt steps out of the world of the play, breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience saying, “If one looks hard enough, one

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<sup>95</sup> James Thomas. *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*. 3rd. Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2005, 136.

can usually see the order that lies beneath the surface.”<sup>96</sup> The playwright declares his purpose as it relates to the audio/visual exposition/background story offered in the opening tableau and uses Matt to connect and define the relationships of the background flashback tableau in a way that matches James Thomas’ definition of point of attack. The playwright’s specific words and choice of point of attack make it clear that the purpose of this play is to examine this family, its dysfunction, and come to an understanding and acceptance of their relationships with one another.

### Complications or Obstacles

The audience is introduced to problems and obstacles in the undertones of the opening montage. These ‘undertones’ are further revealed in scene two when it becomes clear that these are full blown complications and may threaten the happiness of Bette and Boo’s marriage. The playwright chooses a non-linear format that invites a feeling of the chaos involved in the world and relationships he wishes to explore. Scenes often flash back and forth in time with narrative punctuation. This conceit allows the audience to see that the dysfunction in the family is deeply rooted in time and relationships, and the weight of the burden of this dysfunction becomes crushing to the family. Each journey backward in time also reveals a chance to prevent the devastation; an opportunity to heal that is ignored. No scene is devoid of conflict, tension in anticipation of the next conflict, or importantly, hope. This leads the play to its inevitable climax

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<sup>96</sup> Durang. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 8.

and Matt's personal journey to understanding. The order and repetition of the scene's complications and obstacles form a vital element to the dramatic structure of the play.

### Climax

The climax of this play occurs in scene thirty-two. After all the struggles, Bette tells Boo she no longer loves him. Bette's confession goes beyond a failed marriage. As Matt achingly stands by, Bette delivers this blow in the hospital after the death of their last child. The choice of location is significant. A hospital is usually thought of as a place of healing. However, in this case, the hospital fails to heal.

As a result of this play's non-linear time line, the audience has already witnessed Bette and Boo's divorce in court before we see this climatic scene. By positioning the court scene before the confession the playwright is removing the question "if" it is going to happen. This technique of revealing the outcome early allows the audience to focus on "how" it would happen.

### Resolution

The final and longest scene of the play occurs when Matt and Boo are visiting Bette on her hospital deathbed. Bette questions her second marriage and her divorce from Boo in this scene. Importantly Bette and Boo forgive one another. The audience sees love still exists between them. Is this an indication that the playwright also forgives? This final scene provides a glimpse of the family that "could have been." Bette is at peace when she dies, and they are together as a family. The music from the beginning of the play is heard again, a prayer for Bette

is said, and Matt steps forward and delivers his final speech. He speaks of Bette reuniting with her deceased children, Boo, and himself in heaven. Considering his personal conflicts with the Catholic Church, Durang's inclusion of these lines are significant. They signal Matt's (and by extension Durang's) provincial acceptance of his mother's right to her own beliefs and life choices, and allows him to release her from guilt, facilitating his healing.

## CHAPTER 5: DIRECTOR'S CONCEPT

From the very beginning our director, Mr. Christopher Niess, was armed with a clear vision of how we would produce Durang's play successfully. Mr. Niess is a director who works from, and bases his ideas on, research and knowledge; he is very specific in his choices. Performances that come from an informed place (knowing the playwright, the time period, and the specifics of the characters) are better performances. An actor's job is to find the truth of the character. If the portrayal is too general it becomes a stereotype. The success of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* lies in every character being fleshed out, as true as possible, so that the dysfunctional reality is revealed to the audience. Mr. Niess kept track of all actors and characters, which enabled him to be active in each of our individual journeys. It takes finesse as a director to guide many characters into the same world. That was why after Mr. Niess researched and worked closely with the other designers to create a cohesive vision; he began the process by sharing the research and vision with the actors so that all had an understanding of where the show was coming from and where it needed to go.

The beginning presentations highlighted universal concerns for the cast: time period, set and genre of the play. Understanding the challenges we would face as actors, Mr. Niess arranged for the presentations to consist of our set designer, Ms. Vandy Wood, explaining her concept for the show, and Diana Calderazzo, our dramaturge, presenting facts about 1950s culture.

Ms. Wood shared the design concept of using Bette and Boo's wedding cake as the set. She then went into some detail as to how it would be constructed out of stage platforms and would include a large screen, which would hold images projected from behind by a computer connected to an LCD projector. From the design presentation it was clear we would not have a box set; the thirty-three scenes of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* would require a different solution. Although the concept of "setting the play on a great big enormous wedding cake (with the characters able to sit or stand on the different 'edges' of the cake)" was mentioned and labeled a "crackpot notion"<sup>97</sup> by Durang, Mr. Niess saw the validity of the idea and embraced it. Since the world of this play is both fantasy and reality, the absurdity of the cake fits the play and supports the world. Further, the circular shapes of the cakes have symbolic meaning and can represent several things. The circular nature of the dysfunctional family, the circular nature of our own lives, and the idea that one's life must be continually examined so that mistakes of the past are not repeated can be suggested to the audience through this set choice. The cake design was also a good logistical choice. It provided a solution to the many locales needed and the quick switches required between scenes. The vision of how we would move around the cake, quickly entering and exiting, was explained by Mr. Niess, along with the concept of simplistic props and set pieces for this show.

The second presentation by Diana Calderazzo, a graduate student, was intended to be a short overview of the time period and be a cohesive research starting point for the entire cast to use as a springboard for their own research. Being set in the past, the movement and mind frame

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<sup>97</sup> Durang, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 69.

of the characters are naturally different from ours today. Diana focused on the 1950s since the majority of scenes are set in that decade. Diana began her presentation with a timeline handout. She then entertained with common phrases from the time period. Finally she suggested visual research such as *Leave It to Beaver* and Sears catalog advertisements for movement study. Mr. Niess encouraged all actors to wear rehearsal shoes and clothes in order to aid in the development of the movement needed to portray characters.

Mr. Niess provided an active rehearsal period. He wanted us to develop our characters from informed choices. He offered an assignment that had us thinking and on our feet immediately so that our ideas were active, not just ideas. The first step to actively become our character was to focus on identifying laughable traits of ourselves and our characters. Once that was completed, we were to find the similarities and differences between them. This is a common acting tool used as a starting point so actors know what traits they already have and those they will have to adopt in order to fully become their character. After we defined them, we took the exercise a step further and created an improvisational moment. In this improvisation we connected a folly with a task. The importance of the exercise was to focus on the action in order to capture the truth of the moment.

Mr. Niess encouraged us to try and explore before scoring a scene. His blocking philosophy was that blocking should be created during the rehearsal process, not invented before the process begins. Of course, Mr. Niess gave us a logistical outline to work from, but our stage movement developed out of action. Mr. Niess had the actors, as their characters, actively chasing an objective and winding up where they ended up in the process. The blocking took

shape, and naturally evolved from that process. Finally Mr. Niess adjusted the blocking to enhance or clarify the stage picture. The final blocking developed by Mr. Niess was more than functional; it supported my character's relationships naturally. Mr. Niess's use of levels, whether steps or cake pedestals, created intimate settings that felt real and offered a variety of stage pictures. My favorite example of this would be Mr. Niess's placement of Soot next to Bette on the second short level down center stage at the front of the cake with Karl stage right. This ledge provided me an intimate feeling to share with Bette while putting me a level below Karl who was sitting on a cake pedestal giving me a very subservient feeling as I lifted me head from the conversation I was having with Bette to interject a comment to Karl.

Throughout the process Mr. Niess scheduled scenes for rehearsal in a manner that allowed the actor to benefit by being able to build upon scenes and create an arch in a performance while still maximizing the time of each actor present. Mr. Niess understands repetition is a successful learning technique. The actors would be given their notes several times so they could be remembered and implemented. The action sequences were repeated so they could become natural and automatic.

Mr. Niess has an eye for identifying character traits and relationships, an instinctive grasp of reality and truth, is able to identify absurdity within this truth, has a strong sense of timing, and is extremely versed in movement. These traits coupled with the fact our interpretations of Soot, although arrived at independently, were in agreement, made me feel very confident at all times in his director notes. They were specific, referencing a particular line, scene, relationship,



etc., which made them easier to implement. Often Mr. Niess would suggest a particular acting technique for the actor to try in order to keep the development of the character moving forward.

The importance of the relationship of the characters, specifically your relationship with the characters around, was a very helpful note given by Mr. Niess throughout the rehearsal process. Mr. Niess's reminder to be aware of the characters around us and our relationship with them sparked an interest in me as an actor, which led me to explore the script again, this time paying special attention to my relationship with the other characters and how they change throughout the play. This was a very useful revisit for my process. In isolating the scenes during the rehearsal process I was defaulting to my happy mask, basically rewinding at the beginning of each new scene. In reality how I felt towards Bette was in a constant flux. I learned I needed to put purpose behind my emotion and use the coping method when needed.

It was a blessing to have a director that could sense when something was not working for you as an actor and provide a note that would assist you in approaching it another way to gain success. To leave that rehearsal with even a little progress would give you something concrete to work on and bring back to the rehearsal process.

The idea of equilibrium and disequilibrium goes hand in hand with dysfunctional traits and actively trying to reach a goal. To create our dysfunctional world we had to be ever aware of where our characters were in that balance. Our actions went hand in hand with our reactions in creating our characters and the relationships between them. As I stood on stage, I was actively participating in my environment, going in and out of equilibrium with the other characters. It was this active participation that kept my character from becoming a stereotypical mask.

During rehearsal Mr. Niess was constantly expressing the importance of pace, reminding us that in comedy cues need to be picked up and the pace quick in order to best serve the dialogue. Mr. Niess's direction on pace allowed the dysfunction of the family life to have greater power.

The autobiographical nature of the play was something that I had researched prior to the beginning of rehearsal, and was careful throughout the process to never lose sight of the connection. It was the autobiographical nature that compelled my approach of Soot to be reality based. I was aware that *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* is a play fashioned around memories, and the characters are rooted in truthful snapshots of Durang's own life and his family. Mr. Niess mentioned that he felt that Durang's snapshots of life seemed truthful to how our memory really works. I decided this idea rang true to me. Thinking back to moments in my life, they were snapshots as I remember them. As the memories became more distant in time, they were truly combinations of memory and hearsay from others.

The ensemble cast, developed under his direction, was a pleasure to work with and enhanced the experience tremendously. An ever-steady force, Mr. Niess effortlessly kept the entire cast on track, and at the same time allowed us to explore and develop our characters fully. Encouraged by the direction provided I forged ahead, exploring different techniques to achieve the performance I desired to give.

## CHAPTER 6: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

*The Marriage of Bette & Boo* was the third production of the 2003-2004 season and was performed on the Theatre UCF main stage under the direction of Mr. Chris Neiss. *The Marriage of Bette & Boo* began rehearsals October 17<sup>th</sup>, and opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November after thirty-four days of rehearsal. The show ran for two weeks and had an eight-day Thanksgiving break in the middle. The show's final performance was December 7<sup>th</sup>. The show's run included a total of ten performances including three matinees. During this time, I kept a journal to record my thoughts and process.

October 17, 2003 – I was a bit overwhelmed with excitement. I entered the Blue Room for the first read through this evening, and I chose a seat across from Robert who was cast to play my son, Boo. The stage manager handed me a green envelope filled with schedules and necessities. The cast assembled one by one and then the presentations began. Vandy Wood, the set designer, revealed a diagram of the Wedding Cake set equipped with projection screens and columns to be used to sit and stand on. Diana Calderazzo, Dramaturge, spoke about the time period. Diana provided a timeline of the thirty-year span, which contained landmark events. She touched on the idea of the American dream and the undercurrent of Naesent Feminism. She played with phrases from the time period and suggested movies and old catalogs for movement research to support character development. Christopher Niess, the director, spoke of comedy, and his take fascinated me. As I reflected on his words, the word comedy stuck out in my mind. With a self-awareness of the ridiculous elements of my personality and the recent study of

clowning, I decided I would draw from these first. I jotted down many notes from the evening's discussion of the play that would assist my investigation. 'What are we to be poking fun of?' and 'we needed to make the audience laugh and then think' were the notes that fueled my thoughts today. Questions began to form. How did I feel (objectives and relationships)? What was I trying to do (actions)? Soot would be found by identifying objectives, relationships, and actions. The truth of Soot lay here. For this reason I reviewed my character analysis and considered how her truth fit into the comedy of Durang's world that we discussed.

My first task as a member of the cast was to identify three laughable faults, traits, or follies shared by my character and myself.

Today's thoughts: As I visualize my goal ahead, of realizing the truth of Soot, I know that no magic will manifest the result I desire. I will succeed only through the mechanics of questioning and the method of exploring, so they will be my tools for this process.

October 18, 2003 – I began the homework assignment in the morning and worked to identify three laughable faults, traits, or follies that Soot and I shared. I decided to start with myself. As I reflected on past moments to identify ideas, I realized that I could sometimes present a forced, happy appearance when I was not. This was caused by my strong need to please people and to be liked. I could also sometimes be laughably clumsy. When nervous, I could say the wrong thing. I could also be easily embarrassed since I am shy at the core. I could misunderstand things sometimes. Throughout life I noticed that I could never find my keys. This made me laugh. I felt I had enough to work with so I moved onto the laughable traits of

Soot. I realized I had thought of her all along, that I really had not separated us in my mind. The fact that Soot found the cruel things Karl said to her to be funny was similar to my strong need to please. Also, Soot appeared to have found everything that Karl said delightful despite its cruel edge. Soot was very attentive to Karl and always tried to keep him happy and pleasant. Soot disliked conflict and did everything she could to keep peace, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Soot allowed herself to be called by a nickname whose origin she didn't remember even though it seemed quite degrading. Hmm, did I share any of these traits?

I had completed my list of laughable traits; my next step was to use this foundation to create periods of internal truth for Soot through action. I spent time on my own and improvised moments and questioned what was truthfully funny. [Actions were the focus of my exploration.] While we watched and examined Donte's improvisation during rehearsal, the following idea surfaced in our discussion: Maybe being funny meant you took some small sliver of truth and magnified it? This worked for Donte today. He used physicality that gave his arm the appearance of being abnormally long so that he could save submarines or space ships. I have forgotten which arm or why he was saving these things, but I have not forgotten how I laughed whole-heartedly.

Today's thoughts: Sometimes it was easier in my life to be happy and ignore all that was wrong than to face it head on. Ignorance was bliss. Love; how one could be blinded when they were in love could be true for Soot. Could happiness be found in a relationship? Maybe it was easier for Karl to blame Soot than to look inside him for fault. It could be difficult to be committed to a truthful examination of our own faults. Was it natural for humans to want to

change those around us? Who was it that Soot wanted to change? Who tried to change her?

Why?

October 19, 2003 – I entered this rehearsal process with a decision made that Soot was not a cliché dumb blonde, but a complex character that took a psychological journey within the play. Today, I questioned my choice. I ran scene 6 and tried to find Soot's laugh while Karl's last line of the scene rang in my mind. He sure made a strong statement. Not just dumb, but the dumbest white woman alive. Not the dumbest one ever, but alive now. This cruel line really made me think again. Was Soot dumb? After consideration my original instinct was correct, but the complexity of Soot still left me wondering, if not dumb, then what was she? At the close of scene 6, Soot played dumb in response to Karl's proposition. Why did she use that tactic? Was Soot just embarrassed by what Karl proposed at the end of this scene or had she thought it easier to act clueless rather than to tell Karl no?

Today's thoughts: Could one expect their partner to provide them with happiness? Or must happiness be found within oneself? Was this a case of misery loving company?

October 20, 2003 – The following are notes that I jotted down in rehearsal in order to be remembered so that I could revisit and explore them later. Each character was a snap shot of the time period (50s). This idea reminded me of how important it was to approach Soot from her 1950s mindset, not my contemporary one.

We were dysfunctional characters who tried to make it work! I loved the natural way this note incited activity (action).

It was funny to see a character who tried really hard to complete a simple task correctly, but who failed (messed up). We (the audience) liked to watch the character that picked herself up, recovered, and tried even harder again to complete the simple task correctly (essence of clown). The idea of one who tried really hard to keep the alcoholic family functioning despite failure was at the root of Soot's existence, and I believed this truth was both humorous and sad. It was this dual emotional quality that made up Durang's dark humor.

Soot found everything that she did for Karl enjoyable. She found delight in her life. Karl was funny, charming, and all his friends said so. I laughed and found the fun in Soot's world and remembered that Karl enjoyed Soot. She expected that he enjoyed her company. She was not tentative about what she said or talked about around Karl. It was just a matter of finding the right conversation subject.

As I reviewed and reflected on my rehearsal notes I found I questioned them. First off, I thought Soot was careful with what she said to Karl, but I did agree she didn't fear him. She did try to keep Karl happy, and learned over the years what triggers set him off.

What was Soot's ideal life, husband? I believed that Karl gave Soot her ideal life to a point. He was a good provider. Karl gave Soot a lot of attention even though it was negative. He also gave her the security of money. She loved being a wife and mother. She was the happy homemaker.

How did Soot interact with the people (husband, son, friend, stranger, etc.) around her? I identified the differences between 1950 and 2003 in order to avoid contemporary manners. To do this, I watched reruns of *Leave it to Beaver* and *I Dream of Jeanie* as well as gathered information on 1950s etiquette and then applied it to the physicality of Soot. Every time period and culture had physical rules that detailed proper etiquette. During my research gathered I paid special attention to how the TV characters sat, stood, spoke, and interacted with each other. Good manners and proper etiquette aided in the development of Soot. Truth was, as I watched *Leave it to Beaver* I dreamed of living the perfect life. I knew it couldn't exist, but I still dreamed of the fairy tale, and I was positive that Soot had too. Who did not want the picket fence life? Who did not want to be loved and taken care of by her husband? I also watched *Pleasantville*, but found the mother to be Margaret type not Soot. I daydreamed in black and white about what Karl and Soot's first meeting was really like. Were they introduced by family? Underneath the appearance of the American dream, Soot's life was full of the dysfunction that alcoholism caused her family, and this must be remembered.

Today's thoughts: Could the apple fall far from the tree? I knew that behavior was learned, but did one have to have the natural inclination for it? Was there a genetic or environmental connection? Maybe it was knowledge of another choice that could break a pattern? Destiny verses choice (free will)?

October 21, 2003 – Today we worked with Jim Brown on the opening song. The opening song had a music box quality and was lively. This childlike chant of names was as lively in the



mouth as it sounded. We covered the general melody and were assigned groups for the round, and added the basic movement. For the song's movement we explored 1950s physicality by dropping in the image of a Maytag ad containing a housewife being presented with a new washer. The round (song) and circular movement led us to the wedding ceremony of Bette and Boo. In the wedding scene we were instructed to pick an imaginary place and to complete the action 'to look for someone' or 'to tell them something' with our opening lines. To juxtapose the fantasy (imaginary place) with the real task (action), to me, was a perfect way to begin Soot's journey.

Today's thoughts: Actions make a person who they are. What they have said or done as well as why they have done it. Actions speak loudly but 'why' seemed to me the key to truth. Why did Soot make the choices she did? Why did she stay with Karl?

October 22, 2003 – I borrowed 1950s CDs from a friend and began listening to them non-stop and naturally implemented them into my physical warm-up. I found the music delightful as I used it to transport me back into time. I thought about Karl and Soot and their life together. I wondered about moments like their prom and their wedding. What were they like?

I found an informative and interesting gender roles article, *How to be a Good Wife*, in a 1954 high school home economics textbook. This article detailed all the items that a good wife should get done before her husband returns home from work, as well as general information on how your husband can be made happy. I found no information in this article that mentioned what your husband should get done for you or what you should get done for yourself.

Today's thoughts: Should Soot have left Karl? Would Soot have been a stronger or better person if she had? The vows of marriage, how far was 'for better or worse' meant to be taken? The idea of putting your husband first: could this have worked if your husband had done the same? Was any relationship in the 1950s a partnership? Was a wife only a caregiver?

October 23, 2003 – Research supported Soot's loss of hearing at the end of her life as a psychological symptom. It was common for loved ones of alcoholics to have developed psychological symptoms as a coping mechanism. Soot's selective hearing evolved from the healing device of laughter that Soot used to combat Karl's comments. By the marriage retreat Soot relied on her manifested deafness to maintain her happiness. Soot saw Booeey suffer from alcoholism passed down from his father as his marriage fell apart. Soot knew she had enabled the behavior and this pushed her to the breaking point. Soot was unable to handle reality; instead she took solace in silence where she found peace.

Once examined, I found Bette and Soot's behaviors interesting. They reacted so differently to their alcoholic husbands. Soot and Bette both took on the role of an enabler to a certain degree. But, Bette did not sit quietly by as Soot did; instead she fought Boo and pled with him to change. The tactic most often used by Bette in her war against alcoholism was nagging. Bette nagged Boo to change his ways. She did this because she hoped that he would see the error of his ways; unfortunately he used it as an excuse to drink more. Booeey even deluded himself into thinking that he wouldn't have drunk if Bette had not nagged. Interestingly Soot did not nag Karl. I wondered if this was because she and Karl had not challenged the

gender roles that society had set up. Soot accepted Karl as the man of the house and did not challenge his decisions. I believed that it was Soot's natural love of homemaking that saved her from nagging. She focused on her duties and on mothering and found pride in her work. Bette was a woman who expected more from her husband and felt entitled to emotional fulfillment and demanded her husband to work with her to find happiness. This was not to say that Soot did not want this connection.

Scene 6: What was Soot's relationship to Bette? Soot felt a bit threatened by her presence. Bette was another woman in her house who received a great deal of attention and caused conflict, which Soot did not like and worked hard to avoid. She wanted Bette to like her, and was excited about the baby; she loved babies. But, was confused by why Bette did not just let Boeey drink? Soot needed to calm Bette down and to have her energy refocused on the positive (the baby).

Today's thoughts: What went on behind closed doors or happened in a relationship was really hard to judge from outside. What was considered an unhealthy relationship? What could be considered markers? How much did Soot compromise? Did Soot compromise too much and create an unhealthy relationship and sacrifice her core?

October 24, 2003 – From rehearsal notes that were given my new physical goal for Soot was to be grounded, but full of joyful energy. From my physical exploration with Mr. Niess, I have found that to be grounded I needed to place my weight back in my heels. I reminded myself that there was no stress or tension in joy. Also, I needed to be mindful to make sure that I

added in moments of failure to completed Soot's development. As an actor, Mr. Niess suggested that I work until I have found the positive and then I needed to allow myself to tripped up. The obstacle was not to be played. The action was to be played. We were to think positive. As a cast, we were generous with each other. The focus of each scene was to be identified and everyone was to give focus as required. We were characters of Matt's memory (part fantasy and part truth). Functional dysfunction was a concept that was ever present. Positive action to resolve the problem was the action that Soot took. Soot warned Bette that she could not have a baby, because it would die or could be retarded. How did she do this? Since Soot didn't know how to go about it she asked for Karl's help by hinting about a friend of theirs and their child who had been born with a birth defect. Soot did this because she hoped that Karl would jump in and solve the problem, but he did not. Was this a tactic that Soot used often? Did she let Karl deal with the unpleasant often? Did Karl handle the conflicts while Soot tried to create the peace? Was this a good compatibility?

Today's thoughts: Was Karl and Soot a good match? How was true love to be measured or confirmed? How could one know if they were right for each other before they were married? What about arranged marriages? Could respect be the key that was missing in Soot and Karl's relationship?

October 25, 2003 – In order for the complexity of the Christmas scene to be truthfully portrayed I looked at Soot's many roles within the scene. As the hostess of the family gathering and the hero of her dysfunctional family, Soot was responsible for keeping the peace. Not an

easy job since dysfunction ran wild that Christmas. Booeey was drinking, Bette was nagging and all the while Karl was antagonizing everyone. Within this scene we saw Soot play the hero as she tried to keep peace and then switched and accept the role of scapegoat when Karl trusted it upon her.

Ryan and I ran the 'Lottie' section a number of times and discussed Lottie. Karl cheated on Soot with Lottie. This was the first time the secret of his betrayal was revealed. Did Karl love Soot? Could he have loved her? He did not respect her and this he showed clearly when he was unfaithful. I was sure that Soot knew about the affair. I wondered if cheating was commonplace with Karl. Why was Soot quiet about this? Was she quiet about this? Did she put an end to it, and was that why Lottie did not visit? Did she have a broken hip? Or, was she pregnant?

Today's thoughts: Why did Karl stray? Did Karl cheat because he could? Was Karl going through a mid-life crisis? Once trust was lost in a relationship what was left? What were the emotional effects of betrayal on the human psyche?

October 26, 2003 - Eyes fascinated me. How other people saw Soot. How Soot saw herself in Karl's eyes. What she saw in her eyes when she looked in the mirror. What Soot saw in other people's eyes? How she imagined others saw themselves and her. Karl was cruel tongued, but I saw love in Karl's eyes when Ryan portrayed him. Was Ryan's compassion bleeding out and giving compassion to Karl, a man who may have never had an ounce? How two opposites, love and cruelty, could exist together made no real sense to me.

Today's thoughts: If Karl had loved Soot then why did he treat her so poorly? Could it have been simply the difference between men and women? Could it have been Karl's insecurities? Was it fun for Karl? Did he mean it? Did he love Soot? Did he at one time? Could one have loved and not respected their spouse? Where did the divide end? Did all marriages grow and change? Was the key to grow together? Was this possible?

October 27, 2003 – I focused on scene 26 today and explored and asked questions in search of an honest portrayal of Soot. Soot's eyebrows were a focus for her during this scene. It was clear that the stress in her life was escalating quickly and we (the audience) saw Karl push her in this scene beyond her expected role. Soot was accustomed to laughing at Karl's cruel jokes, but here Karl asked her to tell it. With the death of Bette and Boo's last child at the end of the scene we saw Soot hit rock bottom. Soot tried really hard to tell the joke to Karl's satisfaction, but she fell short of Karl's standard.

Did Soot worry about her eyebrows because she had noticed a difference in herself? Did she see changes physically or did she look different to herself.

Today's thought: Can people lose themselves so entirely in a relationship that they are no longer the person they once were? Was this a product of trying to make their other half happy? Or was it because the couple was not a match from the start? Who was compatible? Could opposites attract and form a successful healthy relationship?

October 28, 2003 – I worked on the proper focus for Soot in the marriage retreat scene. I wanted her to be active in the scene even though she was deaf (or was blocking out everything). So I experimented with how visuals were funny. Since Soot could not hear the joke, Donte's physicality was her main cues. Soot easily found delight in Father's jokes through his physical humor. The timing of Soot's exchange with Margaret in this scene needed to also be taken from visuals. Soot's last line needed to be framed to button the scene. This scene was fun and challenged me to work through and develop stronger choices through focus technique. Where did Soot go when she zoned out and heard nothing? I imagined that the cruelty that spew from Karl's mouth and the unhappiness of her son were too much for her to bear. In order to survive at this point Soot retreated into her silent world and was happy. It was not reality, but it is the only survival tool Soot had left.

Today's thoughts: Did Soot blame Karl in anyway? Or, did she find fault in only herself? One always had a choice, they say. Was Soot too meek to see the way out? Would her life have been any better if she had picked up and left? Was Bette's life better after the divorce?

October 29, 2003 – I dealt with humor, joy, laughter, tension and sadness and how they related to Soot's relationships. How did Soot find so much delight in Karl? I reflected on times when I cried so hard as well as times I had laughed and laughed. Both were strong reactions. It was my experience that people could be uncomfortable with crying (crying could sometimes be thought as weak) and substituted laughter instead, even at inappropriate times. What if Soot

knew something we didn't? What if Karl was all bark and no bite? Maybe without fear for Karl Soot was free to laugh instead.

Today's thoughts: Did we make choices in life that changed our path or would we always take the road eventually fated? Did God have control, the greater plan? Did God punish as Matt thought?

October 30, 2003 – Soot was an enabler in her dysfunctional family. She enabled both her husband (Karl) and son (Boo) to drink. Soot was initially unaware of her contribution to her loved ones alcoholism. She was only trying to take care of them and wanted to create peace in her family. Where was it in her journey that she realized her role? Did she every stop enabling her loved ones? It seemed that Soot saw the alcoholism causing problems in her Booney's marriage and understood he learned from his father, but I did not find any clear sign that she stopped enabling either of them.

Smiles could be active and inactive. This idea was a new one suggested to me in rehearsals and I sought out the difference. Soot's inactive smile was the same as a physical mask. It was possible to hide behind this mask, but it was flat and stereotypical. Soot's active happiness evokes an active smile that she hides behind. It comes and goes as needed. In my research I came across the healing effect of laughter. Soot's relationship with Karl was complex. Every time Karl insulted Soot she had two options as to how she could react to him. The first option was to call him on his insult and request that he stop. The second was to not request the behavior to stop and to deal with the insult. Soot chose the latter and then took it one step further



when she made a conscious choice to find Karl charmingly funny. At first glance this seemed like a crazy choice for a person to have made. But, I believed Soot was doing everything she could to make her relationship pleasant and to not rock the boat. This choice was in her mind the best way to handle the situation.

Today's thoughts: Masks and their many forms were on my mind. How natural it was to hide ones feelings from those you love. What was it like to live a lie trying to be who someone wants you to be? If left to herself, who would Soot have become?

October 31, 2003 – Today was Halloween and costumes were everywhere. What we wore and how that informed our characters. More specifically I have thought about women's clothing of the 1950s and how it related to my character. Did the skirts that Soot wore make her feel beautiful? Or did they stifle her and put her in her place? Could she have felt differently if she had worn pants? Could ditching the heels have changed her in anyway? I wondered if she had felt comfortable in the heels. Did she feel beautiful without her make up? How long did she have her particular hairstyle? Drawing from my own personally experience I felt that all the above items subtle effected who Soot was as a person.

Today's thoughts: As I watched the final scene between Bette and Boo at rehearsal I could not take my mind off the idea of regrets. Did Soot have any regrets? What might Soot change if she had the chance?

November 1, 2003 – These are some general notes from rehearsals that I folded into my work: I worked specifics and carried through with my actions. Always aware of tempo and pauses, I did not take three beats to have a thought if a half or one beat was enough. A conscious effort was made to not let the last five or six scenes become melodramatic or drawn out. We vowed as a cast to be generous on stage. Focus was made to play my action and to not layer the text with extra unnecessary sounds.

Exploration of Soot's tempo made me aware of my breath and its connection to action. Aware of the tempo needed to complete each action, I found each intention scored with the appropriate energy needed. Further exploration of Soot's laughter and how it affected my breath and tempo will continue throughout my process. How was it different each time? How was it the same? This comparison fascinated me.

Today's thoughts: Breath equals life and during life the heart beats at different tempos throughout. How personal experiences molded or shaped Soot's likes, fears, wants and desires intrigued me. To take it one step further I considered what Soot was willing to do to get what she wanted.

November 2, 2003 – Scene 9, the first child of Bette and Boo. During the beginning lines of this scene at the hospital, Karl ordered Soot to get him a drink. This section needed further scoring so I examined it again. Was Karl trying to draw attention to himself? Did Karl really want a drink? Surely he knew that no drink could be found in a hospital? Why did he make such an unreasonable request? It was interesting that Karl used emotional blackmail on Soot and

stated that he would not speak to her if she did not fulfill his request. Emotional blackmail was a manipulative tactic. Also for Karl to have picked communication as an item to withhold as blackmail told me that Soot desired this from Karl, and he knew it. Was he testing or asserting his power over Soot? If he was testing, why did he do this? Did he feel threatened by the baby? Soot did love babies!

Today's thoughts: Desire to protect oneself was primary for Karl. This instinct was so strong that Karl took Soot and Booeey on the dysfunctional alcoholism circle with him. Did he realize he was doing this to his family? Was he selfish?

November 3, 2003 – Building her pleasant world was a constant job for Soot. This was important to her since she did not like the vulgar. As I glanced over the last few entries in my journal, I noticed it was full of notes. I was in an exploratory mode where asking questions was essential to my process. I dove into the specifics in order to flush out the many facets of Soot's character. I have lengthened my pre-rehearsal warm-ups to be insured that I am ready and open for discoveries.

Today's thoughts: Did Soot have control over her happiness? Her coping method was created to deal with the painful in her life and I wondered if it did the job. Could denial sugarcoat enough to prevent the pain or was it just enough for Soot to have functioned.

November 4, 2003 – Images were very powerful tools for me. Once the character was pictured in my mind's eye I stepped into her and begun to flush out the facets of her character

that I had been exploring over the last rehearsals. The image of Soot in her apron, domestic and happy, was a very strong image for me to work with. Another powerful image was Soot kissing the cheek of Karl as he headed off to work. The last one I worked with today was Soot's adoring look that she always gave Boo as he left for school. I found working with these images refreshed my approach and informed my body with clues to my character's physicality that I couldn't have found from an intellectual approach alone. These exercises revealed Soot's center of weight to be centered as a sitting dog waiting for the next command. By keeping her weight grounded and centered it allowed Soot to be ready to spring into action. It also allowed for a greater loss of equilibrium when she was not able to complete the command and return to center, as she was used to. We saw this loss of equilibrium in both the 'drink' and 'joke' scenes.

Today's thoughts: Images conjured up responses from all my senses, and I was amazed how strong I felt these. The memory of these images left imprints on my soul that I will draw from throughout the journey.

November 5, 2003 – Laughing has become a focus for me this week. I turned to energy levels to continue development of Soot's laughter. During these between rehearsal sessions I have applied energy levels and the ideas of expanding and contracting to my vocal work of Soot. This allowed the laughter to be a product of joy and released laughter naturally. This joy in my laughter supported Karl and Soot's relationship well. Soot's dysfunction was that she responded to Karl's cruel comments as if they were funny. Soot's delight in Karl was one of her strongest dysfunctional character traits. Finding Karl funny was something I will continue to explore and

build. Continuing to find the humor in Karl and exploring what this means vocally and physically for Soot was essential to discover how Soot's laughter was manifested and to keep it alive.

Today's thoughts: Does Soot's laughter come from love blinded, or was it manifested for only protection, an armor of shorts? It was clear to me that Soot was playing the game with Karl and that she knew her role and how to defuse Karl.

November 6, 2003 – Karl and Soot's relationship was full of dysfunctional communication. I wondered what was said between Karl and Soot behind closed doors. Was Karl kind to her? Did he ever respect Soot? The way he made fun of her in public was a very demeaning action. Why did he do this? Was Karl simply following the example that was set by his father by imposing the role of scapegoat on Soot? I have found that every time Soot took on the scapegoat role in the play that it was needed in the balancing game of the dysfunctional alcoholic family.

Today's thoughts: An examination of body language was also required in the development of Soot. The idea that clues about what is going on inside a person's mind could be seen in body language was a very intriguing idea to me. Could Soot say one thing but convey the deep truth to the audience with her body language? Since body language was mostly about subconscious action I was not certain if I would be able to implement any into my portrayal of Soot, but I was determined to explore the idea fully.

November 7, 2003 – Soot’s props were a ton of fun. I worked with Karl’s (Ryan’s) cigar in the eyebrow/joke scene, and it proved the most challenging prop. The timing of the exchange was key to it working. While we were working through the mechanics of this exchange I found that if I focused on Ryan’s breathing and matched its rhythm that the pass of the cigar came naturally. Did we naturally mimic the breathing of our loved ones?

Today’s thoughts: My modern dance training came flooding back to me as I experimented with synchronizing breath with Karl. This connection of breath created a bonded feeling, a close connection with Karl, and I wondered if making a life with someone produced any of these feelings. Or did Karl keep Soot far enough away that she felt alone?

November 8, 2003 – The Thanksgiving scene also presented a unique prop to work with. Working with the pearl earring in my white-gloved hand was interesting. The white on white masked the earring for the audience. I adjusted my hand shape and gave the earring as much focus as I could and it alleviated the confusion. The earring was only a feeble excuse for Soot to check on Boeey, so the visual was not as important as the checking on son.

Soot’s first exit felt unmotivated for me until I noticed that Karl was giving me my cue to leave. It was so natural and truthful to look to Karl when the dysfunction started to build in the scene. Since I was a guest and it was not my place to step in and fix the dysfunction, I allowed Karl to cue me to leave and scurried to catch up with him. This development of a motivated exist pleased me.

Today's thoughts: The candelabra that Soot brings with her to Thanksgiving seemed very odd to me this evening. Why did Soot choose to bring this item to the family dinner? I decided it was an anniversary gift from Bette, and Soot wanted to make sure that Bette knew she liked it.

November 12, 2003 – Tonight we rehearsed on the stage! The wedding cake was great. The stage proved to be very difficult to navigate for me this evening. The stairs were rough during the quick hospital entrances, and the rake of the set was really hard for me in the taller heels. But, I was not discouraged and managed to increase my comfort level and ease of movement already during the first rehearsal. I have worn heels during the rehearsal process to build up a general comfort for heels, but my costume heels are taller and smooth bottomed. I have purchased rehearsal heels with the taller heel and added rubber to the bottom of them to discourage slipping. I have plenty of time to become comfortable with the set, and I was thankful for this time. Ryan noticed my taller heels and offered to carry the heavier pieces off at the end of our scenes when he could, which I greatly appreciated.

Today's thoughts: Footwear and how it changes your movement is never ending. Just by adding one inch to the heels and raking the stage, weight placement sifts slightly. I loved it. It gave me a chance to revisit the idea of losing equilibrium and to return.

November 13, 2003 – Costume / Dress Parade: The pink dress created for Soot was lovely. I loved how it made me feel. I felt very different when I wore it than I had in my

rehearsal skirt. The apron, gloves, hat and purse all coordinated perfectly. The addition of the costume gave me a thrill. As I snapped myself into Soot's wonderful wrap dress, I was so excited about the performance to come.

Today's thoughts: The idea that 'clothes make the man' may go too far, but I found that the costumed completed mine. I felt from a different time period when wearing the costume and I felt permission to enter the world Durang created since I was so appropriately dressed.

November 14, 2003 – Crew Watch: It was exciting to have the crew in the audience tonight! It was nice to finally have an audience. The slide show went really well and seemed to add to the experience of the audience. I don't know what was on the screen during the 'shade' comment of Karl's, but the audience went wild. I was looking forward to sharing Soot with an audience after working so hard towards portraying her truth. I believe the audience saw her as I had hoped.

Today's thoughts: Live responses reminded me that although Soot has been a personal journey for me, she was always intended to be viewed by an audience. Adding the audience completed the last component needed for theatre. I was looking forward to comments and critiques of the play and performances. I was interested in what elements of Soot were revealed to the audience successfully.

November 16, 2003 – Cue-to-Cue: rehearsal was long in order to finalize the slides and lighting. It felt like forever since allergies had taken over my body, and I was sick. I found



myself tonight miserably trying to suppress a cough on stage. With all the laughter in Soot's dialogue the cough was trouble. Even with a cold I was counting down the seconds until tomorrow's dress rehearsal. I just couldn't wait to get into costume.

Today's thoughts: 'Firsts' were moments that we note in life (first: Christmas, kiss, job, house, love, championship, etc.). These moments were special not only because of what they were but because they were new experiences. I knew that this show would be my first performance on the UCF main stage: an exciting new experience!

November 17, 2003 – Tech Dress Rehearsal: Still searching for further truth in my relationship with Bette I reviewed the advice scene and explored the following ideas. The idea that Soot understood Bette's desire for children, but did not understand why she became pregnant knowing that the doctors did not feel the baby could survive. Bette's desire to have a baby at any cost was a very selfish act that Soot did not understand. Soot wanted desperately for Bette to see the error of her desire.

Today's thoughts: The desire to have something that you cannot have was an easy concept, but risking the death or illness of a child seemed over the top. What was it that drove Bette to go down her path? Was it the Catholic Church? Or was it her need to have someone who loved her unconditionally and that she could care for and control?

November 18, 2003 – Dress Rehearsal: My hair turned out well all curly and wavy.

I felt good tonight. I enjoyed the show and was pleased with my performance this evening. A peaceful feeling came over me this evening during the marriage retreat. This newfound peacefulness sprouted out of Soot's forgiveness. When Soot reached the marriage retreat she was in a different place than we have seen previously. She had released herself from the responsibility of her and her families' mistakes. She had accepted that she could not fix her son's marriage. She has embraced God's love. She blocked everything unpleasant out of her mind and that included Karl and his words.

Today's thoughts: Soot gave herself a clean slate and a chance to be free mentally. Was her mind fractured at this point or had it retained sharpness?

November 19, 2003 – Final Dress Performance: Final Dress went smooth for me and I felt ready to open tomorrow. The technical elements of the play had come together to support as designed. The raked stage no longer registered as anything unusual to my movement. Every character has continued to grow since the addition of the remaining elements and I felt we had created a strong show.

Today's thoughts: Expectations have been high on my end for this production. I have exceeded my original expectation, but have found that I raise the bar every time I have reached it throughout. The natural complexity of Soot lends itself easily to more growth. If I were to play Soot again at another time in my life I would still have more to explore.

November 20, 2003 – Opening Night Performance: After my pre-show warm-up I took extra time to enjoy deep breaths and to push all thoughts other than the show out of my mind. Thrilled beyond believe to share our story, I have to admit I did not hear the audience’s laughter, clapping or moments of silence. I gave my focus so strongly to the tasks at hand that I did not note any of the reactions from the audience during the show. This was a very different experience for me.

Today’s thoughts: Moving moment to moment created an acting experience unlike any I had ever had. I felt prepared and open for anything when I entered the acting area. I could have followed the team anywhere we needed to go without hesitation.

November 21, 2003 – Performance: Filled with energy from last night’s show I was fueled for this evening performance. Ryan suggested a quick exchange of the cigar before the start of show and I thought this was a great addition to our warm-up. This evening my cough was in full swing so I gave extra time to vocal exercises and hoped for some loosening of congestion. This process has been like no other for me. The role was more complex than any I have portrayed, because Soot changes from beginning to end. She was not a cliché or stereotype she was a full character. Her psychological journey was heart wrenching and honest.

Today’s thoughts: Emotions have been on mind this evening. The audience’s emotions are tapped into as the world Durang created flashes through time to reveal the story of Bette and Boo and their family. The sadness felt for Matt and his family is strong, but the laughter that comes from being slightly removed as the conventions dictate allows for thought and hope that

Matt will end the cycle. The hope that our lives are not predestined but what we make of them was what I hoped some members of the audience take from this show.

November 22, 2003 – Performances at 2 & 8: The eyebrow joke with Karl went really well in the matinee and evening performances. When the timing was correct the joke built the needed tension for Soot's emotional break. Timing was on track throughout the show. My line at the end of the marriage retreat scene was well framed and created a good button at the end of the scene as intended.

Today's thoughts: My allergies acted up today and my voice was unusually low. This deeper voice worked for Soot this evening. Using my full range for Soot was explored, but setting her voice in my lower register was never specifically chosen. I loved the grounded feeling that the lower tones gave Soot. I have decided to continue using my lower register for the remainder of performances.

November 23, 2003 – Performance at 2 & photo call: The Osbornes (family friends) came to see the show today and I was very excited to share the show with them. Karl's (Ryan) lines with Soot had a little more harshness and bite to them today. I kept things in balance and countered with extra effort as I smoothed things over and made them as peaceful as I could. Karl (Ryan) followed suit and kept us on a truthful track. The truthful dialogue exchange with Bette today in the advice scene was something that I had been working towards passionately and it felt great to finally get there.

Today's thoughts: In-laws and family was at the forefront of my thoughts today with the Osbornes in the audience. I thought of the many Thanksgivings that I have celebrated with them and how welcoming they were. These positive experiences have renewed me and sent me back to school full of energy. To think what the negative holiday experiences have done to Soot and how they must just suck the energy out of her. Where did she get her strength from to carry on and continue to have family holidays?

December 2, 2003 – Pick-up Rehearsal: I found myself excited to return to the show after the holiday break. In preparation for the pick-up rehearsal I reviewed my lines and blocking. We stumbled through and regained our feet this evening. To take a week off from the show before returning for additional performances was a different process for me. The break did have a great big advantage for me. The break gave the antibiotics time to kick in and improved my health for the second half of the run.

I reviewed my blocking and lines and refreshed the mechanics of the brain, but it was the revisiting of the relationships and actions that fueled my continued search for the truth. I have found that by focusing on the pursuit of truthful relationships, interactions and actions rather than trying to reach a perfect performance has provided a more fruitful process and fulfilling journey. This new approach to acting gained during my studies here at the UCF Conservatory I treasure most from my graduate schooling. It made every performance an exploration towards truth not a stressful performance leaving me empty. Within this new approach I found myself present on

stage and measured my progress easily while I continued to reach for my goal of a truthful portrayal of Soot. The freedom I found in this structured process was fulfilling.

Today's thoughts: I examined Matt's opening passage and realized that scientists and actors have a great deal in common. They have all looked, examined, explored and tested to find the answers to theories.

December 3, 2003 – Performance: I was amazed how easy it was to navigate the raked stage without my cold. The pillars were half the weight and Soot's laughter came freely. I had a fulfilling show I felt connected to the other characters as well as invested in my actions. This was a different level of connection and I was motivated.

Coming back to Karl's (Ryan's) eyes tonight felt like coming home. Every time I lost my equilibrium and returned to Karl's eyes I felt centered again. Which was odd considering that he was the one most often directly responsible for my loss of equilibrium. Karl as my anchor as well as the tide seemed impossible.

Today's thoughts: Were we all creatures of habits? Did we fear change? Could Karl have provided security for Soot?

December 4, 2003 – Performance: This evening I added a review of my script notes, after hair and before physical warm-up, to my preparation. After the review I was pleased to find how far I had come in my quest to find Soot's truth since putting down the script and going off book.

Ryan sensed my need to connect truthfully tonight and spent the first two scenes of the show keeping me on my toes and demanding fresh responses. I found that by the second child of Bette and Boo that we were in step with each other instinctively. What a partner Ryan was through this whole process. Ryan's quality of being a distant acting partner yet always there when needed made me think of Soot and Karl's relationship from another angle. From the very beginning I have understood Soot and Karl's basic core, but through it all the many layers of their characters have fascinated me. Intrigued by the complexity of their relationship I have examined it over and over and have always found another angle to be explored. This time I wondered if Karl teased Soot to take her mind off of unpleasant things. Could Karl have slung whammies at Soot for any good redeemable reason? This was something to be considered, but it was hard to even think of Karl with a compassionate heart so I rejected the idea.

A line was skipped somewhere in the Thanksgiving scene so I had to shorten my look to Karl before he summoned me to leave, and my exit was not timed as I would have liked. On the other hand, when I reentered for the earring section the timing was on and Soot's purpose of checking on Boeey before she left was completed well under the guise of looking for a lost earring.

The 'eyebrow' scene with Karl and Boeey felt raw and honest tonight. The audience seemed to feel for us as a family, they did not see Karl as a monster, and I was pleased to have hit this cord right.

Today's thoughts: Honesty and truth was on my mind as well as the idea of how they fit into the phrase "in the eye of the beholder." Could one choose their own truth and see things the

way they wish? Once inside the mindset of Soot everything looked different. Could she even keep track of the truth amidst the world that she created?

December 5, 2003 – Performance: Tonight I enjoyed the songs at the top of the acts greatly. I felt healthy tonight and sang easily; I have found a deeper connection to the songs. The opening music box song rang in my ears as childlike and sadly poetic as I moved around the stage and sang out the names of my family. While I made the simple circular movement around the stage, moments of the play flashed through my mind and I had to force back tears of joy. Filled with emotion I said my first line and felt ready to take the journey. Are we doomed to repeat the mistake of our parents if we do not examine them carefully? The truth that can be found in honestly looking at one's behavior to move forward and better yourself can be hard to understand and even harder to accept.

The 99 bottles of beer song evoked the opposite emotion for me. It brought on waves of sadness as I thought about my Boeey and his failing marriage and the unhappiness in his eyes. I found myself without the skills to help him and I needed to help my baby boy. Another realization made this evening was that I have become accustomed to the stage and the stairs. With my new realized feeling of comfort in the acting space I began to notice small details again. For example, the rice bags thrown by Karl (Ryan) in the wedding scene was extra funny and appalling all at once this evening. It was the first glimpse the audience had of Karl's temper. The fact that he suffered no consequences from his actions was telling of the dysfunctional



world. It left me to wonder if Soot had stood up to Karl and asked him not to act that way if he would have refrained.

The marriage retreat scene was full of truthful interactions with Margaret for me this evening. Then later in the show as I laid dead on the stage and listened as Karl proclaimed to Matt his philosophy of life and the reason that he stayed married to me. I was shocked by the absurdity that Karl didn't even remember my real name.

Today's thoughts: Nicknames and teasing was to be considered. I have heard it said that one's true feelings could often be found in teasing. Could Karl's teasing to the tenth power (if you could call his cruel comments that) be a clue into the unhealthiness of his relationship with his wife, a manifestation of disrespect? Or was Karl immature? When I was younger my mother would say that young boys tease girls that they like before they have the maturity to express it any other way. Could Karl be immature instead of cruel?

December 6, 2003 – Performance: Karl (Ryan) had fire in his eyes when he unleashed his 'shade' comment on me tonight. The power Karl had over me at that moment was strong; I blushed for real. My reaction was unexpected to even me, but it was honest. I was also pleased with Soot's 'dead baby speech' this evening as I felt a real connection to Booe (Robert) and was driven to action by the pain in my heart. Mothers want the best for their children.

On the other hand, the 'eyebrow' scene didn't go over well with the audience. They seemed to not like Karl or at least his sense of humor (not that I could blame them). When the baby dropped at the end of the scene the audience was the most uncomfortable yet.

I watched Bette's death scene this evening, on the monitor in the green room, and it was very touching. The capacity one could have to forgive and love amazed me.

Today's thoughts: Power and how it was gained. How the upper hand in a relationship is gained to be more exact. Did power have to be taken or could it be given. Why did Karl always have to have the power? Did Karl take the power? Or, did Soot give it? Could it have been a mixture?

December 7, 2003 – Performance: Since today was the last show, I took extra time to prepare. I believed I would remember this show the most, because it was the end of my journey. But, tonight's show came and went like opening night in an excited blur. I remembered breathing, I remembered Karl's (Ryan's) eyes, and I remembered bowing in the final curtain call. I felt a sense of loss, which was overcome with happiness as I hung my costume up for the last time. The ending of this journey was a little sad for me, but the pride of completion along with the promise of the next beginning lay just ahead and carried me forward.

Today's thoughts: The journey, I reflected for a moment and wondered if our journey not the end or beginning was the most important in life. The journey is when living happens.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

I set out to portray Soot as a complete, realistic character who goes through a painful, personal journey during the play. By understanding the nuances and the intricate balancing of the roles within her dysfunctional family, I was able to understand Soot's thoughts and actions. She was not the "dumbest white woman alive"<sup>98</sup> but a woman who had to use brilliantly simple defense mechanisms to get through her day. This understanding provided me with the ability to embrace her point of view and bring her to empathic life on stage. As an actor, I succeeded by identifying what Soot intuitively wanted: to break the cycle. Her journey is painful and embarrassing, but ultimately triumphant. Her memory and actions help her grandson Matt to a better life; even though she failed with her own son. Soot was no simple stereotype. By recognizing this fact and developing a fully-rounded character, I contributed to the ensemble's goal of developing the playwright's intentions.

Olympia Dukakis has the opinion that *The Marriage of Bette & Boo* "is a very forgiving play."<sup>99</sup> Durang agreed, saying, "I remember thinking that that sounded right."<sup>100</sup> With this play, Christopher Durang offers hope to anyone who has or is living in a dysfunctional situation. Soot demonstrates it only takes one concerned and motivated individual to evoke change. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* reveals that change is possible and opportunity is available to break

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<sup>98</sup> Durang. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> Arthur Holmberg. *Family Survival: An Interview with Christopher Durang*. [American Repertory Theatre](http://amrep.org/past/bette/bette2.html) 31 Aug. 1998 29 Sept. 2003 <<http://amrep.org/past/bette/bette2.html>>.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

the negative cycle of dysfunction. The play encourages forgiveness, and moves us forward on the path to healing.

**APPENDIX A:  
SCRIPT NOTES**

masochist

# THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO

by Christopher Durang

Bring  
own  
earring  
SM, SW

What are you saying?  
When you have thoughts?  
revelations?

As the play begins Bette and Boo are being united in matrimony, surrounded by their beaming families. But as the further progress of their marriage is chronicled, it becomes increasingly clear that things are not working out quite as hoped for. The birth of their son is followed by a succession of stillborns; Boo takes to drink; and their respective families are odd lots to say the least: His father is a sadistic tyrant, who refers to his wife as the dumbest woman in the world; while Bette's side includes a psychotic sister who endures lifelong agonies over her imagined transgressions and a senile father who mutters in unintelligible gibberish. For solace and counsel they all turn to Father Donnelly, a Roman Catholic priest who dodges their questions by impersonating (hilariously) a strip of frying bacon. Conveyed in a series of dazzlingly inventive interconnected scenes, the play moves wickedly on through three decades of divorce, alcoholism, madness and fatal illness — all treated with a farcical brilliance which, through the author's unique talent, mines the unlikely lodes of irony and humor residing in these ostensibly unhappy events.

"THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO is the best play of a depressing season, but it would be an adornment to any season."

—The Village Voice

Plan  
comfort  
Once more he is demonstrating his special knack for wrapping life's horrors in the primary colors of absurdist comedy.

—New York Times

... Durang has the ability of making the real absurd and the absurd real."

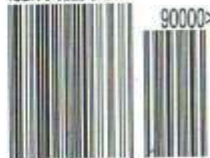
—The New York Post

"Christopher Durang, the humorist and satirist, has rarely written anything funnier or more serious than his mordant comedy THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO ... a bracing cornucopia of brilliant lines."

—The New Yorker

Also by Christopher Durang  
DURANG/DURANG  
NAOMI IN THE LIVING ROOM  
BABY WITH THE BATHWATER  
LAUGHING WILD  
and many others

ISBN 0-8222-0738-2



DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

9780822207368


# THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO

BY CHRISTOPHER DURANG

THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO — DURANG



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



**THE  
MARRIAGE  
OF BETTE  
AND BOO**

BY CHRISTOPHER DURANG



★  
DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



*List of scenes:*

Act I

- Scene 1: The wedding
- Scene 2: The honeymoon
- Scene 3: Margaret gives Emily advice
- Scene 4: The honeymoon, continued
- Scene 5: Emily practices the cello
- Scene 6: Bette and Boo visit their in-laws
- Scene 7: Margaret gives Bette advice
- Scene 8: 20 years later, Boo has dinner with his son
- Scene 9: The first child of Bette and Boo
- Scene 10: Matt's favorite movie essay;  
arts & crafts with Emily
- Scene 11: The second child of Bette and Boo
- Scene 12: Bette and Margaret visit Emily in a rest home
- Scene 13: Fr. Donnally gives Bette advice
- Scene 14: Soot gives Bette advice
- Scene 15: Matt talks about *The Mayor of Cambridge*
- Scene 16: The third child of Bette and Boo
- Scene 17: Bette telephones Bonnie Wilson
- Scene 18: Bette and Boo celebrate Thanksgiving

Act II

- Scene 19: Boo takes a pledge in front of Fr. Donnally
- Scene 20: Bette and Boo go dancing
- Scene 21: Matt's holiday essay;  
Bette and Boo celebrate Christmas
- Scene 22: 20 years later, Boo has dinner with his son;  
20 years later, Bette has dinner with her son
- Scene 23: Boo's second pledge in front of Fr. Donnally
- Scene 24: Joan's birthday celebration
- Scene 25: The funeral of Paul Brennan
- Scene 26: The fourth child of Bette and Boo
- Scene 27: Fr. Donnally gives Bette advice again
- Scene 28: Fr. Donnally's marriage retreat
- Scene 29: The divorce of Bette and Boo
- Scene 30: Matt has dinner with Karl, Soot, Margaret and Paul
- Scene 31: Matt gives Emily advice
- Scene 32: The last child of Bette and Boo
- Scene 33: Matt visits Bette;  
Bette and Boo reminisce

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BETTE BRENNAN  
MARGARET BRENNAN, her mother  
PAUL BRENNAN, her father  
JOAN BRENNAN, her sister  
EMILY BRENNAN, her sister  
BOO HUDLOCKE  
KARL HUDLOCKE, his father  
SOOT HUDLOCKE, his mother  
FR. DONNALLY  
DOCTOR  
MATT



( Dress, gloves, hat, jewelry )

# THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO

Karl/Soot <sup>J E</sup> <sup>(Boo) Bette M ?</sup> <sup>ENTRANCE ORDER</sup> ACT I <sup>E</sup> <sup>USR SOOT (2nd) To EN</sup> <sup>STAIRS 3rd SLISE</sup>

SCENE 1 — All the characters, in various wedding apparel, stand together to sing: the Brennan family, the Hudlocke family. Matthew stands apart from them.

ALL. (Sing.)  
God bless Bette and Boo and Skippy,  
Emily and Boo,  
Margaret, Matt and Betsy Booney,  
Mommy, Tommy too,

Betty Betsy Booney Boozey,  
Soot, Karl, Matt, and Paul,  
Margaret Booney, Joanie Phooey,  
God bless us one and all.

(The characters now call out to one another.)

BETTE. Booney? Booney? Skippy?  
BOO. Pop?  
MARGARET. Emily, dear?  
BETTE. Booney?  
BOO. Bette?

KARL. Is that Bore?  
SOOT. Karl? Are you there?

JOAN. Nikkos!  
BETTE. Skippy! Skippy!  
EMILY. Are you all right, Mom?

BETTE. Booney, I'm calling you!  
MARGARET. Paul? Where are you?

JOAN. Nikkos!  
BOO. Bette? Betsy?

BETTE. Boo? Boo? (Flash of light on the characters, as if their picture is being taken. Lights off the Brennans and Hudlockes. Light on Matt, late twenties or so. He speaks to the audience.)

Lively  
SL  
Steps  
down onto  
cake  
circle  
pose

character  
50's mantag  
washed

imaginary place  
have action  
look for someone to thing  
tell them SOMEBODY  
Dodge L Back  
Go to Platform

picture  
opens in

UP ON TO  
L STOOL

W  
TOWARDS  
L PLATFORM  
W/BOO

Tableau  
the Freeze

7

MATT EX  
Tableau  
alive  
nature

MATT. If one looks hard enough, one can usually see the order that lies beneath the surface. Just as dreams must be put in order and perspective in order to understand them, so must the endless details of waking life be ordered and then carefully considered. Once these details have been considered, generalizations about them must be made. These generalizations should be written down legibly, and studied. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo.* (Matt exits. Characters assume their places for photographs before the wedding. Boo stands to the side with his parents, Karl and Soot. Bette, in a wedding gown, poses for pictures with her family: Margaret, her mother, Emily, her sister, holding a cello; Joan, another sister, who is pregnant and is using nose spray; and Paul, her father. Bette, Margaret, Emily smile, looking out. Paul looks serious, fatherly. Joan looks sort of grumpy. Lights flash. They change positions.)

MARGARET. You look lovely, Bette.  
 EMILY. You do. Lovely.  
 MARGARET. A lovely bride. Smile for the camera, girls. (Speaking out to either audience or to unseen photographer.) Bette was always the most beautiful of my children. We used to say that Joanie was the most striking, but Bette was the one who looked beautiful all the time. And about Emily we used to say her health wasn't good.  
 EMILY. That's kind of you to worry, Mom, but I'm feeling much better. My asthma is hardly bothering me at all today. (Coughs lightly.)  
 MARGARET. Boo seems a lovely boy. Betsy, dear, why do they call him Boo?  
 BETTE. It's a nickname.  
 MARGARET. Don't you think Bette looks lovely, Joanie?  
 JOAN. (Without enthusiasm.) She does. You look lovely, Bette.  
 MARGARET. Where is Nikkos, dear?  
 JOAN. He's not feeling well. He's in the bathroom.  
 EMILY. Do you think we should ask Nikkos to play his saxophone with us, Joan dear?  
 JOAN. A saxophone would sound ridiculous with your cello, Emily.  
 EMILY. But Nikkos might feel left out.  
 JOAN. He'll probably stay in the bathroom anyway.  
 BETTE. Nikkos seems crazy. (Joan glares at her.) I wish you and

duplicates  
 took shd to go

founded Betsy  
 remember her?

last  
 make

Lynn  
 for

Lynn  
 when  
 should  
 break

Nikkos could've had a big wedding, Joanie.  
 MARGARET. Well, your father didn't much like Nikkos. It just didn't seem appropriate. (Emily coughs softly.) Are you all right, Emily?  
 EMILY. It's nothing, Mom.  
 JOAN. You're not going to get sick, are you?  
 EMILY. No. I'm sure I won't.  
 MARGARET. Emily, dear, please put away your cello. It's too large.  
 EMILY. I can't find the case. (Joan uses her nose spray.)  
 BETTE. I can't wait to have a baby, Joanie.  
 JOAN. Oh yes?  
 MARGARET. (Out to front again.) Betsy was always the mother of the family, we'd say. She and her brother Tom. Played with dolls all day long, they did. Now Joanie hated dolls. If you gave Joanie a doll, she put it in the oven.  
 JOAN. I don't remember that, Mom.  
 BETTE. I love dolls.  
 EMILY. Best of luck, Bette. (Kisses her; to Joan.) Do you think Nikkos will be offended if we don't ask him to play with us?  
 JOAN. Emily, don't go on about it.  
 EMILY. Nikkos is a wonderful musician.  
 BETTE. So are you, Emily.  
 MARGARET. I just hope he's a good husband. Boeey seems very nice, Betsy.  
 BETTE. I think I'll have a large family. (Lights flash, taking a photo of the Bremners. Lights dim on them. Lights now pick up Boo, Karl, and Soot, who now pose for pictures.) FLASH  
 KARL. It's almost time, Bore.  
 BOO. Almost, Pop.  
 SOOT. Betsy's very pretty, Boeey. Don't you think Betsy's pretty, Karl?  
 KARL. She's pretty. You're mighty odd to be getting married, Bore. How old are you?  
 BOO. Thirty-two, Pop.  
 SOOT. That's not old, Karl.  
 KARL. Nearly over the hill, Bore.  
 SOOT. Don't call Boeey Bore today, Karl. Someone might misunderstand.

Rice bag for Karl

Special Procession Wedding Procession

Joe

Turn Bette out

she screws up her nose  
the wedding silence if so be it

then oh come on!

KARL. Nobody will misunderstand. (Photo flash. Enter Father Donnelly. The families take their place on either side of him. Bette and Boo come together, and stand before him.)

FATHER DONNELLY. We are gathered here in the sight of God to join this man and this woman in the sacrament of holy matrimony. Do you, Bette . . . ?

BETTE. (To Boo.) I do.

FATHER DONNELLY. And do you, Boo . . . ?

BOO. (To Bette.) I do.

FATHER DONNELLY. (Sort of to himself.) Take this woman to be your lawfully wedded . . . I do, I do. (Back to formal sounding.) I pronounce you man and wife. (Bette and Boo kiss. Karl throws a handful of rice at them, somewhat hostilely. This bothers no one.)

JOAN. Come on, Emily. (Emily and Joan step forward. Paul gets Emily a chair to sit in when she plays her cello. He carries a flute.)

EMILY. And now, in honor of our dear Bette's wedding, I will play the cello and my father will play the flute, and my wonderful sister Joanie will sing the Schubert lied, *Lachen und Weinen*, which translates as Laughing and Crying. (Joan gets in position to sing. Paul holds his flute to his mouth. Emily sits in her chair, puts the cello between her legs, and raises her bow. Long pause.) I can't remember it.

JOAN. (Very annoyed.) It starts on A, Emily. Silence if so be it.

EMILY. (Tries again; stops.) I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Bette. I can't remember it. (Everyone looks a little disappointed and disgruntled with Emily. Photo flash. Lights change. Spot on Matt.)

SCENE 2—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. When ordering reality, it is necessary to accumulate all the facts pertaining to the matter at hand. When all the facts are not immediately available, one must try to reconstruct them by considering oral history—hearsay, gossip and apocryphal stories. And then with perseverance and intelligence, the analysis of these facts should bring about understanding. The honeymoon of Bette and Boo. (Matt exits. Enter Bette, still in her wedding dress. In the following speech, and much of the time, Bette talks cheerfully and quickly, making no visible connections between her statements.)

BETTE. Hurry up, Boo. I want to use the shower. (Speaks to au-

dience, who seem to her a great friend.) First I was a tomboy. I used to climb trees and beat up my brother, Tom. Then I used to try to break my sister Joanie's voice box because she liked to sing. She always scratched me though, so instead I tried to play Emily's cello. Except I don't have a lot of musical talent, but I'm very popular. And I know more about the cello than people who don't know anything. I don't like the cello, it's too much work and besides, keeping my legs open that way made me feel funny. I asked Emily if it made her feel funny and she didn't know what I meant; and then when I told her she cried for two whole hours and then went to confession twice, just in case the priest didn't understand her the first time. Dopey Emily. She means well. (Calls offstage.) Booney! I'm pregnant! (To audience.) Actually I couldn't be, because I'm a virgin. A married man tried to have an affair with me, but he was married and so it would have been pointless. I didn't know he was married until two months ago. Then I met Booney, sort of on the rebound. He seems fine though. (Calls out.) Booney! (To audience.) I went to confession about the cello practicing, but I don't think the priest heard me. He didn't say anything. He didn't even give me a penance. I wonder if nobody was in there. But as long as your conscience is all right, then so is your soul. (Calls, giddy, happy.) Booney, come on! (Bette runs off. Lights change. Spot on Matt.)

SCENE 3—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Margaret gives Emily advice. (Matt exits. Enter Margaret, Emily, holding her cello.)

EMILY. Mom, I'm so upset that I forgot the piece at the wedding. Bette looked angry. When I write an apology, should I send it to Bette, or to Bette and Boo?

MARGARET. Emily, dear, don't go on about it. (Lights change. Spot on Matt.)

SCENE 4—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. The honeymoon of Bette and Boo, continued. (Exits. Enter Bette and Boo, wrapped in a large sheet and looking happy. They stand smiling for a moment. They should still be in their wedding clothes—Bette minus her veil, Boo minus his tie and jacket.)



BETTE. That was better than a cello, Boo.  
 BOO. You're mighty good looking, gorgeous.  
 BETTE. Do you think I'm prettier than Polly Lydstone?  
 BOO. Who?  
 BETTE. I guess you don't know her. I want to have lots of children, Boo. Eight. Twelve. Did you read *Chaper by the Dozen*?  
 BOO. I have to call my father about a new insurance deal we're handling. (Takes phone from beneath the sheets; talks quietly into it.) Hello, Pup . . .  
 BETTE. (To audience.) Lots and lots of children. I loved the movie *Slippy* with Jackie Cooper. I cried and cried; I always loved little boys. Where is my pocketbook? Find it for me, Boo. (The pocketbook is in full sight, but Bette doesn't seem to notice it.)  
 BOO. I'm talking to Pop, Bette. What is it, Pop?  
 BETTE. (To audience.) When I was a little girl, I used to love to mind Jimmy Winkler. "Do you want me to watch Jimmy?", I'd say to Mrs. Winkler. He was five years old and had short stubby legs. I used to dress him up as a lamp shade and walk him to town. I put tassels on his toes and taped doilies on his knees, and he'd scream and scream. My mother said, "Betsy, why are you crying about *Slippy*, it's only a movie, it's not real." But I didn't believe her. Bonnie Wilson was my best friend and she got tar all over her feet. Boo, where are you?  
 BOO. I'm here, angel. No, not you, Pop. No, I was talking to Bette. Here, why don't you speak to her? (Hands Bette the phone.) Here, Bette, it's Pop.  
 BETTE. Hello there, Mr. Hudlocke. How are you? And Mrs. Hudlocke? I cried and cried at the movie *Slippy* because I thought it was real. Bonnie Wilson and I were the two stupidest in the class. Mrs. Sullivan used to say, "The two stupidest in math are Bonnie and Betsy. Bonnie, your grade is eight, and Betsy, your grade is five." Hello? Hello? (To Boo.) We must have been cut off, Boo. Where is my pocketbook?  
 BOO. Here it is, beautiful. (He gives her the pocketbook that has been in full sight all along.)  
 BETTE. I love you, Boo.

SCENE 5—Emily sits at her cello.

EMILY. I can't remember it. (She gets up and addresses her choir.)

12

Leave it to beaver

Physical

(Dress and apron jewelry)

It starts on A, Emily. (She sits down, tries to play.) I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Bette. I can't remember it. (Enter Joan with scissors.)  
 JOAN. It may start on A, Emily. But it ends now. (She raises scissors up. Freeze and/or lights change.)

PRIVATE  
 PUBLIC  
 You're life is perfect

SCENE 6—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. At the suggestion of Redbook, Bette refashions her wedding gown into a cocktail dress. Then she and Boo visit their in-laws. Bette is pregnant for the first time. (Exit. Bette, Boo, Soot, Karl.)

SOOT. How nice that you're going to have a baby.

KARL. Have another drink, Bore.

BETTE. (To Soot.) I think Boeey drinks too much. Does Mr. Hudlocke drink too much?

SOOT. I never think about it.

KARL. Soot, get me and Bore another drink. (Boo and Karl are looking over papers, presumably insurance.)

BETTE. Don't have another one, Boo.

SOOT. (Smiles, whispers.) I think Karl drinks too much, but when he's sober he's really very nice.

BETTE. I don't think Boo should drink if I'm going to have a baby.

SOOT. If it's a boy, you can name him Boo, and if it's a girl you can call her Soot after me.

BETTE. How did you get the name "Soot"?

SOOT. Oh you know. The old saying, "She fell down the chimney and got covered with soot."

BETTE. What saying?

SOOT. Something about that. Karl might remember. Karl, how did I get the name "Soot"?

KARL. Get the drinks, Soot.

SOOT. All right.

KARL. (To Bette.) Soot is the dumbest white woman alive.

SOOT. Oh, Karl. (Laughs, exits.)

BETTE. I don't want you to get drunk again, Boo. Joanie's husband Nikkos may lock himself in the bathroom, but he doesn't drink.

13

Don't stand on South!

Karl enjoy don't be tentative  
 expect <sup>with</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>right</sup> <sup>papers</sup> <sup>concern</sup>  
 finding P.A.

BOO. Bette, Pop and I are looking over these papers.  
 BETTE. I'm your wife.  
 BOO. Bette, you're making a scene.  
 KARL. Your baby's going to be all mouth if you keep talking so much. You want to give birth to a mouth, Bette?  
 BETTE. All right. I'm leaving.  
 BOO. Bette. Can't you take a joke?  
 BETTE. It's not funny.  
 KARL. I can tell another one. There was this drunken airline stewardess who got caught in the propeller...  
 BETTE. I'm leaving now, Boo. (Exit.)  
 BOO. Bette. I better go after her. (Starts to exit.)  
 KARL. Where are you going, Bore?  
 BOO. Bette's a little upset, Pop. I'll see you later. (Exit. Enter Soot with drinks.)  
 SOOT. Where's Booley, Karl?  
 KARL. He isn't here.  
 SOOT. I know. Where did he go?  
 KARL. Out the door.  
 SOOT. Did you say something to Bette, Karl?  
 KARL. Let's have the drinks, Soot.  
 SOOT. You know, I really can't remember how everyone started calling me Soot. Can you, Karl?  
 KARL. Go into your dance, Soot.  
 SOOT. Oh, Karl, (Laughs)  
 KARL. Go get the veil and start in. The shades are down.  
 SOOT. Karl, I don't know what you're talking about.  
 KARL. You're the dumbest white woman alive. I rest my case. (Soot laughs. Lights change.)

Take Cup  
 Scene 7—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Bette goes to Margaret, her mother, for advice. (Exit Bette, Margaret. Emily on the floor, writing a note. Paul, the father, is also present.)  
 BETTE. Mom, Boo drinks. And his father insulted me.  
 MARGARET. Betsy, dear, marriage is no bed of roses.  
 EMILY. Mom, is the phrase "my own stupidity" hyphenated?  
 MARGARET. No, Emily. She's apologizing to Joanie again

about forgetting the piece at the wedding. Joanie was very embarrassed.

BETTE. How can I make Boo stop drinking?  
 MARGARET. I'm sure it's not a serious problem, Betsy.  
 BETTE. Poppa, what should I do?

PAUL. Wffh, ah%% enough oo sh\$w aums\$\$dr ehvg### ing% %s ahm. (Note to reader and/or actor: Paul is meant to be the victim of a stroke. His mind is still functioning well, but his ability to speak is greatly impaired. Along these lines, I give him specific lines to say and be motivated by, but the audience and the other characters in the play should generally be unable to make out almost anything that he says—though they can certainly follow any emotional coloring he gives. I have found it useful for actors who read the part of Paul to say the lines written in the brackets, but to drop almost all of the consonants and to make the tongue go slack, so that poor Paul's speech is almost all vowels, mixed in with an occasional, inexplicable group of consonants. Paul's first line up above—emphasizing that no one should be able to make out almost any of it—would be: "Well, I think you should consider giving things time.")  
 BETTE. What should I do?

PAUL. (Angry that he can't be understood.) On###%t ump oo%#% onoons#\$. Eggh ing ahm#\$. [Don't jump to conclusions. Give things time.]

MARGARET. Paul, I've asked you not to speak. We can't understand you.

EMILY. Mom, how do you spell "mea culpa"?  
 MARGARET. Emily, Latin is pretentious in an informal letter. Joanie will think you're silly.

EMILY. This one is to Father Dummally.  
 MARGARET. M-E-A C-U-L-P-A.

BETTE. Boo's father has given him a very bad example. (Enter Joan, carrying a piece of paper.) Oh, Joan, quick—do you think when I have my baby, it will make Boo stop...  
 JOAN. Wait a minute. (To Emily) Emily, I got your note. Now listen to me closely. (With sobriety.) I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you.

EMILY. (A bit startled.) Oh. Thank you.  
 JOAN. (To Bette) Now, what did you want?

BETTE. Do you think when I have my baby, it will make Boo stop drinking and bring him and me closer together?  
 JOAN. I have no idea.

BETTE. Well, but hasn't your having little Mary Frances made things better between you and Nikkos? He isn't still disappearing for days, is he?  
 JOAN. Are you trying to make me feel bad about my marriage?  
 EMILY. I'm sorry, Joanie.  
 JOAN. What?  
 EMILY. If I made you feel bad about your marriage.  
 JOAN. Oh shut up. (Exits)  
 BETTE. (To Margaret.) She's so nasty. Did you punish her enough when she was little?  
 MARGARET. She's just tired because little Mary Frances cries all the time. She really is a dreadful child.  
 BETTE. I love babies. Poppa, don't you think my baby will bring Boo and me closer together?  
 PAUL. Azzsd\* ot uh ertry owowdf@ eeah oo ah uh ayeer, ehette. [That's not a very good reason to have a baby, Bette.] (Bette looks at Paul blankly. Lights change.)

SCENE 8—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Twenty years later, Boo has dinner with his son. (Boo and Matt sit at a table.)  
 BOO. Well, how are things up at Dartmouth, Skip? People in the office ask me how my Ivy League son is doing?  
 MATT. It's all right.  
 BOO. Are there any pretty girls up there?  
 MATT. Uh huh.  
 BOO. So what are you learning up there?  
 MATT. Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a masochist.  
 BOO. What?  
 MATT. It's a novel we're reading. (Mumbles.) Tess of the d'Urbervilles.  
 BOO. (Laughs.) A man needs a woman, son. I miss your mother. I'd go back with her in a minute if she wanted. She's not in love with her family anymore, and I think she knows that drinking wasn't that much of a problem. I think your old man's going to get teary for a second. I'm just an old softie. (Boo blinks his eyes, wipes them. Matt exits, embarrassed. Boo doesn't notice but addresses the chair as if Matt were still there.) I miss your mother, Skip.

Nobody should be alone. Do you have any problems, son, you want to talk over? Your old man could help you out. (Boo waits for an answer. Lights change.)

SCENE 9—Matt addresses the audience. (Dress, gloves, hat, purse) FOLLOW THE LEADER AFTER THE BEFORE BOO

MATT. The first child of Bette and Boo. (Exits. Enter Boo, Karl, Soot, Margaret, Emily with her cello, Joan, Paul. They all stand in a line and wait expectantly. Enter the Doctor, who is played by the same actor who plays Father Donnelly.)  
 DOCTOR. She's doing well. Just a few more minutes. (Exits.)  
 EMILY. Oh, God, make her pain small. Give me the pain rather than her. (Wines in pain.)  
 MARGARET. Emily, behave, this is a hospital.  
 BOO. Pop, I hope it's a son.  
 KARL. This calls for a drink. Soot, get Bore and me a drink.  
 SOOT? Where would I go?  
 KARL. A drink, Soot.  
 SOOT? Karl, you're teasing me again.  
 KARL. All right, I won't talk to you.  
 SOOT. Oh please. Please talk to me, Boorey, talk to your father.  
 BOO. Come on, Pop. We'll have a drink afterwards.  
 SOOT. Karl, I'll get you a drink. (To Margaret.) Where would I go? (To Karl.) Karl?  
 KARL. This doctor know what he's doing, Bore?  
 SOOT. Karl? Wouldn't you like a drink?  
 EMILY. It's almost here. (Having an experience of some sort.) Oh no, no, no no no no.  
 MARGARET. Emily!  
 KARL. This Betsy's sister, Bore?  
 BOO. Pop, I hope it's a boy.  
 KARL. You were a boy, Bore. (Enter the doctor, holding the baby in a blue blanket.) This is it, Bore.  
 EMILY. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.  
 DOCTOR. It's dead. The baby's dead. (He drops it on the floor.)  
 EMILY. (Near collapse.) Oh no!  
 JOAN. I win the bet.  
 MARGARET. I'm here, Betsy, it's all right. (Paul picks up the

THINK ABOUT DISTANCE FROM KARL

Work on this work lost funny game Talk to me  
 Paul  
 Don't  
 Open up  
 SR  
 Follow the leader  
 After the  
 Before Boo  
 Push up the line  
 Lost  
 Dinner  
 Push up the line  
 Lost  
 Fun joy  
 Think about distance from Karl



baby.) Paul, put the baby down. That's disrespectful.  
 PAUL. Buh uh ayee ah#\$\$ eh!#! [But the baby's not dead.]  
 MARGARET. Don't shout. I can understand you.  
 PAUL. (To doctor.) Uh ayee ah#\$\$ eh!#! Yrr uh abherr, ann##  
 oo re, uh ayee ah#\$\$ eh!#! [The baby's not dead. You're a doctor, can't you see, the baby's not dead.]  
 DOCTOR. (Takes the baby.) Oh, you're right. It's not dead. Mr. Hudlocke, you have a son.  
 KARL. Congratulations, Bore.  
 EMILY. Thank you, God. (Exit Bette, radiant. She takes the baby.)  
 BETTE. (To audience.) We'll call the baby Skippy.  
 EMILY. It has to be a saint's name, Bette.  
 BETTE. Mind your business, Emily.  
 MARGARET. Betsy, dear, Emily's right. Catholics have to be named after saints. Otherwise they can't be baptized.  
 BOO. Boo.  
 MARGARET. There is no Saint Boo.  
 EMILY. We should call it Margaret in honor of Mum.  
 BETTE. It's a boy.  
 EMILY. We should call him Paul in honor of Dad.  
 MARGARET. Too common.  
 SOOT. I always liked Clarence.  
 JOAN. I vote for Boo.  
 MARGARET. (Telling her to behave.) Joanie.  
 KARL. Why not name it after a household appliance?  
 SOOT. Karl. (Laughs.)  
 KARL. Egg beater. Waffle iron. Bath mat.  
 BETTE. (To audience.) Matt—I remember a little boy named Matt who looked just like a wind-up toy. We'll call him Matt.  
 BOO. It's a boy, Pop.  
 EMILY. Is Matt a saint's name, Bette?  
 BETTE. Matthew, Emily. Maybe if you'd finally join the convent, you'd learn the apostles' names.  
 EMILY. Do you think I should join a convent?  
 BETTE. (To audience.) But his nickname's going to be Skippy.  
 My very favorite movie. (Lights change.)

Matt who looked just like a wind-up toy. We'll call him Matt.  
 Matt who looked just like a wind-up toy. We'll call him Matt.  
 Matt who looked just like a wind-up toy. We'll call him Matt.  
 Matt who looked just like a wind-up toy. We'll call him Matt.  
 Matt who looked just like a wind-up toy. We'll call him Matt.

SCENE 10—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. *My Very Favorite Movie*, an essay by Matthew Hudlocke.

My very favorite movie . . . are . . . *Nights of Cabiria*, *8½*, *Citizen Kane*, *L'Avventura*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Persona*, *The Parent Trap*, *The Song of Bernadette*, *Patenkin*, *The Fire Within*, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, *The Singing Nun*, *The Dancing Nun*, *The Nun on the Fire Escape Outside My Window*, *The Nun That Caused the Chicago Fire*, *The Nun Also Rises*, *The Nun Who Came to Dinner*, *The Cassesian Chalk Nun*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Nose*, *But the Lonely Heart*, and *The Nun Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

Page two. In the novels of Thomas Hardy, we find a deep and unrelieved pessimism. Hardy's novels, set in his home town of Wessex, contrast nature outside of man with the human nature inside of man, coming together inexorably to cause human catastrophe. The sadness in Hardy—his lack of belief that a benevolent God watches over human destiny, his sense of the waste and frustration of the average human life, his forceful irony in the face of moral and metaphysical questions—is part of the late Victorian mood. We can see something like it in A. E. Housman, or in Emily's life. Shortly after Skippy's birth, Emily enters a convent, but then leaves the convent due to nerves. Bette becomes pregnant for the second time. Boo continues to drink. If psychiatrists had existed in nineteenth century Wessex, Hardy might suggest Bette and Boo seek counselling. Instead he has no advice to give them, and in 1886 he writes *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This novel is one of Hardy's greatest successes, and Skippy studies it in college. When he is little, he studies *The Wood to the Willows* with Emily. And when he is very little, he studies drawing with Emily. (Emily, Matt. Emily has brightly colored construction paper and crayons.)

EMILY. Hello, Skippy, dear. I thought we could do some nice arts and crafts today. Do you want to draw a cat or a dog?  
 MATT. A dog.  
 EMILY. All right, then I'll do a cat. (They begin to draw.) Here's the head, and here's the whiskers. Oh dear, it looks more like a clock. Oh, Skippy, yours is very good. I can tell it's a dog. Those are the ears, and that's the tail, right?  
 MATT. Yes.  
 EMILY. That's very good. And you draw much better than Mary Frances. I tried to interest her in drawing Babar the elephant the other day, but she doesn't like arts and crafts, and she scribbled all over the paper, and then she had a crying fit. (She

Ask) Oh dear. I shouldn't say she doesn't draw well, it sounds like a criticism of Joanie.

MATT. I won't tell.

EMILY. Yes, but it would be on my conscience. I better write Joanie a note apologizing. And really Mary Frances draws very well, I didn't mean it when I said she didn't. She probably had a headache. I think I'll use this nice pink piece of construction paper to apologize to Joanie, and I'll apologize about forgetting the piece at your mother's wedding too. I've never been sure Joanie's forgiven me, even though she says she has. I don't know what else I can do except apologize. I don't have any money.

MATT. Your cat looks very good. It doesn't look like a clock.

EMILY. You're such a comfort, Skippy. I'll be right back. Why don't you pretend your dog is real, and you can teach it tricks while I'm gone. (Exits. Matt makes "roll over" gesture to drawing, expectantly. Lights change. Matt exits.)

dress on chair / dress gloves hat/purse

SCENE 11 - Bette enters, carrying a chair. She sits on the chair.

(Same as 9)

BETTE. (To audience and/or herself.) I'm going to pretend that I'm sitting in this chair. Then I'm going to pretend that I'm going to have another baby. And then I'm going to have another and another and another. I'm going to pretend to have a big family. There'll be Skippy. And then all the A.A. Milne characters. Boo should join A.A. There'll be Eeyore and Pooh Bear and Christopher Robin and Tigger... My family is going to be like an enormous orphanage. I'll be their mother. Kanga and six hundred Baby Roos. Baby Roo is Kanga's baby, but she's a mother to them all. Roo and Tigger and Pooh and Christopher Robin and Eeyore and Owl, owl, owl, owl, owl, owl, owl! I'm giving birth, Moon. Roo and Tigger and Boo and Pooh and Soot and Eeyore and Karl and Betsy and Owl... (Enter quickly: Boo, Karl, Soot, Margaret, Paul, Emily, Joan. They stand in their same hospital positions. Enter the doctor with the baby in a blue blanket.)

DOCTOR. The baby's dead. (Drops it on the floor.)

MARGARET. Nonsense. That's what he said about the last one, didn't he, Paul?

DOCTOR. This time it's true. It is dead.

20

BETTE. Why?

DOCTOR. The reason the baby is dead is this: Mr. Hudlocke has Rh positive blood.

KARL. Good for you, Bore!

DOCTOR. Mrs. Hudlocke has Rh negative blood.

BETTE. Like Kanga.

DOCTOR. And so the mother's Rh negative blood fights the baby's Rh positive blood and so: The mother kills the baby.

EMILY. (Rather horrified.) Who did this??? The mother did this???

KARL. You married a winner, Bore.

BOO. The baby came. And it was dead. (Picks up baby.)

SOOT. Poor Booney.

BETTE. But I'll have other babies.

DOCTOR. The danger for your health if you do and the likelihood of stillbirth are overwhelming considerations.

BOO. The baby came. And it was dead.

BETTE. Mama, tell him to go away.

MARGARET. There, there. Say something to her, Paul. (Paul says nothing. Lights change.)

SCENE 12 - Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Bette and Margaret visit Emily, who is in a rest home due to nerves. (Exits. Emily with her cells. Bette, Margaret. Bette seems very depressed, and keeps looking at the floor or looking off.)

EMILY. Oh, Mom, Bette. It's so good to see you. How are you feeling, Bette, after your tragedy?

MARGARET. Emily, don't talk about it. Change the subject.

EMILY. (Trying desperately to oblige.) Um... um... uh...

MARGARET. (Looking around slightly.) This is a very nice room for an institution. Bette, look up. Do you like the doctors, Emily?

EMILY. Yes, they're very good to me.

MARGARET. They should be. They're very expensive. I was going to ask your brother, Tom, for some money for your stay here, but he's really not... Oh, I didn't mean to mention Tom. Forget I said anything.

EMILY. Oh, what is it? Is he all right?

MARGARET. I shouldn't have mentioned it. Forget it, Emily.

21



MARGARET. Now, Emily, don't go off about it, that's a fault of yours. If you had stayed in the convent, maybe you could have corrected that fault. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up the convent.

EMILY. That's all right, Mom. *(Silence.)*

MARGARET. Besides, whatever happens, happens. Don't look that way, Emily. Change the subject.

EMILY. Um . . . uh . . .

MARGARET. There are many pleasant things in the world, think of them.

EMILY. *(Trying hard to think of something, then.)* How is Skippy, Bette?

BETTE. Who?

EMILY. Skippy.

BETTE. *(To Margaret.)* Who?

MARGARET. She means Baby Roo, dear.

BETTE. Oh, Roo. Yes. *(Stares off in distance blankly.)*

EMILY. Is he well?

MARGARET. *(Talking Emily to stop.)* He's fine, dear. Looks just like his mother.

EMILY. He's a lovely child. I look forward to seeing him when I finally leave here and get to go . . . *(Gets teary.)*

MARGARET. Emily, the doctors told me they're sure you're not here for life. Isn't that right, Bette? *(Whispers to Emily.)* The doctors say Bette shouldn't have any more babies.

EMILY. Oh, dear. And Bette's a wonderful mother. Bette, dear, don't feel bad, you have the one wonderful child, and maybe someday God will make a miracle so you can have more children.

BETTE. *(The first sentence she's heard.)* I can have more children?

EMILY. Well, maybe God will make a miracle so you can.

BETTE. I can have a miracle?

EMILY. Well you pray and ask for one.

MARGARET. Emily, miracles are very fine . . .

EMILY. Oh, I didn't think, I shouldn't have . . .

MARGARET. But now you've raised Betsy's hopes . . .

EMILY. Oh, Bette, listen to Mom . . . I'm so sorry . . .

BETTE. I CAN HAVE MORE CHILDREN!

mean to bring this up . . .

EMILY. I'm so stupid . . .

MARGARET. But first you start in on your brother Tom who has a spastic colon and is drinking too much . . .

EMILY. OH NO!

BETTE. *(Very excited; overlapping with Margaret.)* I CAN HAVE MORE CHILDREN, I CAN HAVE MORE CHILDREN, I CAN HAVE MORE CHILDREN . . . *(etc.)*

MARGARET. *(Overlapping with Bette.)* . . . and has been fired and there's some crazy talk about him and some boy in high school, which I'm sure isn't true, and even if it is . . .

EMILY. Tom's all right, isn't he, it isn't true . . .

BETTE. . . . I CAN HAVE MORE CHILDREN! . . . *(etc.)*

MARGARET. I didn't mean to tell you, Emily, but you talk and talk . . .

BETTE. . . . I CAN HAVE MORE CHILDREN, I CAN HAVE MORE CHILDREN . . .

EMILY. Oh, Mom, I'm so sorry, I . . .

MARGARET. and talk about a thing until you think your head is going to explode . . .

EMILY. *(Overlapping still.)* I'm so sorry, I . . . WAIT! *(Silence. Emily sits at her cello with great concentration, picks up the bow.)* I think I remember it. *(Listens, tries to remember the piece from the wedding, keeps trying out different opening notes. Margaret looks between the two girls.)*

MARGARET. I wish you two could see yourselves. *(Laughs merrily.)* You're both acting very funny. *(Laughs again.)* Come on, Betsy. *(Margaret and Bette exit, cheerful. Emily keeps trying to remember. Lights change.)*

SCENE 13—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Bette seeks definition of the word "miracle" from Father Donnally. *(Exits. Bette, Father Donnally. She kneels to him in the confessional, nestles herself.)*

FATHER DONNALLY. Hello, Bette, how are you?

BETTE. I'm feeling much better after my tragedy.

*Don't push!*  
*Enjoy! Laugh!*  
 FATHER DONNALLY. It's a cross to bear.  
 BETTE. Have you ever read *Winnu the Pooh*, Father? Most people think it's for children, but I never read it until I was an adult. The humor is very sophisticated.  
 FATHER DONNALLY. I'll have to read it sometime.  
 BETTE. Do you believe in miracles, Father?  
 FATHER DONNALLY. Miracles rarely happen, Bette.  
 BETTE. I do too! Thank you, Father. You've helped me make a decision. *(Lights change.)*

*Apron*  
 SCENE 14—Matt addresses the audience.

*(Dress, apron jewelry)*  
 MATT. Soot gives Bette some advice. *(Exit: Bette, pregnant, Boo, Soot, Karl.)*

BETTE. And then Father Donnally said that I should just keep trying and that even if this baby died, there would be at least one more baby that would live, and then I would be a mother as God meant me to be. Do you agree, Soot?

SOOT. I've never met this Father Donnally, Karl. Pauline has a retarded daughter, doesn't she? LaLa is retarded, isn't she? I mean, she isn't just slow, is she?

BETTE. I don't care if the child's retarded. Then that's God's will. I love retarded children. I like children more than I like people. Boo, you're drinking too much, it's not fair to me. If this baby dies, it's going to be your fault.

BOO. I don't think Father Donnally should have encouraged you about this. That's what I think.

BETTE. He's a priest. *(To Soot.)* Did you ever see Jackie Cooper as a child? I thought he was much cuter than Shirley Temple, what do you think, Soot?

KARL. Bore, my wife Soot hasn't said one sensible thing in thirty years of marriage.

SOOT. Oh, Karl... *(Laughs, flattered.)*

KARL. But your little wife has just said more senseless things in one ten minute period than Soot here has said in thirty years of bondage.

SOOT. Oh, Karl. I never was one for talking.

BETTE. *(To Karl.)* Look here, you. I'm not afraid of you. I'm

*Go for rings  
 Go for shoes  
 ENJOY  
 Soot  
 BOO  
 KARL  
 BETTE  
 MATT*

*the line*

*now's Soot be naming  
 I am butting in!*

not going to let Boo push me to a breakdown the way you've pushed Soot. I'm stronger than that.

SOOT. Oh, my. *(Laughs.)* Sit down, dear. /

KARL. Tell the baby-maker to turn it down, Bore.

BOO. Bette, sit down.

BETTE. I want a marriage and a family and a home, and I'm going to have them, and if you won't help me, Boo, I'll have them without you. *(Exit.)*

KARL. Well, Bore, I don't know about you and your wife. Whatever one can say against your mother, and it's most everything. *(Soot laughs.)* at least she didn't go around dropping dead children at every step of the way like some goddamned giddy farm animal.

SOOT. Karl, you shouldn't tease everyone so.

KARL. I don't like the way you're behaving today, Soot. *(Exit.)*

SOOT. *(Looks back to where Bette was.)* Bette, dear, let me give you some advice. Oh, that's right. She left. *(A moment of disorientation; looks at Boo.)* Boo, Karl's a lovely man most of the time and I've had a very happy life with him, but I hope you'll be a little kinder than he was. Just a little. Anything is an improvement. I wish I had dead children. I wish I had two hundred dead children. I'd stuff them down Karl's throat. *(Laughs.)* Of course, I'm only kidding. *(Laughs some more. Lights change.)*

*hands over*  
 SCENE 15—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Now the Mayor of Casterbridge, when drunk, sells his wife and child to someone he meets in a bar. Now Boo is considerably better behaved than this. Now the fact of the matter is that Boo isn't really an alcoholic at all, but drinks simply because Bette is such a terrible, unending nag. Or, perhaps Boo is an alcoholic, and Bette is a terrible, unending nag in reaction to his drinking so much, and also because he just isn't "there" for her, anymore than Clym Yeobright is really there for Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native*, although admittedly Eustacia Vye is very neurotic, but then so is Bette also.

Or perhaps it's the fault of the past history of stillbirths and the pressures that that history puts on their physical relationship. Perhaps blame can be assigned totally to the Catholic Church.

*cute funny!*

*hands over*

*EYUSE  
 small  
 take  
 put  
 shoot  
 bare  
 in  
 core*



Certainly Emily's guilt about leaving the convent and about everything else in the world can be blamed largely on the Catholic Church. (*Pleased.*) James Joyce can be blamed on the Catholic Church; but not really Thomas Hardy. And then in 1896 Hardy writes *Jude the Obscure*. And when Skippy is nine, Bette goes to the hospital for the third time. The third child of Bette and Boo. (*Exits. Lights change.*)

(Dress, purse, gloves, jewelry, hat)

SCENE 16—*Everyone assembles, except for Bette: Boo, Karl, Soot, Margaret, Paul, Joan, Emily. They wait. Enter the doctor. He drops the baby on the floor, exits. Pause. Lights change.*

SCENE 17—*Bette on the telephone, late at night.*

BETTE. Hello, Bonnie? This is Betsy. Betsy. (*To remind her.*) Bonnie, your grade is eight, and Betsy, your grade is five. Yes, it's me. How are you? Oh, I'm sorry, I woke you? Well, what time is it? Oh I'm sorry. But isn't Florida in a different time zone than we are? Oh. I thought it was. Oh well.

Bonnie, are you married? How many children do you have? Two. That's nice. Are you going to have any more? Oh, I think you should. Yes, I'm married. To Boo. I wrote you. Oh, I never wrote you? How many years since we've spoken? Since we were fifteen. Well, I'm not a very good correspondent. Oh, dear, you're yawning, I guess it's too late to have called. Bonnie, do you remember the beach and little Jimmy Winkler? I used to dress him up as a lamp shade, it was so cute. Oh. Well, do you remember when Miss Willis had me stand in the corner, and you stand in the wastebasket, and then your grandmother came to class that day? I thought you'd remember that. Oh, you want to go back to sleep?

Oh, I'm sorry. Bonnie, before you hang up, I've lost two babies. No, I don't mean misplaced, stupid, they died. I go through the whole nine month period of carrying them, and then when it's over, they just take them away. I don't even see the bodies. Hello? Oh, I thought you weren't there. I'm sorry, I didn't realize it was so late. I thought Florida was Central Time

96

or something. Yes, I got twelve in geography or something, you remember? Betsy, your grade is twelve and Bonnie, your grade is . . . what did you get in geography? Well, it's not important anyway. What? No, Boo's not home. Well, sometimes he just goes to a bar and then he doesn't come home until the bar closes, and some of them don't close at all and so he gets confused what time it is. Does your husband drink? Oh, that's good. What's his name? Scooter? Like bicycle? I like the name Scooter. I love cute things. Do you remember Jackie Cooper in *Skippy* and his best friend Sukey? I cried and cried. Hello, are you still there? I'm sorry, I guess I better let you go back to sleep. Goodbye, Bonnie, it was good to hear your voice. (*Hangs up. Lights change.*)

Cellar L Kitchen R

SCENE 18—*Matt addresses the audience.*

(Same)

MATT. Several months later, Bette and Boo have the two families over to celebrate Thanksgiving. (*Bette, Matt. Bette is on the warpath.*)

BETTE. (*Calling off, nasty.*) Come up from the cellar, Boo. I'm not going to say it again. They're going to be here. (*To Matt.*) He's hidden a bottle behind the furnace.

MATT. Please stop shouting.

BETTE. Did you smell something on his breath?

MATT. I don't know. I didn't get that close.

BETTE. Can't you go up and kiss him?

MATT. I can't go up and kiss him for no reason.

BETTE. You're so unaffectionate. There's nothing wrong with a ten year old boy kissing his father.

MATT. I don't want to kiss him.

BETTE. Well, I think I smelled something. (*Enter Boo.*)

BOO. What are you talking about?

BETTE. You're always picking on me. I wasn't talking about anything. Set the table, Skippy. (*Matt exits.*)

BOO. When are they all coming?

BETTE. When do you think they're coming? Let me smell your breath.

BOO. Leave my breath alone.

BETTE. You've been drinking. You've got a funny look in your eye. (*Enter Matt, holding some silverware.*)

97

MATT. Something's burning in the oven.  
 BETTE. Why can't you stop drinking? You don't care enough about me and Skippy to stop drinking, do you?  
 MATT. It's going to burn.  
 BETTE. You don't give me anything to be grateful for. You're just like your father. You're a terrible example to Skippy. He's going to grow up neurotic because of you.  
 MATT. I'll turn the oven off. (Exits.)  
 BOO. Why don't you go live with your mother, you're both so perfect.  
 BETTE. Don't criticize my mother. (Enter Joan and Emily. Joan has a serving dish with candied sweet potatoes; Emily has a large gravy boat dish.)  
 EMILY. Happy Thanksgiving, Bette.  
 BETTE. Hush, Emily. You're weak, Boo. It's probably just as well the other babies have died.  
 EMILY. I brought the gravy.  
 BETTE. We don't care about the gravy, Emily. I want you to see a priest, Boo.  
 BOO. Stop talking. I want you to stop talking. (Enter Margaret and Paul. Paul is holding a large cake.)  
 MARGARET. Hello, Betsy, dear.  
 BETTE. He's been drinking.  
 MARGARET. Let's not talk about it. Hello, Boo, happy Thanksgiving.  
 BOO. Hello. (Enter Soot and Karl. Soot is carrying a candelabra.)  
 SOOT. Hello, Margaret.  
 MARGARET. How nice to see you. Paul, you remember Mrs. Hudlocke?  
 PAUL. I see oo ee oo, issizzze uhooh##. Iit oo ah uhulll ineing uh arreeng ace###? [Nice to see you, Mrs. Hudlocke. Did you have trouble finding a parking place?]  
 SOOT. I guess so. (To everybody.) I brought a candelabra.  
 BETTE. (To Soot.) You're his mother, I want you to smell his breath.  
 BOO. SHUT UP ABOUT MY BREATH! (Boo accidentally knocks into Emily, who drops the gravy on the floor.)  
 BETTE. You've spilled the gravy all over the rug!  
 EMILY. I'm sorry.

EA  
152

(70  
had  
pink

X  
10  
pink

BETTE. Boo did it!  
 BOO. I'll clean it up, I'll clean it up. (Exits.)  
 BETTE. I think he's hidden a bottle in the cellar.  
 EMILY. Joanie didn't drop the sweet potatoes.  
 SOOT. Are we early? (Laughs.)  
 KARL. Pipe down, Soot. (Boo enters with a vacuum cleaner. All watch him as he starts to vacuum up the gravy.)  
 BETTE. What are you doing? Boo!  
 BOO. I can do it!  
 BETTE. You don't vacuum gravy!  
 BOO. I can do it!  
 BETTE. Stop it! You're ruining the vacuum!  
 SOOT. Oh, dear. Let's go. (Laughs.) Goodbye, Booby. (Karl and Soot exit.)  
 JOAN. I knew we shouldn't have had it here.  
 MARGARET. Come on, Betsy. Why don't you and Skippy stay with us tonight?  
 BETTE. YOU DON'T VACUUM GRAVY!  
 MARGARET. Let it alone, Betsy.  
 BETTE. You don't vacuum gravy. You don't vacuum gravy. You don't vacuum gravy.  
 BOO. (Hysterical.) WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT THEN? TELL ME! WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?  
 BETTE. (Quietly, but very upset.) You get warm water, and a sponge, and you sponge it up. (Bette and Boo stare at one another, spend.)  
 EMILY. Should we put the sweet potatoes in the oven? (Exit Matt.)  
 JOAN. Come on, Emily. Let's go home.  
 MARGARET. Betsy, if you and Skippy want to stay at our house tonight, just come over. Goodbye, Boo.  
 EMILY. (Calls.) Goodbye, Skippy. (Margaret, Joan, Emily, and Paul exit. Enter Matt with a pan of water and two sponges. He hands them to Bette. Bette and Boo methodically sponge up the gravy. Music to the "Bette and Boo" round in the background.)  
 BOO. (Quietly.) Okay, we'll soak it up with the sponge. That's what we're doing. We're soaking it up. (They more or less finish with it.) I'm going to take a nap. (Boo lies down where he is, and falls asleep.)

Look  
Karl  
Soot  
Joan  
Karl  
Paul  
Emily  
Soot  
Karl

more  
away  
front  
gravy  
(dit  
no.)

w/candle

BETTE. Boo? Boo? Booy? Boo? (Enter Soot.)

SOOT. Did I lose an earring in here? Oh, dear. He's just asleep, isn't he?

BETTE. Boo? Boo.

SOOT. He must have gotten tired. (Holds up earring, to Matt.) If you should see it, it looks just like this one. (Laughs.) Booy? (Laughs.) I think he's asleep. Goodbye, Booy. (Exit.)

BETTE. Boo? Booy?

MATT. Please don't try to wake him up. You'll just argue.

BETTE. All right. I won't try to wake him. (Pause.) Boo.

Booy. (She pushes his shoulder slightly.) Boo. (To Matt.) I just want to get through to him about the gravy. (To Boo.) Boo. You don't vacuum gravy. Are you awake, Boo? Boo? I wonder if he's going to sleep through the night. I can wait. Boo. Booy. (Bette looks at Matt, then back at Boo. Matt looks at both of them, then out to audience, exhausted and trapped, but with little actual expression on his face. Lights dim. End Act I.)

All the way in  
Soot  
w/ candle  
or what  
Call to  
Matt

→ (nervous grating) Are we ready?  
→ don't hold bearing to my ear  
with hold soul

observers  
95

ACT II  
(Same)

SCENE 19—Bette, Boo, Father Donnelly down center. Matt to the side. All the others stand together as they did in the beginning to sing the "Bette and Boo" round. Music introduction to the round is heard.

Em/Same  
as Weaving

ALL. (Except Bette, Boo, Father Donnelly, Matt sing.)

Ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall,

Ninety-nine bottles of beer,

Take one down, pass it around,

Ninety-eight bottles of beer on the wall,

Ninety-eight bottles of beer on the wall,

Ninety-eight bottles of beer

(They keep singing this softly under the following scene.)

BOO. (Holding up a piece of paper.) I pledge, in front of Father Donnelly, to give up drinking in order to save my marriage and to make my wife and son happy.

FATHER DONNALLY. Now sign it, Boo. (Boo signs it.)

BETTE. (Happy.) Thank you, Boo. (Kisses him; to Father Donnelly.) Should you bless him or something?

FATHER DONNALLY. Oh, I don't know. Sure. (Blesses them.) In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

BETTE. Thank you, Father.

FATHER DONNALLY. All problems can be worked out, can't they?

BETTE. Yes, they can.

FATHER DONNALLY. Through faith.

BETTE. And will power. Boo, let's have another baby.

THOSE SINGING. (Finishing.)

Take one down, pass it around,

God bless us one and all!

(Lights change.)

Ev  
DSL

Emily  
Sign  
Flowers

SCENE 20—Bette and Boo dance. Perhaps no music in the background.

BETTE. This is fun to go dancing, Boo. We haven't gone since



BOO. You're mighty pretty tonight, gorgeous.  
 BETTE. I wonder if Bonnie Wilson grew up to be pretty. We were the two stupidest in the class. I don't think Joanie's marriage is working out. Nikkos is a louse.  
 BOO. I think the waiter thought I was odd just ordering ginger ale.  
 BETTE. The waiter didn't think anything about it. You think everyone's looking at you. They're not. Emily said she's going to pray every day that this baby lives. I wonder what's the matter with Emily.  
 BOO. Your family's crazy.  
 BETTE. Don't criticize my family, Boo. I'll get angry. Do you think I'm prettier than Polly Lydstone?  
 BOO. Who?  
 BETTE. You're going to have to make more money when this baby comes. I think Father Donnally is very nice, don't you? Your father is terrible to your mother. My father was always sweet to my mother.  
 BOO. I think the waiter thinks I'm odd.  
 BETTE. What is it with you and the waiter? Stop talking about the waiter. Let's just have a nice time. *(They dance in silence.)* Are you having a nice time?  
 BOO. You're lookin' mighty pretty tonight, Bette.  
 BETTE. Me too, Boo. *(They dance, cheered up. Lights change.)*

*(Dress, apron, jewelry)*  
 SCENE 21 - Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. *Holidays*, an essay by Matthew Hudlocke. Holidays were invented in 1203 by Sir Ethelbert Holiday, a sadistic Englishman. It was Sir Ethelbert's hope that by setting aside specific days on which to celebrate things—the birth of Christ, the death of Christ, Beowulf's defeat over Grendel—that the population at large would fall into a collective *deep* depression. Holidays would regulate joy so that anyone who didn't feel joyful on those days would feel bad. Single people would be sad they were single. Married people would be sad they were married. Everyone would feel disappointment that their lives had fallen so far short of their expectations.

A small percentage of people, sensing the sadism in Sir Ethelbert's plan, did indeed pretend to be joyful at these appointed times; everyone else felt intimidated by this small group's excessive delight, and so never owned up to being miserable. And so, as time went on, the habit of celebrating holidays became more and more ingrained into society.

Eventually humorists like Robert Benchley wrote mildly amusing essays poking fun at the impossibility of enjoying holidays, but no one actually spoke up and attempted to abolish them.

And so, at this time, the Thanksgiving with the gravy having been such fun, Bette and Boo decide to celebrate the holiday of Christmas by visiting the Hudlocke's. *(Maybe a bit of Christmas music. Emily sits near Karl and Soot. Boo is off to one side, drinking something. Bette is off to another side, looking grim; she is also looking pregnant. Matt sits on floor near Emily or Soot.)*

EMILY. I think Christmas is becoming too commercial. We should never forget whose birthday we are celebrating.

SOOT. That's right. Whose birthday are we celebrating?

EMILY. Our Lord Saviour.

SOOT. Oh yes, of course. I thought she meant some relative.

EMILY. Jesus.

SOOT. It's so nice of you to visit us today, Emily. I don't think I've seen you since you were away at that... well, away.

EMILY. *(Laughs)* Skippy asked me to come along, but I'm enjoying it.

KARL. Soot, get Bore and me another drink.

BETTE. IF BOO HAS ANOTHER DRINK I AM GOING TO SCREAM AND SCREAM UNTIL THE WINDOWS BREAK! I WARN YOU! *(Pause)*

KARL. *(Looks at Bette.)* You're having another baby, woman?

BOO. I told you, Pop. Betsy has a lot of courage.

KARL. You trying to kill Betsy, Bore?

BETTE. I'm going to lie down in the other room. *(To Boo.)* Skippy will tell me if you have another drink. *(Exits.)*

KARL. You sound like quite a scout, Skip. Is Skip a scout, Bore?

BOO. What, Pop?

KARL. Is Skip a scout, Bore?

SOOT. I was a brownie. *(Re-enters Bette.)*

*Handwritten notes:*  
 CRIMINAL MINDS  
 SR DOWN LOWER  
 SCREAMING  
 SCREAMING  
 SCREAMING

BETTE. Boo upsets Skippy's stomach. (*Sits down.*) I'm not leaving the room. (*Pause.*)

SOOT. (*To Emily.*) My friend Lottie always comes out to visit at Christmas time . . .

KARL. Her friend Lottie looks like an onion.

SOOT. Karl always says she looks like an onion. (*Doing her best.*) But this year Lottie won't be out till after New Year's.

KARL. She may look like an onion, but she smells like a garbage disposal.

SOOT. Oh, Karl. Because this year Lottie slipped on her driveway and broke her hip because of all the ice.

KARL. And she tastes like a septic tank.

SOOT. So, when Lottie gets here she's going to have a cast on her \_\_\_\_ . . . Karl, where would they put the cast if you broke your hip?

KARL. Lottie doesn't have hips. She has pieces of raw whale skin wrapped around a septic tank in the middle.

SOOT. Karl doesn't like Lottie.

KARL. That's right.

SOOT. Karl thinks Lottie smells, but I think he's just kidding.

BETTE. HOW CAN YOU SMELL HER WITH ALCOHOL ON YOUR BREATH?

BOO. Oh God.

KARL. What did you say, woman?

BETTE. You're too drunk to smell anything.

BOO. Will you lay off all this drinking talk?

KARL. (*Holds up his drink.*) I think it's time your next stillborn was baptized, don't you, Soot?

SOOT. Karl . . . (*Karl pours his drink on Bette's lap. Bette has hysterics. Lights change.*)

SCENE 22—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Twenty years later, Boo has dinner with his son. (*Boo, Matt.*)

BOO. Well, how are things up at Dartmouth, Skip? People in the office ask me how my Ivy League son is doing.

MATT. It's all right.

BOO. Are there any pretty girls up there?

MATT. Uh huh.

BOO. So what are you learning up there?

MATT. Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a . . . I'm not up at Dartmouth anymore. I'm at Columbia in graduate school.

BOO. I know that. I meant Columbia. How is it?

MATT. Fine.

BOO. Why are you still going to school?

MATT. I don't know. What do you want me to do?

BOO. I don't know. Your mother and I got divorced, you know.

MATT. Yes, I know. We have discussed this, you know.

BOO. I don't understand why she wanted a divorce. I mean, we'd been separated for several years, why not just leave it at that?

MATT. She wants to feel independent, I guess.

BOO. I thought we might get back together. You know, I always found your mother very charming when she wasn't shouting. A man needs a woman, son. I think your old man's going to get teary for a second. Do you have any problems you want to talk over? (*Blinks his eyes.*) I'm just an old sootie. (*Matt steps out of the scene. Boo stays in place.*)

MATT. (*To audience.*) At about the same time, Bette also has dinner with her son. (*Bette, Matt.*)

BETTE. Hello, Skippy dear. I made steak for you, and mashed potatoes and peas and cake. How many days can you stay?

MATT. I have to get back tomorrow.

BETTE. Can't you stay longer?

MATT. I really have to get back.

BETTE. You never stay long. I don't have much company, you know. And Polly Lydstone's son goes to her house for dinner twice a week, and her daughter Mary gave up her apartment and lives at home. And Judith Rankle's son moved home after college and commutes forty minutes to work.

MATT. And some boy from Pingry School came home after class and shot both his parents. So what?

BETTE. There's no need to get nasty.

MATT. I just don't want to hear about Polly Lydstone and Judith Rankle.

BETTE. You're the only one of my children that lived. You should see me more often. (*Matt looks aghast.*)

MATT. That's not a fair thing to say.

Conversations!



BETTE. You're right. It's not fair of me to bring up the children that died; that's beside the point. I realize Boo and I must take responsibility for our own actions. Of course, the Church wasn't very helpful at the time, but nonetheless we had brains of our own, so there's no point in assigning blame. I must take responsibility for wanting children so badly that I foolishly kept trying over and over, hoping for miracles. Did you see the article in the paper, by the way, about how they've discovered a serum for people with the Rh problem that would have allowed me to have more babies if it had existed back then?

MATT. Yes I did. I wondered if you had read about that.

BETTE. Yes I did. It made me feel terribly sad for a little while; but then I thought, what's past is past. One has no choice but to accept facts. And I realized that you must live your own life, and I must live mine. My life may not have worked out as I wished, but still I feel a deep and inner serenity, and so you mustn't feel bad about me because I am totally happy and self-sufficient in my pretty sunlit apartment. And now I'm going to close my eyes, and I want you to go out into the world and live your life. Goodbye. God bless you. (*Closes her eyes.*)

MATT. (*To audience.*) I'm afraid I've made that conversation up totally. (*They start the scene over.*)

BETTE. Hello, Skippy, dear. I made steak for you, and mashed potatoes and peas and cake. You know, you're the only one of my children that lived. How long can you stay?

MATT. Gee, I don't know. Uh, a couple of days. Three years. Only ten minutes, my car's double parked. I could stay eight years if I can go away during the summer. Gee. I don't know. (*Lights change.*)

SCENE 23—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Back in chronology, shortly after the unpleasant Christmas with the Hudlocks, Bette brings Boo back to Father Donnelly. (*Exits. Bette, Boo, Father Donnelly. Bette in a foul temper.*)

BOO. (*Reading.*) I pledge in front of Father Donnelly to give up drinking in order to save my marriage and to make my wife and son happy, and this time I mean it.

BETTE. Read the other part.

BOO. (*Reading.*) And I promise to tell my father to go to hell.

FATHER DONNALLY. Oh, I didn't see that part.

BETTE. Now sign it. (*Boo signs it. Crossly, to Father Donnelly.*) Now bless us.

FATHER DONNALLY. Oh all right. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

BETTE. Now let's go home. (*Bette and Boo cross to another part of the stage; Father Donnelly exits.*) Now if you give up drinking for good this time, maybe God will let this next baby live, Boo.

BOO. Uh huh.

BETTE. And I'm going to go to Mass daily. And Emily is praying.

BOO. Uh huh.

BETTE. You're not very talkative, Boo.

BOO. I don't have anything to say.

BETTE. Well you should have something to say. Marriage is a fifty-fifty proposition.

BOO. Where do you pick up these sayings? On the back of matchpacks?

BETTE. Why are you being nasty? Have you had a drink already?

BOO. No I haven't had a drink already. I just find it very humiliating to be constantly dragged in front of that priest all the time so he can hear your complaints about me.

BETTE. You have an idiotic sense of pride. Do you think he cares what you do? And if you don't want people to know you drink, then you shouldn't drink.

BOO. You are obsessed with drinking. Were you frightened at an early age by a drunk? What is the matter with you?

BETTE. What is the matter with you?

BOO. What is the matter with you?

BETTE. What is the matter with you?

BOO. What is the matter with you? (*This argument strikes them both funny, and they laugh. Lights change.*)

SCENE 24—Matt addresses the audience.

MATT. Shortly after the second pledge, Bette and Skippy visit the Brennans to celebrate Joanie's birthday. Boo stays home,



drunk or sulking, it's not clear. (*Margaret, Paul, Bette, Emily, Joan and Matt. Joan looks pregnant; Bette also looks pregnant. Margaret comes downstage and addresses the audience.*)

MARGARET. All my children live home, it's so nice. Emily's here, back from the rest home. And Joanie's here because her marriage hasn't worked out and somebody has to watch all those children for her while she's working, poor thing. And Tom's here sometimes, when he gets fired or when his spastic colon is acting up really badly. Then he always goes off again, but I bet he ends up here for good eventually! (*Chuckles, plaint.*) The only one who hasn't moved back home is Betsy, because she's so stubborn, but maybe she'll end up here too someday. I just love having the children home, otherwise there'd be no one to talk to — unless I wanted to learn sign language with Paul. (*Laughs.*) Sometimes I'm afraid if I had to choose between having my children succeed in the world and live away from home, or having them fail and live home, that I'd choose the latter. But luckily, I haven't had to choose! (*Smiles, returns to the scene.*) Come on, everybody, let's celebrate Joanie's birthday, and don't anybody mention that she's pregnant with yet another baby.

BETTE. Every time I look at you, you're using nose spray.

JOAN. You just got here.

BETTE. But the last time I was here. You're going to give yourself a sinus infection.

JOAN. I already have a sinus infection.

MARGARET. The girls always fight. It's so cute. Now, girls.

BETTE. Well, you use too much nose spray. You might hurt the baby inside you.

JOAN. Let's drop the subject of babies, shall we?

BETTE. I can't imagine why you're pregnant again.

EMILY. Happy birthday, Joan! (*Everyone looks at her.*) I made the cake. I better go get it. (*Exits.*)

MARGARET. Where's Booy, Bette?

BETTE. He's home, drunk or sulking, Skippy and I can't decide which. Where's Nikkos, Joan?

JOAN. Under a truck, I hope.

BETTE. Well, you married him. Everyone told you not to.

MARGARET. Let's change the subject. How are you doing in school, Skippy?

MATT. (*Glum.*) Fine.

38

MARGARET. Isn't that nice?

BETTE. Skippy always gets A's. Is little Mary Frances still getting F's? Maybe if you were home more, she'd do better.

JOAN. I can't afford to be home more. I don't have a life of leisure like you do. (*Exits Emily with the cake.*)

EMILY. Happy birthday, Joan.

BETTE. Hush, Emily. If I had several children, I'd make time to spend with them.

JOAN. You have a home and a husband, and I don't have either.

BETTE. Well it's your own fault.

EMILY. Please don't argue, Bette.

BETTE. Why do you say "Bette"? Why not "Joanie"? She's the one arguing.

EMILY. Don't anybody argue.

MARGARET. Don't excite yourself, Emily.

JOAN. You see what your talking has done? You're going to give Emily another breakdown.

EMILY. That's sweet of you to worry, Joanie, but I'm all right.

BETTE. (*To Joan.*) You're just a neurotic mess. You're going to ruin your children.

JOAN. Well it's lucky you only have one to ruin, or else the mental ward wouldn't just have Emily in it. (*Emily has an asthma attack.*)

MARGARET. This cake looks very nice, Emily. Why don't we all have some. I bet Skippy would like a piece. (*Margaret cuts the cake and passes it around.*)

EMILY. We forgot to have Joanie blow out the candles.

JOAN. There aren't any candles on the cake.

EMILY. Oh, I forgot them. I'm sorry, Joanie.

JOAN. Why should I have candles? I don't have anything else.

MARGARET. Poor Joanie.

BETTE. The dough's wet. Don't eat it, Skippy, it'll make you sick.

EMILY. It isn't cooked right?

BETTE. It's wet, it's wet. You didn't cook it enough.

JOAN. I don't like cake anyway.

MARGARET. Poor Joanie.

BETTE. Everything's always poor Joanie. But her baby's going to live.

39

EMILY. Oh, Bette.  
 JOAN. Well maybe we'll both have a miracle. Maybe yours'll live and mine'll die.  
 EMILY. Oh, Joanie.  
 BETTE. Stop saying that, Emily.  
 MARGARET. Girls, girls. This isn't conversation for the living room. Or for young ears.  
 PAUL. (Choking on cake.) #%#%#%GHGHR#%#%#%\*\*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*#@#\*\*\*\*\*  
 MARGARET. Paul, stop it. Stop it. (Paul falls over dead. Lights change.)

SCENE 25—Matt puts a sheet over Paul and addresses the audience.

MATT. The funeral of Paul Brennan. (Paul in a chair with a sheet over him. Present are Matt, Bette, Boo, Margaret, Emily, Joan.)  
 MARGARET. Paul was a fine husband. Goodbye, Paul. (Tears.)  
 BETTE. Boo, thank you for being sober today. (Kisses him.) Look how happy it makes Skippy.  
 BOO. Skippy's drunk.  
 BETTE. That's not funny. (Enter Father Donnelly.)  
 FATHER DONNALLY. Dearly bereaved, Paul Brennan was a fine man, and now he's dead. I didn't know Paul very well, but I imagine he was a very nice man and everyone spoke well of him. Though he wasn't too able to speak well of them. (Laughs; everyone looks faintly appalled.)  
 It's going to be hard not to miss him, but God put his children on this earth to adapt to circumstances, to do His will.  
 I was reminded of this fact the other morning, when I saw my colored garbage man collecting the refuse as I was on my way to say Mass. "Good morning, Father," he said, "Nice day." "And what's your name?" I said. "Perceval Pretty, Father," he said. I smiled a little more and then I said, "And how are you—Perceval?" And he said, "I'm doing the will of God, Father. God saw fit to take my little Buttermilk to Him, and now I'm emptying the garbage." "And who is little Buttermilk?" I said, and he said, "Why, Buttermilk was my daughter who broke her neck playing on the swings." And then he smiled. Colored folk have funny

expect an answer out of every question! Physically stop!

my action!

ideas for names. I knew one colored woman who named her daughter "January 22nd." It wasn't easy to forget her birthday! (Everyone looks appalled again.)

But I think Percival Pretty's smile is a lesson for us all, and so now when I think of Paul Brennan, I'm going to smile. (Smiles.) And then nothing can touch you. (Shakes hands with Margaret.) Be strong, dear.

EMILY. Thank you, Father, for your talk.

JOAN. (To Paul's dead body.) I've turned against Greeks after Nikkos. You were right, Dad, you were right!

MARGARET. Thank you, Joanie. That was a nice gesture.

FATHER DONNALLY. Hello, Bette. Hello, Boo. You're putting on weight, Bette.

BETTE. It's nothing. (Sadly.) I mean, it will be nothing. (Lights change.)

hee!!

different #4 attitude  
 as before  
 fine  
 investigate situation

(Dress, gloves, purse, jewelry, hat)  
 SCENE 26—Matt addresses the audience

MATT. Bette goes to the hospital for the fourth time, et cetera, et cetera. (Exits Karl, Soot, Boo in their hospital "waiting" positions.)

BOO. Pop. Eventually there's menopause, right? I mean, something happens, and then it stops, and . . .

KARL. Where are the Brennans? Have they lost the playing spirit?

BOO. Bette wasn't that way when I married her, was she?  
 SOOT. Karl, is there still a space between my eyes?

KARL. What did you say, Soot?  
 SOOT. Nothing. I'll wait till I get home. (Smiles, feels between her eyebrows.) Lottie always said when your eyebrows start to kiss, you better watch it.

KARL. Your mother's eyebrows are kissing. Bore.  
 SOOT. You make everything sound so dirty, Karl. I wish I hadn't said that.

KARL. You want to hear a dirty story? Bore, are you listening? Once there was a travelling salesman, Soot, who met a girl in a barn who was more stupid than you.

SOOT. I don't know this one.  
 KARL. The girl was an albino, Bore, you listening. She was an albino humpback with a harelip.

BOO. I'm going to get a drink. (Exits.)

Laugh

albino humpback born dicker  
 trigger words!

KARL. And this albino humpback saw the travelling salesman with his dickey hanging out.

SOOT. Karl, I have heard this one.

KARL. And she saw his dickey, and she said, "What's that?" and he said, "That's my dickey."

SOOT. Karl, you told this story to Lottie, and she didn't like it.

KARL. And she said, "Why does it swing around like that?" and he said . . . Soot, what's the end of the story?

SOOT. Karl, I never listen to your stories. *he caught me!*

KARL. WHAT'S THE ANSWER TO THE JOKE?

SOOT. (Cries.) Karl, I don't know. Something about a dickey. Maybe Bore knows. Booe? I have to go home and take a bath.

I feel awful. *(Enter the doctor. He drops the baby on the floor, exits. Karl and Soot stare at it a moment.)* Catholics can't use birth control, can they? *(Laughs.)* That's a joke on someone. *(Enter Boo.)*

KARL. You missed it, Boo. *see don't know answer now?*

BOO. Did it live?

KARL. Not unless they redefined the term.

SOOT. Don't tease Booe, Karl. Let's distract him, see if he remembers the joke.

KARL. You tell it, Soot.

SOOT. No, I don't like the joke. I just thought maybe he'd remember it.

BOO. It didn't live.

KARL. Tell the joke, Soot.

BOO. Pop, I don't feel like hearing a joke.

SOOT. Poor Booe.

BOO. I should probably see Bette, but I don't think I can face her.

SOOT. Why don't you go get a drink, Booe, you look awful. I've got to go home and check my forehead. *try to get out?*

KARL. Tell the damn joke, Soot.

BOO. Pop, I don't want to hear a joke.

SOOT. It's all right, Booe. I'll tell it. Your father seems obsessed with it.

KARL. *(Rubs his cigar in her mouth.)* Here, you'll need this.

SOOT. Oh, Karl. *(Laughs.)* All right, Booe, you ready?

BOO. I don't want to hear a joke.

KARL. You'll like it, Bore.

SOOT. Now, Booe . . . *(Boo starts to exit; they follow.)* . . . it

*So Karl is saying something about a dicky*

*So Karl is saying something about a dicky*

*Chick 155*

*Always clear up the dicky but the word. I choose to tell it & this way. pre-centage clean words*

*Soot Baby!*

seems there was this poor unfortunate, stupid crippled girl, and she met this salesman . . .

BOO. Will you two shut up? I don't want to hear a joke. *(Exits.)*

SOOT. He doesn't want to hear the joke.

KARL. You told it wrong, Soot.

SOOT. I'm sorry, Karl. I'm really not myself today. *(Touches between her eyes.)* I'm sorry, Booe. Booe! *(They exit.)*

SCENE 27 - Bette, playing rope or some such thing.

BETTE.

What is the matter with Mary Jane? It isn't a cramp, and it isn't a pain, And lovely rice pudding's for dinner again, What is the matter with Mary Jane?

Christopher Robin had measles and sneezles, They bundled him into his bed. *(Karl, looks at imaginary gravesites; then to audience, sadly.)*

The names of the children are: Patrick Michael, February twenty-sixth; Christopher Tigger, March eighth; and Pooh Bear Eeyore, March twenty-fifth. Bonnie Wilson and I were, were . . . *(Calls.)* Father Donnally! Father Donnally . . . *(Father Donnally enters into Bette's space.)* Father Donnally, can you help me?

FATHER DONNALLY. I'll try. What's on your mind, Bette? BETTE. I know sometimes one can misunderstand the will of God. But sex is for having babies, right? I mean, it's not just for marriage. Well, even if it is somewhat, I feel that I should be a mother, and I think it would be a sin for me not to try again. But I don't think Boo wants me to get pregnant again.

FATHER DONNALLY. Have you tried the rhythm method? BETTE. But I want to get pregnant.

FATHER DONNALLY. What does your doctor say? BETTE. The problem is that all the babies die. I don't see why I have to go through all this suffering. And Boo never helps me.

FATHER DONNALLY. I give a retreat for young married couples every year in the parish. Why don't you and your husband come to that? I'm sure it will help you if you're having trouble on the marriage couch.

BETTE. All right, I'll bring Booe to the retreat. Thank you, Father.

*Inventor just laughs @ Karl's words. He can't win now!*



FATHER DONNALLY. You're welcome, Bette. (*Father Donnelly exits.*)

BETTE. (*Crosses away; calls out.*) Boo. Boo. Booley. Booley. Booley. (*Enter Boo.*)

BOO. What?

BETTE. Booley, I'm pregnant again. Do you think I'm going to die? (*Lights change.*)

EN DSR  
DICK UP LAKE  
CALLUM  
CUNY/MD  
ST  
DUMAS  
J. P. ...  
Y. ...  
T. ...

SCENE 28 - *The retreat.* Present are Bette, Boo, Matt; also Margaret, Emily, Joan, the dead Paul (*with sheet still over him*), Karl, Soot. Enter Father Donnelly.

FATHER DONNALLY. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. Good evening, young marrieds. (*Looks about himself for a moment.*) Am I in the right room?

EMILY. I'm not married, Father. I hope you don't mind that I'm here.

FATHER DONNALLY. On the contrary, I'm delighted. I'm not married either. (*Laughs.*) The theme of marriage in the Catholic Church and in this retreat is centered around the story of Christ and the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus Christ blessed the young wedding couple at Cana, and when they ran out of expensive wine, He performed His first miracle - He took vats of water and He changed the water into wine. (*Holds up a glass.*) I have some wine right here. (*Sips it.*)

BOO. (*To Bette*) He drinks. Why don't you try to get him to stop drinking?

BETTE. Be quiet, Boo.

FATHER DONNALLY. (*Laughs, nervously.*) Please don't talk when I'm talking. (*Starts his speech.*) Young marrieds have many problems to get used to. For some of them this is the first person of the opposite sex the other has ever known. The husband may not be used to having a woman in his bathroom. The wife may not be used to a strong masculine odor in her boudoir. Or then the wife may not cook well enough. How many marriages have floundered on the rocks of ill-cooked hazon? (*Pause.*) I used to amuse friends by imitating bacon in a saucepan. Would anyone like to see that? (*He looks around. Joan, Karl, and Soot raise their hands. After a moment, Emily, rather confused, raises her hand also. Father Donnelly falls to the ground and does a fairly good - or if not good,*

at least unabashedly peralior - imitation of bacon, making sizzling noises and contorting his body to represent becoming crisp. Toward the end, he makes spattering noises into the air. Then he stands up again. All present applaud with varying degrees of approval or incredulity.) I also do coffee percolating. (*He does this.*) Pt. Pt. Ptpptptptptptptpt. Bacon's better. But things like coffee and bacon are important in a marriage, because they represent things that the wife does to make her husband happy. Or fat. (*Laughs.*) The wife cooks the bacon, and the husband brings home the bacon. This is how St. Paul saw marriage, although they probably didn't really eat pork back then, the curing process was not very well worked out in Christ's time, which is why so many of them followed the Jewish dietary laws even though they were Christians. I know I'm glad to be living now when we have cured pork and plumbing and showers rather than back when Christ lived. Many priests say they wish they had lived in Christ's time so they could have met Him; that would, of course, have been very nice, but I'm glad I live now and that I have a shower. (*Emily bothered by what he's just said, raises her hand.*) I'm not ready for questions yet, Emily. (*Emily lowers her hand; he tips his wine.*) Man and wife, as St. Paul saw it. Now the woman should obey her husband, but that's not considered a very modern thought, so I don't even want to talk about it. All right, don't obey your husbands, but if chaos follows, don't blame me. The tower of Babel as an image of chaos has always fascinated me - (*Emily raises her hand.*)

BETTE. Put your hand down, Emily. (*Emily does.*)

FATHER DONNALLY. (*To Bette.*) Thank you. Now I don't mean to get off the point. The point is husband and wife, man and woman, Adam and rib. I don't want to dwell on the inequality of the sexes because these vary from couple to couple - sometimes the man is stupid, sometimes the woman is stupid, sometimes both are stupid. The point is man and wife are joined in holy matrimony to complete each other, to populate the earth and to glorify God. That's what it's for. That's what life is for. If you're not a priest or a nun, you normally get married. (*Emily raises her hand.*) Yes, I know, you're not married, Emily. Not everyone gets married. But my comments today are geared toward the married people here. (*Emily takes down her hand.*) Man and wife are helpmates. She helps him, he helps her. In sickness

and in health. Anna Karenina should not have left her husband, nor should she have jumped in front of a train. Marriage is not a step to be taken lightly. The Church does not recognize divorce; it does permit it, if you insist for legal purposes, but in the eyes of the Church you are still married and you can never be unmarried, and that's why you can never remarry after a divorce because that would be bigamy and that's a sin and illegal as well. *(Breathes.)* So, for God's sake, if you're going to get married, pay attention to what you're doing, have conversations with the person, figure out if you really want to live with that person for years and years and years, because you can't change it. Priests have it easier. If I don't like my pastor, I can apply for a transfer. If I don't like a housekeeper, I can get her fired. *(Looks disgruntled.)* But a husband and wife are stuck together. So know what you're doing when you get married. I get so nit of these people coming to me after they're married, and they've just gotten to know one another after the ceremony, and they've discovered they have nothing in common and they hate one another. And they want me to come up with a solution. *(Throws up his hands.)* What can I do? There is no solution to a problem like that. I can't help them! It puts me in a terrible position. I can't say get a divorce, that's against God's law. I can't say go get some on the side, that's against God's law. I can't say just pretend you're happy and maybe after a while you won't know the difference because, though that's not against God's law, not that many people know how to do that, and if I suggested it to people, they'd write to the Bishop complaining about me and then he'd transfer me to some godforsaken place in Latin America without a shower, and all because these people don't know what they're doing when they get married. *(Shakes his head.)* So I mumble platitudes to these people who come to me with these insoluble problems, and I think to myself, "Why didn't they think before they got married? Why does no one ever think? Why did God make people stupid?" *(Pause.)* Are there any questions? *(Bette raises her hand, as does Emily. Father acknowledges Bette.)*  
BETTE. Father, if I have a little girl rather than a boy, do you think it might live? Should I pray for this?  
FATHER DONNALLY. You mean . . . a little girl to clean house?  
BETTE. *(Imitated.)* No. I don't mean a little girl to clean house.

I mean that the doctors say that sometimes a little girl baby fights infection better than a little boy baby, and that maybe if I have a little girl baby, the fighting between the Rh positive blood in her body and the Rh negative blood in my body would not destroy her, and she might live. *(Pause.)* Should I pray for this?  
FATHER DONNALLY. By all means, pray for it. Just don't get your hopes up too high though, maybe God doesn't want you to have any more babies. It certainly doesn't sound like it to me.

BETTE. But I can pray?

FATHER DONNALLY. Yes. You can. No one can stop you.

BETTE. That's what I thought. *(Emily raises her hand.)*

FATHER DONNALLY. *(Demanding whatever she's going to say.)* Yes, Emily?

EMILY. Do you think maybe it's my fault that all of Bette's babies die? Because I left the convent?

FATHER DONNALLY. Yes, I do. *(Laughs.)*

EMILY. *(Stitches.)* Oh my God.

FATHER DONNALLY. I'm sorry, Emily, I was just kidding.

Are there any questions about newly married couples? *(Pause; no one stirs.)* Well I don't have time for any more questions anyway. We'll take a short break for refreshments, and then Father McNulty will talk to you about sexual problems which I'm not very good at, and then you can all go home. Thank you for your attention. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. *(Starts to exit.)*

EMILY. Father . . .

FATHER DONNALLY. I was just kidding, Emily, I am sorry.

Excuse me, I have to go to the bathroom. *(Exits in a hurry.)*

JOAN. You know, he makes a better piece of bacon than he does a priest.

EMILY. I don't think he should joke about something like that.

MARGARET. He's a priest, Emily.

EMILY. I know you're right, Mum, but everyone should want to meet Our Saviour, that's more important than having a shower . . .

MARGARET. Don't talk anymore, Emily.

BETTE. Did that make you feel better, Boo? Are you going to be easier to live with?

BOO. *(Sarcasm.)* Yes, it's all better now.

1. Father's talk  
2. Bette's question  
3. try to  
4. answer  
5. them

BETTE. Why won't you let anyone help us?  
BOO. What help? He just said that we shouldn't get married, and that if we did, not to bother him with our problems.  
BETTE. That's not what he said at all.  
MARGARET. Bette, don't talk anymore. Hello, Mrs. Hudlocke. Did you enjoy the talk?  
SOOT. I'm sorry, what?  
MARGARET. Did you enjoy Father's talk?  
SOOT. You know, I can't hear you. I think I'm going deaf. God, I hope so.  
MARGARET. What do you mean?  
SOOT. I'm sorry, I really can't hear you. (Laughs.) I haven't been able to hear Karl for about three days. (Laughs.) It's wonderful.

6. Pretend  
7. Margaret  
8. says  
9. this

BETTE. You should see an ear specialist.  
SOOT. What?  
BETTE. Oh, never mind.  
EMILY. Mom, don't you think . . .  
MARGARET. Emily, I said not to talk.  
BETTE. Well if you don't want us to talk, what do you want us to do?  
MARGARET. Don't be cranky, Betsy. We'll just all wait for Father McNulty. Maybe he'll have something useful to say. (They all wait. Soot smiles.)

10. Keep  
11. Jack  
12. out of  
13. Bette  
14. Think  
15. so  
16. like  
17. my  
18. car  
19. inn?

3

20. something  
21. to  
22. say  
23. to  
24. the  
25. audience

SOOT. (To audience.) Little blessings. (Laughs. Lights change.)

SCENE 29—Matt addresses the audience. Bette, Boo and the Of  
and Paul stay onstage.

26. can't  
27. hear  
28. and  
29. we  
30. just  
31. US  
32. R  
33. down  
34. 5 to 13

MATT. Twenty years later, or perhaps only fifteen, Bette files for a divorce from Boo. They have been separated for several years, since shortly after the death of the final child; and at the suggestion of a therapist Bette has been seeing, Bette decides to make the separation legal in order to formalize the breakup psychologically, and also to get better, and more regular, support payments. Boo, for some reason, decides to contest the divorce; and so there has to be testimony. Margaret and Joanie decide that Catholics can't testify in divorce cases, even though Bette had eventually testified in Joanie's divorce; and so they refuse to

testify, frightening Emily into agreeing with them also. Blah blah blah, et cetera. So in lieu of other witnesses, I find myself sort of having to testify against Boo during my sophomore year at college. I am trying to work on a paper on Thomas Hardy, but find it difficult to concentrate. I fly home for the divorce proceedings. My mother's lawyer reminds me of my grandfather Paul. (Bette and Boo on opposite sides. Matt, c., testifies, questioned by Paul who comes to life with no to-do. He still speaks in Paul's incoherent speech, but otherwise is quite laconic.)

PAUL. Ehl ee att, oo# oo# ing orr agh#er uz acgh acgha@@lehc? [Tell me, Matt, do you think your father was an alcoholic?]  
MATT. What?  
PAUL. (Irritated he can't be understood, as Paul used to be.) Oo# oo# ing, orr agh#er uz acgh acgha@@lehc? [Do you think your father was an alcoholic?]  
MATT. Yes, I do feel he drank a fair amount.  
PAUL. Uht us ee acgh acgha@@lehc? [But was he an alcoholic?]  
MATT. I'm really not in the position to say if anyone is actually an alcoholic or not.

BETTE. I have a calendar here from the twelve years of our marriage. Everytime it says HD, that stands for half-drunk. And everytime it says DD, that stands for dead drunk. I offer this as Exhibit A.

PAUL. (Telling her it's not her turn.) Eeez own awk enn oo aht ain uh am. [Please don't talk when you're not on the stand.]  
BETTE. What?

BOO. I was never dead drunk. She has this thing about drunks.  
MATT. (To Bette.) He said you shouldn't talk when you're not on the stand.

BETTE. I didn't.  
PAUL. (To Bette.) Ssssh. (Long question to Matt.) Ehl ee att, ihd oo# ebeh ee or ah#er ah eh#y ohazsn, it or uher? [Tell me, Matt, did you ever see your father, on any occasion, hit your mother?]

MATT. Yes. Hardy wrote *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1891.  
PAUL. (Irritated.) As ot ut uh ass. [That's not what I asked.]  
MATT. Oh, I'm sorry. I misheard the question.  
PAUL. Ihd ee itt ee? [Did he hit her?] (Makes sitting motion.)



MATT. Yes I did see him hit her.  
 PAUL. Ah!  
 MATT. Of course, she hit him too. They both hit each other. Especially when they were driving. It was fairly harrowing from the back seat.  
 BETTE. He started it.  
 BOO. She'd talk and talk like it was a sickness. There was no way of shutting her up.  
 MATT. Well I would have appreciated your not arguing when you were driving a car.  
 PAUL. (*To Bette and Boo.*) Ee i###e! [Be quiet!]  
 MATT. Or at least left me home.  
 PAUL. Shhh! (*Back to questioning Matt.*) Ehl ee att, oo oof ih or ohn lhahf eber agh uh ink? [Tell me, Matt, do you in your own life ever have a drink?]  
 MATT. No I don't know any happily married couples. Certainly not relatives.  
 PAUL. (*Irritated.*) As ott ut uh ass. [That's not what I asked.]  
 MATT. Oh, I'm sorry. I thought that's what you asked.  
 PAUL. Oo oof ih or ohn lhahf eber agh uh ink? [Do you in your own life ever have a drink?]  
 MATT. No, my paper is on whether Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* is neurotic or psychotic, and how she compares to Emily. That isn't what you asked either, is it? I'm sorry. What?  
 PAUL. Oo oof ink? [Do you drink?]  
 MATT. Ink?  
 PAUL. (*Gesturing as if drinking.*) Ink! Ink!  
 MATT. No I don't drink actually.  
 PAUL. Ehl ee att, urr oo uhaagee ehv or errens epyrateted? [Tell me, Matt, were you unhappy when your parents separated?] (*Matt is at a loss. Paul must repeat the word "separated" several times, with hand gestures, before Matt understands.*)  
 MATT. No I was glad when they separated. The arguing got on my nerves a lot. (*Pause.*) I'd hear it in my ear even when they weren't talking. When I was a child, anyway.  
 PAUL. Ehl ee att, oo oof ink or aher uz uh goob aher? [Tell me, Matt, do you think your father was a good father?]  
 MATT. Yes I am against the war in Vietnam. I'm sorry, is that what you asked?

50

PAUL. Doo oof ink ee uz a gooch ahzer? [Do you think he was a good father?]  
 MATT. Oh. Yes. I guess he's been a good father. (*Looks embarrassed.*)  
 PAUL. (*Pointing at Boo, pushing for more point.*) Buh dyoo oof ink ee ad ohme or uh inking bahblim? [But do you think he had some sort of drinking problem?] (*Makes drinking gesture.*)  
 MATT. Yes, I guess he probably does have some sort of drinking problem. (*Beaming awkwardly.*) I mean it became such an issue it seems suspicious to me that he didn't just stop, he kept saying there was no . . . (*Pulls back.*) well, it was odd he didn't stop. It's really not my place to be saying this. I would prefer I wasn't here. (*Pause. Matt is uncomfortable, has been uncomfortable relating to Boo for the whole scene.*)  
 PAUL. Orr ehcoooz, att. [You're excused, Matt.]  
 MATT. What?  
 BETTE. He said you were excused.  
 MATT. Oh good. (*Paul exits, or goes back awkwardly.*)  
 BETTE. Thank you, Skippy. (*Kisses him.*)  
 BOO. Well, son. Have a good time back at school.  
 MATT. Thank you. I'm behind in this paper I'm doing. (*Pause.*) I have to get the plane.  
 BOO. Well, have a good trip. (*Looks embarrassed, exits.*)  
 MATT. Thank you. (*Bette also exits. Matt addresses the audience.*) Eustacia Vye is definitely neurotic. Whether she is psychotic as well is . . . In *Return of the Native*, Hardy is dealing with some of the emotional, as well as physical, dangers in the . . . One has to be very careful in order to protect oneself from the physical and emotional dangers in the world. One must always be careful crossing streets in traffic. One should try not to live anywhere near a nuclear power plant. One should never walk past a building that may have a sniper on top of it. In the summer one should be on the alert against bees and wasps.  
 As to emotional dangers, one should always try to avoid crazy people, especially in marriage or live-in situations, but in everyday life as well. Although crazy people often mean well, meaning well is not enough. On some level Attila the Hun may have meant well.  
 Sometimes it is hard to decide if a person is crazy, like Eustacia

51

Vye in *The Return of the Native*, which is the topic of this paper. Some people may seem sane at first, and then at some later point turn out to be totally crazy. If you are at dinner with someone who suddenly seems insane, make up some excuse why you must leave dinner immediately. If they don't know you well, you can say you're a doctor and pretend that you just heard your beeper. If the crazy person should call you later, either to express anger at your abrupt leave-taking or to ask for medical advice, claim the connection is bad and hang up. If they call back, I'm afraid you'll have to have your phone number changed again. When you call the phone company to arrange this, if the person on the line seems stupid, hostile or crazy, simply hang up and call the phone company back again. This may be done as many times as necessary until you get someone sane. As the phone company has many employees. (*Breathes.*) It is difficult to totally protect oneself, of course, and there are many precautions that one thinks of only when it's too late. But, as Virginia Woolf pointed out in *To the Lighthouse*, admittedly in a different context, the attempt is all.

Some time after the divorce, five years or fifteen or something, Skippy has dinner with Karl and Soot and Margaret and Paul. Karl is near 80, Margaret is senile, and Paul and Soot are dead.

DSR  
 Get small piles Go sit in chair: He can talk  
 Ew Sk w/ Karl  
 SCENE 30 - Matt sits at a table with all four. Paul and Soot have their heads on the table, dead. Karl seems fairly normal and himself; Margaret is distracted and vague.

MATT. Hello. Nice to see you all.  
 MARGARET. Emily! Huh-huh-huh. Tom! Nurse! Huh-huh-huh. (*Note: the "huh-huh-huh" sound is not like laughter, but is a nervous tic, said softly and rather continuously throughout the scene. Technically speaking, it's like a mild vocal exercise using the diaphragm, like an ongoing cough reflex with no real cough behind it. A tic.*)  
 KARL. You're Skip, aren't you?  
 MATT. Yes. You remember me?  
 KARL. Yes I remember you.  
 MARGARET. Doctor. Mama. Huh-huh-huh. Huh-huh-huh.  
 KARL. (*To Margaret.*) Shut up.  
 MATT. (*To Karl, with seriousness.*) What do you think I should

do with my life?  
 KARL. Well, don't marry Soot.  
 MATT. Yes, but you know—  
 MARGARET. Emily! Huh-huh-huh.  
 MATT. Everyone I know is divorced except for you and Soot, and Margaret and Paul. Of course, Soot and Paul are dead, but you all stayed married right up until death. And I wondered what mistakes you thought I could avoid based on all your experience.  
 KARL. Don't expect much, that's for starters. Look at Bette and Bore. She kept trying to change Bore. That's idiotic. Don't try to change anybody. If you don't like them, be mean to them if you want; try to get them committed if that amuses you, but don't ever expect to change them. (*Matt considers this.*)  
 MATT. Do you agree with that, grandma?  
 MARGARET. (*Seeing Matt for the first time, leaning over to him.*) Go to the baperdy sun ride zone a bat.  
 MATT. Baperdy?  
 MARGARET. Lamin fortis trexin home. Emily!  
 KARL. It's too bad Paul's not still alive. It would be interesting to hear them talk together now. (*Matt laughs at this.*)  
 MATT. Grandma, try to be lucid. I think Karl's advice makes sense, sort of, if you're in a bad marriage. But what if you're not in a bad marriage?  
 MARGARET. When the bob?  
 MATT. I said, do you agree with Karl? Or do you see something more optimistic?  
 MARGARET. I want Emily to clean the mirrors with milk of magnesia. I see people in the mirrors and they don't go away.  
 KARL. At least that's a complete sentence.  
 MATT. Emily's not here right now.  
 MARGARET. Everyone's so late. Dabble morning hunting back, Emily. Huh-huh-huh.  
 MATT. (*Goes up on Margaret, back to Karl.*) You know, I didn't know you and Soot back when you were young, or Margaret and Paul either, for that matter. Maybe your marriages were happy. I have no way of knowing.  
 KARL. I never expected much from life. I wanted to get my way in everything, and that's about all. What did you ask?  
 MARGARET. Huh-huh-huh. Jean. Emily.



MATT. Why did you marry Soot?  
KARL. No reason. She was much prettier when she was younger.  
MATT. But surely you didn't marry her because she was pretty.  
KARL. Don't tell me what I did.  
MATT. And why did everyone call her Soot? How did she get the name Soot?  
KARL. I don't remember. Was her name Soot? I thought it was something else.  
MATT. I think her name was Soot. Do you think I misheard it all these years?  
KARL. I couldn't say.  
MATT. Why were you so mean to Soot?  
KARL. Why do you want to know?  
MATT. Because I see all of you do the same thing over and over, for years and years, and you never change. And my fear is that I can see all of you but not see myself, and maybe I'm doing something similar, but I just can't see it. What I mean to say is: did you all intend to live your lives the way you did?  
KARL. Go away. I don't like talking to you. You're an irritating young man. *(Matt leaves the scene. Karl, Margaret, Soot and Paul exit or fade into darkness.)*

EX DSR FLAT

SCENE 31.

MATT. *(Trying to find his place. To audience.)* Back into chronology again. Bette had the first baby, that is, the first dead baby, in 1951 or something. And then the second one in 1953 or 4 or something, and then . . . *(Enter Emily.)*  
EMILY. Hello, Skippy, dear. How does this sound to you? *(Reads from a note.)* "Please forgive my annoying qualities. I know that I talk too much about a thing and that I make people nervous that I do so. I am praying that I improve that fault and beg that you be patient with me."  
MATT. Who is that to, Emily?  
EMILY. I don't know. Who do you think it should be to?  
MATT. I don't know. It would be up to you.  
EMILY. Do you think it's all right?

54

MATT. I don't think you should be so hard on yourself, but otherwise I think it's fine.

EMILY. Oh, thank you. *(Exit.)*

MATT. Okay. Just as dreams must be analyzed, so must the endless details of waking life be considered.

Having intelligence allows one to analyze problems and to make sense of one's life. This is difficult to achieve but with perseverance and persistence it is possible not even to get out of bed in the morning. To sleep. To sleep, perchance to dream, to take the phone off the hook and simply be unreachable. This is less dramatic than suicide, but more reversible.

I can't make sense out of these things anymore. Um, Bette goes to the hospital for the third time, and there's the second dead baby, and then the fourth time, and the third dead baby, and then some time after Father Donnally's marriage retreat, Bette goes to the hospital for the fifth time. The last child of Bette and Boo.

SCENE 32.—Enter Boo. He and Matt are in their "waiting" positions, back in the hospital.

BOO. You don't have to wait here, Skip, if you don't want.

MATT. It's all right.

BOO. Who knows, maybe it will live. The doctors say if it's a girl, girls sometimes fight harder for life. Or something. *(Pause.)* You doing well in school?

MATT. Uh huh. *(The doctor throws the baby, in a pink blanket, in from offstage.)*

DOCTOR. *(Offstage.)* It was a girl.

BOO. You have any problems you want to talk over, son? Your old man could help you out.

MATT. I'll be outside a minute. *(Exit. Enter Bette.)*

BOO. Bette, let's not have any more. *(Mournfully.)* I've had enough babies. They get you up in the middle of the night, dead. They dirty their cribs, dead. They need constant attention, dead. No more babies.

BETTE. I don't love you anymore, Boo.

BOO. What?

55

BETTE. Why do you say what? Can't you hear?  
BOO. Why do they never have a bar in this hospital? Maybe there's one on another floor.  
BETTE. I'm tired of feeling alone talking to you.  
BOO. Maybe I'll take the elevator to another floor and check.  
BETTE. They don't have bars in hospitals, Boo.  
BOO. I think I'll walk down. See you later. *(Exits.)*  
BETTE. I feel alone, Boo. Skippy, are you there? Skippy?  
*(Enter Matt.)*  
MATT. Yes.  
BETTE. Would you move this for me? *(She indicates dead baby on floor. He gingerly places it offstage.)* Your father's gone away. All the babies are dead. You're the only thing of value left in my life, Skippy.  
MATT. *(With growing anger.)* Why do you call me Skippy? Why don't you call me Matt?  
BETTE. It's my favorite movie.  
MATT. My favorite movie is *Citizen Kane*. I don't call you *Citizen Kane*.  
BETTE. Why are you being fresh?  
MATT. I don't know.  
BETTE. I don't want to put any pressure on you, Skippy dear, but you're the only reason I have left for living now.  
MATT. Ah.  
BETTE. You're so unresponsive.  
MATT. I'm sorry. I don't know what to say.  
BETTE. You're a typical Capricorn, cold and un giving. I'm an Aries, we like fun, we do three things at once. We make life decisions by writing our options on little pieces of paper and then throwing them up in the air and going "Wheeee!" Wee wee wee, all the way home. I should have had more babies, I'm very good with babies. Babies give to you, then they grow up and they don't give. If I'd had more, I wouldn't mind as much. I don't mean to be critical, it's just that I'm so very . . . *(Looks sad, shakes her head.)* I need to go to bed. Come and read to me from A.A. Milne until I fall asleep, would you?  
MATT. All right. *(Bette starts to leave.)*  
BETTE. *(Suddenly tearful.)* I don't want to call you Matt.  
MATT. That's all right. It's fine. I'll be in to read to you in a minute, okay?

56

BETTE. Okay. *(Bette exits.)*  
MATT. So I read her to sleep from *The House at Pook Corner*. And then I entered high school, and then I went to college, and then they got divorced, and then I went to graduate school. I stopped studying Thomas Hardy for a while and tried Joseph Conrad. Oh the horror, the horror. I'm afraid what happened next will sound rather exaggerated, but after she divorced Boo, Bette felt very lonely and unhappy for several years, and then she married another alcoholic, and then after two years that broke up, and then she got cancer. By this time I'm thirty, and I visit her once more in the hospital.

SCENE 33—Emily pushes Bette on in a wheelchair. Bette doesn't look well.

EMILY. Doesn't Bette look well today?  
MATT. Very well.  
EMILY. Let's join hands. *(Holds Matt and Bette's hands.)* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. Heavenly Father, please lift this sickness from our beloved Bette. We place ourselves in Your hands. Amen. *(To Bette.)* Do you feel any better?  
BETTE. The pain is a little duller.  
EMILY. Well maybe I better go to the hospital chapel and pray some more.  
BETTE. That would be nice, Emily. Thank you. *(Emily exits.)* I've spent a lot of time in hospitals.  
MATT. Yes.  
BETTE. I sometimes wonder if God is punishing me for making a second marriage outside the Church. But Father Ehrhart says that God forgives me, and besides the second marriage is over now anyway.  
MATT. I don't think God punishes people for specific things.  
BETTE. That's good.  
MATT. I think He punishes people in general, for no reason.  
BETTE. *(Laughs.)* You always had a good sense of humor, Skippy. The chemotherapy hasn't been making my hair fall out after all. So I haven't needed those two wigs I bought. The woman at Lord and Taylor's looked at me so funny when I said

57

I needed them because my hair was going to fall out. Now she didn't have a good sense of humor. Emily brought me this book on healing, all about these cases of people who are very ill and then someone prays over them and places their hand on the place where the tumor is, and there's this feeling of heat where the tumor is, and then the patient gets completely cured. Would you pray over me, and place your hand on my hip?

MATT. I'm afraid I don't believe in any of that.

BETTE. It won't kill you to try to please me.

MATT. All right. *(Puts his hand on her hip.)*

BETTE. Now say a prayer.

MATT. *(Said quickly as before a parochial school childhood.)* Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, amen.

BETTE. I think I feel a warmth there.

MATT. *(Noncommittal.)* That's good.

BETTE. You're so cold, you won't give anything.

MATT. If I don't believe in prayer, you shouldn't make me pray. It feels funny.

BETTE. You're just like your father—unresponsive.

MATT. Let's not argue about this.

BETTE. All right. *(On a pleasant subject.)* Do you remember when you used to smell your father's breath to see if he'd been drinking? You were such a cute child. I saw your father last week. He came to the hospital to visit.

MATT. Oh, how is he?

BETTE. Well he's still mad at me about my second marriage, but in some ways he's always been a sweet man. I think the years of drinking have done something to his brain though. He'll be talking and then there'll be this long pause like he's gone to sleep or something, and then finally he'll go on again like nothing's happened. *(Exits Boo, holding flowers.)*

BOO. Bette?

BETTE. Oh, Boo, I was just talking about you. Look, Skippy's here.

BOO. Oh, Skip. How are you?

MATT. I'm fine. Hi. How are you?

BOO. You look good.

MATT. Oh yes? Do you want a chair?

BOO. What?

MATT. I'll get you a chair. *(He does.)*

BOO. Skip looks good.

BETTE. Yes.

MATT. Do you want to sit? *(Boo looks uncomprehending.)* I've brought you a chair.

BOO. Oh thank you. *(Sits.)*

BETTE. The flowers are lovely.

BOO. I brought you flowers.

BETTE. Thank you. *(Boo hands them to her.)*

BOO. *(To Matt.)* Your mother still looks very pretty.

MATT. Mother said you came to visit last week.

BOO. I came last week.

BETTE. He repeats himself all the time.

BOO. What?

BETTE. I said, you repeat yourself. *(Boo looks annoyed.)* But it's charming. *(To Matt.)* Your father flirted with the second shift nurse.

BOO. Your old man still has an eye for the ladies. I was here last week and there was this . . . *(Long pause, he stares, blank.)*

BETTE. *(To Matt.)* See, he's doing it now. Boo, are you there? Boo? *(Sings to herself.)* God bless Bette and Boo and Skippy, Emily and Boo . . .

BOO. *(Comes back, continues.)* . . . nurse, and she liked your old man, I think.

BETTE. She thought he was her grandfather.

BOO. What?

BETTE. You're too old for her.

BOO. What?

MATT. Maybe he's gone deaf.

BOO. No I can hear. I think it's my brain.

BETTE. Do you remember when you tried to vacuum the gravy?

BOO. No.

BETTE. Well you did. It was very funny. Not at the time, of course. And how you used to keep bottles hidden in the cellar. And all the dead babies.

BOO. *(Smiles, happy.)* Yes. We had some good times.

BETTE. Yes, we did. And do you remember that time after we got divorced when I came by your office because Mrs. Wright died?

MATT. Mrs. Wright?

BETTE. You were at college, and I didn't have her very long. She was a parakeet. (*Matt suddenly comprehends with an "oh" or "ah" sound.*) And I called her Mrs. Wright because she lived in a Frank Lloyd Wright birdcage, I think. Actually it was a male parakeet but I liked the name better. Anyway, I kept Mrs. Wright free on the screen porch, out of the cage, because she liked it that way, but she'd always try to follow me to the kitchen, so I'd have to get to the porch door before Mrs. Wright, and I always did. Except this one time, we had a tie, and I squashed Mrs. Wright in the door. Mary Roberts Rinehart wrote a novel called *The Door* but I like her *Tish* stories better. Well, I was very upset, and it almost made me wish I was still married to Boo so he could pick it up. So I went to Boo's office and I said, "Mrs. Wright is lying on the rug, squashed, come help, and he did. (*To Boo, with great affection.*) You were very good. (*To Matt.*) But then I think he went out and got drunk.

BOO. I remember that parakeet.

MATT. Why did you drink? (*To Bette.*) Why did you keep trying to have babies? Why didn't Soot leave Karl? Why was her name Soot?

BETTE. I don't know why her name was Soot. I never had a parakeet that talked. I even bought one of those records that say "Pretty blue boy, pretty blue boy," but it never picked it up. Boo picked Mrs. Wright up. As a joke, I called people up and I played the record over the phone, pretty blue boy, pretty blue boy; and people kept saying, "Who is this?" Except Emily, she tried to have a conversation with the record.

BOO. I remember that parakeet. You shut the door on it.

BETTE. We moved past that part of the story, Boo. Anyway, then I called Bonnie Wilson and I played the record for her, and she knew it was me right away, she didn't even have to ask. It's nice seeing your parents together again, isn't it, Skippy?

MATT. (*Taken aback, but then it is nice.*) Yes, very nice.

BOO. (*To Matt.*) I was just remembering when you were a little boy, Skip, and how very thrilled your mother and I were to have you. You had all this hair on your head, a lot of hair for a

baby; we thought, we have a little monkey here, but we were very happy to have you, and I said to your mother . . . (*Pause; he has another blackout, slaves . . .*)

BETTE. Ooops, there he goes again. Boo? Boo? (*Feels pain.*) I better ring for the nurse. I need a shot for pain.

MATT. Should I go?

BETTE. No. Wait till the nurse comes.

BOO. (*Coming back.*) . . . to your mother, "Where do you think this little imp of a baby came from?"

BETTE. We finished that story, Boo.

BOO. Oh.

MATT. I do need to catch my train.

BETTE. Stay a minute, I feel pain. It'll go in a minute. (*Matt smiles, looks away, maybe for the nurse. Bette closes her eyes, and is motionless.*)

BOO. Bette? Betsy?

MATT. Is she sleeping? (*Matt with some hesitation feels for a pulse in her neck. Enter Emily.*)

EMILY. Oh hello, Boo. It's nice to see you. Are you all right, Skippy?

MATT. She died, Emily.

EMILY. Then she's with God. Let's say a prayer over her. (*Emily and Boo pray by Bette's body. Music to "Bette and Boo" sound is heard softly. Matt speaks to the audience.*)

MATT. Bette passed into death, and is with God. She is in heaven where she has been reunited with the four dead babies, and where she waits for Boo, and for Bonnie Wilson, and Emily, and Pooh Bear and Eeyore, and Kanga and Roo; and for me. (*Lights dim. End of play.*)



#### AUTHOR'S NOTES

I feel particularly close to "The Marriage of Bette and Boo," and to the excellent production the play received this past spring at Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival.

The play itself has a rather long history. I wrote the first draft of the play—a 45 minute, one-act version—when I was still a student at Yale School of Drama, and it was produced there my final year (1974).

The play had the same characters and the same number of stubborn children, but otherwise was much more sketch-like, and its emotional impact was far more elliptical. For instance, the scene at Thanksgiving, Bette's phone call, Matt's dinner with the dead grandparents, the divorce scene, the final hospital scene—all these were not in this early version.

The one-act version received a very good student production directed by Bill Luedel, and featured (among others) Kate McGregor-Stewart as Bette, John Rothman as Boo, Franchelle Stewart Dorn as Emily, Walton Jones as Fr. Donnelly, and Sigourney Weaver as Soot.

At Yale my work had been controversial up to this point, especially "Better Deal Than Sorry," which featured Sigourney Weaver singing the title song while receiving shock treatments. "Bette and Boo," though, seemed to win over a far larger audience to my work (at Yale, that is), and was said to have more of a sense of compassion in the midst of the dark humor.

There were subsequently four other productions (that I know of) of the one-act version. The first was at Williamstown Theatre's Second Company, directed by Peter Schifler. I didn't see this production, but heard positive reports, and was especially gratified to hear it was a big success when presented at a women's prison where the inmates apparently got into cheering on Bette and, well, booing Boo.

Then there was a summer Yale cabaret version, directed by Walton Jones, and featuring Christine Eubank as Bette, Charles Levin as Boo, and (ah-hem) Meryl Streep as bitter sister Joan. Then a workshop at Chicago's St. Nicholas Theatre Company (now closed, and lamented). And finally a Princeton College undergraduate production, directed by Mitchell Ivers

and with actress-writer Winnie Holzman a memorable, giggling Soot.

Around 1976, I decided not to let the one-act version be performed anymore, because I felt that the material could be expanded to full length, and I wanted to hold off wider exposure of the work until I did that.

The play "feels" autobiographical, I rather assume; and it would be disingenuous to pretend that the characters of Bette and Boo do not in many significant ways reflect my parents' lives. Many of the surrounding characters and events are indeed fictionalized, but there is a core to the play that is pretty much rooted in my past.

I wrote the first "expansion" of the play sometime in 1980, and had a reading of it at the Actors Studio. Having met Joseph Papp a few times by then, I called him up and asked him if I could arrange a reading of the play for him—which I did. From that reading, I did various rewrites, especially relating to Fr. Donnelly, and to the character of Matt, which was almost nonexistent in the one-act version.

For complicated reasons, the play kept not being scheduled over the next couple years, though it never died at the Public, thanks to Papp's interest, and to the support of Gail Merrifield and Bill Hart in the play department, and of others there as well (Robert Blacker, Lynn Holt, John Ferraro, Morgan Jenness).

In the summer of 1984, Papp and I agreed upon Jerry Zaks as director, and the play was scheduled for the 84-85 season. Zaks, as original director of "Sister Mary Ignatius," "Beyond Therapy" (off-Broadway), and "Baby with the Bathwater," had clearly become somewhat of a specialist in doing my work, and our familiarity with one another has made for that wonderful ease and shorthand that sometimes happens with a long-term collaboration.

Mr. Papp (I do call him Joe, but Catholic schoolboy manners are hard to break) was very much of the opinion that I should play the part of Matt myself. Just as Tom in "The Glass Menagerie" "feels" like an author surrogate, so does the part of Matt; and Papp, who had seen me perform a few times, felt that my doing the role was a head-on way of dealing with the "author's voice" nature of the part that might pay off.

I was fearful that it might seem self-indulgent or self-pitying to have me play Matt; but conversely I also thought it might work fine, and I had had success sometimes acting in my own plays at Yale (though never in parts that had any biographical reverberations). Plus, I thought that if I were to turn down the chance, I would always wonder what it might have been like. So, particularly since Zaks was to be at the helm, I chose to chance it. (I did tell Jerry before rehearsals that I wouldn't hate him if he decided it wasn't working and I should be replaced.)

Performing the role, particularly in previews when it was very new, sometimes struck me as a preposterously public manner in which to reveal some rather personal thoughts and feelings. Since I don't feel I'm easily open about emotions to begin with, it seemed terribly odd to me that I had got myself into this position.

Most of the feedback I got on my doing the part was extremely positive; and I know that the last scene in particular, as experienced from inside it (and shared with actors Joan Allen, Graham Beckel and Kathryn Grody), seemed suffused with a sense of letting go and finishing that acknowledged anger but ended, basically, with—well, I was going to say with acceptance and love but that sounds glib and rhythmically convenient. But then that probably is what I mean. I know that acting the last scene did feel extremely positive and not at all despairing (though certainly sadness was there).

Some people, I'm told, dismiss this play as too angry; I don't agree with them and feel they may be denying something I've found to be true: that unless you go through all the genuine angers you feel, both justified and unjustified, the feelings of love that you do have will not have any legitimate base and will be at least partially false. Plus, eventually you will go crazy. Well, anyway, I'm glad I wrote the expanded version and that I played Matt.

The production of "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" at the Public Theatre was the most positive and joyful experience I have had in professional theatre up to this point (and I say that having liked most of my theatrical experiences). The pleasure of working with Jerry Zaks again, total agreement with all three designers, the support of all the departments in Papp's excellent New York Shakespeare Festival—this made for a production

experience with no drawbacks. I may sound gaga with praise, but it would be pointless not to acknowledge it.

As for the actors, I've usually felt fondness and admiration for all the casts I've worked with, but the "Bette and Boo" company grew to be an especially close and loving one.

The 10 parts are of varying size, of course, but each part is rather meaty in its way, and a few days after our opening in early May, all 10 of us shared in an Obie award for Ensemble Acting. The "Ensemble," as we grew fond of grandly calling ourselves, consisted of Joan Allen, Graham Beckel, Olympia Dukakis, Patricia Falkenhain, Kathryn Grody, Bill McCutcheon, Bill Moor, Mercedes Ruehl, Richard B. Shull, and myself. God bless us, each and every one.

I also won an Obie for playwriting, Jerry Zaks for direction (and for his direction of Larry Shue's "The Foreigner"), and Loren Sherman for his set designs over the past couple of seasons, including "Bette and Boo." One wants to limit how important awards and critical praise seem for all the times one doesn't receive them, and for the instances when fine work of others doesn't get acknowledgement. But that said, we were pretty happy about the Obies.

Well, anyway, it was a terrific experience.

#### SPECIFIC NOTES FOR ACTORS AND DIRECTORS

I am in the habit of writing notes to the acting editions of my plays in an attempt to offer what I would say to the director and actors of a future production if I were able to be present during their rehearsals. The notes are not meant to inhibit the creative impulses of either director or actor, but to help clarify any confusing aspects in the play or in its production, and to offer my ideas on what acting tone best serves my work. Words are only precise up to a point, so your common sense and aesthetic judgment will have to be your chief guide. But I hope you will read these notes as you might have a conversation with me at a pre-production meeting.

#### BETTE'S NAME.

I intend the name "Bette" to be pronounced as "Bet"—one syllable, which better contrasts with her nickname of Betsy.

Another pronunciation thing: please pronounce "Nikkos" as Nee-kos. Margaret may Americanize it as Nick-us, perhaps, but the others should get it right.

#### MUSIC.

Please use Richard Peaslee's music. (He is the distinguished composer of "Marat/Sade.") The music box melodiousness of his "Bette and Boo" theme seems to set just the right tone for the play's opening, and yet the melody has an underlying poignance to it when it comes back later.

Jerry Zaks used a repeat of the theme played on piano (on tape) at the end of Act I, and again at the end of the play. The music helps the acts to end, and the theme's poignance is worth adding to those two moments as well. (I'm always upset when an audience doesn't know an act, or a play, is over; in this case, I know that the endings do play as endings with the proper directorial skill.)

Zaks started the music at the end of Act I somewhere around Bette saying "Are you awake, Boo? Boo?"; and at the end of the play, right after Emily's "Let's say a prayer over her," and before Matt's final speech. I recommend the use of the music at the end of Act I, and request it at the end of Act II.

Zaks also used a recurring musical intro for the entrance of the characters into each of the hospital scenes (except the last one, Scene 32), which I also recommend. (It's actually a jaunty fragment of the "Bette and Boo" theme, and is in Peaslee's packet of music.)

#### THE OPENING.

The "Bette and Boo" theme at the opening of the play is sung through once, sweetly and simply, and then is sung again, more up-tempo, and as a two-part round.

The opening moments are very non-realistic. In Zaks' version, the wedding couple and the relatives and Fr. Donnelly all stood close together on a group of steps in front of stained glass windows, and sang looking straight out. (They were not specifically performing "for" the audience, they just sang straight out, that's all.)

When the characters call out to one another, it's as if they are all in isolation, calling out to their significant others, uncertain where the other is. They are not upset particularly, just desirous that they get a response—though Joan may be annoyed about Nikkos, and Emily may be somewhat worried as she usually is, and so on as is logical for the other characters. It will seem a little enigmatic to the audience, but it's meant to be so, and the enigmatic quality is a good set-up for Matt's opening comments about looking for order.

In Zaks' version, Matt was able to be hidden behind the people on the steps, and make his first entrance coming from behind them (which was nice thematically, as Matt indeed has "come from" this group of people). If that didn't work in terms of your sightlines, just have Matt enter from off-stage after the calling out, I would think.

#### THE SETTING.

I mentioned stained glass windows above, so perhaps this is a good time to discuss the set.

Loren Sherman is a brilliant stage designer who, judging from his work on "Bette and Boo," "Baby with the Bathwater," and Peter Parnell's "Romance Languages," seems especially gifted in solving the problems presented by plays with many different settings that need to move quickly and fluidly.

In describing what he did I do not mean to imply that his is the only solution or one you should try to copy, just that it should be of interest how his set addressed problems inherent in the script.

Sherman's set was a series of sliding, maroon-colored panels that slid on a track recessed into a carpet that covered the stage. These panels were operated by stage hands who stood behind them, but it could be done mechanically as well.

The panels were used to change the stage space in numerous ways, to suggest all the various locales; importantly, they were designed and rehearsed so that the changes were just about instantaneous. With 33 scenes, eliminating "waits" between the scenes is of the highest importance.

There were three sets of panels: an upstage set, which created the back-wall of the setting; a midstage set of panels; and a downstage set of panels.



The upstage, or back-wall, panels were designed to be any of three things: first, a solid maroon background with three stained glass windows, obviously suggesting a church; second, a solid background with one or more windows with venetian blinds and curtains on them, suggesting any of the home settings; and third, a solid maroon background with nothing on it, allowing for an "anyplace" setting.

The midstage and downstage sets of panels were also solid colored with nothing on them, and were used to change and limit the stage space (and to allow stage hands to set up for the next scene behind them).

The "bigger" scenes were performed on the full playing space, using the upstage panels for the appropriate back wall, and with a few chosen furniture pieces. "Big" scenes included the wedding, Thanksgiving at Bette and Bou's house, the retreat, etc. — usually a scene with a lot of people or that "felt" big.

The "smaller" scenes took place in playing areas defined and limited by configurations of the panels.

In any case, these three rows of panels were used in an extremely complicated way to change the shape and size of the playing space in a split second. The logistics of how the furniture pieces were set up behind the closed panels so that when they opened the next set was already in place — these logistics are too complicated for me to articulate for the purposes of this essay.

However, I don't intend for you to copy this system, just to be aware how this panel system allowed for the stage space and setting to be changed instantaneously as far as the audience was concerned — which is my main concern. With 33 scenes, speed in going from scene to scene is of the essence.

In terms of other setting ideas, full realistic settings for any of the scenes would probably be wrong; there are just too many changes for "full" settings not to seem laborious. I'm pretty sure you want a "suggestive" setting for this play, one that changes its implications and look easily.

One single setting (an all-purpose living room, perhaps) that with lighting and staging kept suggesting different locales would be fine with me, and a logical way to solve the problems in designing this play.

Or a totally non-realistic space that had module-like blocks

that stood in for furniture (as is used in all plays at the O'Neil National Playwrights Conference, for instance), is also fine with me. I even suggested to Zaks and Sherman the rather crackpot notion of setting the play on a great big enormous wedding cake (with the characters able to sit or stand on the different "edges" of the cake); though that might be an extreme setting, it would have the benefit of standing in easily for all the different scene changes, without any waits for the audience, and that's my major concern. (I wouldn't want an all-purpose church setting, though, as that would overstate the Catholic influence in the play. With our use of the stained glass windows, it was extremely important to me that they could also disappear when we wanted them to.)

One additional comment about Sherman's solution, though. Aside from the ability to keep the action moving with no stops, the sliding panels sometimes acted as punctuation to the end of a scene. (You could try to get a similar effect with lighting, or doors closing, I imagine.)

#### A BRIEF HARRANGUE.

A stray note about the set. Please don't set the play "where Matt lives," wherever that may be. I saw a production of the full length version that seemed to be in some depressing, lower class tenement, with a cheap kitchen table and a window center stage overlooking a brick wall and a fire escape. This was a "one setting solution" (which I certainly don't object to), so all the scenes took place in this set. Aside from finding the set, though, extremely demoralizing to look at, I wondered why the director had decided that the Brennan and Hudlocke families were so poor; I thought of them as firmly in the middle class, even (especially the Hudlockes) upper middle class.

I was flabbergasted when the director told me that the set didn't reflect the Brennans or Hudlockes at all but was "where Matt lived." Since there are no scenes where Matt lives, the audience (I am convinced) had no more idea than I did that this depressing abode represented Matt's apartment. So this bad idea was not even effectively communicated. But, more importantly, it is a very bad idea. Yes, the play in many ways is Matt's memory play, but to set the play "where Matt lives" makes as little



sense as looking at Tom's last speech in "The Glass Menagerie" and then setting the whole play in Amsterdam.

This same production staged Scene 30 (Matt has dinner with Karl, Soot, Margaret and Paul) with Karl and Margaret not at the table (though Soot and Paul were), and with Matt not at the table, but *lying on his back*, downstage, staring at the ceiling. His opening line, "Hello. Nice to see you all" was very confusing, as one didn't know to whom he was speaking. And since most of the time he didn't get to look at Karl (he finally got up off his back, after a while), the content of the scene never really took place.

The director explained this staging by saying he feared that the audience would think the scene "real" if Matt actually sat at the table; I pointed out to him that since there were two dead people at the table, it was not highly likely that the audience would think the scene "real."

Furthermore, his belief that he had to somehow specially address what was or wasn't "real," due to the fact that Matt is remembering some scenes and presumably imagining and/or exaggerating others—this belief was, I feel, an incorrect and dangerous side path he had wandered down. The director basically didn't trust the audience to make sense of this issue as *communicated by the script itself*, and felt he had to run around "interpreting" it for them with little signals. (The set and this scene were not the only examples. The last scene of the play, a rather realistic piece of writing, was staged Beckett-style, with all three characters sitting in chairs, staring straight ahead, never looking at one another. I don't know what that was supposed to do—perhaps remove the scene's natural warmth, which it certainly did.) What made it worse, he was talented, and he meant well. (I should like Matt.) But it was not a happy meeting of play and director.

Some people, I'm told, bristle at the fact that I write these notes. As an actor, I can sympathize to some degree, and I don't want to straitjacket creativity. But seeing tenements "where Matt lives" and a dinner scene staged with none of the participants at dinner is an extremely painful experience for an author. If a director puts Hamlet on roller skates, or even if a director sets "Endgame" in a subway station—the plays are so famous one knows that it is a directorial interpretation, for good or bad.

(And the subway setting, for instance, which Joanne Akalitis tried at American Repertory Theatre, even sounds interesting to me.) But if a director does a strange interpretation of a new play, the audience quite logically assumes that that is how the author wrote it. And I don't think that's fair.

And that's why I write these notes—probably not for the directors who would stage Matt lying on his back no matter what I said, but for people who might genuinely want to capture the tone I had in mind, and who don't mind some pointers in getting there.

Well, enough of that. But please don't set this play "where Matt lives," or in Matt's mind, or in Amsterdam. Please do not have people lie on their backs on the floor every time a direction says "at table." Thank you.

#### THE COSTUMES.

33 scenes spanning 30 years seems a nightmare in terms of changing costumes to keep up with the time span; plus, many of the scenes are so short, it's probably not even possible. Luckily, I don't think it's desirable either.

Costume designer William Ivey Long, in agreement with me and Zaks, chose to leave everyone in their wedding clothes, more or less, for the whole play. This was thematically appealing to me as well—we are always reminded of how the characters started out.

Though the characters' "core costumes" did indeed remain the same throughout, there were tiny changes for all that made for variety (and a rather significant change for Bette).

As the play went on, the removal of suit coats for the men, or of hats and veils and lace jackets for the women, made for a sense of variety, as well as let the characters look more relaxed for some scenes (when they're at home), and more formal for others (Soot and Margaret putting their hats back on for Thanksgiving, say, or for the early hospital scenes).

Further, there were certain small, logical additions—Paul, usually a bit downtrodden, added to his costume a dumpy-looking cardigan sweater once he was rid of his wedding jacket. Likewise a loose, rather gloomy-looking sweater was eventually worn by the non-fashion-conscious Emily.

In designing the wedding clothes, Long made a conscious decision to give the characters good taste, with which I concur. I would be unhappy with cheap shots making fun of any corny clothing choices, or making any comments about vulgar 1950s garb (like those awful wide skirts that flair out on the sides, which make me think of 1955 movies). Indeed, since the wedding takes place in the late 1940s (judging from the chronology that Matt spouts out in Scene 31), Long pointed out to me that it would be a 1940s look that the wedding apparel would have, not a mid-50s, Doris Day look.

The core costume used at the wedding should, though, not be distracting later in the play. For instance, if one dressed Emily and Joan in full length bridesmaids outfits, it would be problematic in the later scenes. So Long didn't give Emily and Joan floor length gowns, but non-matching (though pastel coordinated) normal length dresses, with corsages and little lace jackets; the corsages and jackets were removed for later scenes.

Boo wore tails for the wedding itself, but by Scene 4, had removed his tuxedo to remain in just his vest and tie, then later removed the tie, then later, as his life disintegrated more, removed the vest and was just in his shirt sleeves. (He though, rather touchingly, dressed back up in his wedding garb for his final visit to Bette in the hospital.)

Bette's wedding dress was the larger problem. Long wanted a full length, full bridal gown look for Bette at the top of the play. I concurred, but felt that it would be too distracting in later scenes. (Imagine Bette striding around yelling "You don't vacuum gravy" in a floor length wedding gown. It *could* work actually, I suppose, as a thematic statement, but the dangers of pretentiousness and ludicrousness are high.)

Long told me -- as I didn't know -- that particularly in the 50s, women's magazines encouraged their readers to re-do their wedding gowns into cocktail dresses, so he decided to build Bette a dress that was normal length but otherwise copied her wedding dress. (For Act II, he gave her a light blue version of the same dress, as if she had dyed it somewhere along the way; Long added this just for variety.)

In dress rehearsals, I found the look of Bette's cocktail dress rather more formal looking than I expected, and I felt that its relation to the wedding dress was not as obvious as I thought it

would be. So the night of the first preview, I asked Zaks and Long if I could add a line for Matt to say about Bette having refashioned her wedding gown at the suggestion of Redbook. I did this only for the sake of clarity, but discovered that the line played also as one of the biggest and most consistent laughs of the evening. Such are the joys of collaboration.

For the hospital scene at the end, Long designed a nightgown for Bette that was from the same cream-colored material as her wedding gown and had a similar neckline. Since Bette had been in light blue for all of Act II, the sudden return to wedding white coupled with Boo's return to his tails was very touching. (At the final dress, when Graham Beckel as Boo entered the hospital carrying a bouquet of flowers and dressed again in his tails, Joan Allen as Bette, seeing this costume choice for the first time, had to fight back tears in order to continue the scene.)

Another costume issue -- the pregnancies of Joan and Bette. I think they should be noticeably pregnant when indicated in the script, but not overdone so as to be grotesque. (Whether Joan should look pregnant in the wedding scene I leave to your discretion. In Scene 6, Bette should not look pregnant yet; she has probably just learned she's expecting.)

For the Christmas at the Hudlockes scene, the 2nd pledge, and Joan's birthday party, it is important that Bette look pregnant. Unfortunately, Scene 23 ("20 years later, Bette has dinner with her son") comes in the middle of this, and Bette clearly must not look pregnant in the 20-years-later scene. Our solution was to make a little pillow that fit under Bette's dress, attached around her waist with velcro, and which was removable and replaceable quickly, off-stage. If for some reason, you had trouble with this, dispense with the pregnancy look for Christmas and the 2nd pledge, and just use it for the birthday party, which is after Scene 23.

A final Bette costume issue. Karl must pour his drink on her at the end of Christmas. At the Public, her dress was scotch-guarded so that water literally ran off it, without damaging the dress. (She actually had two identical Act II dresses, one not scotch-guarded, so that she was not stuck in a wet dress if any of the water should fall onto the non-scotch-guarded part.)

The final costume issues are the doctor, the priest, and Matt. The doctor is a small part, doubled by the actor who plays

Fr. Donnelly (for purposes of convenience, as well as a slight thematic tie of the doctor and priest being outside authorities who deal with Bette and Boo). The doctor's costume should be whatever says "doctor" quickly to the audience and makes it clear that it's not Fr. Donnelly dressed differently.

Fr. Donnelly is a parish priest, and as such has the normal black cassock that Bing Crosby wore in so many films (and so many priests wore in life, I suppose I should add). Zaks and I felt that the black cassock was a little drab for the opening, and so for that one he wore nice white-and-silver priest's wedding robes.

Matt is not dressed for the wedding, as he was not born at that point. Although if you wanted to dress him up out of "respect" for the event, that's okay. I rather prefer Long's solution which was to dress him as "student," with clothes that clearly wouldn't fit in with the wedding picture.

Though Matt would have been in college in the 60s, a full-out radical student look for him would not be a correct match with his personality. Long went for preppy casual—a nice sports jacket, a loosened tie over a blue workshirt, jeans. Long liked that the jeans in particular clashed visually with the wedding party, more than a dressier casual choice (khaki, corduroy) would have. Matt needn't, and shouldn't, change clothes for the duration of the play.

If you set the play in Amsterdam, Matt should wear a sailor suit and have tattoos saying "mother" on his forearms. (Just kidding, just kidding!)

#### ANOTHER HARRANGUE.

No, false alarm.

From here on in, I'm going to offer comments on miscellaneous issues, and will skip around rather.

#### THE HONEYMOON.

Zaks staged Scene 4 (the honeymoon, continued) with Bette and Boo in a bed, unlike how I had it in the script, which was Bette and Boo standing together wrapped in a sheet. I've left it the latter way in the script because I think it's easier to stage

without a bed, but I have no objection to the scene taking place in a bed, if that works out for you.

However, either way (sheet or bed), I like the stylization of keeping Bette and Boo more or less still dressed in their wedding clothes. If you have them either in their underwear or, worse, with their shirts off, I find that that distracts from the content of the scene itself, and for the comedy in it as well. (It can turn it sniggering, which is unpleasant.) The scene certainly has a flirtatious feel to some of it, but it's really *not* about sex or "first time" at all. It's primarily about the workings of Bette's mind (charming but somewhat infantile).

#### THE HOSPITAL SCENES.

I envisioned the hospital "line up" for every scene to be all the characters standing in a straight line, facing out to the audience, as if their backs were against a hospital hallway. This isn't a very realistic pose, but the stylization of it seems right for the scene, and the fact that we can always see their faces at the top of the scene waiting is also important. (I don't mean they stay frozen, staring out; they look at each other when they speak, and turn to the doctor when he comes out. I just mean they start out that way.)

The doctor, the script says, "drops the baby." He does not "throw" the baby down in anger, or disgust; or conversely, he does not toss it onto the ground with some fake cheeriness. He either shows no emotion or, maybe as time goes on, a little normal fatigue over doing the same thing over and over (but subtly). He announces the fact: "It's dead. The baby's dead." Then he lets go of the bundle that has been in his arms, and it drops to the floor. Let the action make the moment; don't color it in any particular way.

#### THE BABY PROP.

The original student production and Zaks' production did the baby prop as a believably shaped "bundle" that made a thud when dropped. It was constructed as a beanbag (I think), more or less in a baby's form, but totally wrapped in a blanket, so that one could not see any "baby" or beanbag. I'm sorry to be didactic, but I think that is the one way to design the baby.



If you use a real doll that you can see through an opening in the blanket (as I've seen) the first thing that happens is that the audience gasps because the image for a split second becomes too real—you think about the horror of dropping a real baby on the ground; then a second later, the audience reminds itself that the doll is, of course, fake and not a baby at all, and by then they're outside the play and not thinking about Bette or the dead baby or any of the characters onstage.

Using the visible doll made the audience react in two stages (within a few seconds), which is not good. When it is only the bundle that is dropped, the audience is able to react together at the same time on the same issue: they are shocked the baby is dead, they are shocked it has been dropped, they laugh that it has been dropped, they question whether it is appropriate to laugh that it has been dropped.

And using any very non-realistic representation—like a basketball or something—is also not good: it will take us too far out of reality and be too jokey. For all the oddness of my representing the babies' death the way I have, it does still communicate that Bette has lost a child. A bouncing basketball would not do that well. (Plus it should make a small thud sound when it hits—which will help trigger the audience's conflicted laughter; if it bounces, it's too farcical, too unreal.)

#### THE FAKE SCENE

Scene 22 (20 years later, Bette also has dinner with his son) starts realistically enough, but starting with "You're right, it's not fair to bring up the children that died" it starts to shift to Matt's fantasy of a scene where his mother suddenly becomes super reasonable and undemanding. Don't tip this to the audience too early. Let Bette play her first two long speeches as convincingly and as logically as possible. If she overdoes any of the comments, the audience will realize it's false too soon. I love instead the sort of cumulative doubt that creeps into the audience—you can feel them thinking, this scene sounds a little false.

#### WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?

The end of Scene 23 when Bette and Boo's quarrel disintegrates into "What's the matter with you," "What's the matter

with you?", etc. When the actors convincingly are fighting, but just find themselves stuck making the same point back and forth, their genuine amusement seems a very good way to end the scene. Because it was hard to totally set that (faking the amusement seemed hard), Zaks and I let the actors keep adding "What's the matter with you?" (up to a reasonable point, 3 or 4 more than the script says) if that helps them. I also like it when Boo starts the laughter.

#### THE CHARACTERS:

##### MATT.

I'm pretty sure Matt should be onstage only when indicated in the script. If he's on for scenes where he's not written in—like his birth, for instance—it overdoes the "this is Matt's memory play" stuff.

It also fights against the unusual shape of the play. I think in Act I, it should feel like Bette's play; in Act II, it begins to feel like Bette and Matt's play; for a little while (from the divorce through the final baby), it starts to feel like Matt's play; and from Bette's entrance in Scene 32 on to the end, it feels like Bette and Matt's play again. (Boo is certainly terribly important, and part of the ending; but something more central seems to happen between Matt and Bette, I think.)

Matt starts the play believing he can make sense of things through analyzing them. As time goes on, this works less and less well for him, culminating in his "I can't make sense out of these things anymore" (a speech I wrote triggered by Joe Papp's comment that Matt should somehow "finish" with his Thomas Hardy stuff, a good comment).

Matt should have a sense of humor—if he seems only sensitive, I find the material becomes pleading and embarrassing (to me, at least). And much of the humor is in the deadpan delivery of comments, I believe.

And though I don't want Matt's position to become bathetic, still from Thanksgiving on, there's no getting around that he suffers in the situations. Edith Oliver's description (in *The New Yorker*) of Matt watching—"sometimes visibly suffering, sometimes numb"—is appropriate, I think.

And the "sometimes numb" image is useful to keep in mind, to avoid any obvious pleading for sympathy; it's accurate as well—children in alcoholic homes often become quite stoic; everyone else around them is in such a mess, they don't want to be any bother, and so they become little adults. And speaking of little adults, it's also good to avoid actually playing Matt as a little boy; just keep it simple for the "arts and crafts" scene, and by the time we're to Thanksgiving he's already the little adult.

Zaks encouraged me and Joan Allen as Bette not to shrink away from rather full anger choices in the Bette-Matt arguments (especially in Scenes 22, 32, and the brief disagreement about healing and prayer in 33).

I resisted this direction at first, due to fear that full out anger might seem too oh-pity-poor-Matt; in playing it, I decided Zaks was very right, and that the full anger made the play not sentimental, just honest. (Damn it, though, it's so tricky passing this sort of advice on. I saw two Matts who did "My favorite movie is 'Citizen Kane', I don't call you Citizen Kane" with genuine anger, and the line still got the appropriate laugh I think it should get; I saw another Matt do the same line with similar anger, and yet due to some overseriousness that the actor communicated, the line was not at all funny, and, alas, I think that's wrong. And I can't prove that to you, or tell you how exactly how to do it right.)

One last thing about Matt. His final speech ("Bette passed into death and is with God") has no irony in it. The impulse behind it is to share with the audience the only comfort human beings have found to cope with death—the belief in an afterlife. Matt has made clear that he doesn't seem to believe in all that, but that fact doesn't belong in this moment. The moment is about sharing with the audience the sense of loss; perhaps for the moment, Matt decides to believe in heaven—or to speak as if he believes because it's the only comfort available, the only thing he can think to say. Any sense of Matt-looks-down-or-separates-himself-from-those-who-believe (which appeared in guess which favorite production) is totally at odds with what I mean by the moment.

BETTE.

Before starting to cast Bette, Zaks and I agreed we were look-

ing for someone who seemed like a "winner." (And Joan Allen, a fabulous actress, is very much a winner.) Part of Bette's story is that she is someone for whom things basically should have and could have gone right. She is thus genuinely charming, very vivacious, etc., it just all goes very wrong. But, for all her chatter, she is not stupid. She comes from a background where the chatter is considered part of a woman's charm, and where no one is expected to have to make thoughtful decisions as nothing problematic is supposed to happen.

If she's not stupid, though, she is also not wise. Karl is partially right in Scene 30—she keeps trying for far too long to change things she can't change (Boo's drinking, having another child against medical likelihood). But unlike the other characters, she is in there trying, and that's something.

We should, of course, feel for her. She can act like a bitch often, but that's not, at core, what she is. Joan Allen can yell with the best of them when the script calls for that, but she also had an extraordinary vulnerability somewhere within Bette's iron will that made Bette's plight extremely moving.

BOO.

Boo is at core very sweet, and he probably loves Bette very much (Graham Beckel was terrific looking at Bette with infatuation in the honeymoon scene). However, his personality never confronts anything—he seems totally inured to watching his father insult his mother, for instance (though, of course, he would have had many years getting used to it.)

He drinks, presumably, to escape, and Bette keeps on and on at him trying to keep him from escaping; and in that way, they are deeply incompatible.

I was grateful that Beckel as an actor never made a fuss about how passive Boo is, particularly in the Hudlocke scenes; he took it as a given of Boo's character, which I think it is. His mother laughs when awful things are said; Boo either doesn't listen, or takes a drink.

Beckel also was very painful to watch in the divorce scene and in the final baby scene; his Boo, when circumstances forced him to see something irrevocable, had hurt eyes.

Zaks made a terrific point about the last scene. For all the fact

that Boo keeps staring off suddenly, most of the time he and Bette have a lovely ease between them in this final scene that, in Zak's words, made you wish that they had found a way to get that ease earlier. His seeing that ease was important for this scene—because for all the sadness in the situation, the sadness isn't what to play (except for the occasional inescapable moments). Bette has given up trying to change Boo, and that has allowed her to enjoy his affection for the first time in ages. It's a scene that shows that a reconciliation among all three has sort of happened—not a triumphant one, because everyone has lowered their stakes and expectations, but a reconciliation nonetheless.

#### SOME OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS.

**SOOT.** Soot's laugh is terribly important, and an integral part of her character. Don't cast an actress who can't or won't do the laugh. Also, please have Soot do the "Oh, Karl" (laughs) lines as written—that is, she says "Oh, Karl," and then laughs; the laugh and the line should be separated.

Soot is one of my favorite characters (and usually one of the audience's as well).

Many of us would gather off-stage nightly to watch certain of Olympia Dukakis' scenes, she was so remarkable. I was particularly enamoured of how she would look over at Karl every time he began to speak with this expression of pleased expectation, as if she knew that whatever was about to come out of his mouth was, without question, certain to be the most delightful and charming remark imaginable. She would then listen with rapt attention as he said his usually horrible or insulting comment, and then she would laugh delightedly as if her pleased expectation had been totally correct. Occasionally, if her line was a slight reproach of Karl—such as "You shouldn't tease everyone so"—her attitude seemed to be that Karl had just said something slightly naughty but still vastly amusing, while what any sane person would have heard was that Karl had just been shocking and cruel.

This extremely crazy disparity between what Karl says and how she responds is the core of Soot's character. It's hilarious and, without the actress having to push it, sort of heartbreaking.

**KARL.** A major thing about Karl—cast him as intelligent

and upper class. (Soot should be upper class as well.) He is not meant to be a lower class Archie Bunker, unmouth and stupid. He is mean to his wife and to others because he is a misanthrope; I think he looked at the world early in life, didn't like what he saw, and out of that perception began to watch everything around him like a scientist looking at bugs through a microscope. But he is smart.

Along these lines, I recall Bill Moor listening to Bette rant on about having more children and about Jackie Cooper's cuteness vs. Shirley Temple's (Scene 14), and seeing on his face, subtly, the thought that Bette was very stupid for making these decisions about having children. You saw the opinion on his face—and this opinion was a more genuine response to what was going on in the room than anything that was coming from anyone else in the room; Boo is drinking and trying not to listen, and Soot, who can't stand any problems of any sort, is smiling at Bette as if everything she was saying was delightful. Of course, Karl follows this silent reaction by being very insulting to Bette, which doesn't particularly help anyone; but the insult comes from a genuine opinion about how foolishly she is running her life.

Another choice Bill Moor made that was useful, I think, was that he decided that Karl was, most times, amused by Soot. This helped explain what kept them together, probably. Karl is a realist and sees things, he just doesn't believe anything can be done about anything, and so he has chosen to be nasty. Soot can't stand reality because most things frighten her, and so she pretends to herself (so successfully that she doesn't even know she's pretending) that everything is fine with everything. In a strange way, they certainly "go" together.

The characters of the Brennan family and Fr. Donnelly are seemingly less open to misunderstanding, and so I'll spend less time on them.

**PAUL** is a kind father, and most of the lines I've given him are actually rather sensible, it's just nobody can understand him. Bill McCutcheon seemed sweet and fond of his girls. He also always looked very irritated, whenever Margaret told him not to speak, and would mutter to himself, which was a funny choice.

A stray thing about Paul's speech. I describe how I envision it



in the script, in terms of Paul's dropping most of his consonants so that it is mostly impossible to understand him. I have seen some actors do that but then add to it a staccato, jerky rhythm to how Paul speaks. I would prefer your Paul not do this—it sounds slightly retarded to me, which is wrong (Paul's mind is absolutely fine), or else like an actor's choice that I just don't "get." Plus, the staccato rhythms very much hurt the divorce scene where Paul's rhythms should be very much like an old-time lawyer—conversational, making points, talking to the judge, etc.; it's just he's incomprehensible. (McCutcheon was hilarious as this frustrated lawyer; if we all watched Olympia's scenes, I noted that she always stood off-stage to watch that scene.)

So, if you would, I prefer normal speaking rhythms (just lose most of the consonants.)

JOAN is a smallish part, and, judging by auditions, a little hard to get a handle on. However, the actresses we called back all had in common an extremely dry delivery and the ability to make the force of Joan's unhappiness and edgy bitterness funny. Probably Joan liked somebody in the world once, but it's not shown in this play. Mercedes Ruehl gave an indelible performance, and it's a tribute to her gifts how much she was noticed in this part. Also, early laughs in a play are important to cue the audience "what kind of play this is going to be," and Joan's character (and Margaret's) have a lot of lines that are laugh lines *depending* on how you say them. ("She does. You look lovely, Bette" is funny when said with the proper, flat, semi-hostile disinterest. Oh, God, he's giving line readings now.)

MARGARET says "Let's not talk about it" many times in the play, whenever anyone brings up a problem. Soot pretends (or has concurred herself) the problems aren't there. Margaret does see them, it's just that she is of the old school who feels you shouldn't talk about unpleasant things. Patricia Falkenhain was hilariously on the nose when, for instance, in Thanksgiving she'd tell Bette that she and Skippy might stay with her to avoid Boo's drunkenness, and then a moment later says with utter cheeriness as if nothing has happened, "Goodbye, Boo!"

As Margaret lets drop in her longest speech (Scene 24), she *lets* her children to have problems, it makes her feel needed. That speech is one of the meanest I've ever written, I think, but

it *does* happen that way; and Patricia Falkenhain's charm was the absolute appropriate interpretation of it—Margaret is charming, she is a caring mother, she just wants to be the queen bee, so she likes all the bickering that goes on around her.

EMILY. Audiences love Emily. She is dear, and doesn't seem to have a mean bone in her body. But her mind sure is mucked up, and writing her I was reminded of a comment a friend once made about a poignant character in a movie (Shirley Knight in "Petulia," mistreated by her husband George C. Scott): I was saying how touching I found her vulnerability, and my friend (a woman) said, yes, she supposed so but one also felt the satisfaction of seeing a sensitive person "get it." I thought this remark was rather shocking, but also rather true.

Emily obviously works out of guilt, very misplaced and deeply rooted. She's also rather childlike—her mind seems to move slower than other people, and she has a child's belief that everything is connected to her (and, in her case, is her fault). I adored watching Kathryn Grody as Emily trying desperately to make sense of what Fr. Donnelly was saying, and always presuming that if she didn't follow it, it must be her fault (ergo, all her hand raisings).

Zaks and Kathryn also made Emily strung in the last scene; she knows about prayer, and about offering comfort, and so there was no apologetic quality to any of her behavior in the last scene; she was (in a nice way) in her element.

FR. DONNALLY was Richard B. Shull. Shull is like one of the marvellous character actors in films from the 30s and 40s; though his priest was often kindly to Bette (and others), irritation is always not too far below the surface; the last third of Shull's marriage retreat was a hilarious explosion of built-up irritation of his intolerable position, being asked to solve impossible problems. If he joined Karl at dinner in Scene 30, they would have had some points of agreement about not being able to change some things (although Donnelly is basically kindly).

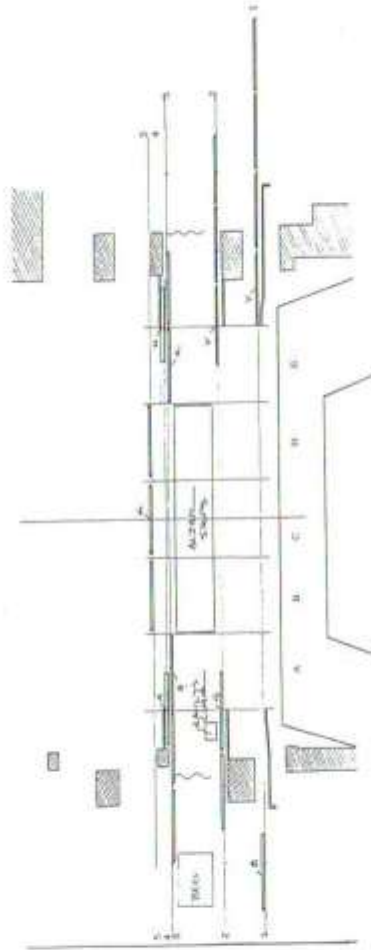
AND NOW THE END.

I really must apologize. I have gone on too long, and though I've tried to edit this (and have cut some stuff, believe it or not), I have fussed and fussed with this for too long, and so I've de-

cided to leave it lengthy so you can choose what to make use of, and what to reject.

I really do know that there is rarely only one way to do something in acting and directing—but within that range of possibilities, there really are, I think, choices that hit the right tone for my stuff, and choices that make it fall flat, or go nasty or go silly. That's what I'm trying to control. Children of alcoholics, I have read, often have trouble in later life trying to over-control things, and I guess this essay is a bit of an example of that. But at least I'm not coming to your house directly, to bother you; and at least I got to praise the actors who worked with such commitment on the play at the Public, and to whom I offer much affection and gratitude.

Christopher Durang  
November, 1985



SCENE DESIGN  
"THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO"  
1/16" = 1'-0"



PROPERTY LIST

ACT I

*Scene 1*

Cello  
Nose spray  
Rice  
Chair  
Flute

*Scene 2*

Pillow

*Scene 3*

Cello (from Scene 1)

*Scene 4*

Sheet  
Pocketbook  
Phone

*Scene 5*

Cello (from Scene 1)

Chair

Scissors

*Scene 6*

Papers  
Drinks

*Scene 7*

Note  
Piece of paper

*Scene 8*

Table

*Scene 9*

Cello (from Scene 1)  
Baby (in a blue blanket)

*Scene 10*

Construction paper (brightly colored)  
Crayons

*Scene 11*

Chair

Baby (from Scene 9)

*Scene 12*

Cello (from Scene 1)

86

*Scene 16*

Baby (from Scene 9)

*Scene 17*

Silverware  
Serving dish  
Gravy boat dish  
Large cake  
Candelabra  
Vacuum cleaner  
Pan of water  
Sponges (2)  
Earring

ACT II

*Scene 19*

Piece of paper

*Scene 21*

Drinks

*Scene 23*

Piece of paper

*Scene 24*

Cake

Nose spray (from Scene 1)

Knife

Plates

*Scene 25*

Chair

Sheet

*Scene 26*

Baby (from Scene 9)

Cigar

*Scene 28*

Glass of wine

*Scene 31*

Note

*Scene 32*

Baby (from Scene 9)

*Scene 33*

Wheelchair

Flowers

Chair

87

COSTUME PLOT

BETTE BRENNAN

*Act I Scene 1*

Seamed hose  
Slip  
Cream satin wedding gown and shoes  
3 Strand pearl bracelet  
Pearl necklace  
Wedding veil

*Act I Scene 3*

(Subtract wedding veil)

*Act I Scene 5*

Satin cocktail wedding gown  
(Subtract cream satin wedding gown)

*Act II Scene 19*

Blue satin shoes  
Blue satin short dress  
(Subtract cream satin shoes and cocktail wedding gown)

*Act II Scene 21*

Water dress  
Stomach pad  
(Subtract dress)

*Act I Scene 22*

Blue dress  
(Subtract water dress and stomach pad)

*Act II Scene 23*

Stomach pad

*Act II Scene 26*

(Subtract stomach pad)

*Act II Scene 32*

Pink nightgown  
Silk robe  
White slippers  
(Subtract heels, dress, and pearl bracelet)

MARGARET BRENNAN

*Act I Scene 1*

Seamed hose  
Full girdle  
Slip  
Rose shoes  
Multi-strand pearl necklace  
Pearl bracelet  
Maroon dress  
Matching jacket with lace  
Cream gloves  
Cream hat with veil  
Gardenias

*Act I Scene 4*

(Subtract gloves, hat, jacket, gardenias)

*Act I Scene 8*

Hat  
Gloves  
Jacket  
Black purse

*Act II Scene 19*

Gold pin  
Gold earrings  
(Subtract pearls, jacket, hat, gloves, purse)

*Act II Scene 26*

Jacket  
Hat

*Act II Scene 29*

(Subtract hat, jacket)

PAUL BRENNAN

*Act I Scene 1*

Grey plaid socks  
Brown shoes  
Grey three-piece suit  
Red and white shirt

Red suspenders  
Maroon tie  
Carnation

*Act I Scenes 2-6*  
Tan sweater vest  
(Subtract carnation, jacket, grey vest)

*Act I Scene 8*  
Jacket  
Vest  
(Subtract sweater vest)

*Act II Scenes 20-23*  
(Subtract jacket)

*Act II Scene 30*  
Jacket

#### JOAN BRENNAN

*Act I Scene 1*  
Scamed hose  
Purple stain heels  
Purple pleated linen dress  
Purple lace jacket with gardenia  
Purple flowered head dress  
Pearl necklace  
White lace gloves  
Large pearl earrings  
Pearl bracelet

*Act I Scene 2*  
Linen jacket with belt  
(Subtract gloves, headdress, lace jacket)

*Act II Scenes 20-23*  
Stomach pad

*Act II Scene 26*  
(Subtract stomach pad)

90

#### EMILY BRENNAN

*Act I Scene 1*  
Scamed hose  
Pink satin pumps  
White half slip  
Pink dress  
Pink lace jacket with gardenia  
Pink floral headdress  
White lace glove (removed scene 1)  
Pearl bracelet and necklace  
Gold cross on chain

*Act I Scene 6*  
Pink blouse top  
Brown shoes  
(Subtract lace jacket, pink shoes, headdress)

*Act I Scene 8*  
Light pink sweater

*Act I Scene 9*  
(Subtract pearl necklace)

*Act I Scene 11*  
Brown sweater  
Pink slippers  
(Subtract pink sweater, brown shoes, pearl bracelet)

*Act I Scene 13*  
Brown shoes  
(Subtract slippers)

*Act II Scene 19*  
Pink sweater  
(Subtract brown sweater)

*Act II Scene 30*  
Dark pink sweater with pockets

#### BOO HUDLOCKE

*Act I Scene 1*  
Black socks

91

Black shoes  
Singlet  
Black pants with suspenders  
Black vest  
Grey striped Ascot  
Black morning coat  
Black and silver cufflinks  
White carnation

*Act I Scene 2*  
Carnation (attached to vest)  
(Subtract coat and carnation)

*Act II Scene 33*  
Jacket  
Carnation

KARL HUDLOCKE

*Act I Scene 1*  
Blue socks  
Black shoes  
Three piece blue suit  
Blue with white striped shirt  
Red tie  
Black belt  
Pocket watch with chain  
Carnation

*Act I Scenes 2-5*  
(Subtract jacket, vest, carnation)

*Act I Scene 7*  
Jacket

*Act I Scene 12*  
(Subtract jacket)

*Act I Scene 15*  
Jacket

*Act I Scene 17*  
Vest  
Jacket

92

*Act II Scene 20*  
(Subtract jacket, vest)

*Act II Scenes 22-27*  
Jacket

SOOT HUDLOCKE

*Act I Scene 1*  
Seamed hose  
Blue heels  
Blue wool skirt  
Beige silk blouse with lace dickie  
Blue wool jacket  
Gardenias  
3 String beads with matching earrings  
Off white gloves  
Blue hat with veil  
Blue bag

*Act I Scene 2*  
(Subtract hat, jacket, dickie, gloves)

*Act I Scene 8*  
Jacket  
Hat  
Gloves  
Purse

*Act I Scene 12*  
(Subtract hat, gloves, bag, jacket)

*Act I Scene 15*  
Jacket  
Hat  
Gloves  
Bag

*Act I Scene 17*  
Dickie

*Act II Scene 19*  
(Subtract dickie, hat, gloves, bag)

93

Act II Scene 20  
(Subtract jacket)

Act II Scene 27  
Dickie  
Jacket  
Hat

FATHER DONNALLY/DOCTOR

Act I Scene 1  
Black socks  
Black shoes  
Black pants and suspenders  
Green hospital pants, shirt, mask  
Black priest robe  
Red priest shawl  
White robe  
White priest cape with trim.

Act I Scene 2  
Doctor's cap  
(Subtract cape, shawl, white robe)

Act I Scene 12  
Black robe  
(Subtract cap)

Act I Scene 14  
Cap  
(Subtract robe)

Act II Scene 19  
Robe  
(Subtract cap)

Act II Scene 25  
Cap  
(Subtract robe)

Act II Scene 26  
Robe  
(Subtract cap, hospital pants)

94

MATT

Act I Scene 1  
Brown socks  
Tan suede wallabies  
Jeans  
Denim shirt  
Brown tie  
Brown wool jacket  
Brown belt

Scene 14 when bette starts talking  
must realize that I  
think she is a little crazy  
so Karl → readded?  
To Bette → oh I've never been  
one for talking

Had dead baby

Competitive →

Jealousy w/ Bette

Scene 18

Funny → Like seeing someone fall  
My Boole's Dinner

Oh he's just asleep isn't he  
oh you're not hurt are you

Scene 26  
The Funny!

Catholic live as embarrassing  
(S. d. l. h. e. n.)

talk as  
readded child  
50 Karl will  
can't she have... say



Wagon on morning paper in morning paper  
laugh

Tell the joke well → If Maybe

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BETTE AND BOO

WORDS BY CHRISTOPHER DURANO  
MUSIC BY RICHARD PEASLEE

WOMEN <sup>mp</sup>

GOD BLESS BETTE AND BOO AND SKIP-PEY EM-I-LY AND

BOO MAR-GRET MATT AND BET-TY BOO-EY MOM-MY TOM-MY TOO

<sup>mp</sup> ALL  
BET-TY BET-SEY BOO-EY BOO-EY JOOT CARL MATT AND PAUL MAR-GRET BOO-IE JOAN-IE PHOO-EY

GOD BLESS US ONE AND ALL GOD

BETTE & BOO - 2

BLESS US GOD BLESS US ONE AND ALL ONE AND

rit. (All) Lively ♩ = 112  
ALL GOD BLESS BETTE AND EM-I-LY AND  
BOO AND SKIP-PY

BOO MAR-GRET BET-TY BOO-EY MOM-MY TOM-MY TOO  
MATT AND  
(Divide into two part round)



BETTE + BOO - 3

BET-TY BET-SEY BOO-EY BOO-ZEY SOOT CARL MATT AND PAUL MAR-GRET BOO-IE JOAN-IE PHOO-EY  
GOD BLESS BETTE AND BOO AND SKIP-PY EM-I-LY AND BOO MAR-GRET MATT AND  
GOD BLESS US ONE AND GOD BLESS BETTE AND BOO AND  
BET-TY BOO-EY MOM-MY TOM-MY TOO BET-TY BET-SEY BOO-EY BOO-ZEY  
SKIP-PY EM-I-LY AND BOO MAR-GRET MATT AND BET-TY BOO-EY MOM-MY TOM-MY  
SOOT CARL MATT AND PAUL MAR-GRET BOO-IE JOAN-IE PHOO-EY GOD BLESS US

GOTTES + GOTT - 4

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece titled "GOTTES + GOTT - 4". The score is written in 2/4 time and consists of two vocal parts and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "TOO GOD BLESS US ONE ONE AND ALL ONE AND ALL". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "rit.". The piano part features chords and some accidentals, including a trill marked "(E)". Below the main score, there are several empty musical staves.

**APPENDIX B:  
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REF #:	PR-23752-3365-7
WORK:	<i>A Performance Study and Analysis of the Role of 'Soot' in "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" by Jodi Renee Coleman</i>
TITLE:	<i>The Marriage of Bette and Boo</i>
AUTHOR:	Christopher Durang
SELECTION:	entire play, acting script for dissertation

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**APPENDIX C:  
CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

## Introduction

The character analysis process was an integral part of my character development of Soot. The following questionnaire created by Dr. Seay was the blueprint of my exploration. His questionnaire initiated my creative process by asking the important questions needed to identify, develop, and shape my approach to the material. The clarity gained fueled my eagerness to begin rehearsals and built a foundation for informed choices throughout Soot's progression.

## Approach and Style of the Play

*What is the genre of the play?* *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* is a comedy.

*What is the basic or central meaning of the play?* The central meaning of the play is that we cannot change people. We can love them. We can understand and misunderstand them. We can even forgive them, but we cannot change them. Durang divulges this central meaning late in the play inside scene 30. Durang chooses Karl to speak the central meaning, which I believe to be very clever. Since the audience has grown accustomed to listening for Karl's jokes and remarks throughout the show, they are not only tuned in to him, but their ear will immediately catch this statement because it is totally different than what we expect him to say.

MATT: Everyone I know is divorced except for you and Soot, and Margaret and Paul. Of course, Soot and Paul are dead, but you all stayed married right up until death. And I wondered what mistakes you thought I could avoid based on your experience.

KARL: Don't expect much, that's for starters. Look at Bette and Bore. She kept trying to change Bore. That's idiotic. Don't try to change anybody. If you don't like them, be mean to them if you want; try to get them committed if that amuses you, but don't ever expect to *change* them.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Durang, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 53.

*How does your character contribute to the basic meaning or central idea of the play?*  
*Are there any selected illustrations of action and/or dialogue of your character that help to reveal the central idea of the play?* It is Soot's acceptance of Karl as he is, paired with Karl's wisdom to not try to change Soot, which is exposed by Durang as the functional part of their dysfunctional relationship.

Durang gives us the opportunity to see Boo and Bette finally accepting each other when Boo visits Bette in the hospital in scene 33. The peaceful way in which they interact with each other forces us to consider the possibility that if Bette and Boo had found this peace earlier, if Bette had known her mistake in trying to change Boo, their relationship may have lasted. But is staying married until death the goal?

*Is your character honestly drawn or has he/she been distorted to affect the central idea of the play?* *The Marriage of Bette & Boo* is structured in a memory play fashion. Matt, the narrator, reveals thirty-three scenes which flash back and forth through time<sup>102</sup> in an attempt to make sense out of his life. Matt addresses the audience in scene 1 saying,

If one looks hard enough, one can usually see the order that lies beneath the surface. Just as dreams must be put in order and perspective in order to understand them, so must the endless details of waking life be ordered and then carefully considered. Once these details have been considered, generalizations about them must be made. These generalizations should be written down legibly, and studied.<sup>103</sup>

As a manifestation of Matt's memory Soot has a sense of heightened fantasy about her but I believe that she is honestly drawn at the core. So, I have approached her from an acting

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid 71.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid 8.



standpoint in this manner. I believe strongly that Soot was an honest product of her life experiences and environment. While Soot is a character shown through Matt's (Durang's) eyes as he remembers her, I do feel that Durang's intention is to show her honestly (her inner truth).

*Does your character fit into the genre chosen by the playwright? Why?* Soot fits perfectly in the comedy genre chosen by Durang because she has character traits that lends her actions to the comical, but is rooted in truth. The way in which Soot reacts to Karl's pointed words as if he is charming and delightful all the time is funny while being laced with sad, dysfunctional truth.

#### Where

*What are the surroundings? Does it take place in a building or another structure? Does it take place in a specific room?* *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* Spans thirty years and jumps around to a number of locales. The locales of the scenes in which Soot was involved are: scene 1: Bette and Boo's catholic church; scene 6: the Hudlocke's living room; scene 9: a hospital waiting room; scene 11: the same hospital's waiting room; scene 14: the Hudlocke's living room; scene 16: the hospital waiting room; scene 18: Bette and Boo's home; scene 19: Bette and Boo's catholic church; scene 21: the Hudlocke's living room; scene 26: the hospital waiting room; scene 28: the catholic church's multi-purpose room; scene 30: the Hudlocke's home.

As mentioned in the director's concept a giant wedding cake with a large screen to hold projected images would be used to facilitate the thirty-three scenes with multiple locations and a timeline that flashes through past and present time.

*Where does it take place, city or town?* It takes place in a small city, middle-class suburb. Knowing the semi-autobiographical nature of the play, I would say Montclair, New Jersey, since it is Durang's hometown<sup>104</sup>. By using a generic location, Durang gives the illusion of anyone's local home, church or hospital. The characters and their relationships with one another gain primary focus when you strip away focus on locale.

*What is the immediate past location?* I have found that the immediate action not the past location will be the information that will assist me best as an actor in navigating the play's structure. The structure is that of quick vignettes in which the stage lights come up on the characters in action. Soot is a character that lives in the moment and has responses drawn from the present action not the past, but colored with past experiences. The immediate actions are: scene 1: I am adjusting Boeey's wedding suit bow tie; scene 6: I am trying to get Bette to stop nagging Boo for his drinking. In order to accomplish this, I am trying to refocus her energy on the positive fact that she is having a baby; scene 9: I am listening intently to the doctor's update; scene 11: I am waiting anxiously for the doctor to bring the baby out; scene 14: I am listening closely to Bette to find out what advice Father has given her regarding having another baby; scene 16: I am praying the doctor brings a healthy baby out; scene 18: I am urging Karl to be nice today before we enter through the front door of the house from their driveway; scene 19: I am mocking the whole idea of this ridiculous pledge; scene 21: I am thinking of a way to help this awkward conversation along; scene 26: I am trying to confirm, on my own, that there is still a space between my eyes; scene 28: I am watching Father begin a prayer; scene 30: I am deceased and only present so that I can be referred to by Karl and Matt.

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<sup>104</sup> *Biography - Durang, Christopher (Ferdinand) (1949-)*.

*Are there any historical period clothing styles pertinent to the play, scene and/or character?* Even though the play spans thirty years, the costuming for Soot is from the 1940s.<sup>105</sup> Soot wears her outfit from Bette and Boo's wedding the entire show. Soot does not remove or add personal items to her wrap dress based on occasion and locale.<sup>106</sup> For instance, she would wear her hat and gloves to go to the hospital and then take them off when she returned home and put on her apron. The costume designer chose a classic wrap dress with belt that was perfect for the character of Soot. I really think that even if Soot had the opportunity to change clothing to be current, she would still be wearing the same versatile wrap dress she began in.

*Are there any historical period caste systems, social structures, customs, or beliefs pertinent to the play, scene and/or character?* Our dramaturge discussed important mindsets of the play's time period. The American dream of a nuclear family, equipped with a nice little house in a suburb with a picket fence and family car, was a ramped mindset that Americans were working towards. Consumer products were geared to the happy home life. TV dinners emerged to go with the televisions that were popping up in the general middle-class household. Gender dictated the role each person would play within the nuclear family. The father would be the breadwinner, head of the household, and decision maker. The mother would be the ever-nurturing, happy homemaker and loving wife. During this same time, an undercurrent of feminism was beginning to challenge traditional roles. Bette's interactions with Boo suggest she is beginning to embrace these new ideas.

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<sup>105</sup> Durang. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 72.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid* 71.

The characters in *The Marriage of Bette & Boo* are of the Catholic faith. Fortunately, I myself was raised in this faith, and so I understand and relate to the beliefs. The Catholic Church had very clear rules on marriage, and divorce was not an option in the eyes of the church. Birth control was not allowed under the rules of the Catholic Church.

Rituals can be found throughout the play, from wedding ceremonies, the honeymoon night, the birth of children, religious holidays, and intimate family dinners. These family rituals are important not only because they are special moments significant to the characters' lives, but they also enable the audience to bookmark the characters' actions from the socially expected behavior as well as their own personal family experiences.

*Are there any historical period political factors pertinent to the play, scene and/or character? Is the setting of the piece affected by war or is it a peaceful time?* Durang makes no mention of historic events in his play. The play takes place in a peaceful time because this is not a political play, but a play that focuses on the state of the family.

*What is the season of the year? What are the weather conditions – raining, snowing, sunny, etc.? What is the time of day or night?* One can tell that the thirty-three scenes of the play happen at a specific time in Matt's life, but as they are revealed from his memory. The playwright does not focus on the exact season, weather condition, or time of day. As an actor, I did assign a rough time to each of my scenes because I felt it would add a subconscious layer to my interactions with the other characters. However, I only indicated the season of the two scenes that take place on a holiday. The times I decided on were: scene 1: 10:00 PM; scene 6: 6:00 PM; scene 9: 4:00 PM; scene 11: 1:00 PM; scene 14: 7:00 PM; scene 16: 2:00 PM; scene 18:

12:00 PM – fall; scene 19: 9:30 AM; scene 213:00 PM – winter; scene 26: 9:00 PM; scene 28: 10:00 AM; scene 30: 6:00 PM.

*Who are/were your parents? What do/did they do for a living? How do they feel about that? Are/were they happy?* Although Durang gives no direct indication of the identity of Soot's parents in the play, one can make educated choices by examining the character traits of Soot and Karl as well as their relationships. For instance, there is no indication that Soot or Karl have been blessed with large wealth from their parents. Karl is employed and Soot handles the housework herself without hired help. I feel strongly that Karl would not marry beneath his class, so I believe that Soot and her parents are also of the middle class. The products of middle class families, Soot and Karl have come together to create an upper middle class family through Karl's success at work. Karl is the breadwinner, just as their fathers were, and Soot is the housewife her mother was. Soot's desire to take care of her family's every whim is a character trait ingrained in her by her mother. A product of her dysfunctional family, Soot is armed with an enabling trait as part of her doting wife arsenal. Soot's father was most definitely a functioning alcoholic. Soot's acceptance of Karl's alcoholism and her natural ability to enable the alcoholic are learned behavioral traits, inadvertently passed on by her mother that Soot has carried into her married life with Karl. Soot is very accepting of Karl's drinking, as I believe her mother was of her father's drinking. The understanding, subservient nature of Soot is fed not only by growing up in a home of an alcoholic father, but also by her Catholic upbringing. Soot's mother put the needs and desires of her husband before everything and Soot follows this example. By recognizing the man as head of the household in her marriage, she feels this will bring her the same happiness her parents had (or she thought they had). Karl, also being raised

in a Catholic family and programmed with a selfish nature learned from his father, eagerly accepts the dominant role in their relationship. Karl finds himself superior to the people around him, as I believe his father did. The cruel edge of Karl's character is a trained behavior developed under his father's tutelage. Karl's father was no doubt a man who married a woman whom he could dominate. Taking from his father's example, Karl sought out the same type of relationship because it had made his father happy. Karl's desire to have things his way was cultivated before he ever entered into a relationship with Soot. Even though Soot is of Karl's social class, he still believes himself superior because he is a man and she is a woman. Karl goes as far as to nickname her Soot, which obviously refers to cinders, dirt, lower than him. The poor treatment of Soot by Karl is his way of dealing with his disappointment in the relationship and a reaction to his misguided desire to be with someone else. I do not doubt that Karl cares for Soot and, in his own way, loves her. I believe that Soot and Karl are not armed with the skills to overcome their dysfunctional upbringings and create an emotionally fulfilling functioning relationship. Soot, unarmed with the skills to deal with Karl's cruelty and the desire for the pleasant happy life she dreamed of, develops a weapon of laughter to combat Karl's cruel treatment. It does not solve their problems. Karl identifies his unhappiness as Soot not being the right match for him. Since Karl and Soot are Catholic and divorce is not an option, Lottie comes into play as Karl looks for greener pastures. Karl is not faithful to Soot, and I believe Soot knows this and wrongfully blames herself. The failure of her marriage in the eyes of God is too much for her to bear and, in the end; she resigns herself to her fate. Soot finds the mercy of God in her deafness, which she identifies as a blessing from God since she is unable to hear Karl. The deafness that Soot refers to is most likely not a physical impairment, but a coping method

that manifests to aid her in dealing with Karl when laughter is no longer enough. I believe in the end, she sees the dysfunction in her relationship with Karl and how Boeey has taken aspects of their dysfunction into his marriage. Ultimately, Soot takes the responsibility for both failed marriages onto her own shoulders.

*How do/did you get along with your parents?* I am Daddy's little girl and Mom's pride and joy. My Dad teased me and, in a way, was entertained by me. I was happy to be his entertainment since it made me the center of his attention and universe. I allow Karl the same privilege out of love and habit. I may be a Daddy's girl, but I look up to my mother and I have learned a great deal from her over the years.

*Where/when were you born? What is your nationality?* I was born October 2, 1910 in Montclair, New Jersey. I am a citizen of the United States of America. I was born into an Irish Catholic family.

*Where do/did you live? How do you feel about it?* The pace of the interactions and the autobiographical nature of the place lend it to be located in the northern part of the United States.

We live in a beautiful track house with a white picket fence at 1310 Karlton Avenue. I love my home; it is more modern than the home I grew up in. Our home is full of new comforts: a television, a vacuum, and a washer. I feel fortunate to be living the American dream.

*Do you have any brothers and sisters?* I am an only child. I enjoyed being Daddy's little girl, but I always wanted a brother.

*When you were growing up, did you have many friends? Were you popular? Why? How do you feel? What were you like as a child?* I was shy as a child and retreated into my very active imagination. I would entertain myself for hours playing house with my dolls. I had a



favorite baby doll, my honey doll, and I was never seen without her as a child. When I grew old enough, I would follow my mother and father around and assist them with chores.

In school, I was never what one would consider popular. Truth is, I was self-conscious and awkward around the popular group. I did have my own circle of friends by the time I reached high school. I enjoyed my small group of friends and flourished in that circle. Unfortunately, I never overcame my shyness.

*Did/do you go to school? How long? Did/Do you like it? Why?* I attended elementary and was expected to finish secondary school with a diploma. I loved going to school because there I could interact with others my own age. My choices after graduation were to go into the workforce as a schoolteacher, nurse, sales lady, or to marry and become a homemaker. Karl asked me to marry him and we were wed soon after graduation. Since Karl wanted me to be a homemaker and did not want me working outside the home, there was no need for further schooling.

*Were/are you a good student? Why? How do you feel?* Although I tried my best in all subjects, I struggled with math and science. I excelled in home economics, due perhaps, to my mother's teaching and duties at home. I was proud of my abilities because I knew that these skills would make me a good wife.

*Are you smart, clever, wise, cunning, intelligent, learned, etc.? How to you feel about it?* While not the smartest woman in the world, I am certainly not the dumbest. I am intelligent because I easily run the household, and have many practical skills that are useful in the home. Although still a little shy, I am an excellent friend, loyal and caring. Others feel welcome and at ease when around me. This makes me a good host when others come to visit. I am very

forgiving of others, overlooking minor mistakes, shortcomings, and personal weaknesses. I love being a mother; loving and taking care of my Boo.

*Who have/had the greatest influences on you? In what way? How do you feel about that?* My mother has been the greatest influence on me. She has been the source of my confidence and my insecurities. My mother has been my example of what I wanted to become: a loving wife and mother. I always hoped and dreamed I would have a life like hers. Staying home and taking care of my family makes me very happy. My mother is glad that I am married with a family, and have become such a good homemaker.

*What do you do in life? (job, title, etc)* I am a mother and a wife. I am in charge of our home and the care of our son. I do the cooking, cleaning, shopping and organizing of the household. I also have to be a good wife to Karl, always looking my best and being there for him. I work hard to make our life beautiful.

*What is your philosophical/religious background and preference? Do you practice a religion?* Karl and I were both raised Roman Catholic. Karl works hard during the week, and so does not feel like going to church on most Sundays, and I would not feel right going without Karl. We do attend church on all major holidays.

*Do you believe in God or gods? Spirit? Force?* Being raised Roman Catholic, I believe in the one true God and the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Outside of the Church, I believe in true love and “the one.” I also believe in fate and destiny.

*Do you believe in life after death, heaven, hell, etc?* I have been taught that after death there is a heaven for the righteous, a hell for the damned, and a purgatory for wayward souls.

*Do you have any special fears, hang-ups, etc.? If yes, what?* Lately Karl and Lottie have been making fun of my eyebrows. If it was just Karl, I would ignore it since he is trying to be funny, but since Lottie is also mentioning it, I am concerned. I have become quite self-conscious about it. As I have seen my father grow old and pass away, leaving my mother alone, I am fearful that I will be alone.

*Do you have any special likes, dislikes, prejudices? If so, what?* I like beautiful things like flowers, pretty dresses, an orderly house, and other such things. I like the fact that Karl takes care of me and makes me feel safe. I like that I entertain Karl, but I wish his teasing was not so cruel.

*Do you consider yourself to be moral, immoral or amoral? Why?* I had a very moral and religious upbringing and see myself as a moral person. I try to follow the laws of the Church and of my community. I try to live by the Bible and follow the Ten Commandments.

*How would you describe yourself?* I am an intelligent person. I pride myself on my patience and understanding with others. I have always been very sensitive and I have a big heart.

*What is your societal level?* I was raised in a middle class home. Fortunately Karl's job provides us with middle class status and comforts. Karl is proud to invite his important business associates to our home for entertaining,

*How old are you now? Are you mature or immature for your age?* At fifty years old, it is hard for me to believe that I have a son who is old enough to get married. I certainly do not feel that old. Although I am a mature responsible adult in charge of a family and household, I guess I am young at heart.

*How is your health? How do you feel about this?* My doctor has recommended I lose a few pounds, but my health is fine.

*What is your marital status? Married, single, divorced, widowed? How do you feel about this?* Karl and I have been happily married for thirty-three years and I love being married. I feel blessed to have found the man of my dreams.

*Do you have any children?* We have the most wonderful son, Boeey. I am very blessed to have a healthy boy. I wanted all my life to be a mom, and I have been granted my dream. Karl was thrilled to have a son, and I love to watch them together. Karl is a great father and Boeey has always wanted to be just like his dad. I would have liked to have a boy and a girl, but Karl was happy with our boy, Boeey.

*What are your physical characteristics?* I am a natural brunette, 5 foot 7 inches, and slightly overweight. I carry my weight evenly throughout my body, making me thick all over. I am very lucky that Karl prefers his women round and curvy.

*What is your temperament?* Generally I am a happy person; I love to smile, laugh, and bring joy to other people. I prefer to see the world and the people in it in a positive light. Life is too short to focus on negative thoughts or feelings.

*What is your movement like?* Grace and fluidity is expected from me. I have moments of this, but my awkward side does show through. I try to float and glide and not be spastic, but I am clumsy at times when under stress.

*Are you neat or sloppy, etc.?* Mother taught me “everything has its place,” and I follow that advice to this day. I work hard to keep our home perfect and orderly. I do my best to keep-up a neat, attractive appearance for my own pride and for Karl’s pleasure.

*How do you stand?* I stand as tall as I can. I always wear heels, which help with my posture. Since I have gained so much weight, I wear an undergarment to help support my body and posture.

*How do you look?* I have noticed, as I grow older, I look more like my mother. This is not a concern for me because I always found my mother attractive. My smile has not tarnished over the years as my other looks have faded.

*Do you have any physical defects-scars, etc.?* I have stretch marks from the birth of my son, Booeey, and a chicken-pox scar above my eyebrow.

*What are you wearing? Any character externals?* I am wearing a wrap dress in mauve that I adore. I bought it special for Booeey's wedding day. The appropriate undergarments and natural colored pumps to match the outfit are a must. I have a very pretty flower, special gloves and my mom's jewelry that I borrowed to complete the outfit.

### Business and Movement

*How does the style and/or period of the play affect (influence) your movement in the play? How do such/factors as the character's age, social status, education and health suggest the type of movement to be used in the play?* As a woman during this play's time frame, Soot's role in society is clearly defined. Society expects her to be a polite lady, graceful, well groomed, a perfect wife and mother. Soot's role in society requires her to wear certain clothing and move in a graceful manner. Soot is in good health and not plagued by arthritis or other impairments; she has no problems going where she needs to go and doing what she needs to do.

*How does the mood of the play affect the type of movement to be used?* The needs of the characters around Soot, or the excitement of the situation, dictate the speed in which she must move. The excitement of the wedding, holidays, the tending to Karl's needs, the birth and deaths of Bette and Boo's babies all require quick movements. When she is taking care of herself, Boeey, and the house, Soot is in control of the situations and moves at a slower, steadier pace.

*How do the demands of dress (costume) affect the movement?* The costume itself supports my character and makes it even easier to bring her to life. While I am used to wearing pants primarily, my costume will consist of a dress. My typical body movements will need to be adjusted in order to be appropriate while wearing the wrap dress created for Soot. Dresses, like the one designed for Soot, can be restraining in movement. There is a freedom of movement in pants that a skirt does not offer. I am not accustomed to wearing them and do not feel comfortable at all, so I will need to work hard at moving naturally. Soot would have been very comfortable in her everyday clothes and I want to portray this ease. This comfort level included movement in the binding undergarment a woman used to control curves and correct posture. The heels women wore helped maintain this good posture, as they are designed to adjust the weight placement of the wearer and elongate stature. The heels will also be a challenge since I have not worn any for years. I have always found that when walking in heels, I had to take shorter steps in order to keep my balance. I will need to work continually with them to insure they do not impede the grace needed for the character.

*Are there any critical pieces of furniture or props, which will affect (influence) movement and business? If so, what and how?* The set will be a large wedding cake with pedestals that can be moved around to create seating and levels. The moving of the cake pedestals at such a quick

pace will take some time to get used to, but the freedom the set creates will allow the cast to move quickly between scenes. It will make the extra focus worth the effort. The degree of rake in the cake will also be a factor in movement; in order to move smoothly around the cake, I am going to add rubber to the bottom of my heels to prevent me from slipping and sliding.

*Are there any differences in language from one character to another, which tend to clarify characterization?* All the characters in the play speak English. Even so, Paul Brennan, who has had a stroke, speaks with an impediment, which makes him impossible to understand completely. Paul Brennan is a character of clarity and reason of thought and yet the playwright has chosen to make his speech affected. There are moments in the play where the characters understand what he is trying to convey, exchanges when they misunderstand, other times when they hear only what they want to hear, and sections when no one listens to him at all. Durang also chooses to apply a theatrical convention and have Paul play the attorney at the divorce hearing of Bette and Boo. He even keeps the speech impediment the same for the attorney. This convention places the focus on what the other characters say and adds a level of humor to a very serious event.

Durang has taken time and care to notate “Soot’s laugh is a terribly important, and integral part of her character,”<sup>107</sup> which conveys that special focus must be paid to how and when it is indicated and the connection to, as well as the timing, of breath. The laugh for Soot is the most important dialogue she has with Karl. Durang reveals, in the Author’s notes of the acting edition of the script, that how Soot responds to Karl is the core of her character and then goes

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<sup>107</sup> Christopher Durang, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, 80.

even one step further to comment that Soot reacts to what Karl says as if she hears the opposite of what a “sane” person would.<sup>108</sup>

*Is your character’s dialogue similar to that of the other characters? What does it reveal about your particular character?* Soot has a pattern of speaking that is sweet and full of laughs to help her deal with the world in front of her. Karl is straightforward and a little rude and crude at times. Without her defense mechanism, Soot would be no match for Karl. Soot’s pattern of delighted dialogue and laughter is special to her, but Margaret, the other mother, does have a trait that is similar. Margaret also dislikes the unpleasant, but she has her own way of dealing with it by changing the subject or commenting on it. Bette was not raised as Soot was and speaks her mind plain as day, paying no mind to the social rules that Soot abides by. Bette’s dialogue has this in common with Karl’s, but it does not have his cruel edge. Instead, it is full of desperate need.

*Does your character speak with any dialect or use a particular regionalism in his/her speech?* Soot does not speak with any dialect or use a particular regionalism in her speech.

*Are there any factors in the character’s age, social status, education, or health that will require a change from your “normal” speaking voice?* There are not any factors in the character’s age, social status, education, or health that will require a change from my normal speaking voice, but for maximum expression on stage I will need to continue to explore my full range and support my voice properly.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid 80.



*Are there any long speeches or passages, which need to be planned or “scored” for performance?* There were two long passages that needed careful study. The first one I dubbed the “dead children speech.”

Boo, Karl’s a lovely man most of the time and I’ve had a very happy life with him, but I hope you’ll be a little kinder than he was. Just a little. Anything is an improvement. I wish I had dead children. I wish I had two hundred dead children. I’d stuff them down Karl’s throat. (Laughs) Of course, I’m only kidding. (Laughs some more. Lights change)<sup>109</sup>

This exchange with Boo is a very important moment for Soot. She reveals for the first time, out loud, that she recognizes the dysfunction in her relationship with Karl. She reaches out to her son with this knowledge so that he does not follow in his father’s footsteps, as she fears he is. She wants him to be better to Bette. She ultimately wants him to be happy and for his marriage to work. Through this speech her frustration with Karl shines through, but in the end, her coping mechanism is activated and she laughs.

The second exchange that needed extra attention, I refer to as the “cigar joke:”

(Cries) Karl, I don’t know. Something about a dickey. Maybe Bore knows. Boeey? I have to go home and take a bath. I feel awful. (Enter the doctor. He drops the baby on the floor, exits. Karl and Soot stare at it a moment.) Catholics can’t use birth control, can they? (Laughs.) That’s a joke on someone. (Enter Boo.)<sup>110</sup>

In this exchange with Karl we see Soot fighting her embarrassment while trying to make her husband happy as he teases her and pushes her to the limit. Only moments before this we hear Soot speak of her fear of losing her mind, referring to Lottie’s warning, “Lottie always said when your eyebrows start to kiss, you better watch it.”<sup>111</sup> The audience experiences Karl’s teasing of

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 41.

Soot many times throughout the play, but at this point Karl has stepped it up even including Lottie in the mind games he plays with Soot. The audience sees that the stress of everything is getting under Soot's skin and into her head and now even affecting her demeanor. Suddenly, Soot says a very Karl like line regarding birth control in response to the death of the baby.

Motivating Force/Desire, Objective, Intentions- What and Why

*What is the motivating force/desire of your character? What do you want?* I want to be a good wife and mother. I want to be loved and return that love two fold.

*What will you, or do you, do to get it?* I will do anything and everything to get my family's happily ever after. I will keep a perfect house, clean and full of delicious food to make those around me feel special. I will give everything I have to my family, focus all my energy into my family. I will put my husband above anything else. My family will be everything to me.

*What are your objectives and intentions?* My objectives and intentions are to be the best wife and mother I can be. I will break the cycle of dysfunction and help my family be happy. This will make my life meaningful and complete.

**APPENDIX D:  
ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION INFORMATION**

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo

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October 20, 2003

Valued Production Members:

I am very excited to be given this responsibility and opportunity to be with all of you on this production. Over the next few days, I will continue to send you materials that will add to this packet.

Please keep in mind that all information is subject to change. Upon such occurrences, swift action will be taken to apprise all members of the updates. All important information will be e-mailed to all parties and updates will be posted on the callboards.

Thank you for all of your work on this production. I appreciate the experience and look forward to a great run.

Sincerely,

Jeannie M. Haskett  
SM

10/3/2003

Jeannie M. Haskett-SM  
Virginia Ekblom-ASM

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo

### Rehearsal Schedule

9:30  
9:45

<del>Friday, October 17</del>	7:00pm	Design Presentations, Dramaturg, Read Thru	All
Saturday, October 18	10:00am	Improv	All
	1:00pm	Lunch	N/A
	2:00pm	Block 1-4	All
	5:00pm	Dinner	N/A
	7:00pm	Block 5-8	All
	<del>Sunday, October 19</del>		Company Day Off
Monday, October 20	6:00pm	Production Meeting	N/A
	7:00pm	Jim Brown w/Music, Review 1-8	All
Tuesday, October 21	7:00pm	Jim Brown w/Music, Work 1-8	All
Wednesday, October 22	7:00pm	Jim Brown w/Music, Block 13-18, Work 9-12	All
Thursday, October 23	7:00pm	Work 13-18	All
Friday, October 24	7:00pm	Work Act I	All
Saturday, October 25	10:00am	Block 19-22	All
	1:00pm	Lunch	N/A
	2:00pm	Block 23-27	All
	5:00pm	Dinner	N/A
	7:00pm	Block 28-TBA	All
	<del>Sunday, October 26</del>		Company Day Off
Monday, October 27	6:00pm	Production Meeting	N/A
	7:00pm	Finish Act II Blocking	All
Tuesday, October 28	7:00pm	Work 1-8	All
Wednesday, October 29	7:00pm	Work 9-18	All
Thursday, October 30	7:00pm	Work 19-27	All
Friday, October 31	7:00pm	Work 28-end	All
Saturday, November 1 Off Book Day	10:00am	Act I	All
	1:00pm	Lunch	N/A
	2:00pm	Act II	All
	5:00pm	Dinner	N/A
	7:00pm	Run Thru	All
	<del>Sunday, November 2</del>		Company Day Off
Monday, November 3	6:00pm	Production Meeting	N/A
	7:00pm	Work Act I	All
Tuesday, November 4	7:00pm	Work Act II	All
Wednesday, November 5	7:00pm	Work Act I	All
Thursday, November 6	7:00pm	Work Act II	All

\*\*Subject to Change  
10/17/03 5:31 PM

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Highlight Area = Changed  
Jeannie M. Haskett

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo

### Rehearsal Schedule

Friday, November 7	7:00pm	Run Thru	All
Saturday, November 8	10:00am	TBA	All
	1:00pm	Lunch	N/A
	2:00pm	Work Act I	All
	5:00pm	Dinner	N/A
	7:00pm	Work Act II	All
Sunday, November 9		Company Day Off	
Monday, November 10	6:00pm	Production Meeting	N/A
	7:00pm	Run Thru	All
Tuesday, November 11	7:00pm	Run Thru	All
Wednesday, November 12	7:00pm	Onstage	All
Thursday, November 13	7:00pm	Dress Parade/Publicity Photo Shoot	All
Friday, November 14	7:00pm	Crew Watch	All
Saturday, November 15	10:00am	Dry Tech	N/A
	1:00pm	Lunch	N/A
	2:00pm	Dry Tech	N/A
	5:00pm	Dinner	N/A
	7:00pm	Dry Tech	N/A
Sunday, November 16		Cue to Cue	All
Monday, November 17	6:00pm	Production Meeting	N/A
	7:00pm	Tech Dress Rehearsal	All
Tuesday, November 18	7:00pm	Dress Rehearsal	All
Wednesday, November 19	7:00pm	Final Dress Rehearsal	All
Thursday, November 20	7:30pm	Opening Night—performance	All
Friday, November 21	8:00pm	Performance	All
Saturday, November 22	2:00pm	Performance	All
	5:00pm	Dinner	N/A
	8:00pm	Performance	All
Sunday, November 23	2:00pm	Performance	
	4:30pm	Photo Call	All
Monday, November 24		Company Day Off	
Tuesday, November 25		Company Day Off	
Wednesday, November 26		Company Day Off	
Thursday, November 27		Company Day Off	
Friday, November 28		Company Day Off	
Saturday, November 29		Company Day Off	

UCF Conservatory Theatre  
Fall 2003

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo Rehearsal Schedule

Sunday, November 30		Company Day Off	
Monday, December 1		Company Day Off	
Tuesday, December 2	7:00pm	Pick-up Rehearsal	All
Wednesday, November 19	8:00pm	Performance	All
Thursday, November 20	8:00pm	Performance	All
Friday, November 21	8:00pm	Performance	All
Saturday, November 22	8:00pm	Performance	All
Sunday, November 23	2:00pm	Performance	All
	4:30pm	Strike	All

\*\*Subject to Change  
10/17/03 5:31 PM

3

Highlight Area = Changed  
Jearrie M. Haskett

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo Scene Breakdown

### ACT I

Scene	Page Number	Bette	Boo	Matt	Margaret	Paul	Joan	Emily	Karl	Soot	Father Donnelly	Matt gives intro
1	7-10	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞		
2	10-11	☞										☞
3	11			☞			☞					☞
4	11-12	☞	☞									☞
5	12-13					☞	☞					
6	13-14	☞	☞					☞	☞			☞
7	14-16	☞		☞	☞	☞	☞					☞
8	16-17		☞	☞								☞
9	17-18	☞	☞		☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞
10	18-20		☞				☞					☞
11	20-21	☞	☞		☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞		
12	21-23	☞		☞			☞					☞
13	23-24	☞								☞	☞	
14	24-25	☞	☞					☞	☞			☞
15	25-26		☞									
16	26		☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞		
17	26-27	☞										
18	27-30	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞			☞

10/3/2003 11:08 AM  
\*\*Subject to Change

Jeannie M. Haskett--SM  
Virginia Ekblom--ASM



## The Marriage of Bette and Boo Scene Breakdown

### ACT II

Scene	Page Number	Bette	Boo	Matt	Margaret	Paul	Joan	Emily	Karl	Soot	Father Donnelly	Matt gives intro	Matt concludes
19	31	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞			
20	31-32	☞	☞										
21	32-34	☞	☞	☞			☞	☞	☞			☞	
22	34-36	☞	☞	☞								☞	
23	36-37	☞	☞							☞		☞	
24	37-40	☞		☞	☞	☞	☞	☞				☞	
25	40-41	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞			☞		☞	
26	41-43		☞					☞	☞	☞	☞		
27	43-44	☞	☞							☞			
28	44-48	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞	☞			
29	48-52	☞	☞	☞	☞							☞	☞
30	52-54			☞	☞	☞		☞	☞				
31	54-55			☞			☞					☞	☞
32	55-57	☞	☞	☞						☞			☞
33	57-61	☞	☞	☞			☞						☞

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo French Scene Breakdown

### ACT I

Scene	Page Number	Bette	Boo	Matt	Margaret	Paul	Joan	Emily	Karl	Soot	Father Donnelly
1	7-8										
2	8-10										
3	10										
4	10										
5	10-11										
6	11										
7	11										
8	11										
9	11-12										
10	12										
11	13										
12	13										
13	13										
14	13-14										
15	14										
16	14										
17	14										
18	14-15										
19	15-16										
20	16										
21	16-17										
22	17										
23	17										

10/3/2003 11:15 AM  
\*\*Subject to Change

1

Jeannie M. Haskett--SM  
Virginia Ekblom--ASM  
Prepared by Virginia Ekblom

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo French Scene Breakdown

### ACT I

Scene	Page Number	Bette	Boo	Matt	Margaret	Paul	Joan	Emily	Karl	Soot	Father Donnelly
24	17		🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	
25	17-18		🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔
26	18	🔔	🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔
27	18-19			🔔							
28	19-20			🔔			🔔				
29	20			🔔							
30	20	🔔									
31	20-21	🔔	🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔
32	21			🔔							
33	21-23	🔔			🔔			🔔			
34	23			🔔							
35	23-24	🔔									🔔
36	24			🔔							
37	24-25	🔔	🔔						🔔	🔔	
38	25		🔔						🔔	🔔	
39	25		🔔							🔔	
40	25-26			🔔							
41	26		🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔
42	26		🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	
43	26-27	🔔									
44	27			🔔							
45	27	🔔		🔔							
46	27	🔔	🔔	🔔							

10/3/2003 11:15 AM  
\*\*Subject to Change

Jeannie M. Haskett--SM  
Virginia Ekblom--ASM  
Prepared by Virginia Ekblom

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo

### French Scene Breakdown

#### ACT I

Scene	Page Number	Bette	Boo	Matt	Margaret	Paul	Joan	Emily	Karl	Soot	Father Donnelly
47	27										
48	27-28										
49	28										
50	28										
51	28										
52	28-29										
53	29										
54	29										
55	29										
56	29										
57	29-30										
58	30										
59	30										

## The Marriage of Bette and Boo French Scene Breakdown

### ACT II

Scene	Page Number	Bette	Boo	Matt	Margaret	Paul	Joan	Emily	Karl	Soot	Father Donnelly
60	31	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔
61	31-32	🔔	🔔								
62	32-33			🔔							
63	33	🔔	🔔	🔔				🔔	🔔	🔔	
64	33		🔔	🔔				🔔	🔔	🔔	
65	33-34	🔔	🔔	🔔				🔔	🔔	🔔	
66	34-35		🔔	🔔							
67	35-36	🔔	🔔	🔔							
68	36-37	🔔	🔔								🔔
69	37	🔔	🔔								
70	37-38			🔔							
71	38	🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔			
72	38-39	🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔				
73	39-40	🔔		🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔			
74	40	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔			
75	40-41	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔	🔔			🔔
76	41		🔔	🔔					🔔	🔔	
77	41		🔔						🔔	🔔	
78	41-42								🔔	🔔	
79	42								🔔	🔔	🔔
80	42								🔔	🔔	
81	42-43		🔔						🔔	🔔	

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**ON STAGE**



**THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE & BOO**  
BY CHRISTOPHER DURANG  
NOVEMBER 20 - DECEMBER 7

**UCF** Conservatory  
Theatre  
Orlando • Lake Haven Park • Daytona Beach

# THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO

BY CHRISTOPHER DURANG

## PLACE

The action takes place in various locations in the present, history, memory  
and fantasy of Matthew Hoollock.

The Marriage of Bette and Boo is presented in two acts with a fifteen minute intermission.

DIRECTOR ..... Christopher Niss\*  
SCENIC DESIGNER ..... Vandy Woodt  
COSTUME DESIGNER ..... Kristina Tollefson  
LIGHTING DESIGNER ..... Jason Tollefson  
SOUND DESIGNER ..... Lauren Gamber  
PRODUCTION MANAGER ..... Jim Hart  
TECHNICAL DIRECTORS ..... Peter Smith, Zach Striding  
STAGE MANAGER ..... Jeanne Marie Hasket  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ..... Jenn Morrison

Produced by special arrangement with Donowitz Play Service, Inc.

\*Matt's Equity number    \*\* Used Scenic Artist    +Alpha Psi Omega

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

*"To dance with a man is to construct a relationship's regulations for sport (and in the judgment of an hour. To pass in courtship without acquaintance, to pass to marriage without courtship, is a skipping of terms reserved for those above who tread the royal road."*

-Thomas Hardy

*"Someone once asked me why women don't gamble as much as men do and I gave the conventional reply that we don't have as much money. That was a true but incomplete answer. In fact, women tend to resist gambling is sanctified by marriage."*

-Clara Steinem

*"Take my wife... please, take her!"*

-Henry Youngman

*"One can't jolly a another man's wife."*

-Helen Rowland

*"Bette's been a lot funnier than I have about coping with life."*

-Marcel Spark

*"Life is just one damned thing after another."*

-Eliott Hubbard

My family was so screwed up...if only my parents hadn't...if I could get my ex-laws to...why doesn't my wife (husband) ever... Regardless of our generation, we all sense at some point that we have cornered the market on experience and understanding of marriage and the family (as opposed to the generation before us) It is in observing the dysfunction sometimes created by our earnest attempts that we find humor in the occasional folly of us all.

Durang pulls no punches as he pointedly skewers the institutions of marriage and the family, often surprising us candidly through the imaginative memory and fantasy of Matt. But as we assembled the play, we became aware that through the laughter of it all, it is Matt's persistence that encourages us and leads him toward resolution.

Laugh, enjoy, be encouraged, and remember...

*"Some family ties last an excessive copy of one."*

-Wayne H

CHRISTOPHER NISS  
DIRECTOR

## DRAMATURG NOTES

"Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage," Frank Sinatra sang to America in 1955. When the song debuted, it embodied an American ideal of marriage, family, and prosperity in the decade — an ideal that developed on the heels of the country's huge sigh of relief as World War II drew to a close. This ideal was gradually undermined, however, by the realities of the Korean and Cold Wars, the McCarthy Era, and the Civil and Women's Rights Movements. Children of the age were taught to strive for the American ideal, but soon became aware of the events that caused many to question its foundation. Christopher Durang was one of those children, and the canon of his plays addresses the conflict between the American ideal and the more tumultuous undercurrents of the time.

As a theatre student at Harvard and then Yale School of Drama in the late sixties and early seventies, Durang began his exploration of this conflict in his dramatic parodies. The style he eventually developed for his plays has been called satirical, surreal, and akin to black comedy. It reached full fruition in such plays as *Sister Mary Ignacia Explains It All for You* (1979), *Baby with the Bacheater* (1983), and *The Marriage of Bear and Boo* (1985).

Durang has said that *The Marriage of Bear and Boo* is his most autobiographical play. This play shows us life in the fifties through the memory of one who grew up during the period. His memories of functional family life are infused with a dysfunction reflective of society's turmoil during the time. The play, however, speaks to families of all time in its dreamlike recollection of the universal concepts of the laughter, pain, and challenges that accompany character relationships. Durang's characters are both comically absurd and sympathetic; their memories and experiences are identifiable to anyone who has ever taken part in family life.

THOMAS CALDERAZZO  
*Durang*

## CAST AND COMPANY

### CAST

Bette Brennan	Heather Friedman
Boo Hadlocke	Robert Stack
Matt	David Kacell
Margaret Brennan	Natalie Werns
Paul Brennan	Jason Bogden
Jean Brennan	Shannon Beeby
Emily Brennan	Ayla Harrison
Karl Hadlocke	Ryan Doty
Seal Hadlocke	Jolie Renee Coleman
Father Dan/Daddy Doctor	Doric Bonner

### COMPANY

Director	Christopher Nien*
Production Manager	Jim Harris
Scenic Designer	Vandy Wood
Costume Designer	Kristina Tollefson
Lighting Designer	Jason Tollefson
Sound Designer	Lauren Garber
Technical Director	Zachary Smithing
Technical Director	Tyler Smith
Assistant Technical Director	Tom Begley
Costume Shop Manager	Randy Blades
Assistant Costume Shop Manager	Wendy Maxwell
Assistant Director	Jon Morrison
Assistant Scenic Designer	Tramaine Berryhill
Assistant Lighting Designer	Aaron Muhl
Assistant Sound Designer	Michael Morales
Assistant Stage Manager	Virginia Ekblom
Wardrobe Crew Head	Matthew Warfield
Properties Master	John Williamson
Sound Board Operator	Michael Morales
Props Acquisition Crew	Likya Korcho
Master Electrician	Scott Messenger
Light Board Operator	Ken Parker
Run Crew	Kendra Holton, Daniel Reyes, Suzanna Richardson Anglica Sandoz, Edward Whitney, Carrie Kasten
Wardrobe Crew	Cecilia Scott, Miriam King, Rebekah Lane, Sarah O'Quinn
Light Hang/Focus	Supercraft I and III



## BIOGRAPHIES

### COMPANY

#### **Shannon Beedy (Jean Brennan)**

is a BFA Performance major from Pensacola, FL. Currently enrolled as a senior undergraduate student, she has been in several shows on the UCF stage including *Under Fire*, *Look Homeward Angel*, *Monty Pythons*, *Cats*, *Lambert and Quince*, and *The Lawrence Project*.

#### **Jason Begler (Paul Brennan)**

is a BFA Performance major from Coral Springs, FL. He is currently enrolled as a sophomore undergraduate student and is making his debut on the UCF Conservatory Theatre stage. Jason was in several productions with the Coral Springs High School theatre, some of which included *Breath in Down Curve the Rain*, *Josh in Zoolie Penn*, *Ray-Bud in Dearly Departed*, Jason in *Small Ants*, and Henry in *Half Candy*.

#### **Donze Bonner (Father Donally Doctor)**

is a BFA Performance major from the Virginia - DC Metro area. A junior undergraduate student at UCF, Donze's goal is to be a true Renaissance man. When he is not performing, Donze explores his visual, literary, and musical talents.

#### **Jodi Renee Coleman (Sue Haddock)**

is a second year MFA Acting graduate student from Wheeling, WV. Making her UCF Conservatory Theatre debut, Jodi has performed several roles with the Rollins College theatre, some of which include *Essie in You Can't Take It With You*, *Bianca in The House of Blue Leaves*, *Mary in The Whores*, *Deb in Small Proximity in Chicago*, and she was a member of the Chorus in *The Bachelor*.

#### **Ryan N. Doty (Karl Haddock)**

is a junior BFA Performance major from Lafayette, IN. He was last seen as Doc Potter

in UCF's summer theatre production of *Crimes of the Heart*, and has performed with the Perdue Theatre as Stanley Kowalski in *The Glass Menagerie* and as Chuck, Charlie, and Horace in *Jitter Bop*. Ryan has also participated in improvisational acting at Second City Chicago's Night of Comedy and performed the role of Soda Pop in Lafayette Civic Theatre's production of *The Outsider*. When he is not acting, Ryan is pursuing his other interests of drawing, painting, and snowboarding.

#### **Heather Friedman (Beth Brennan)**

is working towards her Bachelor of Music at the University of Central Florida. A junior undergraduate student, Heather has graced the UCF stage with such notable roles as Elma in *Bo Stop*, *Serena in Fame*, and *Hypatia in Medallion*, and she has also worked with the Seaside Music Theatre in their productions of *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Miss Saigon*, *Great Expectations*, and *Soot Some*. A budding songwriter, Heather was also the National Anthem singer for the 2001 Rolex 24 Hour Race.

#### **Ayla Harrison (Emily Brennan)**

is a BFA Performance major from Tallahassee, FL. Currently enrolled as a sophomore undergraduate student, she was last seen on the UCF stage as Shirley Tolley in *Fly of July*, a role for which she earned an Indie Ryan Nominating.

#### **David Knoll (Matt)**

is a first year MEA Acting graduate student from Harlan, IA. Making his UCF Conservatory Theatre debut, David has performed with several theatres in Nebraska, including the Nebraska Repertory Theatre where he played the Avatar in *The Little Prince* and *Bonnette Lloyd in Crimes of the Heart*. He also performed an original movement piece, *Gabriel's Horn*, with the University of Nebraska where he also directed *The Baltimore Waltz*.

## BIOGRAPHIES

While in Nebraska, David worked with an improvisational troupe called The Huge Embarrassing Failures.

#### **Robert Stack (Don Haddock)**

is a BFA Musical Theatre major from Duane, FL. A freshman undergraduate student, Robert was last seen on the UCF stage as Joey Percival in *Medallion*. He has also performed with the Rainbow Repertory Company as George Gibbs in *Our Town* and Bert Gates in *Johns for the Wind*, and was the Pirate King in Florida Atlantic University's production of *Pirates of Penzance*. When he is not acting, Robert enjoys songwriting and juggling.

#### **Natalie Weiss (Margaret Brennan)**

is a BFA Performance major from Orlando, FL. A junior undergraduate student, Natalie has performed at several theatres in the Orlando area. Some of her roles include Regina in *Mad Cow Theatre's production of Glengarry Glen Ross*, Edith Frongia in *Wendy Crisp at Impact!*, and Hannah in *Dead Spares with B.O.B.*, a theatrical palindrome. Natalie was last seen on the UCF Conservatory Theatre stage as Christine Lindie in *Now*, and she wrote, composed, directed, and produced *Cats*, *Lambert and Quince* for the 2003 International Fringe Festival. When she is not acting, Natalie performs with her band, *Utopianopta*, and she explores her talents as a director, composer, and playwright.

### PRODUCTION

#### **Tom Begley (Assistant Technical Director)**

has served for seven years in this capacity with the Conservatory Theatre. Prior to that, he served as the technical director for the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and assistant technical director and adjunct professor at Webster University Conservatory. Tom's undergraduate

work was done at Loyola, Chicago and St. Louis University, his graduate studies at Northwestern and Wayne State. His design work with UCF includes scenery design for *Gold Souper and Economics*, lighting design for *The Bookings*, *Angel, To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, and *Piece of My Heart*, and sound design for many shows prior to 1998. Tom is the scenic designer for the spring production of *The Heat*. The upcoming production of *God's Country* will mark his 100th production at UCF.

#### **Trananne Berryhill (Assistant Scenic Designer)**

is a junior BFA Design/Tech major from Miami. Trananne was Assistant Scenic Designer for UCF Conservatory Theatre's production of *Money Wives of Whiskey*. He also served as Lead Carpenter for the Summer 2003 season, Master Electrician for *It's That Little After High School?*, Prop Artist for *The Midsouth* and *Scene Painters on Dawn Yambies*. He is a member of Iota Phi Theta.

#### **Randy Blades (Costume Shop Manager)**

comes to UCF from Atlanta, Georgia, where he worked as a freelance costume designer and as costume shop manager for The Atlanta Opera Company. He has worked with the Alliance Theatre and Theatre Emory in Atlanta, the Georgia Shakespeare Festival, the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, and the Utah Shakespeare Festival. Randy has designed costumes for Penn State, Taste of the Town Theatre (Jacksonville, Alabama), Kenesaw State University (Kennesaw, Georgia), and Stage Door Players (Atlanta, Georgia). Randy holds a BA in Theatre from Jacksonville State University and an MFA in Costume Design from Penn State. He is a member of SETC and the Costume Society of America.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Virginia Etkin (Assistant Stage Manager)

is a BFA Stage Management major from Orlando, FL. A senior undergraduate student, Virginia has assisted the UCF Conservatory Theatre with many of its performances through her roles as Assistant Stage Manager for *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Wardrobe Crew for *Is There Life After High School*, and Props Crew for *Crimes of the Heart* and *Swing! After*. Virginia is the Stage Manager for the Senior Cabaret and the Assistant Director for *All in the Timing*.

### Lauren Gardner (Sound Designer)

is a BFA Stage Management major from North Port, FL. A senior undergraduate student, Lauren has assisted the UCF Conservatory Theatre with several of its productions as Sound Designer for *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Sound Designer for *Now, Stage Manager* for *Assassins*, Stage Manager for *Fifth of July*, and Stage Manager for *It's a Wonderful Life*. Lauren is the Assistant Director for the upcoming *What the Butler Saw*. She hopes to attend graduate school in the near future.

### James P. Hart (Production Manager)

celebrates his seventh year at UCF. From Southern California, he holds a BA in Theatre from Whitier College and an MFA in Lighting Design from the University of South Carolina. Jim has worked season as the Technical Director/Resident Lighting Designer for the Bart Reynolds Institute in Tequesta, Florida, and Pirate Playhouse on Sanibel Island, Florida. At Flat Rock Playhouse, The State Theatre of North Carolina, he climbed the rungs from Carpenter to Technical Director to production Manager. At Whitier College, Jim served as adjunct professor and Scenic and Lighting Designer and Technical Director for the theatre department. At Kent State University, he served as Technical Director. In addition to teaching at UCF, Jim designs lighting and scenery, heads the Production Department, and is the Program

Coordinator for Stage Management. He is responsible for the execution of all scenic, costumes, lighting and sound designs as well as props acquisition for all departmental productions.

### Jeanne Marie Haskett (Stage Manager)

is a BFA Stage Management major from Jensen Beach, FL. A senior undergraduate student, Jeanne has been involved with many of the UCF Conservatory Theatre shows including the duties of Assistant Stage Manager for *Now, Sound Board Operator* for *Balony Sore*, Props Mistress for *Fifth of July*, First Assistant Stage Manager for *Is There Life After High School*, and Stage Manager for *Crimes of the Heart*. When Jeanne is not helping out in the theatre, she enjoys painting, drawing, and exploring her writing talents through short stories, poetry, and more.

### Lidya Korotko (Prop Acquisition)

hails from Orlando and is a junior BFA Design/Tech major. Lidya makes her debut at the UCF Conservatory Theatre with this production. While attending University of West Florida, she served as Prop Acquisition for *Pygals* and Prop Master for both *Ricky Hart Show* and *The Impact*.

### Paul Lortvein (Interim Associate Chair/Artistic Director & Area Coordinator Design Tech/Resident Designer)

holds a Masters of Fine Arts degree in Technical Theatre from Lindenwood University and a Bachelor of Arts in Technical Theatre from the University of Missouri at Columbia (UMC) and a Studio Arts Concentration from Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Illinois (SIUE). Paul is very active with local theatrical support organizations. His work on the Professional Advisory Committee has opened doors with many Conservatory Theatre support-

ers such as ProMix Sound, Fourth Phase Lighting, Techni-Lux Lighting and many others. His activities include many theatrical conferences including the American College Theatre Festival, United States Institute of Theatre Technology, Southeast Theatre Conference among others. Ties through these organizations have helped to recruit outstanding students, faculty, and staff.

### Wendy Smith Maxwell (Assistant Costume Shop Manager)

earned her BA from Radford University and her MFA in Costume Design from The University of Georgia. The breadth of her experience includes working with companies such as The Radio City Rockettes, Glimmerglass Opera, Atlanta Ballet, and Theatre in the Square. For the past two years, Wendy has worked with the California Theatre Center, a company that specializes in children's theatre in Sonoma, California. Her design work at California Theatre Center includes *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Red Prince*, *The Little Prince*, *Happy Feet*, *Anna and the Man*, and *Gracie Sings!*.

### Jenn Morrison (Assistant Director)

was last seen on UCF Conservatory Theatre stage in *The Laramie Project* playing multiple roles including policewoman Reggie Finney. She is a second year graduate student from Ohio.

### Mike Morales (Assistant Sound Designer/Sound Board Operator)

is a BFA Stage Management major from Tampa, FL. A junior undergraduate student, Mike was the Orchestra Audio Engineer for UCF Conservatory Theatre's *Fare, The Musical*, Assistant Stage Manager for *Celebrating Fifty Years of Black Theatre*, *Fifth of July*, *Assassins*, and the Stage Manager for *Gas Game*.

### Aaron Muhl (Assistant Lighting Designer)

is a BFA Design/Tech major from Sarasota, FL. Currently a senior undergraduate student, Aaron was most recently the Sound Designer in UCF's production of *Assassins*. Other sound credits include *Gas Game*, *Is There Life After High School*, and *The Misak*. He is excited to be working in a new capacity and is excited to encounter new challenges.

### Christopher Ness (Director)

is a specialist for the Theatre Department and has been incubating a movement training sequence dubbed Hyper Movement Exploration. His work as an instructor, coach, director, performing artist and workshop presenter spans the US and Canada, and includes: serving as Artist, Director for the Great Lakes Festival Ballet, work for the Cleveland Playhouse, Nebraska Repertory Theatre, Parthenon Theatre, Berkshire Ballet, and Lexington Ballet; and, instructing at Murray State University and Kent State University. He received his MFA in Theatre and Dance with an Acting Emphasis at Kent State University, and has also studied at the National Theatre Studio in London. Chris is currently National Conference Planner for the Association of Theatre Movement Educators, and a member of ATHE, SETC, and Actors' Equity Association.

### Keri Parker (Light Board Operator)

is a junior BFA Stage Management major. She was the assistant stage manager for our productions of *Assassins*, *Is There Life After High School?* and *The Balony Sore*.

### Joseph Rosnock (Interim Chair/Artistic Chair)

joined UCF as Resident Scenic and Lighting Designer/Technical Director in 1985. He was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor in 1989 and assumed the position of Assistant Chair/Artistic Director for the Department in

## BIOGRAPHIES

## BIOGRAPHIES

**1996.** Previously, he was an Assistant Professor of Theatre and Dance at Hamilton College (1973-1985), Yoko College (1973-1979), and a Visiting Instructor of Theatre at Minneapolis College of Art and Design (1976-1977). He holds an MFA in Design and Theatre from the University of Minnesota where he was the recipient of a Bush Fellowship Award. He earned his BA in Theatre Arts from Pennsylvania State University. Joseph designed sets, lights and costumes for over 100 theatrical and dance productions before joining UCF. He has designed 20 ballet productions for the Mohawk Valley Performing Arts Company and has designed scenery and/or lighting for approximately 60 productions at UCF. In addition to his design credits, Joseph has been a properties master with the Guthrie Theatre, the Penn State Festival Theatre and the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis.

### **Tyler Smith (Technical Director)**

previously served as Theatre Faculty and Assistant Technical Director for the University of Illinois, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, and the University of Arizona Repertory Theatre. Recent productions with the Krannert Center include *Into the Woods*, *Oslo*, *Amadeus*, and *Havel and Gerd*, and, with Arizona Repertory Theatre, *Albion*, *Phon*, *Singale*, *Four of My Heart* and *Three Days Open*. Tyler earned his MFA in Theatre Technology from the University of Illinois in 2001, where he specialized in Metalworking for the Stage and Computer Controlled Scenery. His Technical Direction credits as a graduate assistant include too many dance concerts to name, *Stars in the Roof*, *Rain* and *Mid*, *Donis*, *Cherish*, *Jellu* of *Melba*, and *The Last of Simon*. Tyler's summer theatre credits include the Utah Shakespearean Festival, Southern Library Theatre, and Southwest Missouri State's Tent Theatre.

### **Zachary S. Stribling (Technical Director)**

is pleased to be a part of the UCF Theatre Department this year. This past spring, Zachary earned his MFA in Technical Design from Florida State University. His DFA was earned from the University of Evansville. Most recently, he served as the Assistant Scenery Supervisor for the Randall Jones and Adams Theatres at the Utah Shakespearean Festival. Prior to his graduate work, Zachary was a Lead Project Technician at The Production Studio, Inc. in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, producing works that ranged in genre from film and television to expo and amusement parks.

### **Jason Telleman (Lighting Designer)**

received his MFA in Lighting Design and Technology from Purdue University. He is currently a Course Director of Show Light Engineering in the Show Production Division of Full Sail, where he teaches moving light technology, programming and design. He has taught script analysis for the University of Central Florida. Among Jason's regional credits are *Art and I Hate Hamlet* for the Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet* and *Over the River and Through the Wood*.

### **Kristina Telleman (Costume Designer)**

holds an MFA in Costume Design and Technology from Purdue University and BA degrees in Theatre and English from South Dakota State University. Some of her professional credits include Phoenix Theatre, Indianapolis, Summer Stage Repertory Theatre, Florida Children's Repertory Theatre, Prairie Repertory Theatre, Emporia Summer Theatre, Sioux Falls Playhouse, and Texas Shakespeare. She has taught at both Purdue University and South Dakota State University, and is the recipient of four ACTF design awards. Among her recent designs at UCF are *The Mikado*, *Crimes of the Heart*, and

## BIOGRAPHIES

*The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Kristina also serves as Vice-Commissioner for Communications for the Costume Design & Technology Commission of USITT (the United States Institute for Theatre Technology) and moderates the commission's annual list serve which brings together over 400 costuming professional worldwide.

### **John P. Williamson (Prop Master)**

is a junior BFA Design/Tech major making his UCF Conservatory Theatre debut. Originally from Port St. John, he served on the Special Make-Up Crew for Universal Studios' *Halloween Horror Nights* from 1991 to 1993 and was Make-Up Artist for *Wiel* in the *Wilson* at Civic Theatres of Central Florida. He has also redesigned rooms for Orlando's Skull Kingdom.

### **Vandy Wood (Scenic Designer)**

is originally from Skaneateles, NY. She received a BFA in Visual Arts from SUNY Purchase in 1984, and more recently, an MFA from UNC-Greensboro in Design for Theatre. Vandy has been designing professionally for theatre and video since 1986, and has held staff positions at Syracuse Stage, Syracuse University and Clemson University. After receiving a design fellowship to the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference in 2008, Vandy has been asked to return as an associate designer in 2009. Recent design activities include Lighting Designer for the New Plays Festival (2002 and 2003) at Mill Mountain Theatre, Scenographer for *A Boy in Mexico* (a new touring play by Ingrid D'Safrica), and Set Designer for *Lady Honore* at the UNC-Greensboro School of Music.

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