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Directing Nocturne

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DIRECTING NOCTURNE

by
TREVOR BELT

A THESIS PAPER SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN
DIRECTING

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
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This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree in Directing. It is a detailed account of author Trevor Belt’s artistic process in directing Nocturne as a part of Minnesota State University, Mankato’s studio theatre season in the fall of 2019. The thesis chronicles the director’s artistic process from pre-production through performances in five chapters: a preproduction analysis, an historical and critical perspective, a rehearsal and performance journal, a post-production analysis and a process development analysis. Appendices and works cited are included.
CHAPTER ONE

EARLY PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter will contain an early production analysis of *Nocturne* by Adam Rapp. This production will be performed from November 13-16, 2019 in the Andreas Theatre on the Minnesota State University, Mankato campus. The scenic design will be by Trevor Belt, costume design by Ethan Hayes, lighting design by Benjamin Miller, sound design by Jameson Bernhagen, projection design by Anne Miller and Benjamin Miller and technical direction by Philomena Schnoebelen. The Production Stage Manager will be Emma Kearney. It is the intent of the director in this chapter to examine all major design elements, provide a brief structural analysis of the play, discuss the main design concept for the production, and his expectations of all elements within.

The director believes that to begin analysis of all elements he must first explain the physical structure of the play when looking at it on paper. In the acting edition, as provided by the Broadway Play Publishing Company, *Nocturne* reads and appears on the page as if it were a novel. No characters are named in the margins. No setting or time or place is mentioned. No given circumstances are outlined before the play begins. There is only one stage direction in the script. The story is dissected into four parts. Each part is labeled with a simple roman numeral that appears in a title heading as if it
were indicating a chapter in a book. The only indication that this story is a play is a mention of the original production on the page before the text begins.

As the play is read, the novel-like structure is supported throughout. The reader identifies that there is a narrator speaking in the first-person point of view. The reader quickly finds out that the story will be about a tragic event in the narrator’s past. He alternates between speaking in the present and speaking about his life’s journey from the time of the tragedy. Rapp continues this first-person novelistic approach, using “he said,” “she said,” or other variant forms of the phrase, following lines that are spoken by other characters. Additionally, the narrator describes settings around him and the physical features of characters in great detail. He does this to paint a picture of the world around him. This is essential for the reader, because the structure of the story indicates that it is meant to be read and not seen in performance, just like a novel. However, there is an indication that this story is to be presented as a play. That indication is the knowledge that previous productions of this story have been produced on nationally recognized stages and the fact that Rapp identifies the work as one of his plays.

The absence of written given circumstances and traditionally outlined details provides the director with a blank canvas in which to create the story. The director desires to create a concept in which the circumstance of how the narrator addresses the audience is clear and makes sense. The director is fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be the scenic designer for the production as well. This privilege will aid
in allowing his concept to be visually unified and executed in terms of the physical space in which the story will be told.

To understand the director’s concept, it is important to have some information about his past. Before the director returned to graduate school, he worked as a courier in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. One memorable delivery he made was a box of books to an event space in a hotel in Overland Park, Kansas. Upon arriving, he discovered he was delivering books to a small literary festival that focused on “The Midwestern Existence.” The idea that a festival would focus on such a specific cultural experience was fascinating to him. He wondered what kind of stories were being told in those small meeting rooms in the hotel.

When searching for a thesis project, the director re-read Nocturne, as he already had the play on his bookshelf from reading it during his undergraduate career. When doing the most recent reading, the memory of the delivery to the festival returned to him and he decided that the story of Nocturne is the kind of story that would have been told in that festival. In the play, the narrator is a former piano prodigy turned moderately successful novelist. The story originates in Joliet, Illinois. The family is in the socio-economic lower middle class. They live in the suburbs. The novel that the narrator writes is about the tragedy that occurred with his family and the subsequent fallout. All the details of the story fit the idea of the “Midwestern existence.” The director’s concept is born out of all this information as well as the novelistic structure of Rapp’s words in the script.
It is the director’s desire to set the play in a meeting room of a hotel in Overland Park, Kansas. The Son (the narrator), will be attending a literary festival about the Midwestern Existence. He has been invited there to speak about his novel, entitled Nocturne. He will not be speaking directly to us, but to a group of actors who will play audience members that are attending the festival. While he will be speaking about his journey, certain memories will throw him back into the past. He will see the characters of the Mother, Father, Sister and Girlfriend in his mind as he re-enacts certain parts of his past before us. The visuals will alternate between his “memories” and the “now.”

To support this concept, it is the director’s desire for the scenic design to be recognizable as the traditional proscenium stage setup. The director sees this as a space divided into two distinct areas: A raised platform in which a speaker is to stand and the area where the listeners, or audience, sits and observes. For this production, the space configuration for this production will be in the thrust. This is when the audience sits on three different sides of the stage, as opposed to sitting on one side, like the traditional proscenium setup.

Against the back wall of the hotel meeting room will be a temporary stage, as if the maintenance crew at the hotel sets it up periodically for speakers when the hotel has events. On the stage will be a moveable podium as well as a projection screen and projector, as if the speaker will have visual aids to enhance their presentation. On the ground level will be a modest number of folding chairs, set in three distinct rows. They will be facing the temporary stage.
The key to the scenic design will be the collaboration between the director and the projections designer. Throughout the play, the Son will use the projections for two purposes. The first will be to provide visual aids in order to make his presentation more impactful. It is the director’s desire to see projection slides of the car involved in the accident, the pictures of the Son’s piano on which he learned to play, pictures of his sister, and other elements mentioned in the story. The second function will be to enhance the visual storytelling of the flashback moments that the Son experiences throughout the play. One strong image in the director’s imagination is the visual that the Son describes of the Sister, in which he cannot see her eyes, but instead two giant black Xs. Images like this will be projected on the screen during the memories to enhance the inherent nightmarish qualities of the flashback scenes.

The journey of the Son takes place over the course of a fifteen-year period. Part of the story that the Son tells takes place in Joliet, Illinois. The other takes place in New York City, New York. As stated earlier, the physical location of the play is a hotel meeting room in Overland Park, Kansas. The scenic design will replicate this multipurpose room as the “real space” of the story. It is the director’s desire to have the elements of lighting design and scenic design aid in transporting the Son back into his memories. The changes in the elements will help the audience suspend their disbelief and make the journey with him.

The sound design will be imperative in setting the ambience of the hotel meeting room. The director hopes to establish a noise floor throughout the “reality” scenes in
order to give the audience a subconscious clue to when the Son returns to reality. For the memory scenes, such as when he speaks about the car accident, the conversation with his mother in the hospital, the moment when his father sticks a gun in his mouth, the whirlwind courtship with the Girlfriend and the final scene in the play, it is the director’s desire to not have the sound realistically reflect what the Son heard in those moments. Instead, the director wants an impressionistic version of the sounds that the Son thinks he remembers. The Son is a novelist with a large vocabulary and an affection for metaphor. The director believes that the Son has a tendency to exaggerate his circumstances in order for the story to be moving. These tendencies, in addition to amount of time that has passed since their occurrence, would likely make the details challenging to recall. Therefore, the sound design in these moments should be focused to evoke emotional reaction, not reflect reality.

Similarly, the lighting design for this production will be the instant indicator for when the Son leaves the reality of the room and goes back into his mind for the memories. For the reality scenes that take place in the hotel, it is the director’s hope to get a basic florescent wash of lights that fills the entirety of the space. The lighting should feel functional, as if someone walked into the room and flipped a wall switch. There is no sign of production in the hotel’s setup. No spotlights or additional instruments are present.

In the flashback moments, it is the director’s hope that the lights will be expressionistic in their use. The lights will not represent reality but reflect the emotions
that the Son experiences during the memories. Unlike the reality of the hotel meeting room, in which there are obvious practical sources, the lighting in the flashback scenes will be more theatrical than realistic. They will reflect the nightmare aspect of the situations the Son describes. It is the desire of the director to have the design be fragmented in nature, as if partial memories of the lighting are spilling through the sensationalized feelings of the story. The two worlds of light, the realistic and the flashback moments, should be polar opposites in order to enhance the juxtaposition of the past and present.

The director’s vision for the costume design has similar goals to that of the lighting and sound design. For the characters of the audience members, it is imperative to have a group of individuals that look as if they are from the present day, are from the same geographical location, who are all completely different individuals who all happen to be in the same room at the same time. It is the director’s hope that the Son will appear to be a man who has lived a simple yet difficult life. He will wear clothes that make sense in the present day yet are reminiscent of the style of young men in the early 2000s. He should appear like a sort of everyman. He should feel relatable. Members of the real audience should feel as if they know someone who is exactly like him. He should not have the appearance of a public speaker or someone of importance. He should look as if he dresses for function and comfort first.

The director wishes that the costumes of the additional characters of the Mother, the Father, the Sister and the Girlfriend reflect exaggerated versions of
themselves. The son goes into extreme detail about the features of all these characters. Those details should be clear to the audience. The Mother is described as harsh, angular and caked with makeup. It is the director’s desire that the makeup and hair of the Mother be tactfully overdone, to portray a sort of midwestern stereotype that the audience will recognize. The Father is described as a typical midwestern educator who is stuck in a dead-end career. To represent this, it is the director’s hope to make him a sort of archetypal representation of midwestern male educators: slightly overweight and simply dressed. It is the director’s desire that the audience is shocked by the behavior of this seemingly harmless man.

The outfit that the Sister wears is described in intricate detail during the play. The dress will be created exactly in this image that the Son describes. Large Xs will be painted over the Sister’s eyes to the point in which her pupils are imperceptible. The key to this costume is the appearance of innocence and youth. It is the hope of the director to cast a female actor under five feet tall to play this role in order to sell this convention. For the character of the Girlfriend, it is the director’s desire that the outfit that we see her in is the outfit that she wore when she met the Son at the poetry reading for the first time. It should be simple, traditionally feminine, and have the shape and cut of the popular young adult clothing for women in the early 2000s.

The only exception to these rules is when we re-visit the Father character in the final scene. In this scene, he is dying slowly from a bout with testicular cancer. The difference in this flashback scene is that the memory is recent for the Son. Years have
not past this time, only months. The memory is more vivid and real to him. In order to portray this, it is the director’s vision to see almost a corpse of a man. The makeup will show the severity of his illness, highlighting the decaying skin and sunken features of a once healthy man. It is imperative that we see some sort of extreme weight loss here.

It is the desire of the director that a body suit is used to make the Father look hefty in the first scene. A body suit is padding added to the costume of an actor to make their silhouette appear larger than it is. The removal of said suit in the final scene would accomplish the desired weight loss effect. The goal here is not to sensationalize like before, but to reflect an eerie, yet identifiable suffering to which the audience can relate.

The properties master position is also being tackled by the director. As stated earlier, there is no list of properties listed in the script. The director desires the properties to primarily serve functional purposes within the realistic and flashback scenes. Apart from the Son’s childhood piano, everything that is discussed as being touched in the scene will be seen onstage. Due to the immediacy of the memories with the Father character, all properties associated with his arc in the story will be realistically portrayed. Special focus will be paid to the gun that is inserted into the Son’s mouth in Scene II, as well as the morphine cartridge used by the ailing Father in Scene IV. The reality of these props will help support the sincerity of the moments of their use, as each mention of them in the dialogue has emotional or psychological significance in the scene. Additionally, the director will create copies of the Son’s novel
for the audience members to carry in at the beginning of the play in hopes to drive home the idea that they are at an event having to do with the novel.

In terms of thematic approach, the director recognizes that *Nocturne* can be interpreted to be about many different things. In the following chapters, the director will explore these numerous themes in detail. When it comes to the physical production, the director’s primary approach will be to focus on the concept of grief and forgiveness. At the beginning of the play, the Son speaks of how he killed his sister. He expresses remorse for his actions and it is apparent that he suffers greatly due to what he has done. As the play continues, the Son illustrates the aftereffects of the accident on both his family and on himself. It is director’s goal to explore the different stages of grief that the Son has experienced in his life. The journey that he takes should be one of self-forgiveness. By giving the Son an audience, the director is providing someone for the Son to explain his story. The characters of the audience will serve as a friendly and nonjudgmental ear for our narrator. Through the telling of this story, it is the director’s hope that the audience will see the Son finally forgive himself for what he has done, as well as come to understanding about how his mother and father reacted to the tragedy.
CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Nocturne, by Adam Rapp, received its world premiere on October 15, 2000, at the American Repertory Theatre (A.R.T.), in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It subsequently received its New York premiere in May 2001 at the New York Theatre Workshop. These productions of the play were the first fully realized and fully funded productions of his work. Since those productions, Rapp has enjoyed great success as a playwright, filmmaker and young adult novelist. His play Red Light Winter was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 2006 and he had his Broadway debut in 2019 with The Sound Inside. Despite his success since the debut of Nocturne, the play has seen very few professional productions in the last twenty years. Shortly after the production at the New York Theatre Workshop, the Berkeley Repertory Theatre in Berkeley, California produced Nocturne in November 2001. It has not had a production of comparable size since then.

The reasons that Nocturne has not received more productions in its twenty-year old existence are purely speculative. Rapp’s plays have been characterized by some as “devoid of authenticity” and “lyrically dense” (Isherwood). For example, Charles Isherwood, former New York Times critic, was not a fan of Adam Rapp’s plays, going so far as to have written an article specifically about how he did not connect to any of Rapp’s work and that he would cease in reviewing them altogether. He even suggested
in his review of *Nocturne* that Rapp should stick to writing novels, saying that at the conclusion of Rapp’s “dense, dark and literary work, you may still be wondering whether he is a playwright” (Isherwood). On the other hand, New York Observer critic David Cote references a line from *Nocturne* in his recent review for Rapp’s *The Sound Inside*. 

He speaks of a sentence being lodged in his brain from seeing the show twenty years ago (Cote). Like it or hate it, the poetry of Rapp’s words creates a memorable night of theatre.

The language of *Nocturne* does read like a novel. The script is written in paragraph form and in first person point of view. There are no character names given, no character descriptions and only one stage direction (the reveal of the Father’s letter to the Son) in the entire script. Rapp’s background as a novelist is apparent through the structure of the work and his use of long and descriptive compound sentences. This exemplified by a line in Scene II of the play:

“Despite the expanse of chrome and the spidering lines and the chutes and the tubes and its accompanying intravenous bladder that somehow looks like a crystal kidney proudly plucked and mounted in glorious, surgical crucifixion, the whole thing, with all of its gleaming, prophylactic paraphernalia, is as noiseless as a twig floating in a stream.” (Rapp 15)

The keys to understanding *Nocturne* lie in the understanding of Rapp’s use of language, as well as the title of the play itself. The structure of the play is representative of the
Son’s journey throughout the play, Rapp’s stylistic approach to storytelling, and the socio-psychological viewpoints inherent in the story.

Charles Burchell defines a nocturne as a musical composition that reflects the moods and feelings of nighttime. Our modern definition of a nocturne describes the piece as a single movement typically written for a single instrument, mostly the piano. The focus of the piece is a simple melody, enhanced by chromatic embellishments. Nocturnes vary in dynamics, often growing and sinking between pianissimo and mezzo forte throughout their duration. They begin in a certain key and end in that same key, offering a sort of musical resolution to the piece.

The structure of the play follows the characteristics of the musical form. The play is written in a novelistic way, providing narration from the protagonist. We see and “hear” the events through his perspective. All the scenes invoke a sense of nighttime, as the Son speaks often of his never-ending insomnia. He talks about the piano as a person and how it sobs. He is a brilliant pianist who since the accident has avoided the daytime. The play fluctuates from intense scenes of pain and sorrow, to the wandering depression of day to day existence, comparable the dynamic range of mezzo forte to pianissimo. The character of the Son himself is simple, but a love of musical language creates a sort of chromatic embellishment.

The comparison with the play starting in one key and going on a journey but ending up in the same place is there too. Like the piece, the story covers many changes,
with a simple melody (plot) and ends up where it started, which is the Son just telling his story. But we still see growth, change and resolution, just like a nocturne.

To understand the play structure’s enforcement of socio-economic themes, we must examine how the original production of the play came to be. It was originally written as a monologue and envisioned by Rapp to be performed by one actor that would sit in a chair and deliver the play to the audience in direct address. The director of the world premiere, Marcus Stern, through collaboration with Rapp, suggested that play should be staged in an expanded form. Stern wanted to increase the cast to five characters and let actors inhabit the roles of the Father, the Mother, the Sister and the Girlfriend (or as he called her, the Redheaded Girl with the Gray-Green eyes). He also wanted to dissect the play into two acts, taking an intermission at the conclusion of Rapp’s scene II. Rapp agreed to the structural changes (Brenton). The production at Minnesota State University, Mankato followed suit.

By dividing the play into two acts, the story takes a “before and after” type of structure. In scene I, the Son speaks of his day-to-day existence in the suburb of Joliet, Illinois and the tragic accident in which he runs over and decapitates his younger sister. In scene II, he speaks of the reactions of his mother and father to the disaster. His father sticks a gun down into the Son’s mouth, leading the Son to leave the house and travel to New York City.

This “first act” (Scene I and II) sets up the perceived idea of the American Dream. The phrase “American Dream” was invented during the Great Depression. It was coined
by historian James Truslow Adams in 1931, who defined it as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone” (Leonhardt 47). This definition gave a framework for the idealistic American existence. It involved the ideal familial unit: married parents, with at least two children, at least one girl and one boy. The Mother would be a stay-at-home wife who would care for the children and the Father would be the one to financially support the home. But the key promise was greater financial success than the generation before.

The generation of working-class Americans at this time did see financial improvement and increase in quality life in comparison to their parent’s generation. This seems logical, as it is well known that those who lived and worked during the Great Depression had next to nothing. It was the grandchildren of those who survived the Depression that did not live up to this standard, as financially, the country flattened out and the beginning of great wealth disparity began.

The family in Nocturne is like the typical family associated with the American Dream. The parents are married. There is one boy and one girl in the household. The Mother stays at home, while the father goes out and works to support the family. The Son is a piano prodigy, winning numerous awards in competitions. The pressure for him to succeed is tremendous, reflecting the expectation that men in the United States are to be successful. The women are painted as strong individuals with admirable traits yet are held down by the expectation that they wear dresses, makeup and do their hair, all while clearing the table and attending to other household chores. There is a garden
gnome and trees in the yard. The house is filled with Formica, associated with suburban America. It is the picture of the typical middle class American life.

The Father and the Mother are like those who strive for the American Dream. They have been told all their life that things get better. However, that is not the case. The Father is in a decent paying job as a School Administrator but has no upward mobility. The Mother struggles to obtain the unreasonable standard of perfection set by the women before her. Both are coasting through life, teaching their children the norms they were taught, just waiting for that so-called American Dream to kick in.

Then in an instant, the realization that their lives will never be better hits them out of nowhere. Through one quick mistake, the American Dream for this family is destroyed. The typical family unit is obliterated, and the three remaining members are plunged into seemingly unending grief. The strong father is no longer protective, but aggressive towards his son. His mother is no longer the comforter, as she collapses into the coma of grief. The Son, who does not yet fully comprehend the consequences of his actions, is physically assaulted by his father. He is forced to flee his entire existence mere days after the accident.

In the following two scenes (III and IV) and subsequent epilogue, the Son tells us of his time navigating the world of New York City. He struggles with debilitating poverty over a fifteen-year period. He discovers his passion for writing. He collects little monetary gain from his works, but he embraces it, nonetheless. He meets a woman who is interested in him, but the relationship crumbles due to his impotency. She tells
him that it does not matter but the narrator ends it due to his humiliation for not fulfilling his masculine duties. He is not allowed to have joy.

He eventually receives a letter, in which the Father reveals that he has testicular cancer and he is dying. The Son returns to Joliet, fifteen years later, in hopes of reconciling with his dying father. They come to an understanding and eventually forgive one another, but the Father dies in squalor, with only four thousand dollars to his name.

The first act (Scenes I and II) speak of the false expectations of the American Dream. The second act reflects the fallout from those expectations. Even though the Son finds some solace at the conclusion of the play, the family unit that exemplifies the American Dream has been shattered, resulting in poverty for all and death for all but one member of the original unit.

In his book *The American Dream: A Cultural History*, Lawrence R. Samuel references Jennifer L. Hoschschild’s quote that “The Dream is the promise that all Americans have a reasonable chance to achieve success as they define it- material or otherwise- through their own efforts, and to attain virtue and fulfillment through success” (Samuel 5). *Nocturne* is an iconoclastic attack on this idea, showing that one terrible yet brief tragedy can serve as a reminder that things do not get better. The representation of the home through the memories of the Son represents the frailty and falseness of the perfect suburban life. Even in the narrator’s escape to New York, he only finds little success and a virtual return to emotional and financial poverty.
In the Epilogue of the play, the Son summarizes his journey by explaining the nature of grief: “Grief does not expire like a candle or the beacon on a lighthouse. It simply changes temperature. It becomes a kind of personal weather system” (Rapp 42). He makes this statement to let his audience know that grief over the death of a loved one is not something that ever completely disappears. Like the weather, it can change daily or hourly and without warning.

The process of grieving was outlined in Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ 1969 book On Death and Dying. In this text, Kubler-Ross outlines the five stages of grief in a stage theory entitled the Kubler-Ross Model. This model postulates a series of emotions that an individual will experience when they are approaching death themselves or dealing with the loss of a loved one. The five stages expressed in this model are denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance.

It is important to note that this model has been both misinterpreted and criticized since its inception. There is not one standard model for dealing with death and grief. No empirical evidence supports the Kubler-Ross model; however, it has somehow become a sort of cultural weathervane in our society. The critics of the method argue that there is no linear path in dealing with death. In her 2005 text, On Grief and Grieving, Kubler-Ross addresses these concerns. She states that “The stages have evolved since their introduction, and they have been very misunderstood over the past three decades. They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages” (Kubler-Ross 7). She explains that the five stages of grief are “a part of the
framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost. They are tools to help us frame and identify with what we may be feeling. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. Not everyone goes through all of them or goes in a prescribed order” (Kubler-Ross 7).

In *Nocturne*, all five stages of grief are exemplified in the Son’s emotional journey from the day of the accident to the present day telling of the story. By using the Kubler-Ross model, we can identify the stages of grief and use them to understand the Son’s grieving process and how it affects his life choices along the way. Although the grieving process is not linear, the first stage is consistently Denial, as it helps the person survive the loss.

The beginning of the Son’s grieving process begins when, after crashing his car into a tree, he discovers the body of his little sister crumpled in the road. Upon approaching the body, he realizes that she has been decapitated and her head is in a neighbor’s driveaway across the street. He walks to it and picks it up in a way that he describes as “Simply. Perfunctorily” (Rapp 8). He then proceeds to bend down to his sister’s corpse and try to re-attach the head to the body. The Son recalls that this action was in order to have his sister rise again and walk back into their house and join them for supper. This seemingly ridiculous action can be explained as a part of the Denial stage of grief. Kubler-Ross explains that at the beginning of the grieving process, a person will experience a moment of shock, resulting in a paralyzing feeling or blanketed feeling of numbness (Kubler-Ross 8). In this moment, the Son feels no sadness for his
sister. He is simply reacting to the situation and taking action to fix it. It is not that he does not know that his sister is dead. His reaction, as a part of the Denial, is a way for his psyche to deal with the trauma. His body is not ready to process the pain.

The Son carries this stage into the following scene. His brief conversation with his mother at the hospital is filled with imagery of the room in which he is confined and the physical features of his mother. He dissects the words she uses in the conversation. He describes in detail her likeness to John Steinbeck’s Joad women in the *Grapes of Wrath*. He emotionlessly describes a graphic image of a patient without a chin upon a gurney that passes his room. When he is told that he is being charged with manslaughter, he simply replies that he is sorry.

His actions, or lack thereof, in this scene represent the survival tactics his brain is implementing to deal with the recent trauma. “Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible” (Kubler-Ross 10). The suddenness of the death has thrust him into a new abnormal world. In a sense he is going through the actions of life, doing what he thinks he is supposed to do in this situation. He is quickly snapped out of this initial surge of denial when his father, in dealing with his own grief, sticks a revolver into the Son’s mouth. His fear and his subsequent fleeing to New York City make him realize that the world he knew before the tragedy would never be the same.

In the same scene, the Son exhibits behavior typical of the Anger stage of grief. He tries to piece together the events of the crash in order to understand how everything happened. His attitude quickly turns to anger when he realizes that he cannot
remember the color of his sister’s hair. His hypotheses on why his sister died seem illogical and absurd as he tries to justify her death. Kubler-Ross explains that “Anger does not have to be logical or valid” (11). The Son personifies this as he surmises that this accident was part of her attempted suicide. He assumes that her distaste and fear for her prescribed middle-class existence fed into her need to end her life prematurely. He boldly poses the theory that “perhaps there is a kind of deathwish with children” (Rapp 12).

The behavior of the Son throughout the play rarely crosses into the world of anger. It is eventually revealed that the break line of the car had snapped, not allowing the Son to break in time and avoid the accident. He knows that circumstances beyond his control led to her death. But through his anger, he makes these absurd assumptions, even blaming God for dealing her his “ugly deck of cards” (Rapp 13). It is important to note that the Son is speaking of his anger in the present tense. His anger is fueled by looking at the tragedy in retrospect. At the time of the accident, he was trying to survive. He did not have time for anger. Now that time has passed, he is emotionally able to confront those feelings. Kubler-Ross explains that this retroactive anger is normal. She says that anger surfaces once the person has realized that they have survived the events themselves. The Son, technically at the end of his journey, is now comfortable enough to share his audacious reasonings with the audience.

In Scene III, the Son tells us the story of his life in New York after fleeing from his boyhood home. The sudden move to the city is shocking for the Son, as he is forced to
leave every aspect of his life behind in order to survive. Because of this, he is sent into a period of bereavement. Thomas Attig defines bereavement as the personal state or condition of someone caused by loss through death (8). He has not only lost his sister, but his mother and father as well. He has no companionship and must live an existence in which the possibilities of life are limited.

Due to the swift nature of the events of the tragedy, the Son did not have the time available to fully experience the Bargaining stage of grief. In the Bargaining stage, the person becomes involved in a maze of “What if” and “If only” statements, followed by promises made to God, others or themselves in order to return to the normalcy of before (Kubler-Ross 17).

The Son never speaks these statements in the text of the play. But his actions following the physical assault by the Father exemplify a person that is bargaining for forgiveness. Kubler-Ross states that “Guilt is often bargaining’s companion” (17). The Son feels tremendous guilt for what he has done. By staying in New York City, leaving his life behind and living in poverty, he is seeking atonement for his actions. As a part of his bereavement, he seeks out extraordinarily little in terms of physical possessions. He makes no friends. He even unconsciously punishes himself by living in a situation where he must schedule his bowel movements because the toilet is located on a separate floor than his apartment.

This behavior is closely tied with another stage of grief: Depression. Kubler-Ross explains Depression as a sadness that we feel as we focus directly on the present (20).
The Bargaining period of the Son’s grieving process lasted for over a decade, with moments of Anger and Denial peppered within. But the Son’s depression comes at the discovery of his sexual impotency.

His relationship with the Girlfriend seems to be a positive moment in the painful life of this young man. However, he discovers that he is unable to attain an erection, and he slips into a deep depression. His depression leads to humiliation and self-hatred. He refers to himself a “virginal, fish-infested garbage dump” (Rapp 26). Despite the Girlfriend telling him that the impotence was not an issue, he purposefully ends the relationship. His feelings of depression convince him that he is not worthy of happiness. He sinks into himself, convinced that nothing will relieve him from the pain of his bereavement.

The Son’s arrival at the final stage, Acceptance, begins when he receives the letter from the Father. The Father explains in the letter that he is dying of testicular cancer and asks his son to return to Jolliet. The Son does as he is asked, hoping to find some closure in seeing his father one final time.

The stage of Acceptance is perhaps confusing, as it does not equate to the idea of closure. Closure is the idea that all is okay and the struggle is over. This is not the case. Acceptance is “about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality” (Kubler-Ross 25). It is not about being “over” the death or the tragedy. It is about dealing with the world in its present state.
When the Son visits the Father, he realizes that he too has led a life full of grief. He has not spent his life angry at the Son for what he had done. He had lived his life dealing with the loss of his wife, daughter and son. The Son recognizes the parallel between the two of them and although no formal apologies are given or forgiveness exchanged, at the end of the scene, both can finally accept what has happened.

Unfortunately, the Father dies that evening. However, the Son has now moved into the stage of acceptance and can finally begin to heal. Healing is about remembering, recollecting and reorganizing (Kubler-Ross 25). The Son does this by taking the step of sharing the story of his life to the audience. Talking about his tribulation is part of the healing. Acceptance is not a final endpoint, but a process that all grieving people must go through (Kubler-Ross 27). Therefore, the dramatic reason that the character is speaking is to share his journey in order to accept the reality of his situation.

The non-linear nature of the play is indicative of how the grieving process works. In the text, the Son frequently switches back and forth between being in the present and being in the past. He speaks about his present feelings looking at the tragedy retrospectively when in the present. When he is narrating or participating in events of the past, he shares the reactions he had when it originally occurred. Because of this writing style, he fluctuates from grief stage to grief stage without warning. This is like the grieving process. Kubler-Ross explains that “Grief is not just a series of events, stages, or timelines... the loss happens in time, in fact in a moment, but its aftermath
lasts a lifetime” (203). The Son would not experience any of these steps in order and Rapp shows us that in the structure of the play. The Son will never be through with his grief. However, he will find a way to deal with it.

Thomas Attig, in the preface of his book *How We Grieve: Relearning the World*, uses Edvard Munch’s painting “The Death Chamber” to illustrate the circumstances and processes associated with grief and bereavement. He notes that in the composition, everyone is on their own, dealing with their grief alone, even though they all are sharing the same space. You cannot see the person for whom they are grieving. The focus of the painting is on those experiencing the aftermath of death. They are dealing with their new realities and the observer can see the hole that is left by the one they have lost (Attig vii). *Nocturne* addresses the same themes. We never hear from the Sister, the origin of all the grief. We see the Son, the Mother and the Father dealing with it in their own way. They are all sharing the same space, yet they are all alone. The painting represents the fact that the process of grieving is something that can only be tackled by the one who is experiencing it. No one can grieve for another.

Attig goes on to say that those in Munch’s painting look as though they do not want to leave the room and face the world. “Yet, that is precisely what they must do” (Attig viii). Rapp shows us that he believes this as well, showing that the Son’s trip home to confront his fears and reconcile with his father was the key for him to accept his grief and move on.
Nocturne is a unique play that deals with issues of grief in an unadulterated and unapologetic approach. It is a critique of the American Dream that pulls no punches in the deconstruction of the idealistic perspective. Though it might fade into obscurity, it is an important piece of theatrical literature in terms of dealing with losing those you love. But most importantly, it serves as an example of how someone must move forward from their tribulations in order to find true peace.
CHAPTER THREE

JOURNAL ENTRIES

8/29/2019 First Production Meeting

Today we had our first production meeting. It was exciting to see a bunch of fresh faces around the table. The last two productions I have directed at Minnesota State University, Mankato were Talley’s Folly and The Mousetrap. For those productions, I had essentially the exact same production team. This time around, the team is completely new. It is a group of individuals that have quite a bit of experience working in their specialty areas. However, for this process, they are all in areas in which they have not served as lead designer. I anticipate that being a challenge, but I also know that they are a focused group that will work hard for me.

I began the meeting by explaining my concept for the show. I explained that we will not be doing the play as it appears on the page (a one man show); My concept is to pull out each individual that the narrator, (or the Son, as we call him in our production), names in the script. We will cast an actor as the Mother, the Father, the Sister and the Redheaded Girl with the Grey-Green Eyes (or the Girlfriend, because we do not know if we will find someone with those physical attributes). I added that we will also be casting two actors as EMTs to roll out the Father’s body at the conclusion of the show,
as well as seven to nine “ensemble” members that will serve as an “audience” for the Son.

I explained that my concept was rooted in an experience I had when working as a courier in Kansas City, Missouri. We were going to do the show in a way that the Son is a semi-successful novelist who has been invited to speak about his story at a book convention. As he speaks about the book, his memories throw him back into the past, and the memories associated with this terrible tragedy will be played out before us onstage. The action would switch back and forth between the present and the past.

I spoke about the unconventional approach that I am taking in terms of style and explained that the play is half-realistic and half expressionistic memory play. I then went around the table, design element to design element, explaining the direction that I see each element going in. I told them I would send them some links of imagery that was inspiring me.

I then mentioned my idea about a slide show accompanying the Son’s talk throughout the play. We discussed some possibilities with how to go about this. I also mentioned that I would be serving as not only the director for the production, but the scenic designer and properties master as well. We reviewed the fact that we have a $750 budget and to keep that in mind as we jump into the production process.

We then concluded the meeting by agreeing to bring some ideas and research to the next meeting to show to the group. We would discuss budgeting on the twelfth.
9/5/2019 Second Production Meeting

For this meeting I brought in some sketches of what I was thinking for the set design. Since the production is being staged in the narrow thrust configuration, I explained that I wanted the “stage” that exists within the play to be in the upstage area of the playing space, and all the chairs for the audience members to be on the floor in the downstage area. I discussed that I wanted a secret alcove in the back wall of the set. I expressed my desire for it to appear out of nowhere and explained its purpose as being a window, of sorts, back into the dark corners of the Son’s memory. Philomena SchnoebeLEN, the technical director, agreed that that was doable, and that she would tackle a solution to it once I had provided a ground plan. I agreed that I would have a ground plan at the next production meeting.

Sound designer Jameson Bernhagen had some sound clips for us to listen to. He explained he was at the beginning of his process and these were just preliminary ideas. I confirmed that he was heading in the right direction. We also briefly discussed the idea of him and I getting together outside of the regular production meetings, for him to get an idea of where I was wanting sound reinforcement, as none of it is indicated in the script.

Costumer designer Ethan Hayes also had some costume research to present. I was pleased because all but one of his ideas was completely in the right direction. I also mentioned that I would now be looking for five to six audience members, not the seven
to nine that I had originally intended. I reiterated that some of these decisions would have to wait until the auditions were over, and then we could go from there.

9/12/2019 Third Production Meeting

For this meeting, I brought a ground plan for the team to review. Questions were asked and answered. No great complications or concerns were brought to my attention, so we decided to set the ground plan in stone.

I discussed the possibility of using an old school slide projector for the slide show in the play. I was basing this decision on the fact that the character has an affinity for old technology. We discussed the issues associated with using a slide projector, such as the cost of creating the slides, the possible difficulty of finding a light bulb to effectively make the machine work, as well as the need for someone to physically run the projector from either offstage, or have the Son do it manually within the action. Benjamin Miller volunteered to do some research into the cost of creating the slides from photos that we take and from public domain images we retrieve from the internet.

No budget was discussed, as it was necessary for Schnoebel to have the ground plan before she could bring a feasible number to the table. I acknowledged that this was my error and that we would discuss the budget at a later time.
**9/19/2019 Production Meeting**

Not a lot to report on this meeting. Miller returned with information on getting the slides made professionally: $220 for 36 slides on a four-day rush delivery, or $190 for 36 for a 10 to 14 day delivery time. I expressed my concern about the slides taking up that much of the budget when the list for buying lumber has not been finalized yet. Everyone around the table agreed. George Grubb mentioned that David McCarl had a slide projector in an earlier meeting, so I said that I would reach out to McCarl to see if I could use his.

I asked the team at this point to bring estimates for their respective design budgets to the next meeting. We will then work together to come up with a budget that is fair for all involved.

**9/26/2019 Production Meeting**

This meeting was very productive! Today, Hayes brought in sketches for each character, including color palates. Except for the length of the Son’s jeans, all his designs looked wonderful! He asked if I thought it would be okay to ask the actors who get cast as audience members to bring their own clothing for costumes. After conferring with Grubb and Heather Hamilton, we agreed that that would be a good idea and would help us in terms of budget.
Miller brought up the idea of getting the slides done at CVS. They said that it could be done, but we would have to send them away and it would take three weeks to get them back. I told him that I would take that into consideration. I am still putting together the slide lists, making edits as a reread the play.

I brought up to Bernhagen that the characters of the Son, the Mother and the Father would need some sort of lapel mics for the show. We had agreed earlier to mic up the Son but had not discussed the other two characters. I expressed my concerned with inconsistency in sound projection, as one actor would have proper amplification and the other two would have none. My concern was that it would come across as a mistake. After some deliberation, Bernhagen agreed, and promised to pull two additional lapel mics for the parents.

Auditions are this week! It will be exciting to see who we will be getting to work with! The designers expressed their eagerness, especially Hayes, who was ready to see who he will have to costume.

9/30/2019 Auditions

The auditions for this round were interesting. I was sharing an audition room with Matthew Caron and he was trying to cast Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll House. On the audition notice, I told all auditioners to just do a classical realism monologue, so both Caron and I could get an idea if they would fit our shows. That, and I had mentioned on
the notice that the play deals with issues of suicide, graphic violence, depression, addiction, PTSD, cancer, sexuality, and loss of loved ones. I just did not know who would be willing to jump into a play that dealt with so many complex issues.

We saw over forty auditions and many of them did not follow the audition instructions. Many of them brought in contemporary monologues. Even though it showed me that they did not follow the audition protocol, it did show me that there were certain individuals who were focused more on getting into my play as opposed to Caron’s. When I asked him his opinion on this, he agreed with me that that seemed to be the case.

I had a lot of possible choices for all roles. The role of the Son was the one for which I was the most concerned. I needed a ringer. Over forty pages of just one-person speaking is not a light task and I needed someone with the ability to carry the load.

After the auditions concluded, Caron and I convened with Paul J. Hustoles, as he was also casting his production of The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime. As is normally the case, Hustoles took the lead in the room, beginning the discussion with who I wanted for my cast. I expressed my great need for a male actor that could handle all the text in my play. I explained that I needed thirteen actors to accomplish my vision for the piece. I followed up by saying that if I could have one of the actors in my top three for the role of the Son that I could wait and fill the remaining roles after both Hustoles and Caron had chosen a majority of their leads.
After about thirty minutes of deliberation, I was fortunate enough to land a majority of my first picks and a good number of my second choices to round out my cast. I ended up with a cast that included Michael Poleleyev as the Son, Charles Ranum as the Father, Hannah Sayler as the Mother, Brynn Berg as the Sister, Isabella Fox as the Girlfriend, William Hallock and Via Logan as my EMTs, and Allyson Bryson, Victor Garcia, Emma Inga, Grace Ewals, Patrick Thofson and McKenna Prill as my Audience members (ensemble).

**10/3/2019 Production Meeting**

Not a lot of new development occurred during this meeting. We got an update from Schnoebelen about progress with the set. I informed the team that we finally have a cast. Miller, Hayes and I discussed the needs for the pictures in the slide show, and I informed the team that the only cast member who will need their picture taken is Berg as the Sister. Hayes confirmed that he would have Berg’s costume finished by November 1 for Miller to have enough time to take photos and edit them.

**10/10/2019 Production Meeting**

At today’s meeting I made the decision to not use a slide projector for the show. I want to have the illusion of the Son carrying a remote control around for him to be able to change the slide from wherever he is on stage.
Schnoeblelen expressed her concern for gathering eighteen chairs that all looked alike. She was having trouble locating some to use. Hamilton mentioned exploring surplus, while Grubb suggested looking for chairs in other storage locations on campus.

I reminded the team that rehearsals would begin the next week. Hayes confirmed that he would be present at the first rehearsal to present his sketches to the cast.

10/14/2019 First Rehearsal

Tonight was our first rehearsal! I was excited to share my concept and ideas with the cast. It feels like we have been preparing for the show forever now, but it is finally here! Rehearsals this week will be in Performing Arts Room 113, as Arsenic and Old Lace is still in its run in the Andreas Theatre.

I began the evening by having everyone introduce themselves and say what their roles are in the production. We have some new faces in the group and I wanted to make sure that they did not feel lost. Hayes then presented his colored renderings to the group and explained how we arrived at the designs. He explained to the audience members that they would have to bring their own clothing for costumes and told them that he would be in contact later in order to coordinate what they were going to wear.

I then talked in depth about my concept for the production. I explained how I arrived at my ideas, told them the story of how I got the inspiration and then shared my
scenic design with them. I then opened the room up for questions. Unfortunately, no one asked any. It made me wonder if I had not properly explained my ideas. Or perhaps they all were intimidated by the project or they did not fully understand what I was trying to do. Either way, it made me a tad self-conscious. But I am used to others not understanding my ideas at the beginning. Later, it clicks for them. I have been wrong about that in the past, but often, my ideas seem to work.

The conversation then shifted to the rehearsal schedule and how I conduct my rehearsals. I refer to these elements as “housekeeping.” I expressed my desire for fruitful and productive rehearsals, as well as my want to not waste anyone’s time. I told the audience members and EMTs that I would try to limit their rehearsal time, as I understood that there would be a lot of sitting around for them at times.

We then jumped into the readthrough. I told the audience members and the EMTs that they did not have to stay, but most of them did, as I can assume they wanted to hear the story out loud. This was a strange readthrough, as most of the play is the character of the Son talking by himself. But it provided me with some insight into how much work Michael Poleleyev had put into memorizing the script before tonight. To my genuine amazement, it seemed that he had roughly half the play memorized already. He had the script in his hand, and he occasionally checked it, but he knew the play.

This is tremendous. We only have two rehearsals this week, as some of my cast, including Poleleyev, are in Arsenic and Old Lace. I was initially concerned about the loss of time, especially for Poleleyev, because I wanted to get him as many repetitions with
the script as early as possible. But I could immediately tell that he had done his homework. Because of this, I had the rare opportunity to take character notes for him. This is usually something that I do after the initial staging. But due to the nature of the play (mostly stand and deliver) and his incredible preparation, I had the chance to do it tonight.

After the completion of the readthrough, I released all the cast, except for Poleleyev. I gave him the notes I took. They were mostly about his relationship with the other characters in the play, with some notes about how healthy the character is mentally. Poleleyev was very receptive to the notes. He knows how to receive them. He would listen intently, write them down, and then wait for me to be finished before asking clarifying questions. I have a good feeling about this collaboration. I am positive that I chose the right actor for this role.

10/15/2019 Blocking the Show

Tonight, I had the lofty goal of staging the entirety of the play. I called the Son, the Mother, the Father, the Sister and the Girlfriend to rehearsal, but told the remaining members of the cast to not come, as they would mostly be sitting around.

We were working with the set taped out in classroom PA 113, so we began rehearsal by explaining the ground plan to the cast. Soon after, we jumped into the
staging. It took us until ten o’clock, but we got it done! The groundwork was finished. This will open us up to start working the scenes when we come back next week.

I reminded actors Charles Ranum and Hannah Sayler that they were to be off book next week. I decided to have separate off book dates for the Mother and the Father from the Son. This was mainly because of the sheer volume of text that Poleleyev must memorize. However, I have a hunch, that at least for the first two scenes (I and II), he will be off book with them as well. It feels so good to be on schedule! Sometimes, my eyes are bigger than my stomach when I make the rehearsal schedule. But this time, it has worked out.

10/17/2019 Production Meeting

We have a projection screen! Thanks to Steve Smith, we can borrow one from the college. We are still looking for the chairs. Schnoebenel is having trouble finding 19 matching chairs that look like they would belong to a motel. Grubb recommended that Schnoebenel check with Dan Stark about chairs that he has used in the past for dance concerts. I made it known that it was important that we have the chairs by Monday. If that were not possible, I would be okay with rehearsal chairs for the time being. I just need physical chairs in the space in order to plug the audience members into the staging.
10/21/2019 Rehearsal

Tonight we had the audience members back in rehearsal. The major goal for this evening was to stage the beginning of the show and to plug them into the staging that I had set with Poleleyev the week before.

Staging the beginning took a bit longer than I anticipated, but in retrospect I think that it was fine. It is the first thing that our paying audience will see. I wanted to make it as clear and precise as possible. I will have the “audience” actors enter the playing space and take their seats during the preshow. So, when the house is open, they will walk down the vomitorium and then sit onstage until the action begins. I am a little concerned that the actual audience will want to sit onstage. But I am going to continue to think about ways to make it clear that it is just part of the show.

Ranum and Sayler were successful in being off book for tonight’s rehearsal, based on what little I got to see of it. I ended up spending more time on the audience members tonight and neglected the two of them. I know they understood and it was good for them to be prepared anyway.

10/24/2019 Designer Run

In an effort to be transparent, I think it is important to note that I unapologetically hate this rehearsal. Tonight was our first full run of the show without
stopping. It was also the night designated for the design team to come and watch the show.

I understand the importance of this rehearsal. I know it is imperative for the design time to see a show early on to make sure that their work is on the same track as mine. But selfishly, I do not like this rehearsal because it always feels so underprepared to me. Yes, the designers will see the bare bones of the show, but I never feel like the designers get a true idea of what is working and what is not. I know they are prepared for the show to be unpolished. But there is always a part of me that fears that they will see it and lose faith in the potential of the show to be good. That would eventually lead to them not caring as much about their own work on it.

I know that is just my own insecurities talking. I just have such a passion for this show. Tonight was okay. Honestly, it went better than some of my other design runs in the past. We would have been in a better place if we had those three rehearsals we missed because of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, but I made the decision to use someone in that, so that responsibility is on me.

On a positive note, Poleleyev is almost completely off book for the entire show. According to the schedule, tonight was supposed to be the night that he was completely memorized for Scenes I and II. He knows those like the back of his hand. I am so impressed by his professionalism. He has taken so much stress off me in this last week. I have been able to focus on crafting the show, rather than stressing about whether this actor will have all the words in his brain or not. It is an incredible feeling!
Most importantly, Hamilton came and observed the show tonight. As always, she gave me a variety of things to think about. She had two main concerns. The first was the length of the show. It ran for one hour and forty-two minutes without an intermission. She thought it was too long. I am on the fence about it. Yes, that seems like a long time, but it is not any longer than a movie. I told her I would think on it and try to find a solution.

Her other worry was pertaining the question: “What is this play about?” When she presented me with that question, all I could talk about was the ideas that were presented in the piece. She made me realize that I was presenting it in a way that was not about the characters in the piece, but about the ideas the piece was trying to convey. She made me realize that it was not working and it was causing the play to lose its heart.

At first, I was taken aback by the criticism. Not because of what she said, but because I let that happen. Plays are about ideas, but we cannot stage them as such. As a director it is my duty to make it about story and the characters, and then the ideas can come forward. I am afraid that due to my overwhelming workload, I had forgotten the basic principles of what I do and had made it too academic.

I am so grateful for instructors that challenge me. Hamilton was completely right. I am going to try to get some distance from the process this weekend with the hopes of coming back to it with fresh eyes. Hopefully, that will allow me to fix the issues that we are having.
This evening’s rehearsal was focused solely on the scenes between Poleleyev and Ranum. The first scene between the two is the most dramatic and staging intensive scene in the entire play. The second is the most dialogue heavy and feels more like a traditional play. All the scenes in the play are important, but I wanted to spend some extra time with these two. The relationship between the Son and the Father is the source of so many of the Son’s problems following the accident. There is so much subtext between the two characters. They rarely say to each other what they truly mean. Poleleyev is experienced but still a young actor. Ranum is older and has more life experience, but this is his first full length play. Both are smart men and empathetic actors, so I do not have to worry about that. I just wanted to take some time to do beat work and to solidify the precision of the staging.

It was a short but successful rehearsal. It was a Friday, and I could tell that both actors were tired and I made the decision to not overwork them and send them home. My goals for the rehearsal were still accomplished. I just cut down the number of repetitions I wanted to do.

If I am being honest, I am tired as well. Serving as the director, scenic designer and properties master for this show is a handful. It is nothing that I have not done before. The difference is that on top of the show, I am adjusting to working twenty hours in the shop this semester, as opposed to my regular ten from the years past. It is amazing how much less time you seem to have when you take away ten hours from
your normal week. It also does not help that I am currently buried in the job search for employment at the conclusion of this school year.

I decided that I would go home and rest tonight. It will be the most beneficial to my physical and mental health.

10/27/2019 Rehearsal

Tonight’s rehearsal was a full run with all the principals and no audience. At the beginning of the evening, I gathered the actors together and explained that I had made a few mistakes in my approach to this play. I assured them that much of the work that we had done up to this point was solid and was not going to change. I admitted that in some of the scenes, I had focused too much on what the scene was supposed to say conceptually, opposed to just telling the story and letting that come organically. I also told them that I was going to adjust the staging for the beginning of the show and the intermission of the show to reflect this new approach to the text. I explained that I had gotten off the track with the story and I had forgotten that this story is about the Son searching for forgiveness. He needs forgiveness from his father, his mother, his sister and most importantly, forgiveness from himself. I explain that we were going to make some changes to reflect his guilt about the accident and his journey to forgiveness, together.
The actors responded positively to my admission. I have always operated under the idea that honesty is the best policy. By admitting when I am wrong, it shows that I am not too proud to do what is best for the show. I think great leaders are not afraid to admit their mistakes. When they do, their followers respect them more for it. I think in this instance, that is the case.

We restaged those moments without the audience and then continued to work moments in the show. Poleleyev is completely off book now and is really starting to thrive in this character.

**10/30/2019 Rehearsal**

Tonight was a working run through. The show is really starting to take shape. I am so proud of the progress we have been making. Nothing revelatory happened tonight, but I did have a wonderful realization.

The cast members who play the audience members have given this show so much shape. I challenged them at the beginning of the process to carve out complex and unique characters for this show and to not just be placeholders onstage. Their dedication to this story is so commendable. Often I find myself looking towards the audience and I see such rich and grounded reactions to the Son. It makes me feel like I am a fly on the wall. Their commitment has reinforced my belief in my concept for this show. It works and it works well.
10/31/2019 Final Production Meeting

It has been a long road, but today is our final production meeting. Schnoebelen is still struggling to find chairs for the set. We have confirmed that we can sign out a projector from the Centennial Student Union for the remaining rehearsals and the entirety of the run. I am currently searching for fabric to cover the front of our stage and will be checking with surplus about the availability of bunting.

I discussed my realization that I was taking the beginning of the play incorrectly and that I had taken steps to fix it. I told the team that it should not affect anyone’s work, except for Bernhagen. I explained that I needed to record a brief voiceover that needed to be attached to the end of the current cell phone announcement. My intention here to make a seamless transition into the play world from the real world and to have the paying audience feel like they too were at the talkback about the novel.

11/3/2019 Rehearsal

I had been going back and forth in my head about putting an intermission into the show. Tonight, I made the decision to do so. I had fought the idea of an intermission. This is because in the original production, the playwright Rapp also directed, and he intended the piece to be performed without an intermission. I always try my darndest to adhere to the instructions and intentions of the playwright. They are the original artist and I am merely interpreting their work. In this case, however, I
believe that Rapp was wrong. Especially with how I am staging the story, it makes sense to put an intermission in. So much heavy stuff happens in Scenes I and II, the audience could use a reprieve. That way, they can come back refreshed and with some distance from the emotionalism of the story.

The breakdown of the times reiterated to me that it was a good decision. The “first act”, containing Scenes I and II, ran for 54 minutes and the “second act,” containing Scenes III and IV with the epilogue, ran for one hour and fifteen minutes. I know I can get each act’s run time to be more equal. With the content, an hour per act is acceptable in my eyes. I believe that the intermission will stay.

11/4/2019 Rehearsal

We did another run tonight. I am incredibly happy with the show. Everyone is dialed in and doing exceptional work. The only element to note about tonight was the run times of each act. The “First Act” ran 54 minutes and the “Second Act” ran for one hour and two minutes. According to the stage manager Emma Kearney, we dropped almost ten minutes from the run time from the night before. I could be completely wrong here, but it did not seem like we went that much faster. It makes me wonder if the first time the second act was timed, it was done so incorrectly. Hopefully, tonight’s was accurate. If it was, I have zero concerns about the running time of each act. We shall see what tomorrow brings!
11/6/2019 First Technical Rehearsal

This was a long night. Tonight was our first technical rehearsal. The focus of this evening was to rehearse the technical elements of lights and sound. Here at Minnesota State Mankato, this rehearsal is typically conducted in an observational way. The director typically watches the lights and listens to the sound and then provides notes for the designers for them to fix the issues in their spare time. Due to the technically intensive nature of this show, in combination with the current state of the production in terms of the acting, I decided that I wanted to do tonight’s rehearsal differently.

I have an incredibly specific vision for this show. I have staged the story in a way that the design elements must be in perfect harmony with the actor’s movements in order to portray the story the way it should be portrayed. Because of this specificity, I wanted to give the designers notes on the fly, and then in turn, have them fix it on the spot. This is how I have operated in professional theatres before I came to Minnesota State Mankato and thought that this format would suit this show best.

We ran almost the entire show, occasionally jumping from cue to cue. We would sometimes go back and run moments three or four times to solidify the moment and then continue on. It was a tedious evening. However, we got through all but the last two pages of the play. Bernhagen and Miller showed tremendous professionalism in this rehearsal, embracing my approach, even thought they had never been a part of one like this before.
At the end of the evening, I could tell everyone was exhausted and frustrated. I thanked them all for their patience and told them that because we worked so hard tonight, that the rest of the technical rehearsals would go more smoothly than normal. I released them without notes and told them I would see them tomorrow.

Everyone left without saying anything to me. This is unusual for this group, as normally, someone has a question to ask me before they take off. Tonight was different. As is often the case with a rehearsal like this, I felt that everyone hated me at its conclusion. But this is just part of being a director. Sometimes being a leader requires you to be the bad guy. But I know God is in details and that the physical and mental energy of everyone involved in the production will be better in the long run because of it.

11/7/2019 Second Technical Rehearsal

At the beginning of tonight’s rehearsal, we picked up where we left off and finished rehearsing the technical cues for the Epilogue. After we finished doing that, we regrouped and began a run-through. We added projections tonight on top of the lights and sound.

This went so smoothly! I always love this rehearsal because I can start to see the final product taking shape. Because of the minutia we focused on yesterday, I had the chance to focus on the projections primarily. There were a few awkward moments with
the slides, as well as moments without slides that need them. I gave notes to Miller afterward about these issues. I reassured him that I would find the necessary slides that are missing and forward those images to him so he can insert them into the slideshow.

**11/8/2019 Third Technical Rehearsal**

This rehearsal went on with little to no issues. Because of the progress we made earlier in the week, I used tonight to focus on the sound design. I listened very intently for any moment that would pull me out of the show and remind me that I was in a play. Bernhagen has created a beautiful soundscape for this production. It, in conjunction with lights, really helps sell the sequences where the Son goes back into his memories. Because his design was so detailed, I did not want there to be any moment in the play that would take away from that.

I gave the designers some notes at the conclusion of the run. I decided not to give the actors notes tonight, as I did not want to bombard them with too many details. Sometimes too much direction can take away the spontaneity of a performance and they are currently in fine shape.

The actors expressed their frustration with Hayes and claimed that they had not received any information about what they were supposed to do for their makeup yet. I asked Kearney to reach out to Hayes to provide that information to them, as first dress was two days away.
**11/9/2019 Off Day**

Typically, on the production calendar for Minnesota State Mankato studio shows, the Saturday before opening would be a technical rehearsal. When I began to put the rehearsal calendar together, I looked at this day and decided that it was unnecessary to have a rehearsal. I did this because of two reasons. The first is the intense subject matter. It can be draining on a human being and getting time away from that is important. The second reason is that I do not believe in rehearsing for thirteen days in a row. My philosophy is that if you give actors and technicians time off, especially ones that are also students, they will return to rehearsals fresher and reinvigorated about the show. I just hope my team is taking advantage of it!

**11/10/2019 First Dress Rehearsal**

First dress rehearsal went incredibly well. Hayes was very well prepared, and all costumes were completed as promised. No makeup was used tonight, as that will be added for tomorrow’s second dress rehearsal. I did not have a single costume note for him. I believe this is a first for me! Again, I will chalk it up to clear and concise communication at the beginning and throughout the process.

I am struggling because I feel that I should have more to write about. But I will trust my work and see how tomorrow goes with makeup.
There are some shows where the makeup design does little to change the product from what you are used to seeing as director. This show is not that kind of show. I was blown away by how more intense and grittier the show felt after the actors started wearing makeup.

The harsh and angular makeup of the Mother transformed Sayler into a woman that was double her age. The thick lines of makeup and the almost triangular hair painted the perfect picture of a woman who was obsessed with conformity and who was eager to not be who she really is. The difference between the healthy Father and the cancer-stricken Father were striking. Coupled with the fat-suit enhanced costume, the makeup on Ranum almost made him look like two entirely different characters. Normally, I would be concerned, but that is the point. The audience needs to be as shocked as the Son is when he sees his father in Scene IV. I definitely think they will.

The black Xs over Berg’s eyes were especially haunting. The hair design really sold the young child look. The two pigtails accompanied by the large black Xs made me feel uneasy, which is good!

However, the lack of black contact lenses in Berg’s eyes were disappointing to me. We had discussed this as a necessity in the design weeks before tonight. Normally, I would ask Hayes why the contact lenses were not being used. The reason I did not is because the Sister has been deliberately staged in shadows throughout the play. No
one was going to be able to see her black eyes anyway. The desired effect was still being achieved. I decided to pick my battles and not mention anything.

11/12/2019 Final Dress and Student Preview

Tonight was the night that we finally get to do the show for an audience. We had a smattering of students from the department in the audience, in additional to some visitors from Assisted Living Center, who typically join us for our student previews.

It was a great performance. I was so proud of the entire cast and crew. There were some jitters, but nothing that anyone other than the director would notice. I had less than a page of notes for them after the show.

Some of the audience members left the show during intermission. I was expecting this. Not only for this performance, but I think that this will happen during the other performances throughout the run. The subject matter is unsettling. Some folks just do not want to watch a play about these kinds of things and I completely understand. I told the cast to be prepared for that to happen throughout the run and encouraged them to bring the same energy to Act II as they do in Act I, regardless of who is left in the audience.

I had a few students approach me after the show. Most were dumbfounded and seem profoundly moved. One even had tears in their eyes. I even received the comment: “It is so real.” It might be strange to say, but these kinds of responses are
what I am looking for during this run. This is not a feel-good show. This is a show about grief and loss. I am looking for people to identify with this story and with what the Son has gone through. I hope that it continues to do so throughout the run.

**11/13/2019 Opening Night**

I am so proud of my team. Opening night was a great success. Although the attendance was small in numbers, every audience member was glued to their seats for the entirety of the performance. I do not think anyone left at intermission, either!

In my opinion, this was one of the best runs of the show that we have had. The preview had helped us get those jitters out of our system and tonight we got back to doing the work and telling the story. This is rewarding for me not because it went so well but because I feel that I have encouraged a culture of respect and focus in my cast. As an educator, there is no better feeling.

**11/14/2019 Second Performance**

Tonight is photo call following the performance. Because of that, I decided to use tonight as the night in which I recorded the play for our department’s archives. I hope I captured the essence of the performance.

It was another solid show across the board. I wish there was more to say about it. But because of our consistency, there is nothing new to report.
I was humbled, however, after the show. After curtain call, in which we received a standing ovation, I began to pack up the camera to deliver it back to Hustoles in the office. When I looked up from my camera, there was a line of my peers and mentors leading up the stairs to me. I received numerous congratulations and compliments on the production. One friend of mine came to me in tears, hugged me, and said the words, “It is so good Trevor. You should be proud.”

I am proud. This is exactly how I wanted my thesis production to be.

11/15/2019 Third Performance

Our audiences are growing! Tonight, most of the center section was full. There were people sitting on all three sides of the stage for the first time. Perhaps word of mouth is picking up? Or maybe people prefer to attend on a Friday or Saturday? Either way, I am simply happy my cast is getting bigger crowds to perform in front of. They have worked tremendously hard and they deserve people to see their work.

Another solid show that ended with a standing ovation. One more to go! I will be sad to see it go.

11/16/2019 Final Performance

Tonight’s performance is the final performance in the run. Again, our audience grew to a number larger than the night before. I spent most of this performance
watching the audience reactions. Again, they were glued to their chairs and their eyes were constantly on the action of the play. At the conclusion of the show, we received another standing ovation. For a play that is not filled with flashy scenes or brisk pacing, it is rewarding for me to see that something I helped craft is keeping audience members of the digital age intrigued.

The play did not grow much from where it was in during the week of Technical and Dress rehearsals. But I think that is okay. We were ahead of schedule and were ready to go days before we got our first audience. In terms of logistics, I consider this a win for myself as a leader. There are some shows where you cannot seem to get things to time out the way you want them to. But for this beast of a production, we got to where we needed to go early, but not too early.

As I reflect on all that has happened, one thought comes to my mind: I am tired. I have given my all to this project. I am so thankful for the opportunity to do this daring script that is so close to my heart. I know I will likely never get a chance to do this play again. I am once again reminded why I chose Minnesota State Mankato for my graduate school. They push me when I need pushing. They allow me to take risks when I crave them. Most of all, they believe in my abilities as an artist, educator and leader.

I will never forget Nocturne. This has been one of the most artistically rewarding experiences of my career.
CHAPTER FOUR

POST PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter will contain a post-production analysis of Trevor Belt’s direction of Nocturne by Adam Rapp. The director will examine and analyze the reactions of the audience to the performance as well as explore the successes and failures in both the dramatic execution of the text and the execution of all design elements.

The production was well received by audiences. Although the physical attendance was not high, the impact of the story upon those who saw it was apparent. Several audience members approached the director following each presentation and spoke of how moved they were by the powerful performances given by the actors in the play. It is the director’s opinion that we do theatre for the audience first and foremost. The praise received by the director and the cast indicated that the story was told well, and the themes of the play were clear.

In Chapter One, the director stated that he wanted to focus on the themes of grief, loss and forgiveness. This goal was eventually accomplished. At the beginning of the process, the director realized that he was approaching his direction of the piece with the goal of expressing a certain feeling. As opposed to simply telling the story and letting the meaning shine through, he was attempting bring the message forward through his staging and attitudinal washes. He was focused on the why and not the
how. After explaining and admitting his mistake to his cast, the director made some staging changings, went back to his actor coaching basics and told the story. In his opinion, the results yielded exceptional change.

The story was about The Son’s journey to forgiving himself for being part of the accident. The audience was with the character from the get-go and went on the journey with him. They began to empathize and relate to the character and the guilt he felt that was associated with the loss of his sister. Audience members approached the director after the play and shared with him how accurate the feelings of sadness, loneliness and guilt were portrayed by the Son. They spoke of their own trials dealing with losing a loved one and expressed their gratitude for the director tackling such a universal and hard-hitting piece.

As mentioned earlier, the physical structure of the play is not like that of a traditional play. Nocturne is written as if it were a novel. There are no character identifiers. There is only one stage direction. The only indication that this is a play is the fact that the playwright Rapp says it is. Because of this lack of information, the visual and story-telling elements of the piece are left entirely in the hands of the director. The director conceptualized his approach to the text based on a real-life experience that occurred when he was working a courier in Kansas City, Missouri.

The concept of setting the play in book talk in a literary festival was a success. By doing this, it removed the convention of an actor speaking directly to a theatre audience. To the director, this often creates a falsehood within the story. Even though
many theatre audiences accept the convention, the director wanted the play to be a story that was being observed, in a real life and relatable situation. The actors who portrayed the “audience members” at the festival succeeded in making this work. Their commitment to the concept, by creating characters with rich backstories, set the tone for the reality-based element of the play. They provided The Son someone with whom to relate. It turned the character into a person, not just a narrator speaking into the heavens.

The setting and the projections were successful in creating this circumstance for the story to be told. Even though it might have not been immediately apparent where we were, the familiarity of the physical setup was clear: An area that serves as a stage and an area that can serve as an audience. Many people in Western Civilization have been in a situation like this. So even if it was not clear that the characters were in a hotel, the atmosphere and physical setting provided some familiarity to the actual audience.

The scenic design served its purpose well. It was the goal of the director to create a presentation-like setting within the world of the play, and that was undoubtedly clear. The secret alcove in the wall worked well. Serving as a visual representation of The Son looking back into his memory, the alcove created a visual disruption of sorts to the rectilinear and symmetrical look of the conference room. It provided ways for the Son to retrieve props within scenes without leaving the stage. It created visually disturbing compositions, bringing outlines of the Son’s family into the
seemingly safe world of the book presentation. Most effectively, it provided a surprise reveal in Scene I, showing the audience in real time the moment when the Son looked back and saw his mother’s face in the window, distraught, as he was attempting to reattach his sister’s decapitated head.

The success of the setting was accomplished by the nuanced collaboration of the scenic and projection designs. It was originally stated that the projections would be the key to making the scenic design work, and it was successful in doing so. All previously stated goals of the projections were met. Some of the slides provided visual aids for the Son’s presentation of his novel. Others, like the picture of the car that was involved with the accident, the piano he grew up playing, or the photograph of the Son at a young age, removed the need for the audience to use their imaginations to see the memories that the Son was describing. Its initial function was a slow and soft way to introduce the audience to each of the conventional uses of the slides. Then, after the audience accepted the convention, some images were used to show the Son’s vivid and dark imagination when he would spin out of control because of his grief. In the director’s opinion, the most powerful image was that of the Sister, screaming, with large black Xs over each of her eyes.

The director was incredibly pleased with the execution of the Sound Design. Sound Designer Jameson Bernhagen worked tirelessly to create a soundscape for this production and succeeded in doing so. The subconscious ambient noise that was created for the hotel meeting room was not observed by the audience members when
they entered the space, but it set up an aural expectation for the audience that they did not know that they needed. As was the original intention, it was simply a part of their world. When the ambience was removed for effect, the silence was deafening. The director could see audience members react in their seats, turning to their friends or family to see if they experienced the same change of volume that they had.

The most successful elements of Bernhagen’s design were the sound cues that enhanced the memory scenes. The goal of these cues was to create impressionistic versions of the events that occurred in the memory. The focus was to reflect the Son’s feelings about the memories, not necessarily the accuracy of them. The effects created by Bernhagen aided in the build to the climaxes within each scene. By creating this change in emotional charge, the design helped the audience suspend their disbelief and be emotionally tied to the events that the Son was experiencing. The most memorable moment in the play was the reenactment of the car crash. The quality of sound coming from the AM radio coupled with the hum of the engine created a familiar and nostalgic feeling to those who were listening. This lulled the audience into a false sense of security, setting them up for the blood-curdling sounds of the car running over the body of the Sister and crashing into a tree. The success of this design element added a level of professionalism to the production that could not be rivaled.

The lighting design was also successful in creating the two specific worlds of the play. As the director asked, the lights in the hotel meeting room were functionally florescent, as if someone had walked into the room and turned on the lights. This effect
was successful because it not only seemed like the kind of light you would see in a room such as this, but it blended seamlessly into the seats for the actual audience. The director wanted the real audience to feel as if they were observing the play. But, he did not want them to feel outside of it. Lighting Designer Benjamin Miller accomplished this by leaving the house lights on a limited percentage during the “realistic” moments in the play. It was successful as it created a comfortable ambience for the audience to take in at the beginning of the play.

Like Sound Design, the visual juxtaposition of the memories with the real world was imperative to telling the story. It was the director’s goal to have them expressionistic and fragmented to portray how memories might exist in the head of deeply disturbed and broken young man who tells stories. Miller succeed in this, creating the nightmarish and dreamlike feeling the director desired in all the memories. Heavily saturated colors were used to create emotional visual effects. The immense success of the static and sterile blue in the hospital, the deep and aggressive red of the study scene and the unsettling green during the love story elevated the staging that the director implemented for those scenes. However, the most effective scene was Scene IV, when the Son returns to Joliet to see his dying father. The use of severe side lighting, in conjunction with the light spill from the projector and the television practical, created a shadow-riddled world for the play’s climax. Given the limited budget, the use of lights and scenery in this moment was visually stunning and is one of the director’s prouder moments.
The Costume design was also successful in terms of the goals set forth by the director. As mentioned before, the Son goes into detail describing each of the characters with whom he interacts in the play. It was the director’s vision to have the costumes reflect exaggerated versions of these characters. Like with lighting and sound, the director wanted to keep the idea that memories get warped as time goes by and can change in terms of detail compared to what they truly were. Costume Designer Ethan Hayes was successful in doing this. The Mother’s makeup and hair were extreme and what some might call “overdone.” The stereotype of the midwestern wife who was trying too hard was the goal and Hayes succeeded in creating a believable look. Both of the Father’s looks were successful, showing the decay of this human over time. In Scene II, the Father looked like a recognizable midwestern superintendent in midcareer. The tactful but not overdressed look, in combination with the bodysuit provided to the actor Charles Ranum, created a look that was recognizable to our midwestern audience. By removing the bodysuit and business casual wear and putting him in an oversized sweat outfit, Hayes succeeded in creating the look of a deteriorated man who was gravely ill.

The Girlfriend character was executed properly. Her outfit fitted into the time period of the early 2000s seamlessly. It was executed perfectly to fit the director’s expectation.

The character of the Sister was the most difficult to create. This is because the Son describes her in the most detail. Hayes was successful in creating this look. The final product portrayed the desired look of innocence and youth. It is difficult to make
grown women look like little girls due to the differences in the topographies of their bodies. Hayes succeeded in deemphasizing the mature features of Brynn Berg, by dressing her in a loose dress that had a similar fit to what you see young children wear. Because of this, in combination with Berg’s portrayal of the character, it never felt like a student playing a child. When a costume helps the audience suspend their disbelief, that is when it is most successful.

The Properties Design was handled by the director. The design and creation of the properties were carried out to satisfaction. Because the script lists no properties anywhere in the text, the director made a detailed list of items he deemed necessary to enhance the story. During the first week of rehearsal, he adapted the list, removing items that he decided were unnecessary. All properties were used successfully in their implementation. Two important props were built for the production. The first was the morphine cartridge used in Scene IV by the Father. The director built the cartridge using scrap electronic parts, scrap wood and medical tubing. With the aid of dim lighting in the scene, the device looked authentic from view of the audience. The other important prop was the two physical copies of the novel Nocturne. The director felt that physical copies of the novel should be carried into the space by actors that play audience members. If the actual audience was playing close attention, the font used to create the cover for the novel is the same font used in the beginning of the slide show that the Son presents during the play. This was done to tie the world of the play together more clearly.
All the designs coalesced to create the world of the play. All worked together seamlessly to create a space in which the actors could live in the universe of these characters. Although they all fulfilled the director’s goals from the beginning of the production, the strongest element in the play was the exquisite performance by Michael Poleleyev as the Son, supported by the strong performances of the rest of the cast.

Rapp’s plays tend to be about the terrible things that happen to midwestern Americans. Anyone who decides to tackle his plays must be careful to observe the sincerity needed to do the plays fairly and accurately. Without doing so, the stories can drift into the world of the melodramatic. If, at any time, Nocturne would have floated into that realm, the plausibility of the story and the trust of the audience would have been lost. Fortunately, that never occurred.

The commitment of the cast in this production is commendable. As mentioned before, special recognition must be paid to the portrayal of the Son. Poleleyev is a consummate professional and the most prepared student actor that the director has ever worked with. He came to the first rehearsal with over half of the play memorized. Within the first week of rehearsal, he was completely off book for the entirety of the play. The director has always taken pride in his ability to coach actors. But with an actor as prepared as Poleleyev, the director was able to do the level of actor coaching that he is accustomed to in the professional world. The dedication to the story, not just from Poleleyev, but from the whole cast, was invigorating and refreshing for the director. The entire ensemble cared deeply about the piece and trusted the director
throughout the process, even when things changed along the way. This intense commitment, combined with the director’s extensive dramaturgical research and deep personal attachment to the piece, allowed him to become deeply acquainted with this script. This production is a true reflection of a group of artists coming together to mount a project that needs to be heard by the world.

In conclusion, the director is more than proud of the final product. He had the privilege to work with a dedicated ensemble and a driven production team. From day one they believed in his vision and worked hard to carry it to fruition. It is a special process for the director when he can tackle plays that have a universal social message. The message of forgiveness was successfully represented and the director is proud to have led the charge.
CHAPTER FIVE

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

Prior to his admittance into the Master of Fine Arts in Directing Program here at Minnesota State University, Mankato, the director’s experience included 15 years of professional acting experience, over a decade of professional directing experience and nine years of running his own production company. This previous experience provided the director with a strong foundation of skills about how to tell stories and mount them in numerous production venues and professional situations. The director returned to school to expand his knowledge and skill set to become a more diverse and meticulous director in either the professional or academic theatre world. In this chapter, the director will discuss and illuminate how the classes he has taken at this university have helped him grow as a director, artist and storyteller.

The most applicable experience was the director’s minor project, *Talley’s Folly* by Lanford Wilson. Although the director had been in over two hundred production meetings before returning to graduate school, this process was the first that provided him with a full team of student designers. This helped the director learn how to manage his expectations of those less experienced than he in the craft of creating a play, as well as navigating the time management skills of students who were working on several projects at once.
The following fall, the director staged *The Mousetrap* on the mainstage as his major project. The director applied the knowledge he gained while working on *Talley’s Folly* regarding working with student designers. Except for one faculty designer, David McCarl, his entire design team was comprised of students. The project was much larger than his minor project and brought some additional problems into the process. The director learned valuable lessons in how to be flexible with student designers in order to get the best work out of them while keeping them confident in their work.

During *The Mousetrap*, the director was simultaneously rehearsing for *The Visitors from the Planet Bop!* as a part of the annual children’s theatre tour. The director served as the writer of the book for this world-premiere musical in addition to serving as director on the project. The cast was comprised entirely of freshman theatre majors and served as a reminder for the director of how it was to work with inexperienced actors. The director was used to a certain level of motivation and skills for the actors at Minnesota State Mankato and was temporarily disappointed with the progress of the show at the beginning. This reminded the director that freshman actors are freshman actors regardless of where they go to school. It helped him realize that he needed to take a step back and approach rehearsals with the fundamentals in order to productively move forward.

The Advanced Directing class, taught by Heather Hamilton, provided additional scene work required for graduate student directors. In this class, the director had the opportunity to direct scenes from *Tribes* by Nina Raine, *The Rooftop Lesson* by Rich
Orloff and *Savage/Love* by Sam Shepard. Each scene had its own individual lesson. For the first, the director under-coached more experienced performers, as he thought he could assume that the actors would do their work on their own, without his pressure. The performances lacked inspiration. In the second piece, the director learned that the proper amount of time to learn complicated blocking and character development varies from young actor to young actor. In the third scene, the director realized that if he moved quickly with explanations of complicated and specific staging, that some actors would quickly get lost and pretend to understand what he desired. All these experiences served as a reminder to the director that he should not underestimate or overestimate the abilities of his collaborators, but that he should stay vigilant in the pursuit of telling the story the way it should be told.

In the following spring, the director took Advanced Directing II with Paul J. Hustoles. The director learned a variety of vocabulary from the course. This terminology provided him with more approaches to directing actors in a collegiate setting. As a part of the class he had the opportunity to direct two scenes: *Circle Mirror Transformation* by Annie Baker and *The Pavilion* by Craig Wright. Both experiences reminded the director that he was a solid actor coach who could pull deeper and more nuanced performances out of underutilized and underexperienced actors.

The Acting Techniques class, taught by Hustoles, was the most informative class he has taken at Minnesota State Mankato. Through the director’s intense observation, he learned the pedagogical skills necessary to lead actors in developing complex and
physically diverse characters. He gained a wealth of terminology from the course and it bettered his communication skills with the actors that he has directed at the university.

For his first two years, the director participated in ten weekly hours of work in the Scene Shop. This year, he has had the opportunity to work twenty hours a week for both semesters. This is required for his Graduate Assistantship. The work in the shop has been instrumental in his development as a director. This experience has provided him with the technical knowledge necessary to accurately have productive conversations with both scenic designers and technical directors.

Director specific courses in Lighting Design (taught by Steve Smith), Costume Design (taught by David McCarl), Scenic Design (taught by John Paul) and Sound Design (taught by George Grubb) have provided the director with terminology and an adequate amount of information to have productive and intelligent conversations with his designers. Because of these classes, the director is now even more detail oriented than he was before. All four classes taught him that “God is in the details” when it comes to all elements of design. This was reiterated in the Director and Designer Communication Seminar class. Like the director specific courses, this class put the director in the shoes of a designer and gave him valuable experience in seeing the communication from the alternative perspective.

The Stage Combat class was the director’s first exposure to fight choreography that involved weapons. He had been previously trained in hand-to-hand combat, but not in the areas of Quarterstaff, Broadsword or Rapier. Additionally, the class
conducted basic instruction on tumbling, in which the director had only little experience. This class “put more tools” into the director’s toolbox. This information will allow him to stage some basic fight choreography in the future.

Theatre Speech I & II expanded on the director’s knowledge of the physiology and function of the voice. Theatre Speech II exposed the director to the numerous vocal qualities an actor can use to convey character. Theatre Speech I expanded the director’s previous knowledge of the Linklater technique. The director recognizes that these classes provided him with the necessary pedagogical techniques needed to help his future actors and students connect with their voices emotionally.

Theatre History I expanded the director’s knowledge of the ancient artform known as theatre. The class expanded his knowledge of practitioners, methods, philosophies and texts. It reinforced the director’s mantra of: “You cannot know where you are going, if you don’t know where you have been.” This class reminded him that he must acknowledge how certain plays are traditionally approached and explored in order to expand his own take on them.

The Theatre History II course continued in the path of Theatre History I by expanding the director’s knowledge of theorists and practitioners. The required group study leadership in the class helped the director refine his skills in communicating the importance of history in theatre education to undergraduate students. The director has always had the ability to memorize the authors of plays. That had always made history an easy class for him. The director realized that none of the members of his group
worked in that fashion, so he had to come up with alternative approaches to get the

group to retain the information.

The Theatre Research Course helped the director tremendously as an academic

writer. It exposed him to a plethora of academic sources. It informed him of the idea of

new historicism as the current approach to research in the world of academia. Through

practical research and class discussion, numerous social and sociopolitical issues were

brought to his attention. This forced him to expand his worldview, take a different look

at the social institutions in place and the reflect on how they could be improved upon.

The director then took these skills into the Dramaturgy class. This class reiterated the

great amount of work that is necessary to research a play to its fullest. The skills that he

learned from both this class and Theatre Research has helped to expand his knowledge

on how to use history to shape his visions for plays he will direct in the future.

In a similar vein, the Theory Criticism class exposed the director to the numerous

philosophers and theorists who have had the greatest historical contribution to the art

of theatre. This class was very stimulating to the director because of the intense

discussions that were had within it. Again, his mind was expanded and exposed to

different worldviews and philosophical approaches to the problems that are inherent in

the modern patriarchal approach to the theatre. The director feels that these

perspectives will allow him to listen closer to those different than he and hopefully lead
to a better understanding of his future students.
The Stage Dialects I and II classes exposed the director to a side of theatre in which he had extraordinarily little experience. Through the study and mastery of ten distinct different dialects, the director became proficient in the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet. This has led to a profound confidence in the director’s ability to stage plays in which a dialect is used. He is confident that he could serve as a dialect coach on not only productions he stages himself, but for other directors. Without a doubt, this is the most useful academic tool he has obtained during his tenure at Minnesota State Mankato.

The director is currently in Theatre Management, the only class for his final semester at Minnesota State Mankato. The class has been valuable in helping the director understand the business needs of theatre companies and academic theatre departments. Explorations in the hierarchies of numerous theatres and departments has given the director insight in how both small and large regional, stock and academic theatres are structured. The anecdotes from Hustoles are the most beneficial, as the director learns more from examples than text work. The cautionary and celebratory tales will serve as constant reminders for the director as he heads into the upcoming job search following graduation. The director also feels that it is necessary to note that this class has transitioned to an online format due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. Because of this necessary step, the director has been exposed to the benefits and downfalls of teaching a theatre course in an online format.
Practical experience is often where the greatest amount of learning occurs. During his first semester, the director performed as an actor in *The Aeneid*, directed by Hustoles, and *These Shining Lives*, directed by Kristin Fox. During his second year, he performed in *Stupid Fucking Bird*, directed by James Van Oort and *Macbeth* directed by Hamilton. In his final year, he performed in *Cloud 9*, directed by Seth M. Honerman. The director has over seventeen years of professional acting experience. He has also worked extensively in the world of academic theatre as a director. By participating in these productions, he has been reminded of how the student actor approaches a script, how they handle the pressure of the rehearsal process and how they exude the differing levels of professionalism. By seeing these elements from the inside of the process, the director is better equipped to understand his actors in future projects.

Finally, the experience of teaching the Acting for Everyone class for the first two years has reinforced his opinions on the value of leadership. Students need support and guidance. An open mind is important, but only in conjunction with a strong and steady hand. The experience of teaching this class will not only help the director in his future academic pursuits but also in the rehearsal room when dealing with multiple levels of ability and knowledge.

In summation, the classes and experiences provided to the director by the Theatre Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato, in conjunction with his previously acquired skills and experience, will provide him with the necessary knowledge and practical skills needed to become either a passionate academic or a
frequently-working regional theatre director. The director is pleased he chose to come to Minnesota State Mankato and is grateful for the opportunity to grow in such a supportive environment.
APPENDIX A

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

“The Son gazes at the stars.”

Foreground: The Son (Michael Poleleyev)

Background (Left to Right): The Mother (Hannah Sayler), the Sister (Brynn Berg),
the Father (Charles Ranum).
“The Mother takes the gun”

The Mother (Hannah Sayler) and the Father (Charles Ranum)
“The Death of the Father”

The Son (Michael Poleleyev), an EMT (William Hallock) and the Father (Charles Ranum).
“The Son reminisces about his 1969 Buick Electra”

The Son (Michael Poleleyev)
“The Son attempts to rewrite his sister’s history.”

The Son (Michael Poleleyev)
“The Son returns to reality.”

The Son (Michael Poleleyev) with Ensemble.

(Left to Right): Patrick Thofson, Emma Inga, Allyson Bryson, Victor Garcia, Grace Ewals and McKenna Prill
APPENDIX B

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

_Nocturne_ Rehearsal Schedule (as of 10/2/2019)  *All rehearsals begin at 6:35 PM*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rehearsal</th>
<th>Called</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 14</td>
<td>*Read Through and Table Work Design Presentation/Concept</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>*Stage Show</td>
<td>Son, Mom, Dad, Sister, Girlfriend</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td>GO SEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td>ARSENIC AND</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td>OLD LACE</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Plug Audience In/Continue Working Show</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>FATHER AND MOTHER OFF BOOK</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Work I &amp; II</td>
<td>No Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Work III &amp; IV</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SON OFF BOOK – I &amp; II</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Run Show</td>
<td>No Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Work Show</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SON OFF BOOK- III &amp; IV</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Run Show w/notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Work problem areas/TBA</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Run Show/PUBLICITY PHOTOS</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Light/Sound Tech/Run Show</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1(\text{st}) Tech Rehearsal</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>2(\text{nd}) Tech Rehearsal</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>First Dress</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Second Dress</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Final Dress/Student Preview</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Show #1- OPEN</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Show #2- PHOTO CALL to follow performance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Show #3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Show #4- CLOSING- Strike to follow</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*All rehearsals will be at the Andreas, unless informed otherwise. Check your email frequently. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns!*
APPENDIX C

DIRECTOR’S PROGRAM NOTE

The colloquial saying goes that nothing is certain, except death and taxes. It is often taken out of context or re-contextualized as some sort of joke. We all laugh at the absurdity of it, focusing on all the possible things it does not mention and how we cannot truly rely on the consistency of anything. But rarely is the focus put on what the saying is actually about: The certainty and inevitability of taxation and the impending loss of not only us, but those we love. Everything has a cost, and everything eventually ends.

Yes, this is a hard pill to swallow. But it is a universal experience that we have all faced in some way or the other. Loss can manifest itself in the death of a loved one, the ending of a relationship, the physical separation between friends, the progression of a career beyond those we started with, and many others. I would hope that we can all agree that we all deal with loss in our own way, often tackling the grief that accompanies it through its many stages in our own time. We become angry. We deny it. We bargain. And eventually before we accept the loss for what it is, we deal with the depression and the guilt associated with our own actions.

Nocturne is a story about a young man who made a tragic mistake and the familial consequences that follow. I personally cannot say that I have gone through what The Son has gone through. But I have dealt with a great amount of recent loss. Without a doubt, I can identify with the struggle that both he and his family go through. It is my hope, that through his story, you can empathize with this family’s journey, like I have. Hopefully, you will grant them the understanding that they need; and in turn, grant yourself the forgiveness that you deserve.

Just remember:

“Greif does not expire like a candle or the beacon on the lighthouse. It simply changes temperature. It becomes a kind of personal weather system...” – The Son, Nocturne

Thank you for going on this very personal journey with me, this amazing cast and this dedicated production team. We hope that you find solace in our story and we wish upon you many sunny days ahead.

Trevor Belt

Director, Nocturne
## APPENDIX D

### WORKING PROJECTIONS LIST

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<tr>
<th>Nocturne Slide Plot (Working Draft 11/01)</th>
<th>Status?</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>The Buick Electra</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>King- Petersens German Shepherd</td>
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<td>Spooked Swallow</td>
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<td>Football</td>
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<td>Pronation of feet</td>
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<td>Shoes with Lace</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Body shot of girl in dress</td>
<td>Photo Needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sister with hand up</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Sister with handlebar mustache</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Sister with XX over her eyes</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Clown with balloons in her cheeks</td>
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<td>The Story of my Life Manuscript</td>
<td>Trevor Make</td>
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<td>Notecard w/note from Dad</td>
<td>Trevor Make</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td><em>nocturne</em> Title Slide</td>
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INITIAL CONCEPT NOTES

NOCTURNE Concept Meeting Notes

My personal journey with this play:

I was exposed to this play during my undergraduate years. I had become a fan of Sam Shepard, thanks to some Theatre literature classes. I loved how he wrote abstractly, but also about people that I knew. He wrote about the blue-collar people, the midwestern life, those in middle or lower classes socially. It was still theatrical enough for me but had a sense of realism that I had never been exposed to.

One day, a friend of mine said, “If you like Shepard, you’ll love this new play called Red Light Winter (written by Adam Rapp).” I found the play, read it and was blown away by how painfully real and gross and identifiable it was. It almost felt too real to be theatre. It was nominated for a Pulitzer in 2004. Because I had such visceral reaction to it, I investigated Rapp’s other works, and I found the first full length play he ever wrote, which was Nocturne.

Didn’t really get it at the time. I had experienced loss, but not in what I would call a real way. Since then, I have experienced some hard loss (most recently my grandfather. My grandmother to cancer. My young aunt to cancer, and I was her primary caretaker). And as an adult, grief is different than when you’re young (but in many ways the same). I experienced all the stages of grief. Dealt with a lot of personal guilt regarding the choices I made around the time of all their deaths. Guilt about my feelings after they died, etc. So now, a play about grief is very real to me and very identifiable.

Side note: I was a delivery driver before I came back to grad school. I delivered a box of books to a hotel in Overland Park, Kansas, at an event center. When I dropped the books off, I realized it was for a “Midwesterner Experience Literature Conference.” I remember thinking that it was something that I would really enjoy.

Taking both experiences, it led me to choose Nocturne, and led me to my concept.
IN A NUTSHELL:

Nocturne is a story about grief. The pain of loss. Losing someone you love, losing your will to live, losing your defined existence. It deals with how we deal with loss. It examines how we deal with our grief. How it manifests itself in mental and physical illness. It explores the emotional pitfalls of the Lower-Middle class existence. The paranoia and nagging tug of guilt. The tragically persistent emotional issues associated with our past.

Ultimately, Nocturne is a deeply personal and very real horror story about the process of grieving.

Nocturne is defined as: a short composition of a romantic or dreamy character suggestive of night, usually for piano OR a picture of a night scene.

Genre and Style:

Nocturne is half realistic drama, and half expressionistic MEMORY play (or I like to reference it as, his ongoing nightmare).

THE DETAILS

Time: November 2019 (The accident occurred in 2004. Events after that lead up to the present).

Where: A Conference (or multipurpose room) at a hotel in Overland Park, Kansas.

Why: Our narrator, “The Son” has been invited to a small literary conference concerning contemporary literature about the “Midwestern experience.”

Concept: The Son gets invited to this conference. The Son is a former piano prodigy turned semi-successful author. He goes because he needs the money. He wrote a book called Nocturne that sold modestly, less than 2000 copies. He has been invited there to speak about this book, which to the world, is considered fiction. When he gets up to speak to the audience, he ends up spiraling into his memories, starts to share details of what really happened, revealing that it is a true story, and sharing with the audience the details. The part with the Father at the end was not in the book. Throughout the play,
we will go back and forth between the reality of the speech he is giving and the flashbacks of his memories.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO THIS

The Set:

We are going to set it in one of these multipurpose rooms you find in midwestern hotel/event centers.

A stage in the room. Folding chairs are going to be facing it, as if creating a temporary audience space. I want to fill the space with as many folding chairs as possible. Preferably identical.

There will be a podium set up on the stage, as well as a projection screen for the Son to use in his presentation.

Maybe there is a piano in the room? Nothing fancy.

But he speaks to both our audience, and audience members (who are our actors) onstage. He will move from stage, into the audience, and back.

The memories will be played on the stage, for the most part. Definitely the scene where the Dad puts the gun in his mouth and when the Son returns to see his dying father.

We will use the projection screen to show photos from his past. They will alternate from the slides he prepared for his talk and pictures needed for his “memory sequences”

We will use token pieces in the memories to suggest different locations, but we will rely mostly on lights and sound to do the work for us.

He speaks about the old underwood typewriter, his 69 Buick Electra. His old novel fascination, his love of classical music and Steely Dan and the Alan Parsons Project. The guy likes old things and old technology.

Which leads to props:
PROPS:

Would love for there to be an old school projector onstage, that it is looking like it is projecting onto a screen.

The morphine drip machine will be tough. And the gun, but this is pretty prop lite.

Maybe programs for our actor audience members to have.

Also: Want to explore removing the Father’s body in a bodybag at the end. Gurney and all.

COSTUMES.

Our characters: THE SON, THE MOTHER, THE SISTER, THE GREEN EYED GIRL, THE SISTER, 8-9 “AUDIENCE MEMBERS”- This will be selected based on auditions, and I will create personas for them and why they are at the conference. Contemporary dress.

THE SON- Dresses youthful, not to impress. For comfort. Muted things. Not any sort of presentational garb. Almost like he’s stuck in the past. Think about the fact that what he wears is in someone his attempt to disappear.

THE MOTHER- Described in the play

THE FATHER- Described in the play. Two different looks, and want to find a way to make he look deteriorated at the end... maybe put him in a body suit or give him a belly at the beginning, so at the end it looks like he’s lost weight.

THE GREEN EYED GIRL- Described in the play. I will be putting it in the audition notice that this actor will have to strip down to their underwear to play this part. So nothing overtly sexual, just practical, but consider that.

THE SISTER- Described in great detail in the play. I’m seeing her with the big black X over her eyes.

Maybe see two men clean up the dead father. Haven’t decided this.
LIGHTS:
Lights will go back and forth from a stale almost florescent feel in the presentation room, to the suggested, severe and expressionistic lights in the memory sequences.

Lights will be an essential component in the memory sequences to invoke the feelings of the scene, not necessarily the most realistic quality of the scene. This expressionism like in old German films. This sidelight. Up light. Severe downlight. Pin spots. Abstract and cutting colors.

SOUND
Sound will be the most transportive element of the play. We will use sound design to help show when the Son is moving into his memories.

This ranges from atmospheric sounds in the hospital, to hearing the Steely Dan playing, the wires humming, to possibly the decapitation.

You and I will have to work closely together to find out what is needed in the moments throughout the play. We will discuss as we move through the process about what is exactly needed. I would love to hear your ideas.

OVERALL:
The memory sequences as of right now are (that we will act out, sound will be more prevalent):

The Son and Mother in the hospital
The Father puts gun in kids mouth scene
The Son seeing his dead sister but can’t see her face
The Meeting of the Green Eyed girl
The final scene with the dying Father
KEY: God is in the details here. Precision is key. We will have to ride the line of not overdesigning the show. The key here is to use all these elements in just the right amount. This should not FEEL like a spectacle show. All of these elements should support the story. Because at the end of the day, it is a story that is being told by one individual. The play should still feel that way. This whole this is from the perspective of the sun. We need to respect his brain, and not try to show the audience spectacle.

Thank you for tackling this big project with me!

QUESTIONS?
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