

*SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR:*

Adapting and Directing a Modern Drama for a Contemporary Audience

A Senior Honors Thesis Capstone Project for the Department of Drama and Dance

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*Please find the program, which includes my essay, “The Man and His Muse,” attached.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

At base, the task of the stage director is to serve as the filter between author and audience. It is my duty to take the detailed creation of the playwright and present it with great relevance and expression to a contemporary audience. This may require the play to be presented precisely as written, or perhaps, involve adaptation or refraction as the audience and author are often separated by eras. This theatrical role, the leader of the artistic process, is all encompassing and includes active, collaborative work with actors and designers. Much of my time at Tufts University has been dedicated to exploring the role of the director and discovering how to best bring a play to life for an audience. This work culminates in my senior honors thesis capstone project. After much thought and consideration, I chose to direct Pirandello's modern masterpiece, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The play's role in modern drama and exploration of theatre as an art form seemed an appropriate capstone project for a drama major with a focus in directing. After my initial encounter with the text, I was confronted with the following question: how can I present this play and its latent themes, so deeply rooted in its modern context, to a contemporary audience? As the play began to sift through me, it became apparent that a successful production would require more than simply staging the drama as written. This question led to a myriad of other provocative ones, but seemed to possess a challenge worthy of the culminating project of my academic dramatic career. It has served as my driving question throughout the entire process and the core of my work. Both a highly academic and artistic endeavor, it forced me to reexamine the text—as it passed through me, the filter—and the way in which I would present it to my audience with as much verve and thematic relevance as its premiere in 1921. The written portion of

the thesis capstone project details my work in answering this essential question from the selection process to performance. However, this written component must be combined with the adapted script, rehearsal notebooks and documented performance, itself, to comprise the project in its entirety.

## **II. THE JOURNEY TO SIX CHARACTERS**

After completing Directing II, I refined my values as a theatre artist and a director. I began to develop a relationship with plays that are self-referential: texts that, in some way, address the obvious and essential, though often ignored, nature of this unique, live, form of art. My study-play in Directing II speaks strongly and clearly to the type of theatre that I am passionate about. Both comic and dramatic, Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* celebrates and challenges theatre. What struck me most profoundly in my close scrutiny of the play was the presence of both actor and character on stage. Whereas in realism, the actor assumes the role and attempts to completely "become" the character, leaving his sense of self in the dressing room, Wilder brings both on stage. He allows the actor and character to exist at separate times, within the same body. This convention felt jarring, frightening, but quintessentially theatrical. For many audiences—and actors, too—the ultimate crime, the most significant and detrimental mistake that can be committed in the theatre is "breaking character." It stops the flow of the action and breaks the *illusion* of the play. For Wilder, the presence of the actor on stage is of equal importance, and so the audience is confronted with two separate "worlds" of the play.

After discussing my desire to express the themes and meta-theatrical qualities of *Skin* with my thesis advisor, Barbara Grossman, she suggested I explore an earlier text

that possesses similarities in genre and form. It, too, explores the actor-character relationship, yet polarizes it even more severely than in Wilder's work by placing the actor and character in separate bodies. Though I had not initially been captivated by its message and argument, returning to the text several years later revealed its power and incited my passion to direct it. This play, of course, is Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. On the surface, the play celebrates and challenges the theatre and its forms. I knew there were other, more powerful themes buried deep within the text that would soon envelop and inspire me, but I first encountered this play as an investigation of dramatic art, itself. As such, it was the ideal selection for my senior honors thesis capstone project; it explored the art form to which I am committing my life.

This rather personal theme felt relevant and timely. My disillusionment with the commercial American theatre paralleled Pirandello's disdain of the dominant theatrical forms of his own era. While there is a wide variety of challenging, thought provoking drama presented throughout the country, the most widely viewed productions seem to reintroduce an audience to a recognizable world or reality. However, as in *Six Characters*, the most effective drama focuses on *defamiliarizing* what is known in order to increase perception and reveal an otherwise hidden truth (Shklovsky 16). I felt it was the appropriate time for a revival of this challenging piece of theatre; it would illuminate the necessity of form-challenging drama and, if presented effectively, garner the spirited, violent reaction it received at its premiere. Although an important message to communicate, it did not seem the play's essential one. I began my investigative "textual analysis and research phase" of the process in order to get closer to Pirandello, the play itself, and its universal, human themes.

### **III. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**

Before I began conducting research outside of the text, I set out to ascertain the story Pirandello is telling, the story I needed to tell to my audience. This would help keep my research focused on fueling and informing what is already present in the text. The story describes the journey of the play. It involves character, and, most importantly, it embodies a value change. This also involves the emotional world of the play. I ask the question: what happens to this character, or this group of characters in his/her/their journey? What changes for them? The Characters make a massive and impactful realization in the final moments of their time on stage. It is a realization that they make time and time again, yet nonetheless, they become brutally aware of their state of being, as characters. They reaffirm, as fresh as the first time, that, without an author, they cannot alter the events of their past. Their present is the inexorable repetition of past events. This is why, then, they so desperately seek an author; they want to write an end to their story in order to escape the pain and suffering they must endure.

Although the story often belongs to one specific character, I felt very much that the story belongs to the family, specifically the Father, Son, Mother, and Stepdaughter. They all share the role of storyteller and, without each of them, it would be impossible to share their drama; this life drama revolves around all four of them. Thus, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* tells the story of group of characters who arrive at the theatre in pursuit of a new playwright in order to resolve their “cataclysmic” and painful life drama only to re-realize their immutability as characters, products of art, and thus, their inability to alter or escape their predetermined, cyclical fate. Ascertaining this story early in the

process was imperative, as it informed nearly every decision during the rehearsal and design process.

This goal of this phase of the process was to excavate and explore the text's universal themes, but also to gain a greater understanding of its theoretical arguments and contexts. This period of the analysis and exploration occurs before the rehearsal and design process and it is important that it end before they begin. As with every rule, however, this one has its exceptions—sometimes certain aspects of the play warrant research in these later stages. I attempt to “get lost in the play,” as director Anna D. Shapiro describes it, and researching the play helps me achieve this. It is also important to conduct the appropriate amount of research; too little leaves a director uninformed and too much deters one from the primary goal of staging a live, active event for an audience.

The discoveries made and knowledge acquired in this phase of the process informs my later decisions and work in the rehearsal room. As such, I present the majority of my research in this section and my work in the rehearsal room separately to represent the progression of my directorial process. However, where a direct correlation between a discovery in the research phase and a choice in the rehearsal/design phase exists, I synthesize them where appropriate to reflect my translation of the research into an active, theatrical context.

I began with the exploration of previous productions of *Six Characters*. Typically, I do not allow myself any knowledge of this information in order to keep my work as organic as possible. Yet given this play's rich performance history and role in the Western theatrical canon, I felt it necessary to explore the evolution of the text and responses to other productions in order to discern what would work best for my own.

I began by exploring Robert Brustein's adaptation for the American Repertory Theatre. Though I did not use his adaptation, I retained a strong sense of its spirit. My decision to use Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as the play the Company is rehearsing and have the Characters interrupt its opening scene came directly from the American Conservatory Theatre's production that Brustein describes in his introduction to his adaptation (3). He recommends "the play being rehearsed by the actors should, if possible, be a vehicle familiar to your audiences" (3). Although I initially intended to use *Macbeth*, based on the presence of magic and spirits in that text, I, instead, turned to *Hamlet*; my audience would be a wide-ranging, diverse one and *Hamlet* would certainly be the most accessible to such an audience. Brustein also claims that *Six Characters* "depends a lot on magic, which is to say stage tricks" (4). Even though I agree that there exists magical quality of the play, the use of stage tricks seemed, well, cheap. Fooling the audience is something of the illusory theatre Pirandello was so strongly averse to. The genre of this play is, quite famously and undoubtedly, meta-theatre. Given this, the play must assert itself as a play. The revelation of the rehearsal process achieves this, but Pirandello embraces this meta-theatricality more prevalently throughout the play. The goal was not to trick the audience into believing the Characters are "real," but rather, to create circumstances in which the truth of the Characters' reality is undeniable. It seemed that Brustein was focused on what the audience *sees*, yet I became much more concerned with what the audience *feels*. If the audience believed a certain moment to be true for one nanosecond and then determined the simple obvious way in which we created "stage magic," it would not matter. For then the audience would question the reality of the Characters and actually

debate it. This is the meta-theatrical paradox I, and Pirandello, want the audience to experience.

*Six Characters* made its premiere in an English-speaking nation in the West End of London in 1922; it did not make its debut in English, however, until its New York presentation later the same year. A review of the opening performance rationalizes this oddity: “Owing to some difficulty with our Censor [the Lord Chamberlain] the play was presented in its native tongue, the assumption being, I suppose, that however objectionable it might prove to be, only the Italian members of the audience would run the terrible risk of contamination!” (Pharamond). The radical form of the play, including its setting in a theatre and destruction of accepted theatrical convention prevented the Lord Chamberlain from allowing the audience any possibility of actually understanding it! Though preposterous, this helped me gain a sense of just how strongly Pirandello challenged the Western theatre. This feeling of disarray and demolition of the theatrical norm was a necessary aspect of the drama and something I would want to incorporate in my production.

I next turned to a seasoned and well-respected literary and dramatic expert. In his introduction to *Luigi Pirandello*, Harold Bloom discusses the importance of action in the work of Pirandello. With a text like *Six Characters*, so reliant on rhetoric, with its densely packed speeches that do not inherently yield action, Bloom makes clear the importance of *doing*. What happens is the most important aspect of the play and good dialogue must support it (Bloom). This reminded me that no matter how imperative the words are—in this case, they certainly are powerful and eloquent—they must be supported by action. The text *informs* the action.

I also explored Anne Paolucci's expansive investigation of *Pirandello's Theatre*. Paolucci discusses Pirandello's transition from the literary world to the theatrical one and his dedication to the detailed differences between these forms of storytelling. "He looked down upon the stage representation as a mere technique for communicating the substance of stories that are much better told, for intelligent readers, in narrative form" (Paolucci 8). Though a novelist himself, Pirandello embraced the power of drama and recognized that only certainly stories deserve to have their action, their narrative, unfold on stage before a live audience. He initially believed the six Characters to belong inside a novel. Yet as he "went on grimly determined to expunge them from [his] consciousness, they, who by now had almost completely broken free of their narrative context, fictional characters magically transported outside the pages of a book, were carrying on with their own lives" (xiv). As they exited his imagination and took shape outside of the mind, they transported themselves beyond the page and into the world of art, specifically, the world of theatre. In his detestation of symbolic art and stories unworthy of the stage, Pirandello "invaded the modern stage to recover it for dramatic art" (Paolucci 12). To do this, he breaks apart the theatre and reveals to us, his audience, its inner workings—something typically kept highly secretive. "He shows us...how it works to shape personality for us on the stage and in us through the dramatic catharsis we experience" (Paolucci 12). Paolucci recognizes Pirandello's ability to create drama on stage that demands the audience's involvement and possesses the ability to shape our personalities. It seems to me, however, that the *lack* of dramatic catharsis is what stays with the audience; the absence of a resolution prevents a clean dismissal of the event and comfortable exit from the theatre. Like the Characters, the audience does not receive the conclusion they desire and are

accustomed to. Although Paolucci recognizes Pirandello's dramatic power of expression, it is the lack of dramatic catharsis that has the most enduring effect on the audience.

Pirandello also reveals the consciousness and self-consciousness of the theatre (Paolucci 16). The action of the play includes the preparation for a performance, yet never addresses the audience directly. This is yet another Pirandellian paradox; its genre is meta-theatre, but must also operate under some rules of realism to create the illusion of an interrupted rehearsal. In doing so, Pirandello “[shatters] the illusion of the stage as the mirror of everyday life and forces us to look upon it as a reality itself” (Paolucci 19). This is the most enduring image in my approach to staging the play. While the reality of the Company should feel like looking into a mirror, the entrance of the Characters should shatter it. A separate reality of the stage, of the Characters, must be revealed in the presentation of this drama. As the Father states, this reality must be “not as real, possibly, but more true” than that of the Company (Pirandello 11).

Paolucci also discusses what the Father refers to as the “eternal moment” in which the Father, Stepdaughter, Son and Mother receive their frozen motivation and become solidified in this painful expression. “In their characteristic posture, each of them recollects the spontaneous overflow of emotion associated with the eternal moment which is their entire being” (45). This highlighted the entirety and the impact of this moment upon each of the four main Characters. It would later influence my decision to create a “characteristic posture,” which would be the physical and emotional foundation for each Character, as well as the basis of expression during moments of passionate “flare-ups.” Similarly, Paolucci’s description of the Characters’ ability to “only narrate

and act out the key moments that have shaped them” influenced my creation of the “levels of existence” within the Characters, described in detail in Section V.

Bassnet-McGuire also discusses the importance of this eternal moment not only in *Six Characters* but in all of Pirandello’s work. His “plays continually revolve around the moment of exposure, the point at which the fictions collapse and the emptiness of human life is laid bare” (26). *Six Characters* does not revolve around this moment, but the life drama of the Characters certainly does. This is the moment in which the Father’s physical frustration, of which he is quite ashamed, transcends from the private world into the public one. Even though he describes the pains of “physical frustration” in great detail, and defends his “unconfessable...temptation,” these excuses seem a façade that crumbles away, revealing a base human desire; in this case, it is a shameful one (Pirandello 24).

Bassnet-McGuire goes further to discuss how one is always posing, for others, in a characteristic posture that suggests the way in which one wishes to appear. (27-30). In this eternal moment, the Characters’ pretense is stripped away and their truths revealed. As characters, products of art, the Characters lack the ability to pose a certain way and create a more respectable, desirable image for oneself. They cannot present themselves in any other way; their mistakes and sufferings experienced in this moment become their inescapable reality. By forcing the Characters to remain in this expression, Pirandello compels the audience to recognize the enduring pain that can occur in *life* in such a moment of exposure. When we make mistake, a regrettable decision, it cannot be altered. It is fixed, and, no matter how much we may try to cover it up, it still exists within us. The reality of the past is unchangeable. This revealed an extraordinarily painful yet

truthful and universal aspect of our being that could be, and would need to be, communicated to each and every audience member.

Paolucci quotes the Italian critic Bontempelli: “They [Pirandellian figures] are the victims of a clear and restless consciousness of the nothingness which surrounds man—the center and the outermost limit of a universe of infinite radius” (qtd. 48). This paradox revealed a great sense of the loneliness that surrounded and haunted Pirandello; his extreme awareness of his solitude certainly contributed to the creation of these creatures. Like Pirandello, they are trapped in their reality. This sense of agony in isolation makes itself present in one of the Father’s monologues in which he discusses being trapped in his “empty house...wandering blindly from room to room” (22). The Father, and the Characters, exceed any agony with which we are familiar. Their emotion is so powerful, so palpable and painful that they “go beyond tragedy, to the very limits of art” (Paolucci 49). Their life drama is tragic and its inexorability even more so.

A key and troubling question I confronted in my research was, “Why do the Characters come to the Balch Arena Theater tonight?” It seems as though they continue to metamorphose in theatres all over the world, reminding companies and audiences of the true nature and force of dramatic art. Still, the question remained. Why here? Why now? Paolucci suggests that perhaps they have been “called forth out of the eternal limbo by the unanswered questions in all of us” (50). They do seem to exist in a universe parallel to our own, neither fully able to adopt the naturalness of life, nor find peace in death. Tragically, they exist somewhere in between and take shape on stage for the duration of the play, only to return to their limbo.

As a director, I believe in the power of asking questions, impossible questions that generate conversation, thought and not necessarily answers. Through the text, Pirandello poses questions of great magnitude that deal with the plight of human existence. The Characters, then, may arrive, in part, not necessarily to answer these questions, but simply to bring them into our awareness. Perhaps the Characters will force us to question what we know and accept, and possibly, take for granted. As such, “theatre invades life itself” (Paolucci 50). This highlights a key, universal theme, while providing a fruitful and terse description of the play’s primary action.

Also important to consider is the multifaceted disposition of the Characters. They are both nothing and everything. They are nothing because they are, after all, figments of one man’s imagination. They are everything, then, as they are made up of the emotions, pains and truths present in all of us (Paolucci 57). The Characters are created from the aspects of all our lives, rearranged and amplified to create an independent reality. Paolucci directly addresses the play’s meta-theatricality as she later states that Pirandello is “staging the illusion of life and the life drama itself” (61). This made abundantly clear to me that the illusory aspect of the play is, in fact, the Company. We must attempt to create the illusion that natural, unplanned life is taking shape on stage. The Characters then must not possess any illusory qualities. They are made up of the emotions and truths of life, but their existence is completely separate from ours, governed by different rules, and exists on another plane. Thus, their drama is completely real; it is merely unknown. It is their life drama that must be presented on stage; the drama is their life and their life is the drama. Nothing in this world must seem illusory—no tricks are to be played on the audience.

In exploring A. Richard Sogliuzzo's *Luigi Pirandello, Director: The Playwright in the Theatre*, I was able to ascertain some of my impulses based upon the text.

Sogliuzzo discusses the Company as sort of Greek Chorus, with the [Director] serving as the Chorus leader (154). The play tells the story of the Characters and the audience views this story through the eyes of the Company. This greatly influenced the staging of the play. The Company sat in the first row of seats for nearly the entire first act, watching and commenting on the action. The Arena allowed for this to be enhanced, as the Company sat in the house as well; the audience truly needed to look through the Company to see and feel the Characters.

One key aspect of the play that perplexed me was the Stepdaughter's "song and dance" in the first act. Sogliuzzo describes this moment as both a warning to the Company of the mysterious power and drama they possess and also a means to lure them (162). This is the first moment in which the Characters seem to bring their distinctive world into the theatre. To do so, Pirandello has the Stepdaughter sing a popular Italian nursery rhyme. Felicity Firth, the translator of the text on which my adaptation is based, adopted a popular British tune of the day. I knew neither of these would work for my adaptation, my production. It would need to be something that was of the Characters' unique world, something completely unfamiliar to the Company and the audience. Yet it needed to possess this luring quality. After much deliberation, I turned to some of Pirandello's contemporaries and discovered a book of Romantic poems. The degree of emotion expressed in this Italian poetry matched that of the Characters. Drawing upon the musical skill of the actress playing the Stepdaughter, Natalie Buzzeto, we created a tune

for one stanza of this poem. In a minor key, seething with dissonance, it certainly captured a sense of mystery and enticement.

Olga Ragusa describes a reading of *Six Characters* in which Pirandello read the entire play himself, with great passion, taking on a new persona and voice for each role. This was surely a great treat for those in attendance at the reading, but, more importantly, evinces the reflexive nature of personality. Like the characteristic posture of the Characters, we merely assume different personalities for different people in order to communicate the aspects of ourselves we wish to reveal. This notion takes on great importance, then, when the Father boldly proclaims that “this is the heart of the drama: we think of ourselves as just one person. But this is wrong; each one of us is many different people. We go around thinking we’re exactly the same person for everybody, but this isn’t the case at all!” (Pirandello 26).

Ragusa further explores the differences between the Characters and the Company, specifically, the way in which they are “birthed” into and are formed by their respective worlds. “Characters are distinguished from persons, the former being creations of authors, the latter products of procreation and environment” (158). Thus, all discoveries and decisions made about the Characters were to stem from the script and Pirandello’s introduction, and all choices for the Company should be born out of the environment I create in the rehearsal room, based on the environment we experience daily. Though actors typically “play” the role of the Character, in separating these two realities, Pirandello suggests that “characters are essences; actors are roles” (Ragusa 159). This highlights, further, the tangible quality of the Company and the ethereal existence of the Characters. The externalization, or concretization, of these Characters is, essentially, the

imagination taking the form of a stage presentation (Ragusa 168). This is one of the great powers of theatre, and, it is necessary, then, to make sure the Characters stem from someplace imaginative rather than actual.

A final conclusion that Paolucci draws deals with the meta-theatricality of the play in the clearest and most visual sense. She unveils how his adoption of this genre is able to evoke a sense of his theme, his message to the audience. “For Pirandello, communication is ultimately not in words but in the mirroring of intuitions—through phrases that echo one another, through parallel situations, through the very image of the mirror” (62). Revealing the reflexive nature of art and life, their interaction, their parallel existence and eventual intertwining is of the utmost important to him. The text reflects this, certainly, but this discussion informed a great deal of work in my adaptation. I wanted to make sure to create this sense of the mirror in every way possible; it would need to be done organically and subtly so as to not overwhelm or insult the audience with the obviousness of the image.

Working in the round made achieving the image of the mirror both achievable and fascinating. I drew an imaginary line down the center of the space and reflected each reality on either side. The height and circularity of the Arena allowed this image to become clearer than in a proscenium or thrust space. It also allowed the audience to look through the mirror via a unique lens, based on the composition of the Characters on one side of the stage and the Company on the other. Audience members seated in section IV saw the play through the eyes of the Company and through the mirror, the Characters. For the audience in Section II, it was the opposite; like a mirror, this is not a symmetrical image, but an inverted one. It seemed that this would be a visual that would satisfy

Pirandello's message. For those audience members in Sections I, III, and V, this visual was a more balanced view of the Characters and Company. For these sections, I wanted the first act of the play to feel as though it was played upon the "scales of justice." Each world of the play exists on either side of the scale, tipping back and forth as the degree of reality served as each world's weight.

I also worked to incorporate this image of the mirror into phrases and situations. For example, Royi, the Company member, played his role as if he had no actual desire to take on Hamlet. He did not want to rehearse or take the stage because of the work required to play this seminal character, as well as the physical and emotional abuse required to fully absorb the role. Though this could have been communicated more clearly in my adaptation, Royi the Company member's rejection of the role was to mirror the Son's; neither wanted to take the stage for fear of the emotional weight it exerted upon one. The Son, to me, always seemed to be contemplating suicide. Though it never stated outright and cannot necessarily be proven, it was clear to me that if the Son had the ability to take his own life, to remove himself from the life drama of the Characters, he would certainly do so. When Bassnet-McGuire asserted that "an actor who desires not to appear on stage may be parallel to a man contemplating suicide," I knew my initial inclination was correct (45). The drama is the life of the Son and so his rejection to participate in it, then, is a rejection to participate in his life. This was comically mirrored in Royi's dissatisfaction with his role in art.

This mirroring also affected the formation of Eliza's personality. She, like the Stepdaughter, possessed a sense of insolence and immaturity. She commanded others to do as she wished, and seemed to think that, for lack of a better phrase, the world revolved

around her. The Stepdaughter certainly believes her world revolves around her. They serve similar roles in their respective worlds and often question and doubt their leaders.

I also created a parallel situation in the passing of the scarf utilized in THE SCENE. Pirandello calls for the Leading Actress—in my adaptation, Eliza, the actress—to be wearing a hat that the Stepdaughter is to borrow and wear in the scene. (The mere usage of a costume piece belonging to the Company in THE SCENE, the most fully realized moment of the Characters' life drama is strong symbol of the intertwining of these universes). In my production, a pashmina scarf was utilized instead of a hat. This was, truthfully, a piece of clothing that actresses often wore to rehearsal and seemed a stronger image than the hat; though a hat would hide the Stepdaughter's face, a scarf would disclose her breast, her sexuality. And so when the Father asks her to remove the scarf, the long, tense, painful removal and hand-off to the Father served as a palpable symbol and evocation of the loss, or, rather, abandonment, of the Stepdaughter's innocence. Mirroring the Stepdaughter's tentativeness, when the Father asks Eliza to borrow her scarf, she, too, is slow and reluctant to hand it off.

This sense of intertwining became strong image in the staging of the play. The first act consisted heavily of the image of the mirror; the Characters and the Company reflected one another across an imaginary line down the center of the stage. Paolucci further describes the journey of the Characters as a “spiral-like movement towards insight” (58). Firstly, this reassured my decision that the story of the play centered on the value change that occurs in the Characters as they, once more, realize the inexorability of their fate and their inability to escape it. The journey to this painful re-discovery certainly felt to be a spiraling one, an ideal staging concept for our presentation, in which the

audience fully surrounds the action. From the image of the mirror, it seemed as though in the second act of my adaptation, the second and third of the original, the two realities blend together in spiral-like fashion—much like the Yin and yang image—and finally, in the climactic scene in the garden, become almost completely intertwined. Then, with the gunshot, the climax of the play, the lights cut out and the Characters implode into the nucleus of this spiral and zip back to their “eternal limbo.” From this one quote, I was able to essentially garner my entire staging concept for the play that reflected its progression and central theme, specifically tailored to the performance space.

Pirandello lived a life full of chaos and unpredictability. After his father lost his wife’s entire dowry in the collapse of the mining industry, Pirandello’s wife fell ill, becoming quite mentally unstable. Though Pirandello cared for her for some time, he eventually banished her to a mental institution, neglecting her completely and remarrying the actress Marta Abba. It seems as though he took some sort of strange comfort in the rigidity of art, of theatre (Bassnet-McGuire). However, he cannot neglect the involvement of his tumultuous life in his art and their constant blurring. In the introduction to the second edition of the play, Pirandello exquisitely describes how the story of these Characters began to take shape. “For a great many years now, though it seems no time at all, I have been assisted in my artistic labours by a sprightly young helpmate, whose work remains as fresh today as when she first entered my service. Her name is Imagination...Her great delight is to search out the worlds’ unhappiest people and to bring them home for me to turn into stories and novels and plays” (Pirandello xi-xii). Whether the world’s unhappiest people visit Pirandello because he is unhappy or he is unhappy because the world’s unhappiest people visit him cannot be determined. This

may be the ultimate Pirandellian paradox, and is certainly an issue that pervades *Six Characters* and much of his other work. There is great tension and a troubling overlap that occurs between life and art, and it became quite clear to me how important it would be to make this philosophical theme come alive in a palpable and active way. I did not merely want to present this argument, but to have it actively and competitively play out on stage. As a dialectical argument, the onstage battle would not result in one world “winning” and the other “losing,” but appear as “face-off” in which each side feuds with one another, actively and aggressively, as the audience is forced to consider the outcome for themselves.

#### **IV. THE WORLD OF THE COMPANY**

Prior to my interaction with *Six Characters*, I did not believe adaptation to be the best approach to presenting plays of the past. Adapting canonical plays, whether they require translation or not, often seems a heavy-handed approach that can override the intention of the playwright. The language spoken by the characters is specific to the world of the play. By changing the text, often making it more contemporary, the specifically crafted world of the play is altered as the language is brought closer to the audience. As it turns out, this is precisely what I would need to do to one “world” of the play.

In our formation of the dialogue and action of the Company, I aimed to be as truthful to Pirandello’s story as possible. There are several key facts revealed about the Company in the opening scene that need to be established. There must to be a sense of chaos, a lack of organization. This will allow for comedy similar to the perfectly

orchestrated disarray of farce, as well as humor in contrast to the exactness of the Characters. It also became immensely important to illustrate the flux and flow of life and art. Where art is unchanging and pre-determined, life is chaotic and constantly changing and evolving in an unexpected manner.

Just prior to the entrance of the six Characters, Pirandello curtly informs the reader, “Any stage production of the play must make absolutely clear the fundamental distinction between the six Characters and the...Company” (8). This would become one of the primary foci of the entire process and a key concept of the play that I adhered to with a religious dedication. Pirandello calls for the actors to be “natural and volatile” (8). The Company needs to be organic and natural, almost to the point of naturalism. It also must have the ability to rapidly change at any moment. Volatile seemed a threatening word choice for changeable, yet immensely specific. There is something dangerous and frightening about the inconsistency. Changes can be dramatic, sudden and unexpected. These two words are all that Pirandello shares with us about the Company. It seems as though that is enough, as he expected us to be quite in touch with this reality.

In order to stage this battle and explore the tension between art and life, Pirandello created the Company as an example of life as *he* felt it to be. In order to carry out this key theme, the Company would need to be a staging of life as *we*, the audience and I, know it. It is, first, important to note the impossibility of staging true life. This paradox was important to Pirandello and I think he embraced challenge. Although it would be the present, contemporary life, the rules of the world that Pirandello insists upon cannot be ignored. The world of the Company must be a chaotic one. This “life” must possess a frightening lack of consistency. This world must also be comical. The

audience needs to be able to find joy in the tribulations of the Company, in contrast to the extreme pain felt in the misfortunes of the Characters. The Company should move, speak, behave and interact as naturally on stage as they do off stage. This is an immense challenge to be so true to oneself on stage, when the expectation is to perform, but this rule of the world further heightens the contrast with the Characters.

I began by looking at the opening moment of Pirandello's play carefully, trying to determine (a) what is revealed to the audience and (b) what happens, the action. The actors and production staff are revealed, as well as their relationships to one another. Some care about the play, others do not. The audience is also informed that the Company is rehearsing *The Rules of the Game*, another of Pirandello's plays—it cannot get more meta-theatrical than that! They begin to rehearse a scene from the play. The actors question decisions—or indecisions, rather—of the Producer and the Producer responds in a rather “volatile” manner. He begins a ranting monologue about the representative nature of theatrical actions. “And there’s more to beating eggs than you might think” (Pirandello 7). Finally at the climax of this unsuccessful rehearsal, the Characters enter.

In our adaptation, we retained the essential information and action, but reinvented it in the most organic process possible. Prior to engaging with it in the rehearsal room, I changed the play the Company is rehearsing to *Hamlet*. I selected the most widely known and studied play in the Western theatrical canon since, unlike Pirandello’s 1923 audience, my audience would unfamiliar with *The Rules of the Game*. Every audience member would know this Shakespearean classic, regardless of theatrical experience, and rehearsing the opening scene would allow for a poignant revelation of the Characters. In casting the Company I worked to create a balance and variety of personality and dramatic

experience. They would need to feel like a complete ensemble, with varying shades and differences in opinion to create an exciting and entertaining diversity.

Once in rehearsal I worked with each member of the Company to create what a *Boston Globe* theatre critic refers to as a “facsimile of oneself” (Siegel). I worked individually with each actor to create his or her stage persona, picking up on specific traits that were needed to create a diverse rehearsal room. Eliza was to play the leading actress, so we heightened her dedication to the rehearsal process and focus in rehearsal. Truthfully and comically, I also encouraged her to react strongly to her fellow Company members and embrace a negative attitude whenever possible. Emily, too, had a great deal of focus in rehearsal, always believed in the work and adopted a serious-minded approach, so we worked to amplify these traits. Bradley had less experience and was a more of a jokester, so he took on a rather clown-like role in the Company; he was often unaware of obvious facts about the play and mocked the process. Royi had a goofy side, as well, and was constantly stressed about his work, so we allowed these traits to take precedence in his interactions with others. Eliana, dedicated, focused and beaming with energy, needed to be the theoretically-minded, vague director. Lily did not like administrative tasks, so she was a Stage Manager who would rather be mingling with the actors than doing her job. From these initial decisions and discoveries, these “facsimiles” grew and developed truthful relationships with one another.

Once this was established, I incorporated two techniques into the rehearsal process to help the Company exist on stage in a relaxed and natural state. The first is a method acting technique created by Uta Hagen and discussed in her instructional and descriptive acting textbook *A Challenge for the Actor*. Hagen believes that an actor must

always have a destination when he or she is on stage (144-47). One must possess a reason for entering, staying, and leaving. Her exercise methodology is founded heavily on the principle that one must be able to be one's true self on stage before one can truthfully assume the role of a character. Her technique and initial exercises leant themselves well to the process of the Company. One exercise asks for an actor to hide his or her keys somewhere in the room and realistically and truthfully go through the process of finding them. I modified this exercise slightly to fit our work, having Actor A hide Actor B's keys, and asking Actor B to come in and search for the keys, genuinely having no idea where they are. Once Actor B found the keys, he or she must place the keys in the same place and go through the identical searching process with the identical level of genuineness. This allowed the Company to not only train themselves to behave naturally before an audience, but also to repeat actions and behavior with the freshness and truth of the initial experience.

In order to maintain this naturalness throughout, I also trained the Company in basic improvisational techniques. Improvisation teaches its students to have complete comfort and confidence in oneself, and the group. It forces actors to rely on nothing but the other performers, creating a sense of trust and ensemble rather quickly. This was the primary method utilized in developing the Company's three sections of action. We would discuss what would need to happen in each section, based upon the original script, and then, simply, improvise it. The first few times there was a sense of unease, yet as the process progressed and the Company became more comfortable with themselves and each other, this process became smooth, fruitful and enjoyable.

Repetition was very important to this process; we would conduct the improvisation four to six times in a given rehearsal. In between each improvisation, I would state what did and did not work and insert a few ideas I had to heighten comedy or drive action. Finally, once we reached a position in which we had a general idea of the way in which the section would play out, I would make an audio recording of the improvisation and bring an extremely exact script to the following rehearsal. From this newly created text, we made minor tweaks in the action and made sure to keep the dialogue fresh and specific to each personality. The Company gained a strong sense of ownership in these sections of the play, and took over the stage with great naturalness and confidence. Even though the structure was rigid, these sections allowed for a reasonable amount of freedom in the lines in order to maintain the Company's volatility.

## **V. THE WORLD OF THE CHARACTERS**

Pirandello describes the Characters, the creations of his imagination, with much greater detail and specificity. These Characters are, after all, of another world, one that exists only in the mind of the playwright, so their description is important and informative. “The Characters must not, in fact, seem to be phantasms; they must appear as figures of created reality, immutable constructs of the imagination: more real and more consistent, because of this, than the natural and volatile Actors” (Pirandello 8). This is an important distinction that Pirandello makes between the phantasmagorical and created reality. The Characters must not appear to be dreamlike in any way; they are not surrealistic figures. They are however, utterly “real.” They are of a created, imagined reality that has the same degree of truth and believability as the Company, yet much more

constant and rigid. In order to communicate this immutability with great expression, Pirandello feels that the “most effective and apposite means [he] can suggest would be the use of special masks for the Characters...The masks will help convey the idea that these figures are the products of art” (8). My initial reaction to this costuming requirement was of great shock; it seemed that the use of masks would not “elucidate the play’s essential message” but rather, turn the Characters into the stereotypical figures of the Italian commedia dell’arte (Pirandello 8). By placing a mask over an actor’s face, it would also strip away his or her ability to create a multitude of expressions. One would not be able to see the changing and natural face of the performer; this was something “volatile” that Pirandello wished to save for the Company. Masking the Characters would give each of them one, singular emotion that would be expressed, facially, at every moment. In the battle between life and art, this also made the Characters, played, of course, by humans, seem more constant, carved in stone. Pirandello also asks for each mask to “[express each Character’s] basic motivation; the Father’s face registering remorse; the Stepdaughter’s, revenge; the Son’s, contempt and the Mother’s sorrow” (8). When considering this effect, it is quite overwhelming and seems to border on melodrama, even. Yet I trusted Pirandello’s specificity and explored further why he would call for such a powerful device. Even though these four emotional states are not all motivations in the Stanislavskian sense, they reveal an extraordinary wealth of information about each character, what they want from the other Characters and their general behavior on stage.

After a deeper investigation of the text, it became abundantly clear that the Father registered remorse the entirety of the play because he feels responsible for and guilty

about his role in the dissolution of the family. It was, after all, his “perfectly innocent interest” in the Stepdaughter and his “physical frustration” stemming from his lack of sexual interaction that caused these “cataclysmic” events to occur. (Pirandello 22, 24). The Father believes himself to be the catalyst of the family’s suffering. Dissatisfied with his “simple” wife who was only a “mother” to his child and also, due to his jealousy of her relationship with his secretary, he sent her away to the countryside (Pirandello 16). His loneliness inspired him to pursue a relationship with his stepdaughter, who he would eventually nearly hire as a prostitute. Meanwhile, the Son grew up away from his Mother, because of her banishment. The Mother, however, enters before this dreadful action can be carried out. It is in this “eternal moment,” these four Characters are frozen in their singular motivation, or, emotion. The Son recognizes the Father’s selfishness and after being forced to live alone with him for years, developed a vicious contempt for him. The Son’s contempt is felt most fully in the final moments of the garden scene, leading up to the suicide, when he is forced to take a role in the action he so despises. On that ill-fated day, the Son locked himself in his room, avoiding discussion with his Mother and, from his window, witnessed the double suicide of his stepsiblings. Locked in his bedroom, he was unable to act, but forced to watch the atrocities. (Pirandello 57-62). He is the only Character to have witnessed these acts and thus, when their drama reaches this point, he must be the one to describe the action, forcing it to come to life. He also feels contemptuous towards the Stepdaughter, who, in her own frozen emotion, spitefully retells the “vile” and private wrongdoings of the Father, and her own amoral role in the matter. The Stepdaughter describes these actions in great detail because of her desire; she needs to enact revenge on the Father. Finally, the Mother is the frozen image of sorrow. ,

She is dressed in mourning for the loss of her husband, the secretary, but is also frozen in her sorrow at the death of her youngest children.

Before considering whether or not to use masks to evoke this sense of artistic creation, I went through the script again to explore the role of this frozen expression in the action of the Characters, both in their life drama and in their “live” interactions with the Company. Each of these four Characters is consistently acting from one’s solidified emotional state. The Father defends his actions; the Stepdaughter forces the Father to feel the same sense of overwhelming shame she once did. The Son consistently expresses his disdain for the Father’s actions and abhorrence with the Stepdaughter’s behavior; the Mother is unable to escape the overwhelming weight of her sorrow. It seemed that the labeling of these emotions as “motivations” was likely a discrepancy in translation. This is what the Characters are frozen in, yet not what they are fighting for, what whey want in the play.

I began to attempt to ascertain what the *super-objective* of these Characters is. I needed to look no further than the title to reveal what these six Characters are all in search of. Their rising action and catalysts along the way are enacted, their exposition passionately described, their climax reached, yet what is never achieved is a resolution. This is what the Characters lack and what they have come to the theatre in search of. Concluding the play and dissolving the conflict would allow them to escape the pain of their frozen expression. Characters in plays must be active, fighting beings, not frozen in anything, yet the playwright calls for this frozen expression as the essential way in which to communicate the play’s message. I struggled with this balance, attempting to be both faithful to the playwright as well as the action taking shape in the rehearsal room.

Early in the process, I chose to have the Mother remain seated for nearly the entire first act. This seemed natural to me, as the Mother is weighed down by her sorrow to the point that she cannot stand. The Little Girl and Boy, too, were rather inactive as they are “dead” and not a part of the action until the final scene. After attending a run of the first act on November 6, Barbara Grossman observed that these three Characters felt inactive and as though they were not a part of the action. This is exactly the way I had been directing these three characters, yet Dr. Grossman pointed out that their lack of involvement was more distracting than intriguing. This is certainly not what I wanted to communicate to my audience. I went back to the script to investigate this perplexing issue. After additional correspondence with Dr. Grossman and an exploration of the story, I realized that these three Characters may be not be involved in the life drama of the Characters at certain points, but simply due to their presence on stage, they are a major part of the action of *Six Characters*. The Mother, though not in the story until later, possesses strong feelings and opinions about the actions discussed. Wouldn’t it be more theatrical, then, to have her fight her sorrow rather than dwell in it? This realization lifted her from the chair organically and, in turn, inspired more movement and involvement from the Little Girl and Boy who “[cling] to their mother all the time” (Pirandello 51).

From these discussions with Dr. Grossman, I realized how to have the Characters “frozen” in their expression and active in their objective simultaneously. They must be fighting, throughout the play, to escape it. The Father pleads with Eliana, the director, and the Company to script an end to their life drama in order to break free of this mask, to escape its painful rigidity. After all, these Characters are not frozen in joy or anything remotely positive, but, quite possibly, the four most painful, taxing, and life-depriving

emotions known to humankind. I began to consider a way in which I could achieve the effect of the mask, without the use of an external application to the Character's face.

I also recognized that the Characters are frozen in this expression throughout the "live" action of the play, yet when they play out specific moments, they should truthfully transport themselves back to that specific moment. It also seemed that the mask should magically disappear in these moments, revealing a different Father, Stepdaughter and Mother. The audience should be boldly confronted with the innocent qualities of the Stepdaughter and charismatic, though lecherous, ones of the Father.

In order to attain variety in performance and allow the mask to dissolve in these choice moments, we decided to create the mask with make-up. In this way, the sense of the mask could be achieved without occluding the actors' faces. The decision to utilize more colorful lighting in these select moments in which the life drama of the Characters is acted out allowed for the details of the make-up to be washed away in the powerful light. This choice also allowed the Character to express his or her specific emotion at all times, even when still and stoic. When a Character began to speak, he seemed to wrestle with his expression, trying to escape it with each word, each action, yet retuning to it, regardless.

The intimate space also allowed for the subtlety of the "make-up mask" to read and evoke a sense of construction and permanence in each Character's face. (The space also allowed us the ability to use little to no make up with the Company, heightening this contrast). The Father's age lines and, specifically, his brow line were enhanced and shaded appropriately so it appeared to be constantly downturned. This helped him look much older—both appropriate to his actual age and the toll his remorse took on his

face—and evoked a clear sense of guiltiness in every moment. These age lines were enhanced by the tone of his skin, which is to be “outstandingly pale and pallid” (Pirandello 8). The Stepdaughter’s eyebrows were painted dark and thick, with a ridge in the middle. This pointedness gave her expression a constant sense of vengeance, as well as an “arrogance and [brashness]” (8). The Mother had large bags painted under her eyes, a pale skin tone, and a single tear frozen on her face. Pirandello calls for wax tears, yet the most evocative creation was a glitter-filled drop of clear glue in the shape of a larger-than-life tear, applied to the face with spirit gum (8). It was a tear of another world, a tear resembling a sorrow much greater than the sorrow we, and the Company, know. The Son possessed the most challenging expression to achieve through make-up. He “bears himself stiffly,” so we attempted to create as rigid an expression of contempt as possible (9). This meant highlighting and shadowing all the lines in his face, especially near his eyes, until a clear sense of disdain was achieved. Through trial and error, the application of each Character’s “mask” was refined. Ultimately from the extremity and immutability of the make-up, the Characters did, in fact, look to be “more real and more consistent” than the Company.

The Little Girl and Boy do not possess an emotion, nor do they speak, because they are dead. If the other four Characters are frozen in a specific emotional state for the duration of the play, it seemed that the Little Girl and Boy should be nearly petrified in their “deathly” status throughout the play; they do not take action until the final scene in the garden. One rule that was determined early on the rehearsal process for the world of the Characters is that each character can only act out the actions that Pirandello has imagined. In this case, the Little Girl can only fall into the fountain; the Boy can only

carry out a “single gesture” (Pirandello xvi). Thus when these actions are performed, the Little Girl and Boy must not emote—they cannot and do not come to life. They simply carry out what Pirandello has forced them to. They are frozen in their deathly state, and we worked to create this static expression in their make-up, as well.

All of these decisions and realizations were brought to the rehearsal process. It would be a violently emotional, highly intellectual and generally challenging process to bring the Characters to the level of art that Pirandello requires of them. They border on melodrama, yet must be truthful and believable every second. They must exist in a world that is completely separate from ours, the Company’s, yet it must posses the identical degree of reality. I had two actors with vital non-speaking roles, a 19-year-old playing a man in his early fifties, and young woman who needed to express the sorrow beyond the possibilities of the world we know. I felt invigorated by the challenge and was blessed with committed, open-minded and openhearted actors who were able to truthfully assume each “essence.” There was a great deal that needed to be explained to the actors playing Characters and made clear to them about their world, yet I wanted to let them discover as much as possible on their own. We began by reading the play and re-reading certain sections, followed by carefully structured conversations. We discussed the world of the Characters, the nature of their being, and their frozen expression. I had the pleasure of working with an incredibly focused and clever group of actors that brought a wealth of knowledge and experiences to our discussions. In the initial stages of the rehearsal period, it was important to ask the actors challenging questions, in order to force them to (a) take complete ownership of the role and (b) feel challenged by possibilities as opposed to limited by answers. I asked the actors playing the Characters many of the

same questions I asked myself. What is your frozen expression? Is it truly frozen? Why? What is your motivation? What can an author provide you? From these questions, several lively discussions were generated that allowed the actors to understand the rules of the world of the Characters, deeply rooted in the text.

From this, we began our work with Viewpoints. It was one of the first rehearsal methodologies introduced to the Characters, and entire ensemble. Invented by the chorographer Mary Overlie and refined and adapted for theatre by Anne Bogart of the SITI Company, Viewpoints are, literally, the nine “viewpoints” from which we view the world. They are: tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, topography, spatial relationship, shape, gesture (both expressive and behavioral) and architecture. These varying elements of the universe make up the way in which we respond to nature, manmade elements of life, and, most importantly other humans. The SITI Company refers to Viewpoints as a “language” for the rehearsal room; they do not produce and create “viewpoints plays.” Creating a unique and specific language for the rehearsal room is always one of my primary goals, so utilizing the Viewpoints “language” as one of our tools seemed a wise choice in the early rehearsal period. The Viewpoints training relies as much on observing as participating, so while the Characters trained, the Company observed and vice versa. Although the Viewpoint work yielded a wealth of discoveries and discussions I could never have anticipated, establishing the two distinct ensembles served as the initial goal in training the ensemble in Viewpoints. It also frees one from making decisions, allowing actors to create and “play” with great freedom. Like theatre itself, the possibilities are endless, the impossible something to strive for, and the bodies in the space take precedence.

We began with an intensive teaching session in which all the viewpoints were addressed, taught, and experimented with. Players began to understand the extremes of each viewpoint and all the possibilities that it allowed. From this, we progressed toward “open viewpoints” in which each “world” *viewpointed* off the space and each other while the other observed. The spectators would create and frame the playing space in which the exercise would take place. Furniture, blocks, posters, anything could be moved and adjusted in order to create a unique “set” for the players to develop a relationship with and explore.

The results of this exercise, repeated several times, were surprising and invigorating; each and every actor brought sense of openness and commitment to this work. I strove to make the Viewpoints work serious and consistent. Sure, comedic events may occur in the exercises, and certainly some of our most inventive and powerful open Viewpoints induced laughter both in player and observer, but I maintained and required a sense of focus and commitment. Actors began in their personal space, and not until each performer felt connected with the group were they permitted to emerge and enter the playing space. The exercise would last fifteen minutes and the results were unpredictable: players are pushed around in chairs, climbing on top of one another, clapping, leading, falling, twirling, bowing, the list is endless. What can be observed and deduced from this is a sense of non-verbal communication. The repetition of gestures and other actions and creation of events by more than one performer shows a commitment to the group and the ability to “listen with the whole body” (Bogart, Landau 32). This is the ultimate goal: to hear the entire ensemble, to be aware of everyone else and oneself at all times. When this

awareness is brought on stage, a confident, tuned-in actor is able to feel quite comfortable in the role, in the space, and allow relationships and action to blossom organically.

The most significant result of the Viewpoints work is the language it created for the room. I did not anticipate this to take on such a prominent role, but it proved quite useful. I was able to ask such questions as “What is the Father’s tempo in this moment?” “What is the Stepdaughter’s topography here?” Based on intuition and physical discoveries made previously, actors were able to draw upon these experiences and apply them to decisions made about specific moments. This work tended to be the most significant and palpable with Harrison Stamell and Natalie Buzzeo, playing the Father and the Stepdaughter. In the initial moments of dialogue, in which the audience is introduced to the tense and mysterious relationship between these two characters, both their tempos are quite quick. There is a buoyant sense of energy and excitement about the possibility of satisfying the super-objective, finding an author to conclude their play. While their tempos were the same, their topographies differed greatly. The Father’s consisted exclusively of direct, angular lines. As my initial research informed me, the Father seems to find himself in a “symbolic court of law” (Ragusa 149). As such, the Father’s movement had a forward-driving energy as he moved back and forth between the judge—Eliana, the director—and the opposing party—the Mother. The Stepdaughter’s topography is much more curved; in fact, she did not move in any straight lines for the initial section of the play. We worked with the image of a “snake slithering around her prey.” This read quite well in the Arena; she was able to play to the entire space and follow its elliptical shape.

All of these decisions about the physical world of the play were based upon their frozen expression. Yet when they reenact specific moments prior to the “eternal” one, a contrasting physical world would need to come to life. The first time this occurs is the climax of the first act when the Father and Stepdaughter reenact their encounter outside of the Stepdaughter’s school. We realized early on that there is a clear change in heartbeat as the two characters enter this memory. From a fast and frantic tempo, we move to a slower, more calculated and painful one. The Father and Stepdaughter now move at a slow, even pace. It is thick and fraught with tension. Topographies changed as well. The Stepdaughter still moved in curved manner, as she circled the Father, yet it was much less brash and bold, now timid and with great trepidation—in this memory, she is, after all, a very young girl. The Father’s topography is one singular point on the stage; he does not move.

The shape of their bodies was also quite different. It reflected their younger ages sure, but more importantly, the emotional temperature of the moment. The Stepdaughter is much younger and shyer, and thus her shape is a smaller, more compact one. She hunched over and held her hands close to her chest. This revealed both her fear and vulnerability. The Father is less confident as well. His shape became more lecherous; his head was tilted and leaned slightly forward. Their spatial relationship was the most varied and telling viewpoint in this performed memory. Whereas before, they rarely come together, bouncing about the space quickly, this spatial relationship was more deliberate and fraught with tension. The Stepdaughter circled the Father in the shape of a hemisphere, as the Father remained still center stage. Then, with great increase in tension, the Stepdaughter began her slow, steady walk towards the Father. They came quite close

together, and, as outlined in the script, he “runs his hand across her face” (Pirandello 23).

In the “live” moments of the play, these two characters never touch, yet here, in this memory, they engaged in physical contact. This touching of the face served as both a behavioral and expressive gesture; it is a common one, yet it expressed the Father’s inner desires.

This memory is brought to life by simple changes in the body and the relationship between bodies, that reveal a wealth of information about the characters and their relationships. Through Viewpoint exercise and the use of the “language” of Viewpoints, we are able to create these two contrasting worlds of the play for the Characters to live in and the audience to experience.

As discussed previously, Viewpoints became a significant informant and tool throughout the remainder of the process, but, with the occasional exception, was intentionally not revisited in such detail. However, the rules of the world discovered in “Viewpoints play” affected all choices in staging and more detailed character work. Some of these rules included: always wear your emotions on your sleeve; each emotion is felt fully and completely; and, if you describe a past event, feel it as if it’s happening for the first time. In “Viewpoints play,” actors were able to make impulsive, physical discoveries about the character, but I also led more focused laboratory-style work in rehearsals that allowed actors to develop a more personal relationship with his or her character.

Early in the process, I instructed each actor to mold, as if from clay, his or her Character. We began with the feet and ascended to the head until the actor had completely and in great detail carved what he or she felt the character to look like.

Then, I instructed the actors to “step into” the character, starting with the feet and progressing towards the head, allowing each body part to change as the actor felt him or herself inside another body. Next, actors were instructed to walk around the space in Character, discovering how it felt to walk, sit and stand. It is important that this is done through physical exercise only, and not discussion. This allows actors to make impulsive decisions from their “gut” and intuition; it is fatal for an actor to consider too deeply and over think these choices.

As this began to develop, in tandem with staging rehearsals, I led another exercise that allowed actors to get in touch with their objectives and relationships with others *physically*. This world must feature heightened emotions, and, in order for this level of passion to emanate from the stage and into the house, these emotions required a physical expression. Each actor would choose a line that was either the climax of a specific moment or expressed an essential desire of the character. He or she would find a private space in the room and begin to repeat the line. I instructed the actors to try to speak the line in every way imaginable and start to determine the objective and the tactic of that specific line. That is, “*what do you want from another Character?*” and “*what do you do to get what you want?*” I instructed everyone to choose an active verb, something that needed to be done with the body. As in my work with designers, finding appropriate metaphors proved the most fruitful. Some choices included to stab, to stomp, to relinquish, to throw, etc. Next actors were to experiment with a physical manifestation of this tactic. They were to begin stomping the Father or throwing the Son. I instructed them to do this with great passion, dedication, and urgency. Once they had created an expressive gesture that was the embodiment of this tactic, they were to perform the

gesture and speak the line simultaneously. From this exercise, the actors were able to physicalize what they wanted from another character. Much of these gestures appeared in performance and helped raise the stakes of their life drama. This also infused a great sense of tension and passion into the bodies of the Characters, which not only strengthened their performances, but also created a palpable contrast with the natural Company.

The next step in the process was to discover the entirety of the Characters story. The degree to which Pirandello realized the Characters' life drama is varying. Certain moments have been fully realized and thus, are able to manifest themselves on stage. Much of their story, however, is discussed and revealed to the Company, and the audience, in the form of exposition. Though these events do not occur in the "live" events of *Six Characters*, they are felt to be equally as real and important to the Characters. The actors playing the Characters needed to have real, tangible and specific memories of these moments. As with the Company, I sat down with the Characters and examined each line of the text, each thought, recording every detail about the action that occurs in the exposition and important information that is revealed. From this, I created a list of scenes to be improvised, in character, and conclusions or revelations that must be reached in each scene. The exercise was left intentionally open to allow actors to make the most discoveries possible. I coached where necessary to maintain an adherence to the text, but otherwise, let the Characters exist in their world and explore. I encouraged them to keep the emotional level extremely high and expressions as physical as possible in order to become comfortable and quite familiar with these rules governing their world.

The exercise proved successful and gave the Characters specific moments and emotional reactions to call upon in the exposition-heavy first act of the play. As Downing Cless had previously explained to me, the first act of the play must feel like a mystery-suspense thriller. With such specific and strong emotional recall, the Characters were able to draw the audience in and force them to take an interest in their story. This exercise also helped give the Characters a full sense of the unfinished arc of their life drama.

Another aspect of the exercise work I did with the characters, specifically the Father, Mother, Stepdaughter and Son centered on their frozen expressions. I felt that this mask must be something wholly and completely absorbed by the entire body and merely clarified with make-up. We began to work towards creating a statue-esque pose for each of these four Characters. It would be frozen in its expression, yet actively emanating it. This would be the body position these Characters would hold themselves in when not directly involved in the action, and conversely, break out of when fighting to break free of this emotion.

I encouraged actors to find images in nature and art and again, attempt to conjure up metaphors for the frozen expressions. Lyle Friedman, the actress playing the Mother, immediately identified with the image of a weeping willow. We had previously discussed the weight her shame and loss bear on her posture and so this manifested itself as Lyle's lower torso served as the trunk, her upper torso waning forward heavily, and her outstretched arms reaching towards her children as the branches. The Father's was a formal one, evocative of the guilty defendant and also a lawyer. His face, filled with guilt and remorse, seemed to push forward while his body, the source of his desires that caused such pain, retracted. He is clearly attempting to break out of his emotion, but trapped

within it. The Son's stemmed from his desire to not take part in the action. As such, his pose featured a downturned chin and crossed arms. It felt active in its dismissal of the other characters. The Stepdaughter's, too, came quite naturally. In our earlier work, it became clear that much of her revenge is expressed through a sense of sexuality well beyond her age. And so her pose featured her hip popped, revealing as much leg as possible, her chest puffed out, and a devilish smile. This pose feels violent and truly "insolent" in comparison with the other three. These poses were refined in rehearsal and masked not only the face, but helped to provide stoicism to the entire physical being of the actors playing the Characters.

In the final moments of the play, when these four Characters return to the stage and confront Eliana, the director, alone, they are in these active emotional states most clearly and vivaciously. Because they are to "stand there like figures in a trance," I took this trance to be a more powerful version of this statue (Pirandello 68). It is the final moment of the play, the concluding, resounding image left with the audience. As such, it seemed necessary to present the Characters in their frozen expression to help drive home the play's essential message. They return to the stage as a final reminder to Eliana, the director, and the audience of their power and entrapment within their emotion. This moment also seemed closest to Pirandello's interactions with these four Characters. He, like Eliana, the director, is haunted by these figures, these beings. They are ushered into his mind by his imagination and invade his life. Each of the four Characters entered from a vomitorium and stood frozen in their expression. Yet this time, I encouraged them to violently attempt break out of it. With great attention to detail, I instructed them to imagine their Character stuck in a molding just slightly larger than his or her own body. It

was to feel as if one had been placed inside a doll and was attempting to break free. As the Characters tried to escape the holds of this singular emotion, each vibrated with a painful sense of stiffness.

Later in the rehearsal process, this notion of escaping became an issue with the Stepdaughter. Pirandello asks for her to “let out a piercing squeal of laughter” and this felt quite right to me (68). It further expressed her revenge and gave a horrifying uneasiness to the final moment. It was not just scary, but chilling. Still it seemed that the Stepdaughter wanted to fully feel her revenge and live it, unlike the other Characters. And so Natalie and I came to the conclusion that the Stepdaughter should not attempt to escape her expression, but find a guttural and near-evil satisfaction in watching the other Characters, primarily the Father, suffer in their remorse, sorrow and contempt. This forced Natalie and me to alter her super-objective and reevaluate her progression throughout the entire play. We realized that, start to finish, she loves the stage. She finds a necessary satisfaction in watching the Father experience his remorse, as well as the Company’s response and judgment of his amoral behavior. However, she still was one of the six Characters in search of an author. Her source of this desire became abundantly clear when exploring her monologue in which she escorts the Little Girl into the garden. She seems to see herself in the Little Girl for she, too, once was sweet and innocent, and uncorrupted. In this beautiful and expressive monologue that ushers both the Little Girl and the theatre, itself, into the garden she refers to her as her “poor darling… [,] pet [and] little love” (Pirandello 63). The only moment in the “live” action of the play that the Stepdaughter seems to break out of her revenge directly follows her description of the Little Girl’s fate. She becomes “overwhelmed by the memory, and gives way to a long

and desperate fit of crying...Her emotion silences everyone" (Pirandello 60). This is a crucial moment in the Stepdaughter's journey. We learn, most importantly, that her revenge is not only fueled by the loss of her innocence, but by the loss of her siblings.

In our preceding exercises, the Stepdaughter and the Little Girl had a close, delightful relationship. This made her revenge as powerful as one could muster, yet it also gave her sense of truth and made her a tragic Character as opposed to an evil one. She was not acting out for attention, or merely due to insolence, as it may seem in the first act, but from a deeply painful place. Her revenge maintained its sense of alarm and vigor yet became well justified and appropriated.

There is only one portion of the script that I did not follow closely and honestly as Pirandello prescribed. The final stage directions read: "The Stepdaughter...runs towards one of the stairways. She stops at the top step for a moment to look back at the other three. She lets out a piercing squeal of laughter and hurls herself down the steps. She runs up the central aisle to the back of the auditorium where she stops again, turns, and gives another burst of laughter at the sight of the tree left on stage. She disappears from the auditorium and she runs through the foyer, her laughter is heard growing fainter and fainter. There is a short pause and then the curtain" (68). I wanted the Characters to fade away from the space as fluidly as they entered, and so after the lights dimmed, the audience heard the fading laughter of the Stepdaughter. This moment felt like there was another "rip" in the time-space continuum and the Characters passed through this opening as they returned to their parallel universe. However, I was struck by Pirandello's choice to have the Stepdaughter exit the theatre through the house, the way in which he has them enter. This final action seemed to imply that the Stepdaughter is able to break away from

the family and escape her role in their life drama. This combated directly some of the most imperative rules of their world. The Characters must relive each and every moment “as fresh as the first time,” as the Mother painfully clarifies to the Company (Pirandello 52). They cannot choose their own course, an author governs them, and the Stepdaughter’s exit would imply that Pirandello wrote the Stepdaughter a resolution to the story and gave her the opportunity to exit. This would mean their drama, then, possessed a conclusion, a resolution. I knew this was not the case.

My research informed me that the original script ended with the exit of the Company; the choice to add the return of the Characters was one added following Georges Pitoëff’s 1923 production in Paris. Pitoëff ushered the Characters in on a strange stage elevator and made the choice, with Pirandello’s permission, to have them return as the final moment of the play (Loch 60-62). Pitoëff, it seemed, was able to create on stage, in a clear and tangible fashion, what Pirandello had sensed for the Characters. I was quite surprised that the original script did not feature the return of the Characters, as this was the most clear and theatrically powerful evocation of the play’s essential message and the Characters’ degree of reality. The audience sees the play through the eyes of the Company, and primarily, the director. The director’s journey, full of questions and realizations along the way, should mirror the audience’s experience with the play. Without this final image that “seems a mistake,” the audience would exit, like the Eliana, the director, with a sense of disbelief in the Characters’ degree of reality (68). The final moment, if created properly, should shake the theatre, director, and audience, and, for the first time, make violently clear the reality and power of the Characters.

Still, the choice to have the Stepdaughter exit the theatre seemed like one that Pirandello would not include in his final edition of the script. And so I chose to have the Stepdaughter remain on stage, still frozen in her expression, yet unlike the other three, reveling in the pain and misfortune the immutability causes the others. I also went back to my analysis of the play and recalled the story I set out to tell.

As previously discussed, I felt the play to be the story of the six Characters, the family, and not that of the Stepdaughter. Thus I removed the Stepdaughter's exit in order to tell the inconclusive story Pirandello crafted with great clarity; the exit would, in fact, *hinder* the play's essential message.

In the final weeks of rehearsal, my academic advisor, Downing Cless, and directing mentor, Virginia Anderson, attended a late run of the play. Much of their feedback was encouraging and positive, yet the most important discussion we had centered on the production's lack of a clear arc. Though the play had a sense of drive and progression, it didn't possess a clear rising action and build toward the climax. I, once again, went back to the script to explore this arc further and attempt to determine a clear way to present it and allow the performance naturally build. It became clear to me that the play gathers momentum as the Characters delve deeper and deeper into their life drama. The discovery of this drama, forces the drama of *Six Characters* to progress. Dr. Cless also expressed to me the need to clarify the difference between the "flare-ups" and the live interactions on stage. Though I recognized that some moments were inside their drama, and others outside, driven by interactions with the Company, it was clear that we were lacking all layers of the Characters' existence.

Borrowing from our work in Viewpoints, previous discussions, and work the actors had been doing on their own, I created a master chart for the Characters that clarified all levels of their existence. Though much of the information on the chart had already been established or subconsciously addressed, it helped to make the rules of the world extremely clear, and brought everyone on the same page. The first level of existence was referred to as “character theory.” In this level, only the Father, Son, and Stepdaughter are able to speak. They are the only three Characters who have been realized to the extent that they are aware of their status as a character within a play. In this level, they only speak to Eliana, the director, as they protest to her the nature of their existence and the state of their reality. The second level is that of “storytelling.” The Mother is able to come alive in this level of existence because of her role in the story, though she has no knowledge of the context. Much of this level was previously discovered in the exposition exercise, yet this helped to clarify that the Characters speak to other Characters in this level, and feeling the emotions truthfully, as if for the first time, yet present the story for the Company. They are revealing their inner truths as each of them fights to defend their unchangeable actions before the Company. No new discoveries are made in this section; the emotions are as fresh as the first time, yet do not come as a surprise. The next level of existence is what Dr. Cless referred to as the “emotional flare-up.” These outbursts happen live, truly for the first time, within the action of *Six Characters*. These are the moments in which each Character acts from his or her frozen expression, and thus, only the Mother, Father, Stepdaughter and Son exist at this level. The final level of existence was referred to as “in it.” All characters exist at this level, and operate completely within the world of their life drama. This helped to refine

our discoveries about the Little Girl and Boy. With this realization, it became clear that they are permanently “in it,” specifically forever in the moment in which the Little Girl falls into the fountain and, the moment in which the Boy shoots himself, the entirety of the play.

I dedicated an entire rehearsal to sitting down with the six Characters, working through the script and ascertaining which level each Character existed in at every moment of the play. With this, the arc of the play revealed itself on paper, and also, in action. The Characters begin in “character theory” and progress towards existing exclusively “in it.” The ebb and flow of the arc became clear and when the actors adhered strictly to the rules of each level of existence and clearly separated each, the arc of the play naturally revealed itself with great power and sense of journey. Although I wish I had created this chart earlier in the process, it revealed a full understanding of the world of the Characters and all the levels of existence within which they exist. This chart can be found on the following page.

## CHARACTER “LEVEL OF EXISTENCE” CHART

CATEGORY/LEVEL	Character Theory	Storytelling	Emotional Flare-up	In It
<b>Who can exist at this level?</b>	The Father, Stepdaughter, Son	The Father, Stepdaughter, Son, Mother	The Father, Stepdaughter, Son, Mother	The Father, Stepdaughter, Son, Mother, Little Girl, Boy, Madame Pace
<b>Who is directed towards?</b>	Eliana, the Director	The Company	Each other	No one (fully in the moment)
<b>When?</b>	Now; real time	In real time, though reflective	Locked in frozen expression	The moment being enacted
<b>Where?</b>	Here; Balch Arena Theatre	Here, through reflective and transporting	Here (theatre) though also, locked inside of the emotion, and thus, Pirandello's' Imagination	Wherever the moment takes place (Outside the school, backroom of Madame Paces, the garden)
<b>Level of Emotion</b>	None, reacting in the moment	Layered over the text, thought not fully embodied	Full expression of, exclusively, the frozen emotion	In the moment, appropriate to the size of the Characters' world
<b>Tempo</b>	Quick, buoyant, adagio	Driving, though slower	Specific to each Character's frozen emotion	Incredibly slow and steady; like a pounding heartbeat
<b>Spatial Relationship</b>	Great distance and tension separating the Characters from each other and the Company; Characters do not touch each other	Characters become closer to each other, though still further from the Company; Characters do not touch each other	Very close together, infused with frozen emotion; Characters do not touch each other, though Company and Characters may	Very close together, dense, compact; Characters may touch one another

## **VI. DESIGNING THE TWO WORLDS OF THE PLAY**

The design process for *Six Characters* was a constantly evolving one.

Logistically, the play presents a myriad of challenges: the appearance of the Characters must be simple yet startling and the climactic final scene in the garden should transport to the audience to that ill-fated place. The uniquely shaped Balch Arena Theatre provided us with an even greater challenge in allowing all of these impactful and important events of the play to unfold seamlessly.

Initially, my design conceptions for the production were heavily based upon Robert Brustein's adaptation, which calls for visually startling images that are massive in scope. In a large-scale production, one is able to create these exciting and optical illusory events. I imagined using a scrim to reveal these events and create a dream-like feeling for the moments in which they occur. In this initial design phase, I was thinking about the play pragmatically. The focus was on the surprise and the reaction, not necessarily based upon the original Pirandello text.

I knew our first priority would be to create the two worlds of the play. In our initial discussions, it felt very much that we were designing two different productions. One production was utterly naturalistic. The goal was to make that world as truthful and as close to the reality that we engage with daily as possible. The clothing should be of the every day, the lighting and the space just as it would be for a rehearsal. We knew this world; we live in it. Although accurately recreating it provided its challenges, conceptualizing it was unnecessary; we are in it constantly. The other world, that of the Characters, was much more challenging to acclimate ourselves with. I knew from the start of the process that the Characters must be just as Pirandello has written them. This

meant that they were to come from Italy in the 1920s. Still, we weren't quite sure how to key in to these Characters, how to create their world and fully give them the ability to come alive on stage.

As such, the designers and I asked Ted Simpson, our resident set design professor, to attend our final design meeting of the school year. We all felt very strongly that we needed to get on the same page and have some clear decisions made about our approach before we departed for the long summer break where collaboration would be a great challenge. We discussed our ideas with Ted and he politely and curtly reminded us that we were thinking well beyond our budget; filling up a pond with water was not feasible. Frustrated by the inability to do what we initially wanted, I relayed to Ted my difficulty with expressing, in what I inappropriately deemed "design terms," how I thought the play should come alive and take shape in the space. Ted made it very clear to me that this was not my job; the designers know quite well how to do this and create expressive environments. It was my job to convey what I wanted specific moments to *feel* like. He revealed the strength of speaking in metaphor and allowing designers to create a feeling, rather than construct an idea I had. I knew he was correct, but had no idea how to speak in that manner. It became clear to me that I needed to do my research, to engage with the play both intellectually and emotionally and share this with my designers. With this task, we departed for the summer.

I returned with a greater sense of the play, yet still needed time in rehearsal with the actors to make more confident discoveries. Throughout the summer, we had plans to present the play with Section III of the Balch Arena Theater removed. This transforms a theatre-in-the-round into a three-quarter thrust. What was most crucial to us was the

ability to create a proscenium-like arrangement. The dimensions of the space and the singular perspective would allow for the creation of these events in which the audience needed to be tricked or fooled. I originally felt that using a scrim would be utterly necessary. It would allow us to create two distinct playing spaces, and with light, reveal and occlude important actions. This was the perfect example of the error in my thought process. I had made the decision that the best way to create “magical” events was with a scrim. I was thinking from a practical perspective, rather than exploring what the play wanted and should feel like.

Days before auditions began I was presented with the news that removing section III would no longer be a possibility and the play was to be presented in the full round. I had been imagining the play in my head in a very specific way and suddenly that changed. I knew instantaneously that rules of this world were now much different. We would be unable to rely on the proscenium setup to fool the audience; my compulsion to use a scrim was thrown away. This forced me to go back to the drawing board and, once again, reacquaint myself with the text.

Adhering to Ted’s advice, I made a concerted effort to discover the way in which the play must feel. I sat down with my set designer, Alex Cheser, to discuss how we would function in the new spatial arrangement. I shared with her some of my new discoveries about the play, hoping they would inform her as to the kind of evocation I wanted, as opposed to what I wanted to see in the space. I had discovered that the climax of the play is the Boy’s suicide. The entire play must lead up to that one moment, that painful and tragic gesture. I also shared with Alex my beliefs about the relationship between the Characters and theater. From my research and, based upon the progression of

the play, it became quite clear that the Characters can call upon the technical elements of the theatre. The power of their drama elicits the technical abilities of the space to tell their story. Even though we do not realize it initially, they, as Characters, possess the power to reenact their story in a full theatrical presentation, incorporating all its elements. With this in mind, we tracked each and every moment of the play. Alex expressed it was important that she being to understand how the play would come to life in the space.

Many of the questions Alex asked me in this meeting were ones I had never considered previously. However, my preparation and close relationship with the text allowed me to speak surely about what certain moments must feel like. One example of this is the choice to have the Son sit in the house until he is called upon to take part in the action. I had never pictured it occurring this way, but Alex continually asked me where I saw him existing in the theatre. I wasn't sure how to answer the question, but I was sure that he must feel like a ball and chain being dragged along with the family. I knew he wanted to break away from the family, to leave the theatre. Unlike the Father and the Stepdaughter, he is vehemently averse to participating in the drama. In terms of the spatial relationship between the Son and the rest of the Characters, there should be great distance and tension. Whereas in a play with a unit set, Alex would design a setting for the actors to inhabit, and I would be sure the actors truly lived in and had a clear relationship with the set, this play called for no additional setting until the final scene in the garden. As such, Alex and I worked together to compose the bodies in the space. From this collaborative and challenging discussion with Alex, it became apparent that the Son should sit in the house when the Characters enter, and he should remain there for as long as possible—specifically, until he is discussed in the action of the Characters' life

drama. This choice was a fruitful manifestation of my conceptions about the Son and his relationship to the rest of his family, the Characters. Symbolically, as he sat in the house, he served as an audience member until forced to act. Great tension was discovered in this relationship spatially, as well. The Son was a great distance away from and higher than the other Characters, creating an exciting three-dimensional diagonal, only possible in the Arena. It activated actual audience members as well, forcing them to become active viewers and turn back and forth to see the Son and the other Characters, as they found themselves in the midst of a heated argument.

Alex and I also wrestled with the climactic scene in the garden. In adhering to the accuracy of the Characters, we had discussed creating a genuine Italian garden, or something similar. This felt wrong to us, though; it was too delightful and the emotional resonance seemed off. This scene serves as the climax of the play, the very last moment that Pirandello created for these characters. I realized that this is the moment in which the Company, and the audience, must realize that the Characters have more power on stage than the Company does. This is the scene in which the Characters take full ownership of the theatre, calling upon lights, sound and set pieces that may not even exist, realistically, in our Balch Arena Theatre. They can enact any and every element of the theatre to come alive with their story, their emotion.

We focused our attention to the emotional quality of the scene. Alex and I both agreed that the garden really felt much more like a deep, dark forest. This is something hidden, private. Building upon the emotional reality of the scene, we made the decision to set the scene in a forest with tall, narrow trees in the thick of winter. I felt that a fountain did not fit well in forest and felt too small, too meager to play host to the drowning of the

Little Girl. I felt something deeper, more threatening to be present, and almost instantaneously Alex insisted on using a well. This seemed much more appropriate and emotionally resonant. In this way, we would be able to give the Little Girl a place to drown, but would not show it. Like in Greek drama, the moment seemed to acquire a greater sense of weight and power due to the fact that the painful death of this young child was not seen but felt and individually perceived in the mind of each audience member. With our knowledge of the trap door in the center of the Balch Arena Theater's stage, we also knew we would be able to have the Little Girl fall into the well and disappear. This disappearing act felt much more painful and horrifying, actually, than then her death.

Still the great problem remained: how do we get the Arena to suddenly metamorphose into a forest? One afternoon, Alex wistfully stated that she felt as though a series of trees should magically and instantaneously rise from the Arena floor. I told her that felt quite right and would be the appropriate power for the moment, but I laughed it off; it seemed less possible than filling a fountain with water. Yet our technical director, Dave Kutalek, offered the possibility of lowering trees from the grid. Given the amount of man-hours they took to hang and lower properly, Dave probably regrets giving Alex and me this solution. However, it could not have been a more exciting, creative and ideal choice for this powerful moment. The moment in which the Stepdaughter ushers the Little Girl into the garden, she feels herself to be back there. It certainly felt that something magical, beyond the power of life, was occurring in the script, so lowering trees from the grid would be the ideal way to physically, actually, match and blend harmoniously with the Characters' emotions.

I also thought this choice was a wonderful way to activate and involve the height of the Balch Arena Theater. The Arena felt much larger, a much different place than the first act. The trees' primary purpose is to evoke the feelings of that garden, in that specific moment. They needed to incredibly visceral, rough and ominous. It was not until days before the performance when we saw the trees under light that we had any clear idea as to how to make them evoke an emotional reaction. The focus was placed upon texture and contrast. Small strips of cloth were painted on a grayscale gradient and inserted into the coarse rope the tree was made from. Under lights, these strips gave the tree a great deal of texture. It felt as though the tree was falling apart, crumbling away. Also, in placing darker strips at the bottom and lighter ones higher in the tree, we were able to give a greater sense of the height and oppressiveness of the forest. The trees and the well developed a close relationship with the Characters, and seemed to take on traits more akin to a character than a set piece; they embodied emotional qualities, and developed a relationship with the audience.

This discovery led us to an essential rule that was applied to all other aspects of design: what it feels like dictates what it looks like. In creating the world of the characters, what it felt like, the emotional resonance of a character or a specific moment, would inform the way in which it is physically manifested itself on stage. The Company required a realistic approach to design, but the Characters, non-human creations of an imagination, required a more emotional one, in order to have them be most evocative. This rule helped lead us to creative choices that revealed emotional truth and character.

Though sound was only designed and implemented in a few key moments at the end of the play, it was an important and thoroughly discussed aspect of the design

process. Though typically I like to score a play, it seemed that would not be allowed in this case, given the rules of the world. The Characters would only have sound accompanying their on-stage action when they begin to take over the theatre and call upon, with great power, other elements of design. I felt the climactic scene in the garden to evoke a quiet, painful and eerie sound. Julia Izumi, the sound designer, agreed with this and I told her I felt it to be one singular, very high-pitched note performed on a violin. As previously mentioned, the Son fights the entire play to evade the pain of his fate. Yet for the first time, as he describes the events leading up to the Boy's suicide, he briefly and truly feels something. The eeriness and pain of this moment felt like that fleeting note on the violin, both taunting and foreboding. This was the only cue that was remotely musical, and because of its quietness and solitude, it was able to speak loudly and both blend with and heighten the emotional pain of the Son.

Early on, it was very important to me that the gunshot was, in fact, an actual gunshot. I wanted to have the startling effect of the gunshot ring out in the cavernous theatre and genuinely frighten the audience. Yet when our rule of "what it feels like dictates what it sounds like" was applied, we found ourselves with a more monetarily achievable and emotionally resonant sound effect. It was indeed a gunshot, yet we focused on the feeling we wanted it to evoke, rather than its accuracy. The gunshot marks not only the climax of the play, but also the disappearance of the Characters in a simultaneous blackout. This was the final moment Pirandello realized of their story, and thus, after enacting it, they transport themselves back to their parallel universe. With this in mind, as well as its emotional impact, we decided to create an actual resonance in the theatre. In increasing the bass of the sound effect, a very low, rumbling noise was created. This kind of noise is

perceived and felt more than it is actually heard audibly, and this seemed appropriate. It was jarring and powerful, as I had initially imagined, yet focused on the feeling of the sound, rather than the sound itself.

This rule was also applied to the design of the lighting. Jeremy Guterl, the lighting designer, focused on the progression of the play, and the bursts of action in which the Characters seem to take over the space. Their entrance onto the stage is the first time in which their world interrupts that of the Company. It is followed by the Stepdaughter's song, the reenactment of the Father coming to visit the Stepdaughter outside of her school, THE SCENE, and finally, the climactic scene in the garden. With each of these events the Characters seem increasingly closer to taking over the entire theater, as they do fully in the final scene.

And so we began to discuss and design this ebb and flow-like progression of lighting. The action of the play began with the work and house lights up; the lighting of the theatre as the audience entered was the identical lighting of the first chunk of action of the play. This highlighted the fact that the Company is living in the same world as the audience. As with the work lights, the lighting was also rather dull. It was not dynamic; it did not bring out any specific colors or even seem to light a performance. Intentionally, it felt a mistake. Then, when the Characters enter, the house lights were slowly dimmed and the works switched with the performance lighting.

With each of the previously described moments in which the Characters exert their power upon the stage and evoke a feeling, the lighting took on a more emotional, expressive quality. It was focused on specific Characters—the Company was no longer lit, though still visible—and took on a dynamic and bold color and wash. THE SCENE

felt as if it were seeping with pain. The tension it evoked was stifling, and so we tried to create a sense of heat in the lighting. The wash was as warm as possible, coloring everything, including the Characters, in a fiery orange glow. Lighting came from the sides as well, providing a greater sense of shadow as figures became more carved out in space. As Eliana, the director, cuts off the scene, the lights zip back to the plain, simple lighting as before, suddenly and palpably revealing the contrast between the two worlds.

Similarly, the final scene in the garden, or the forest, had a strong sense of color, yet this scene was lit almost exclusively in blue. After discussing the cold, snowy, even rainy forest metaphor for the final garden scene, the choice to have cool, powerful lighting was an obvious and organic one. As the Characters' greatest sense of loss, sorrow, revulsion, and remorse are felt in this moment, they evoke a response from the audience and, also, a response from the lighting instruments. It provides a lonely, unnatural and ominous feeling for the scene. Again, its contrast is realized fully when, following the blackout, the lighting returns to its original emotionless simplicity.

Jeremy and I discussed the timing of these cues in great detail. It was very important to us that some cues be slow and gradual, and others harsh and sudden. We worked with a kind of wave imagery as a metaphor for the progression of the lighting design. We started with calm water and then little by little, the waves garnered momentum until finally, one impactful wave crashed against the shore, washing everything away. The lighting played a key role in the production, and, like the setting, seemed more an emotive character than merely an aspect of design.

In the design of the costumes, Francesca Cerullo and I followed the same rules of creating our own reality and another one in which “what it feels like dictates what it looks

like.” Francesca has a background in fashion design, as well, and this skill set leant beautifully to our process. In great contrast to Characters, the dress of the Company should not feel like costume. We discussed a great deal about what actor and directors often wear to rehearsal. Though many attend rehearsal in sweats and comfortable clothes, we felt it important to reflect each Company members' role in the Company and personality in his or her dress. We attempted to choose clothing pieces that were emblematic of the person's personality. We created “outfits” more than costumes that reflected what other people associated with the person, and also, the person's favorite or most distinctive clothing. This way the clothing, like a costume, would reveal information about the person without being, well, theatrical.

We were also well aware of the contrast we needed to create between the Characters and the Company. We instinctually knew from the beginning of the process that the Characters would have a black and white palette, while the Company's would be vibrant and colorful. This made the difference not only stark, but also gave the Characters a certain formality and storybook quality. I was inspired by the notion that we dream in black and white, as opposed to color. Whether this is true or not, it was the perfect way for Francesca and me to contextualize and differentiate these two worlds. The world the audience knows and experiences in color is seen in color and the world that is utterly foreign and stems from the imagination is seen in black and white (it is worth noting here that both realities looked and felt extremely and equally vivid).

Francesca and I considered the emotional truths of the Characters to design their costumes in addition to our primary rule of design. They are the products of an imagination in the 1920s, so we considered the style and fashion of this time period in

order to influence their costuming choices. The Father and the Boy were costumed formally in suits and a cravat and bow tie respectively, the Boy in a vest to reveal his youth. The Son, too, wore a tuxedo, though he also donned a long black jacket. Pirandello calls for this, and it seemed appropriate in the way in which it weighed him down. The Little Girl wore a simple white dress and a back sash, precisely as Pirandello calls for (9). It was important that she look as young, dainty and innocent as possible and the frill along the dress and bow in her hair illustrated this beautifully. The Stepdaughter and Mother provided us with the most freedom, and thus, the greatest ability to evoke their “frozen expression” in costume. Pirandello calls for a veil to cover the Mother’s and states that she is the “image of sorrow” (8). Her design possibilities provided the greatest ability for her to, quite literally, wear her emotions on her sleeve. A woman in mourning is already such an evocative image, and the traditional black and use of the veil appropriately expressive, so we merely amplified this. We found great success in the use of patterned and textured fabrics. Like the trees, these fabrics seemed to provide the most visceral response from the audience and palpable expression of emotion. Her black shawl was made of a thick yarn, her veil, heavy and crepe-like. Together, the costume was large—in size and degree of emotion—and came together to create a unified image of a mother in mourning. The Stepdaughter was clad in a simple black dress, built specially for Natalie Buzzeo. Though a flapper dress seemed inappropriate, Francesca and I wanted the dress to be cut in a way specific to the 1920s. Thus, her dress was simple, short, and stylish (9). It revealed a certain amount of her skin and the shape of her body.

The costume design process was a joyful one for both Francesca and me. In the other aspects of design, there seemed to be ebb and flow in the creation of the two worlds

of the play, yet for the design of costumes, it was completely and constantly separate. We embraced this and created two ensembles with different color palettes and style of dress. The high level of emotion and formality to the Characters' world is revealed, parallel to a revelation of the casualness, color, and personality of the Company. This created a visual distinction between the two worlds and allowed their imperative, core differences to be revealed through dress.

*Six Characters* marked the first time I engaged with designers on a full scale. It is an exciting and thrilling relationship I was able to discover and explore throughout the process. I understood how to create a world in the rehearsal room for the actors to exist in, yet had less experience in creating a world, an environment, with designers. Through these collaborative relationships, I've learned the beauty of speaking in metaphor. Though it may seem esoteric, it is the ideal way to communicate an idea, theme, or image to a designer; it gives the designer the freedom to create, yet is focused in its expression of what I have decided must be made clear to the audience.

Creating rules for the world of the play are just as essential with designers as with actors. The discovery of the rule "what it feels like dictates what it looks/sounds like" was a fruitful one that helped create a unified design. Just as the feeling emanates from the page to the reader, when executed properly, the designed environment(s) will emanate that same emotion from the stage into the audience.

## VII. PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT

Presenting my production to an audience was both thrilling and nerve-wracking. It felt deeply personal and so, like the Company, I felt to be revealing much of my

personality to the audience. Though frightening, this ultimately, was what I intended. I had staged a carefully crafted approximation of my own reality and seeing it on stage felt jarring, like looking into a mirror. Based upon audience reaction, it seemed as though the more familiar one was with our rehearsal process, the more it reflected one's own reality. Thus those who worked on productions at Tufts felt closest to the Company, followed by anyone who had ever been part of a theatrical process and, finally, the remainder of the audience who connected with the naturalness of the Company. This created a wide range of audience experiences, which proved quite interesting in discussion following the performance. Each audience member developed a unique and specific relationship to, first, the Company and, in turn, to the Characters.

Some, primarily those not involved in the theatre, followed the progression of the Company identically, just as I intended. This meant, however, that throughout the first act, and, even into the second, many audience members would laugh at the behavior of the Characters. They, too, fidgeted in their chairs and occasionally did not possess a genuine interest in the Characters. Though this seemed fatal and it was painful for me to see audience members reading the program during the performance, it was due, in part, to the experience that I had crafted. Because of the degree of reality we attained in creating the world of the Characters, everyone in the audience believed in the power of their drama as we reached the climactic garden scene and their final, frozen appearance in the mysterious blue light. Each night when the trees descended, even though they were visible for the entirety of the play and despite the ability to see and hear technicians standing above the grid lowering these trees, the audience felt the power of the Characters' drama emanate into the house. The Balch Arena Theater truly felt to be

“invaded” and the looks of shock and awe on audience member’s faces, especially those who doubted the Characters previously, gave me great pleasure. We had, in fact, taken the audience on a journey from November 20, 2008, 10pm in the Balch Arena Theatre in Medford, Massachusetts, to another place not of this Earth. The energy in the room during this moment was incredible; a beautiful and evocative fusion linked audience and actors and revealed the power of the Characters and thus, the play’s essential message.

The audience also was quite surprised each and every night that there was no curtain call. Brustein specifically calls the absence of a curtain call in his adaptation, and this felt quite right to me. Bringing the Characters and Company back on stage for the audience to applaud would negate all the work we had achieved in the action of the play. It would leave the audience settled and provide them with the catharsis and separation from the play they so desired. Still, audiences clapped and clapped until they realized that there was, in fact, no one returning to the stage. It was an appropriately awkward moment and was both enjoyable and strange to watch parties look at each other, unsure whether they were allowed to leave the theatre, if the play, had, in fact, concluded. An audience’s need for catharsis was made even clearer to me when, as actors emerged into the lobby of the theatre to greet friends and family, they were ushered in with raucous applause.

Appropriate to the theme of the play, this process of adapting, directing and presenting this piece of dramatic art was the most challenging, enriching and gratifying experience of my artistic life. It was the most time-consuming, all-encompassing one yet I learned an immense amount about directing, theatre and art itself. It seemed appropriate that I investigate a play that explores the power of drama for my senior honors thesis capstone project; it truly felt as though my entire academic and artistic career were

leading up to this point and were able to blend beautifully to create this piece of theatre.

The lessons I learned from this process are numerous, many of which I may not even recognize, yet are apparent in my work.

I developed a genuine passion to stage classical plays of the past. These are the plays that have stood the test of time, that continue to require presentation. They speak to audiences a hundred, sometimes thousands, of years apart. I learned the importance of stripping away the artifice of a play, its time, place and even language, to excavate the themes buried within the text. The themes of humanity, fallibility, and presence of art in life were not only timeless ones, but also timely. I reaffirmed my belief that theatre should entertain an audience, while forcing them to consider some aspect of their existence, in this case, the nature and reality of it. In order to tell the story and communicate the message of a play one must occasionally adapt the script. Adapting should occur as infrequently as possible, yet in this case, it required me to merely translate the reality of the Company into the present reality. Changes to the script should be made with careful consideration and must only serve to tell the story more clearly and effectively to a contemporary audience.

The rule that we established in the design process of “what it feels like dictates what it looks/sounds like” is something that I will take with me and apply to every play I direct. I will tell this to all designers at the first meeting and see it through religiously (again, like all rules, I am sure there will be an exception to this one in some production). The feelings, associations and metaphors of the play that I communicated to my designers allowed them to create the environment of the world I envisioned. When based upon feeling, this environment, and actions enacted within it, has the ability to establish a

direct connection with the audience and allow them to draw their own conclusions from the play.

In rehearsal, I leaned the importance of listening and patience. Like Viewpoints trains actors to listen with one's entire body, I too must listen fully, in order to pick up on the subtlest details of each actor's performance. In tackling such works as *Six Characters*, the toll it takes on the actor is extreme. Playing oneself on stage or transforming into the image of sorrow takes great bravery. I must respect this and be as patient as possible in order for them to gain a full understanding and entrance into the role, the Character, in his or her own time. I spent a great deal of time working with Lyle Friedman, the Mother, to get her to unlock her deepest and darkest sorrow and present it on stage. Lyle possesses the great ability to emote and place the emotion on the text so it blends beautifully. I worked hard to help her unleash these emotions and explore them in rehearsal. As Pirandello places a great deal of focus on her immense sorrow, I did too, and with reasonable success. Halfway into the rehearsal process she had determined how to bring such strong emotional content to each and every rehearsal. Though helpful throughout the process, by the time we reached the performances, Lyle had drained her "emotional capacity" and lost the freshness and explosive quality of her performance. I assume full blame for this; Lyle proved herself able to reach the heights of the role in rehearsal. I learned that with such extreme roles and emotion, a director must encourage an actor to curb the inclination to express oneself fully in rehearsal. This, again, must be a gradual process working towards performance. Though it may not deliver immediate results, I must trust that my actors will be able to reach such heights when the time comes.

The final and most important lesson I learned from this process came out of my relationship with Signor Luigi Pirandello. With great nerve, he created a piece of theatre that broke all its present rules, yet embraced theatre as a dramatic art form. He scripted a radical, experimental play that explored the purpose of dramatic art and celebrated and challenged the liveness of theatre. Where there seemed to be a chasm between audience and performer, Pirandello enlivened this imperative relationship, fusing an unbreakable bond between those on stage and those sitting around it. He created a piece of theatre that was fundamental to his beliefs, regardless of its response.

As a theatre artist, I must make sure I am directing plays for my audience and no one else. I must be in touch with the world around me in order to present its inhabitants with evocative and provocative dramatic art. I must not be afraid to break the rules. I must study and understand the rules that govern art and drama, and breaking them must be a careful, purposeful decision. I must be steadfast to my beliefs as a human and theatre artist. Though differing from others, I must be sure to adhere to these values in every theatrical event I stage. I must, of course, respect the playwright and audience as I serve as the link between the two. I will continue to ask questions, questions that challenge life and art and are impossible to answer. Maintaining this sense of curiosity and desire to explore will keep my art fresh, relevant, and necessary to an audience.

Though Pirandello's masterpiece provides a sense of an answer to this seemingly clichéd question, it seems as though this thesis capstone project would be incomplete without answering for myself, "Why take the time to create theatre?" Pirandello's play revealed some of the most painful truths about the human existence. I never before considered the way in which we perform for others, creating masks that allow others to

see us the way in which we wish to be seen. Nor did I consider how one moment, one decision, could haunt us for the rest of our lives. Pirandello seemed to be plagued by these notions and deals with them by exploring them in his art. Taking after Pirandello, I will work to explore the inexplicable inescapable complexities and difficulties of the human existence in search of a unifying truth, a truth that can bring together artists and audiences together under one roof to examine the issues that connect and confront us all.

# **SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR**

**A play by  
LUIGI PIRANDELLO**

**Translated by  
FELCITY FIRTH**

**Adapted by  
JOSHUA ALTMAN and THE COMPANY**

## ACT I

*The first sight that greets the audience on entering the theatre is the stage in its ordinary work-a-day guise. The stage is empty, almost dark, and devoid of any items of scenery. This is to give us the impression, right from the start, that all we see is quite impromptu. The audience must have the feeling that it has entered a theatre where not a performance, but a rehearsal is about to take place.*

*As the house is closed and the fire announcement is made, LILY comes into the theatre and on stage and begins to set up for today's rehearsal. SHE brings on a table and begins to prepare for rehearsal.*

*After a bit, EMILY enters and greets LILY. EMILY puts her stuff down and runs to the bathroom.*

*As EMILY is exiting, BRADLEY enters. HE, too, puts his hockey bag down and goes to the bathroom.*

*Next, ELIZA enters and exchanges pleasantries with LILY.*

*BRADLEY and EIMLY return from the bathroom, and EMILY and ELIZA exchange pleasantries, as well. After this, ELIZA brings the conversation to being off-book.*

ELIZA: You off book for today?

EMILY: Yeah.

ELIZA: Wait. Sorry. Lily, we were supposed to be off book for today...

LILY: Yeah. Yes. For sure.

ELIZA: Okay good, cause I was up till like four in the morning trying to memorize all my friggin' lines.

LILY: That's good.

ELIZA: Yeah, it was like...not okay.

LILY: Good, way to be a team player.

ELIZA: K, 'cause if I realized I didn't have to be off book, I'd probably throw a tantrum, or something.

*ELIZA goes and begins to stretch.*

LILY: Well, we don't want that again. Oh, and just so you guys know, we'll be starting with the first scene today with Bernardo and Francisco.

*EMILY goes to gossip with LILY. BRADLEY sends a text message as he mocks ELIZA.*

BRADLEY: Cool stretching, Eliza.

ELIZA: Oh, thanks Bradley. You should try it sometime. It's actually like really helpful.

BRADLEY: Oh, yeah? You see, I'm just naturally limber so...

*ELIANA enters, on the phone, and greets her ACTORS. THEY respond.*

ELIANA: Hey, Lily, can we do something about the lights? I can hardly see anything with just the works on.

LILY: Uh, sure. (*Shouting up to the booth*) Hey Jeremy, can you kill the works?

*Suddenly, light fills the stage. The ACTORS respond to the light, as well, yet with less excitement than ELIANA.*

ELIANA: Ah, much better. Hey, Lil' are we missing anyone?

ELIZA: Uh...Royer.

ELIANA (*Annoyed*): Of course. Can you call him?

LILY (*Already on it*): Sure.

BRADLEY: Tots obvi, Royer's not here.

ELIZA: Tots obvi?

ROYER (*Bounding in*): Hi guys, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry I'm late, I was getting in line for Stir Fry Carmichael, but you know how long that line is and so I ran down to the Campus Center, where there was another huge line and got—

ELIZA: Don't worry guys, he's got his Ultimate Grilled Cheese

*The COMPANY responds briefly with their opinions on the U.G.C. and other sandwich options.*

ELIANA (*Cutting them off*): Okay, okay, okay. Rehearsal time! Yay! (*Going over to ROYER*) Hi.

ROYER: Hi.

ELIANA: Okay. Hi guys. Today is off book day. Off book day. Oh! Welcome to the Arena. Very exciting to be here. So things may be a little disorienting, but it'll be great, we'll push through. (*To ELIZA, remembering*) Oh! Oh! Sweetie, c'mere. (*Spinning her around*) Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy. Okay?

ELIZA: Wait, the exits?

ELIANA (*Correcting her*): The voms. You're heard me say that before. Voms. Vomitoriums. And one, two, three, four five.

*During this last line, BRADLEY and ROYI have begun talking over ELIANA.*

ELIANA: Royi. Bradley. Do you guys know the voms?

ROYI: Yeah. Able, Bobby, Candy.

ELIANA (*Sighs, and then moving on*): Okay great; let's get started with the first scene.

ROYI: I'm not in that scene, am I?

ELIANA: No, Hamlet, you're not. We don't get to meet you 'till later. (*To BRADLEY and EMILY*) Okay, let's get you guys up there.

EMILY (*Overlapping BRADLEY*): Where exactly are we...

ELIANA: Okay, Bernardo, you'll be up top there (

BRADLEY: Like, in the exit?

ELIANA: Like right up top there.

EMILY: Like above Dog.

BRADLEY: Okay, should I go there now, or....

ELIANA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So it'll start and like Jeremy and Julia have all these crazy lights and this crazy music, and it'll start out, like, in darkness.

LILY: Ooh—do you want the flashlights?

ELIANA: Yes. We actually have them, huh.

*LILY goes to grab the flashlights.*

BRADLEY: Oh! Flashlight tag!

ROYI: Yes! Flashlight tag! Can we?

BRADLEY: Ugh, Eliana, please.

ELIANA: There is no flashlight tag in Hamlet. Save it for bonding.

*BRADLEY and ROYI are dejected.*

ELIANA: Okay, Brad, so you'll be up there and you'll just like, appear. And then, Em, you'll be entering in from—

EMILY: Charlie.

ELIANA: Yeah. Okay, so Emily, you are coming to replace Bradley at his post.

EMILY: Wait, actually, I think that...

ELIANA (*Taking a seat*): Okay, let's just start from there and....lights up!

EMILY: Wait, sorry, it's gonna be like, dark, right?

ELIANA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like a.....metaphorical lights up.

EMILY: Okay.

ELIANA: And....go!

*BRADLEY begins the scene and realizes the rail can move and make a noise.*

BRADLEY: Holy shit, dude! This thing moves. Listen to this. (*He produces the noise for everyone.*) Am I the only one who thinks this is cool?

ROYI: That is kinda cool.

LILY: Yes.

EMILY: It's cool that it's broken.

LILY: I'll make a note of it.

EMILY: It's just broken.

ROYI: Since we're stopped, I'm gonna go pee.

ELIZA: It's fine, Bradley.

ELIANA: Okay, it's, it's a moving rail.

ELIZA: Can we just start?

ELIANA: Yes, okay, and...metaphorical lights up.

*They begin the scene.*

BRADLEY: 'Who's there?'

EMILY: Nay. Answer me. Stand and unfold your—

ELIANA: Hey, Emily, can you be a little more...grounded?

EMILY: What?

ELIANA: Yeah. Like grounded. You're guarding the castle. You know. Like, manly!

EMILY: Manly?

ELIANA: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: Wait, I'm sorry...that's not what we've been working on. What do you mean, manly?

ELIANA (*Thinking on her feet*): Okay. Emily. Have you...have you ever asked somebody out?

EMILY: What?

BRADLEY: Have you ever asked a guy out before, Eliana?

ELIANA: The question is for Emily.

BRADLEY: Well, I know the answer anyways.

ELIANA (*To BRADLEY*): Hahahaha.

*The COMPANY gets a kick out of this. ELIANA attempts to bring some focus back.*

ELIANA: Have you?

EMILY: Yes.

ELIANA: So that feeling. Of taking the initiative. Of taking control. (*Searching for the word.*) That, that...dominance. Is what you are. You are not man, you are not woman in this world. You are masculinity. Okay? Got it? Are you fed?

BRADLEY: I'm actually kinda hungry.

EMILY: Yeah.

ELIANA: Think grounded.

EMILIY: Yeah. Okay. Sure.

ELIANA: Okay, let's just try it again. Metaphorical lights up!

BRADLEY: 'Who's there?'

EMILY: 'Nay. Answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.'

BRADLEY: 'Long live the king!' Alright, um, time out. Help me, help you. I have no idea why I'm saying that line. What does that mean?

*ELIZA makes a noise.*

ELIANA: 'Long live the king'?

BRADLEY: Yeah. I'm starting to make sense of the 'Who's there?' but I'm stuck on that one.

ELIANA: Bradley, have you read the play?

BRADLEY: I've read my lines.

ELIZA: Bradley, it's just a line!

ELIANA: Just a line? This is a valid, valid question. Why would Shakespeare have included this if it was just a line? This "line" is who you are. It's your identity, your desire for the King to live. Long. That is your desire, your motivation. This is how you announce yourself—through your loyalty to the King. The King is order.

BRADLEY: That's his name?

ELIANA: Who **represents** order. You are a man defending order with your life. Okay. What's going on in Denmark right now?

BRADLEY: Wait, Denmark like. . .now?

ELIZA: No, Bradley. Denmark in the show.

ELIANA: Yeah, world of the play people. Denmark is chaos. Think about it. We are in a world where sister-in-laws become wives become mothers become lovers. This line is your desire for order, okay? Right now you are not Bradley standing above Dog, you are not even Bernardo guarding Fortinbras. You are order in a world of chaos. This is how you announce yourself to a figure in darkness. . .and to your audience. Got it?

BRADLEY: Well, not really, but...

ELIZA: Bradley, you should have read the play already. Can we just start?! We've wasted so much time already! (*Aside, wrapping her pashmina around her*). Ugh, it's freezing in here.

ELIANA: Yes. Thank you.

ROYI (*Walking right through this debate*): Okay, so I know that—

ELIANA: Royi, in the middle of rehearsal? Seriously? Seriously? Can we just go back and start again?

ROYI: Sorry. I think just took the world's longest piss.

ELIANA: Royi. Shhh. Okay. From the top!

BRADLEY notices the CHARACTERS, who have appeared on the concourse. No one else has.

BRADLEY: Who's there?

EMILY: Nay. Answer me. Stand—

BRADLEY (*Pointing to the CHARACTERS*): No. Seriously. Who's there?!

*The SIX CHARACTERS come into full view. They are bewildered and ill at ease. “Any production must make clear the fundamental distinction between the SIX CHARACTERS and the ACTORS and members of the company. The physical separation of the two groups, recommended in the stage directions once both are on the stage, should certainly help to make the distinction clear. Different colored lighting should also be used to reinforce it. The CHARACTERS must not, in fact, seem to be phantasms; they must appear as figures of created reality, immutable constructs of the imagination: more real and more consistent, because of this, than the natural and volatile ACTORS. Though Pirandello calls for masks, the CHARACTERS will wear make-up that will (as the masks are intended) help convey the idea that these figures are the products of art, their faces immutably fixed so that each one expresses its basic motivation; the FATHER’s face*

*registering Remorse, the STEPDAUGHTER's, Revenge; the SON's, Contempt, and the MOTHER's, Sorrow.*

*The FATHER is about fifty, balding slightly, his reddish hair receding at the temples. A thick, curly mustache fringes his still youthful lips, which tend to part in a meaningless uncertain kind of smile. He has a wide forehead, outstandingly pale in a pallid face, oval blue eyes, very bright and piercing; light trousers and a dark jacket: his voice is sometimes mellifluous, sometimes jerky and harsh.*

*The MOTHER gives the impression of someone appalled and oppressed by and intolerable burden of shame and humiliation. She is quietly dressed, in widow's black. When she lifts her heavy crepe veil she reveals a face, which is more like wax than ailing flesh. She keeps her eyes permanently downcast.*

*The STEPDAUGHTER is eighteen, arrogant and brash to the point of insolence.*

*Strikingly beautiful, she too is in mourning, but in her case the clothes have a flashy stylishness. She is clearly contemptuous of her shy, unhappy, bewildered younger brother, a scruffy BOY of fourteen, also in black. She is warmly affectionate, however, towards her little sister, a LITTLE GIRL of about four, who wears a white frock tied at the waist with a black silk sash.*

*The SON is a tall young man of twenty-two. He bears himself stiffly, as if grown rigid in the suppressed contempt he feels for his FATHER and the sullen indifference he shows his MOTHER. He wears a purple overcoat and has a long green scarf tied round his neck.*

ELIANA: Um...hi...Can I help you guys?

FATHER (*Approaching the steps which lead down to the stage, followed by the others*): We are here in search of an author.

ELIANA: (*Angry and astonished*) An author? What do you mean author?

FATHER: Any author, madam.

ELIANA: Well, there's no author here, Shakespeare's been dead for like, 400 years, it's not a new play, so if you wouldn't mind—

STEPDAUGHTER: (*Rushing down the steps toward ELIANA with jubilant enthusiasm.*) But that's even better! That's terrific! Have us! We can be your new play!

ROYI: What the hell is she talking about?

ELIZA: This rehearsal is so screwed up.

EMILY: Oh god, can we just get on with this. I have a paper due tomorrow.

FATHER: (*Following the STEPDAUGTER onto the stage.*) Well, yes...but if there's no author...(*To ELIANA.*) Unless you would like to be our author...?

*The MOTHER, leading the LITTLE GIRL by the hand, heads onto the stage. The BOY does so too, and halfway they pause expectantly. The SON remains at the top, evidently sulking.*

BRADLEY: Okay, if this is an episode of Punk'd, not cool MTV.

LILY: Yeah, this has to be a joke, or something.

FATHER: It's very from being a joke. What we bring you is a grievous and painful drama.

STEPDAUGHTER: We could make your fortune!

ELIANA: Well that would be wonderful and as much as we could use whatever "fortune" you could bring us, I'm going to have to ask you to leave my rehearsal. We really can't have visitors today. This is absurd!

FATHER: (*hurt, using his 'mellifluous' voice.*) But I don't need to tell you, Madam, that life is like that; it's made up of absurdities, things which don't make sense—and which, like it or not, don't need to be credible, because they are true.

ELIANA: Okay, thanks for the life-lesson, but you're still gonna need to leave.

FATHER: All I'm saying is that it is actually more nonsensical to do the opposite, to force things into the mold of credibility to give them the appearance of truth. And might I point out that, mad as it is, this is exactly what your profession tries to do.

*Indignant reaction from the ACTORS.*

ELIZA: Great, someone else who thinks actors are crazy. Surprise, surprise.

FATHER: Well, this making untrue things seem true...pointlessly, as a kind of game...Your job is to make fictional characters seem true to life, am I right?

ELIANA: I'll have you know that the job of the actor is one of the toughest and most respected professions in the world.

*The COMPANY glares at ELIANA.*

ELIANA: Okay, well, it's definitely one of the toughest. And I'll agree with you that there are many playwrights out there writing awful and unoriginal plays, and some directors that completely disrespect the playwright and force some other not-so-hidden agenda. But you know, right here on this stage, many times throughout the year, we come together and take scripts, that are just words on a page, and we give them life.

*The actors are pleased with ELIANA's defense.*

FATHER: (*Interrupting and pressing his point home passionately.*) Right! That's exactly what I mean! You have created living beings! As much alive, or more so, as the kind who breathe and wear clothes! Not as real, possibly, but more true! So you see, we agree!

LILY: (*Trying to piece his argument together.*) Wait...I don't think you're making any sense. First you said...

FATHER: No, I'm sorry that was meant for you, madam, when you barked at us that you had no time to waste on nonsense. Actually, who knows better than you that the most important instrument in the creative process is the human imagination!

EMILIY: Alright, we get it. Where are you going with this?

FATHER: Nowhere. I'm simply trying to show you that there are a great many ways, and guises, in which one can be born: it might be as a tree, or water, a butterfly... (*To ELIANA*) or a woman. It's also possible to be born as a character!

BRADLEY: Alright, lemme get this straight. You mean you and your little friends here have all been born as characters?

FATHER: Exactly so. And alive, just as you see us.

ROYI: Well, were any of you born as Hamlet, cause I could seriously use a nap right now.

*The COMPANY laughs.*

FATHER: (*Hurt.*) I'm sorry you find this funny; because, as I said, we carry within us a painful drama, which I imagine you are capable of deducing from the sight of this lady here in her black veil. (*As he speaks he offers a hand to the MOTHER and escorts her with an air of tragic solemnity and elegance to the far side of the stage, which is suddenly bathed in an unearthly light. The LITTLE GIRL and the BOY follow the MOTHER. Then the SON crosses over, holding himself aloof and retiring to a seat in the house.*)

*The ACTORS are impressed.*

ROYI: Oh, sweet light cue, Jeremy. Is that for my entrance?

ELIANA: Royi, don't encourage them. (*To the CHARACTERS.*) I'm sorry, but you guys really have to leave now. We still have a ton to do I know I seem young, and I mean no disrespect, but this has gone on long enough. Lily, can you please handle this?

LILY: (*Approaches them and then stops as if restrained by a strange sense of awe.*) I'm sorry guys. Listen, I'd be happy to show you out.

FATHER: (*To ELIANA.*) But we can't, you see, we—

ELIANA: Don't you get that we actually have work to do?

ELIZA: (*Under her breath.*) This would never happen in a department show.

ELIANA: Eliza, I'm doing the best I can.

FATHER: (*moving resolutely over to them.*) I am amazed by your skepticism. Surely as actors and actresses you're quite accustomed to seeing fictional characters suddenly take on life right before your eyes, here on this stage? What's the difficulty? Is it because (*pointing to LILY's script*) we're not in a script?

STEPDAUGHTER: (*Approaching ELIANA with an ingratiating smile.*) You must believe we really are six characters, and fascinating ones at that!...Abandoned, though...homeless.

FATHER: (*Edging her out of the way.*) Abandoned, yes, that is so...(*Quickly, to ELIANA.*) In the sense that the author who created us, who gave us our life, found later that he didn't want, or perhaps technically wasn't able, to bring us to birth in Art. And this was criminal of him because, you see, if you're lucky enough to be born as a character, you have no reason to fear death. You don't die! Your creator dies, the instrument of your being; but you, the creature, can't die. Who, after all, was Sancho Panza? Who was Mr. Micawber?

BRADLEY: Yeah, who were those guys, right?

FATHER: But they, you see, will live forever, because they took root in an imagination able to nourish and develop them and ultimately give them immortality!

EMILY: OK, I sort of understand what you're saying, but what do you want from us?

FATHER: We want to live, madam!

ELIZA: Right, we got that. You wanna live forever.

FATHER: No, we want to live just for a moment. In you.

ROYI: Oh, Christ.

EMILY: You wanna live—in us?

BRADLEY: I wouldn't mind living in her (*the STEPDAUGHTER*) for a moment, and I right Royi?

*The girls respond to BRADLEY's comment as if it's utter misogyny.*

FATHER: It's like this you see: the play has yet to be made; (*To ELIANA*) but if you're willing and your actors are willing, we can sort something out between us, straight away!

ELIANA: Sort something out? Look, maybe you can talk to Bare Bodkin, but we don't do new work. Or even improv; right now we're doing Shakespeare.

ROYI: Again.

ELIANA: We put on legitimate plays, scripts.

FATHER: Well, that's why we're here.

ELIANA: Okay...well then, where's the script?

FATHER: It's in us. (*The ACTORS laugh.*) The drama is in us; we are it! And we are desperate to get it out and put it on the stage. It's a compulsion, a passion.

STEPDAUGHTER: (*with a sneer, yet tantalizing and mockingly seductive.*) Passion, now! My passion! You don't know one half of it! My passion...for him! (*She is speaking of the FATHER and pretends she is going to embrace him, but instead bursts into strident laughter.*)

FATHER: (*Snapping at her fiercely.*) You keep you place, miss! And stop that laughter!

STEPDAUGHTER: Well perhaps I may be allowed to show you my other talents! Ladies and gentlemen, in spite of my recent bereavement, it's my pleasure in presenting to you my latest song and dance number! (*She begins her performance; it is vindictive and throughout, she makes suggestive looks at the FATHER and teases BRADLEY.*)

My passion cannot be expressed in words.  
My heart, it burns evermore.  
For the way I feel it, no heart can conceal it.  
It's you I'm waiting for.

*The ACTORS, especially BRADLEY, seem drawn towards her by some strange fascination. She finishes and stands looking abstracted, as if lost in thought. The ACTORS applaud her performance. The ACTORS ad lib comments.*

ELIANA: Chill out, you guys. Big deal, she can sing and dance. (*Confidentially and anxiously to the FATHER.*) Hey...is there...something "up" with her?

FATHER: Oh, no. It's worse than that.

STEPDAUGHTER: (*Running to ELINA and cutting in quickly.*) Worse? I'll say it's worse, all right! Listen! Please! Let's act it now, our drama, then you'll see how at a

certain point, I...when this sweet little girl (*She takes the LITTLE GIRL's hand and brings her from her MOTHER's side across to ELIANA.*)...Have you ever seen such a darling? (*She picks her up and kisses her.*) Oh, my little angel! (*She sets her down and speaks in great agitation, as if hardly aware of her words.*) Well, when this sweet little girl here eventually gets taken from that poor Mother, and when this imbecile here (*She roughly grabs the BOY by the sleeve and pulls him forward*) does the most idiotic thing (*shoving him back towards the MOTHER*), you won't see me anymore. I shall be gone for good. And believe me, it can't come soon enough! Because after what. . ."took place" between him and me (*with a lurid glance in the FATHER's direction*), I can't stay with them a moment longer; I can't bear to stand by and watch while this Mother eats her heart out over that poor fool. (*She indicates the SON.*)—Look at him! Just look at him! Really cool, uninvolved, because he's legitimate, see, the legitimate son, so much better than me, or him there (*pointing to the BOY*) or this little thing here (*the LITTLE GIRL*). Because we are the bastards. Do you hear me? Bastards. (*She goes up to the MOTHER and embraces her.*) And he won't even acknowledge this poor mother—who is mother to us all! He treats her like dirt. To him she's just the Mother of three bastards. He is...vile! (*All this is said rapidly in a state of extreme agitation. She reaches a crescendo with her 'three bastards' and then utters the last word 'vile' in a whisper, almost spitting the word out.*)

MOTHER: (*In a tone of total anguish*) Please, madam, for the sake of these two little ones, I beg you...(*She totters, unable to go on.*)—oh my god...

FATHER: (*Rushing to support her; the ACTORS are astonished and bewildered.*) Get a chair, someone! Quickly, a chair for this poor creature!

*The ACTORS are unsure how to react—EMILY: Oh god!, ROYI: Has she really fainted?, etc.*

ELIANA: Will someone please get a chair?!

*One of the ACTORS brings a chair; the others crowd round anxious to help. She tries to stop the FATHER from removing the veil that hides her face.*

FATHER: Just look at her! Look!

MOTHER: Oh don't! For God's sake, don't!

FATHER: Let them see you! (*He lifts up her veil. She is, of course, the "image of sorrow."*)

MOTHER: (*getting up and covering her face with her hands in shame*) Oh, madam, I beg you, stop this man from doing the dreadful thing he has in mind! It's too horrible!

BRADLEY: What is with you guys?

ELIANA (*To the FATHER*): Are you guys married?

FATHER: (*Promptly*) Yes, she's my wife.

LILY: (*Suddenly bursting out this realization.*) Wait, hold on. That's impossible. You just said she's a widow, but, uh...you're definitely alive.

*The ACTORS find relief at this in laughter.*

FATHER: (*wounded and resentful*) Don't laugh! Stop laughing at us! This is the point, this is her drama! She had another man. Another man who should be here with us.

MOTHER: (*with a shriek*) No! Stop!

STEPDAUGHTER: He's dead, and well out of it. I told you, he died two months ago. We are still in mourning for him, as you can see.

FATHER: He's not here...but that's not because he's dead. He's not here because...well, one look at her should tell you. Hers isn't the drama of a woman torn between two men; I don't think she felt anything for either of them. She wasn't capable, beyond, perhaps, a little gratitude. But not for me, for *him*. No, she isn't a woman; she's a mother! Her drama, and oh, yes, it's powerful stuff, her whole drama is bound up in these four children, these children she's had by two different men.

MOTHER: I had two men? How can you stand there and say I had two men, as if that was what I wanted? (*To ELIANA.*) *He* wanted it. He forced the other man on me. He made me go away with him!

STEPDAUGHTER: (*cutting in bitterly*) That's not true!

MOTHER: (*Startled*) What's not true?

STEPDAUGHTER: It isn't!

MOTHER: What do you know about it?

STEPDAUGHTER: It's just not true! (*To ELIANA*) Don't believe her! Do you know why she says that? Because of him! (*She points to the SON.*) She's tearing herself apart over the indifference of the son she abandoned when he was two years old. She's desperate to convince him that she only left him because she had to, because he (*pointing to the FATHER*) forced her to.

MOTHER: He forced me, all right! God knows he forced me! (*To ELIANA*) Ask him. Make him admit it! She (*gesturing towards the STEPDAUGHTER*) knows nothing about it.

STEPDAUGHTER: I know that all the time you were with my father, as long as he was alive, you were perfectly happy and at peace. You can't deny it!

MOTHER: I don't deny it, I—

STEPDAUGHTER: He was so loving, so good to you. (*To the BOY, angrily.*) Wasn't he? Admit it. Say something you fool!

MOTHER: Leave the poor boy alone! Why are you making me out to be so ungrateful? I wouldn't dream of saying anything against your father. (*She looks to the FATHER.*) It wasn't my fault, nor was it my pleasure to leave his house. My son.

FATHER: She's perfectly right. It was my idea. (*A pause.*)

ROYI: If they can't get their own story straight, how anyone else is supposed to get it.

ELIZA: Wow. They have more drama than we do.

EMILY: I didn't think that was possible.

ELIANA: (*Starting to get really interested*) Em, Eliza, quiet. (*To the FATHER*) Please continue.

*ELIANA goes and stands on the stairs, as if to get an audience's perspective of the scene.*

SON (*Without moving or raising his voice, which is cold and ironic*): If you want to know what's coming next, it's a load of meaningless philosophy. He'll tell you about his evil genius, his Daemon of Experiment.

FATHER: You think you're so damn clever, don't you boy? (*To EMILY.*) He despises me, you see, for this expression I use to explain my behavior.

SON: (*Scornfully.*) Words, words, words.

FATHER: Well, yes! Words! When we are desperately perplexed or distressed, what do we do? We find some word, which in itself means nothing, yet offers us piece of mind.

STEPDAUGTHER: Lovely remedy for remorse, isn't it?

FATHER: Remorse? That's not fair. I've used more than mere words to quiet my remorse.

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh...of course! How much money were you willing to offer me for my services?

There is a horrified reaction from the ACTORS.

SON: (*Contemptuously to his stepsister.*) That was wretched!

STEPDAUGHTER: Wretched? But there it was in a nice little pale blue envelope on the mahogany table in the back room at Madam Pace's. Nice boutique in the front, providing a cover for Madame's other little business; the 'work-rooms' where she can employ girls from decent homes who need the cash.

SON: And now she's torturing us all with the money she was going to charge him. But as things turned out, he never had reason to pay it!

STEPDAUGHTER: It was awfully close, though. (*She bursts out laughing.*)

MOTHER: (*strenuously getting up*) Have you no shame?

STEPDAUGHTER (*Quickly*) Shame? This is revenge! I am trembling, trembling in every nerve to get at that scene and live it! The room, now. There's a glass case displaying clothes over here! Over there a sofa, doubling as a bed. A long mirror, here, and a screen. By the window we've got the infamous mahogany table with the blue envelope on it. I can see it! I can even pick it up! Perhaps you should all be looking the other way, as I've hardly got anything on. Not that it makes me blush. I can't blush anymore. He's the one who's red in the face now. (*She indicates the FATHER.*) However at the time I am speaking of I can tell you he was quite pale. (*To ELIANA*) Of that I can assure you.

ROYI: I can't keep up with all this.

FATHER: Of course you can't! (*To ELIANA*) You really shouldn't listen to this savage piece of character assassination without hearing my side of the story!

STEPDAUGTHER: But it's not a story! You can't tell it like a story!

FATHER: I'm not, I just want to explain!

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh, yes, lovely. Explain it your way, you mean.

*ELIANA returns to the stage in an attempt to restore some order.*

FATHER: But isn't this is the whole trouble! We all carry around inside us a world made up of things as we see them; each one of us in a world of our own! We only *think* we understand each other. Look! The pity I felt for this poor woman (*He indicates the MOTHER*)—she took it as cruelty!

MOTHER: You sent me away!

FATHER: There, you see? She thinks I sent her away!

MOTHER: You're good at talking; I'm not...*(To ELIANA)* But believe me, madam, once he married me...though goodness knows why. A poor, simple woman....

FATHER: But that's what I loved! You were simple, and I thought...*(He cannot make her understand, and he trails off, shrugging desperately at the utter impossibility of doing so. He turns to ELIANA.)* It's no good, you see! She won't see it! Her mental deafness is absolutely terrifying! Plenty of love where her children are concerned, but in the head, she's deaf. Agonizingly deaf!

STEPDAUGHTER: *(To ELIANA)* Have him tell you just where all *his* intelligence has got us.

FATHER: If we only knew, beforehand, the harm that can result from our efforts to do good!

ELIZA: Eliana, are we gonna rehearse today or what?

ROYI: Yeah, I have this huge Spanish test tomorrow.

EMILY: You wanna leave now?

BRADLEY: I can't stop watching this.

EMILY: They're fascinating.

ELIZA: Right, if you're into that whole soap opera thing.

ELIANA: OK, guys, enough. I know we have a lot of work to do, but they're trying to tell us their story. *(The ACTORS subside.)* How do you see it?

FATHER: Right. Well, look. I had this assistant. He was my junior, a rather downtrodden but devoted fellow...And he had this extraordinary understanding of my wife. Absolutely innocent, of course. He was good and simple...like her. Both incapable of doing anything wrong.

STEPDAUGHTER: So he did it for them.

FATHER: That's not true! I meant to do what was best for them—and for myself, I admit it. It had gotten to the point, you see, where I couldn't say a word to either of them without their exchanging understanding looks, looking for clues as to how to react to what I had said. As you can imagine, this put me in an unbearable state of constant exasperation.

BRADLEY: So why didn't you fire him?

FATHER: I did! I fired him and was stuck with this poor woman drifting round the house like a lost soul, like a stray animal you keep out of kindness.

MOTHER: Is it so surprising?

FATHER: (*Quickly, turning to her, as if to get it in first.*) Ah, yes....Our Boy.

MOTHER: He had already taken the child from my arms.

FATHER: But not out of cruelty! I did it so he would grow up strong and healthy, close to nature.

STEPDAUGTHER (*Pointing to the SON, jeering*): And my, what a magnificent success that was.

FATHER: Is it my fault he turned out like this? (*To ELIANA*) My wife didn't seem strong enough, so I put him in the care of a foster-mother, in the country. A peasant-woman, like her (*the MOTHER*). I saw in her what I saw in my wife. A trend, I suppose, but I have always been plagued by the desire for a kind of sound moral wholesomeness. (*The STEPDAUGTHER produces a guffaw of raucous laughter.*) Can't you stop that? It's insufferable.

ELIANA: Seriously, shut up! I can't hear what he's saying.

*At this remonstrance from ELIANA, the STEPDAUHTER immediately reassumes her usual lost far-away look as she is cut off mid-laughter. ELIANA again takes his position on the stairs.*

ELIANA: (*To the FATHER.*) Please.

FATHER: I could no longer bear to have this woman in the house. Not because her presence was suffocating, but because of the pain, the anguish she was enduring.

MOTHER: So he sent me away!

FATHER: (*Defensively.*) Yes I did, I provided for her properly, and sent her to that man—I gave her freedom!

MOTHER: The only person you freed was yourself!

FATHER: Well, yes, mine too, I admit it! I thought I was doing the right thing. (*He lays his hand on his heart; then turning quickly to the MOTHER.*) But I didn't lose sight of you, did I? No, not until the day when the damned fool carted you off to another town, overnight, without a word! He was idiotic enough to resent the interest I took...which was perfectly innocent! I became incredibly fond of this new little family that was growing up. I was interested. (*To the STEPDAUGHTER.*) She'll tell you.

STEPDAUGHTER: You were interested all right! I was, you know, an adorable little girl. Pigtails down to my shoulders, my little knickers showing. I used to see him as I left school. He came to see how I was “growing up”....

FATHER: That is a vile thing to say.

STEPDAUGTHER: Have I got it wrong?

FATHER: This is outrageous! (*His tone suddenly changes to one of desperate self-explanation.*) The fact is, you see, once she had gone, my house seemed empty. Though her presence was dismal, it filled the house. Left alone, I almost went off my head, wandering blindly from room to room. He, you see (*indicating the SON*) had been in a foster-home up till then. When he came home, somehow he didn’t seem to be mine anymore. With his mother no longer there to keep us together, he grew up in a world of his own. There was no relationship there. So, I know it sounds odd, but I began to feel drawn towards her little family. It filled the emptiness in my life. I needed to know she had found peace, free of my spiritual agonizing. And that’s why I used to watch that little girl coming out of school.

STEPDAUGHTER: He used to follow me all the way home, smiling. And when we got there, he used to wave (*She demonstrates*). And I’d glare at him, give him nasty looks. I didn’t know who he was. I told my mom; she knew who it was all right. (*The MOTHER nods.*) She kept me out of school for several days. When I went back, there he was again, holding a paper parcel. He ran his hand across my face and unwrapped a beautiful silk shawl with a fringe on it—for me!

ELIANA: You guys, this is really interesting, but this is a story, not a play.

SON: (*Scornfully.*) Just a bunch of fiction!

FATHER: Fiction? This isn’t fiction! This is life! This is passion!

ELIANA: Either way, it won’t work on stage.

FATHER: You’re right. This all happens before the play starts. I’m not suggesting we should act this. As you can see, she’s hardly a little girl with pigtails anymore....

STEPDAUGHTER: Nor you can’t see her little knickers!

FATHER: The real drama begins now. An extraordinary, intricate drama.

STEPDAUGTHER: (*Coming forward, proud and menacing.*) Once my father died...

FATHER: (*Quickly, to stop her from saying any more.*)...they were faced with destitution. They came back here. I didn’t know. She (*he points to the MOTHER*) was too

stupid to tell me. The drama erupted, unforeseen and cataclysmic. I was still suffering the misery of...physical frustration. It is misery when a man lives alone, if he doesn't want some sordid affair; not old enough to go without a woman, not young enough go out and meet one without feeling disgust. The fact is, we all clothe ourselves with a kind of outward dignity, while inwardly, we're full of uncontestable, intimate thoughts. We give in to temptation, of course, then scramble to reestablish our dignity. We all do shameful things. But in secret! That's why it takes more courage to admit them. If you mention them, people say you are cynical, but you're the one who's not afraid to look rationally at the blushing face of human sexuality. It's a part of our bestial nature, but we refuse to see it. Take a woman. She looks at you, seductively, so you grab her and as soon as she's in your arms, she shuts her eyes. It's a signal of surrender, she's saying "Be blind, as I am blind."

STEPDAUGHTER: And what about when she gets past that stage and can stare, unmoved, with wide, dry eyes at the shame of the man in her arms, lying there, without love, his eyes shut against his lust! I can't listen to your intellectualizing about man and his animal nature. It makes me sick! Because if you are ever actually driven to live at that simple, animal level, if you're ever forced to do without all the human 'extras' like chastity, purity, idealism, duty, modesty, shame—you'll find that nothing is more nauseating than bogus remorse!

ELIANA: Alright, can we cut to the chase, guys?

FATHER: Ah, yes! A fact on its own, you see, is like an empty sack; to make it stand you have to put something inside it—the motivation, the feelings that caused it. Anyway, how could I have known that after they came back here the Mother was working as a seamstress to support her children, and for Madam Pace, of all people!

STEPDAUGHTER: She serves a very special clientele. Her distinguished ladies as a cover for the not-so-distinguished ones...

MOTHER: Believe me, I hadn't the faintest suspicion that monstrous creature gave me work because she had her eye on my daughter.

STEPDAUGTHER: Poor Mama! She used to sit up half the night doing Madame Pace's sewing. I would bring it in and Madame Pace made me note down the amount of stuff she had ruined and deduct it from *my* pay. I was being made to pay while Mama thought *she* was making scarifies.

ELIZA: And so it was at this shop slash secret brothel that you met...?

STEPDAUGTHER: Him! And old, established client. You'll see what an incredible scene it makes!

FATHER: When the mother bursts in—

STEPDAUGTHER (*Quickly, treacherously*): Almost in time!

FATHER: No! *Just* in time. Because luckily, I recognize her before it's too late. And then I take them all back to my home. Try and imagine that scene with the way things are between us now! She's behaving...well, just like this! I can't even look her in the face!

STEPDAUGTHER: That's a laugh. There's no way—after that—that I can pass myself off as a nice young lady in order to justify his damned notions of 'moral wholesomeness.'

FATHER: And this is the heart of the drama: we think of ourselves as just one person. But this is wrong; each one of us is many different people. We go around thinking we're exactly the same person for everybody, but this isn't the case at all! We discover this when we are caught doing something, and we hang there, in that moment, as if dangling by a hook. We can see our whole self isn't in this act. It would be a savage injustice to judge us on this act alone, never to let us off the hook, chained up for life, for all to see, as if the one action summed up our whole existence! Now do you see how treacherous she is being? She caught me in a compromising situation, in a place I should never have been, doing something, which in her eyes, I should not have been able to do. And now she insists on identifying me with a single fleeting moment of my life, fixing this single, shameful moment as my reality. This is what hurts the most! You'll see this is really what gives the play its power. And then of course there's the situation of the others. His, for instance...(*Points to the SON.*).

SON (*With a contemptuous shrug*): Leave me out of it; this has nothing to do with me!

FATHER: What do you mean, this has nothing to do with you?

SON: I don't come into it. I don't want to! I was never meant to be mixed up with you all...

STEPDAUGTHER: He thinks he's better than us. Though you'll notice whenever our eyes meet, his shifts his gaze away. He knows what he's done to me, all right.

SON (*Not looking at her*): What *I've* done?

STEPDAUGHTER: Yes, you! You were the one who put me on the streets! (*The COMPANY reacts.*) Did you, or didn't you make sure we never felt at home in your house? We were intruders, invading your legitimate territory. (*To ELIANA*) I'd like to show you certain little private scenes that took place between him and me. According to him we had no right to move into his house with my mother—but she's his mother, too!

SON: You see how it is? They gang up on me. But try and see it my way. You're at home one day, and in marches some insolent girl who looks down at you, and says she has some sort of business with your father! She waltzes in as if she owns the place, with that little girl, and proceeds to treat your father, God knows why, in the most suggestive and

forward way, asking him for money in a voice which suggests he has no choice but to give it to her, that's he's in no position to refuse.

FATHER: But that's right. I can't refuse. It's for your mother.

SON: How am I supposed to know that? When have I ever seen my mother? When have I ever heard her name mentioned? She just turns up one day with her, (*the STEPDAUGHER*), that boy, and that little girl. They say, 'Oh, didn't you know? She's your mother, too!' And then I start to get it, how they came to live with us just like that.... (*to ELIANA*) What I feel, what I'm going through, I can't express and I don't want to. I can't even bring myself to think about it. So you see, no action can possibly be got out of me. Believe me, in dramatic terms, I'm an 'unrealized' character. I'm just not one of them, I really don't belong. So leave me out of it, will you?

FATHER: How can we! Just because you're like that—

SON (*In violent exasperation*): How the hell do you know what I'm like? When have you paid any attention to me?

FATHER: I agree, you're right. But isn't this a dramatic situation in itself? This cutting yourself off, this coldness is so cruel; both to me and your mother. Think of her, coming home and meeting you for the first time, this fully-grown stranger who she just knows is her son... (*He draws ELIANA's attention to the MOTHER*.) Look at her now, she's crying.

STEPDAUGHTER (*Angrily*): She's sobbing!

FATHER: He says he doesn't come into it, but in many ways he's the crux of the action! Look at this little boy clinging to his mother all the time. Do you see how abject and hopeless he is? Well, that's his fault! (*indicating the SON*) Perhaps this poor little boy is in the most hurtful situation of all; more than any of them he feels he doesn't belong. He finds it painfully humiliating to have been taken in, out of charity... (*confidentially*) He's just like his father. Rather dim... never spoke.

LILY: There are kids in this play? Eliana, I don't do babysitting.

FATHER: Don't worry; the nuisance removes itself pretty quickly. And so does the little girl. In fact, she goes first...

ELIANA: I gotta say, you guys have got me hooked. The relationships, it's pretty intriguing. I think this would actually be a pretty good play.

STEPDAUGHTER (*Butting in*): Especially with a character like me.

FATHER (*Pushing her out of the way in his anxiety to hear ELIANA's decision*): Stay out of it!

ELIANA (*Ignoring the interruption*): Well, it's definitely original, unlike anything we've done...

FATHER: Oh yes, quite original.

ELIANA: And props to you guys for just coming in and presenting it to us.

FATHER: You must understand madam; born, as we are, for the stage—

ELIZA: That's a pretty bold claim. We haven't even seen you guys act yet.

EMILY: Still, you must've had some professional acting training.

FATHER: None at all. Only the acting everybody does, in the parts we give ourselves in life or that other people give us. In my case, I'd say the theatricality comes from passion. Strong feelings do that, you know, when one gets worked up...

ELIANA: That's so true. So listen, the story is fascinating but to make it into a play, you'll need an author, a playwright. Why don't you talk to—

FATHER: Oh, no. Don't do that. You be the author!

ELIANA: I don't think that's a good idea.

FATHER: Yes, you. And your company. Why not?

BRADLEY: I'll write it.

ELIZA: Oh, please, Bradley.

ELIANA: I mean, I've never written a play before.

FATHER: Well why not start now? There's nothing to it! Look at all the people who do. And your job will be that much easier with all the characters alive and in front of you.

ELIANA: I just think there's more to it than that.

FATHER: Is there? After seeing us actually live our play...

ELIANA: Fine, sure, but we'll still need someone to actually write it.

FATHER: Write it down, you mean. All you need to do is transcribe it, scene by scene, as it unfolds before you.

ELIANA: Well, it's certainly tempting...

ROYI: And it's not like Hamlet is going anywhere.

ELIANA: I mean, I guess we could try it...

FATHER: Oh, you must. You'll be amazed with the scenes that come out of it. I can give you a rough outline straight away.

ELIANA: Well, it's a big risk...but I want it. I wanna do this. What do you guys think? (*The ACTORS respond accordingly.*) Okay, we're doing this. (*To the ACTORS*) Okay, I think we should go on a break and then dive in. (*To the FATHER*) Maybe you and I should go take a look at this outline. Okay, this is happening.

FATHER: They had better come too, don't you think? (*He refers to the other CHARACTERS.*)

ELIANA: Oh, yeah, good call. Okay, you guys all wanna follow me? (*On her way out, back to the ACTORS*) Guys, just 15 minutes, ok? Royi, 15 minutes is not enough time for the Campus Center. And if someone's going to Jumbo and if could get me a Diet Coke that would be fabulous.

ROYI: I, I got it, Eliana.

ELIANA: Great, thanks. Okay, let's go.

*ELIANA and the CHARACTERS exit and the moment hangs for a bit. The ACTORS are unsure what to say.*

BRADLEY: And Eliana was never heard from again.

ELIZA: Wha—

ROYI: What the hell was that?

ELIZA: Is she serious? Lily, I'm sorry but—we're giving up *Hamlet*? We're doing some other like, random play—

LILY: Like I understand anything she's done for the past hour.

ROYI: What the hell is she thinking?!

ELIZA: Holy—Who are they? Wha—what is this?!

ROYI: Wait, seriously, who are they?

EMILY: I have no clue, but they really—

LILY: They're like a group of traveling...thespians. Like the Von Trapps. But on Jerry Springer.

ELIZA: I thought they were just some random club that just needed the space for a while.

ROYI: Uh-uh. You know what they are? You know what they are? They're one of those freaking, one of those goddamn guerilla theatre groups that come up to you—

BRADLEY: Easy, Royi, easy.

EMILY: Guys, listen, if they were a theatre group—

ELIZA: I'm just...I'm very frustrated right now. Seeing as we all just got off-book for Hamlet—

BRADLEY: Ah ah ah ah.

ROYI: Define all.

BRADLEY: Yeah, really.

LILY: Guys, you were all supposed to be off-book today.

BRADLEY: Okay, you bring up a good point because there's a very big difference between supposed to be and actually are.

LILY: Thank you Mister Philosophy major.

ELIZA: Does anyone even know what play this is? I've never heard of it.

EMILY: Does that really matter, Eliza?

LILY: There's no play! It's just talking and talking and talking!

EMILY: You guys, is it really gonna kill us to try something new?

ELIZA: Well, I just don't understand how we're gonna...make up some play during the rest of rehearsal.

EMILY: I dunno you guys, there's just something about them. Their drama...

ELIZA: I am not just gonna get on stage with six random people.

ROYI: Well, if there is a play, they stayed in it the whole time.

EMILY: It was intense.

ROYI: That really emo dude and those two kids—

LILY: Ugh, those kids!

ROYI: I don't think they said a word the entire time.

BRADLEY: I didn't hear anything.

ELIZA: And what about that song and dance number?

BRADLEY: That was some hot shit.

ELIZA and EMILY: Bradley.

ROYI: I did not appreciate that.

ELIZA: They're all just fucking with us now.

LILY: Well, I don't think we have any choice. Eliana's already decided we're doing their play.

ELIZA: I dunno. You guys going to Jumbo? I'm gonna go.

BRADLEY: Let's go.

EMILY: Yeah.

ROYI: Hey, does anybody have any money for me to buy Eliana her Diet Coke

*The ACTORS are annoyed with ROYI's request for money. It is not the first time he has done so.*

ROYI: Come on, she's gonna get mad at me because I'm not off book, I need to get her a Diet Coke.

*As the ACTORS exit the theatre, they continue to put ROYI down for not having money on him. As they near the exit, we hear:*

ROYI: Come on, don't you guys remember what happened the last time she didn't get her Diet Coke?

*The ACTORS exit the theater. Meanwhile, LILY has been collecting her things and calls her mother.*

LILY: Hi Mom. Good. (*As she exits*) Yeah, it's really messed up today. There are these people who...

## ACT II

*During the intermission, the COMPANY, less ELIANA, returns from their break with food and drink. THEY hang around the stage, waiting for rehearsal to begin again. The act opens with:*

ELIANA (*Excited*): OK, guys, let's do it. Hey, Lily, come on. The lights.

LILY (*Shouting up to the booth*): Jeremy! Lights!

ELIANA: Thank you. Okay, let's get started. Are we all back?

LILY: (*She looks around and checks.*) Yup.

ELIANA: Wow, almost a miracle. Okay, this is gonna be fun, but may take some work, so I really need everyone to focus. So, Lily, here's the ground plan for the scene, and they need some props and furniture and costumes.

LILY: Well...we can use what's lying around.

ELIANA: Do we have a divan or a chaise lounge?

LILY: Yeah, I think we have that old beige one backstage.

STEPDAUGHTER: We can't have a beige one! It was yellow plush with flowers on it. Very comfortable.

LILY: We have nothing like that.

ELIANA: Just give us whatever's back there, it doesn't matter.

LILY (*Getting BRADLEY to help*): Hey, Bradley.

*LILY and BRADLEY exit to retrieve the chaise lounge.*

STEPDAUGTHER: Doesn't matter? That's Madam Pace's famous couch!

ELIANA: It's just a rehearsal, don't worry. (*to LILY, who is entering, carrying on the chaise*) Oh, and they want long, narrow display case.

LILY (*Out of breath*): Are you kidding?

ELIANA: Forget the display case.

STEPDAUGHTER: And the table! The little mahogany table for the blue envelope!

LILY: We can just grab on of the prop tables.

ELIANA: Is it mahogany? (*LILY shoots ELIANA a look that, once again, says, “Are you insane, Eliana”*. *Eliana subsides.*) Prop table will do fine.

FATHER: And a long mirror.

STEPDAUGTHER: And the screen! I can’t do the scene without it.

LILY: Well, I don’t think we’re gonna be able to get a mirror out here. They’re all in stock. Not sure if we have a screen, per se, but we can find a good substitute.

ELIANA: Awesome. Let’s bring it out. And some hat stands, right?

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh, yes, lots of them.

LILY: I can’t make any guarantees, but I’ll see what I can do. (*LILY exits to gather all of this and arranges it onstage.*)

ELIANA: OK, so as soon as Lily gets back with the furniture and stuff, we’ll start. This (*She holds a piece of paper*) is the breakdown of the play, scene by scene, if any of you wanna take a look at it. (*Handing it to Royi*)

ROYI: Sweet, we don’t have to learn any lines.

ELIANA: Right, Lily is gonna write down the lines as we go along.

*Lily returns on this line and reacts another or Eliana’s bold requests. EMILY and BRADLEY help set up the furniture.*

LILY: I am?

ELIANA: Yes, please. Just try to get down the lines, as they say them, as best as possible.

*LILY and BRADLEY finish arranging the furniture.*

ELIANA: OK, can I have everyone’s attention?

ELIZA: Sorry Eliana, but I’m not sure I understand what we’re—

ELIANA (*Anticipating her*): It’s fine Eliza, relax. You won’t have to do any improv.

BRADLEY: So what are we doing then?

ELIANA (*Growing impatient*): Just watching and listening for now. We're gonna start the rehearsal now, and they're (*the CHARACTERS*) gonna do it first.

FATHER (*Bewildered*): Us? But what do you mean, a rehearsal?

ELIANA: You're going to rehearse for the benefit of the actors.

FATHER: But if we *are* the characters....

ELIANA: Sure. Fine. You're the characters. But characters don't do the acting here. The actors do the acting. The characters belong in the script—when there is a script.

FATHER: Exactly! But since there isn't one and you people are lucky enough to have the characters here in person...

ROYI: Oh, great. They wanna write it, act in it, even direct it, probably. They're gonna do everything themselves.

FATHER: Of course. That's why we're here.

ROYI: So why are we here...

BRADLEY: To be Eliana's puppets. Duh.

*The ACTORS laugh.*

ELIANA: Alright let's get on with it. We need to cast this thing. OK, let's have...Emily playing the mother. (*to the FATHER*) We gotta give her name.

FATHER: Her name's Amalia.

ELIANA: Oh, no, we don't want to use her real name.

FATHER: Why ever not? If that's her name. But if this lady here has to play the part...(*Looks bleakly in the direction of EMILY.*) Though I really see her (*the MOTHER*) as Amalia. But it's up to you...(*getting confused*) I don't really know what to say...I'm beginning to feel...well, as if my own words sounded false, not really mine, somehow.

EMILY: Don't worry about it. That can happen sometimes.

BRADLEY: Yeah, Royi gets confused all the time.

ELIANA: That's right, nothing to worry about. If you want to call her Amalia, she's Amalia. You know what, let's not even use names right now. So you (*ROYI*) can play the son, and then let's have...., ah, of course, you (*ELIZA*) as the Stepdaughter.

STEPDAUGHTER (*Galvanized*): What? That woman is going to play me? (*She bursts out laughing.*)

ELIANA: What's so funny?

BRADLEY: Cat fight.

ELIZA (*Indignantly*): Why is that so hard to believe? This is bullshit, I'm not just gonna stand here while she laughs at me.

*The other ACTORS, primarily BRADLEY, are amused.*

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm not laughing at you.

ELIANA: Hey, Eliza is a wonderful actress. You should be proud to be played by—

ELIZA (*Mocking the STEPDAUGHTER, quickly and scornfully*): 'That woman'.

STEPDAUGHTER: It wasn't you I was thinking of. It's me. I just don't see myself in you at all. That's all. You're nothing like me.

FATHER: That's just it. (*to ELIANA*) Look, what we want to express...

ELIANA: Wait—what you want to express? Do you really think that you, the characters, can provide your own means of expression?

FATHER: What? Are you saying we haven't even got it in us to express ourselves?

ELIANA: Not in the way that is necessary for the theatre. You're the raw material. Anything you express on stage needs to be given its own reality. The actors know how to do that. They give it Body and Shape, Voice and Gesture.

ELIZA: And we've done far more difficult plays with incredible characters.

ELIANA: Yeah, if it actually works on stage, it'll be because of them.

FATHER: Well, I don't want to contradict you, but for us, this is an extremely painful process. This is what we look like. These are our bodies, these are our faces.

ROYI: That's why we have stage makeup.

FATHER: All right. But what about voices, gestures...

ELIANA (*Quickly losing patience*): Listen to us! There is no place for you, as yourself, on the stage. Here you don't exist. The actors play your parts, and that's just how it is!

ELIZA: Thank you.

FATHER: I understand. And I think I'm beginning to get an inkling as to why our author decided not to write us into a play. He saw us, as we are, alive...I'm, by no means, attempting to insult your profession, but the idea of seeing myself played by someone else, some actor...

BRADLEY (*Rising proudly*): By me, actually.

FATHER (*With honeyed deference*): I'm deeply honored. (*He bows.*) (*to ELIANA.*) The fact is, however hard our friend here tries to absorb my being...(*He gets confused.*)

BRADLEY: Go ahead...

FATHER: Well, I mean, his portrayal of me, even with the help of make-up....well, with his build ...

BRADLEY: You callin' me fat?

FATHER: It will hardly be me, as I really am. It will be more of a personal interpretation of what I'm like. It won't be me, as I feel myself to be.

ROYI: Or not to be.

ELIANA: Royi, c'mon. (*To the FATHER*) But that's just how it is. Look, we need to keep moving. So... the set is in place. (*To the STEPDAUGHTER*) Look good to you?

STEPDAUGHTER: Frankly, no. I don't recognize it at all. Where's the white flowered wallpaper?

ELIANA: Can't do walls in the round. Come on, you can't expect us to create an exact replica of Madame Pace's for you on the spot. I think it's good enough. Let's move the table forward a little. (*LILY does so.*)

LILY: Look good?

ELIANA: Just about—(*remembering*) Ah, yes! He (*the FATHER*) needs that envelope. Blue, if possible, Lily.

LILY: A business envelope or a letter envelope?

FATHER and ELIANA: A letter envelope.

LILY: Right....(*She goes to get it.*)

ELIANA: All right, let's do it. So, the scene opens with the young lady on alone. (*ELIZA steps forward, proud and eager.*) Oh, sorry, not you. We'll start with her (*the STEPDAUGHTER*) Just watch this time.

STEPDAUGHTER: Watch how I bring it...to life!

ELIZA (*Hurt, mocking her*): Don't worry, I know how to bring a part...to life! And I'm only...a freshman.

ELIANA: OK, let's just focus, now. OK, so. Scene I: the Young Lady and Madame Pace. Oh...(*She looks around worriedly.*) So...where's Madame Pace?

FATHER: She isn't with us.

ELIANA: How the hell are we supposed to do the scene?

FATHER: But she's alive, just as alive as we are!

ELIANA: That's great. Where is she living?

FATHER: (*Realizing ELIANA is right, thinking on the fly*) Let me try something. Ladies, would you be good enough to let me have some of your belongings for a moment? Just the few things you have, that hat. Some scarves.

BRADLEY: What do you need our stuff for?

FATHER: Nothing much. Just to hang them here on the pegs.

ELIZA: Fine, but this is my favorite pashmina, so please be careful.

FATHER: I certainly will, madam. Thank you.

EMILY: Can I ask what all this is for?

FATHER: Indeed you may. If we prepare the scene a little more authentically, Madame Pace may be drawn towards the implements of her trade and appear among us. (*Quiet and conspiratorial*) Now, everyone be very quiet. Watch. Watch...

*Suddenly, MADAME PACE emerges from behind the screen and advances a few paces onto the stage. She is a hideous old lady, fat, with an ugly wig perched above her face and a rose stuck over one ear. She wears a tasteless but modish gown of gaudy red silk, and carries a fan made of feathers in one hand while holding a cigarette in the other. At the sight of this apparition, ELIANA and the ACTORS back away horrified, possibly leaving the actual stage. The STEPDAUGHTER, however, runs up to MADAME PACE and greets her respectfully.*

STEPDAUGHTER (*As she runs up to her*): She's here! She's here!

FATHER (*Glowing with pleasure*): It's Madame Pace! Didn't I tell you?

ELIANA (*Still shocked and amazed*): You did...Yes. How did that...

ROYI: How did she get in here?

BRADLEY: Magic, Royi!

EMILY: No, she must have been hiding. Something with the door and the—

FATHER (*Cutting them off*): Please. Why do you have to be so small-minded and pick everything to pieces? You're destroying the miracle! Reality itself kindled into life, conjured up, brought into being by the scene itself and drawn towards it, with more right to life in this place than you have. She has more truth than any of you! Which of you actresses is going to play Madame Pace? You? You? Well, here *is* Madame Pace. No actor will be as authentic, as true as she is, for she is the real Madame Pace! See how my daughter recognized her! Now watch, just watch this scene.

*With some hesitation, ELIANA and the ACTORS return to the stage to watch. The STEPDAUGHTER and MADAME PACE have by now been engaged in their scene together for some time (the preceding dialogue). Their low, whispered conversation is naturalistic, obviously too small for the stage. When the ACTORS' attention has been drawn to the scene by the FATHER and they turn to watch it, they see MADAME PACE, her hand under the STEPDAUGHTER's chin, gabbling away unintelligibly into the girl's raised face. After attempting to listen for a few moments, they give up, and dismiss the scene.*

ROYI: I can't hear one word they're saying.

EMILY: Not a thing.

LILY: I know, how the hell am I supposed to write this down?

ELIANA: Just try!

ELIZA: You guys it's called projection.

STEPDAUGHTER (*Leaving MADAME PACE, who has a mysterious smile on her face, and coming down to the actors*): Projection? What do you mean, "projection"? These aren't things that can be said out loud. Oh, I could say them out loud to shame him (*the FATHER*). But that would be for the sake of revenge. For Madame Pace, it's an entirely different matter; she could go to prison!

BRADLEY: That's...awful for her. But still, you have to project so the audience can hear you.

EMILY: Yeah, we're sitting in the first row and we can't even hear you.

ELIANA: Right. Every single person needs to be able to understand you.

ELIZA: Use a stage whisper.

ELIANA: Right, you have to imagine, pretend, the two of you are alone in the back room talking.

*The STEPDAUGHTER wags her finger and smiles sardonically in disagreement.*

ELIANA: K...why not?

STEPDAUGHTER (*In a loud, knowing whisper*): Because there's someone who will hear us if she says it all out loud!

ROYI: Oh jeez, there isn't someone else who's gonna jump out at us, is there? (*The ACTORS are ready to run away again.*)

FATHER: Oh, no! She means me. I would be on the other side of that door, waiting. And Madame knows this. In fact you must excuse me, so I don't miss my cue. (*He starts to go.*)

ELIANA (*Stopping him*): Hold up a second. You can't just jump right into that scene; you've gotta—

STEPDAUGHTER (*Interrupting*): Yes! Let's do it now! I'm dying to live that scene, I'm mad to live that scene! If he's ready for it, I'm ready too.

ELIANA (*Shouting*): No! Before we get there, we have to do the scene with you and Madame Pace!

STEPDAUGHTER: For heaven's sake; she's just telling me what you know already; that once again my mothers sewing has been bad, the stuff's ruined, and that I must be patient if I still want her to help us out of our financial difficulties.

PACE (*Advancing with an air of great importance*): It is so senora. Porque never would I try to profit myself...

BRADLEY: Wait, I'm sorry, seriously? Like. Seriously?!

*The ACTORS laugh.*

STEPDAUGHTER (*Laughing too*): That's how she speaks ! It's funny, isn't it?

PACE: It does not seem to me buena crianza, how you say—good manners, that you laugh of me. I try to hablar your language como puedo, senora!

ELIANA: No, stop, she's right. Don't laugh at her, you guys. This'll be a nice bit of comic relief. Speak just like that, please. That'll be great.

STEPDAUGHTER: Of course it will be great. It'll be hilarious to hear her give me my special instructions in that language. Imagine hearing there's a viejo senor who's looking to have a good time con migo! Don't you agree, Madame?

PACE: Not 'viejo', linda, 'viejito', a little bit old! But mejor para ti, all the better! If you don't like him, at least he will have a prudencia.

*The ACTORS laugh.*

*The MOTHER rises from her seat, to the astonishment of the ACTORS who haven't really noticed her until now. She hobbles over to MADAME PACE, furious, and pulls the wig off of her head. The ACTORS don't know if it's appropriate to laugh or not. They try to stop the violence.*

MOTHER: You devil! You devil! You monster! Oh, my poor child!

STEPDAUGTHER (*Trying to hold her back*): No, mama! Please! Stop!

FATHER (*At the same time as the STEPDAUGHTER*): Just calm down now, calm down. Take a seat.

MOTHER: Get her out of my sight!

STEPDAUGHTER (*To ELIANA, who has hurried over*): We can't have my mother here, we just can't!

FATHER: They can't be in the same place! That's the reason why Madame Pace wasn't with us when we first arrived. If you put them together it all happens to soon.

ELIANA: It's fine, don't worry about it. We're not doing it full out. We're just sort of walking through the scene, here, exploring and seeing what we discover. (*Turning to the MOTHER and helping her back to her seat*) OK, here ya go ma'am. Sit down, now. Just relax.

*Meanwhile the STEPDAUGHTER and MADAME PACE have begun their scene again.*

STEPDAUGHTER: Come on, Madame.

PACE (*Offended*): Oh, no! Gracias, no! I do not do nada if there is your Mother.

STEPDAUGHTER: Come on, show in the viejo senor, who's looking to have a good time con migo. (*turning to the others, announcing*) It's time for the scene; it has to be played now. (*to MADAME PACE*) You can go.

PACE: I go, I go! Most seguramente I go! (*She leaves in a huff, picking up her wig, and glaring at the actors who snigger and clap.*)

STEPDAUGTHER: Now, make your entrance! No need to go off again! Come here! Let's say you're on already. Right. Now I'm standing here, all modest, with my head down like this. Okay then. Nice and loud. Sort of fresh-sounding, like someone coming in from the outside, 'Good afternoon, my dear...'

ELIANA: Whoa, whoa, whoa, are you directing this show, or am I? Go ahead, back to where you were. Nope, no need to exit. Just a little upstage. Good.

*The FATHER does this almost hypnotically. He is very pale, fully immersed in the reality of his created life. He smiles as he nears the stage, as if not yet touched by the drama, which is about to burst upon him. The ACTORS watch the scene attentively.*

## THE SCENE

FATHER (*In an insinuating manner*): Good afternoon, my dear.

STEPDAUGHTER (*Her head down, frightened, barely controlling her disgust*): Good afternoon.

FATHER: (*He eyes her tentatively, peering under that hat which hides her face. He notices how young she is and is half-delighted, half-fearful of this risky situation*). Now...it won't be the first time, will it?... I mean, it won't be your first time here?

STEPDAUGTHER (*Head still bowed*): No.

FATHER: You've been here before? (*The STEPDAUGHTER nods.*) More than once? (*She doesn't reply; peers again at her face, he smiles, then speaks.*) Well, then...you shouldn't be so...Would you let me talk your shawl off?

STEPDAUGTHER (*Quickly, to stop him, with a shudder of disgust*): No. I'll take it off myself. (*She does so, trembling.*)

*The MOTHER watches all this in a state of extreme agitation. She sits with the SON and the younger children who cling to her closely all the time, on the opposite side of the stage from the ACTORS. As she watches the scene, her face registers pain, outrage, anxiety and horror. From time to time, she hides her face or utters a moan.*

MOTHER: Oh God! Oh my God!

FATHER: (*He seems momentarily stunned by this sob from the MOTHER, after a pause he resumes his earlier tone.*) Here, give it to me. (*He takes the shawl from her.*) A pretty little creature like you needs something a bit more special, I think. Why don't you come over here and help me choose you one of Madame Pace's confections?

ELIZA (*Interrupting*): OK, that's my pashmina, so please be careful!

ELIANA (*Quickly and angrily*): Eliza, chill out. Don't interrupt them now! (*to the STEPDAUGHTER*) I'm sorry about that, just go right on from there.

STEPDAUGHTER (*To the FATHER*): No, really, I couldn't.

FATHER: You must accept! I'll be so disappointed. Look, they really are extremely pretty. Madame Pace would be so pleased. She puts them out for you, you know.

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh no, sir. You see...I can't wear it.

FATHER: What's the trouble? Are you worried about what they will think when you come home in a new shawl? Shall I tell you what to say?

STEPDAUGHTER (*Desperate, finding all this unbearable*): No, that's not it! I can't wear it because I'm...well, look at what I'm wearing. (*She shows him her black dress.*)

FATHER: You're in mourning! I'm sorry my dear, I see now. Believe me I'm most desperately sorry.

STEPDAUGHTER (*Mustering all her strength in an effort to conquer her abhorrence and disgust*): All right, all right, it doesn't matter. I should be thanking you, really. There's absolutely no need for you to apologize and get upset. Please don't think about it anymore. As for me, well, obviously, (*She forces herself to smile.*) I've really got to stop thinking about it, these clothes, I mean.

ELIANA (*Interrupting, coming back to the stage*): OK, great. Let's hold please. (*To the FATHER and the STEPDAUGHTER*) You guys are doing great. Nice work there. (*To the FATHER*) And then we'll just go straight on to that next part, like we talked about. (*To the ACTORS*) Great scene, isn't it?

STEPDAUGHTER: But the best part is coming up! Can't we go on?

ELIANA: Hold on just one sec. (*To the ACTORS*) So obviously it needs something to lighten it up a bit....

EMILY: A little quicker, perhaps.

ELIANA: Yeah, could pick up the tempo a bit.

ELIZA: It shouldn't be too difficult. (*To BRADLEY*) Shall we try it?

BRADLEY: Let's do it. (*He goes off to prepare for his entrance*)

ELIANA (*To ELIZA*): K, great. So Eliza, you'll start right over here.

ELIZA: Yeah lemme just grab my pashmina. (*She does so and puts it on.*)

ELIANA: Looks great. So you start over here, facing out. A little left. Good. And looking down, of course

STEPDAUGHTER (*Amused*): But she's not wearing black!

ELIZA: Don't worry, I will be. And trust me, I look great in a black cocktail dress.

ELIANA (*To the STEPDAUGHTER*): Hey, this is our time now, ok? Just watch. Maybe you'll actually learn something. (*She claps her hands.*) Alright. So, let's take it from Bradley's entrance.

*ELIANA climbs up the stairs to get the audience's view again. BRADLEY enters with the knowing air of an aging lecher. The way in which the ACTORS play with subsequent scene must be very different, but not a parody in any way. It is supposed to be the new and improved version with embellishments. When the STEPDAUGTHER and the FATHER hear their own words uttered by the ACTORS, they obviously fail to recognize themselves. And so, during the scene, they express surprise, amazement through gesture, laughter and protest. LILY feeds the BRADLEY and ELIZA their lines.*

ELIANA: We ready? OK, and...scene!

BRADLEY: 'Good afternoon, my dear.'

FATHER (*Unable to restrain himself*): No, no no!

*The STEPDAUGHTER bursts into laughter.*

ELIANA: Shut up, okay? And stop laughing at us. How the hell are we supposed to do this play with you guys mocking us the entire time?

STEPDAUGHTER (*Coming forward*): I'm sorry, but I can't help it. That actress stood in her place, but if I heard someone say 'good afternoon' to me in that voice, I'd burst out laughing—as I did.

FATHER (*Coming forward, as well*): She's absolutely right. It's the manner, and the tone of voice...

ELIANA: Alright, we'll work on his tone and manner.

BRADLEY (*Coming forward*): I mean, I'm just supposed to be some creepy old guy, right?

ELIANA: And you're doing a wonderful job. OK, let's take it again. Same place. And...scene!

BRADLEY: 'Good afternoon, my dear.'

ELIZA: 'Good afternoon.'

BRADLEY (*He goes through the same motions as the FATHER, peering down at ELIZA, then distinctly experiencing, first, satisfaction, and then, apprehension.*) 'Ah!...but, I say, this won't be the first time, I hope...'

FATHER (*Unable to not correcting him*): Not 'I hope.' 'Will it?' 'Will it?'

ELIANA: K, so it's a question. 'Will it?'

BRADLEY: (*Looking to LILY*) I heard 'I hope'

ROYI: Yeah, me too.

EMILY: I think it may have been a question—

LILY: I'll bracket it.

ELIANA: Whatever. It's the same thing! Let's just keep going. A little lighter, maybe.

ELIZA: What do you mean lighter? Like on our feet, the pitch of our voice?

BRADLEY: I don't really know what you mean either.

ELIANA: It's not so literal, guys. The feel of the scene must be....just lemme show you! (*She goes onstage and plays the entrance through to...*) 'Good afternoon, my dear'.

ELIZA: 'Good afternoon.'

BRADLEY (*To ROYI*): So now she's giving me line readings?

*ELIANA give the appropriate reaction. She turns to BRADLEY.*

ELIANA: See what I mean now? It's gotta be surprise and anxiety and satisfaction all at once. (*Back in the scene*) 'Now...it won't be the first time, will it?...I mean, it won't be

your first time here? (*Back to BRADLEY*) You see what I mean? A little more creepy, a little less dude, a little more (she gives a ridiculous gesture....k?)

BRADLEY: Sure...

ELIANA: Just do it Bradley. And....scene!

BRADLEY: ‘Now...it won’t be the first time, will it? I mean, it won’t be your first time here?’

ELIANA: Hold on that’s a two-part question. “it won’t be the first time will it?” Then Eliza, you have to nod, and then ask “I mean it won’t be your first time here” It’s a two-parter.

ROYI: One and two.

*BRADLEY sighs loudly.*

ELIANA: Would you rather do Hamlet?

BRADLEY: No. No. Absolutely not.

LILY: Same place.

ELIANA: And scene!

BRADLEY: ‘it won’t be the first time, will it?’

ELIANA: Nod. (*ELIZA simultaneously nods very violently.*)

BRADLEY: ‘I mean, it won’t be your first time here?’

STEPDAUGHTER (*Involuntarily*): Oh my God! (*She claps a hand to her mouth to stifle her laughter.*)

EMILY (*Annoyed*): Ugh, what now?!

STEPDAUGHTER (*Quickly*): Nothing, nothing.

ELIANA: Bradley, it’s your cue.

BRADLEY: ‘More than once? Well, then...you shouldn’t be so...Would you let me talk your shawl off?’

*BRADLEY says this line in such a way that the STEPDAUGHTER can’t help but burst out laughing, despite her genuine attempt not to.*

ELIZA: I'm not gonna stand up here while she just laughs at us!

BRADLEY: Yeah, it's impossible for me to work on it with her here.

ELIANA: For the last time! SHUT! UP!

STEPDAUGHTER: Yes, of course. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

EMILY: I'm sorry, but she is so rude!

FATHER: Yes, I know. But don't be too hard on her.

ELIANA: Why not? She's laughing at everything we do! Her rehearsal manners are ridiculous!

FATHER: You're right, of course, but you know it really is such a strange sensation...

ELIANA: What's such a strange sensation? What's so strange? Why?

FATHER: I admire your actors. This gentleman (*BRADLEY*) and this lady here (*ELIZA*). But there's no doubt about it—they're not us!

ELIANA: Of course not. They're actors.

FATHER: That's it! Actors! And they both do a very nice job playing our parts. But to us it's quite different; it's supposed to be the same and it just isn't!

ELIANA: It's the exact same lines. Come on, they just got the scene.

FATHER: It has turned into something ..., which belongs to them now; it's not ours anymore.

ROYI: Come on, you guys know you can't play these parts yourselves.

FATHER: Yes, I understand. I do.

ELIANA: OK, well there's no need for anyone to get upset. We'll rehearse this later, you guys—by ourselves. It's just impossible to get anything done with the creators here.

ELIZA: I'm not sure this was such a good idea, Eliana. We made so much progress with—

ELIANA: It's a great idea. You'll see. (*To the FATHER and STEPDAUGTHER*) Let's try it again with you two. But without the obnoxious laughter.

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh, I won't laugh now. My best bit is coming up, don't you worry!

ELIANA: Okay, so she says, 'I've obviously got to stop thinking about these clothes' and so on, and then you (*to the FATHER*) come in with 'Oh, yes, I understand, I understand' and then you immediately ask her—

STEPDAUGTHER (*Interrupting*): What! What does he ask?

ELIANA: Why you're wearing black.

STEPDAUGHTER: But he didn't. You're so wrong! Look, when I said to him to ignore my dress, do you know what he said? He said, 'Well, let's take this little dress off, shall we, as quickly as we can!'

ELIANA: Whoa...I'm not so sure we can go that far. If it's implied that's one thing, but—

STEPDAUGHTER: But it's the truth!

ELIANA: Listen, that may be your truth, but we're after the theatre's truth. We don't need to put your entire truth on stage.

STEPDAUGHTER: How do you want to do it, then?

ELIANA: You don't need to worry about that, I'll handle it.

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh, no, you won't. You want to use my feelings of disgust, my most humiliating moments, to concoct a sentimental little romantic sob-story; you want him to ask me why I'm in mourning and me to tell him that my Daddy died two months ago. Well, we are not having it. Not on your life! He has got to say to me exactly what he did say 'Let's take this little dress off, shall we, as quickly as we can' And I, still grieving for my Father, went over there, do you see? Behind that screen. And with my fingers trembling with embarrassment and loathing, I unhooked the top half of my dress....

ELIZA: Jeez, how far is she gonna go?

EMILY: And in front of her little siblings!

ELIANA: Yeah, I'm sorry. I love to push the envelope, but this is way to far; we can't put that moment on stage. It's just not possible.

STEPDAUGTHER: Not possible? Well! In that case...thank you very much.

ELIANA: No, wait a sec, listen—

STEPDAUGHTER: You can count me out. You two (*ELIANA and the FATHER*) have decided what's possible on the stage; you've fixed it together back in that room. I know exactly what's happened! I know what he's after! He wants a chance to flaunt his spiritual agonies. Well, I want to put on my drama! My drama!

ELIANA: Your drama? But it's not just your drama. What about everybody else's? What about his? (*She points to the FATHER.*) What about your Mother's? I see what you're trying to do, you just wanna hog the stage for yourself, and upstage the rest of your family. I'm sorry, but that's not right. That's not the drama your author wanted to convey—

STEPDAUGHTER: How dare you?

ELIANA: I'm just saying that it might not be acceptable to people for you to run around the stage, with your outbursts and protests when you said yourself you've been with other men at Madame Pace's.

STEPDAUGHTER (*She pauses to recollect herself; then in a low voice, her head bowed*): That's true. But can't you see that for me, all those other men are him!

ROYI: What's that supposed to mean?

STEPDAUGHTER: When somebody goes wrong, isn't it always the responsibility of the person who set the whole thing going in the first place? All the blame goes back to him, before I was even born. Look at him, you can see it's true!

BRADLEY: Look, the guy seems to have a whole lot on his mind and he's said he's sorry. Why don't you give him a chance to act out his guilt?

STEPDAUGHTER: What? How can he present himself as a man of conscience, tormented by moral scruples, if you're going to skip the other bit?...If you're going to skip the horror. The moment when he realizes that the woman in his arms, the prostitute, whom he's just asked if she will remove her black dress is the little girl...the little girl he used to go and watch coming out of school? (*These last words have been spoken in a voice shaking with emotion. The MOTHER, hearing them, is overcome by an excess of irrepressible anguish, which finds expression first in a kind of stifled moaning and then erupts into uncontrollable sobbing. Her emotion silences everyone. There is a long pause.*)

STEPDAUGTHER (*as soon as her MOTHER's sobs allow, in a somber resolute tone*): Tomorrow you will make your own play out of us and put it together however you like. But do you want to see it really, our drama? Shall we let it explode for you, as it really happened?

LILY: Yes!! Please!!

STEPDAUGHTER: All right, then. Get that Mother on stage.

MOTHER (*with a loud cry*): No, no! Don't let them do it! I can't! I can't!

ELIZA: What's the big deal if everything has happened already?

MOTHER: You don't understand. It's happening now! It's happening all the time! My agony isn't made up! I am living my agony constantly, every moment; it keeps coming back, as fresh as the first time. Those two children there, have you heard them speak? They can't speak, not now. All they can do is cling to me, all the time, to keep the pain alive. In themselves, they don't exist anymore! And my elder girl has run away, left me, and now she's lost...lost...If I see her standing here before me now, it's for the same reason: to keep my agony, my suffering alive forever.

FATHER (*solemnly*): The eternal moment! I told you about it. She's here to hang me up on that hook, to keep me trapped in that one shaming, fleeting moment of my life. It's what she has to do. And you, madam (*ELIANA*) can't save me from it.

ELIANA: Oh, no I think we definitely should show that moment. It'll be the climax of the first act, when she (*the MOTHER*) discovers you...with her (*the STEPDAUGHTER*).

FATHER: That's right. The moment that seals my fate; that final scream of hers that marks the culmination of all our suffering.

STEPDAUGHTER: I can still hear it now. That scream sent me out of my mind. You can do whatever you like with my part, I don't care. Have me in clothes, if you like. As long as my arms are bare, just the arms. They have got to be bare because, you see, standing like this ... (*She goes to the FATHER and places her head against his breast.*) ... with my head here like this, and my arms around his neck like this, I could see a vein throbbing, just here in my arm. And then, as if that single palpitating vein filled me with revulsion, I scrunched up my eyes like this...like this...and buried my head in his chest. (*turning towards the MOTHER*) Scream, Mama, scream! (*She buries her head in the FATHER's breast again, and with her shoulders tensed as if to protect herself from the scream, she adds in tones of muffled anguish.*) Scream like you screamed then!

MOTHER (*flinging herself onto them to separate them*): No! Oh, my child! My child! (*She tears the STEPDAUGHTER away.*) Oh, you beast, you filthy beast! Can't you see she's my daughter?!

*The ACTORS appear flabbergasted.*

ELIANA: And...blackout! Wow, you guys. This is some amazing stuff, that's great.

FATHER (*hurrying over, distraught*): Yes, because that's exactly how it happened!

LILY: Hey, guys, sorry to interrupt, but we really need to keep moving.

EMILY: Yeah, so what happens in the second act?

STEPDAUGHTER: It's when we go to live with him (*the FATHER*) much to his (*the SON's*) disgust over there!

ELIANA: Sure. Of course. But please, let me handle that.

STEPDAUGHTER: As long as you make it clear how much he loathed us coming.

MOTHER: Not that it did us any good.

STEPDAUGHTER: That's not the point! The worse it was for us, the guiltier he felt about it.

ELIANA (Placating THEM): Okay, don't worry. I'll keep all this in mind. But we need to figure out where exactly the second act takes place.

STEPDAUGTHER: In a garden—the garden behind his (*the FATHER's*) house.

ELIANA: That's right, the garden. With the fountain—

STEPDAUGHTER: And, some trees. But putting the whole thing in the garden isn't going to work!

ELIANA: Why not?

STEPDAUGHTER: Because of him! (*She points to the SON.*) He spends the whole time shut up in his room, on his own! And anyway, my little brother's scene happens in the house. Poor little soul.

ELIANA: Well we can't keep changing the set every five minutes like a movie.

ROYI: Yeah, it's no big deal. People will accept the illusion.

FATHER (*Jumping up suddenly*): I beg you not to use that word. For us it has a particularly cruel ring.

BRADLEY: Why?

ELIZA: Yeah, isn't that our job? To create illusions?

EMILY: Yeah, that's what makes the play come to life.

ELIANA: Exactly, Come to life for the audience, to create the illusion of reality.

FATHER: But what if you consider that we, the six of us (*He gestures briefly to indicate the six.*) have no other reality; we don't exist outside this illusion. What for you is an illusion, that has got to be created, for us is our only reality.

LILY: I can't handle this guy anymore!

ELIANA: Sir, please, where does all this get us?

FATHER: Oh, nowhere. I just wanted to show you that if we have no reality outside illusion then perhaps you ought not to place too much faith in your reality either—on the grounds that like yesterday's reality, today's too will turn out to be illusion by tomorrow.

ROYI: Oh, great. So now he's trying to tell us that he's more real than we are.

FATHER (*with the utmost seriousness*): Of that there can be no doubt at all.

BRADLEY: I've got a few doubts.

ELIZA: Yeah, me too.

FATHER: I thought you understood that all along.

ELIZA: That you're more real than we are?

FATHER: Doesn't your reality change from one day to the next?

ELIANA: Of course it does. It's always changing. Everybody's is.

FATHER: But not ours! Don't you see, that's the difference! It doesn't change, it can't change, because it's fixed. And therein lies the horror. We are stuck within an immutable reality. You should find our presence chilling.

ELIZA: Well, I've never heard of a character jumping off the page and making speeches about how "chilling" we're supposed to find him.

FATHER: No, you've never heard of such a thing because authors keep quiet about the pains of creation. Once an author's characters come to life and stand before him as living beings, they decide what to say and do, and he simply follows their suggestions. If you can imagine the disaster it is for a character to go through what I've described, to be born in the imagination of an author who refuses him life—can you say that such a character, abandoned, is wrong to do what we are doing? To come and beg of all of you the thing we begged of him, beseeching him, urging him, appearing before him. I would go, she (*the STEPDAUGHTER*) would go, sometimes this poor Mother—

STEPDAUGHTER (*Coming forward in a kind of trance*): It's true. I used to go tempt him in that cheerless study where he did his writing, just after dark. The room would get

darker and darker and the darkness would be teeming with our presence. (*She seems to be back in the study she is describing. The actors' presence appears to irritate her.*) Go away, can't you? Can't you leave us be?

ACTOR: What? You came here?

STEPDAUGHTER: Mom's there with that 'son'. I'm there with the little one...that kid always on his own...and then me with *him* (the FATHER) and then me alone in the dark again. (*She gives a sudden start as if anxious to grasp hold of that vision she has of herself, glowing with life in that darkness.*) Oh, my life! What scenes we used to suggest to him! And I was the one who tempted him most!

FATHER: You did. But maybe that was it. Perhaps it was your fault; you tried to hard and overdid it.

STEPDAUGTHER: He made me like this, didn't he! (*to ELIANA, confidentially*) I think the real reason was discouragement, disgust with the theatre—the way it let itself be dictated by public taste.

ELIANA: OK, there's no need to bash today's Theatre. Enough talking; let's get to the action of the play. To make this work I think we'll need to edit a few things so the action of the play flows better. It's just not be possible to show your little brother coming home from school, and then wandering around the house, hiding behind doors, brooding over his plan, how did you describe it?

STEPDAUGHTER: A plan that drained the life out of him.

ELIANA: OK. Yeah, I kinda like that. And then we see the plan "looming larger and larger in his eyes", is that right?

STEPDAUGHTER: That's right. Just look at him. (*She points to the BOY, standing beside his MOTHER.*)

ELIANA: Right. And then, at the same time, you want to show the little girl playing innocently in the fountain. I really don't think we can do that.

STEPDAUGHTER: Oh yes, having a lovely time in the sun. That's my one satisfaction, to see her playing so happily in that garden, after the misery and squalor of the horrible bedroom where the four of us slept together. She and I shared a bed—think about that! My horrible contaminated body next to hers! She used to hold me ever so tight in her loving, innocent little arms! And whenever she saw me in the garden she used to come running up to me and hold my hand. She had no time for the big flowers, only the little baby ones'. She used to love showing them to me, she'd get so excited! (*At this point she breaks off, overwhelmed by the "memory", and gives way to a long and desperate fit of crying. She buries her face in her arms. Her emotion silences everyone.*)

ELIANA (*Motherly, comforting her*): Ok, sweetheart, it's gonna be okay. We'll have the garden, I promise. We'll uh...we'll just put all the action in the garden. (*to LILY*) Let's clear this stuff and start to set up the garden.

*LILY begins to clear the furniture. A few ACTORS help.*

ELIANA: And instead of hiding in the house, the little boy can just...hide behind some trees. I'm sure that'll be fine. And how 'bout for the fountain?

LILY: Right. The fountain. Um, I think there's something backstage

ELIANA: Great, let's bring it out. (*to the BOY*) Alright c'mere. It's time for your scene, buddy. (*The BOY doesn't move.*) Royi, you're good with kids, can you handle this, please?

ROYI: Sure, where do you want him?

ELIANA: Over there.

ROYI: Alright, pal, let's do this. My name's Royi, what's yours? (*No response.*) Okay. Why don't you just follow me? (*The BOY doesn't move.*) It's not that scary, come on, we're just gonna play a little game. (*The BOY still doesn't move.*) What the hell's the matter with this kid? Is he mute or just shy? Ma'am I'm just gonna take him over here, he'll be fine. (*ROYI puts a hand on the BOY's shoulder and brings him out on the stage. ROYI lifts the BOY's head up, but it keeps falling down on his chest.*) Come on now, you gotta show everyone your nice little face. Okay, you see this open space that's called a vom for some reason that nobody knows? You're gonna stand in it. Just pretend like you're hiding back here, watching all these people do all these crazy things. You can see them, but they can't see you. Okay, good, just stay right there. (*Walking back toward the other ACTORS*) Weird kid.

ELIANA: Ooh! Idea! Maybe...we could have the little girl run over to him. Maybe that would make him talk.

STEPDAUGHTER: It's no good hoping he will say anything as long as he's (*the SON*) around. You would have to get rid of him, first.

SON (*Moving towards the staircase*): My pleasure! What could be better?

ELIANA: Hey, where are you going? You can't leave now. Guys—(*She gestures for the ACTORS near the SON to stop him from leaving.*)

*The MOTHER, gets up, horrified, deeply distressed at the thought of the SON leaving. She instinctively reaches out her arms to stop him, but without leaving her place.*

SON (*At the edge of the stage, while held by an ACTOR*): I've got nothing to do with all this! Will you please let me go? Let me go!

EMILY: What do you mean you've got nothing to do with it? Of course you do!

STEPDAUGHTER (*In a cool, ironic tone*): Don't worry about it. He can't leave.

FATHER: He has to play the dreadful scene in the garden with is Mother.

SON (*Quickly, with fierce resolution*): I'm not acting in any play! I've said that from the start! Let me go!

STEPDAUGHTER: It's alright, let him go. (*The ACTOR holding the SON does so.*) All right then, off you go.

*THE SON attempts to leave but his held back by some mysterious force. He moves to another set of stairs, and the same thing. The STEPDAUGHTER, who has followed his movements as though challenging him to go, bursts out laughing.*

STEPDAUGHTER: He can't , you see. He can't get away! He is chained to us by a bond that is unbreakable. I'm the one who gets away in the end because I hate him so much and can't bear the sight of him. But he can't leave, so he's got to stay here with that delightful father of his, and that mother, and be their only child again...(*to the MOTHER*) Come on, then, Mommy. (*Explaining the MOTHER's movements to ELIANA*) Look, she got up already to try and stop him from going. (*to the MOTHER, as if exercising some strange power*) Come along, that's the way...(*to ELIANA*) Imagine what it's costing her to show her feelings like this in front of your company—look! See? (*Gesturing towards the MOTHER who has come towards the SON.*) She's even willing to go through that scene again!

*The MOTHER has indeed crept up to the SON, and the moment her daughter finishes speaking, she stretches out her arms towards him to indicate her readiness to play the scene.*

SON (*Quickly*): No! Not me! If I can't leave, then I'll stay here, but for the umpteenth time, I'm not acting in any play!

FATHER (*seething with fury, to ELIANA*): Make him, can't you?

SON: No one can make me!

FATHER: Then I will!

STEPDAUGHTER: Wait a minute! Wait! First we've got to get the little one over to the fountain. (*She runs to the LITTLE GIRL, falls to her knees in front of her, and takes her little face between her hands*): Oh, my poor darling. Such a lost look in your beautiful

eyes. You don't know where you are, do you? It's a stage, my darling. (*The LITTLE GIRL appears confused.*) What's a stage? Well, it's a place where people play at being serious. And we're going to act a play. That's right, even you... (*She takes her in her arms, holding her tightly, and begins to rock her gently*) Oh, my darling, my little darling, what a horrid play it's going to be for you. What an awful thing they've thought up for you! The garden...the fountain...yes, of course, it's a pretend fountain! That's the trouble, my darling, that everything here is pretend. Perhaps for you a pretend fountain is more fun than a real one, because you can play in it, can't you? But it's only a game for the others; for you, darling, it's all too real. You are really playing in a real pond, a lovely, big green one, looking at your own reflection, and lots of baby ducks swimming about, making ripples your own image. Then you want to catch one of the baby ducks—(*She gives a shriek which fills everyone with horror.*) No, Rosetta, my darling, no. Your mama's not looking after you, because of that swine of a son. And that boy there...(*She leaves the LITTLE GIRL and turns with her usual impatience to the BOY.*) What do you think you're doing out here, skulking around with that pitiful face? It will be your fault if that poor little thing drowns. (*The BOY's arm begins to tremble. She seizes him by the arm to try and drag his arm out of his pocket.*) What have you got there? What are you hiding? (*She wrenches his hand out and to everyone's horror, reveals that he is grasping a revolver. She registers momentary satisfaction, and then adds grimly*) Ah! Where did you get that gun? (*The BOY seems stunned. HE stares vacantly and does not answer.*) You stupid idiot! Instead of killing yourself, I would have killed one of those two. Or both of them. Father and son together! (*She pushes him back into his hiding place behind the trees. She helps lift the little girl into the fountain, who vanishes from sight. She then sinks wearily down beside the fountain and buries her face in her arms.*)

ELIANA: That's really beautiful stuff. So then at the exact same time—

SON (*Scornfully*): What do you mean "at the exact same time"? There never was a scene between her and me (*referring to the MOTHER*) It's a lie! She'll tell you what happened! Guys—

*At ELIANA's request, ROYI and EMILY have left the other actors to study their roles, the SON and MOTHER.*

MOTHER: Oh yes, it's true. I had gone to his room.

SON: To my room, understand! Not the garden at all!

ELIANA: Doesn't matter. I told you we'll have to change where it takes place.

SON (*Noticing ROYI*): What the hell do you want?

ROYI: Uh...nothing.

SON (*To EMILY*): And I suppose you're playing her part?

EMILY: Yeah.

ELIANA: Yes. She is. And she'll do a great job.

SON: Well thanks very much! But haven't you realized yet that you're not going to be able to do this play? You haven't got us inside you! Your actors can only look at us from the outside! How could we live our life in front of a mirror, which doesn't just reflect our frozen expression, but twists it into a travesty, which we don't even recognize?

FATHER: He's right! He really is, you know!

ELIANA: OK, fine. Emily. Royi. Take a seat guys.

SON: It's all useless, anyway. I'm staying out of it.

ELIANA: Oh, shut up already and let us hear what your Mother has to say. (*to the MOTHER*) So, you'd gone into his room?

MOTHER: Yes, I had. I couldn't bear it any longer. I was sick with anxiety. I had to get it off my chest. But as soon as he saw me come in....

SON: I didn't want a scene! I left the room because I didn't want a scene! I've never been a part of it, do you understand?

MOTHER: That's true.

EMILY: Look, I'm sorry, but we have to play the scene. It's crucial to the entire play.

MOTHER: I'm here. I'll do it. Oh, if you could only find some way for me to speak to him a moment, and pour my heart out to him!

FATHER (*Violently, coming towards the SON*): You're doing this scene, boy. Do it for your mother.

SON (*More determined than ever*): I'm not doing anything!

FATHER (*Seizing him and shaking him*): Oh, yes you are! Can't you hear what she's saying to you? Don't you have any feelings for her at all?

SON (*Grabbing in turn his FATHER*): I won't! I won't! That's all there is to it!

*There is a general uproar. The MOTHER, horrified, tries to separate them.*

MOTHER: Don't fight! For God's sake please don't fight!

FATHER (*not letting go*): You'll do as you're told. As you're told!

SON (*Struggling with him and finally throwing him to the ground*): What the hell's got into you? Aren't you ashamed to flaunting your disgrace—our disgrace—in front of people? I'm keeping out of it! that's what he wanted, isn't it? Our author who wouldn't put us on a stage!

ELIZA: So why did you come here then?

SON: He wanted to! (*the FATHER*) I didn't!

ELIANA: But you're hear now....

SON: He's the one who dragged us all here. And he's the one who went into that little room with you to dream up not just what happened, but a whole bunch of stuff that never happened at all!

ELIANA: Then tell me what did happen. You left your room, did you say anything?

SON: Nothing. I told you, I didn't want a scene.

BRADLEY: And then...what happened then....?

SON: Nothing. I went across the garden...(*He begins walking across the stage and breaks off, lost in dark thoughts.*)

EMILY: And what happened when you walked in to the garden?

SON (*Exasperated*): Why must you make me talk about it? It's horrible!

*The MOTHER is shaking all over. A stifled moaning sound comes from her as she looks toward the fountain.*

ELIANA (*Softly, following the MOTHER's glance, and turning to the SON with rising apprehension*): The little girl?

SON (*Staring straight in front of him*): There, in the fountain . . .

FATHER (*On the floor still, pointing towards the MOTHER, his voice full of pity*): She followed him out there.

ELIANA (*to the SON, anxiously*): And then what happened?

SON (*Slowly, staring straight in front of him*): I ran to the fountain. I rushed over to fish her out . . . but suddenly I stopped, because behind those trees I saw a sight which made my blood run cold. It was the boy. He was standing there staring at the drowned body of his little sister in the fountain. (*The STEPDAUGHTER is sill huddle up against the*

*fountain, her sobs ringing out like an echo. Pause.) I went up to him, and.... (The BOY has raised the gun to his head and at this moment pulls the trigger.)*

*A loud gunshot rings out. The lights black out.*

MOTHER (*The first thing we hear in the blackout*): My son! My son! Help me!

*General confusion, including:*

ELIZA: Oh, shit! What the hell?

ROYI: Oh...

EMILY: Oh my--!

ELIANA: Oh God!

BRADLEY: Is everyone okay?

ROYI: Yeah.

ELIANA: Lily! Someone! Turn the fucking lights back on!

LILY: Jeremy! What the hell?! The lights!

ELIZA: Here. I have a flashlight!

*ELIZA runs over to the BOY with the flashlight. HE is lying dead on the ground.*

ELIZA: Oh my God!

BRADLEY: Holy shit!

ELIZA: Eliana. He shot himself!

ROYI: No, no. He didn't shoot himself. He couldn't've—

EMILY: I think he actually did—

BRADLEY: That looks really real, Royi.

ROYI: It's fake, you guys c'mon.

ELIZA: What do you mean, it's fake?! Look at his head! He's bleeding!

ROYI: It's part of their fucking play!

EMILY: No. Eliza's right. It really happened. He actually killed himself.

ELIZA: What the hell are we gonna do? There's a dead person in here!

ROYI: It's fake! He's pretending!

FATHER (*From far off*): There's no pretence! It's the truth; it's real! That ladies and gentlemen, is reality!

*ELIZA shines the flashlight away from the BOY in order to find out where the FATHER's voice is coming from. The lights flicker and return. The CHARACTERS have disappeared.*

BRADLEY: Oh my God, you guys, look!

EMILY: He's gone!

*EMILY runs into Dog to look for the BOY.*

LILY: Who found the lights?

ELIZA: Holy shit! Eliana, they're all gone!

ROYI: Where did they go?

EMILY (*Returning*): He's not back there. I—

ELIANA: Lily, you didn't see anyone?

LILY: No—

ELIZA: How the hell do six people disappear?

ELIANA: Shit!

LILY: I checked the door, it's locked.

BRADLEY: That all happened, right?

ROYI: Yes. Yeah. Right? We all saw it.

EMILY: That poor kid!

ROYI: Emily, it was fake, relax!

ELIANA: Fake! Real! Who the hell cares anymore?!

LILY: Did they tell you about this?

ELIANA: No!

ROYI: Was this in the script?

ELIANA: No! I had no idea...

EMILY: Who were those people?!

ELIZA: What the hell are we gonna do now? We just wasted today's rehearsal—

ROYI: Eliza, Jesus.

EMILY: Yeah, really.

ELIANA: Lil, what time is it?

LILY: *Reads off he actual time.*

ELIANA (*Under her breath*): Fuck.

ROYI: Um...Ellie, you did say we'd be done by ten...

ELIZA: Yeah...

LILY: Like that's ever stopped her before.

ELIANA: Okay, we'll just...we'll just pick up where we left off tomorrow. We'll just do everything we didn't do yesterday tod—I mean, today, tomorrow.

ROYI: With what?

ELIZA: Yeah, what play?

ELIANA: Hamlet, we're back to Hamlet.

EMILY: We are?

ELIZA: You sure you didn't invite six more people to come tomorrow

BRADLEY: Can Royi and I trade parts?

ROYI: I'm not even off-book for my own part.

ELIANA (*Definitively*): Tomorrow. Hamlet rehearsal. Back to normal. If you are not off-book, I will freak out! We'll start with Hamlet/Ophelia, and then we'll go back to the opening scene.

ROYI: Wait, I'm not in that scene, am I...?

*ELIANA shoots ROYI a look of death. ROYI subsides.*

BRADLEY: You are if we trade parts.

ELIANA: Royi, Bradley. Can you guys just get rid of this (*the well*)?

BRADLEY: Sure. Just have the men do it.

ROYI: That's very sexist, Eliana.

*BRADLEY and ROYI exit with the well.*

ELIZA: So we're back to Hamlet?

ELIANA: Yes, Eliza.

LILY: Eliana, do we tell someone about what happened? Cause I mean, there were people here. I mean, I don't know where that kid went, but he coulda been hurt and we're liable—

ELIANA: Well, they're not here now, so...we'll just pretend this never happened.

ELIZA: So can we go?

ELIANA: Yes. Go.

*The ACTORS begin to collect their things and leave. We hear such things as—"Is anyone going to the library?" "Yeah. I am" "Let's walk together, I'm not sure I wanna walk alone." "I'm gonna go to the Rez." "I dunno, I don't have that much work. I may just go back to West and watch TV," etc.*

*EMILY has gathered her things but appears lost in thought.*

BRADLEY: Uh. Emily. Hello, you comin'?

EMILY: Yeah. I just...Yeah. Yeah, let's go.

*Meanwhile, Eliana has begun collecting the giant masses of tree on the stage.*

ELIANA: Hey, you guys wanna help me with this?

*The following lines are delivered simultaneously from the landing above Dog.*

BRADLEY: I need caffeine.

ROYI: I have a ton of work to do.

EMILY: Oh, I gotta go to the library.

ELIZA: Oh, sorry, I can't

*The ACTORS exit the theater via the main doors. LILY begins to help ELIANA clean up.*

ELIANA: No, don't worry about it.

LILY: No, really, I'm here—

ELIANA: It's fine I got it. Thank you, though.

LILY: Yeah, no problem. You alright?

ELIANA: Yeah. Uh...sure.

LILY: Okay. Call me tomorrow?

ELIANA: Yeah, sure.

LILY: Okay.

*LILY begins to exit.*

ELIANA: Oh, Lil, can you just hit the lights on your way out?

LILY: Sure.

ELIANA: Thanks.

*All the lights go out leaving ELIANA in pitch darkness.*

ELIANA: Oh, wait not everything—oooh-kay.

*Suddenly a strange, dim, light fills the stage. It seems a mistake. Four figures of the characters (less the BOY and LITTLE GIRL) appear. ELIANA looks at them, horrified, and runs out of the theatre. As she does so the strange dim light is replaced by the blue moonlight effect from before. The characters remain frozen, but are now revealed more*

*fully. The STEPDAUGHTER lets out a piercing squeal of laughter. The lights cut to black, we hear a final laugh from the STEPDAUGHTER and then the works and house lights bump on slowly. No curtain call.*

*End of play.*

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